



Pashto Cultural Orientation

Technology Integration Division

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## Chapter 1 Profile

### Introduction

Located in south-central Asia, Afghanistan is a poor, largely undeveloped country that has experienced considerable conflict throughout its history. The region's strategic location has long made it prone to invasion, but its rugged, unforgiving topography has also served to isolate it. The nation is home to a great variety of ethnic, linguistic, and tribal groups.

Although these groups maintain diverse customs and traditions, the vast majority of them practice Islam, the nation's predominant religion. Pashtuns, who speak Pashto and form the largest ethnic group in the country, have played a significant role in the growth of the nation. Until the 20th century, the term "Afghan" applied only to Pashto-speaking peoples.<sup>1</sup>



© Domingos Fernandes  
Afghan village

### Geography

#### Area

Afghanistan occupies a landlocked position in south-central Asia. Its northern border abuts the Central Asian countries of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan. A large section of this border is formed by the Amu Darya River and its tributary, the Panj. In the northeast, Afghanistan shares a short border with China at the eastern end of the Wakhan Corridor. The country shares its eastern and southern borders with Pakistan. On its western edge, Afghanistan borders Iran. As the country has no direct access to the ocean, the nearest coast lies on the Arabian Sea, about 300 miles (480 km) to the south in Pakistan.<sup>2</sup> Its total area is 652,230 sq km (251,827 sq mi), making it slightly smaller than the state of Texas.<sup>3</sup>

#### Climate

Afghanistan is generally subject to hot, dry summers and cold winters, but conditions vary according to region. The northeastern mountain regions, including the Wakhan Corridor, have a subarctic climate characterized by dry, cold winters. The Central Highlands receive the bulk of their precipitation in the winter and early spring, when cold air masses blow in from the north and northwest. Lower elevations may receive rainfall during this time, while the peaks of many of the country's high elevation ranges are covered in snow year-round. In the summer, the mountainous regions near the Pakistani border may receive tropical air masses influenced by the Indian monsoon. These air masses often carry humidity and rain, and they may move into the central and southern areas of the country. Known as the "wind of 120 days," strong winds are a near daily occurrence in the southwest during the summer. These hot, dry winds often create

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<sup>1</sup> *Historical Dictionary of Afghanistan*, Third Edition. Adamic, Ludwig W. "Afghan [p. 12]." 2003. Lanham, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press.

<sup>2</sup> Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Afghanistan: Land." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-21414>

<sup>3</sup> Central Intelligence Agency. The World Factbook. "Afghanistan." 13 April 2010. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/af.html>

dangerous sand or dust storms that sweep across the southern deserts. The Southern Plateau experiences the hottest, driest weather in the country.

The country's various climatic regions demonstrate extreme variations in temperature. Depending upon elevation, temperatures in the Central Highlands range from  $-15^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $5^{\circ}\text{F}$ ) and below in the winter to between  $0^{\circ}\text{C}$  and  $26^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $32^{\circ}\text{F}$  and  $78^{\circ}\text{F}$ ) in the summer. Lows in the Wakhan Corridor often reach  $-21^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $-6^{\circ}\text{F}$ ) and below,<sup>4</sup> whereas highs above  $35^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $95^{\circ}\text{F}$ ) are common in the southern deserts. In the northeast, extremes of  $49^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $120^{\circ}\text{F}$ ) and  $-31^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $-24^{\circ}\text{F}$ ) have been recorded in Jalalabad and Kabul, respectively.<sup>5</sup>

### Geographic Divisions

Afghanistan can be divided into three distinct geographic regions: the Central Highlands, the Southern Plateau, and the Northern Plains. The Central Highlands include the Hindu Kush Range, which is the country's dominant mountain system. This mountain range extends in a southwesterly direction from the Wakhan Corridor of the far northeast toward the center of the country. Spreading out from the Hindu Kush, a number of mountain chains extend throughout the country's eastern and central regions, with some ranges stretching westward to the Iranian border. High mountain passes are of great strategic value in the Central Highlands; these include Shebar Pass and the legendary Khyber Pass, the gateway to the Indian subcontinent. The country's highest point, Nushaq Peak, is found in the Hindu Kush at 7,485 meters (24,577 ft).<sup>6</sup>



© checkstaticlines / flickr.com  
Hindu Kush Mountains

To the north of the Central Highlands lie the Northern Plains. Extending into Central Asia, this expanse of foothills and fertile plains is the site of heavy agricultural activity. There are also abundant mineral resources and natural gas deposits in this region. The country's low point of 258 meters (846 ft) is found in the Amu Darya Basin of this region.<sup>7</sup> South of the Central Highlands, the Southern Plateau consists of varied desert and semi-desert terrain, including salt flats and dry, stony expanses. The soil of much of this region is infertile. The southeastern section of this region, known as Rigistan, is a sandy plain scattered with sand dunes and ridges.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. *Afghanistan: A Country Study*. Blood, Peter R., ed. "Chapter 2: The Society and Environment: The Natural Environment: Climate." 1997. [http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+af0034\)](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+af0034))

<sup>5</sup> Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Afghanistan: Land: Climate." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-21418>

<sup>6</sup> Central Intelligence Agency. *The World Factbook*. "Afghanistan." 13 April 2010. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/af.html>

<sup>7</sup> Central Intelligence Agency. *The World Factbook*. "Afghanistan." 13 April 2010. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/af.html>

<sup>8</sup> Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Afghanistan: Land: Relief: Physiographic Regions." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-226121>

## Rivers and Lakes

Although Afghanistan is located in an arid region, the country has relatively abundant water resources due to its many high mountain ranges. Over 80% of the country's river water originates in the Central Highlands (including the Hindu Kush), which collect significant snowfall.<sup>9</sup> Yet, due to a lack of infrastructure, most of the country's water resources remain unharnessed. Only 30-35% of the annual water supply is used domestically, with the rest flowing out into surrounding countries. In the absence of sufficient storage, management, and distribution systems, water shortages are common.<sup>10</sup>

The major Afghan rivers are the Amu Darya, the Kabul, the Helmand, and the Hari Rud. Forming a large section of the country's northern border, the Amu Darya is Afghanistan's only navigable river. The Kabul, the major waterway in eastern Afghanistan, flows from its source in the Central Highlands into the Indus River in Pakistan. The Helmand is the longest river in the country and an important resource for irrigation water in the south. Flowing westward from the central mountains, the Hari Rud passes near the large western city of Herat and ultimately forms a portion of the Afghan-Iranian border. Afghanistan's few lakes are mostly small in size; some are saline. Many of the country's streams and lakes are only active after periods of rainfall or during the spring snowmelt.<sup>11</sup>

## Major Cities

### *Kandahar (Qandahar)*

Located in southeastern Afghanistan, Kandahar is situated alongside the Tarnak River on a high plain between the foothills of the Central Highlands and the deserts of the Southern Plateau. The city is surrounded by fertile agricultural land, with major regional crops consisting of various fruits, such as grapes and pomegranates. With a population of approximately 325,000 people, it is the third largest city in Afghanistan.<sup>12</sup> (As population figures for the country vary, other estimates place the city second in size behind only the Afghan capital, Kabul.) Historically, the city's strategic location on major trade routes made it prone to frequent invasion. The city served as Afghanistan's first capital after Ahmad Shah Durrani unified the tribal nation in the 18th century. Ahmad Shah's mausoleum is found in the city, as is the Khirqah Mosque, which is believed to house the cloak of the Prophet Muhammad.<sup>13</sup> As a major center for Pashtun peoples, the city is



© Domingos Fernandes  
Kandahar

<sup>9</sup> Asian Development Bank. "Afghanistan: Issues, Constraints and Objectives." 2005.

<http://www.adb.org/Water/NARBO/2005/Training-Program/pres-AFG-grp1-NARBO-training.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> Reuters. Salahuddin, Sayed. "With War and Neglect, Afghans Face Water Shortage." 24 March 2010.

<http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE62N19Q20100324>

<sup>11</sup> Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Afghanistan: Land: Drainage." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-21416>

<sup>12</sup> City Population. Brinkhoff, Thomas. "Afghanistan." 26 March 2010.

<http://www.citypopulation.de/Afghanistan.html>

<sup>13</sup> Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Kandahar." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9044534>

home to the Kandahari dialect of Pashto, which is the soft-voice form of the language.<sup>14</sup> The city served as a stronghold for the Taliban during their time in power.

### *Gardez (Gardeyz)*

The town of Gardez is located on a high plain in eastern Afghanistan, roughly 80 km (50 mi) from the Pakistani border. Situated at 2,300 m (7,550 ft), the town is a transshipment center for regional timber production. It is also located on transit routes to Kabul, Ghazni, and nearby Pakistan.<sup>15</sup> Although small in population (est. 20,000 in 2006),<sup>16</sup> Gardez is important for strategic purposes. The city and the surrounding area once served as a stronghold for the Taliban, but it is now home to a forward operating base for the U.S. Military, as well as a base for the Afghan National Army. Both the town and the greater province (Paktia) are largely populated by Pashtuns, and the region is known for its tribal traditions and divisions.<sup>17</sup>



© Todd Huffman  
Villagers near Jalalabad

### *Jalalabad*

Jalalabad, the capital of Nangarhar province, is located in a strategically important region of eastern Afghanistan. Situated on the Kabul River, the city lies on the major trade and transportation route that runs through the Khyber Pass from the Afghan capital, Kabul, to nearby Pakistan and the Indian sub-continent. Because of its location, the Jalalabad region has been occupied for millennia and has often served as a military outpost and command center. In the modern era, both the British and Soviets stationed troops in the city. More recently, Jalalabad served as a stronghold for Taliban forces during their time in power. The city is also home to an important regional airfield.

The city's population is dominated by Pashtuns, and it is in close proximity to Peshawar, a major Pashtun city in northwestern Pakistan. Fertile agricultural fields surround Jalalabad, with nuts, fruits, and cereals grown as major crops.<sup>18</sup> Nangarhar province was once known as a major site of opium poppy cultivation, but efforts to reduce production in the region have demonstrated considerable success.<sup>19</sup> Jalalabad has a population of 168,600 (2006 est.), making it the fifth largest city in the country.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Language Materials Project, Center for World Languages, UCLA. "Pashto." No date. <http://www.lmp.ucla.edu/Profile.aspx?LangID=64&menu=004>

<sup>15</sup> Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Gardeyz." 2010 <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9036064>

<sup>16</sup> City Population. Brinkhoff, Thomas. "Afghanistan." 26 March 2010. <http://www.citypopulation.de/Afghanistan.html>

<sup>17</sup> GlobalSecurity.org. Pike, John. "Gardez." 12 November 2008. <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/afghanistan/gardez.htm>

<sup>18</sup> Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Jalalabad." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9043270>

<sup>19</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. "Opium Cultivation Down by a Fifth in Afghanistan." 26 August 2008. <http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/press/releases/2008-08-26.html>

<sup>20</sup> City Population. Brinkhoff, Thomas. "Afghanistan." 26 March 2010. <http://www.citypopulation.de/Afghanistan.html>

## History

### *Early History*

Human settlement in the Afghan region dates back several thousand years. Historically, the region served as a crossroads for traffic between the Middle East, Central Asia, South Asia, and East Asia. Accordingly, various waves of migrating peoples and invading armies passed through the area, bringing trade and war. Many of these peoples followed an important trade route that cut through the Hindu Kush Mountains of modern-day Afghanistan. This route formed a section of what would later be known as the Silk Road.

The Persians were one of the first major powers to control the region. Later, in the 4th century B.C.E., Alexander the Great and his forces conquered the area for the Greeks. After several centuries during which various powers fought for control of the area, the Arab Muslims swept into the region in the 7th century C.E. They spread the practice of Islam, which remains prevalent in the region today. Several centuries of power struggles and turmoil followed, including a Mongol invasion led by Genghis Khan. Overall, throughout the ancient era, the Afghan region was subject to frequent incursions and conflict, as well as influxes of diverse cultures.

### *The Afghan State and the Colonial Era*

In the early modern era, the Afghan state was founded by Ahmad Shah Durrani, a Pashtun chief who was elected *Shah*, or King, in 1747 by an assembly (*loya jirga*) of Pashtun tribal leaders. Ahmad Shah consolidated the Pashtun tribes and expanded the Afghan territory to Delhi (in modern-day India) and the Arabian Sea. Thereafter, Pashtuns dominated the Afghan government for much of the modern era.



Courtesy of Wikipedia  
Afghan warriors, 1847

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, incursions by the British, who were then based in colonial India, led to three Anglo–Afghan Wars. These wars occurred as part of the “the Great Game,” a prolonged battle for Central Asia waged between Russia and Britain. Due to the strong resistance of Afghan armies, the British failed to fully colonize the country, although they exerted various levels of control on Afghan leaders. In the late 19th century, the British established the Durand Line, the boundary that marks the modern Afghan–Pakistani border. (At that time, the line designated the northwestern edge of British-controlled India.) This demarcation created serious and longstanding tension, as it divided a cohesive Pashtun area into two different regions. Opposition to the Durand Line later prompted unsuccessful attempts to unify the Pashtun region and create an independent state of “Pashtunistan.” Such efforts seriously strained relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan in the 20th century.<sup>21</sup>

### *The 20th Century*

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<sup>21</sup> *Historical Dictionary of Afghanistan*, Third Edition. Adamec, Ludwig W. “Pashtunistan.” 2003. Lanham, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press.

In 1919, after the end of the Third Anglo–Afghan War, Afghanistan gained its formal independence. In the following decades, the nation experimented with political and social reforms, including the adoption of a constitutional monarchy. Many of these reforms were met with resistance by conservative factions. This period was marked by the prolonged reign of the nation’s last king, Zahir Shah, who ruled from 1933 to 1973. During a period of economic hardship, Zahir Shah was overthrown by a former prime minister, Sardar Mohammad Daoud. Upon taking power, Daoud abolished the monarchy and declared himself President of the new Republic of Afghanistan. His subsequent efforts to address economic problems failed to quell political instability.

In 1978, the People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), a communist group, seized power in a violent coup. The PDPA had strong ties to the Soviet Union, which provided it with financial assistance and military support. Various tribal insurgencies mounted a fierce resistance against the communist government. In 1979, the Soviets invaded the country in an effort to solidify communist rule in the region. Aided by the U.S. and other countries, the *mujahideen*, or resistance fighters, fought for more than a decade to end communist rule in Afghanistan. In 1989, the Soviets officially withdrew from the war-torn country, leaving hundreds of thousands dead and millions more displaced. However, the Afghan communist government remained in power, and the civil war continued. The communist government fell in 1992, but power struggles between various competing factions prolonged the internal conflict. In 1996, the Taliban, an extremist Islamic group dominated by Pashtuns, seized power over much of the country, including the nation’s capital, Kabul.<sup>22</sup>



© Kodak Agfa  
King Zahir Shah

### *The Taliban Regime and U.S. Intervention*

During its time in power, the Taliban regime implemented policies that had a detrimental effect on the country and its impoverished, war-weary population. The fundamentalist group’s strict code of law deprived Afghans of basic human rights, with women, in particular, subject to severe restrictions and punishments. During this time, many minority groups were targeted for attacks and abuse. The Taliban also destroyed non-Islamic cultural artifacts, such as two massive Buddha statues located outside the city of Bamiyan.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, as the country’s infrastructure and economy remained in a state of collapse, the resource-poor Taliban government offered few services to the populace.

After taking power, the Taliban allowed various terrorist organizations, including Osama Bin Laden’s Al Qaeda network, to base their operations in Afghanistan. After the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, the U.S. and a coalition of international forces entered Afghanistan in order to remove the Taliban from power and combat the Al Qaeda forces based in the country. The U.S.-led operation quickly toppled the Taliban regime,

<sup>22</sup> Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. “Country Profile: Afghanistan.” August 2008. <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Afghanistan.pdf>

<sup>23</sup> Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, U.S. Department of State. “Background Note: Afghanistan.” March 2010. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5380.htm>

allowing other Afghan political groups to assume power. They formed a transitional government and drafted a democratic constitution. On 9 October 2004, Afghanistan held its first democratic presidential election. Hamid Karzai, an ethnic Pashtun, won the election. Meanwhile, Taliban insurgents regrouped while taking refuge in areas outside the limited control of the Afghan government, as well as in safe havens in nearby Pakistan.<sup>24</sup> By December 2008, a resurgent Taliban had once again extended its influence over a large share of the country.<sup>25</sup>

In August 2009, the second national democratic presidential election, which drew charges of corruption, resulted in a runoff between Karzai and his primary competitor, Abdullah Abdullah. After Abdullah withdrew from the runoff vote, Karzai was appointed to another five-year term as President by the Independent Election Commission (IEC). In December 2009, the Obama administration called for a significant increase in troops for combat operations in Afghanistan.<sup>26</sup> Major objectives for the surge included: defeating Al Qaeda and eliminating its safe havens; suppressing the resurgent Taliban and preventing it from overthrowing the Afghan government; and strengthening the capacity of the Afghan government and its security forces.<sup>27</sup> The U.S.-led military operation is ongoing, as Taliban and Al Qaeda forces continue to pose a threat to regional stability and international security.<sup>28</sup>

## Government

The Afghan government is an Islamic republic. Political reforms have produced a constitutional framework that provides the country with a democratically elected president and national assembly. However, centralized Afghan governments have historically lacked a strong influence outside the capital due to the longstanding tradition of local tribal rule in the country. In the past, local leaders tended not to challenge the state, and in return they were left alone by the government to administer their respective areas. This pattern largely persists today, as the central government's powers remain limited and local tribal leaders continue to control many regions of the country. Military aid and reconstruction efforts have helped strengthen the government's capacity, but its ability to provide security and services remains limited. Moreover, it continues to face serious challenges due to



© Pierre Gazzola  
Kandahar governor and residents

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<sup>24</sup> Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. "Country Profile: Afghanistan." August 2008. <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Afghanistan.pdf>

<sup>25</sup> Council on Foreign Relations. Bruno, Greg and Eben Kaplan. "The Taliban in Afghanistan." 3 August 2009. <http://www.cfr.org/publication/10551/>

<sup>26</sup> BBC News. "Barack Obama Orders 30,000 More Troops to Afghanistan." 2 December 2009. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8389778.stm>

<sup>27</sup> Federation of American Scientists. Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress. Bowman, Steve and Catherine Dale. "CRS Report: War in Afghanistan: Strategy, Military Operations, and Issues for Congress." 25 February 2010. <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/R40156.pdf>

<sup>28</sup> Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, U.S. Department of State. "Background Note: Afghanistan." March 2010. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5380.htm>

ongoing security threats, the lasting effects of decades of war, and the region's longstanding tribal divisions.<sup>29</sup> Corruption is also a serious issue.<sup>30</sup>

On a regional level, the country is divided into provinces, districts, and sub-districts. Officially, the provinces are overseen by governors, but local warlords in control of militias hold considerable power. Traditionally, tribal councils known as *loya jirgas* address issues at the local level. In general, Afghans are governed under Islamic or tribal law.<sup>31</sup> Pashtun tribal law is known as Pashtunwali. This detailed code of conduct consists of a number of principles ranging from hospitality and responsibility to revenge and the preservation of honor. Such principles guide Pashtuns in their daily lives and determine their moral and legal responsibilities to the community. During the Taliban's years in power, a strict interpretation of Islamic law became widespread; their code of law was based, in part, on Pashtunwali.<sup>32</sup>

### Economy

Afghanistan is one of the poorest countries in the world. Economic activity ground to a halt under the Taliban due to road blocks and recurrent fighting. Although the region is rich in natural resources, including fossil fuels and minerals, its deposits have remained largely unexploited. Industrial production in Afghanistan is limited, as much of the country's infrastructure is in ruin. Agriculture and animal husbandry constitute the bulk of the nation's economy, as they have for centuries. In terms of crafts and textiles, Afghanistan is famous for its exquisite hand-made rugs and carpets, as well as for the production of *karakul*, a silky wool made from the pelts of Karakul lambs.



© Chuck Holton  
Poppies in the Hindu Kush

Afghanistan was once self-sufficient in agricultural production, but it has relied heavily on imports and external aid in recent decades. Droughts, prolonged conflict, and loss of infrastructure have all severely limited the country's conventional agricultural sector. For example, many of the nation's irrigation canals have been destroyed, and widespread landmine use has made many areas unsuitable for farming or grazing. Violence has also forced millions of Afghans to flee their lands, with many of them taking refuge in nearby countries, such as Pakistan or Iran.

A problematic aspect of the Afghan economy is its heavy reliance on opium poppy cultivation.<sup>33</sup> As a drought resistant plant, it has proved to be the ideal cash crop for

<sup>29</sup> Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, U.S. Department of State. "Background Note: Afghanistan." March 2010. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5380.htm>

<sup>30</sup> Federation of American Scientists. Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress. Katzman, Kenneth. "CRS Report: Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy [p. 16]." 25 March 2010. <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL30588.pdf>

<sup>31</sup> Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. "Country Profile: Afghanistan." August 2008. <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Afghanistan.pdf>

<sup>32</sup> Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, U.S. Department of State. "Background Note: Afghanistan." March 2010. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5380.htm>

<sup>33</sup> BBC News. "Record for Afghan Poppy Planting." 29 February 2008. [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/7271654.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/7271654.stm)

impoverished Afghan subsistence farmers. Moreover, traffickers will extend credit to poppy growers to tide them over until harvest time due to the certainty of the market.<sup>34</sup> As a result of these and other factors, poppy cultivation is pervasive in Afghanistan, the source of the vast majority of the world's opium. This drug trade, which generates revenues that far exceed the Afghan government's entire annual operating budget, soared in recent years. Meanwhile, yields of traditional but typically less-lucrative crops, such as wheat, declined. The opium trade has been a primary source of capital and financing for the Taliban insurgency.<sup>35</sup> It is also tied to a substantial black market in which a variety of goods are smuggled out of the country. In the absence of an alternative livelihood for Afghan farmers, poppy cultivation remains difficult to eradicate. However, government and coalition efforts to reduce cultivation have demonstrated success in recent years. In 2009, domestic opium cultivation decreased by 22% from the previous year, and the number of poppy-free provinces rose to 20.<sup>36</sup> Nonetheless, the opium trade remains strong and continues to pose a serious security threat.<sup>37</sup>

Although it remains weak and undeveloped, the Afghan economy has improved since 2001, largely due to foreign aid and investment in the country. Much of this funding has been channeled toward reducing poverty and rebuilding the nation's infrastructure. However, a variety of social and economic factors, including the country's unstable security situation, have hampered reconstruction and development efforts. In early 2010, unemployment remained around 40%.<sup>38</sup>

### **Ethnic Groups**

As a historic crossroads for diverse peoples, Afghanistan is home to a wide array of linguistic, ethnic, and tribal groups. Many of these groups are ethnically or linguistically related to peoples in surrounding countries. The Pashtun people, the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan, comprise approximately 42% of the Afghan population.<sup>39</sup> Although they can be found in pockets throughout the country, Pashtuns dominate a large crescent-shaped region that stretches from the western frontier, across much of the south, to the eastern highlands. Pashtuns also



© Rob Bakker  
Pashtun family on bike

<sup>34</sup> Asian Development Bank. ADB Review. Curtis, Grant. "Afghanistan's Opium Economy." December 2005. [http://www.adb.org/Documents/Periodicals/ADB\\_Review/2005/vol137-6/opium-economy.asp](http://www.adb.org/Documents/Periodicals/ADB_Review/2005/vol137-6/opium-economy.asp)

<sup>35</sup> Reuters. "ISAF Chief Sees Afghanistan Drug Trade Rising in 2008." January 2, 2008. <http://www.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idUSSP4364920080102>

<sup>36</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. Government of Afghanistan Ministry of Counter Narcotics. "Afghanistan Opium Survey 2009: Summary Findings." September 2009. [http://www.unodc.org/documents/crop-monitoring/Afghanistan/Afghanistan\\_opium\\_survey\\_2009\\_summary.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/documents/crop-monitoring/Afghanistan/Afghanistan_opium_survey_2009_summary.pdf)

<sup>37</sup> Council on Foreign Relations. Gavrilis, George. "The Good and Bad News about Afghan Opium." 10 February 2010. [http://www.cfr.org/publication/21372/good\\_and\\_bad\\_news\\_about\\_afghan\\_opium.html](http://www.cfr.org/publication/21372/good_and_bad_news_about_afghan_opium.html)

<sup>38</sup> Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, U.S. Department of State. "Background Note: Afghanistan." March 2010. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5380.htm>

<sup>39</sup> Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, U.S. Department of State. "Background Note: Afghanistan." March 2010. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5380.htm>

populate the nearby northwestern region of Pakistan, across the Durand Line, or Afghanistan's eastern border.

Pashtuns generally speak Pashto, an Indo-European language. They are divided into many subgroups, but there are two major tribes: the Ghilzai and the Durrani. Formerly known as the Abdali, the Durrani have played a major role in governing the country throughout the last few centuries. In general, Pashtuns earn their livelihood through farming and animal husbandry. They are also known as fierce warriors. A number of Pashtun tribes are nomadic. These tribes engage in a continuous migration throughout the Afghan–Pakistani borderlands.

Comprising approximately 27% of the population, the Tajiks are the second largest ethnic group in Afghanistan.<sup>40</sup> They speak Dari, a dialect of the Persian language. Tajiks live mainly in the mountains of the northeast, in the west, and in larger cities such as Herat, Kabul, and Mazar-e-Sharif. In general, they engage in agriculture or commerce, or they work as artisans. As Dari has long been the administrative language of Afghanistan, Tajiks have often served in court or government positions.<sup>41</sup> Afghan Tajiks do not organize themselves by tribe.<sup>42</sup>

The mountainous region of central Afghanistan is home to the Hazaras. The Hazaras make up approximately 9% of the nation's population.<sup>43</sup> The majority of them practice Shi'a Islam, which is a minority religion in Afghanistan. The Hazara people speak Hazaragi, a dialect of Persian mutually intelligible with Dari.

The Uzbeks are another relatively large ethnic group, accounting for approximately 9% of the Afghan population.<sup>44</sup> Along with the Tajiks, the Uzbeks share the great plains of the north with the Turkmen, Aimak, Kyrgyz, and many other ethnic groups that have immigrated into Afghanistan from Central Asia. The Uzbeks and Turkmen speak Turkic languages. Additional ethnic groups live in the eastern mountains. One such group is the Pashai, whose 2,000 year-old language was rendered in written form for the first time in 2003. Many Pashai speak Pashto as well.<sup>45</sup> Nuristanis live in Nuristan, a northeastern province formerly known as Kafiristan, or "Land of the Infidels." Their lands were

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<sup>40</sup> Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, U.S. Department of State. "Background Note: Afghanistan." March 2010. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5380.htm>

<sup>41</sup> *Historical Dictionary of Afghanistan*, Third Edition. Adamec, Ludwig W. "Tajik." 2003. Lanham, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press.

<sup>42</sup> Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. *Afghanistan: A Country Study*. Blood, Peter R., ed. "Chapter 2: The Society and Environment: Social Structure: Ethnic Groups: Tajik." 1997. [http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+af0038\)](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+af0038))

<sup>43</sup> Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, U.S. Department of State. "Background Note: Afghanistan." March 2010. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5380.htm>

<sup>44</sup> Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, U.S. Department of State. "Background Note: Afghanistan." March 2010. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5380.htm>

<sup>45</sup> SIL International. Yun, Ju-Hong. "Pashai Language Development Project: Promoting Pashai Language, Literacy, and Community Development." 2003. [http://www.sil.org/asia/ldc/parallel\\_papers/ju-hong\\_yun.pdf](http://www.sil.org/asia/ldc/parallel_papers/ju-hong_yun.pdf)

incorporated into Afghanistan in the late 19th century, when they were converted to Islam.<sup>46</sup>

## Languages

Pashto, also known as Pashtu or Pakhtu, is one of Afghanistan's two official languages. Dari, the other official language, is more widely spoken, as it is the primary language of communication between speakers of different tongues. Dari is especially dominant in the north and west. (Many of the minority ethnic groups in the north are fluent in Dari or various related dialects.) Pashto is dominant in the eastern and southern regions of the country, as well as in the northwestern region of Pakistan. Pashto is spoken primarily by Pashtuns, but not all Pashtuns speak it as their first language, and many non-Pashtun groups (particularly those in the south and southeast) are capable Pashto speakers.

Both Pashto and Dari belong to the Iranian branch of the Indo-European linguistic group, but they are not mutually understood.<sup>47</sup> Dari, the Afghan dialect of Persian-Farsi, traditionally served as the language of the Afghan court. Thus, Afghanistan's literary heritage is largely preserved in the Dari language, the language of the literati. Pashto literature is largely represented by tribal histories and love poems.<sup>48</sup> However, Pashto gained prominence in the 20th century as the Pashtun-dominated government promoted it as the official national language. A variety of other languages are spoken among the country's many ethnic groups, including Balochi, Pashai, and the Turkic languages of Turkmen and Uzbek.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> *Our Women are Free: Gender and Ethnicity in the Hindukush*. Maggi, Wynne. "Chapter 1: Getting There." 2001. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

<sup>47</sup> *Historical Dictionary of Afghanistan*, Third Edition. Adamec, Ludwig W. "Pashtu (Pakhtu)." 2003. Lanham, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press.

<sup>48</sup> Afghan Profile. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. Alexe, Dan. Taliban Forced Rift Between Country's Two Main Languages. 27 January 2002.

[http://afghanprofile.net/index.php?Itemid=27&id=134&option=com\\_content&task=view](http://afghanprofile.net/index.php?Itemid=27&id=134&option=com_content&task=view)

<sup>49</sup> Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. "Country Profile: Afghanistan." August 2008.

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Afghanistan.pdf>

## Profile Assessment

1. Prior to the 20th century, the term “Afghan” applied only to Pashto-speaking peoples.

**True.** Pashtuns, who form the largest ethnic group in the country, have played a significant role in Afghan history. Until the 20th century, the term “Afghan” applied only to Pashto-speaking peoples

2. Islam arrived in Afghanistan in the 5th century C.E.

**False.** Arab Muslims swept into Afghanistan in the 7th century C.E. They spread the practice of Islam, which remains the dominant religion in the region today.

3. The Durand Line now marks the modern Afghan–Pakistani border.

**True.** In the 19th century, the British established the Durand Line that now marks the modern Afghan–Pakistani border. This boundary has created longstanding tensions because it divides the Pashtun area into two different regions.

4. The Taliban took control of most of Afghanistan, including Kabul, in 1990.

**False.** By 1996, the ultra-conservative and largely Pashtun Taliban, were in control of most of Afghanistan. The group was assisted by Pakistan’s military and the Gulf States.

5. Hamid Karzai, the first democratically elected president of Afghanistan, is an ethnic Pashtun.

**True.** In 2004, after the fall of the Taliban, Afghanistan held its first democratic presidential election. Hamid Karzai, an ethnic Pashtun, won. As of 2008, he was still in power.

## Chapter 2 Religion

### Introduction

Islam is the predominant religion in Afghanistan, where approximately 99% of the population identify themselves as Muslim. Islam is one of the few common bonds that unite the diverse ethnic and tribal groups in the country. Most Afghan Muslims follow the Sunni branch of Islam. There is also a substantial minority population of Shi'a Muslims in the country. They live primarily in the central provinces, but they can also be found in the nation's major cities. Ismaili Muslims, who form a sect within the Shi'a branch of Islam, can be found in the central and northeastern areas of the country.



DoD photo: SSgt Ricky A. Bloom  
Mosque in Kandahar

Afghanistan is also home to a large number of Sufis, who practice a mystical form of Islam. Both the Sunni and Shi'a schools in Afghanistan have Sufi practitioners. The city of Herat and its surrounding area is a major center for Sufi practice, but Sufi groups can be found throughout the country, including in the Pashtun-dominated south and east.<sup>50</sup>

Non-Muslims comprise only about 1% of the country's population. There are small minority populations of Hindus and Sikhs, whose sites of worship are located mainly in the urban centers of Kabul, Jalalabad, and Kandahar. In the past, Afghanistan had a small Jewish community, but its members have largely migrated to other countries as a result of recent conflicts. There are also very small Christian and Buddhist populations.<sup>51</sup>

### Islam

Islam is a monotheistic religion, meaning its followers profess faith in a single God. In the Muslim community, or *ummah*, God is known as Allah. The Arabic term *islam* means "to submit" or "to surrender." A Muslim, therefore, is one who submits to the will of Allah. Muslims believe that Allah revealed his message to the Prophet Muhammad, a merchant who lived in Arabia from 570 to 632 C.E. They consider Muhammad to be the last of a long line of prophets that included Abraham (Ibrahim), Moses (Musa), and Jesus (Esa). In this way, Muslims share some of the basic elements of the Judaic and Christian traditions. However, they believe that the message relayed by Muhammad is the final and definitive revelation of the faith. This message is recited in the *Quran*, the sacred scriptures of Islam. Additional sacred texts include the *Hadith*, a collection of the sayings of Muhammad, and the *Sunnah*, which describes the practices of Islam by way of Muhammad's example.

<sup>50</sup> Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. *Afghanistan: A Country Study*. Blood, Peter R., ed. "Chapter 2: The Society and Environment: Religion: Islamic Expression in Afghanistan: Sufis." 1997. [http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+af0066\)](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+af0066))

<sup>51</sup> Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State. *International Religious Freedom Report 2008*. "Afghanistan." September 2008. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2008/108497.htm>

The essential beliefs and rites of the Islamic faith are encapsulated in the five pillars of Islam. The first and foundational pillar is the sincere recitation of the *shahada*, or Islamic creed: “There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is the prophet of Allah.” The remaining pillars include: the performance of ritual prayers five times per day; the giving of alms to the poor and needy, traditionally through a tax on income; fasting during the holy month of Ramadan; and the undertaking of a pilgrimage to the Islamic holy city of Mecca.<sup>52</sup> Muslims believe that Allah will judge them for their actions on earth, with the consequences of spending their afterlife in heaven or hell.<sup>53</sup>

### *Sunni and Shi’a Divide*

Islam has two major branches: Sunni and Shi’a. The two sects formed shortly after the initial spread of Islam in the 7th century C.E. They divided over disagreements about the selection process for the successor, or caliph, to the Prophet Muhammad, who died in 632 C.E. The Sunni, as they came to be known, believed that Muhammad had not definitively chosen a successor, so they decided that the first caliph should be elected from among the leaders of the Muslim community. They chose Abu Bakr, Muhammad’s father-in-law, as the first caliph. The opposing group, later known as the Shi’a, believed that Muhammad had designated his son-in-law, Ali ibn Abi Talib, as his successor. Accordingly, they believed that only Muhammad’s descendents held rightful claims to the caliphate. The unresolved issue of rightful succession created a deep divide between the two groups, leading to infighting and the assassination of Ali.<sup>54</sup> While the two sects share the fundamental tenets of Islam, their separation resulted in a divergence of practices and beliefs. Over time, several additional sects emerged within the two major branches. Today, Sunnis comprise approximately 85% of the global Muslim community.<sup>55</sup>



© Michael Von Bergen  
Three Hazara men

In general, conflicts between the Sunni and Shi’a schools of Islam have not proven destabilizing in Afghanistan. However, there is a history of persecution against Shi’a Muslims in the country, particularly against the Hazaras. Tensions between Sunnis and Shi’a occasionally lead to violent clashes in some of the central provinces, where substantial numbers of Hazaras live. Pashtuns are predominantly Sunni Muslim, and historically they have been involved in such conflicts.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Encyclopædia Britannica Online. “Islam: Fundamental Practices and Institutions of Islam: The Five Pillars.” 2009. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-69149>

<sup>53</sup> BBC. “Religions: Islam: Beliefs: Basic Articles of Faith.” 3 September 2009. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/beliefs/beliefs.shtml>

<sup>54</sup> Encyclopædia Britannica Online. “Islam: Islamic Thought: Theology and Sectarianism.” 2009. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-69163>

<sup>55</sup> BBC. “Religions: Islam: Beliefs: Sunni and Shi’a.” 19 August 2009. [http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/subdivisions/sunnishia\\_1.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/subdivisions/sunnishia_1.shtml)

<sup>56</sup> Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State. *International Religious Freedom Report 2008*. “Afghanistan.” September 2008. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2008/108497.htm>

## Sufism

Sufism is a mystical form of Islam. The basic objective of its practice is to obtain a direct, personal connection with Allah. Sufi practices include ritual prayer, meditation, and various ascetic or ecstatic activities. The central figure in Sufi practice is the *pir*, or spiritual leader. *Pirs* are thought to possess a special charismatic power, known as *karamat*, as well as the ability to bestow blessings, or *barakat*. *Pirs* act as mentors and spiritual guides to groups of students who form brotherhoods around their teachings. The Qadiriyya order, led by Sayed Ahmad Gailani, is a popular brotherhood among Pashtun tribes.<sup>57</sup>

## The Role of Religion in Government

Islam is the state religion of Afghanistan, and it has a strong influence on the country's government and legal system. The Afghan constitution states that "no law can be contrary to the beliefs and provisions of the sacred religion of Islam." It also requires the President and Vice President of Afghanistan to be Muslim. The constitution does, however, provide freedom of religion, so long as non-Muslim religious minorities practice their faith "within the limits of the provisions of the law."<sup>58</sup> It also provides the framework for the establishment of an independent judiciary,<sup>59</sup> but Islamic and tribal traditions remain strong, even within the formal court system.



© Chuck Holton  
President Hamid Karzai

For example, legal cases concerning familial issues—such as marriage, inheritance, and property—are typically judged according to Islamic legal code, or Shari'a. Furthermore, according to the constitution, any issue not addressed in the constitutional legal code is subject to Islamic law. Blasphemy and conversion from Islam are two such issues that fall outside the scope of the constitution and are thus judged according to Islamic law. In Afghanistan, both of these acts are illegal, and according to some interpretations of Shari'a, they are punishable by death.<sup>60</sup> In 2008, for example, an Afghan student who allegedly distributed literature criticizing Islam was convicted of blasphemy and sentenced to death. An appeals court later overturned his death sentence, but he nonetheless received 20 years in prison.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, Second Edition. Rubin, Barnett R. "Chapter 2: Social Structure under the Old Regime: Religion [pp. 39-40]." 2002. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

<sup>58</sup> Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State. *International Religious Freedom Report 2008*. "Afghanistan." September 2008. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2008/108497.htm>

<sup>59</sup> CBS News. Associated Press. Graham, Stephen. "A New Constitution for Afghanistan." 26 January 2004. <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2004/01/02/world/main591116.shtml>

<sup>60</sup> Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State. *International Religious Freedom Report 2008*. "Afghanistan." 19 September 2008. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2008/108497.htm>

<sup>61</sup> Los Angeles Times Online. King, Laura. "Afghan Student Gets 20 Years Instead of Death for Blasphemy." 22 October 2008. <http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fg-afghanistan22-2008oct22,0,7466691.story>

Such a strict interpretation and application of Islamic law became more widespread as a result of the Taliban’s years in power.<sup>62</sup> Overall, the country’s lack of a strong independent judiciary has made it difficult to enforce certain provisions of the Afghan constitution, including its stated commitment to human rights.<sup>63</sup> Islamic and tribal traditions remain prevalent. As of 2006, approximately 90% of legal cases held throughout the country’s many provinces were based on Islamic and tribal law.<sup>64</sup>

### **Influence of Religion on Daily Life**

The daily routine of Afghans is heavily influenced by Islam, which applies to all aspects of life. Foremost among daily rituals, Muslims are obliged to perform a series of prayers, known in Afghanistan as *namaz* (the second pillar of Islam). Traditionally, these prayers are performed at five approximate times of the day: dawn, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset, and evening. Muslims are called to prayer by the *muezzin*, who typically announces the call for prayer from the minaret of the local mosque.

#### **Exchange 1: When do you pray?**

Visitor:	When do you pray?	tsa waKht lmoonz kawee?
Local:	We pray at noon.	da maaspishin po waKht key

Daily prayers may be performed alone or with other Muslims at mosques. Friday is the Islamic holy day, when the Muslim community meets at the local mosque to participate in group prayer. Held at noon, this communal prayer is traditionally limited to male Muslims. On this day, special sermons are given by the *mullahs*, or clergy members. All prayers must be offered in the direction of Mecca, the holy city of Islam, which is located in Saudi Arabia. Stores, businesses, and government offices will likely be closed on Fridays.<sup>65</sup>

Prior to prayer, Muslims are required to perform ablution, known in Arabic as *wudu*, as a form of ritual purification. This process typically involves washing one’s hands, face, arms, neck, and feet, as well as rinsing out the mouth and nose.<sup>66</sup> Ablution is not solely intended for purposes of physical cleanliness—although this, too, is important. Rather, the rite is meant to spiritually and mentally prepare the participant to perform a holy action in a pure and concentrated state. This state of ritual purity is thought to be broken by any of several acts, such as defecating or urinating, breaking wind, or, for many Muslims, simply touching a person of the opposite sex. The necessity of performing multiple daily prayers encourages Muslims to maintain ritual purity throughout the day. Mosques often have facilities where Muslims can perform ablution prior to prayer.

<sup>62</sup> Encyclopædia Britannica Online. “Afghanistan: Government and Society: Political Processes: Informal Institutions and Justice.” 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-226133>

<sup>63</sup> Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State. *International Religious Freedom Report 2008*. September 2008. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2008/108497.htm>

<sup>64</sup> Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. “Country Profile: Afghanistan.” August 2008. <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Afghanistan.pdf>

<sup>65</sup> Kwintessential: Cross Cultural Solutions. “Afghanistan: Language, Culture, Customs, and Etiquette.” No Date. <http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/resources/global-etiquette/afghanistan.html>

<sup>66</sup> *The New Encyclopedia of Islam*, 3rd edition. Glassé, Cyril. Wudu [pp. 553-555].” 2008. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.

## Religion and Gender

Under the Taliban, women were banned from entering mosques. After the Taliban was overthrown, many Afghan women requested permission from the government to worship in separate mosques. Their request presented difficulties because according to Islamic law, females are not allowed to assume the role of *mullah*, or mosque leader.<sup>67</sup> Ultimately, in 2008, Afghan women gained the right to enter mosques in Kabul, although they are only allowed to



© Michael Foley  
Afghan woman

attend certain mosques where they can pray in segregated spaces.<sup>68</sup> In general, mosques in rural communities have not yet allowed women to worship in their facilities. Traditionally, Afghan women have instead exercised their religious faith through activities related with shrines, known as *ziarats*. Visits to such shrines are often made in order to pray for blessings of a protective or curative nature.<sup>69</sup> It is also common for women to simply pray at home.

## Religious Events and Holidays

Islamic events and festivals are observed according to the Islamic lunar calendar, which is shorter than the standard Gregorian calendar used in the U.S. and internationally. The dates of these events on the standard calendar thus change from year to year.

### *Ramadan*

Ramadan (or *Ramazán*) is the ninth and holiest month of the Islamic calendar. It is during this time that observant Muslims fulfill the third pillar of Islam, the undertaking of a fast (known in Afghanistan as *ruzah*). This period is an opportunity for Muslims to demonstrate their piety and devotion to the Islamic faith. Tradition requires that adults abstain from eating, drinking, and smoking during daylight hours. Restrictions also apply to sexual intercourse. Only the young, sick, elderly, and pregnant or nursing women are exempt from participating in the fast.

In addition to fasting, many people spend their time during Ramadan performing extra prayers. Muslims take care to avoid any wrongdoing during this time of piety. Ramadan is also a time for giving charitable contributions to the homeless or to an established organization like a mosque or the Red Crescent Society, which is similar to the Red Cross. The majority of the restaurants are closed during the day, and the work schedule is altered to release workers early.

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<sup>67</sup> IPS/Pajhwok. "Women Get to Sing and Want a Place in Mosques. 29 October 2004. <http://ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=26062>

<sup>68</sup> Asia Calling. Babakarkhail, Zubair. "Afghan Women Return to the Mosques. 27 September 2008. [http://www.asiacalling.org/index.php/bn/news/components/com\\_comment/joscomment/templates/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=712:afghan-women-return-to-the-mosques&catid=101:afghanistan&Itemid=379&lang=bn](http://www.asiacalling.org/index.php/bn/news/components/com_comment/joscomment/templates/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=712:afghan-women-return-to-the-mosques&catid=101:afghanistan&Itemid=379&lang=bn)

<sup>69</sup> Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. *Afghanistan: A Country Study*. Blood, Peter R., ed. "Chapter 2: The Society and Environment: Religion: Meaning and Practice. 1997. [http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+af0067\)](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+af0067))

Large meals are typically served after sunset to offset the rigorous demands of the daytime fast, which can cause fatigue and irritability. The fasting period can be difficult and may affect some people more than others. They may become easily agitated or react more slowly. In general, the pace of everyday life slows considerably during this holy month. Non-Muslims, including foreigners, are not required to fast, but they are expected to refrain from eating, drinking, smoking, or chewing gum in public.

### *Eid*

*Eid al-Fitr* or *EidRamazan* (“The Festival of the Breaking of the Fast”) marks the end of Ramadan. (In Pashto, this festival is known as *Kurbaneyy Akhtar*.) Muslims celebrate the end of the fast with a large, multi-day feast with family and friends. *Eid al-Adha* or *Eid-e-Qurban* (“The Festival of Sacrifice”) is a religious holiday held in the 12th month of the Islamic calendar. (In Pashto, the name of this festival is *Loy Akhtar*.) It traditionally marks the end of the Muslim pilgrimage, or *hajj*, to Mecca. The festival commemorates Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his son in obedience to Allah. Muslim families typically slaughter a goat or sheep and divide it into three shares, giving one share to relatives and another to the poor.



DoD photo: Cpl. Thomas Childs  
Jalalabad locals prepare the Eid feast

People throughout Afghanistan spend the three-day Eid holidays calling on their close friends and relatives. It is customary for people to wear new clothes and to prepare large feasts during these festivals. The exchange of gifts is also common, although a family’s wealth determines the extent of their celebrations.

### *Ashura*

Ashura commemorates the martyrdom of Hussein ibn Ali, the son of Ali and grandson of Muhammad, who was killed in the Battle of Karbala in 680 C.E. amid power struggles for the caliphate. This day is recognized by all Muslims, but it is especially important to the Shi’a community, which views Hussein as the rightful successor to the caliphate. Ashura occurs on the 10th day of the Islamic month of Muharram, a period of mourning for Shi’a Muslims. During this time, Shi’a Muslim men may scourge themselves with various instruments until their backs bleed. Such acts of self-flagellation demonstrate the Shi’a belief that only physical pain can truly reflect the grief felt by the Muslim world when Hussein died. In Afghanistan, the celebration of Ashura is generally limited to areas with large Shi’a populations. In recent years, Ashura festivals in Afghanistan have been marred by conflicts between Sunni and Shi’a factions.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> CNN. “Violence Mars Ashura Festival.” 10 February 2006.  
<http://www.cnn.com/2006/WORLD/asiapcf/02/09/ashura.wrap/index.html>

## Buildings of Worship and Sacred Sites

### Mosques

A mosque, or *masjid*, is the traditional site of Muslim worship. Every village in Afghanistan has at least one mosque, which serves a variety of purposes for the community. In addition to holding prayer services, mosques are often used as a school room for traditional Islamic education. In many villages the local mosque is also used for general community meetings and, occasionally, as a guest house. Travelers may be allowed to stay overnight in mosques, in which case villagers provide them with food and drink. Foreigners may be invited into a mosque to meet with local leaders.

### Shrines and Cemeteries

Shrines, or *ziarats*, are a common sight throughout the country. These commemorative markers may consist of tombs or reliquary complexes, or modest mounds of dirt or stones. They typically honor saints, venerated holy men (such as *pirs*), or martyrs (*shahids*). Afghans believe that the *ziarat* of a pious saint or martyr is a channel of communication with Allah, and they usually go to these places to pray for assistance.



© Richard F Jones  
Tomb of Ahmed Shah Massoud

Cemeteries are, of course, sacred places and they should be treated with respect. Afghans avoid walking over tombs, and visitors should follow this practice. The *shahid* (martyr) has special importance in both Islamic and Afghan society. When crossing cemeteries anywhere in Afghanistan, visitors will encounter many tombs that are distinguished with red or green flags. These are the final resting places of Afghan *shahids* who died defending their country and their beliefs.

### Behavior in Places of Worship

Muslims regard mosques as sacred spaces, and they should be respected as such. When foreigners visit a mosque, they should ask for permission to enter.

#### Exchange 2: May I enter the mosque?

Visitor:	May I enter the mosque?	kawalaay sham che jomaat ta oor nanowzom?
Local:	Yes.	ho

Under normal, non-combat circumstances, visitors should remove their shoes at the doorway and place them in the designated area before entering.

#### Exchange 3: Must I take off my shoes before I enter the mosque?

Visitor:	Must I take off my shoes before I enter the mosque?	majboor yam che leh jomaat ta de bandee iKhubul bochon raa wokaagem?
Local:	Yes.	ho

In Afghanistan, women traditionally do not visit mosques. Some mosques may allow women to pray in a segregated area. If a woman does enter a mosque, only her face, hands, and feet can be visible, and her hair must be completely covered. Females should cover their heads with scarves before entering a mosque.

**Exchange 4:** Do I need to cover my head?

Visitor:	Do I need to cover my head?	majboor yam che iKhbul sar pit krim?
Local:	Yes.	ho

Visitors should take care not to disrupt or walk in front of Muslims in prayer; this is thought to invalidate their prayers. The presence of dogs in a mosque is considered a desecration.

## Religion Assessment

1. The majority of Afghan Muslims are Shi'a.

**False.** Islam is the predominant religion in Afghanistan and most Afghan Muslims follow the Sunni branch of Islam. However, there is a substantial minority population of Shi'a Muslims.

2. There is a history of persecution of Shi'a Muslims in Afghanistan.

**True.** There is a history of persecution against Shi'a Muslims in the country, but generally, conflicts between the Sunni and Shi'a schools of Islam have not proven destabilizing.

3. Islam is Afghanistan's state religion.

**True.** Islam is the state religion of Afghanistan, and it has a strong influence on the government. The Afghan constitution requires that the president and vice president of Afghanistan be Muslim.

4. Most legal issues in Afghanistan are judged according to Islamic law.

**True.** Approximately 90% of legal cases held throughout the country's many provinces were based on Islamic and tribal law. The Afghan constitution states, "No law can be contrary to the beliefs and provisions of the sacred religion of Islam."

5. Women are allowed to enter the majority of mosques in Afghanistan.

**False.** Females are permitted to enter only a few mosques in Kabul. Most mosques are not open to female worshippers. Traditionally, Afghan women have prayed at shrines known as ziarats.

## Chapter 3 Traditions

### Introduction

Afghan society is deeply rooted in Islamic and tribal customs, many of which have been in practice for centuries. Ranging from basic manners of interaction to codes of honor and responsibility, these customs make Afghanistan a conservative, traditional society. Various attempts at social reform have been made in Afghanistan in the modern era. In many cases, such reforms were overturned following fierce resistance from the nation's tribal and Islamic fundamentalist factions.<sup>71</sup> During the Taliban's time in power, strict Islamic fundamentalism served as the basis for Afghan law and social code. After the fall of the Taliban, social reforms have once again been implemented, but traditional and fundamentalist practices remain prevalent. Although attitudes vary throughout the country, such resistance to change demonstrates the strength of Afghan traditions.



© Rob Bakker  
Going to the market in Kabul

The foremost priority of the Pashtun social code is the preservation of individual and familial honor, which are inextricably linked and valued above all else. Perceptions of character not only affect everyday social relations, but also political and economic matters within the community. Honor is especially contingent upon one's adherence to customary views and practices that enforce the clear distinction and segregation of the sexes.

### Greetings and Codes of Conduct

Afghans place great value on hospitality. They are generally quick to greet friends as well as strangers. Greetings, especially between strangers, are typically offered in a formal manner that is respectful of status and gender. A common greeting is the standard Arabic blessing used throughout the Muslim world, "Assalamu alaikum," and the response, "Wa alaikum assalam."

Handshakes are a typical greeting between men in Afghanistan. When exchanging greetings, Afghans may also offer a slight bow and touch their hands to their heart as a show of sincerity.<sup>72</sup>

#### Exchange 5: Good morning.

Soldier:	Good morning.	sahaar mo po Khayr
Local:	Good morning.	sahaar mo po Khayr

It is customary to exchange a series of friendly greetings before conducting any business.

<sup>71</sup> Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, U.S. Department of State. "Background Note: Afghanistan." March 2010. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5380.htm>

<sup>72</sup> Kwintessential: Cross Cultural Solutions. "Afghanistan: Language, Culture, Customs, and Etiquette." No date. <http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/resources/global-etiquette/afghanistan.html>

**Exchange 6: Good evening!**

Soldier:	Good evening!	shpa mo po Khayr!
Local:	Good evening!	shpa mo po Khayr!

Titles are used to greet persons in formal situations.

**Exchange 7: Hi, Mr. Hamidi.**

Soldier:	Hi, Mr. Hamidi.	salaamo 'alaykum hameedee sayb
Local:	Hello!	wa 'alaykumo salaam!
Soldier:	Are you doing well?	Khee yaast?
Local:	Yes.	ho

If they are good friends or relatives, Afghan men may hug and kiss each other on the cheek. They may also hold hands. In Afghan culture, these acts are demonstrations of friendship, nothing more.

Women may greet each other with a handshake or simply exchange a verbal greeting. Close female friends and relatives may hug and kiss each other on the cheek. They may also hold hands.

**Exchange 8: How are you?**

Soldier:	How are you?	tsanga yaast?
Local:	Fine, very well.	manana, der Kheh

Afghan men and women do not make physical contact while greeting, as such contact is perceived as taboo. Verbal greetings may be used in some circumstances, but it is more common for men and women to not be introduced, especially in conservative areas populated by Pashtuns.

*Eye Contact*

In Afghanistan, breaking eye contact during conversation is a demonstration of modesty; it is not seen as impolite or indicative of dishonesty or ill will. Afghans consider staring or fixed gazes as a sign of aggression. Such looks may also be interpreted as the “evil eye,” which is considered extremely offensive. Members of the opposite sex do not look each other in the eye, including in some cases within the extended family.<sup>73</sup> Male foreigners should avoid making eye contact with Afghan women, as it could cause serious offense.



© Carol Mitchell  
Street scene in Kabul

*Right Hand vs. Left Hand*

<sup>73</sup> Centre for Intercultural Learning, Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada. “Cultural Information: Afghanistan.” 15 October 2009. <http://www.intercultures.ca/cil-cai/ci-ic-eng.asp?iso=af#cn-2>

Afghans maintain an important distinction between the right and left hands. The right hand is used for all public interactions, including shaking hands, eating, drinking, making a payment, presenting or receiving a gift, and other actions. The left hand is traditionally associated with matters of personal hygiene and is thus considered unclean. It is therefore inappropriate to use the left hand for eating, passing things to others, or performing other interactive motions. Even left-handed persons should observe this custom.

**Male-Female Interactions**

Afghan social codes are heavily influenced by Islamic and tribal customs that dictate the maintenance of distinct boundaries between men and women. Foremost, the segregation of men and women is common practice in Afghanistan, especially among the Pashtun. Members of the opposite sex do not mix socially in public, especially if they are unrelated. While circumstances vary according to location and family, many women may be largely restricted to the home. Gender boundaries are also observed in the home, among the extended family. Physical contact between unrelated men and women is taboo, and even friendship between members of the opposite sex is seen as inappropriate.

Afghan men maintain an appropriate and respectful distance from unrelated women in public. It is unacceptable for men to shake hands or initiate any physical contact with women outside their own families. It is also inappropriate for a man to address any female directly or initiate a conversation with her. Men should instead communicate through the woman’s husband or close male relatives.



© Michael Foley  
Women in burkhas

It is a grave taboo for a man to compliment a woman on her beauty, attire, or other related topics. Unless the person voicing such sentiments is also female, this type of compliment may offend the woman and her family. By the same token, Afghan men do not welcome inquiries about their wives and daughters. One should ask about their family as a whole instead.

**Exchange 9: How is your family?**

Soldier:	How is your family?	koraney da changa da?
Local:	They are doing fine, thank you.	Khada, manana

**Gender Roles and Relationships**

In Afghan society, women are traditionally seen as a valuable asset to the family and as a symbol of the family’s honor and wealth. Unmarried women and girls are seen as especially valuable due to their worth as potential brides. Brides fetch bride prices for the family and establish social alliances with other families through marriage. Because a female is a representative of the family, her actions reflect upon both herself and the family as a whole. Men are responsible in this respect as well, but women are especially tied to familial honor, which is valued above all else. Even incidents that are beyond a woman’s control, such as cases of assault, can bring disgrace to both her and her family. In this context, the segregation and seclusion of women is used as a means to protect and

control female family members. In other words, these practices are meant to shield females from outside forces, such as tribal enemies or unfamiliar men, as well as prevent them from performing any actions that could bring dishonor upon themselves and the family.<sup>74</sup> This especially concerns female chastity and the preservation of virginity before marriage.

Male family members are responsible for protecting and supervising their female relatives, especially in public. In Afghanistan, as in many Muslim societies, the public realm is seen as a male-dominated space, as well as a space that is prone to danger and instability. It is common for many Afghan women to be restricted to their homes. When venturing into public, women are typically required to be escorted by their male relatives. Many Afghan women wear a *chadri*, a garment that covers the entire body, including the face. This piece of clothing is meant to shield women from the gaze of unfamiliar persons. This practice became more widespread under the strict rule of the Taliban, and it remains common throughout many areas of Afghanistan.



© Chuck Holton  
Father and daughter

Afghan society is patriarchal, meaning that females are expected to defer to male family members in virtually all matters. A woman's individual rights are therefore often subordinated to the will of her male relatives. In extreme instances, "honor killings" are known to occur in Afghanistan. These killings are carried out in cases in which a woman or girl is thought to have shamed her family. Serious offenses include committing adultery, engaging in pre-marital

sexual relations, refusing an arranged marriage, running away from home, or suffering rape. The death of the shamed woman in such a killing is thought to restore the family's honor. Male relatives usually carry out the killings themselves, and they are often supported by the male community in doing so.<sup>75</sup>

Officially, the Afghan constitution ratified in 2004 provides equal rights for women, including access to the public sphere and expanded legal freedoms. However, many women continue to face serious abuse or discrimination if they do not follow traditional Islamic and tribal customs.<sup>76</sup> A woman's observance of such traditions, either forced or freely chosen, may vary according to her socioeconomic background and location. In any case, veiling and seclusion remain common in many Afghan communities.<sup>77</sup> Overall, women are fiercely protected in Afghan society, often to the point that they are fiercely

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<sup>74</sup> *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, Second Edition. Rubin, Barnett R. "Chapter 2: Social Structure under the Old Regime: Kinship, Qawm, Tribe, Ethnicity [pp. 22-25]." 2002. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

<sup>75</sup> IRIN, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. "Afghanistan: Honour Killings on the Rise." 15 September 2006. <http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?reportid=61698>

<sup>76</sup> The World Bank. "Afghanistan: National Reconstruction and Poverty Reduction—The Role of Women in Afghanistan's Future [pp. 75-76]." March 2005.

<http://siteresources.worldbank.org/AFGHANISTANEXTN/Resources/AfghanistanGenderReport.pdf>

<sup>77</sup> *Culture and Customs of Afghanistan*. Hafizullah Emadi. "Chapter 6: Family, Women, and Gender Issues: Seclusion and Restriction [pp. 169-171]." 2005. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

controlled. This tendency has been reinforced in response to the unstable and dangerous conditions that have characterized Afghanistan for the last three decades.<sup>78</sup>

### **Social Codes: Pashtunwali**

Pashtunwali is an ancient tribal code that is adhered to by traditional Pashtun peoples, especially those living in rural areas effectively beyond the reach of the central government.<sup>79</sup> The code outlines the social responsibilities of Pashtuns, and it traditionally serves as the basis for local law in Pashtun communities.

Within these communities, it is often associated with Islamic legal codes and traditions, even though there are contradictions between the two.<sup>80</sup> The Taliban,

who are largely composed of Pashtuns, based their rule of law on a combination of Pashtunwali and a strict interpretation of Islam.<sup>81</sup> The strength of the Pashtunwali tradition varies according to region. The following are its major principles.



© Victoria Villalobos  
Grandfather and granddaughter

#### *Honor (Nang)*

For Pashtuns, and the Afghan people as a whole, honor is the defining characteristic of an individual's self-worth and reputation within society. The Afghan concept of honor is closely related to courage (especially in battle), self-respect, and responsibility. A Pashtun's honor is deeply connected to that of his or her family and the tribe as a whole. Without honor, a Pashtun is no longer respected or accepted within the Pashtun community. Accordingly, Pashtuns are quick to defend their honor. Insults upon a Pashtun's honor are taken extremely seriously and may be cause for violence, including murder and prolonged blood feuds between tribes.<sup>82</sup>

#### *Hospitality (Melmastia)*

The generous display of hospitality is one of the most important principles in the Pashtunwali code. Pashtun hospitality extends to both guests and strangers, who are traditionally offered food, shelter, and, in some cases, gifts by their Pashtun hosts. Meals prepared for guests will often be more lavish than those the Pashtun family regularly eats. The Afghan concept of hospitality is closely related to another Pashtunwali principle, *nanawati*. This principle requires the defense and protection of guests during their stay

<sup>78</sup> The World Bank. "Afghanistan: National Reconstruction and Poverty Reduction—The Role of Women in Afghanistan's Future [p. 6]." March 2005.

<http://siteresources.worldbank.org/AFGHANISTANEXTN/Resources/AfghanistanGenderReport.pdf>

<sup>79</sup> *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, Second Edition. Rubin, Barnett R. "Chapter 2: Social Structure under the Old Regime: Kinship, Qawm, Tribe, Ethnicity [pp. 28-29]." 2002. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

<sup>80</sup> Afghan Legal History Project, Islamic Legal Studies Program, Harvard Law School. Kakar, Palwasha.

"Tribal Law of Pashtunwali and Women's Legislative Authority [p. 2]." No date.

<http://www.law.harvard.edu/programs/ilsp/research/kakar.pdf>

<sup>81</sup> Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, U.S. Department of State. "Background Note: Afghanistan." March 2010. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5380.htm>

<sup>82</sup> Afghan Legal History Project, Islamic Legal Studies Program, Harvard Law School. Kakar, Palwasha.

"Tribal Law of Pashtunwali and Women's Legislative Authority [pp. 3-4]." No date given.

<http://www.law.harvard.edu/programs/ilsp/research/kakar.pdf>

with a Pashtun community. It may also involve the mediation of a dispute in which the guest may be involved. For Pashtuns, it is a great honor to provide hospitality and protection to their guests.<sup>83</sup>

#### *Protection of Women, Land, Honor, and Wealth (Namus)*

The concept of *namus* has a broad meaning. In general, it applies to the protection of sanctity and honor, which, in turn, are upheld through the protection of the tribe's assets and social customs. For example, any insult or attack upon the tribe's territory or women would be seen as a direct attack upon the tribe's honor and sanctity. This extends to the preservation of social codes within the community, which serve to maintain order and tribal integrity.

*Namus* is especially tied to the protection of women and the preservation of their sanctity. The concept of *parda* (*pardah*), or the veiling and seclusion of women, is closely linked to *namus*, as is the general practice of segregating the sexes. These practices do not only affect females. Male Pashtuns are required to respect the established gender boundaries, and they may face shame, punishment, and even expulsion for not doing so.<sup>84</sup>

In a very broad sense, *namus* may also refer to the protection of land, which is closely linked with women in some Pashtun tribes.<sup>85</sup> Overall, Pashtuns fiercely protect their women and territory, as their ability to do so reflects greatly upon their honor and integrity.

#### *Vengeance (Badal)*

*Badal* is vengeance or retribution for insults or attacks made upon one's honor, family, or tribal assets. According to Pashtunwali, a person who violates another's *namus* is subject to punishment, generally of an equivalent nature. It is a Pashtun's duty to exact revenge when his honor has been insulted, and other Pashtuns may look down on him if he does not seek retaliation. This mandate for retribution is strong among Pashtun communities, and it has led to long-running blood feuds between tribes. However, conflict mediation and reconciliation is possible through some channels, including the *jirga*, or tribal council.<sup>86</sup>



© Pierre Gazzola  
Tribal council in Kandahar

<sup>83</sup> Afghan Legal History Project, Islamic Legal Studies Program, Harvard Law School. Kakar, Palwasha. "Tribal Law of Pashtunwali and Women's Legislative Authority [p. 4]." No date. <http://www.law.harvard.edu/programs/ilsp/research/kakar.pdf>

<sup>84</sup> Afghan Legal History Project, Islamic Legal Studies Program, Harvard Law School. Kakar, Palwasha. "Tribal Law of Pashtunwali and Women's Legislative Authority [pp. 4-5]." No date. <http://www.law.harvard.edu/programs/ilsp/research/kakar.pdf>

<sup>85</sup> Wardak.org. *Essays on South Asian Society: Culture and Politics II*. Glatzer, Bernt. "Being Pashtun - Being Muslim: Concepts of Person and War." 1998. Berlin: Das Arabische Buch. [http://www.wardak.de/tribes/being\\_pashtun.pdf](http://www.wardak.de/tribes/being_pashtun.pdf)

<sup>86</sup> Khyber.org. "Pashtoonwali: Badal." No date. <http://www.khyber.org/culture/pashtoonwalai/badal.shtml>

### *Tribal Council (Jirga)*

The *jirga* is a council of tribal leaders, usually composed of elder men who are known for their adherence to the Pashtunwali code. In some cases, it may consist of all the adult males in the tribe. The *jirga* acts as the local legislative and judicial body and thus oversees disputes or addresses important issues within the community. In judicial matters, the council generally interviews those involved and considers relevant evidence. Its members reach decisions based on consensus, and the persons involved in the matter under consideration are required to abide by the council's decision. This process provides a relatively democratic and peaceful way to resolve disputes within or between tribes, although the council's decision may override a person's individual rights, particularly in the case of women.<sup>87</sup>

### *Escort (Badragga)*

The concept of *badragga* is important as it applies to strangers passing through Pashtun tribal lands. *Badraggas* are armed escorts who accompany travelers (or even fugitives) on their journeys through Pashtun territory. The traveler must first ask permission from the tribe and pay for the services of the *badragga*. When under the escort of a *badragga*, travelers are guaranteed safe passage. It is against Pashtunwali code for other Pashtun tribes, including enemies of the traveler, to harm the traveler when under the protection of the *badragga* of another tribe.<sup>88</sup>

### **Hospitality and Gift-Giving**

It is very important for Afghans, regardless of their wealth, to show hospitality to all visitors. To do so is a source of both pride and honor. Guests generally receive the best an Afghan family has to offer, which varies according to the family's means. This applies not only to Pashtuns, who follow the Pashtunwali code, but all Afghan peoples.



© Keith Stanski  
Pashtun elders

### **Exchange 10:** I really appreciate your hospitality.

Visitor:	I really appreciate your hospitality.	les taasoo da meelma paa leena dera manana kom
Local:	It is nothing.	qaabelyat nalaree

In rural Afghanistan, villages generally have a *hujra*, or guest house, which is traditionally open to friends as well as strangers. In some areas the guest house may be owned by the village leader, or *khan*, while in other areas it may be maintained by the village as a whole. In general, a stranger or traveler can go to these houses and be given shelter and food. A *hujra* more commonly serves as a meeting room for male village

<sup>87</sup> Afghan Legal History Project, Islamic Legal Studies Program, Harvard Law School. Kakar, Palwasha. "Tribal Law of Pashtunwali and Women's Legislative Authority [p. 6]." No date.

<http://www.law.harvard.edu/programs/ilsp/research/kakar.pdf>

<sup>88</sup> Afghanan.net. "Pashtunwali: Pashtunwali Terminology." c.1999-2008.

<http://www.afghanan.net/pashto/pashtunwali/terms.htm>

members to receive male guests and friends. In this sense, it may act as meeting room for the village council or as a site for social events.<sup>89</sup>

The most basic and common form of Afghan hospitality is an invitation for tea. It is customary for Afghans to drink at least three cups of tea. While guests should accept the offer of tea, they may leave it without drinking and not cause offense. When visiting an Afghan home for tea or a meal, it is appropriate to bring a small gift such as fruit or pastries. Gifts are not expected, however, as it is the host’s honor to provide for the guest. Gifts should be presented discreetly and with great modesty; they should not be given immediately or in a showy manner. It is best to place the gift aside and leave it there for the host. Such gifts will not be opened in front of the one who has provided it. When giving gifts, foreigners should respect Islamic dietary customs that prohibit Muslims from consuming pork or alcohol.<sup>90</sup>

**Exchange 11:** This gift is for you.

Visitor:	This gift is for you.	da taaso ta yawa soghaatee da
Local:	Thank you, but I cannot accept this.	manana, magar zey na qablawom

**Traditional Jobs and Economy**

Agriculture and animal husbandry have historically formed the basis of the Afghan economy. Most Afghans continue to work as farmers and livestock herders, or in related businesses. Major conventional crops include cereals (such as wheat and barley), cotton, fruits, and nuts. The cultivation of opium poppies has become widespread due to the hardness and high market value of the crop. Cows, sheep, goats, donkeys, and horses are typical breeds of livestock. The first three are especially important for milk production. Other varieties include camels, buffalo, and mules.<sup>91</sup> Some tribes, including Pashtun tribes in the southeast, subsist as nomadic shepherds, migrating in search of grazing land. The production of handicrafts and textiles, such as carpets, is another common economic activity.



© Munir Squires  
Young Pashtun shepherd

**Exchange 12:** Are you the only person in your family who has a job?

Soldier:	Are you the only person in your family who has a job?	po Khpol faameel ke taasee yowazeeney kaar kawonke yaast?
Local:	No.	na

<sup>89</sup> Khyber.org. “Pashtoonwali: Hujra.” No date. <http://www.khyber.org/culture/pashtoonwalai/hujra.shtml>

<sup>90</sup> Kwintessential: Cross Cultural Solutions. “Afghanistan: Language, Culture, Customs, and Etiquette.” No date. <http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/resources/global-etiquette/afghanistan.html>

<sup>91</sup> Encyclopædia Britannica Online. “Afghanistan: The Economy: Agriculture and Forestry.” 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-21433>

**Traditional Dress**

Following Islamic and tribal customs, traditional Afghan dress is conservative. Afghan men generally wear full-length pants and a long shirt that reaches down to their knees. The shirt is generally not tucked into the pants, and both of these items are loose-fitting. Vests are worn over the shirt, and it is common for men to carry a shawl-like garment on their shoulders. This piece of cloth is often used as a rug for prayer. Turbans, which consist of a long strip of cloth wrapped around the head, are common among Pashtun men, who often leave a loose end hanging. Skullcaps are another popular form of headgear; they are generally worn underneath the turban.<sup>92</sup> Wool shirts and coats are worn in colder, high-altitude areas.<sup>93</sup>



© Michael Von Bergen  
Traditional Pashtun dress

In public, Afghan women are often completely concealed in accordance with local custom. In general, they wear baggy cotton pants and a long, loose-fitting shirt. A headscarf or shawl is used to cover the hair and, when necessary, the face. (This garment may be quickly placed over the face when a woman encounters an unfamiliar man.) When in public, many Afghan women wear a *chadri*, an extensive, loose-fitting garment that covers the entire body. Lattice-work openings near the eyes allow women to see out of the *chadri*.

Foreigners should respect the Afghan tradition of conservative attire.

**Exchange 13: How should I dress?**

Visitor:	How should I dress?	tša dool kaalee aghoostalee sham?
Local:	Wear loose fitting clothes which cover your body.	daasee kaalee waaghoondee che praaKh wee aw haykal dee pit kree

It is advisable for women to carry a scarf in order to cover their hair or face in certain situations.

**Exchange 14: Is this acceptable to wear?**

Visitor:	Is this acceptable to wear?	daa dool kaalee da aghoostoloo war dee?
Local:	Yes.	ho

Neither men nor women should wear shorts in public. Women should avoid wearing short skirts, short-sleeved shirts, and tight-fitting or low-cut blouses in public. Although men commonly take their shirt off in hot weather in the U.S., this practice is considered highly inappropriate in Afghanistan.

<sup>92</sup> *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life*, First Edition. Gall, Timothy L. “Pashtun.” 1998. Detroit, MI: Gale Research.

<sup>93</sup> [Bosnia-Herzegovina/Pashtun.html](#)

<sup>93</sup> *Culture and Customs of Afghanistan*. Hafizullah Emadi. “Chapter 5: Social Customs, Cuisine, and Traditional Dress: Clothing and Fashions [pp. 145-151].” 2005. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

## Food

The Afghan region has been exposed to many different culinary influences throughout its history. As most Afghans are farmers and livestock herders, cereals and animal products are staples of the Afghan diet.



**Exchange 15:** This food is very good.

Visitor:	This food is very good.	daa Khowaro der sheh dee
Local:	It's Qorma-e Morgh.	dee cherge qoorma dah

In general, an Afghan meal usually consists of tea, bread (*naan*), rice, and a main dish containing some type of meat, such as lamb, chicken, or beef. Stews (*qorma*) are popular dishes.

**Exchange 16:** What ingredients are used to make Qorma-e Morgh?

Visitor:	What ingredients are used to make <i>Qorma-e Morgh</i> ?	de day qoorma mawaad tsa dee?
Local:	It is chicken meat sautéed in onions. Spices, tomato sauce and a little water are added to it.	dee cherge ghowha da che po peeyaazo ke sara shawe da. adweeya jaat aw roomee baanjan de logo boo sara peeka achool shawee dee

*Naan* is especially important and is an essential part of the meal for any Afghan family, regardless of wealth.

A popular Afghan dish is *pilau* (pilaf), which consists of rice, meat (typically lamb), vegetables, and spices. Carrots, raisins, and lamb are the main ingredients in *qabili pilau*, one of the nation's most famous dishes, but there are many other variations of *pilau*.

**Exchange 17:** What is the name of this dish?

Visitor:	What is the name of this dish?	da Khoraak tsa noom laree?
Local:	This is Qabili Palaw.	da qaabeele palaw de

Kebabs, skewered chunks of seasoned meat, are another popular meal in Afghanistan, although they are mostly found in urban centers. They are typically accompanied by *naan* or, sometimes, vegetables. Meat dumplings, noodle soups, and lamb stews are also popular. Fruits and nuts typically complement all meals, as they are common Afghan agricultural products. Yogurt, eggs, and other animal products are also staples. Alcohol and pork are strictly avoided in accordance with Islamic tradition.<sup>94</sup>

<sup>94</sup> *Culture and Customs of Afghanistan*. Hafizullah Emadi. "Chapter 5: Social Customs, Cuisine, and Traditional Dress: Culinary Tradition [pp. 137-145]." 2005. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

## Eating Habits

An invitation for a meal is a common form of Afghan hospitality. This will certainly occur if one is visiting an Afghan village as a guest. Meals will often be given in the village *hujra*, or guest house. In many cases, the host will slaughter an animal for the meal as a sign of his generous hospitality. If the guest is male, the meal will likely be attended only by men. Dining etiquette may vary according to region and family.



© Munir Squires  
Sitting down for a meal

When entering an Afghan home for a meal, it is customary to remove one's shoes. Meals in Afghan homes are usually served on a cloth on the ground, and cushions may be provided for seating. The hosts will generally direct the guest where to sit, and guests should wait for them to do so. Guests should sit cross-legged and take care not to show the soles of their feet or point them at other persons. This is considered offensive.<sup>95</sup> Before the meal, it is customary for each person to wash their hands.

Afghans eat from a single large plate and use their right hand to take food from the dish. The left hand is considered unclean, as it is associated with acts of personal hygiene. Even if guests are left-handed, they should not take food from the communal plate with their left hand or use it to consume food. Likewise, items should only be passed with the right hand.

Each person may have an individual plate to place food upon. Afghans generally do not use utensils, but they may offer them to foreigners. Eating with the utensils will not offend the host. The most common eating method is to collect small portions of food with the fingertips, at times rolling it into a ball, before eating it. Bread may also be used to scoop food. Certain meals require bowls and spoons.

It is polite to compliment the quality of the food.

**Exchange 18:** This food tastes so good.

Visitor:	This food tastes so good.	da Khowara derah Kha maza kawee
Local:	Thank you.	manana

Guests should leave a small amount of food on their individual plate to show that they are full. Otherwise, the host will continue to offer food, as it is customary for the host to ensure that the guest is fully satisfied. Indeed, a host's honor is tied to his ability to provide for guests.

<sup>95</sup> Kwintessential: Cross Cultural Solutions. "Afghanistan: Language, Culture, Customs, and Etiquette." No date. <http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/resources/global-etiquette/afghanistan.html>

## Non-Religious Holidays

Although Islamic holidays are the most important events of the year, Afghans also celebrate a number of secular holidays and festivals. The largest of these is *Nowruz*, a New Year’s celebration that follows the solar calendar. This event typically falls on 21 March, the first day of spring. During this time, Afghans traditionally decorate their homes and wear new clothing, depending upon their means. Friends and families gather to celebrate the holiday with special meals, including a sweet, pudding-like dish known as *samanak*. A variety of local events and festivals may be held on this day in various regions of the country. As an ancient, pre-Islamic tradition, *Nowruz* was prohibited by the Taliban during their time in power.



© Eliza Tasbihi  
Traditional Nowruz table setting

### Exchange 19: Will you be celebrating the festival?

Visitor:	Will you be celebrating New Year?	taaso de newee kaal jeshin tar sara kawee?
Local:	Yes!	ho!

Another important holiday is *Jashn*, or Independence Day, which is celebrated on 19 August. This event commemorates Afghanistan’s formal independence in 1919, when the British relinquished control over the region.<sup>96</sup>

During celebrations, it is not uncommon for Afghans to fire guns, especially in rural areas. Gunshots may be fired, for example, to mark the end of Ramadan, the first day of Eid, a marriage, or the birth of a child.

## Weddings

Prior to marriage, an Afghan female’s interaction with members of the opposite sex is often limited exclusively to her male relatives in the domestic realm. Marriages are typically arranged between families, and thus there is no period of dating or courtship for most couples. (Roughly 80% of Afghan women enter forced or arranged marriages.)<sup>97</sup> Afghan marriages represent a merger between families, not a private union between individuals. The groom’s family pays a bride price, and the bride brings a dowry of larger monetary value.

Under Taliban rule, wedding celebrations were austere. While weddings remain traditional affairs in which parents select the partners of their children, the celebrations are full of color and as lavish as budgets permit. Guests often bring their entire families. In villages, it is necessary to invite everyone or risk losing face in the community. In the cities, weddings have become big financial burdens to the groom’s family, which pays

<sup>96</sup> *Culture and Customs of Afghanistan*. Hafizullah Emadi. “Chapter 5: Social Customs, Cuisine, and Traditional Dress: Festivals and Leisure Activities [pp. 151-155].” 2005. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

<sup>97</sup> Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. “Country Profile: Afghanistan.” August 2008. <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Afghanistan.pdf>

for the often-lengthy celebration and its many related events. As the wedding ceremony is an important display of social status, even poor Afghans will go to great lengths to arrange an elaborate celebration.<sup>98</sup>

**Exchange 20: Congratulations on your wedding!**

Visitor:	Congratulations on your wedding!	wadoo mo mobaarak sha!
Local:	We are honored you could attend.	staaso ishteraak kawel mog te ifteeKhaar bahee



© Michael Foley  
Wedding car in Kabul

After negotiations and preparations for the wedding, the ceremony is generally performed by a *mullah*, or Muslim clergy member. The formal ceremony is followed by an elaborate celebration and feast, traditionally held at the bridegroom’s home. Today, weddings in some areas, particularly in cities, may be held in public wedding halls. The reception includes music and dancing, and the bride traditionally receives gifts from the wedding guests.

**Exchange 21: I wish you both happiness.**

Visitor:	I wish you both happiness.	dowaro ta de neyk marghee heela kawoom
Local:	We are honored.	mog ta ifteeKhaar dey

Men and women generally celebrate in different rooms or banquet halls, as Islamic and tribal custom requires them to be segregated. In some tribal communities, “proof” of the bride’s virginity will be required on the wedding night; evidence to the contrary may result in a broken marriage contract.<sup>99</sup>

*Funerals*

Burials in Afghanistan are conducted according to Islamic custom. The body of the deceased is first washed and then shrouded in clean linen. Women are shrouded in extra linen in order to conceal their face and further cover their torso. In order to maintain the segregation of the sexes, deceased men and women are not buried together.

**Exchange 22: I would like to give my condolences to you.**

Visitor:	I would like to give my condolences to you and your family.	zo ghowaarim che taaso aw taaso kooranee ta iKhpalee Khwaa Khoogee oraan deklam
Local:	Thank you.	manana

<sup>98</sup> The New York Times. Semple, Kirk. “Big Weddings Bring Afghans Joy, and Debt.” 14 January 2008. <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/14/world/asia/14weddings.html>

<sup>99</sup> The World Bank. “Afghanistan: National Reconstruction and Poverty Reduction—The Role of Women in Afghanistan’s Future [p. 79].” March 2005. <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/AFGHANISTANEXTN/Resources/AfghanistanGenderReport.pdf>

In Pashtun communities, male and female mourners are segregated at the burial site. Women often perform loud wailing as a demonstration of their grief. If related to the deceased, Pashtun women are prohibited from wearing colored clothing or jewelry for three days. After this period, widows may wear white or black. Male and female graves are marked differently. Stones are lined on men’s graves from side to side, while on women’s graves, they run from end to end.<sup>100</sup>

**Exchange 23:** Please be strong.

Visitor:	Please be strong.	lotfan Khpal zaan satr wosaatee
Local:	We will try.	koshesh be oo wokroo

**Weapons**

Afghans traditionally keep personal weapons in their homes. Since the onset of conflict in 1979, many people have acquired sophisticated firearms, such as assault rifles (AK-47s) and other military weapons, including RPGs and heavy machine guns. In rural Afghanistan, several generations of young men have participated in military conflicts, either in the war against the U.S.S.R. from 1979 to 1989, or in the ensuing civil conflict. Many of these fighters (*mujahideen*) kept their weapons for personal safety or as war trophies.



DoD photo: Spc Eric Hughes  
Weapons in an Afghan village

<sup>100</sup> *Encyclopedia of Women and Islamic Cultures, Vol. III: Family, Body, Sexuality, and Health*. Joseph, Suad and Afsaneh Najmabadi. “Funerary Practices: Iran and Afghanistan [pp. 119-120].” 2006. Leiden: Brill.

## Traditions Assessment

1. Walking hand in hand, hugging, and shaking hands are only allowed between people of the same sex.

**True.** Pashtun customs limit the interaction between men and women. Forms of greeting such as shaking hands and hugging are only allowed between people of the same sex.

2. It is acceptable for a man to speak to woman who is not related to him.

**False.** It is also highly inappropriate for a man to address any unrelated female directly or initiate a conversation with her. Instead, he should communicate through her husband or close male relatives.

3. Female family members are seen as symbolic of the family's honor.

**True.** In Afghan society, women are traditionally seen as a symbol of the family's honor. Because a female is a representative of the family, her actions reflect upon both herself and the family as a whole.

4. The code of Pashtunwali is still followed by many Pashtuns in Afghanistan.

**True.** Pashtunwali is an ancient tribal code that is adhered to by traditional Pashtun peoples, especially those living in rural areas effectively beyond the reach of the central government.

5. Pashtuns are very distrustful of strangers and often chase away any unknown visitors.

**False.** It is very important for Afghans, regardless of their wealth, to show hospitality to all visitors. To do so is a source of pride and honor and a part of the Pashtunwali code (melmastia).

## Chapter 4 Urban Life

### Introduction

City populations in Afghanistan are generally a mixture of people from different ethnic and tribal groups. Many of these urban residents have migrated to the city in order to escape the violence, poverty, and drought-ridden conditions that have afflicted rural Afghanistan over the last several decades. In 2009, approximately 24% of the nation's population lived in urban areas. The majority of urban dwellers live in the cities of Kabul (the capital), Herat, Kandahar, Mazar-e-Sharif, Jalalabad, and Kunduz.



© Ryan Whitney  
View of Kabul

With the influx of migrants and the return of millions of refugees who fled the country when the Taliban was in power, Afghan cities are experiencing a growth rate significantly higher than that of the country as a whole.<sup>101</sup>

Kabul, for example, which had a population of about one million in 2001, is now home to an estimated five million people.<sup>102</sup> More than one million of these residents are former refugees who have returned to Afghanistan from neighboring countries.<sup>103</sup> This population influx has severely strained the city's infrastructure and services. As a result, in Kabul, as well as in the country's other major cities, migrants have established large informal settlements. Already heavily burdened and short of resources, municipal governments often do not provide services to squatter settlements that lack legal status. Yet, a large percentage of city residents may live in such makeshift communities. Some three million of Kabul's residents, for example, are thought to live in "illegal and unplanned houses."<sup>104</sup> Many of these residents work informal and low-paying jobs, if they can find employment at all.<sup>105</sup> In turn, widespread unemployment and poverty have contributed to an increase in criminal activity, especially robbery.

Afghan cities, most notably Kabul, have also experienced high-end development projects since the fall of the Taliban. Some observers have noted that most of these projects have benefited a small class of wealthy citizens and upper-level government and military

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<sup>101</sup> United Nations Population Fund. *State of the World Population 2009: Facing a Changing World: Women, Population and Climate*. "Demographic, Social and Economic Indicators [p. 86]." 2009. [http://www.unfpa.org/swp/2009/en/pdf/EN\\_SOWP09.pdf](http://www.unfpa.org/swp/2009/en/pdf/EN_SOWP09.pdf)

<sup>102</sup> IRIN, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. "Afghanistan: Unsafe Housing Puts Kabul Residents at Risk." 15 July 2009. <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=85286>

<sup>103</sup> IRIN, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. "Afghanistan: Kabul Facing 'Unregulated' Urbanization." 26 November 2007. <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=75508>

<sup>104</sup> IRIN, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. "Afghanistan: Unsafe Housing Puts Kabul Residents at Risk." 15 July 2009. <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=85286>

<sup>105</sup> Afghanistan Research Evaluation Unit. Beall, Jo and Stefan Schütte. "Urban Livelihoods in Afghanistan." August 2006. <http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/DESTIN/pdf/AREU%20Urban%20Livelihoods%20SP%20FINAL%20PROOF%205Oct2006.pdf>

officials.<sup>106</sup> Yet, overall, urban expansion and development in Afghanistan has suffered from a general lack of proper planning and regulation. As a result, many cities have serious deficiencies, such as a lack of waste treatment facilities.<sup>107</sup> Kabul, for example, does not have a comprehensive public sewage system, and electricity is not regularly available for most residents. Plans have been made to build a “Greater Kabul” to the northeast of the current city in order to address the ongoing problem of unregulated urbanization. Kabul’s population is expected to exceed 8 million by 2025.<sup>108</sup>

**Health Issues**

Due to the lack of basic municipal services, urban residents are exposed to health dangers related to pollution, unsanitary living conditions, and lack of shelter. Residents of informal settlements and slums are at particular risk to these dangers. For example, without access to improved water, poor urban dwellers are often forced to use polluted water resources, a cause of serious health problems.<sup>109</sup> Diarrhea, hepatitis A, and typhoid are common food- and water-borne diseases in Afghanistan.



© Ard Hesselink  
Kabul River

Furthermore, as a result of an aging vehicle fleet and extremely poor gas quality, air pollution is a major concern in cities, particularly Kabul.<sup>110</sup>

Decades of conflict severely damaged the nation’s medical system, leaving much of its infrastructure destroyed and causing most of its healthcare professionals to flee.<sup>111</sup> This contributed to the deterioration of the general health of the Afghan population, as determined by a number of indicators.

**Exchange 24: Is the doctor in?**

Soldier:	Is Dr. Azizi in?	daaktor 'azeezee dalta tashreef laree?
Local:	No.	na

<sup>106</sup> The Washington Post. Gannon, Kathy. Associated Press. 11 November 2006. “Post-Taliban Kabul Blossoms for the Rich.” <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/11/11/AR2006111100615.html>

<sup>107</sup> IRIN, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. “Afghanistan: Kabul Facing “Unregulated” Urbanization.” 26 November 2007. <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=75508>

<sup>108</sup> IRIN, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. “Afghanistan: Unsafe Housing Puts Kabul Residents at Risk.” 15 July 2009. <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=85286>

<sup>109</sup> Afghanistan Research Evaluation Unit. Beall, Jo and Stefan Schütte. “Urban Livelihoods in Afghanistan.” August 2006. <http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/DESTIN/pdf/AREU%20Urban%20Livelihoods%20SP%20FINAL%20PROOF%205Oct2006.pdf>

<sup>110</sup> Post-Conflict and Disaster Management Branch, United Nations Environment Programme. “Afghanistan’s Environment 2008: Executive Summary.” 2008. [http://postconflict.unep.ch/publications/afg\\_soe\\_E.pdf](http://postconflict.unep.ch/publications/afg_soe_E.pdf)

<sup>111</sup> Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. “Country Profile: Afghanistan.” August 2008. <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Afghanistan.pdf>

Most notably, the country has suffered from extremely high maternal, infant, and under-five mortality rates. Since the fall of the Taliban, the nation’s healthcare system has improved due to international aid and reconstruction efforts. Non-governmental organizations, or NGOs, have played a major role in this process, as they have established clinics in various locations throughout the country.<sup>112</sup>

**Exchange 25:** Is there a hospital nearby?

Visitor:	Is there a hospital nearby?	po daa sha Khowa kee yo roghtoon shta?
Local:	Yes, in the center of town.	ho, de Khaar po markaz ke dey

As part of the reconstruction effort, there is a particular need to train female doctors due to customary views and practices that restrict female patients from receiving treatment from male doctors. Under the Taliban, for example, many Afghan women were not allowed to seek medical treatment in Kabul because they were subject to the strict enforcement of seclusion and segregation.<sup>113</sup> Furthermore, while many residents now have access to primary health care (including vaccinations), they lack access to most forms of costly secondary care, such as surgery or emergency treatment. These forms of treatment are often only available in private hospitals, which are too expensive for most Afghans.<sup>114</sup>

**Exchange 26:** Do you know what is wrong?

Visitor:	Do you know what is wrong?	po hejee che bada Khabara tsa da?
Local:	No.	na

In general, urban residents have access to better and more advanced medical services than those living in rural areas. Kabul, for example, is home to multiple private clinics staffed with Western-trained medical personnel. In case of emergency, foreign nationals are advised to seek care at these clinics rather than from public hospitals or unregulated private clinics, where treatment may be inadequate and unreliable. In general, patients are required to pay before receiving any medical treatment.<sup>115</sup>



© AfghanKabul / flickr.com  
Girl's school in Farah Province

<sup>112</sup> Relief Web. The World Bank. Loevinsohn, Benjamin and Dastagir Sayed. “World Bank: Afghanistan Health Sector Provides Lessons in Development.” 7 September 2008.

<http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900sid/MUMA-7J9BCT?OpenDocument>

<sup>113</sup> The Nation. Block, Max. “Kabul’s Health Apartheid.” 4 October 2001.

<http://www.thenation.com/doc/19971124/19971124block>

<sup>114</sup> Reuters. Lyn, Tan Ee. “Afghanistan Struggles to Provide Decent Healthcare.” 21 April 2008.

<http://www.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idUSISL20255320080421>

<sup>115</sup> Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. Department of State. “Afghanistan: Country Specific Information.” 25 March 2010. [http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis\\_pa\\_tw/cis/cis\\_1056.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1056.html)

## Education

Officially, primary education in Afghanistan is free and compulsory in areas where it is available, but a comprehensive level of enrollment has never been achieved, even when all the country's schools have been open. This remains true today for urban Afghans, as the educational opportunities for children in cities depend on the financial status of their families. Children who live in squatter settlements are far less likely to be enrolled than those from families of means, typically because their families need them to work instead. A family's proximity to a school is also a major factor in whether children receive an education. In these, and many other cases, girls are more likely to be kept at home than boys due to cultural norms that prioritize male education.<sup>116</sup>

### Exchange 27: Is there a school nearby?

Visitor:	Is there a school nearby?	po daa shaaKhowa ke yaw Khwanze ishta?
Local:	Yes.	ho

Under the Taliban, girls were prohibited from attending schools, and many educational institutions were closed. During this time, *madrassas*, Islamic schools that base their education on interpretations of the Quran, became prominent. After the Taliban regime was ousted, international efforts were made to repair the nation's education system, which was severely damaged by decades of war. As of 2010, an estimated seven million Afghan children—including 2.6 million girls—were attending school.<sup>117</sup> As of 2007, Afghanistan had seven functional universities, the most notable of which is Kabul University. This school was closed for several years during the civil war, as well as during subsequent conflict, but it reopened most recently in 2002. Overall, literacy levels in the country remain low, especially for women. According to estimates made in 2006, only 43% of Afghan men and 13% of Afghan women can read and write.<sup>118</sup> Illiteracy has been identified as a major obstacle in training recruits for Afghan security forces.<sup>119</sup>

<sup>116</sup> Afghanistan Research Evaluation Unit. Beall, Jo and Stefan Schütte. "Urban Livelihoods in Afghanistan." August 2006.

<http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/DESTIN/pdf/AREU%20Urban%20Livelihoods%20SP%20FINAL%20PR OOF%205Oct2006.pdf>

<sup>117</sup> RAWA News. "No School for Almost Half of Afghan Children." 6 March 2010.

<http://www.rawa.org/temp/runews/2010/03/06/no-school-for-almost-half-of-afghan-children.html>

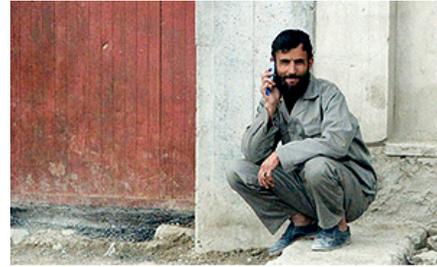
<sup>118</sup> Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. "Country Profile: Afghanistan." August 2008.

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Afghanistan.pdf>

<sup>119</sup> National Public Radio. James, Frank. "Afghan Army's 90% Illiteracy Rate Big Training Obstacle." 16 September 2009. [http://www.npr.org/blogs/thetwo-way/2009/09/afghan\\_armys\\_90\\_percent\\_illite.html](http://www.npr.org/blogs/thetwo-way/2009/09/afghan_armys_90_percent_illite.html)

## Telecommunications

Afghanistan has greatly expanded its telecommunications sector since the Taliban regime was ousted from power. In 2001, telephone availability was minimal and cellular phone coverage was nonexistent. By late 2009, however, Afghanistan had more than 12 million telephone subscribers, nearly all of whom used cellular phones.<sup>120</sup>



© Jeff / flickr.com  
Man using a cell phone

### Exchange 28: What is your telephone number?

Visitor:	What is your telephone number?	staaso de teeleefoon naambar tsa dey?
Local:	My phone number is (144-356-9573)	izmaa teeleefoon naambar dey (yawo saloo chaloor chalweKht - dre sawoh peenjash peta - peenja nawee dree awyaa)

Cellular phone coverage reached over 70% of the country's population in 2008, although financial limitations have prevented many Afghans from subscribing to it.<sup>121</sup> The Taliban has also disrupted coverage through attacks on cell towers and nightly blackouts on cell phone service in areas that it controls. It has achieved the latter by intimidating service providers—through attacks on infrastructure and personnel—to comply with its demands.<sup>122</sup> The expansion and maintenance of cellular service has been identified as a vital component of U.S. Military operations. Functional communication networks are important for counteracting militant propaganda in insurgent-held areas, as well as fostering economic development and communications between Afghan civilians and security forces.<sup>123</sup>

### Exchange 29: May I use your phone?

Visitor:	May I use your phone?	kawalay sham staasee la teeleefoon tsKha isteefaada wokrem?
Local:	Sure.	ho

<sup>120</sup> The Wall Street Journal. Trofimov, Yaroslav. "Cell Carriers Bow to Taliban Threat." 22 March 2010. <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704117304575137541465235972.html>

<sup>121</sup> The Washington Post. "Afghanistan's Communications Revolution." Gross, David and Amir Zai Sangin. September 8, 2008. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/09/07/AR2008090701951.html>

<sup>122</sup> The Wall Street Journal. Trofimov, Yaroslav. "Cell Carriers Bow to Taliban Threat." 22 March 2010. <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704117304575137541465235972.html>

<sup>123</sup> The Boston Globe. Bloomberg News. Lakshmanan, Indira A.R. "US Effort in Afghanistan Focuses on Cellphone Use." 3 April 2010. [http://www.boston.com/news/world/asia/articles/2010/04/03/us\\_effort\\_in\\_afghanistan\\_focuses\\_on\\_cellphone\\_use/](http://www.boston.com/news/world/asia/articles/2010/04/03/us_effort_in_afghanistan_focuses_on_cellphone_use/)

Internet service has also expanded over the last decade, as over 500,000 Afghans have access to the web, up from an estimated 1,000 users in 2000. Major urban centers have some internet facilities available for public use, although irregular electricity service often interrupts internet service.<sup>124</sup>

### Traffic and Transportation

Prolonged conflict in Afghanistan has damaged the country’s existing transportation network and slowed the development of new infrastructure. Although reconstruction teams have made considerable progress, many roads remain in a state of disrepair and some forms of transportation are wholly unavailable.



© Ryan Whitney  
Overloaded car in Kabul

#### Exchange 30: Is there a train station nearby?

Visitor:	Is there a train station nearby?	pa dey shaa Khwa kee d orgaadee taam zaay ishta?
Local:	No.	na

Foremost, Afghanistan lacks an operational railroad system, although a few short cross-border railways are planned. Among the projects in development is a railway line running from the northern city of Mazar-e-Sharif to the Uzbek border.<sup>125</sup> Most of Afghanistan’s major national and private airlines have been deemed unsafe by various foreign entities,<sup>126</sup> including the U.S. Government.<sup>127</sup>

#### Exchange 31: Which road leads to the airport?

Visitor:	Which road leads to the airport?	koom sarak hawaay dagar ta zee?
Local:	The road heading east.	da sarak che Khatyiz ta zee

Since the fall of the Taliban, a tremendous surge in auto traffic has posed health and safety concerns, particularly in urban areas such as Kabul. During the Taliban era, only taxis, bicycles, and Taliban-operated trucks were evident in Kabul’s streets.<sup>128</sup>

#### Exchange 33: Where can I get a cab?

Visitor:	Where can I get a cab?	cheree kawalaay sham che yo taksee wooneesam?
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<sup>124</sup> Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. “Country Profile: Afghanistan.” August 2008. <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Afghanistan.pdf>

<sup>125</sup> Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, U.S. Department of State. “Background Note: Afghanistan.” March 2010. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5380.htm>

<sup>126</sup> Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. “Country Profile: Afghanistan.” August 2008. <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Afghanistan.pdf>

<sup>127</sup> Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. Department of State. “Afghanistan: Country Specific Information.” 25 March 2010. [http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis\\_pa\\_tw/cis/cis\\_1056.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1056.html)

<sup>128</sup> The Washington Post. Associated Press. Gannon, Kathy. “Post-Taliban Kabul Blossoms for the Rich.” 11 November 2006. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/11/11/AR2006111100615.html>

Local:	Over there.	lahaa ghezaay na
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By 2005, an automotive census revealed that there were more than 340,000 registered vehicles in Kabul, approximately two-thirds of which were small cars. At that time, the country also had an estimated 300,000 unregistered vehicles, most of them located in the capital.<sup>129</sup> The number of vehicles in the country continues to grow as an influx of foreign cash has fueled a thriving import business. Most imported cars are used and salvaged vehicles that often do not meet basic safety and emissions standards, thereby contributing to pollution.<sup>130</sup>

Continuous road work and a high volume of vehicles have created immense traffic jams in urban areas. Traffic is notoriously bad in Kabul, where there is a limited number of working traffic lights.<sup>131</sup>

**Exchange 35: Will the bus be here soon?**

Visitor:	Will the bus be here soon?	serwees ba dalta zhir wora see-ee?
Local:	Yes.	ho

Urban roads are often in poor condition and may be unlit at night. Accidents are common as many Afghan drivers are unlicensed and traffic rules are often neither obeyed nor enforced. The mixture of vehicles, pedestrians, cyclists, military convoys, and animals provides for crowded and dangerous conditions for both drivers and pedestrians.<sup>132</sup> Accidents involving foreign nationals may quickly escalate into confrontations. A deadly accident in 2006 in which a U.S. military convoy killed Afghan civilians sparked riots that rapidly spread throughout Kabul.<sup>133</sup>



© Olly Lambert  
Kabul Bird Market

Violent crime has also become more common in city streets. Incidents of kidnapping, vehicle theft, highway robbery, and drug-related violence have been widely reported. In some cases, these acts have been carried out by persons masquerading as law

<sup>129</sup> Asian Development Bank and the Clean Air Initiative for Asian Cities Center. "Country Synthesis Report on Urban Air Quality Management: Afghanistan." December 2006. <http://www.cleanairnet.org/caiasia/1412/csr/afghanistan.pdf>

<sup>130</sup> Australian Broadcasting Corporation News. Reuters. "Dodgy Cars Clogging Kabul's Roads." 9 May 2009. <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2009/05/09/2565599.htm>

<sup>131</sup> RAWA News. The Canadian Press. Perkel, Colin. "Kabul Traffic Cops Fight to Keep City Moving but Government Slow to Pay." 21 January 2010. <http://www.rawa.org/temp/runews/2010/01/21/kabul-traffic-cops-fight-to-keep-city-moving-but-government-slow-to-pay.html>

<sup>132</sup> Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. Department of State. "Afghanistan: Country Specific Information." 25 March 2010. [http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis\\_pa\\_tw/cis/cis\\_1056.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1056.html)

<sup>133</sup> International Herald Tribune. Gall, Carlotta. "Convoy Crash Sparks Riots." 31 May 2006. <http://www.iht.com/articles/2006/05/29/news/afghan.php>

enforcement or Afghan Army officers. This surge of criminal activity has affected truck and bus routes, and forced automobile drivers to take extra security precautions.<sup>134</sup>

**Exchange 36:** Can you take me there?

Visitor:	Can you take me there?	kawalaay shee che maa halta warasawee?
Local:	Yes, I can.	ho, kawalaay sham

**Markets**

In Afghan cities, shopping is traditionally done at open-air markets, or bazaars.

**Exchange 37:** Is the market nearby?

Visitor:	Is the market nearby?	bazaar dalta nazhde day?
Local:	Yes, over there on the right.	ho, halta shee laas ta day

These busy markets are usually located in old city centers and districts populated by craftsmen and skilled artisans.

**Exchange 38:** How much longer will you be here?

Visitor:	How much longer will you be here?	tir koma waKhte poor taasee ba dalta yaast?
Local:	Three more hours.	tir dryo nooro saa'too porey

A wide array of items can be purchased at bazaars, including textiles, jewelry, handicrafts, foodstuffs, and various consumer goods.

**Exchange 39:** Do you have any more of these?

Visitor:	Do you have any more of these?	dedey po shaan laa noor ham laree?
Local:	No.	na

As bargaining is the norm, customers are expected to haggle over the price with the vendor. Depending upon the item and vendor, the bargaining process may be lengthy and involved.

**Exchange 40:** May I examine this close up?

Visitor:	May I examine this close up?	kawalaay sham daa la nazhday na wooweenam?
Local:	Sure.	hatmee

Customers can familiarize themselves with the market and its practices by visiting a number of different stalls and comparing prices and qualities of goods.

**Exchange 41:** Do you sell shawls?

Visitor:	Do you sell shawls?	taase patkee Khar tsaawee?
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<sup>134</sup> The Washington Post. Constable, Pamela. "As Crime Increases in Kabul, So Does Nostalgia for Taliban." 25 September 2008. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/09/24/AR2008092403339.html>

Local:	Yes.	ho
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With an understanding of local pricing norms, foreigners will be able to better conduct negotiations with vendors.

**Exchange 42:** Can I buy a carpet with this much money?

Visitor:	Can I buy a carpet with this much money?	dee day paysoo sara kawalaay sham che yo qaaleena waKhlam?
Local:	No.	na

After a price has been agreed upon, the customer should follow through with the transaction, as it is inappropriate to withdraw an offer that has been accepted.

**Exchange 43:** Can you give me change for this?

Visitor:	Can you give me change for this?	kowalaay shee che daa paysee maa ta maayda kree?
Local:	No.	na

**Restaurants**

Restaurants and teahouses are popular social venues in urban areas, although many Afghans may not have the financial means to visit them.



© Munir Squires  
Lunch in Kabul

**Exchange 44:** Are you still serving breakfast?

Visitor:	Are you still serving breakfast?	tir oosa pore laa naashta warkawee?
Local:	Yes.	ho

Food stalls or restaurants specializing in kebabs are common in cities. Care should be taken when purchasing food at these stalls as conditions may be unsanitary.

**Exchange 45:** What type of meat is this?

Visitor:	What type of meat is this?	da tsa daal ghwaKha da?
Local:	Lamb.	doree da

Since the fall of the Taliban, the variety of available cuisine has expanded, especially in Kabul, where Italian, French, German, and other styles of restaurants can be found.

**Exchange 46:** I would like coffee or tea.

Visitor:	I would like coffee or tea.	ze qahwa aw yaa chaay ghwaarim
Local:	Very well.	deer Kha

Again, such places are often too expensive for many Afghans to afford.<sup>135</sup>

**Exchange 47:** I'd like some hot soup.

Visitor:	I'd like some hot soup.	lik taawda shorwa ghowaarim
Local:	Very well.	deer Kha

As in the majority of Afghan homes, utensils are not typically used when dining out at restaurants.

**Exchange 48:** May I have a glass of water?

Visitor:	May I have a glass of water?	kawalaay shee che maa ta yo geelaas oob raakree?
Local:	Yes, right away.	ho, hamdaa dastee

Instead, food is eaten using the right hand, or scooped up with bread.

**Exchange 49:** Do you have dessert?

Visitor:	Do you have a dessert?	do Khwaarloola na pas orostanay Khoraak ham laree?
Local:	Yes, we have <i>ferni</i> .	ho, frinee laroo

When dining out in groups, it is customary for one person to pay the bill. This is traditionally done by the person who organized the meal.

**Exchange 50:** Can I have my total bill, please?

Visitor:	Can I have my total bill, please?	kowalaay sham che de hisaab paana waKhlam?
Local:	Yes, of course.	ho, hatmee

Paying individually is uncommon and may cause offense to Afghans.

**Exchange 51:** Put this all in one bill.

Visitor:	Put this all in one bill.	daa tool ba pa yo hisaab ke waachom
Local:	Okay.	ho

<sup>135</sup> The Washington Post. Associated Press. Gannon, Kathy. "Post-Taliban Kabul Blossoms for the Rich." 11 November 2006. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/11/11/AR2006111100615.html>

Cash is required for payment, as credit card services are mostly unavailable in Afghanistan.

**Exchange 52:** Do you accept U.S. currency?

Visitor:	Do you accept U.S. currency?	taasee amreekaayee daalar qablawee?
Local:	No we only accept Afghanis.	na, moog faqat afghaanee paysee qablawo

**Street Vendors and Beggars**

Due to a surging population and widespread unemployment, informal street vendors and beggars are common in urban areas. Beggars are often women (especially widows) and small children.



© Munir Squires  
Changing money

**Exchange 53:** Give me money.

Local:	Give me money.	maa ta paysee raakra
Visitor:	I don't have any.	za hits paysee nalarim

Street vendors will likely target foreign nationals, and they can be quite persistent salesmen, especially the young boys.

**Exchange 54:** Please, buy something from me.

Local:	Please, buy something from me.	lotf ukree aw yo shay lemaana waaKhlee
Visitor:	Sorry, I have no money left.	Khwashee na yam, paysee me Khlaasee shwee dee

In November 2008, the Afghan government banned the practice of street-begging in Kabul, citing its ties to child abuse and prostitution. Among those who have since been arrested for begging are male drug addicts who have been deported from Iran and Pakistan. Despite the government's efforts to crackdown on begging, it remains widespread.<sup>136</sup>

<sup>136</sup> IRIN, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. "Afghanistan: Crackdown on Kabul Beggars Continues." 10 September 2009. <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=86089>

## Urban Life Assessment

1. Almost one quarter of the Afghan population lives in cities.

**True.** Recent estimates place approximately 23% of the nation's population in urban areas. Afghan cities are experiencing a growth rate significantly higher than that of the country as a whole.

2. Emergency care is available for most urban residents at public hospitals.

**False.** Many residents now have access to primary health care (including vaccinations), but they lack access to costly secondary care such as emergency services, which are often only available at private hospitals.

3. Urban dwellers can avoid the polluted water sources that many rural residents must use.

**False.** Due to the lack of basic municipal services, poor urban dwellers are often forced to use polluted water resources, a cause of serious health problems.

4. After the fall of the Taliban, girls began to outnumber boys in most schools.

**False.** As of 2006, an estimated eight million Afghan children were attending school, but only three million were girls. In many cases, girls are more likely to be kept at home than boys, mainly for cultural reasons.

5. All forms of transportation in Afghanistan have suffered from years of neglect and conflict.

**True.** Prolonged conflict has damaged the country's transportation network and slowed the development of new infrastructure. Roads remain in a state of disrepair, trains no longer run, and planes are deemed too risky to use by some foreign countries.

## Chapter 5 Rural Life

### Introduction

The central Afghan government has historically lacked a strong presence in rural areas, which have long been locally administered by ethnic or tribal groups. This pattern persists today, and it carries numerous consequences. Foremost, while rural communities may remain relatively independent, they generally lack access to resources and modern services. While services such as electricity, waste disposal, and water treatment are often limited in urban areas, they are non-existent in many rural regions, especially in remote, isolated villages. Healthcare and education are also often inadequate or only available at remote distances. Other forms of infrastructure, such as paved roads or modern irrigation systems, are also uncommon in rural areas.



© Nigelito / flickr.com  
Village in Taqhar Province

As such, rural life in Afghanistan is deeply rooted in tradition. Tribes and families are responsible for protecting their own, and they rely on ancient modes of subsistence to survive. This situation often lends itself toward poverty and hardship, but also hardiness and relative independence. Accordingly, remote rural areas have long served as a refuge for insurgents who seek to evade government forces or influence. Specifically, the Pashtun-dominated eastern and southern regions of the country have experienced heavy insurgent activity in recent years.<sup>137</sup>

### Tribal Divisions

Afghanistan's rural areas are often divided along tribal lines. A tribe's area of control may span official provincial borders. Among the Pashtun-dominated areas, the eastern region of the country is heavily populated by the Ghilzai Pashtun tribes. The southern and western areas of the country are largely dominated by Durranis, who form the other major Pashtun tribe.<sup>138</sup> These areas are further divided among the sub-tribes of each of these two major groups, although they also contain pockets of other ethnic and tribal factions, such as the Hazaras and Tajiks. This tradition of fragmented tribal rule has historically made it difficult for the central government to consolidate power.

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<sup>137</sup> Program for Culture and Conflict Studies, Naval Postgraduate School. *The Culture and Conflict Review*, Vol. 2, No. 1. "Eastern Afghanistan Security/Poppy Map," and "Southern Afghanistan Security/Poppy Map." January 2008. [http://www.nps.edu/Programs/CCS/Journal/Jan08/Research\\_update.html](http://www.nps.edu/Programs/CCS/Journal/Jan08/Research_update.html)

<sup>138</sup> Program for Culture and Conflict Studies, Naval Postgraduate School. *The Culture and Conflict Review*, Vol. 2, No. 1. "Eastern Afghanistan Tribal Map," and "Southern Afghanistan Tribal Map." January 2008. [http://www.nps.edu/Programs/CCS/Journal/Jan08/Research\\_update.html](http://www.nps.edu/Programs/CCS/Journal/Jan08/Research_update.html)

Pashtuns also make a distinction between two types of Pashtun tribal regions: those that are predominantly free from government control (*yaghistan*) and those that receive greater oversight from the state (*hukamat*). For the Pashtuns, these areas correspond, respectively, with the mountainous tribal regions, which are more remote and inaccessible (and thus more independent), and the plains, which are exposed to greater government influence and other external forces. In the *hukamat* areas, which extend to urban centers, Pashtuns follow more modern socioeconomic practices, such as paying taxes to the state and paying rent to wealthy landowners. On the other hand, Pashtuns in the *yaghistan* generally do not observe these practices. A Pashtun proverb speaks to the difference between the two regions: “Honor (*nang*) ate up the mountains; taxes (*qalang*) ate up the plains.” In other words, while taxes and rent may exhaust the resources of the *qalang* Pashtuns, blood feuds and inter-tribal conflicts often exhaust the resources of the *nang* Pashtuns. As the proverb suggests, Pashtuns in the *yaghistan*, or independent regions, are more likely to follow a strict interpretation of the traditional Pashtun tribal code, Pashtunwali.<sup>139</sup>



© Pierre Gazzola  
Afghan girl near Kandahar

### Rural Economy

For centuries, most rural Afghans have subsisted as farmers and livestock herders. However, as only 12% of the land in Afghanistan is arable, resources are limited. Approximately 45% of the country is pasture land, which supports livestock owned by settled farmers and nomadic herders.<sup>140</sup> Historically, the primary obstacle faced by Afghan farmers has been a shortage of water, which is often most plentiful in the spring, when snowmelt runs off the mountains. Long ago, farmers developed a variety of techniques to capture water and channel it to their crops. In the northern plains, dams were used to divert water into irrigation schemes. Throughout much of the rest of the country, Afghans used a Persian technique known as the *karez*. The *karez* consists of an underground tunnel intersected with numerous vertical shafts that open to the surface. Fed by the shafts, the underground canal collects runoff from the hillside and carries it toward the agricultural fields below. Both of these techniques demand frequent and labor-intensive maintenance in order to function.<sup>141</sup>

#### Exchange 55: Where do you work, sir?

Visitor:	Where do you work, sir?	saahiba chere kaar kawee?
Local:	I am a farmer.	ze o bazgar yam

<sup>139</sup> *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, Second Ed. Rubin, Barnett R. “Chapter 2: Social Structure under the Old Regime: Religion [p. 28].” 2002. New Haven: Yale University Press.

<sup>140</sup> Relief Web. Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit. Wiley, Liz Alden. “Land Rights in Crisis: Restoring Tenure Security in Afghanistan.” 31 March 2003.

<http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/AllDocsByUNID/4aecf9d78aaba09cc1256d270042cf16>

<sup>141</sup> Government Publications Access, Paul V. Gavin Library, Illinois Institute of Technology. Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. *Afghanistan: A Country Study*. Nyrop, Richard F. and Donald M Seekins, eds. “Chapter 3: The Economy: Agriculture: Land Use Patterns.” 1986.

<http://www.gl.iit.edu/govdocs/afghanistan/Agriculture.html>

Prolonged conflict has left much of the country’s irrigation infrastructure in total disrepair. It has also made many farm and grazing lands unsafe, as land mines and unexploded ordnance are scattered throughout the countryside. Furthermore, severe drought is a recurrent trend that frequently hampers agricultural production. After the Taliban was overthrown, reconstruction teams sought to combat this trend by reducing crop vulnerability to drought.<sup>142</sup> Such efforts have entailed making repairs to the irrigation system and introducing drought-resistant seeds. A major factor identified in the further development of the country’s agricultural sector is the need to make conventional crop farming more financially attractive to Afghan farmers. Cultivation of the drought-resistant opium poppy typically yields significantly higher returns than conventional food crops such as wheat.<sup>143</sup> Thus, the task of reducing opium production remains challenging. As an expert has observed, “To stop poppy production [requires] more than just law enforcement. It’s a complex [process] of establishing the rule of law, building alternative livelihoods, building access to markets, education—and all of these things are very difficult to deliver in an unstable environment.”<sup>144</sup>



© Pierre Gazzola  
Girls using a new water pump

## Land Ownership

Afghanistan lacks a clear and consistent national policy for registering and validating land ownership claims. This is due in large part to the population’s historical reliance on informal customs and local legal systems. However, a history of unjust land distribution policies—many of which benefited the Pashtun majority—has also complicated matters.<sup>145</sup> Due to the limited availability of land, property disputes have been a common cause of conflict within or between families, villages, and tribes. Such conflicts have often stoked ethnic or tribal tensions and, in some cases, have led to violent clashes.

In the last three decades, this situation has worsened due to successive wars and frequent changes in government.<sup>146</sup> Political and social upheaval led to large-scale migration and routine changes in official land tenure policy. Foremost, as many Afghans were forced to flee their lands, the status of their property often became unclear. In many cases, refugees

<sup>142</sup> South Asia Department, Asian Development Bank. “Rebuilding Afghanistan’s Agricultural Sector.” April 2003.

[http://www.adb.org/Documents/Reports/Afghanistan/Agriculture/Rebuilding\\_Agriculture\\_Sector\\_AFG.pdf](http://www.adb.org/Documents/Reports/Afghanistan/Agriculture/Rebuilding_Agriculture_Sector_AFG.pdf)

<sup>143</sup> McClatchy Newspapers. Nissenbaum, Dion. “Afghan Poppy Harvest is Next Challenge for U.S. Marines.” 16 March 2010. <http://www.mcclatchydc.com/2010/03/16/90477/afghan-poppy-harvest-is-next-challenge.html>

<sup>144</sup> BBC News. Leithead, Alastair. “Poverty Feeds Afghan Drugs Trade.” 22 January 2008.

[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/7201085.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/7201085.stm)

<sup>145</sup> Relief Web. Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit. Wiley, Liz Alden. “Land Rights in Crisis: Restoring Tenure Security in Afghanistan.” 31 March 2003.

<http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/AllDocsByUNID/4aecf9d78aaba09cc1256d270042cf16>

<sup>146</sup> IRIN News, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. “Afghanistan: New Report Identifies Land Disputes as a Major Source of Conflict.” 12 May 2003.

<http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?reportid=19920>

have returned to Afghanistan to find their property inhabited or redistributed without their permission, typically by those who assumed “squatter’s rights” in the owner’s absence.

**Exchange 56: Do you own this land?**

Visitor:	Do you own this land?	taaso de dey zmakit cheKhtan yaast?
Local:	Yes.	ho

In this context, it can be difficult for returnees to reassert their property rights, as their land titles may be hard to verify or may be rejected outright by local leaders, sometimes due to ethnic tensions.<sup>147</sup> Moreover, there are often multiple claims on a single plot of land, making the issue difficult to resolve while leaving some members of the community with no place to farm. Some people, such as local warlords, have taken advantage of the unclear land tenure system to expand their own holdings at the expense of the less powerful. Overall, as a considerable percentage of the population remains landless, such disputes will remain a source of contention in the absence of an impartial resolution mechanism and enforceable rule of law.<sup>148</sup>

**Nomadic Tribes**

Afghanistan is home to several nomadic or semi-nomadic groups, although their numbers have decreased in recent years. Traditionally, Afghan nomads are pastoralists who engage in seasonal migration. They base their livestock herds in lowland pastures during the winter and move them to higher elevation grazing lands for the spring and summer. Sheep and goats are the most common stock, and dogs are used as fellow shepherders. Belongings are often transported on camels or donkeys. As they move from area to area, nomads sleep in tents (typically made from black goat’s hair), trading animals and animal products for other goods and foodstuffs with the villagers they encounter. In the past, their migratory practices played a major role in regional trade.<sup>149</sup>



© Munir Squires  
Kuchi nomads

**Exchange 57: Do you know this area very well?**

Visitor:	Do you know this area very well?	dee shaa Khowa sara Kheh baladyaat laree?
Local:	Yes.	ho

<sup>147</sup> Alertnet, Reuters. IRIN, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. “Afghanistan: Ethnic Antagonism Spurs Land Disputes in North.” 11 September 2008.

<http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/IRIN/158b7ec7af87f8512712132aeb2b3ba4.htm>

<sup>148</sup> Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre. Norwegian Refugee Council. Foley, Conor. “Land and Property Disputes in Eastern Afghanistan [pp. 1-2].” 2004. [http://www.internal-displacement.org/8025708F004CE90B/\(httpDocuments\)/3E2AD065B3616B2D802570B7005876F4/\\$file/Land\\_disputes\\_NRC\\_june04.pdf](http://www.internal-displacement.org/8025708F004CE90B/(httpDocuments)/3E2AD065B3616B2D802570B7005876F4/$file/Land_disputes_NRC_june04.pdf)

<sup>149</sup> Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. *Afghanistan: A Country Study*. Blood, Peter R., ed. “Chapter 2: The Society and Environment: Modes of Subsistence: Pastoralism.” 1997. [http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstty:@field\(DOCID+af0054\)](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstty:@field(DOCID+af0054))

The Kuchi, a Pashtun group of nomads, is the largest and most well known nomadic tribe in the country. Their population is estimated at roughly 1.5 million, but the number of those who actually maintain a nomadic lifestyle may be much lower.<sup>150</sup> Traditionally, the Kuchi moved their herds throughout the Afghan-Pakistani border region. However, their way of life has been compromised by a number of pressures, including war, drought, ethnic tension, environmental degradation, and changes in commerce and transportation. As one Kuchi who had given up the nomadic lifestyle observed, “The grazing land is not there, trade and transportation have changed so much. Kuchis are not needed.”<sup>151</sup> The Kuchi who remain nomadic must contend with the prevalence of landmines.

### Rural Health Care

Historically, access to health care in rural Afghanistan has been limited or non-existent. This was the case even before the nation’s healthcare system was virtually destroyed throughout decades of conflict. During this time, much of the country’s medical infrastructure was decimated and most professional medical personnel fled the country. A lack of healthcare and sanitation services, the physical effects of war, and the maintenance of strict cultural taboos all contributed to the development of a number of serious health risks for the country’s population. As a result, the country has suffered from some of the world’s highest maternal, infant, and under-five mortality rates. For example, it is estimated that in 2001, roughly one out of every four Afghan children died before reaching the age of five.<sup>152</sup>

#### Exchange 58: Is there a medical clinic nearby?

Visitor:	Is there a medical clinic nearby?	pe daa sha Khowa kee yo orooghton ya kleeneek shta?
Local:	Yes, over there.	ho, halta

After coalition forces removed the Taliban from power, efforts were made to expand medical services to rural areas, with a focus on providing reproductive health care. This was a priority since most Afghan women give birth multiple times, usually without professional assistance. The training of female doctors and midwives was a central goal of these initiatives, as cultural taboos often prevent Afghan women from receiving health care services from



© lakerae / flickr.com  
Women and children waiting at a clinic

<sup>150</sup> Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. “Country Profile: Afghanistan.” August 2008. <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Afghanistan.pdf>

<sup>151</sup> RAWA. Associated Press. Garwood, Paul. “Poverty, Violence Put Afghanistan’s Fabled Kuchi Nomads on a Road to Nowhere.” 14 May 2006. <http://www.rawa.org/nomad.htm>

<sup>152</sup> International Development Association, The World Bank. “IDA at Work: Afghanistan: Building on Basics in Health Care.” June 2009. <http://go.worldbank.org/9B2MX9BKU0>

men.<sup>153</sup> As a result of such efforts, the percentage of rural Afghan women who received professional medical care during pregnancy rose from an estimated 4.6% in 2003 to 32.2% in 2006.<sup>154</sup> Nonetheless, as of 2009, Afghanistan had the second-highest maternal mortality rate in the world.<sup>155</sup> Despite signs of improvement, infant and under-five mortality rates also remain extraordinarily high.<sup>156</sup>

Of the rural Afghans who have access to medical services, most are served by small healthcare facilities or mobile health clinics. These facilities have provided services to rural residents who previously had to travel long distances for treatment. While the number of minors receiving vital childhood immunizations has increased, further progress has been hampered by several factors, including the ongoing instability in rural areas. Many rural Afghans still need to travel to urban centers for treatment, although they often cannot afford advanced or even basic health care.

**Exchange 59: My arm is broken, can you help me?**

Visitor:	My arm is broken, can you help me?	mat may maat shaway day, kawalaay shee che maa sara marasta wokree?
Local:	Yes, I can help you.	ho, kawalaay sham che taaso sara marasta wokrem

Broadly, the quality of care is sub-standard at Afghan hospitals, where staff, supplies, and overall service capacity are generally insufficient.<sup>157</sup>

**Rural Education**

Like the nation’s health services, Afghanistan’s education system suffered greatly from prolonged conflict and fundamentalist policies mandated by the Taliban. Under the Taliban, girls were prohibited from attending schools, female teachers were not allowed to work, and many educational institutions were closed. During this time, *madrassas*, Islamic schools that base their curriculum on study of the Quran, became prominent. Only boys were allowed to attend these schools, which emphasized religion over conventional subjects such as math and science. These factors contributed to widespread illiteracy in Afghanistan,



<sup>153</sup> IRIN, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. “Afghanistan: Plight of ‘Forgotten Women’ Needing Health Care in Rural Areas.” 2 March 2004.  
<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=23844>

<sup>154</sup> Public Health News Center, Bloomberg School of Medicine, Johns Hopkins University. “Substantial Improvements Achieved in Afghanistan’s Health Sector.” 5 July 2007.  
[http://www.jhsph.edu/publichealthnews/press\\_releases/2007/Burnham\\_afghanistan.html](http://www.jhsph.edu/publichealthnews/press_releases/2007/Burnham_afghanistan.html)

<sup>155</sup> United Nations News Centre. “Afghanistan: Maternal Health Factors Improve, but High Death Rate Continues – UN Report.” 26 January 2009.  
<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=29663&Cr=maternal&Cr1>

<sup>156</sup> UNICEF. “Afghanistan: Statistics.” 2 March 2010.  
[http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/afghanistan\\_statistics.html](http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/afghanistan_statistics.html)

<sup>157</sup> Reuters. Lyn, Tan Ee. “Afghanistan Struggles to Provide Decent Healthcare.” 21 April 2008.  
<http://www.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idUSISL20255320080421>

particularly among women. As of 2006, only 43% of Afghan men and 13% of Afghan women could read and write.<sup>158</sup>

After the Taliban regime was ousted, efforts were made to repair the nation’s education system, with emphasis placed on opening schools for girls. This process required the construction of thousands of schools and extensive teacher training in order to meet the demands of increased enrollment.<sup>159</sup> As of 2010, an estimated seven million Afghan children—including 2.6 million girls—were attending school. While this figure represented a huge increase from 2001, some five million children remained without access to education.<sup>160</sup>

**Exchange 60: Do your children go to school?**

Visitor:	Do your children go to school?	staaso kochneeyaan shoo-oon ta zee?
Local:	Yes.	ho

In rural areas, various factors continue to contribute to low enrollment rates, especially for girls. Traditional gender stereotypes are strong in rural areas, where schooling is often reserved for boys. Girls, on the other hand, are often required to stay home and contribute to the household. Poverty, disability, and lack of local schools also prevent many children from getting an education. In the southern and eastern provinces, a major cause for low enrollment has been a spate of attacks on schools, female students, and teachers. As the Taliban has resurged in these areas, they have attempted to restore their restrictive policies concerning education, and they have used violent means to do so. Militants have destroyed school buildings, killed teachers, and disfigured female students.<sup>161</sup> These attacks have forced many schools to close and compelled many parents to keep their children, especially their daughters, at home.<sup>162</sup>

**Gender Roles in Rural Areas**

The respective roles of Afghan men and women vary according to their socioeconomic background, location, and age. A factor in determining these roles is the extent to which the sexes are segregated in the village, which varies from area to area. For Pashtun peoples, segregation is typically more strictly enforced by *qalang* Pashtuns (those who own land



© Goosemountains / flickr.com  
Afghan beekeeper

<sup>158</sup> Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. “Country Profile: Afghanistan.” August 2008. <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Afghanistan.pdf>

<sup>159</sup> UNICEF. Rafi, Mohammad. “Female Teachers Help to Rebuild Afghanistan’s Education System.” 8 June 2007. [http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/afghanistan\\_39946.html](http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/afghanistan_39946.html)

<sup>160</sup> RAWA News. “No School for Almost Half of Afghan Children.” 6 March 2010.

<http://www.rawa.org/temp/runews/2010/03/06/no-school-for-almost-half-of-afghan-children.html>

<sup>161</sup> Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. Najibullah, Farangis. “Acid Attack on Afghan Schoolgirls Causes Fear, Anxiety Among Parents.” 15 November 2008.

[http://www.rferl.org/content/Acid\\_Attack\\_On\\_Afghan\\_Schoolgirls\\_Causes\\_Fear\\_Anxiety\\_Among\\_Parents/1349538.html](http://www.rferl.org/content/Acid_Attack_On_Afghan_Schoolgirls_Causes_Fear_Anxiety_Among_Parents/1349538.html)

<sup>162</sup> IRIN News, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. “Afghanistan: Attacks Deprive 300,000 Students of Education.” 22 September 2008. <http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?ReportId=80506>

and live in the plains or urban areas) than by *nang* Pashtuns (those who live in remote, typically mountainous regions).<sup>163</sup>

When the sexes are thoroughly segregated, they each maintain their own spaces and duties. In these cases, women are often restricted to the home, where they perform tasks such as cooking, cleaning, child-rearing, and household maintenance. They also commonly engage in handicrafts, horticulture, the processing of crops or animal products, and other tasks that can be performed within the family compound. The management of food resources is also often a woman's duty, as is collecting water.

Men are generally responsible for ensuring the economic welfare of the family, providing protection, instilling discipline, and engaging in social, political, and financial interactions outside the home.<sup>164</sup> They are more likely than women to perform agricultural duties and tend to livestock, but this is not always the case. For example, in less segregated areas, women may be heavily involved in various tasks related to crop production and animal husbandry. This includes activities that take place outside the family compound, such as harvesting. Widows take on a wide range of duties, as they must provide for their family without the assistance of a husband.

## Transportation

Prolonged conflict in Afghanistan has severely damaged the country's existing transportation network and slowed the development of new infrastructure. Although reconstruction teams have made substantial progress in building new roads in certain areas, many roads remain in a state of disrepair and some forms of transportation are wholly unavailable. Afghanistan lacks an operational railroad system, and being landlocked, the nearest seaport is over 2,000 km (1,243 mi) away.<sup>165</sup> The Amu Darya River is the only major waterway used for transport.<sup>166</sup>



© Goosemountains / flickr.com  
Buses unloading refugees

Road conditions are particularly poor in rural areas. Decades of war, floods, and lack of proper maintenance have destroyed many of the nation's roads and bridges, leaving large sections of the country physically isolated. Roads in rural areas are unpaved and subject to various extreme climatic conditions. In remote areas, there are often no roads at all, only trails. Afghan vehicles are typically old and poorly maintained, and drivers are often unlicensed. Traffic rules are not regularly obeyed or enforced. Pedestrians, animals, and

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<sup>163</sup> Afghan Legal History Project, Islamic Legal Studies Program, Harvard Law School. Kakar, Palwasha. "Tribal Law of Pashtunwali and Women's Legislative Authority [p. 2]." No date. <http://www.law.harvard.edu/programs/ilsp/research/kakar.pdf>

<sup>164</sup> Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. *Afghanistan: A Country Study*. Blood, Peter R., ed. "Chapter 2: The Society and Environment: Gender Roles." 1997. [http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+af0057\)](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+af0057))

<sup>165</sup> The World Bank. "Afghanistan Transport Sector." No date. <http://go.worldbank.org/3058WF94E0>

<sup>166</sup> Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. "Country Profile: Afghanistan." August 2008. <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Afghanistan.pdf>

carts also present hazards to drivers. Many roads have yet to be completely cleared of extant land mines, and roads and highways are often newly planted with improvised explosive devices. Finally, criminal activity, particularly robbery, has become common on highways outside urban areas.<sup>167</sup>

A major goal in reconstruction efforts has been the development of an extensive highway network linking Afghanistan's major cities of Kabul, Kandahar, Herat, and Mazar-e-Sharif. Known as the "Ring Road," this project has made significant progress but remained incomplete as of March 2010.<sup>168</sup> Its construction has been hampered by insurgent activity, including bombings, shootings, and kidnappings. Described as "a symbol of governance," the road, once complete and secured, is expected to greatly contribute to economic development.<sup>169</sup>

Accurate, updated maps have been published since the fall of the Taliban. It may be difficult to find an Afghan who can read a map, however. Most Afghans use topographical features and the directions of sunrise and sunset for reference when they travel. Distance is measured in travel time rather than kilometers or miles.

### **Markets in Rural Areas**

An important tradition in rural Afghanistan is market day, when traders, craftsmen, and farmers gather to engage in commerce. At these gatherings, farmers can sell their marketable surplus and buy goods or resources that they cannot produce themselves. The bazaar usually takes place in the largest town or village in the region. In addition to promoting commerce, the market serves as a communal meeting place and a venue for the exchange of information between those who have few other opportunities to meet.

Market day can draw large crowds. Afghans living in more remote villages must leave their homes very early in the morning in order to set up for business before the market opens, which usually occurs shortly after daybreak. The movement of large numbers of people and goods on market day is common.

### **Self-Protection and Firearms**

Centuries of inter-tribal strife and conflict have instilled Afghans with a ready and dedicated sense of personal and familial protection. Afghans under the age of 30 have known little else besides conflict, be it from Soviet occupation, civil war, tribal feuds, terrorism, insurgency, or counter-insurgency. Under these circumstances, large stores of weapons have been brought into the country, and Afghans have been forced to defend themselves in the



© lohan1025 / flickr.com  
Search for weapons at a market

<sup>167</sup> Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. Department of State. "Afghanistan: Country Specific Information." 25 March 2010. [http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis\\_pa\\_tw/cis/cis\\_1056.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1056.html)

<sup>168</sup> Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, U.S. Department of State. "Background Note: Afghanistan." March 2010. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5380.htm>

<sup>169</sup> The Wall Street Journal. Wonacott, Peter. "Afghan Road Project Shows Bumps in Drive for Stability." 17 August 2009. <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB125046546672735403.html>

absence of any rule of law. This is particularly the case in rural areas, where the government lacks a strong security presence and local militias wield power. As a result, gun ownership is commonplace, despite wide-scale disarmament efforts.<sup>170</sup> Many men in rural towns and villages routinely carry firearms. These weapons are often old and of Soviet origin, but some Afghans may possess modern weaponry. In most cases, weapons are carried for self-defense purposes. For example, because the country lacks public transportation networks, it is not uncommon for Afghans to walk long distances between villages. During these treks, Afghans often carry AK-47 assault rifles or other weapons.

**Exchange 62:** Did these people threaten you?

Soldier:	Did these people threaten you?	de Khalko taaso ta gwaKh karey dey?
Local:	No.	na

**Rural Leadership**

In rural areas, local leaders may include tribal chiefs (*khans*), warlords, village elders (who often form a council), or prominent religious figures, such as *mullahs* or *pirs*.

**Exchange 63:** Does your leader live here?

Soldier:	Does your leader live here?	speen zheeree aw yaa staaso da kelee mashir dalta zhwand kawee?
Local:	Yes.	ho

In traditional Pashtun tribal areas, the village council, or *jirga*, is the reigning legislative and judicial body. In other areas, the local leader may be a wealthy landowner.

**Exchange 64:** Can you take me to your leader?

Soldier:	Can you take me to your leader?	kawalaay shee che maa daKhpl kelee ma shir ta bozee?
Local:	Yes.	ho

Meetings with local leaders or councils may take place in the village *hujra*, or guest house. These guest houses may be located at the home of the village *khan*, or they may be maintained by the village. Mosques may also be used for meetings.



© Munir Squires  
Tea with village elders

<sup>170</sup> IRIN, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. *Guns Out of Control: The Continuing Threat of Small Arms*. “Afghanistan: Where the Rule by the Gun Continues.” May 2006. <http://www.irinnews.org/InDepthMain.aspx?InDepthId=8&ReportId=34289&Country=Yes>

**Exchange 65:** Respected leader, we need your help.

Soldier:	Respected leader, we need your help / advice / opinion.	mohtaram mashir sahib, moog staaso marastee / naseehat / 'aqeedeya ta zaroorat laroo
Local:	Yes.	ho

**Checkpoints**

Checkpoints are common throughout Afghanistan, and Afghans who travel are familiar with them.

**Exchange 66:** Where is the nearest checkpoint?

Visitor:	Where is the nearest checkpoint?	de palatano kantrolee markaz che dalta nazhdee wee, cherey dey?
Local:	It's two kilometers.	la day zay na dow a keelo metra larey

As a result of unclear jurisdictional boundaries, some checkpoints within close proximity of each other may be administered by different regional leaders.<sup>171</sup>



DoD photo: Spc. Patrick Tharpe  
Search at a check point

**Exchange 67:** Please get out of the car.

Soldier:	Please get out of the car.	marhamat wokree aw la mortor na sha ta see
Local:	OK.	sha

In general, Afghans will anticipate the need to step out of the vehicle and show identification, if available.

**Exchange 68:** Show us the car registration.

Soldier:	Show us the car registration.	de Khpal motar da raajistir sanadoona raata woKh-ee
Local:	OK.	Kha

<sup>171</sup> The New York Times. Gall, Carlotta and Craig S. Smith. "A Nation Challenged: Warlords; Checkpoints as Flash Points: Rival Flags Stir Afghan Fear." 4 February 2002. <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/02/04/world/nation-challenged-warlords-checkpoints-flash-points-rival-flags-stir-afghan-fear.html>

Unrelated males and females should be kept in separate areas for body pats, which should be conducted by a person of the same gender.

**Exchange 69:** Is this all the ID you have?

Soldier:	Is this all the ID you have?	daa tol istaaso de pezhandelo sanadoona dee?
Local:	Yes.	ho

Checkpoints are a target of insurgents. Afghans may feel tension when dealing with local enforcement agents of a different ethnic background.

**Exchange 70:** Are you carrying any guns?

Soldier:	Are you carrying any guns?	zaan sara toopok laree?
Local:	Yes.	ho

**Landmines**

From the Soviets to the Taliban, numerous factions have made extensive use of landmines in Afghanistan. High estimates have placed the number of landmines scattered throughout the country in the millions, although more conservative estimates limit this figure to several hundred thousand.<sup>172</sup> There is also widespread abandoned and unexploded ordnance in the country. Although contamination is pervasive, eastern and southern Afghanistan are the most affected areas, particularly the provinces of Helmand and Kandahar.<sup>173</sup> While demining efforts have made significant progress, it will take a stable security situation and many years of additional surveying and demining before the roads and fields of Afghanistan can be considered free of explosive hazards.



© TKnoxB / flickr.com  
Unexploded ordnance

In many cases, only the locals know where mine fields are located in the region. These areas are sometimes marked with red-painted rocks, although many hazardous areas remain unmarked.<sup>174</sup> Even in marked areas, floods and other climatic factors can change the location of land mines, making it difficult to pinpoint their exact location. Not only open areas but entire abandoned villages and other structures may be mined. As of 2008, an estimated 70,000 Afghans had been injured or killed by landmines since 1990.<sup>175</sup>

<sup>172</sup> Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. Recknagel, Charles. “Afghanistan: Land Mines From Afghan-Soviet War Leave Bitter Legacy (Part 2).” 13 February 2004. <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1051546.html>  
<sup>173</sup> Landmine Monitor, International Campaign to Ban Landmines. Landmine Monitor Report 2009. “Afghanistan.” 2009. [http://www.the-monitor.org/index.php/publications/display?act=submit&pqs\\_year=2009&pqs\\_type=lm&pqs\\_report=afghanistan&pqs\\_section=](http://www.the-monitor.org/index.php/publications/display?act=submit&pqs_year=2009&pqs_type=lm&pqs_report=afghanistan&pqs_section=)  
<sup>174</sup> Landmine Monitor, International Campaign to Ban Landmines. Landmine Monitor Report 2007. “Afghanistan.” 2007. <http://www.icbl.org/lm/2007/afghanistan>  
<sup>175</sup> IRIN, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. “Afghanistan: Mine Clearance Making Good Progress – UN Agency.” 21 July 2008. <http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?ReportID=79351>

**Exchange 71: Is this area mined?**

Soldier:	Is this area mined?	daa mantiqa mayn laree?
Local:	Yes.	ho

Landmine contamination has displaced Afghan communities and prevented them from farming and herding in certain areas.<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> IRIN, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. "Afghanistan: Landmines Impede Civilians' Return to Volatile Arghandab." 22 June 2008.  
<http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?ReportID=78869>

## Rural Life Assessment

1. Rural communities in Afghanistan generally lack access to resources and services.

**True.** Services such as electricity, waste disposal, paved roads, and water treatment are often non-existent in rural regions. Healthcare and education are also often inadequate or only available at remote locations.

2. In Afghanistan, approximately 45% of the land can be used for farming.

**False.** In Afghanistan, only 12% of the land is arable. Approximately 45% of the country consists of pastureland, which supports livestock owned by farmers and nomadic herders.

3. The largest nomadic group in Afghanistan is a Pashtun tribe.

**True.** The Pashtun group of nomads known as the Kuchi is the largest and most well-known nomadic tribe in the country. Traditionally, they ranged throughout the Afghan-Pakistan border region.

4. Due to extremely high maternal, infant, and under-five mortality rates, new rural health initiatives have focused on women and children.

**True.** Afghanistan has some of the highest maternal, infant, and under-five mortality rates in the world. Consequently, international efforts have focused on reproductive health care and childhood immunizations.

5. In rural areas, boys and girls have equal access to education.

**False.** In rural areas, conservative attitudes keep many girls out of school. In addition, insurgents have attacked female students, their schools, and their teachers, so many families fear sending their daughters to school.

## Chapter 6 Family Life

### Introduction

The family is the essential unit in Afghan society, and its welfare and propagation are the central concerns of its members. As Afghanistan has historically lacked comprehensive public welfare, security, and education systems, the family has long served as the primary social support network for the Afghan people. As a result, extensive family networks are common. These networks serve the economic and social interests of the extended family or tribe, and they are often integral in political or commercial affairs. Nepotism, or the patronage of family members, is commonly practiced, and marriage is used as a means to build further alliances.<sup>177</sup>



© Michael Foley  
Afghan family on a bicycle

Because personal and familial honor are intertwined in Afghan culture, an individual's identity is closely tied to those of his or her family members. The reputation and actions of each family member reflect upon the family as a whole. Ideally, this creates a tight bond between relatives, but it can also have negative consequences, such as in the case of honor killings. Overall, the Western notion of individual self-sufficiency is neither practical nor socially acceptable in Afghan society. Living in a poor and conflict-ridden country, most Afghan families need the assets, labor, and support of all of their members. In many regions of the country, it is simply not possible to subsist on one's own.

### Exchange 72: Does your family live here?

Soldier:	Does your family live here?	staaso koraanee dalta zhowand kawee?
Local:	Yes.	ho

### Afghan Homes

Traditional Afghan homes consist of rudimentary mud-brick or stone structures topped with flat or domed roofs. In urban areas, families may live in modern houses or apartments. Poor people who have migrated to the city often live in makeshift structures in slums. Nomadic populations generally live in tents or, in some cases, yurts. In rural areas, traditional mud-brick and stone houses predominate, although wooden structures may be seen in some regions. Comprising clusters of houses, rural villages are traditionally fortified with exterior walls and, in some cases, towers.

Traditional housing compounds for an extended Afghan family consist of a series of individual structures built around a courtyard and surrounded by fortified walls. In conservative areas where strict segregation of the sexes is practiced, these compounds

<sup>177</sup> *Culture and Customs of Afghanistan*. Emadi, Hafizullah. "Chapter 6: Family, Women, and Gender Issues: Concept of the Family [pp. 165-166]." 2005. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

have specific male and female spaces.<sup>178</sup> When entering a private residence in a non-combat situation, foreigners should respect the differentiation of these spaces by knocking before entering both exterior and interior doors.

### Familial and Tribal Relations

#### *Qawms*

Afghan family networks extend into larger groupings based on lineage, ethnicity, tribal affiliation, locality, or other shared traits or interests. An Afghan’s basic network of affiliations is known as his *qawm*. This term has a variety of usages, which vary according to tribe, ethnic group, and region. Foremost, a person’s *qawm* is often based on his or her kinship or tribal affiliation. In such cases, the members of a *qawm* may trace their heritage to a common ancestor. *Qawms* may also refer to location, such as a specific village or region, or to one’s occupation or other socioeconomic commonalities.<sup>179</sup> These groupings have historically served to organize and identify Afghans and provide them with cooperative social bonds and safety in numbers.



© Victoria Villalobos  
Afghan girls

#### Exchange 73: Did you grow up here?

Soldier:	Did you grow up here?	taasee dalta loo shwee yaast?
Local:	Yes.	ho

#### *Feuds*

For Pashtuns, larger groupings such as clans, tribes, and tribal confederations have served similar purposes, although divisions among them are often antagonistic. This may also be the case within extended families and *qawms*.

Competition for power or resources is a common cause for conflict among groups. For example, when the head of a family dies, conflicts may arise over the distribution of resources among the brothers and male cousins of the family. Specifically, the allocation or division of a plot of land is a major source of dispute in rural Afghanistan. Adult males may also disagree as to who should become the family’s authority figure. In particular, violent disputes between male cousins are quite common. (In Pashto, the term for hostile dislike between two persons is *tarburghanay*, which is derived from the word *tarbur*, meaning male cousin.) In any case, such conflicts may force extended families to divide into separate households.<sup>180</sup>

<sup>178</sup> Afghan Legal History Project, Islamic Legal Studies Program, Harvard Law School. Kakar, Palwasha. “Tribal Law of Pashtunwali and Women’s Legislative Authority [p. 5].” No date. <http://www.law.harvard.edu/programs/ilsp/research/kakar.pdf>

<sup>179</sup> Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. *Afghanistan: A Country Study*. Blood, Peter R. , ed. “Chapter 2: The Society and Environment: Social Structure.” 1997. [http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+af0036\)](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+af0036))

<sup>180</sup> *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, Second Edition. Rubin, Barnett R. “Chapter 2: Social Structure under the Old Regime: Kinship, Qawm, Tribe, Ethnicity [p. 23].” 2002. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

**Exchange 74:** Are these people part of your family?

Soldier:	Are these people part of your family?	daa Khalik staase do koraaney gheree dee?
Local:	Yes	ho

On a larger scale, a simple dispute between clans or tribes over the use of resources or a breach of honor may lead to violent clashes. Sometimes these feuds can take years to resolve. In an extreme case, a blood feud in a village in eastern Afghanistan lasted for 30 years and resulted in the deaths of over 300 men. During this time, the traditional roles of men and women were reversed, as only women could safely venture into public. Men, on the other hand, could not leave their homes for fear of being attacked by their rivals.<sup>181</sup> Nonetheless, it is not uncommon for tribal factions to unite against an outside threat, even if they are involved in an internal feud.

**The Typical Household**

*Extended Family*

A traditional Afghan household contains a large extended family. Usually, this consists of a husband and wife, their sons, their sons' wives and children, and their unmarried daughters. Once married, a woman moves into the home of her husband's family; thereafter she belongs to that family and must obey its authority figures. Overall, it is common for various combinations of grandparents, parents, children, aunts, uncles, and cousins to live in the same compound. Of course, the composition of a household may vary according to tribe and socioeconomic status. Younger members of wealthy families are more likely to move out and start their own households.<sup>182</sup>



© Carol Mitchell  
Members of Parliament

**Exchange 75:** How many people live in this house?

Soldier:	How many people live in this house?	po daa koor ke tso mara Khalk zhowand kawee?
Local:	Ten.	las kasan

<sup>181</sup> Telegraph. Coghlan, Tom. "Afghan Blood Feud Ends After 30 Years." 3 June 2008. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/afghanistan/2061531/Afghan-blood-feud-ends-after-30-years.html>

<sup>182</sup> *Culture and Customs of Afghanistan*. Emadi, Hafizullah. "Chapter 6: Family, Women, and Gender Issues: Concept of the Family [pp. 165-166]." 2005. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

*Polygamy*

In some cases, an Afghan man will have more than one wife. (Islamic law allows men to marry up to four women at the same time.) However, this occurs on a limited basis in Afghanistan, usually only when the man is wealthy (and thus has the resources to provide for additional wives), or if his existing wife has not provided him with a son. In other instances, a man will marry a second wife of his choosing after marrying the first in an arranged marriage, or he will marry a young woman in the hopes of producing more children.<sup>183</sup> In any of these cases, each wife is usually provided with her own private room within the household, and, according to Islamic law, the husband must treat them equally.<sup>184</sup>

**Exchange 76:** Is this your entire family?

Soldier:	Is this your entire family?	daa staasee de koraaney tool gheree dee?
Local:	Yes.	ho

*Widows and Orphans*

Many Afghan families have been affected by war, illness, and lack of proper medical care. With large numbers of Afghan men killed in conflict, widows are common in Afghanistan. (In 2008, the number of Afghan widows was estimated at over 1.5 million.)<sup>185</sup> In most instances, young widows try to remarry, typically to another member of the extended family, such as a brother or cousin of their deceased husband. Sometimes, a man will take on a widow as a second wife, or she will simply be retained within the larger household.



© Pierre Gazzola  
Afghan women at a clinic

**Exchange 77:** Are you married?

Soldier:	Are you married?	wadeh dey karey dey?
Local:	No.	na

If such an arrangement is not possible, widows may be forced to provide for themselves and their children, or they may become destitute and forced to beg. This often happens when the family has lost many male members to war and sickness. Such circumstances expose widows to a variety of ills. As an expert observed, “In Afghanistan’s patriarchal society, the death of a husband not only diminishes a woman’s economic independence,

<sup>183</sup> *Culture and Customs of Afghanistan*. Emadi, Hafizullah. “Chapter 6: Family, Women, and Gender Issues: Institutions of the Family [pp. 166-168].” 2005. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

<sup>184</sup> Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. *Afghanistan: A Country Study*. Blood, Peter R., ed. “Chapter 2: The Society and Environment: Family.” 1997. [http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+af0056\)](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+af0056))

<sup>185</sup> IRIN, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. “Afghanistan: Bleak Prospects for Country’s Estimated 1.5 Million Widows.” 30 January 2008. <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=76492>

but also damages her sense of social protection.”<sup>186</sup> In an effort to combat this trend, Western aid organizations have aimed to help these women become productive citizens by offering literacy classes and job skills training.<sup>187</sup>

Orphans are also widespread in Afghanistan, largely due to high maternal mortality rates and casualties of war. In 2010, some estimates placed the number of Afghan orphans at 2.1 million or more.<sup>188</sup>

### Gender Roles

Afghan families are patriarchal, meaning they are headed by a male authority figure. This role is filled by the father or, in the case of his death, the eldest son. The patriarch and the other male adults of the family are responsible for the family’s economic security, safety, and strict adherence to traditional social codes.



© Michael Foley  
Girls making paper flowers

### Exchange 78: Do you have any brothers?

Soldier:	Do you have any brothers?	taasee woroor laree?
Local:	Yes.	ho

As women are often restricted to the home, men act as the family’s representatives in the public sphere. In urban areas, this involves working a paid job. In rural areas, men often perform the majority of the agricultural labor that takes place outside the household compound. Men also participate in local politics and serve in militias.

The eldest women in the family have authority in various domestic matters such as allocation of chores. They are in charge of the younger women in the household. Child-rearing, caring for the family, and the many tasks involved in operating the household are their primary responsibilities. In some cases, they may work outside the home, although this practice was banned under the Taliban and remains taboo in many communities. Overall, women are required to submit to the will of their fathers, husbands, and other male relatives. Failure to do so may result in domestic violence.<sup>189</sup>

<sup>186</sup> IRIN, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. “Afghanistan: Bleak Prospects for Country’s Estimated 1.5 Million Widows.” 30 January 2008.

<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=76492>

<sup>187</sup> The Christian Science Monitor. Montero, David. “Afghan Women Start Businesses, Help Reconstruct a Torn Nation.” 8 May 2006. <http://www.csmonitor.com/2006/0508/p04s01-wosc.html>

<sup>188</sup> Public Affairs Office, International Security Assistance Force. Thomas, Jason. “Launch of Ghazni City Hospital and Orphanage Brings Hope to Afghans.” 16 March 2010.

<http://www.isaf.nato.int/en/article/news/ghazni-city-hospital-and-orphanage-brings-hope-to-afghans.html>

<sup>189</sup> Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. *Afghanistan: A Country Study*. Blood, Peter R., ed. “Chapter 2: The Society and Environment: Family.” 1997. [http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+af0056\)](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+af0056))

## Marriage and Divorce

In Afghanistan, marriages are social and economic contracts between families, rather than romantic unions between individuals. Parents arrange marriages for their offspring, with marriage between cousins a common and preferred practice among many Afghans. (Such an arrangement keeps resources within the family.) Arranged marriages involving minors remain common, despite laws that prohibit girls younger than 16 from marrying. This is especially true in rural areas, where marriages are often arranged to settle disputes or debts between families.<sup>190</sup> In any case, grooms are usually older than their brides; in some cases, they may be significantly older.

In Afghanistan, divorce is uncommon due to the social stigmatization that results from its occurrence. Islamic law grants men the ability to divorce their wives simply by declaring their intent to dissolve the union three times; the consent of the wife is not required. This method is still used in Afghanistan, and it can have devastating effects upon women. Both sexes involved in a divorce will likely suffer social censure, but women also lose the economic and social security provided by the extended family, which remains the husband's domain. It is more difficult for women to remarry, especially if they are older and unable to produce children. Women also lose custody of their older children, particularly if they remarry. Men do, however, suffer some financial loss, as they typically lose the bride price that was given to the wife as part of the marriage contract.<sup>191</sup> Officially, women are allowed to initiate divorce for various reasons, but this is less common as the effects of separation are often more damaging for them. As a result, suicide among unhappily married wives is not uncommon, with physical abuse being a primary motivating factor.<sup>192</sup>



© Cactus / flickr.com  
Afghan mother and baby

## Life Stages

### *Birth*

Once married, women are expected to produce many children. Because many Afghan women lack access to proper medical care, childbirth can be dangerous. Afghanistan has one of the world's highest maternal mortality rates. The birth of a child is a joyous event, especially when the child is a boy. In many areas, celebrations include the firing of guns and a feast with family and friends. Celebrations are also held when a baby boy is circumcised, a practice mandated by Islamic custom.<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> IRIN, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. March 16, 2005. "Afghanistan: Law on Forced Marriages Still Widely Flouted." 16 March 2005.

<http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?reportid=28332>

<sup>191</sup> *Culture and Customs of Afghanistan*. Emadi, Hafizullah. "Chapter 6: Family, Women, and Gender Issues: Divorce [pp. 179-181]." 2005. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

<sup>192</sup> IRIN, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. "Afghanistan: Women Reluctant to Seek Marital Redress Through the Courts." 21 August 2007.

<http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?ReportID=73829>

<sup>193</sup> *Culture and Customs of Afghanistan*. Emadi, Hafizullah. "Chapter 6: Family, Women, and Gender Issues: Child Rearing [pp. 177-178]." 2005. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

### *Status of the Elderly*

The elderly are well-respected and cared for by their offspring, and they maintain important roles within the family throughout old age. For example, elderly women often help raise the family's young children, and they are frequently in charge of allocating food resources.<sup>194</sup> Overall, older members have authority over younger ones, with the eldest male having authority over the family as a whole.

### *Status of Children*

Children are highly valued, with boys having a much higher status than girls. This is due to several reasons. Foremost, Afghan families are patrilineal, which means that familial descent is traced through the male line. Inheritance passes to the male offspring as well. Afghan women are supposed to receive a portion of the inheritance, but this does not always occur.<sup>195</sup> In this way, male offspring propagate the family and accumulate its wealth, whereas female offspring become members of other families through marriage. Overall, this makes investment in boys seem more socially and economically practical than investing in girls.



© Faizabad / flickr.com  
Afghan boy from the Wakhan Corridor

### **Exchange 80:** Are these your children?

Soldier:	Are these your children?	daa staasee kochneeyaan dee?
Local:	Yes.	ho

While children may be doted upon by family elders, misbehavior is often met with corporal punishment, with the goal of instilling respect for authority.<sup>196</sup> Mothers may be more indulgent toward boys in order to cultivate their loyalty, which will be tested upon the son's marriage. Both boys and girls contribute to the household from a young age. In addition to performing household and agricultural chores, boys may seek paid employment outside the home (in areas where it is available). Girls typically help their female elders in cooking, washing, and caring for younger family members. Educational opportunities vary according to a family's means and location, with priority given to sending boys to school. With high rates of infant and under-five mortality, Afghan families frequently suffer the loss of children.

<sup>194</sup> Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. *Afghanistan: A Country Study*. Blood, Peter R., ed. "Chapter 2: The Society and Environment: Family." 1997. [http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+af0056\)](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+af0056))

<sup>195</sup> Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. *Afghanistan: A Country Study*. Blood, Peter R., ed. "Chapter 2: The Society and Environment: Family." 1997. [http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+af0056\)](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+af0056))

<sup>196</sup> IRIN, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. "Afghanistan: Domestic Violence Against Children Widespread – Study." 26 February 2008. <http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?ReportID=76949>

## Naming Conventions

On an everyday basis, Afghans usually use only their first name. In formal situations, they are identified by both their first name and their father's name.

Even if the first name has two or more parts, it is considered to be one first name. (Afghans do not use middle names.) For example, *Ahmad Youness walade Muhammad Moqim* translates to Ahmad Youness son of Muhammad Moqim. *Ahmad Youness* is the first name, and *walade* means “son of.”



For Pashtuns, first names are often the names of valued objects or qualities, such as Batoor, one of many male names meaning “brave,” or Sarbaz, which means “eagle.” For girls, names such as Ranrha, meaning “light,” or Gulalai, which means “beautiful,” are common. Last names are often Pashtun tribal names.<sup>197</sup>

Today, the practice of using a family name is becoming more popular among Afghans who have traveled abroad or have had contact with international visitors.<sup>198</sup> Some are using their tribe's name as their family name. Foreigners should be aware of possible spelling variations when transliterating names from Pashto to the English alphabet. A name spelled differently on two documents may nonetheless refer to the same person.

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<sup>197</sup> Khyber.org. “Pashto Names.” No date. <http://www.khyber.org/culture/names/names.shtml>

<sup>198</sup> The Cultural Orientation Resource Center, Center for Applied Linguistics. Robson, Barbara, et al. *The Afghans: Their History and Culture*. “Language and Literacy.” 2002. <http://www.cal.org/co/afghan/alang.html>

## Family Life Assessment

1. In rural areas, traditional mud-brick or stone houses are the norm.

**True.** Traditional Afghan homes consist of rudimentary mud-brick or stone structures, typically topped with flat or domed roofs. In conservative areas, houses have specific male and female spaces.

2. In Afghanistan, a feud between families is known as a qawm.

**False.** In Qawm has a variety of meanings, but it is basically a network of affiliations. This can include kinship and tribal affiliations, as well as affiliations based on location or shared occupation.

3. A typical Afghan household is made up of a nuclear family.

**False.** A traditional Afghan household contains a large extended family. Usually, this consists of a husband and wife, their sons, their sons' wives and children, and their unmarried daughters.

4. Due to years of conflict and poor medical care, widows and orphans are common in Afghanistan.

**True.** Recent estimates place the number of war widows in Afghanistan as high as 1.5 million. Due to high maternal mortality rates and the large number of war casualties, there were an estimated 1.6 million orphans in the country.

5. Divorce is common in Afghanistan.

**False.** Even though Islamic law grants men the ability to divorce their wives simply by declaring their intent to dissolve the union three times, divorce is uncommon due to the social stigmatization that results from its practice.

## Final Assessment

1. Pashtuns dominate the eastern and southern regions of Afghanistan
2. Pashtuns form the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan.
3. The Afghan state was founded by a Pashtun leader in the 18th century.
4. The majority of Pashtuns are Shi'a Muslims.
5. Shi'a Muslims in Afghanistan have avoided persecution by their Sunni neighbors.
6. Islam is the state religion of Afghanistan.
7. Pashtun beliefs prohibit men from belonging to Sufi groups.
8. Afghan families are patriarchal.
9. Displays of affection, such as hugging, are only appropriate between members of the same sex.
10. Daughters are viewed as a valuable asset by their families.
11. Since the fall of the Taliban, millions of girls who were previously barred from education are now attending school.
12. Less than 10% of all Afghans live in urban areas.
13. Many Afghans now have access to primary health care, such as vaccinations.
14. In Afghanistan, only about one tenth of the land can be used as pastureland.
15. In rural areas, the ancient tribal code of Pashtunwali is still closely followed.
16. Most marriages in Afghanistan are arranged by professional matchmakers.
17. Afghan men must gain permission from the local imam in order to get a divorce.
18. Feuds are a common occurrence among Pashtuns.
19. Afghan custom restricts a man from having more than one wife.
20. An Afghan's network of affiliations is known as his qawm.

## Resources