



CULTURAL ORIENTATION

DARI



Tea (chai), a key part of hospitality and everyday life in Afghanistan Flickr/Afghanistan Matters





About Rapport

Predeployment language familiarization is target language training in a cultural context, with the goal of improving mission effectiveness. It introduces service members to the basic phrases and vocabulary needed for everyday military tasks such as meet & greet (establishing rapport), commands, and questioning. Content is tailored to support deploying units of military police, civil affairs, and engineers.

In 6-8 hours of self-paced training, Rapport familiarizes learners with conversational phrases and cultural traditions, as well as the geography and ethnic groups of the region. Learners hear the target language as it is spoken by a native speaker through 75-85 commonly encountered exchanges. Learners test their knowledge using assessment questions; Army personnel record their progress using ALMS and ATTRS.

- Rapport is available online at the DLIFLC Rapport website
<http://rapport.dliflc.edu>
- Rapport is also available at AKO, DKO, NKO, and Joint Language University
- Standalone hard copies of Rapport training, in CD format, are available for order through the DLIFLC Language Materials Distribution System (LMDS)
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Woman with burqa in a light sandstorm, near Balkh, northern Afghanistan Flickr/Afghanistan Matters

Chapter 1 | Dari Cultural Orientation

Profile

Introduction

Landlocked and mountainous, the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan is a tribal nation in South Central Asia. The region's turbulent history and rich culture dates back 5,000 years, though its many tribes were united just 270 years ago, under Ahmad Shah Durrani, into what is currently known as Afghanistan. The country's strategic location has long made it prone to invasion. Early on, the region was a focal point of Silk Road trade routes. Over the last century, it has served as a link between Pakistan, China, Iran, and three former Soviet republics (Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan).¹ Its rugged physical environment has isolated communities within the country, resulting in a great variety of customs and traditions between and within

tribal groups.² Most Afghans practice Islam, one of the few unifying forces in this multiethnic nation.

Ethnically, Afghanistan is home to Pashtuns, who are predominant in the south and southeast, and Dari-speaking ethnic Tajiks, Hazara, and Uzbeks as well as other cultural minorities. Thus, Pashtun is an ethnicity with its own language, Pashto, while Dari is a common language spoken by multiple ethnicities, including Pashtuns who interact with other groups. For the most part, Pashtuns controlled power after Afghanistan assumed a form of statehood. Their culture, therefore, became synonymous with Afghan culture. Yet Dari is the language of administration, and therefore Dari speakers have historically been well represented in the ranks of government.

Geography

Area

Afghanistan occupies a landlocked position in South Central Asia, lying between Pakistan (to the south and east) and Iran (to the west). Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and, to a much smaller extent, China also share borders with Afghanistan to the north. Visually, Afghanistan drops down in a southeasterly direction like a leaf, stretching approximately 1,240 km (771 mi) from the narrow Wakhan Corridor in the northeast—the “stem”—to the Dasht-e Margo desert

Afghanistan and its neighbors, South-central Asia
Graphic/DLIFLC

in the southwest. Afghanistan’s total area is 652,230 sq km (251,827 sq mi), making it slightly smaller than the state of Texas.³ With no direct access to the ocean, Afghanistan’s nearest seaport is in Karachi, Pakistan—1,170 km (727 mi) away.^{4, 5}

Climate

Afghanistan’s typically harsh climate is a product of its geography and extreme landscape. Its weather is marked by dramatic temperature differences between day and night, and summer and winter. The country is mostly arid or semiarid, with sudden seasonal transitions, but conditions vary according to region.⁶ Highs above



U.S. Army 101st Airborne Division and Afghan border police hiking to an observation point along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border Flickr/The U.S. Army

35°C (95°F) are common in the southern deserts. The northeastern mountain regions, including the Wakhan Corridor, have a subarctic climate characterized by bitter winters that are dry and cold. Extremes of 49°C (120°F) and -31°C (-24°F) have been recorded in Jalalabad and Kabul, respectively.^{7, 8}

The deep, narrow valleys and high mountains of the Central Highlands receive the bulk of the precipitation in the winter, and blizzards are common.⁹

Lower elevations may receive rainfall, while the high elevation peaks are covered in glaciers. Between July and September, the mountainous region near the Pakistani border may receive moist tropical rain brought by Indian monsoons, which can move into the central and southern areas of the country.¹⁰ At this time, violent winds are a near daily occurrence in the west and southwest. These hot, dry winds, known as the “wind of 120 days,” often create dangerous sand storms that sweep across the arid southern deserts.

Geographic Divisions



Kajakan Valley, between Jalalabad and the border city of Torkham, Nangarhar Province Flickr/Afghanistan Matters

Afghanistan can be divided into three distinct geographic regions: the Central Highlands, the Northern Plains, and the Southern Plateau. The Central Highlands include the formidable Hindu Kush Range, the country’s dominant mountain system. It extends in a southwesterly direction from the Wakhan Corridor of the far northeast into the center of the country. High mountain passes are of significant strategic value in the Central Highlands; these include the Shebar Pass and the

legendary Khyber Pass. Earthquakes, which frequently trigger destructive landslides, are common in the Badakhshan area, where an average of 50 occur each year.^{11, 12}

The Northern Plains lie to the north of the Central Highlands. Extending into Central Asia, this expanse of foothills and fertile plains is densely populated and the site of

heavy agricultural activity. Mineral resources and natural gas deposits are abundant. At 258 m (846 ft), Amu Darya Basin is the lowest elevation point in the region.¹³ South of the Central Highlands, the Southern Plateau consists of 129,499 sq km (50,000 sq mi) of high plateaus and diverse desert terrain, including salt flats and dry, stony expanses. Its southeastern section, known as Rigestan, is a red-sand desert covering 32,375 sq km (12,500 sq mi), and its scattered dunes and ridges may reach 30 m (100 ft) high.¹⁴

Mountains

Mountains dominate the landscape of Afghanistan, sweeping through the center of the country in a northeast, southwest direction. The 38 summits of the Hindu Kush Range, considered an extension of the Himalayas, rise more than 7,000 m (22,965 ft).¹⁵ The highest is Noshaq Peak, at 7,485 m (24,577 ft).¹⁶ Over 49% of the country's land area lies 2,000 m (6,561 ft) above sea level.



Map of the Hindu Kush mountains, the source of 80% Afghan river water; and the Helmand River drainage basin
Wikimedia/Kmuser

Several mountain ranges shoot off from the Hindu Kush, spreading south and west from the central area of the country. Extending southwest, the Baba Range (Kuh-e Baba) in Bamyan Province reaches 5,142 m (16,870 ft). This range gradually descends to the Kermu Pass.¹⁷ Southeast of Kabul, the Safed Koh (White Mountain) Range rises along the border area with Pakistan. The Khyber Pass, one of the most important trade routes between the two countries, crosses a spur of this range. Also found here, the Tora Bora (Spin Ghar) cave complex was a Taliban stronghold. Other prominent ranges include the Torkestan Mountains and the Siah Kuh and Heşar ranges.¹⁸

Rivers and Lakes

Although Afghanistan is in an arid region, the country has relatively abundant water resources. Over 80% of the country's river water originates in the Central Highlands (including the Hindu Kush), which collect significant snowfall.¹⁹ Yet, much of these water resources remain unharnessed because infrastructure is lacking. Only 30-35% of the annual water supply is used domestically, with the rest flowing into surrounding countries. In the absence of sufficient storage, management, and distribution systems, water shortages are common.^{20, 21, 22}

Afghanistan's most important rivers are the Amu Darya, the Kabul, the Helmand, the Farah, and the Harirud. Nearly all flow into neighboring Iran or Pakistan, making international water-sharing disputes are common.^{23, 24, 25, 26} Forming a long section of the 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 and Farah rivers join in southwestern Afghanistan, entering the salty wetlands of the Sistan Depression, on the Afghan-Iranian border. The Helmand, the longest river in the country at 1,400 km (870 mi), and the Farah are critical resources for irrigation water in the south. Flowing westward from the central mountains, the Harirud passes near the western city of Herat and ultimately forms a portion of the Afghan-Iranian border. Afghanistan's lakes are small in size and number; those in the south and west are commonly saline. Streams and lakes are only active after periods of rainfall or during the spring snowmelt.²⁷



*Kajaki Reservoir, a holding tank for the Kajaki Dam powerstation, on the Helmand River, southern Afghanistan
Flickr/ USACE Afghanistan Engineer District-South*

Major Cities

Kabul

Kabul is the capital of Afghanistan and by far its largest city.^{28, 29, 30} Situated near the eastern border with Pakistan, its nearly 5 million residents represent roughly 41% of the total urban population.^{31, 32, 33} Kabul lies between the Hindu Kush mountains at an elevation of about 1,800 m (5,900 ft) along the Kabul River. At the crossroads of north-south and east-west trade routes, Kabul is the center of culture and commerce in Afghanistan. There are 9 universities in the city, 24 television stations, and cell phones are common.^{34, 35} From Kabul city, there are major routes that lead to Kandahar, Herat, Jalalabad, and



Early morning, Kabul and Kabul River Flickr/seair21

Mazar-e Sharif; other routes link to Pakistan via the Khyber Pass, or through the Hindu Kush to Uzbekistan.

Kabul has existed for more than 3,500 years, and the cityscape is a blend of old and new architecture. In the southwest of the city, the new parliament buildings are located close to the Dar-ul-Aman Palace, destroyed during Afghanistan’s civil war.³⁶ Kabul’s population speaks mainly Dari, although Pashto is spoken as well.³⁷

Kandahar (Qandahar)

Located in southeastern Afghanistan, Kandahar lies alongside the Tarnak River on a high desert plain between the foothills of the Central Highlands and the deserts of the Southern Plateau. The city is surrounded by fertile, irrigated farmland, with important regional fruit crops, such as grapes and pomegranates; the entire province of Kandahar is also Afghanistan’s third-largest producer of opium.³⁸ With a population of approximately 400,000 people, Kandahar is the second-largest city in Afghanistan.³⁹ Historically, its strategic location on critical trade routes made Kandahar prone to frequent invasion. The city served as Afghanistan’s first capital after Ahmad Shah Durrani unified the tribal nation in the 18th century. His mausoleum is in the city, as is the Khirqah Shrine, which is believed to house the cloak of the Prophet Muhammad.⁴⁰ As a main center for Pashtun peoples, the city is home to the Kandahari dialect of Pashto, the soft-voice form of the language.⁴¹



Kandahar International Airport, the country’s second main international airport, used for both military and civilian flights U.S. Army photo by Spc. Jerry T. Combes

Mazar-e Sharif

The capital of Balkh province in northern Afghanistan, Mazar-e Sharif lies in one of Afghanistan’s most fertile regions. The Balkh River provides water for cotton, grain, and fruit crops. Industries include flour milling, silk and cotton textiles manufacturing, and oil and natural gas production.^{42, 43, 44} The Salang Pass connects Mazar-e Sharif with Kabul, 320 km (200 mi) southeast, and other Afghan cities. Russian engineers built the 2.6 km (1.6 mi) Salang Tunnel in 1964, and it remains one of the world’s highest road tunnels. Mazar-e Sharif lies close to Uzbekistan and Tajikistan and is the country’s

main regional hub for trade in Central Asia. Mazar-e Sharif’s estimated population of 300,000-400,000 mostly Dari-speaking people consists mainly of Uzbeks, Tajiks, and Turkmen.^{45, 46, 47}

Mazar-e Sharif, which means “tomb of the saint,” is revered by Shi’a Muslims as the burial site of the Prophet Muhammad’s cousin, Ali ibn Abi Talab, who established the Shi’a branch of Islam. Whether his remains are housed in the shrine is a matter of dispute, but the site is a significant draw for Shi’a Muslims.⁴⁸ The shrine, also known as the Blue Mosque, draws hundreds of pilgrims annually to commemorate Ashura.^{49, 50} Shi’a Muslims are often the target of violent sectarian extremists during this time.⁵¹



*Blue Mosque, Mazar-e Sharif, Balkh Province
Flickr/Peretz Partensky*

Herat

Herat is Afghanistan’s third- or fourth-largest city (population estimates range from 272,800 to 477,452).^{52, 53} Herat is located on flat river plains north of the Harirud River—a fertile agricultural region that is the economic center of western Afghanistan. The region has been plagued by drought in recent years, and the extremely strong winds that blow through the city in summer months can evolve into dust storms.⁵⁴ The border with Iran is less than 80 km (50 mi) away, and Persian culture influences daily life.⁵⁵ Most Herat residents are Tajik and speak Dari as well as Pashto. Herat was once the capital of the Timurid Empire, along the Silk Road between Europe and Asia. Traces of more than 2,000 years of rich history can be seen throughout Herat today. The citadel, Qala Ikhtyaruddin, built by Alexander the Great, and the famous Friday mosque, Jama Masjid, with its cobalt blue minarets, are striking examples.



*Qala Ikhtyaruddin (the Citadel of Herat), western
Afghanistan Wikimedia/U.S. Department of State*

Jalalabad



Minarets rise above the landscape in Jalalabad, Nangarhar Province, eastern Afghanistan Flickr/Todd Huffman

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 bustling trade and transportation route that runs through the Khyber Pass from Kabul to Pakistan and the Indian subcontinent. 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, Britain, the Soviet Union, and most recently the U.S., have stationed troops in Jalalabad, which was also a Taliban stronghold until 2001.^{56, 57, 58} While ISIL-Khorasan (ISIL-K) presence in Afghanistan is small, as of early 2017 the militant group had an established footing in Nangarhar Province.^{59, 60}

The city's population is dominated by Pashtuns, and it is close to Peshawar, a major Pashtun city in northwestern Pakistan. Fertile agricultural fields surround Jalalabad; nuts, fruits, and grains are the main crops.^{61, 62}

Khost



U.S. Army infantry platoon sergeant watching for insurgent activity near the Afghan-Pakistan border, Khost Province Flickr/The U.S. Army

Khost is located on a plateau in eastern Afghanistan, roughly 150 km (93 mi) south of Kabul and 16 km (10 mi) from the Pakistani border. Khost's roughly 160,000 residents are predominantly Pashtun, as is Khost Province as a whole. Khost is one of a few main transit hubs for trade with Pakistan, as well as a waystation for smuggled goods into and out of Afghanistan. Militarily, the city and the surrounding area have been of critical strategic importance over the last 40 years. During the Soviet-Afghan war, Khost was the object of a siege that lasted over 8 years; more recently, it has been a site of key military engagements between U.S. forces and Taliban militants.

Khost is isolated from the rest of Afghanistan to the west by a mountain chain with peaks that reach 3,000 m (9,800 ft); there is only one westward road through to Gardez. To the east, Khost borders the Pakistani province of North Waziristan, where the Taliban subgroup The Haqqani Network is based.⁶³ Remote districts of Khost Province are used as infiltration points for militants crossing between the two countries. The rocky, wooded border terrain makes security patrols and surveillance extremely difficult.^{64, 65}



Haqqani network fighter encampment site in Paktika province, cleared by combined Afghan and coalition security forces
Flickr/ResoluteSupportMedia

History

Early History

Human settlement in the Afghan region dates back several thousand years. Historically, it was 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 a main 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.



Map of ancient Persia 750 C.E, with Greater Khorasan in gold and Sind in pink, encompassing the area of today's Afghanistan
Wikipedia

The Persians were one of the first great 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 of various powers fighting for control, the Arab Muslims swept into the region in the 7th century C.E. (During this period, today's northern and western Afghanistan belonged to a region known as Greater Khorasan; this name was appropriated centuries later by a branch of the Islamic State—ISIL-Khorasan.)^{66, 67, 68} Arabs spread the practice of Islam, which remains prevalent 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. Rulers often relied on Pashtun tribal militia for security while Tajiks dominated commerce and government administration.

The Afghan State and the Colonial Era

In 1747, Afghanistan was created from a loose group of states when Ahmad Shah Durrani was elected shah (king) by a Loya Jirga (assembly) of Pashtun tribal leaders. Ahmad Shah Durrani consolidated the Pashtun tribes and expanded the Afghan territory to Delhi (in modern-day India) and the Arabian Sea. Pashtun monarchs ruled Afghanistan more or less continuously from 1780. In the 19th century, the British, based in their colonies in India, fought 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. Neither side was able to completely subdue the country, although they exerted various levels of control on Afghan leaders.



Afghan Emir Mohammad Yaqub Khan (center) with British officers at the signing of the Treaty of Gandamak, ending the first phase of the Second Anglo-Afghan War, 1879
Wikimedia/British Library Online

Independence

Afghanistan became an independent state in 1919, and Amanullah Kahn, who had fought for freedom from British control, came to power. He established many western-style reforms, including coeducation, discouraging polygamy, and lifting strict dress codes for women. Following a revolt by conservative Afghans, Amanullah abdicated in 1929. Despite this, he left a legacy that would later spur modernization in Afghanistan.⁶⁹



Daoud Khan, first president of Afghanistan, with General Mohammed Asif Safi and other senior Afghan officers
Wikimedia/Safi1919

The reign of the final king, Zahir Shah, lasted 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, nullified the 1964 constitution that allowed the establishment of political parties, and declared himself president of the new Republic of Afghanistan. His subsequent efforts to address economic problems failed to quell political instability. The People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), a communist political party established under the 1964 constitution, reorganized with Soviet backing.

The Soviet Era

In April 1978, the PDPA overthrew the Daoud government in a bloody coup and established the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan. Its Marxist agenda, which included the introduction of secular education for both boys and girls, quickly drew opposition from powerful families and clans due to its violation of Islamic norms.⁷⁰ A friendship treaty with the U.S.S.R. provided the government with enough material support to stave off collapse. The PDPA government ceased following Moscow’s advice, however, as the country’s security deteriorated. In December 1979, the Soviets dispatched large numbers of airborne troops to Kabul on the pretext of a training exercise. The existing head of state was killed, and the Soviets installed a rival, Babrak Karmal. The Karmal government was unable to exercise its power beyond Kabul, and more Red Army troops were dispatched to maintain order.



Tajbeg Palace in 1987, once home of the Afghan royal family, later headquarters of the Soviet 40th Army in Kabul
Wikimedia/ Mikhail Evstafiev

The Pashtun tribes mobilized into resistance groups and fought against the Moscow-backed government. The Soviet invasion also spawned a power vacuum that enabled non-Pashtun ethnic groups to assert their autonomy to a degree that was unprecedented in Afghan history. The Uzbeks reached an accord with the Kabul regime, allowing them a measure of independence in exchange for their support. The Hazaras, who occupy central Afghanistan, worked to “advance their status in both government-controlled areas and in the armed opposition.”^{71, 72} The Tajiks resisted Soviet occupation.

The number of mujahideen (resistance groups), however, stymied collective action, which was also undermined by competitive rivalry for international support from countries such as the U.S. and Pakistan.⁷³ U.S.-administered support had the unintended effect of strengthening warlordism; support went to regional commanders, who had their own militias, rather than to a centralized political authority.⁷⁴

A 1988 agreement between the Afghan and Pakistani governments called for U.S. and Soviet noninterference in Afghan affairs, leading to a total Red Army troop withdrawal by 1989. The mujahideen were not involved in the agreement, which was known as the Geneva Accords, and they did not accept its terms.⁷⁵ The Afghan Communist government remained in power, and the civil war, waged with armaments that had been supplied by outside powers, continued in the absence of an occupying foreign power. The communist government finally fell in 1992, and from 1992 until 1996, the ethnic Tajik-led Jama'iat-i Islami party controlled the central government in Kabul. This elicited a Pashtun backlash that received support from Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, the latter driven by a desire to curb Iranian influence.⁷⁶

The Taliban Regime



Taliban police patrolling the streets of Herat in a pickup truck, 2001
Wikimedia/bluurgh

In 1996, the Taliban, an extremist Islamic group dominated by Pashtuns, seized power over much of the country, including Kabul.⁷⁷ The group benefited from assistance from Pakistan's military and financial support from the Gulf States.

Taliban leaders were groomed in madrassas (religious schools) in Pakistan during the Soviet occupation. Their education occurred in an all-male environment removed from family life.⁷⁸ Instruction was led by mullahs who often had minimal training.⁷⁹ (A mullah is a Muslim man educated in the religion of Islam.) While the leadership was Pashtun-dominated, the Taliban considered themselves above tribal politics, viewing some tribal traditions as unacceptable deviations from shari'a law (Islamic law), while using others to recruit Pashtuns to their ranks.^{80, 81}

The Taliban had three goals: establishing an Islamic state; reunifying the country; and eliminating communist collaborators.

The society created under Taliban leadership denied Afghans their basic rights. Men and women who violated the strict code of behavior could be publicly flogged or subject to limb amputation. Schools for girls were closed, and women were banned from engaging in any type of work outside the home or venturing out without a male escort. Many families, left without a male breadwinner, were forced into exile or complete dependence on charity.

In addition, the country's non-Islamic cultural heritage was destroyed. Afghanistan was home to the world's tallest Buddha statues (located in Bamiyan), but the Taliban regarded the statues as a form of idolatry that implied Buddha was equal to Allah. Despite international outcry, in 2001, the 1,500-year-old statues were destroyed with explosives.⁸²



Taliban destroying the Bamiyan Buddha statues in March 2001 Flickr/Christian Frei Switzerland

Mullah Mohammed Omar (Clerical Leader Umar) associated his Taliban movement with other radical Islamists, such as Osama bin Laden, and he invited thousands of terrorists and foreign Islamic fighters into the country. Only some mountainous enclaves controlled by the Northern Alliance, a resistance group largely comprised of Dari-speaking Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Hazara Shi'a, remained outside Taliban control.⁸³ The Northern Alliance was led by Ahmad Shah Masoud, also referred to as "The Lion of Panjshir." By the summer of 2001, however, Taliban forces were poised to defeat the Northern Alliance.⁸⁴

Osama bin Laden, a source of support for the Taliban, used Afghanistan as a headquarters for his al-Qaeda movement. During this time, he organized attacks on American targets all over the world, including the destruction of U.S. embassies in East Africa and the attack on the USS Cole in Yemen. U.S. efforts prompting the Taliban government to hand over bin Laden were unsuccessful. Moreover, it was unclear if bin Laden's activities could be effectively hampered by targeting his supporters in other



A damaged USS Cole in 2000, after the bombing organized by Osama bin Laden out of his al-Qaeda headquarters in Afghanistan Defense Intelligence Agency/Sgt. Don L. Maes

states.⁸⁵ The terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001 changed Washington’s position regarding al-Qaeda. They provoked widespread agreement on the need to destroy al-Qaeda’s sanctuary in Afghanistan. Accordingly, Congress authorized President George W. Bush to launch Operation Enduring Freedom to remove the terrorist threat.

A Democracy Emerges



U.S. Army soldiers and U.S. Air Force combat controllers ride with Northern Alliance forces, October 2001, Dari-a-Souf Valley, Balkh Province Wikimedia/The U.S. Army

In the weeks following 9/11, teams of U.S. Special Forces entered Afghanistan and formed coalitions with Northern Alliance resistance fighters. Within three months, through cavalry-style assaults and targeted air strikes, they had overthrown the Taliban regime. In the process, many al-Qaeda leaders were killed or forced into hiding. This allowed Afghan opposition groups to assume power and form a transitional government. On 9 October 2004, Hamid Karzai, head of the interim government, won the first democratic presidential election in Afghan history.

It was recognized early on that outside funding was crucial for rebuilding Afghanistan.⁸⁶ But ongoing instability has made it difficult to invest in communities that need it the most. That instability, moreover, has driven up the costs for aid donors, so less money is available for public health programs and other projects that would benefit the Afghan people.⁸⁷

Since its 2001 downfall, the Taliban has had a resurgence in Afghanistan.⁸⁸ The extremist group has even been able to establish a presence in some areas in the north, where its support was never strong, even when it ruled the country.⁸⁹ This has been attributed to central governance failure.⁹⁰ As someone who spent time in the field observed, “much of what drives support for the Taliban is not support for their agenda or support for their objectives. It is grievance driven. It is grievances with a local government. It is grievances with the international community that is often perceived as supporting a corrupt or illegitimate provincial government.”⁹¹

Constitutional Reform

In January 2004, Afghanistan ratified a new constitution that established a modern, democratic Islamic state.⁹² As Hamid Karzai, an ethnic Pashtun, took office as

president, the Taliban insurgents regrouped, taking refuge in areas outside the limited control of the government, as well as in safe havens in nearby Pakistan.⁹³ By December 2008, a resurgent Taliban had once again extended its influence over a large share of the country.⁹⁴ In a policy shift, Karzai began to bring warlords, former mujahideen leaders, into government structures. In turn, their militias supported the Afghan military in its fight against the Taliban.⁹⁵ In 2009, Karzai was appointed by the Independent Election Commission (IEC) to a second 5-year term, after a controversial race against Abdullah Abdullah.

Since 2014, the National Unity Government (NUG) of President Ashraf Ghani and his chief executive officer Abdullah Abdullah have governed Afghanistan. The U.S. brokered the power-sharing arrangement to ensure stability after the contested presidential elections. With the withdrawal of international troops, a still unprepared Afghan army struggled to combat the Taliban.⁹⁶ The NUG worked to bolster its national forces with local militias and continued the trend of appointing warlords to government positions. Among those is Ghani's first vice president, General Abdul Rashid Dostum. In late 2016, the international community endorsed the continuation of the NUG, which was set to expire, through President Ghani's full term.^{97, 98} As of late 2016, the Taliban controlled more areas of Afghanistan than at any time since 2001.⁹⁹



Afghan presidential candidates Abdullah Abdullah (left) and Ashraf Ghani (right) after signing a joint declaration to form the National Unity Government U.S. Embassy Kabul Afghanistan

Government

Over the past half century, the central government of Afghanistan has taken a variety of forms. These include a monarchy, various socialist systems, a communist regime dependent on outside support, and a theocracy.¹⁰⁰ Yet national leaders have never exercised much power outside the capital. As a scholar observed, “Despite all the efforts of 20th century Afghan leaders . . . the average Afghan paid far less attention to edicts from Kabul than to the words of his local mullah or tribal chief.”¹⁰¹

The political reforms of 2004 produced a constitutional framework for the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, with a centralized government seated in Kabul. The constitution provides for a separation of powers, a democratically elected president,

a judiciary, and a national assembly—the Meshrano Jirga (House of Elders) and the Wolesi Jirga (House of the People).

Centralized Afghan governments, however, have historically lacked a strong influence outside the capital due to the long-standing tradition of local tribal rule. This pattern largely persists today; the government’s powers remain limited, and local tribal leaders and warlords continue to control many regions of the country. Additionally, the Loya Jirga, a constitutional assembly of thousands of representatives from ethnic, religious, and tribal groups around Afghanistan, wields tremendous influence. It is convened for important matters relating to heads of state, the constitution, and national or regional conflicts, and it may ultimately ratify, or end, the current power-sharing presidential structure.¹⁰²



Parliament building in Kabul Wikimedia/Guru chai

The government in Kabul continues to face growing security threats from insurgents—including the Taliban and pockets of ISIL-K and al-Qaeda—the lasting effects of decades of war, and the region’s long-standing tribal divisions.^{103, 104, 105, 106, 107} With the departure of most U.S. and coalition troops in 2014, Afghanistan began to experience setbacks against the Taliban and other armed groups that oppose it, the war on opium, and in reconstruction efforts.¹⁰⁸ Despite \$115 billion in aid provided by the U.S. toward reconstruction, counternarcotics, and Afghan National Security Forces training since 2002, Afghanistan has lost territory to the insurgency, unemployment remains high, and poverty persists.^{109,110} Many blame endemic corruption and Afghanistan’s inability to sustain its progress without continued international support.^{111, 112, 113}



Afghan National Army soldiers, literacy training materials in hand, at the completion of their training at NATO Capital Division headquarters in Kabul Flickr/NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan

Ethnicity continues to play a dominant role in Afghan politics, with Pashtuns and Tajiks leading the current government.¹¹⁴ On a regional level, the country is divided into provinces, districts, and subdistricts. Officially, the provinces are overseen

by governors, but local warlords in control of militias hold considerable power. Traditionally, jirgas (tribal councils), address issues at the local level. Their decisions are based on customary law, which mainly originates from the Pashtun community's code of Pashtunwali. The Afghan legal system, which governs the country as a whole, is a blend of customary tribal law, Islamic law, and Western legal traditions. Still, tribal or customary law alone prevails in much of the country.¹¹⁵

Media

In stark contrast to the days of Taliban rule when television was banned as immoral, Afghanistan has a flourishing media. In 2016, there were 83 local and national television channels, 161 radio stations, and 12 news agencies in Afghanistan.¹¹⁶ Television programming consists mainly of shows and serials imported from India and other programming modeled after Western shows. But Afghans' low literacy rate (36%), coupled with the high cost of electronics, limits public access to news and basic information. Newspaper readership is low and internet access is scarce; radio is still the main source of news for most Afghans. Radio broadcasts of foreign stations in Dari and Pashto are aired from Kabul, including Deutsche Welle, BBC World Service, Voice of America, and Radio France Internationale.



Broadcaster in the sound room, radio station Mozdah FM, Herat Flickr/Todd Huffman

Afghanistan has more media freedom than some other Central Asian or Middle Eastern countries. Freedom of speech and expression is guaranteed by the constitution. Recent laws give access to information from the government, prohibit censorship, and aim to improve transparency and accountability.¹¹⁷ Nevertheless, censorship exists due to broad restrictions placed on content that is deemed un-Islamic. Reporters continue to face intimidation, harassment, threats, arrests, and even kidnapping by the government as well as the Taliban.¹¹⁸ Media outlets may be fined or warned for violating regulations against un-Islamic content.¹¹⁹ Journalists who run afoul of this regulation cannot rely on an independent judiciary for support.^{120, 121, 122} With the reduction of foreign troops since 2014, the physical safety of journalists in the field remains a serious problem.

Economy

Economic Trends

Regarding gross domestic product (GDP), Afghanistan is among the poorest countries in the world.¹²³ Over the last two decades, armed conflict and political upheaval have set the Afghan economy on a rollercoaster of downward and upward swings.¹²⁴ Widespread poverty, unemployment, and political corruption are continuing economic challenges. Until recently, the country experienced a period of steep economic decline following the cutbacks in coalition forces that began in 2011.¹²⁵ Between 2011 and 2014 the number of registered new firms dropped by over 50%.¹²⁶ As of late 2016, increasing regional instability continues to hinder recovery and reconstruction efforts.¹²⁷ With nearly 68% of the country under the age of 25, the fighting and sluggish economy is causing the loss of future potential. Large numbers of young Afghans are leaving the country in search of a better life.^{128, 129, 130, 131}



*Two Afghan children playing in a refugee camp outside of Kabul
Flickr/NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan*

Economic growth is also weakened by the Taliban; the group feeds off an increasing amount of legal and illegal business in the country as their control spreads. Power lines, transmission towers, roads, and bridges are a favorite target of insurgents, who sabotage them and then extort fees for their “protection” or reconstruction.¹³² Mining and farming operations are also subject to Taliban “taxes.” It is, however, illegal business that provides the bulk of Taliban funding. The Taliban organized Afghanistan’s massive opium smuggling network, and also levies fees on other smuggling operations, such as cigarettes.^{133, 134, 135, 136}

Considering this, the U.S. and the international community pledged military and financial support through 2020, with the U.S. retaining 8,400 troops to assist Afghan forces.^{137, 138, 139} Afghanistan also became a member of the World Trade Organization that same year, and the hope is that greater access to world markets will help reboot the economy.¹⁴⁰

Industries and Manufacturing



Brick makers, with bricks drying in the sun, in Daykundi Province Flickr / Institute for Money, Technology and Financial Inclusion

Industrial production of any significant size in Afghanistan is limited, as much of its infrastructure remains crippled by war.¹⁴¹ But services and small-scale industry, such as brick and textile production, account for the bulk of Afghan GDP.¹⁴² Major industrial exports include scrap iron and coal. Afghanistan is also extremely rich in natural resources, including fossil fuels and an estimated \$1 trillion in mineral resources, but the deposits remain

largely unexploited.¹⁴³ Additionally, illegal mining and nonpayment of royalties limit the mining profits that make it to the treasury.^{144, 145} In terms of textiles, Afghanistan is famous for its exquisite handmade rugs and carpets, which are important exports, as well as for the production of karakul, a silky wool made from the pelts of Karakul lambs.

Agriculture



An Alfalfa farmer works his field by hand, Bamyan Province Wikimedia/The U.S. Army

As they have been for centuries, farming and animal husbandry are the main sources of income for most Afghans.¹⁴⁶ In recent decades, droughts, prolonged conflict, and loss of infrastructure have severely limited the conventional agricultural sector. Once self-sufficient in its production of wheat, a staple food for Afghans, the country now counts wheat flour among its main imports, along with cooking oil, tea, sugar, and moisture-retaining peat for farming.^{147, 148, 149}

Banks and aid organizations have worked to bolster the agriculture sector through education, microfinance, mine clearing, and irrigation projects.^{150, 151} As a result, Afghanistan's world-class crops—almonds, pomegranates, pistachios, grapes/raisins, and apricots—are making a slow comeback. Today, its main agricultural exports are grapes/raisins, nuts and seeds, raw cotton, dates, figs, and other tropical fruit.

Electricity

Afghanistan has one of the lowest rates of electricity usage in the world. As of 2015, only about 38% of Afghans, mostly living in urban areas, had access to electricity. Household backup generators are used to supplement the frequent periods of interruption (to ease the load on generating plants) and outages. Afghan rivers, fed by snow and glacial melt from the Hindu Kush, offer tremendous domestic hydropower potential. But many of the larger plants built in the 1950s and 1960s have fallen into disrepair.^{152, 153} Existing dams generate only a quarter of the power used domestically.¹⁵⁴



Kajaki Dam powerstation, on the Helmand River, southern Afghanistan Flickr/U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

The Afghan government, with assistance from the international community, is working to build additional dams for hydropower and irrigation.¹⁵⁵ In the meantime, Afghanistan continues to import 75% of its electricity from neighboring countries. As of 2016, at least two significant powerline projects were underway, one from Turkmenistan through the Salang Pass to Kabul, and another from Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan.^{156, 157, 158}

Opium Drug Trade

Afghanistan provides the vast majority of the world's opium. As a drought-resistant plant, opium poppies are the ideal cash crop for impoverished Afghan farmers.^{159, 160, 161}

The opium trade, which generates revenues that far exceed the Afghan government's entire annual operating budget, jumped 43% in 2016.^{162, 163} Decreased international and domestic security, and eradication efforts are major factors in the resurgence of opium production. While many Afghan farmers have devoted more of their fields to planting wheat in recent years, prices have dropped and it is less lucrative than opium. Poppies are highly profitable in many areas of southern Afghanistan, and farmers claim the profit from poppies is 324 times that of wheat.¹⁶⁴ In the absence of an alternative livelihood for Afghan farmers, poppy cultivation remains difficult to eradicate.



Almost 435 kg (960 lbs) of opium seized by Afghan National Security and International Security Assistance Forces during a vehicle stop Flickr/ResoluteSupportMedia

Ethnic Groups



President Hamid Karzai greeting villagers in Tarinkot, a Pashtun-dominated region, 2010 Flickr / ResoluteSupportMedia

As a historic crossroads for diverse populations, Afghanistan is home to approximately 40 ethnic groups who speak over 50 separate languages or dialects.¹⁶⁵ Many of these groups are ethnically or linguistically related to communities in surrounding countries. An Afghan's identity is not just defined by a common cultural or genetic group, but also by tribes, families, and geographic regions, or even occupations. Ethnicity dominates the political landscape in Afghanistan. It has become so politicized that it may be considered rude to inquire about someone's ethnic identity. Generally speaking, the Pashtun-dominated south and the Tajik- and Uzbek-dominated north represent the ethnic division of power in the country.^{166, 167}

Pashtuns



Former Taliban fighters preparing to hand over their rifles to local officials during a reintegration ceremony in Ghor province, central Afghanistan Flickr / ResoluteSupportMedia

Nearly half the Afghan population is made up of Pashtuns.¹⁶⁸ Although Pashtun tribes live in pockets throughout the country, they dominate a vast crescent-shaped region that stretches from the western frontier, across much of the south, to the Eastern Highlands. Many Pashtuns also populate the nearby northwestern region of Pakistan. Afghan Pashtuns are Sunni Muslims who maintain a strong sense of common identity that is bound by *pashtunwali*, a moral code that promotes honor and its defense. While there are at least seven tribal subgroups, the largest confederations are the Ghilzai and the Durrani.¹⁶⁹ Apart from President Ashraf Ghani, who is Ghilzai Pashtun, Afghanistan's rulers have nearly all been from the Durrani tribe.¹⁷⁰ In general, Pashtuns earn their livelihood through farming and animal husbandry. Many Pashtun tribes are nomadic, engaging in a continuous migration throughout the Afghan-Pakistani borderlands. The Taliban is comprised almost completely of Pashtuns—and its leaders are mostly Ghilzai Pashtuns.¹⁷¹

Tajiks



A Tajik man, at a market on the Afghanistan-Tajikistan border Flickr/kvitlauk

In contrast to the Pashtun, tribal identities have largely broken down among Tajiks. Tajiks live mainly in the mountains of the northeast and in bigger cities such as Herat, Kabul, and Mazar-e Sharif. They organize themselves by lineage, ancestral region, and, for those who have migrated to a city, occupational group.¹⁷² In general, urban and plains-dwelling Tajiks are well educated and work in commerce or as artisans; those living in the mountains are herdsmen or farmers.

Within Afghanistan, other Afghan groups may use the term “Tajik” to refer to nontribal Afghans in the north, or to urban Afghans.^{173, 174} There is also a tendency to assume that all Dari speakers are Tajiks.¹⁷⁵ Roughly a quarter of all Afghans are Tajik.^{176, 177}

Other Ethnic Groups



Hazara boy selling bananas in the Shahr-e Naw neighborhood of Kabul Flickr/Peretz Partensky

The mountainous region of central Afghanistan is home to another Dari-speaking ethnic group, the Hazara, who make up about 9% of the population. They are said to be descendants of Genghis Khan’s soldiers, and the word *hazar* translates to “one thousand”—the size of the smallest unit of the Mongolian military.¹⁷⁸ Hazaras are seasonal migrants who typically fill the lowest-level jobs in cities.¹⁷⁹ Most Afghan Shi’a belong to the Hazara group, who were treated particularly harshly under

Taliban rule.¹⁸⁰ Bamiyan Province, the center of the Hazara region, once held the ancient, monumental Buddha statues that were destroyed by the Taliban in 2001.^{181, 182}

Uzbeks and Turkmens occupy the greatest share of Afghanistan’s arable land in the north and are mostly farmers and herders. Uzbeks are the largest of Afghanistan’s Turkic ethnic groups, accounting for approximately 9% of the population. They speak Southern Uzbek, though many are fully literate in Dari. Uzbek men are considered

the champions of *buzkashi*, a horse-mounted sport, while Uzbek women are known for making high quality rugs.¹⁸³ Though Turkmen number only about 200,000, they contribute a significant amount to the Afghan economy. Their carpets and pelts made from karakul sheep wool are among Afghanistan's most important exports. Formerly nomadic



Buzkashi players Flickr/Peretz Partensky

and warlike, most Turkmen today are seminomadic.¹⁸⁴ The Uzbek and Turkmen share the great plains of the north with the seminomadic Aimaq. The Aimaq are herders and farmers who live mainly in Herat and into the mountains of Ghowr and Badghis provinces. They speak several dialects of Dari, with words of Turkic and Mongolian origin.

In mountainous northeastern Afghanistan, communities live in relative isolation. Here live the Kyrgyz and Nuristani. About 200,000 Kyrgyz live in the Wakhan Corridor of Badakhshan Province. They are “vertical nomads,” moving their herds of sheep and goats from low-lying areas in the winter to higher elevations in the summer. They will often use yaks or camels to transport loads during these seasonal migrations.^{185, 186} The Nuristani also live in relative isolation in communities perched at high elevations along the river valleys



Afghan boys tending sheep and goats in the village of Shabila Kalan, Zabul Province, southern Afghanistan Wikimedia/U.S. Department of Defense

south of the Wakhan Corridor, along the Pakistani border. Nuristan Province was formerly known as Kafiristan, or “Land of the Infidels,” because the tribes there long resisted the spread of Islam. They continued to practice their polytheistic religion, a form of animism, until the 1890s, when they became among the last converts to Islam. During the Anglo-Afghan wars, the Nuristani were known for their fierceness and guerilla-type fighting tactics. There are about 300,000 Nuristanis in Afghanistan.^{187, 188, 189}

The Baloch, a seminomadic people, occupy the barren, lower expanse of the Southern Plateau. They practice a moderate form of Islam, which has, during times of Islamic extremism, led to their repression. Numbering about 100,000 in Afghanistan, the Baloch are seminomadic and famed for camel breeding.^{190, 191, 192}

Languages



King Mohammad Zahir Shah, the last king of Afghanistan, here with John F. Kennedy at a dinner in the king's honor in September 1963 U.S. Government/Abbie Rowe

Among the country's many ethnic groups, which are known collectively as Afghans, Dari and Pashto are the dominant and official languages.¹⁹³ Pashto speakers live in large numbers in Afghanistan and northern Pakistan, and the use of the language is generally limited to these regions. Dari, by contrast, can be understood by anyone proficient in Persian Farsi, which, historically, was spoken in an area that extended from the Middle East to India.¹⁹⁴ The name Dari, in fact, dates back only to 1964, when King Zahir Shah, a Pashtun, grew concerned about the political and cultural ascendancy of neighboring Iran. In an effort to assert autonomy, he renamed Persian Farsi "Dari," which is a "medieval literary synonym for Persian meaning 'the language of Court.'"¹⁹⁵ The language is also known as Dari Persian or Afghan Persian. The difference between spoken Persian Farsi and Dari is akin to the difference between European and Canadian French.^{196, 197, 198}

In the north, ethnic groups are fluent Dari speakers while the native tongue for those living in the south and southeast is Pashto. Although Pashto is the language of the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan, Dari, the mother tongue of the second largest ethnic group, is the lingua franca of most Afghans. It is generally necessary to speak Dari to communicate with others from different groups.



Front page of the 13th-century epic Mathnawi-Walters Art Museum

Dari's status has been reinforced by the fact that Afghanistan's literary heritage is primarily preserved in the Dari language. The 13th century epic *Mathnawi*, which has been referred to as the "Persian Quran," was written in a language that is thought to be the linguistic forbearer of contemporary Dari. By contrast, Pashto speakers, who lived largely in isolation from outside influences, lack such a literary tradition. Nonetheless, Pashto literary tradition is rich in both oral and written forms, which began in the 16th century. "Wearana," a famous Pashtun poem written in the 9th century, is an epic tale of honor and defense of the home.¹⁹⁹ The national poet of Afghanistan is Khushal Khan Khatak, a Pashtun poet who lived during the 17th century.

The Taliban introduced Pashto as the language of government administration.²⁰⁰ While Pashto was discarded after the regime was toppled, language remains controversial in multiethnic Afghanistan.

Language, in short, is at once a unifying but potentially divisive issue for Afghan people. In response to a proposal to create separate schools, a legislator voiced concern that creating separate classes for children according to mother tongue would only serve to deepen the divisions in Afghan society.²⁰¹

Other Languages



*Afghan refugee children outside of their school in Kabul, waiting in line for donations of clothing and school supplies
Flickr/NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan*

A variety of other languages are spoken among the country's many ethnic groups, including Balochi, Pashai, Nuristani, and Pamiri and the Turkic languages Turkmen, Uzbek, and Kyrgyz. In areas where the majority speaks one of these languages, it is considered the third official language in the area. Though Nuristani form a single Indo-Iranian linguistic group, they speak five different languages, and many of the Nuristani tribes cannot communicate with one another.²⁰² The Pashai's 2,000-year-old

language was rendered in written form for the first time in 2003. Many Pashai speak Pashto as well.²⁰³ The Hazara people speak Hazaragi, a dialect of Persian Farsi that is mutually intelligible with Dari. The Baloch speak Balochi, which is also closely related to Dari.^{204, 205, 206}

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Dari Cultural Orientation

Chapter 1 | Profile

Assessment

1. The two most commonly spoken languages in Afghanistan are Kyrgyz and Uzbek.
2. Islam arrived in Afghanistan in the 7th century C.E.
3. The Soviet Army occupied parts of Afghanistan for 10 years.
4. In 1990, the Taliban took control of most of Afghanistan, including Kabul.
5. Afghanistan is an arid, water-scarce region that relies on drinking and irrigation water from Iran and Pakistan.

Assessment Answers: 1. False; 2. False; 3. True; 4. True; 5. False



A Muslim U.S. Marine chaplain praying during Ramadan, when he ministers to Afghan Muslims throughout Helmand and Kandahar provinces Flickr/DVIDSHUB

Chapter 2 | Dari Cultural Orientation

Religion

Introduction

Religion is an essential part of daily life, and most Afghans pray five times a day. Because nearly all Afghans adhere to the Islamic faith, religion is also one of the few unifying forces in this multiethnic nation.²⁰⁷ The word Islam means “to submit” or “surrender.” Islam, like Judaism and Christianity, is a monotheistic religion and recognizes the validity of the Old and New Testaments. However, Muslims believe that the final and culminating revelations were made to Muhammad, the last prophet. The Quran, the Muslim’s sacred text, is considered the record of God’s revelations made to Muhammad. Muslims worship their god (called Allah in Arabic) directly, without the intermediary of clergy.

Islam has two main branches: Sunni and Shi'a. The origins of the Sunni-Shi'a split lie in conflicting views of how the successor to the Prophet Muhammad was to be chosen. Upon the Prophet's death, Sunnis felt that the community should choose the next leader. Shi'a, by contrast, believed that leadership should remain within the family, and that Ali, Muhammad's son-in-law and cousin, was the rightful successor. The Sunnis prevailed and chose the first caliph (successor) based on his merit. While Ali eventually became the fourth caliph, his succession followed violence between the disputants.^{208, 209} Those who believe that Ali should have been the immediate successor are called Shi'a, short for *Shi'a-t-Ali*, or "party of Ali." This difference in beliefs continues to divide the two schools of Islam and remains a source of theological tension.

Islam

While the Sunni and Shi'a schools share a belief in the fundamental tenets of Islam, their split resulted in diverging practices and beliefs. Over time, several more sects emerged. Today, Sunnis comprise approximately 85% of the global Muslim community, and the Sunni branch of Islam is the state religion.²¹⁰ In Afghanistan, Sunni Muslims make up 85-90% of the population, while Shi'a account for 10-15%.²¹¹ Afghan Shi'a Muslims, including the Hazara, live primarily in the central provinces, but they also live in the nation's major cities. Traditionally relegated to menial jobs, Hazara frequently complain of discrimination from the Sunni-majority society.^{212, 213, 214} Ismaili Muslims, a sect within the Shi'a branch of Islam, live in central and northeastern Afghanistan. Western Dari-speaking Tajiks and Pashtuns are often referred to collectively as Farsiwan, or speakers of Persian Farsi. They are also predominantly Shi'a Muslims.²¹⁵



Locals entering a mosque in Herat during Ashura, a time of mourning for Shi'a Muslims Flickr/Hassan Reza

Though conflicts between Sunni and Shi'a have not been destabilizing recently, there is a history of violence against Shi'a Muslims, especially under the Taliban. Tensions between Sunnis and Shi'a occasionally lead to violent clashes in central and western provinces.²¹⁶ Pashtuns are predominantly Sunni, and historically have been involved in such conflicts.²¹⁷

Sufism

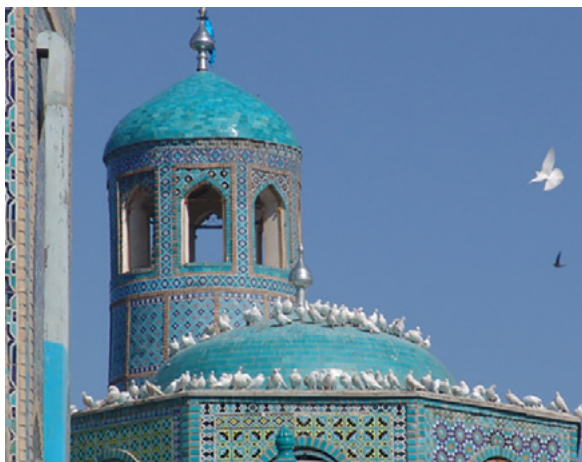


Khwaja 'Abd Allah Ansari shrine, the tomb of Sufi poet Abdullāh Ansari, in Herat
Wikimedia/Sven Dirks, Wien

Sufism is a mystical form of Islam. Sufis pursue truth as a path toward a direct, personal connection with Allah. Sufi practices include ritual prayer, meditation, and various ascetic or ecstatic activities. The central figure 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 Qadiriya order is a popular brotherhood among Pashtun tribes. Its leadership is hereditary rather than appointed, and *pirs* are chosen from those who can trace their lineage to the order's founder, Abdul-Qadir Gilani. The Qadiriya believe Gilani was a direct descendant of the Prophet Muhammad.²¹⁸

The area that is today western Afghanistan is regarded as a birthplace of Sufism, and it is home to a large number of Sufis. The city of Herat—birthplace of the Sufi poet Rumi—and its surrounding area is a center for Sufi practice.²¹⁹ But Sufi groups live throughout Afghanistan, including in the Pashtun-dominated south and east, where its influence is evident in Pashtun song and dance.^{220, 221, 222} Both the Sunni and Shi'a schools in Afghanistan have Sufi practitioners.

The Five Pillars of Islam



Blue Mosque, Mazar-e Sharif Flickr/Babak Fakhamzadeh

The Five Pillars of Islam are a set of essential beliefs and rites of the Islamic faith. The first and foundational pillar requires sincerely reciting the *shahada*, or Islamic creed: “There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is the prophet of Allah.” The remaining pillars include: performing a ritual prayer five times per day; giving alms (money or other assets) to the needy, traditionally through a tax on income; fasting during the holy month of Ramadan; and making a pilgrimage to the Islamic holy

city of Mecca.²²³ Muslims believe in a Day of Judgement when Allah will determine whether each individual will spend their afterlife in heaven or hell.²²⁴

Care and Treatment of the Quran

The printed Arabic Quran is regarded as holy, and desecrating a copy is a serious offense.²²⁵ As such, Islam’s holy book should be treated with respect. Do not touch the Quran with dirty hands. Keep the Quran off the floor—if you are sitting on the floor, hold the Quran above your lap or waist. When not in use, protect the Quran with a dustcover and do not place anything on top of it. Muslims keep Quranic texts on the highest shelf of a bookcase. Finally, keep Qurans out of latrines. Old or damaged copies can be properly disposed of in one of two ways. Burning is acceptable as long as the process is conducted with respect. Texts should not be burned with trash or other items. The second method of disposal is burial. Before burying the text, it should be wrapped in something pure and then buried where people do not walk.^{226, 227, 228} Other texts sacred to Muslims 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.



Kissing the Holy Quran, a sign of respect—though not universal among Muslims
Flickr/NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan

The Role of Religion in Government

Islam is the state religion of Afghanistan and 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, as long as non-Muslim religious minorities practice their faith “within the limits of the provisions of the law.”²²⁹ It also provides



Kunar Province Chief of Justice speaking to a group of mullahs and religious leaders in Asadabad about the rule of law and constitutional rights Flickr/ResoluteSupportMedia

for an independent judiciary, but Islamic and tribal traditions remain strong, even within the formal court system.²³⁰

For example, legal cases concerning familial issues—such as marriage, inheritance, and property—are typically judged according to Islamic legal code, or shari’a. The constitution states that 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 for men, and life imprisonment for women.²³¹

The Taliban’s years in power led to a strict interpretation and application of Islamic law.²³² 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.²³³

Influence of Religion on Daily Life

Prayer



Basic Patrolmen praying before graduation, their hands open in the qunut posture of supplication, Kandahar Flickr/ResoluteSupportMedia

Islam heavily influences a person’s daily routine in Afghanistan. Foremost among daily rituals, Muslims are required 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: before dawn, midmorning, midafternoon, at sundown, and after sundown. Whether a man folds his hands during prayer or places them on his thighs identifies him as either Sunni or Shi’a, respectively. Muslims are

called to prayer by the muezzin, who typically announces the call for prayer from the minaret of the local mosque.

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 males, and special sermons are given by the mullahs (a male religious leader or teacher). All prayers must be offered in the direction of Mecca, the holy

city of Islam, which is located in Saudi Arabia. Most stores, businesses, and government offices close on Fridays.²³⁴

When do you pray?		
Visitor:	cheh waqt shumaa namaaz meeKhaneed?	When do you pray?
Local:	dar waqt chaasht	We pray at noon.

Exchange 1

Cleansing

Prior to prayer, Muslims are required to perform *wudu* (a ritual cleansing). This purification process typically involves washing one’s hands, face, arms, neck, and feet, as well as rinsing out the mouth and nose.²³⁵ Cleansing 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. A Muslim can break this state of ritual purity through several acts: 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 cleanse prior to prayer.



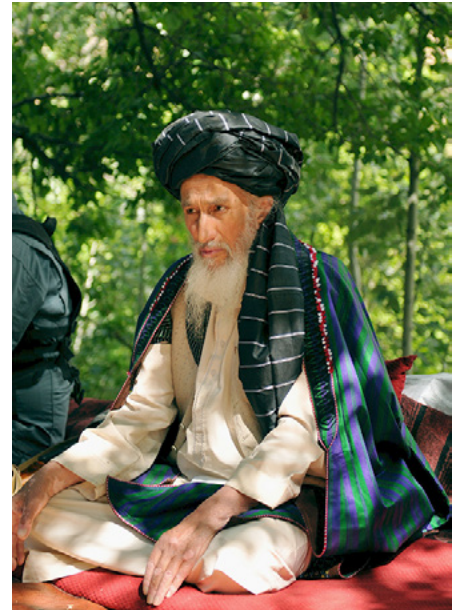
A member of the Afghan National Police (ANP) washing his hands at a well in Bala Boluk, Farah Province DVIDSHUB

Religious Schools

In Afghanistan, mosques and madrassas, or Muslim schools, provide primary- and secondary-level religious studies, respectively. In the 1970s, many Afghans fleeing the Soviets studied in ultraconservative Pakistani madrassas. These students later returned to Afghanistan as part of the Taliban movement.²³⁶ The trend of sending young Afghans to madrassas in Pakistan continued beyond 2001.²³⁷ To retain students and control curriculum, the Afghan government established its own madrassas. These schools, run by the Afghan Ministry of Education, are required to have 60% religious instruction and 40% general instruction.

In 2015, there were 3,224 government-registered madrassas and “Quran learning centers,” including some for girls, in Afghanistan.^{238, 239} Located mostly in Kabul, Balkh, Nangarhar, and Herat provinces, these madrassas serve roughly 340,000 students. Certificates issued by registered madrassas allow students to pursue higher education at government universities. There are, however, many unregistered madrassas in Afghanistan. In these schools, there is little curriculum oversight.^{240, 241, 242}

Non-Muslims account for less than 1% of the country’s population. A small minority of Hindus and Sikhs live mainly in the urban centers of Kabul, Jalalabad, and Kandahar. There is one government-sponsored school for Sikh children, located in Kabul. There is also a privately funded Sikh school in Jalalabad. A few Sikh children also attend private international schools. Hindus do not have separate schools but sometimes send their children to Sikh schools. There are no Christian schools in Afghanistan.²⁴³



School religious elder in Panjshir Province, northeastern Afghanistan Flickr/ResoluteSupportMedia

Religion and Gender

According to the Quran, men and women are moral equals with the same religious obligations. In terms of rights and responsibilities, however, there is a clear division. In predominantly conservative Sunni Afghanistan, women must conform to prevailing patriarchal cultural norms, and there are numerous restrictions on their behavior. Women are typically seen as key to preserving tradition; and they maintain family and social continuity and culture.²⁴⁴ In areas controlled by the Taliban, the interpretation of Islamic doctrine is more extreme, and the consequences for women who challenge traditional norms are severe.²⁴⁵ There are a few exceptions among Shi’a minority groups, such as the ethnic Hazara and Sufis, where women participate in the political process and work outside of the home.^{246, 247}



Eight-year-old female student at the opening of a new co-educational school in Herat city Flickr/ResoluteSupportMedia

Afghan women were first allowed to enter certain mosques in Kabul and other large cities in 2008, after segregated spaces were designated for them.^{248, 249} But most mosques in urban and rural communities have yet to open their doors to female worshippers. Traditionally, Afghan women have instead exercised their religious faith through activities related to shrines, known as *ziarats*. Women visit such shrines to pray for blessings of a protective or curative nature.²⁵⁰ It is also common for women to pray at home.



Ziarat-e Shah Maqsd Shrine, northern Kandahar Province, regarded by many Afghans as the third holiest Islamic site in Afghanistan Flickr/ResoluteSupportMedia

Religious Events and Holidays

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

Ramadan

Ramadan (or Ramazan) is the ninth and holiest month of the Islamic calendar. During this time observant Muslims fulfill the third pillar of Islam—fasting (known in Afghanistan as *ruzah*). During Ramadan, Muslims demonstrate their piety and devotion to the Islamic faith. Tradition requires that adults abstain from eating, drinking, and smoking during daylight hours for 30 days. Restrictions also apply to sexual intercourse. Only the young, sick, elderly, and pregnant or nursing women are exempt from fasting. Non-Muslims should avoid eating and drinking in public during fasting hours of the day, as such activities are seen as disrespectful and rude.



A guard sitting atop donations bound for needy families in Nawa, Ghazni Province, during Eid al-Fitr Flickr/ResoluteSupportMedia

In addition to fasting, many people perform extra prayers during Ramadan. 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. Most restaurants are closed during the day, and the work schedule is altered to release workers early.

Large meals are typically served after sunset to offset the rigorous demands of the daytime fast, which may affect some more than others. People may become more irritable or fatigued during Ramadan. Foreigners should be aware of this and be prepared to show patience. In general, the pace of everyday life slows considerably during the holy month. It is also important for foreigners to avoid causing embarrassment during Ramadan. They should not smoke, eat, drink, or chew gum in public during daylight hours.



A traditional iftar dinner breaking the daily fast during the Islamic holy month of Ramadan Flickr/ResoluteSupportMedia

Eid

Eid means “festival” in Arabic, and Eid al-Fitr or Eid Ramazan (The Feast of the End of the Fast) marks the end of Ramadan. Muslims celebrate the end of the fast with a large, multiday feast with family and friends. One of the holiest days in Islam, Eid Qorban or Eid al-Adha (The Feast of Sacrifice), marks the 12th month of the Islamic calendar. 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. People celebrate their happiness and show forgiveness during the two Eid periods.



Local children waving Afghan flags during the celebration of Eid Il-Iftar, Helmand Province Flickr/ResoluteSupportMedia

People throughout Afghanistan spend the three-day Eid holidays calling on close friends and relatives. Each of these events is a time to put on new clothes and prepare

large feasts. The extent to which Afghans are able to do this depends on their wealth. People go from house to house for short or long visits. To visit someone during Eid is to pay a great compliment, and the same goes for inviting someone to visit. These two Eid celebrations are considered holy and sacred.

Ashura



Crowd of Shi'a men during Ashura, wearing black as a sign of mourning and green to commemorate Hussein ibn Ali
Flickr/Hassan Reza

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 significant to the Shi'a community. 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.^{251, 252}

Hajj



A pilgrim at Masjid al-Haram (the sacred mosque), Mecca
Wikimedia/Ali Mansuri

Performing the *hajj* is one of five central duties for Muslims who are able and can afford to go. The pilgrimage ritual begins on the 7th day of Dhu al-Hijjah (the last month of the Islamic year) and ends on the 12th day. A person who is unable to make the journey can appoint a relative or friend to go as a “stand-in.” In 2015, about 24,250 Afghan pilgrims flew the roughly 7,400 km (4,600 mi) from various Afghan cities to Mecca with subsidies from the Afghan and U.S. governments.^{253, 254} Those who have

made the pilgrimage may add the title *haji* to their names.²⁵⁵

Buildings of Worship and Sacred Sites

Mosques

Mosques (*masjid*) play a vital role in Afghan society. Every village in Afghanistan has at least one mosque. Friday is the one-day weekend and holiday for Afghans. Like Sundays for Christians, Fridays have a religious significance. Muslim males are expected to participate in the Friday prayer and listen to special sermons from the mullahs. Foreigners should not interrupt the sacred Friday prayer, which takes place at midday; they should, if possible, avoid entering mosques altogether during this time.



Men praying at the Blue Mosque in Mazar-e Sharif
Wikimedia/vetman

In Afghanistan, the village mosque is much more than a house of prayer. It is usually used as a schoolroom for traditional Islamic education. Muslim boys typically attend a Quranic madrassa prior to formal education. In many villages, the local mosque is also used for community meetings and sometimes as a guesthouse. Travelers often stay overnight in mosques, and villagers provide them with food and drink. Foreign males may be invited into a mosque to meet with local leaders. Visitors should respect mosque etiquette and refrain from using bad language or smoking in the vicinity of the mosque.

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 *shahids* (martyrs). Afghans believe that the *ziarat* of a pious saint or martyr is a channel of communication with Allah. Foreigners may enter the *ziarat*, but they should be aware of the sacred and sensitive nature of these places; mosque etiquette applies in the *ziarat*.



Sayed-Mokhtar Shrine, Herat city
Flickr/Hassan Reza



Cemetery, Daykundi Province
 Flickr/Institute for Money, Technology and Finance

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* 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



Women attending a photojournalism course,
 Farah City Flickr/ResoluteSupportMedia

Muslims mosques are sacred spaces, and they should be respected as such. When foreigners visit a mosque, they should ask permission to enter. The dress code requires modesty and dignity. Clothing should always be loose fitting. As a rule, the more rural the region, the more one should be covered. Once inside the mosque, non-Muslims should not touch books or walls (especially the western corner where people direct their prayers).

May I enter the mosque?		
Visitor:	metawaanam dar masjid daaKhil shawam?	May I enter the mosque?
Local:	baleh	Yes.

Exchange 2

Under normal, noncombat circumstances, visitors should remove their shoes at the doorway and place them in the designated area.

Must I take off my shoes inside the mosque?		
Visitor:	metawaanam botahaayim raa dar daaKhil masjid az pahaayam beekasham?	Must I take off my shoes inside the mosque?
Local:	baleh	Yes.

Exchange 3

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; her hair must be completely covered.

Do I need to cover my head?		
Visitor:	baayad saram raa beposhaanam?	Do I need to cover my head?
Local:	baleh	Yes.

Exchange 4

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



Id Gah Mosque in Kabul, the chief religious mosque in the country Wikimedia/KevinScottNL

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Dari Cultural Orientation

Chapter 2 | Religion

Assessment

1. Afghanistan's state religion is Shi'a Islam.
2. Women are not allowed to enter most mosques in Afghanistan.
3. A mosque is known as a *ziarat* in Afghanistan.
4. Ramadan is the holiest month in Islam.
5. Muslims celebrate over a dozen Eids, or festivals, throughout the year.

Assessment Answers: 1. False; 2. True; 3. True; 4. False; 5. False



Pashto man with a henna beard, a religiously allowed means of dying hair that may also indicate he has performed the hajj Pixabay/ArmyAmber

Chapter 3 | Dari Cultural Orientation

Traditions

Introduction

Afghan society is deeply rooted in Islamic and tribal customs, many of which have been practiced 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 occurred in the modern era. In many cases, such reforms were overturned following fierce resistance from the nation's tribal and Islamic fundamentalist factions.²⁵⁶ During the Taliban's time in power, strict Islamic fundamentalism served as the basis for Afghan law and social behavior.

After the fall of the Taliban, social reforms were implemented, but traditional and fundamentalist practices remain prevalent. Although attitudes vary throughout the country, such resistance to change demonstrates the strength of Afghan traditions. Banned during the Taliban reign, many Afghan traditions have endured and flourish today as never before. Afghan music, dance, kite fighting, and *buzkashi* tournaments are celebrated events again, reinforcing traditions from the many different tribes and languages throughout the country.



Afghan boy flying a kite, Kandahar Flickr/ ResoluteSupportMedia

Greetings and Interactions

Afghans of the same sex hug and kiss each other on the cheek as a sign of affection. An embrace generally demonstrates concern and sympathy. It is common to see Afghan men walking hand in hand; this is an act of friendship. Afghans are quick to greet friends as well as strangers. Greetings, especially to strangers, are offered in a formal manner respectful of status and gender.

Good morning.		
Visitor:	sob baKhayr	Good morning.
Local:	sob baKhayr	Good morning.

Exchange 5

How are you?		
Visitor:	cheetoor asteed?	How are you?
Local:	tashakur, besyaar Khoob	Thanks, very well.

Exchange 6

Handshakes are sometimes used as a greeting between Afghan men. Using both hands to shake hands demonstrates warmth and sincerity. When exchanging greetings, Afghans may also offer a slight bow and touch their hands to their heart as a show of sincerity or respect.²⁵⁷ This gesture should be returned. Afghans will also stand when a leader or elder enters the room.

Good evening!		
Visitor:	shabetaan Khosh!	Good evening!
Local:	shabetaan Khosh!	Good evening!

Exchange 7

It is customary to exchange a series of friendly greetings before conducting any business. Expressing concern about health and family is important. The time a task will take is not as important as accomplishing the task. An Afghan's sense of personal space is different from that of most Westerners. Foreign visitors should not be surprised if someone of the same sex stands very close to them in a professional context. Stepping back may be considered offensive.



Afghan men embracing one another, Kandahar Flickr/ResoluteSupportMedia

Hi, Mr. Hamidi.		
Visitor:	salaam aqaayeh hameedee	Hi, Mr. Hamidi.
Local:	salaam!	Hello!
Visitor:	Khoob asteed?	Are you doing well?
Local:	baleh	Yes.

Exchange 8

By contrast, distance should be maintained between unrelated people of the opposite sex. When greeting a woman, Afghan men do not make physical or eye contact; such contact is a serious offense. Verbal greetings may be used between men and women in some circumstances. However, it is more common to not introduce men and women, especially in conservative areas populated by Pashtuns.

Eye Contact

In Afghanistan, it is not impolite to break eye contact during a conversation, and it does not indicate any dishonesty or hostility. It is a demonstration of modesty. Afghans consider staring or fixed gazes a sign of aggression. Such looks may also be interpreted as an “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.²⁵⁸ Male foreigners should avoid making eye contact with Afghan women, as it could cause serious offense.

Right Hand vs. Left Hand



Afghan village elders washing their hands before a meal, Kunar province, northeastern Afghanistan DVIDSHUB

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

Male–Female Interactions

Shaking hands with women is prohibited. Such an act will likely be considered offensive to them and their family members, especially those who live in rural areas. Usually Afghans politely say “salaam” to women with a small gesture or nod. Afghans generally call women *syassar*. An unfamiliar male should communicate with a woman through her husband or a close male relative.



Male-female interaction, with strict boundaries Flickr/The U.S. Army

It is a grave taboo for a man, especially a foreign man, to compliment a woman on her beauty, attire, or other related topics. It is more acceptable for a woman to compliment another woman. By the same token, Afghan men do not like outsiders asking about their families, especially their wives and daughters. When socializing with Afghan colleagues, one should not ask detailed questions about their private lives, unless one is asking about the family as a whole.

How is your family?		
Visitor:	faameel taan cheetor ast?	How is your family?
Local:	Khoob astand, tashakur	They are doing fine, thank you.

Exchange 9

Gender Roles and Relationships

Although men and women have equal rights under the Afghan constitution, the country remains deeply conservative and patriarchal. Afghan men participate in politics and relationships with outsiders. Within the family, they are the breadwinners, disciplinarians, and providers for elderly relatives. In general, male family members preside over a woman's life. The head of the household will make all key decisions for a woman: whether she can attend school as a girl, who she marries, and even whether she is allowed to seek professional medical help.²⁵⁹ When given permission to go out in public, women must typically be escorted by their male relatives.



Afghan woman after voting, Herat Flickr/UNAMA News

Afghan women are the custodians of family honor, and their actions reflect on themselves and the family. As such, Afghan women face the painful contradiction between the freedoms and opportunities they have under Afghan law, and what is acceptable in practice. Women have the right to vote, drive, go to school, and pursue a career. However, many women continue to face serious abuse or discrimination if they do not follow traditional Islamic and tribal customs.²⁶⁰ The extent to which a woman observes such traditions, either forced or freely chosen, varies according to her occupation, education, and where she lives. While views of women can vary from community to community, veiling and seclusion are common.²⁶¹

Reclaiming Family Honor

Family honor especially concerns the preservation of a woman's virginity before marriage. Even events that are beyond a woman's control, such as assault, are viewed as bringing disgrace to her family and community.²⁶² In extreme instances, "honor killings" occur in Afghanistan. These executions are carried out in cases in which

a woman or girl is thought to have shamed her family.²⁶³ Serious offenses include committing adultery, engaging in premarital sex, refusing an arranged marriage, or suffering rape, which is often treated as adultery.²⁶⁴ Honor killings are most commonly committed against women accused of sex outside a marriage (*zina*), or even suspicion of it (running away from home). 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 other males in the community.^{265, 266}

Hospitality and Gift Giving

It is paramount for Afghans, regardless of their wealth, to show hospitality to all visitors. To do so is a source of pride and honor. Guests generally receive the best an Afghan family has to offer, which varies according to the family's means.

I really appreciate your hospitality.		
Visitor:	az mehmaan navaazee taan waaq'an tashakoR maykonam	I really appreciate your hospitality.
Local:	cheezee nees	It is nothing.

Exchange 10

Afghans try to show respect and sympathy for those who find themselves far away from home. Inviting someone for a cup of tea is a way to show hospitality to a visitor. If visitors are offered a cup of tea when meeting Afghans, it should be accepted. If the visitor does not want to drink the tea, it may be left without causing offense. It is customary for Afghans to drink three cups of tea at one sitting. When visiting an Afghan home for tea or a meal, it is appropriate to bring a small gift such as fruit or pastries.²⁶⁷ Gifts are not expected, however; it is the host's honor to provide for the guest.



Tea (*chai*), the national drink of Afghanistan, typically served with a small dish of sugar Flickr / Marius Arnesen

An Afghan may offer a foreign visitor a gift if they have become friends. It is important to accept the gift, but it is not mandatory to respond with one in return. When an Afghan offers a gift, it is to show friendship.

This gift is for you.		
Visitor:	een toofa baraaeye shomaast	This gift is for you.
Local:	tashakur, walee man een raa qabool kardan nameetowaanam	Thank you, but I cannot accept this.

Exchange 11

The presentation of any gift should be performed in a discreet and modest manner. As a rule, the gift is not opened in the presence of the person who gave it. When giving gifts, foreigners should respect Islamic dietary customs that prohibit Muslims from consuming pork or alcohol.²⁶⁸

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 grains (such as wheat and barley), cotton, fruits, and nuts. Cultivating opium poppies has become widespread due to its hardiness and high market value. Cattle, sheep, goats, donkeys, and horses are common types of livestock. The first three are especially important for milk production. Other varieties include camels, buffalo, and mules.²⁶⁹ 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.



Afghan farmer cultivating his skills at an agricultural school in Farah City Flickr/ResoluteSupportMedia

Traditional Pastimes

Buzkashi (goat-grabbing) is the national sport of Afghanistan. The ancient game—much like rugby on horseback—is played by teams of 10 riders who grapple for the carcass of a goat or calf and take it across the goal line. Uzbeks are considered champions.

*Buzkashi players, some wearing Soviet tanker helmets, in a muddy winter field
Flickr/Peretz Partensky*



Kite fighting is another competitive pastime in Afghanistan. Kites are made of brightly colored tissue paper and bamboo and are flown on glass-coated “cutting lines.” The object is to cut down each other’s kites. The last kite in the sky wins. Young boys will try to capture the cut kites (kite running).²⁷⁰

Traditional Dress

Following Islamic and tribal customs, traditional Afghan dress is conservative. In public, Afghan women are often completely concealed per local custom. Many wear a black or blue *chadri*, extensive, loose-fitting garments that cover the entire body.



Female U.S. Army soldiers covering their hair before taking part in a shura Flickr/The U.S. Army

Latticework openings near the eyes allow a woman to see out. Underneath, female attire includes a long dress, which may be exquisitely embroidered with different colored thread and fabrics, along with trousers. In recent years, more women wear baggy cotton pants and a long, loose-fitting shirt (*peraahn wa tonban*).²⁷¹ A headscarf or shawl (*chader*) is used to cover the hair and, when necessary, the face. Shawls made from sheep’s wool may be worn as the outer garment in cold weather.

Men’s everyday attire consists of a loose-fitting tunic and pants (*kameezperaahn wa tonban*) and a turban head cover. These items are made from materials with solid, dull colors. Vests may be worn over the shirt, and it is common for men to carry a shawl-like garment on their shoulders.



Traditional Pashtun clothing for men, the kameez peraahn wa tonban Flickr / DVIDSHUB

This piece of cloth is often used as a rug for prayer. To keep the turban in place, a cap is worn underneath. Young boys first wear the cap, which they are allowed to personalize with items such as reflective mirror chips sewn into the design (*aiyna dozi*).²⁷² Distinct from the turban, a *pakol* is a wool hat with a thick band that rests on the head like a beret.²⁷³ Another type of head covering is the *karakul* hat, made from newborn sheepskin and popular with wealthier Afghan men.

What type of head garb is that?		
Visitor:	ee che qesem kolaa as?	What type of head garb is that?
Local:	yak pakol as	It is a pakol.

Exchange 12

Is this acceptable to wear?		
Visitor:	posheeden een leebaas qaabele qabool ast?	Is this acceptable to wear?
Local:	baleh	Yes.

Exchange 13

Foreigners should respect the Afghan tradition of conservative attire. Male visitors should not to wear shorts in public or take their shirts off, regardless of the temperature. T-shirts with graphics or text that could be offensive should also be avoided. It is advisable for women to carry a scarf to cover her hair or face in certain situations. Women should also avoid wearing tight-fitting clothing such as leggings, short skirts, short-sleeved shirts, and tight-fitting or low-cut blouses in public.



The headscarf or shawl (*chader*), covering the hair and, when necessary, the face Flickr/DVIDSHUB

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. In general, an Afghan meal usually consists of tea, naan flatbread, rice, and a main dish containing meat, such as lamb, goat, chicken, or beef. A much-loved street food is *bolani* (filled bread), a turnover-style flatbread filled with a variety of vegetables.²⁷⁴



Naan-e Afghani, traditional flatbread often sprinkled with cumin, caraway, or poppy seeds Wikimedia/Paulscf

What ingredients are used to make...?		
Visitor:	een qorma az cheh mowaadee saakhta shoda?	What ingredients are used to make Qorma-e Morgh?
Local:	gosht murgha ast keh dar peyaaz sorKh shoda. masaale jaat, baadinjaan roomee wa kamee aab beh aan izaafa shoda ast	It is chicken meat sautéed in onions. Spices, tomato sauce, and a little water are added to it.

Exchange 14

A customary Afghan dish is pilaf (*palau*), which consists of rice, meat (chicken, lamb, or goat), vegetables, nuts, dried fruit, and spices. Carrots, raisins, and lamb are the main ingredients in *qabili palau*, one of the nation's most famous dishes, but there are many other variations. Meat dumplings, noodle soups, and lamb stews are also popular. Fruits and nuts typically complement all meals because they are common agricultural products. Yogurt, eggs, and other animal products are also staples. Afghan Muslims must ensure that their food, particularly their meat, is halal (much like kosher). Alcohol and pork are strictly avoided in accordance with Islamic tradition.²⁷⁵



Traditional Afghan meal, with rice, naan flatbread, and chicken
Flickr/David Bailey

Yogurt, eggs, and other animal products are also staples. Afghan Muslims must ensure that their food, particularly their meat, is halal (much like kosher). Alcohol and pork are strictly avoided in accordance with Islamic tradition.²⁷⁵

What is the name of this dish?		
Visitor:	naam een gheezaa cheest?	What is the name of this dish?
Local:	een qaabee palaw ast	This is qabili palau.

Exchange 15

For Tajiks, hosting guests is considered an honor and necessitates a fine meal. *Osh* is an important dish prepared by male members of a household. It consists of noodles, spiced lamb, currants, and vegetables. It may also be served with naan baked with a blend of several flours and accompanied by fruit, yogurt, and tea.

Eating at an Afghan Home

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. In Pashtun-dominated areas, meals

are often at the village *hujra*, or guesthouse. In many cases, the host will slaughter an animal as a sign of his generous hospitality. If the guest is male, the meal will likely be attended only by men. Women eat separately, but dining etiquette may vary according to region and family.

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 or rug on the ground, and cushions may be provided for seating. The hosts will typically 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 others, which is considered offensive.²⁷⁶ Before the meal, it is customary to wash one’s hands.



Lunch, Zabul Province, southern Afghanistan Flickr/ResoluteSupportMedia

Customary Eating Habits

Afghans often eat from a single large plate and use their right hand to take food from the dish. 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 for food. It is uncommon for Afghans to use utensils, but they may offer them to foreigners. Most commonly, a person collects 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.

This food is very good.		
Visitor:	een gheeza besyaar Khoob ast	This food is very good.
Local:	qoormeh murgh ast	It’s Qorma-e Morgh.

Exchange 16

It is polite to compliment the quality of the food, and Afghans may wipe or stroke their face or beard to indicate they have finished. The gesture demonstrates thanks to God for the food. Guests should leave a small amount of food on their individual plate

to show they are full. Otherwise, the host will continue to offer food, as his honor is tied to his ability to provide for guests.

Weddings

Afghan marriages, which are almost always arranged, settle debts or strengthen family status through social alliances with other families; they are not private unions between individuals. Roughly 80% of Afghan women enter forced or arranged marriages.^{277, 278}

Wedding 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. Weddings reflect the specific characteristics of different Dari-speaking groups. For example, Tajik and Uzbek women wear embroidered dresses with distinctive designs. In the case of Uzbeks, the dress is made by members of the groom’s family and typically has a noticeable human-face pattern in the center.²⁷⁹



Afghan men dancing at a wedding in downtown Jalalabad, Nangarhar Province Flickr/ResoluteSupportMedia

Some Shi’a also enter a type of union known as *seegha* (temporary marriage), a practice that is banned by Sunnis. Afghan refugees returning from Iran are said to have introduced the practice in their homeland, where it was formerly rare.²⁸⁰ The ceremony is simple; one need only stand before a mullah, who pronounces the couple man and wife for a fixed duration. These unions may last anywhere from a few hours to many years. For this reason it is controversial. The ease of entering into *seegha* may benefit widows, as women do not need the permission of a male relative to marry—and it is inexpensive for men. However, *seegha* is used by some men to gain sexual access to virgins; the family may benefit from the union, but once the marriage ends, the woman may have difficulty remarrying.^{281, 282}

Congratulations on your wedding!		
Visitor:	‘arooseetaan tabreek!	Congratulations on your wedding!
Local:	baa mushaarakat taan ba maa ifteeKhaar baKhsheedid	We are honored you could attend.

Exchange 17

In the cities, weddings have become financial burdens for the groom’s family, who pays for the lengthy celebration and its many related events, in addition to the bride price. Depending on the region, the circumstances, and the families’ means, the bride price alone can reach an amount that equates to tens of thousands of U.S. dollars.^{283, 284} As the wedding ceremony is an important display of social status, even Afghans with little means will go to great lengths to arrange an elaborate celebration.²⁸⁵ The high cost of weddings has led some cash-strapped Afghans to turn to low-cost mass weddings, where up to 100 couples can exchange vows at the same time.^{286, 287}

I wish you both happiness.		
Visitor:	baraayee har doyeetaan KhoshbaKhtee aaroozoo meekunam	I wish you both happiness.
Local:	baraayee maa ifteeKhaar ast	We are honored.

Exchange 18

Funerals



Cemetery in Gaza Ghar, Herat Wikimedia/Sven Dirks, Wien

In essence, Muslim burial rites are universal, regardless of ethnic affiliation. The deceased must be buried within 24 hours, but never at night, and cremation is not an option. Bodies must be washed first and then shrouded in clean linen; in Afghanistan this is done by close relatives of the same sex. Women are shrouded in extra linen to conceal their face and further cover their torso. To maintain the segregation of the sexes, deceased men and women

are not buried together. Bodies are positioned in the coffin so that the head faces Mecca. 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.

I would like to give my condolences to you and your family.		
Visitor:	meeKhom ba shuma wa faameeltaan tasaleeyat begoyam	I would like to give my condolences to you and your family.
Local:	tashakur	Thank you.

Exchange 19

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.²⁸⁸

Please be strong.		
Visitor:	lutfan Khood raa qawee nagahdaareed	Please be strong.
Local:	maa kosheesh meekuneem	We will try.

Exchange 20

Celebrating with Guns



Afghan boys in their best clothing, playing with toy guns on Eid al-Adha, one of the holiest days in Islam, Jalalabad
Flickr/quasuo

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

Many people have been killed or seriously injured by falling bullets; onlookers should keep a safe distance. It is crucial to distinguish friendly celebration fire from hostile fire. If unsure, foreigners should ask a local about the reason for rifle fire.

Nonreligious 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 Persian New Year's celebration that follows the solar calendar, begins on the first day of spring, and often lasts for more than a week. The main public celebration is held in Mazar-e Sharif. The holiday begins when the *janda* (religious banner) is raised in the courtyard of the city's famous blue-domed shrine, signaling the beginning of spring. For two weeks, until the *janda* is taken down in a closing ceremony on the 13th day of the New Year, tens of thousands of visitors, including Pashtuns from southern Afghanistan, visit the city.²⁸⁹



Dressed up for Nowruz, Mazar-e Sharif, Balkh Province, northern Afghanistan Flickr/Peretz Partensky

The draw of celebrators is mixed. Shi'a pilgrims come to pay their respects to what is a holy place for them. Others make the journey purely to enjoy the festivities. Legend draws those seeking disability cures to a makeshift structure located at the shrine's western wall, known as the *Chiba Khana* (House of Forty). Supplicants will sleep there every night of the holiday to be cured of whatever ails them or their children.²⁹⁰

Will you be celebrating New Year?		
Visitor:	shuma nawrooz raa jashin meegeereed?	Will you be celebrating New Year?
Local:	baleh!	Yes!

Exchange 21

Because the festival is partly rooted in the religious traditions of Zoroastrianism, the Taliban and some conservative Sunni imams condemn it as a pagan holiday.²⁹¹

Another important holiday is *Jashn* (Independence Day), which is celebrated on 19 August. This event commemorates Afghanistan's formal independence from British control in 1919.²⁹²

Dos and Don'ts



The light handshake, a common formal greeting between men in Afghanistan Flickr/The U.S. Army

- **Do** use your whole hand and motion inward to summon someone.
- **Do** keep the soles of your shoes hidden from public view when seated.
- **Do** place your right hand briefly on your chest when greeting people; this gesture conveys humility and respect.
- **Do** remove your gloves before shaking hands.



Two young Herati men Flickr/Jim Kelly

- **Don't** use the OK sign, as some will understand it as an obscene gesture.
- **Don't** summon people by using a crooked finger.
- **Don't** sit on a floor with your legs stretched out in front of you.
- **Don't** point directly at Afghans; this is considered rude.
- **Don't** wag your finger at somebody; this is perceived as threatening.

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Dari Cultural Orientation

Chapter 3 | Traditions

Assessment

1. In Afghan culture, avoiding direct eye contact is considered a sign of dishonesty.
2. Talking to or touching an unfamiliar female is strictly prohibited in Afghanistan.
3. Tradition requires Afghans to show hospitality to all visitors.
4. Afghans only fire guns when hunting, in self-defense, or in anger or hostility.
5. The most important nonreligious holiday in Afghanistan is Nowruz.

Assessment Answers: 1. False; 2. True; 3. True; 4. False; 5. True



Bagh-e Babur gardens, Kabul, one of the earliest surviving Mughal gardens and a UNESCO World Heritage site Flickr/Ninara

Chapter 4 | Dari Cultural Orientation

Urban Life

Introduction

City populations in Afghanistan are a mosaic of people from different ethnic and tribal groups. Like the country as a whole, they are also predominantly young; more than 65% of urban Afghans are under the age of 25.²⁹³ Many urban residents have left rural areas—with their families or alone—to escape violence, poverty, and drought-ridden conditions. Because of this influx of economic refugees, along with the nearly 6 million political refugees who have returned to Afghanistan since the fall of the Taliban, the city populations have increased at a rate that is substantially higher than the population growth of the entire country. In 2015, more than one in four Afghans lived in cities—an increase of almost 4.5% a year.^{294, 295, 296} Most of Afghanistan’s urban

populations live in informal—or unplanned—settlements in or around the major cities of Kabul, Herat, Mazar-e Sharif, Jalalabad, and Kandahar.²⁹⁷



*Kabul's urban sprawl, home to nearly 5 million people
Flickr/Jim Kelly*

In particular, the population of Kabul has grown to an estimated 5 million in 2016, up five-fold since 2001 when there were roughly 1 million residents. Kabul is twice the size of any other Afghan city and contains 41% of Afghanistan's total urban population.²⁹⁸ The population surge has severely strained the city's infrastructure and services.²⁹⁹ Already heavily burdened and short of resources, municipal governments often do not provide services to squatter settlements because they lack

legal status. Despite this, a large percentage of city residents live in these makeshift communities where there are few job opportunities.^{300, 301, 302}

Accordingly, security problems in urban areas, particularly in Kabul, have increased significantly. Car theft, robbery, and drug-related violence have become more common on city streets. Insurgents are using vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices with greater frequency. These are a serious threat to civilians, Afghan security forces, and members of the international community.^{303, 304, 305, 306}

Urban Issues

IDPs and Economic Refugees



*Refugees in Kabul awaiting donations of food, clothes,
and supplies from members of the International Security
Assistance Force Flickr/ResoluteSupportMedia*

Afghanistan has experienced a steady stream of returnees since 2002, when roughly 2 million Afghans returned home from Pakistan and Iran after the fall of the Taliban. Many fled during Soviet occupation 20 years earlier. Nearly half the internationally displaced people (IDP) have settled in and around Afghanistan's largest cities. While 90% of the refugees returning from Pakistan settled in the eastern province of Nangarhar, many

others moved to Kabul, straining services and contributing to increased housing costs. In 2016, up to 50% of Kabul residents lived in encampments on the city's outskirts.³⁰⁷

In 2016 alone, an average of 1,000 Afghans fled their homes each day due to conflict, and the number of refugees returning to Afghanistan topped 1 million. City centers have been unable to accommodate the steady stream of settlers, and the result has been an extensive urban sprawl of tented camps and hastily built structures. These areas typically have little to no employment opportunities and limited public services for refugees. Many living on the outskirts have no access to clean water or healthcare and are dependent on food assistance.^{308, 309, 310}



Students at Kabul's Aschiana School, which provides vocational and literacy education to children from the Afghan streets and refugee camps Flickr/ResoluteSupportMedia

Income Gap

Afghan cities, most notably Kabul, have experienced high-end development projects since 2001. Some observers note that most of these projects have benefited a small class of wealthy citizens and upper-level government and military officials.³¹¹ Kabul has turned into a two-tiered city. While some Afghans have found well-paying jobs with international companies or non-governmental organizations (NGOs), most work for a dollar or two a day, and others cannot find a job at all. Unemployment among Afghanistan's urban poor is a growing concern for city governments.^{312, 313, 314, 315}



Afghans constructing new buildings which will expand the bazaar in the Nawa District of Helmand Province Flickr/ResoluteSupportMedia

Overall, urban expansion and development has suffered from a general lack of proper planning and regulation. As a result, many cities have serious deficiencies, such as a shortage of clean drinking water and a complete lack of waste treatment facilities.^{316, 317, 318} Traditional pit latrines are the most common form of sanitation, and cross-contamination with ground and drinking water is a serious health concern.^{319, 320} While most urban residents have access to electricity, it is irregular and unreliable.

Healthcare and Health Issues

The Afghan healthcare system, devastated by years of civil war, has improved in recent years due to international aid and reconstruction efforts. NGOs have played a significant role in this process, establishing clinics in various locations throughout the country. Maternal, infant, and under-5 mortality rates have improved, but still are far higher than international averages.³²¹ The country continues to face medical challenges—lack of qualified personnel, dilapidated facilities, lack of proper equipment, and shortages of clean drinking water and electricity.



Opening ceremony of the Kandahar Nursing and Midwifery Institute in Kandahar United States Air Force

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.

Is there a hospital nearby?		
Visitor:	dar een nazdeekee haa shafaKhaana wujood daarad?	Is there a hospital nearby?
Local:	baleh, dar markaz shahr	Yes, in the center of town.

Exchange 22

With an increasing number of rural Afghans seeking refuge in cities, urban healthcare facilities and hospitals lack the space and staff to treat all of the sick.³²² Residents of informal urban settlements and slums are exposed to health dangers related to pollution, unsanitary living conditions, and lack of shelter.

Is the doctor in?		
Visitor:	aqaaay, doktor ‘azeezee tashreef daarand?	Is Dr. Azizi in?
Local:	neh	No.

Exchange 23

As part of the reconstruction effort, there is a particular need to train female doctors because customary views and practices restrict female patients from receiving

treatment from male doctors. Furthermore, while many residents now have access to primary healthcare (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.³²³

Do you know what is wrong?		
Visitor:	meefahmeed keh pas cheeh qaraar ast?	Do you know what is wrong?
Local:	neh	No.

Exchange 24

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. This remains true today for urban Afghans; the educational opportunities for children in cities depends 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. A family’s proximity to a school is also a significant factor in whether children receive an education. In these cases, girls are more likely to be kept at home than boys because of cultural norms that prioritize male education.³²⁴



Elementary school teacher in Jalrez, (Maidan) Wardak Province, central eastern Afghanistan Flickr/ ResoluteSupportMedia

Is there a school nearby?		
Visitor:	dare een nazeekheehaa maktabee wujood daarad?	Is there a school nearby?
Local:	baleh	Yes.

Exchange 25

With the establishment of a democratic government in 2002, efforts were made to repair the nation’s education system. As of 2015, an estimated 9 million Afghan children—including 3.6 million girls—attended school. While this figure represented a significant increase, some 6 million children remained out of school.^{325, 326} Moreover, school sessions are typically only a few hours long because children must often work to

help support their families. These factors contribute to low literacy rates, especially among women; according to 2015 estimates, only 52% of Afghan men and 24% of Afghan women can read and write.^{327, 328}

Kabul University, Afghanistan’s premiere institution of higher learning, sustained serious damage during the 1990s. As the frontlines of the civil war shifted toward the city, the campus was closed in 1992 and heavily mined.³²⁹ The university reopened after the Taliban came to power, but classes were taught only in Pashto. When Afghanistan was liberated in 2001, the faculty resumed using Dari as the primary (and traditional) language of instruction.³³⁰



Kabul University Herbarium, housing a collection of preserved native Afghan plants for study Flickr/USAID Afghanistan

With the first wave of post-Taliban students to reach university age in 2009, higher education enrollment in Afghanistan also expanded. The number of universities and higher education institutions jumped from 7 in 2007 to 82 in 2014.³³¹ Many of these are privately funded and provide job-specific and technical training. Still, university attendance remains among the lowest in the world, and only one-fifth of students are women.

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. While fixed line telephone service is still limited, an increasing number of Afghans use mobile phones. In 2015, more than 60% of Afghans had cell phones, a number that increased 5-10% in 2016.^{332, 333}

What is your telephone number?		
Visitor:	numreh teelifontaan cheest?	What is your telephone number?
Local:	numreh teelifonam yak sado chiloo chaar sey sadoo penjo shash nawado panj haftaadoo se ast	My phone number is 144-356-9573.

Exchange 26

Cellular phone coverage reached over 80% of the country’s population in 2016, although financial limitations prevented many Afghans from subscribing to it.³³⁴ The Taliban

has disrupted coverage through attacks on cell towers and nightly blackouts on cell phone service in areas that it controls.³³⁵ It has achieved the latter by intimidating service providers—through attacks on infrastructure and personnel—to comply with its demands.³³⁶ Fixed line services and mobile communication are best in major cities. However, outside of the towns, satellite phones are often required for communication.

May I use your phone?		
Visitor:	metawaanam az teelifontaan isteefaada kunam?	May I use your phone?
Local:	baleh	Sure.

Exchange 27

Following a surge in internet users in 2009-2010, internet access is rapidly expanding while the cost is dropping.³³⁷ More than 4 million Afghans have access to the internet as of 2016, up from an estimated 300,000 users in 2006.³³⁸ Public internet access is available in Kabul; in other large urban centers, internet is available in internet cafés and some coffee houses, although electrical outages often interrupt service.³³⁹

Transportation and Traffic

Prolonged conflict has damaged Afghanistan’s existing transportation network and slowed the development of new infrastructure. Although reconstruction teams have made considerable progress, many roads are in disrepair. Afghanistan’s railway system is still under development. While there were no passenger rail lines as of 2016, two short, cross-border cargo lines connect northern cities to Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, and more were being built.^{340, 341}

One success has been the completion of Highway 1, or the Ring Road, in 2016. The 3,360 km (2,088 mi) stretch of paved road wraps around the heart Afghanistan and connects many of the provincial capitals. As such, it is a frequent target for Taliban roadblocks and attacks.³⁴² Most of Afghanistan’s national and private airlines are designated unsafe by the U.S. and various foreign entities.



Trucks waiting at the Afghan-Iranian border crossing in Zaranj, southwestern Afghanistan Wikimedia/Sgt. Mallory S. VanderSchans

Which road leads to the airport?

Visitor:	kudaam sarak ba maydaan huwaay meerawad?	Which road leads to the airport?
Local:	sarakee keh be taraf sharq meerawad	The road heading east.

Exchange 28

Urban Roads

Road conditions throughout Afghanistan are hazardous. Urban roads are often in poor condition and may be unlit at night. Accidents are common because many 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 drivers and pedestrians.³⁴³ Continuous road work and a high volume of vehicles have created enormous traffic jams in urban areas. Traffic is notoriously bad in Kabul, where there are few traffic lights, virtually no signage, and no lane demarcation.³⁴⁴ Accidents involving foreign nationals may quickly escalate into confrontations. Typically, the foreigner involved is expected to pay for damages, no matter who is at fault.^{345, 346}



Khair Khana neighborhood of Kabul, extensively redeveloped with new highrises, malls, and modern apartments Flickr/Jon

Is there another road we can take?

Visitor:	kodaam saRake dega as ke maa begeeReem?	Is there another road we can take?
Local:	baleh, eenja yak saRake degaam as	Yes, there is an alternative route.

Exchange 29

In 2014, an estimated 700,000 vehicles were on the narrow streets of Kabul, which can only accommodate about 30,000.^{347, 348} Most imported vehicles are used or salvaged and do not meet basic safety and emissions standards, thereby contributing to pollution.^{349 350}

Taxis

One of the most common forms of public transportation in Afghanistan is shared taxis. Service within the limits of larger Afghan cities is cheap and easy to find, but traveling between cities can be expensive. Shared taxis do not have set rates or meters, so it is best to negotiate price before getting into a cab. Fares usually depend on the distance covered, but the cost is negotiable. Some shared taxi companies hire English-speaking drivers and mainly service the airport-downtown



Afghan taxi, Kabul Flickr/Step

route. Extra precaution should be used when hailing cabs in Afghanistan, especially near sensitive locations like military bases. In some of the larger cities private taxis are available; passengers are expected to haggle, and foreigners may pay an inflated rate on top of the regular price. When entering a taxi, it is customary for women to sit in the back seat.^{351, 352}

What street is this?		
Visitor:	ee kodaam saRak as?	What street is this?
Local:	saRake daaR lamaan	Dar ul Aman Street.

Exchange 30

Where can I get a cab?		
Visitor:	az kujaa metawaanam yek taksee begeeram?	Where can I get a cab?
Local:	az aanja	Over there.

Exchange 31

Buses

Milli buses are the glue that holds Afghanistan together. You can find these government-run buses at transport depots, along with shared taxis. Milli buses don't have a fixed departure time; they leave as soon as they have collected enough passengers. Milli buses also have a per-seat fare, but there are usually more passengers than seats. They are cheaper than any other form of transportation.³⁵³



Government-operated Milli bus Flickr/Julien-G. Albert

Will the bus be here soon?		
Visitor:	sarwees be zoodee be eenjaa Khaahad reseed?	Will the bus be here soon?
Local:	baleh	Yes.

Exchange 32

Where can I rent a car?		
Visitor:	az kujaa metawaanam yek motar keraaya kumam?	Where can I rent a car?
Local:	dar markaze shaher	Downtown.

Exchange 33

Is there another way to get to Jalalabad from Kabul?		
Visitor:	az Kabol kudam raa ba tarafe Jelaal abaad mera?	Is there another way to get to Jalalabad from Kabul?
Local:	baleh, saRake shaaeq baa jelaal abaad meera	Jalalabad is east of Kabul.

Exchange 34

Can you take me there?		
Visitor:	metawaaned maraa ba aanja bebareed?	Can you take me there?
Local:	baleh metawaanam	Yes, I can.

Exchange 35

Restaurants and the Marketplace

Restaurants

Restaurants and teahouses are popular social venues in urban areas, although they are too expensive for many Afghans. The variety of available cuisine has expanded, especially in Kabul, where there are Italian, French, German, and other styles of restaurants.

Are you still serving breakfast?		
Visitor:	hanooz ham naashta meedeeheed?	Are you still serving breakfast?
Local:	baleh	Yes.

Exchange 36

As in the majority of Afghan homes during mealtime, utensils are not typically used at restaurants. Instead, food is eaten using the right hand or scooped up with bread. Afghans eat three types of bread: naan, obi naan, and lavash. Naan is made from wheat and is generally an oval shape and baked. Obi naan is shaped more like a disk and has a thicker texture than naan. Lavash is distinguished by its thinness.³⁵⁴



Tajik obi non (naan), a thicker flatbread
Wikimedia/Zlerman

Food stalls specializing in kebabs are common in cities. Care should be taken when purchasing food at these stalls because conditions may be unsanitary. Food stalls are often too expensive for many Afghans.³⁵⁵

What type of meat is this?		
Visitor:	een cheh naw'a gosht ast?	What type of meat is this?
Local:	goosfand	Lamb.

Exchange 37

The most common drink in Afghanistan is tea (*chai*).

I would like coffee or tea.		
Visitor:	man qahwa yaa chaay meeKhaaham	I would like coffee or tea.
Local:	besyaar Khoob	Very well.

Exchange 38

Soup (*shorwa*), made from a variety of ingredients, is a common accompaniment to a meal.

I'd like some hot soup.		
Visitor:	kamee shorbaay garm meeKhaaham	I'd like some hot soup.
Local:	besyaar Khoob	Very well.

Exchange 39

Afghan cuisine is noted for its moderate spiciness.

May I have a glass of water?		
Visitor:	metawaaneed yek geelaas aab be man beedaheed?	May I have a glass of water?
Local:	baleh, hameen haala	Yes, right away.

Exchange 40

Afghans enjoy a variety of seasonal fruit, including melons from Mazar-e Sharif, grapes and pomegranates from Kandahar, and oranges from Jalalabad. They appear on menus according to availability.

Do you have a dessert?		
Visitor:	cheezee baraay pas az gheeza daareed?	Do you have a dessert?
Local:	baleh, farnee daareem	Yes, we have ferni.

Exchange 41

Afghans are very generous, and when dining out in a group they do not request separate checks; rather, the one who invites others pays for everything, even if it is a financial hardship.

Can I have my total bill, please?		
Visitor:	metawaanam sorate hesaab kaamil raa daashte baasham?	Can I have my total bill, please?
Local:	baleh, yaqeenan	Yes, of course.

Exchange 42

Paying individually is uncommon and may cause offense to Afghans.

Could you put this all on one bill?		
Visitor:	hamee een haa raa dar yak soorat hesaab bigzaareed?	Could you put this all on one bill?
Local:	baleh	Okay.

Exchange 43

Because credit card services are mostly unavailable in Afghanistan, cash is required for payment. There is typically no service charge added to a bill, though a tip of about 5% for the server is appreciated.

Where is your restroom?		
Visitor:	tashnaabtaan kujaast?	Where is your restroom?
Local:	aan utaaq dar daste chapetaan, aanjaa	That room to your left, over there.

Exchange 44

The consumption of alcohol is prohibited, and public restaurants do not serve it. With rising security issues in recent years, including the 2014 Taliban attacks in Kabul on the Taverna du Liban and Serena Hotel, nightlife has dwindled.

Marketplace

There are various shopping options in Afghan cities, including a handful of shopping malls such as the Roshan Shopping Center, Majid Mall, and Park Mall, all in Kabul. Traditionally, shopping is done at bazaars (open-air markets). Pul-e Khishti Bazaar is Kabul's main bazaar; Kocha-e Murgha (Chicken Street) is popular for its tourist fare of carpets, carvings, knives, and antiques.³⁵⁶



Spice market in Herat Flickr/Jim Kelly

Is the bazaar nearby?		
Visitor:	baazaar be eejaa nazdeek ast?	Is the bazaar nearby?
Local:	baleh, anja dast raast	Yes, over there on the right.

Exchange 45

These busy markets are usually located in old city centers and districts populated by craftsmen and skilled artisans. Different regions specialize in different products.³⁵⁷

How much longer will you be here?		
Visitor:	baraay cheh madatee dar eenjaa Khaaheed bood?	How much longer will you be here?
Local:	seh saa'at deegar	Three more hours.

Exchange 46

A wide array of items can be purchased at bazaars, including carpets and textiles, jewelry, lapis lazuli, handicrafts, spices, dyes, and various consumer goods.³⁵⁸ Services such as tailoring may also be available.

Do you have any more of these?		
Visitor:	az eenhaa deegar ham daareed?	Do you have any more of these?
Local:	neh	No.

Exchange 47



*Bargaining, a customary practice in markets and bazaars
Flickr/Georgia National Guard*

For the most part, prices in Afghan bazaars are not fixed, and customers are expected to haggle over the price. Depending on the item and vendor, the bargaining process may be lengthy and involved, so patience and calm are required. Some vendors may offer tea to customers.

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

Do you sell shawls?		
Visitor:	shuma shaal sarshaaneh meefroosheed?	Do you sell shawls?
Local:	baleh	Yes.

Exchange 48

With an understanding of local pricing norms, foreigners can better conduct negotiations with vendors.

Can I buy a carpet with this much money?		
Visitor:	ba een maqdaar pool metawaanam yek qaleen beKharam?	Can I buy a carpet with this much money?
Local:	neh	No.

Exchange 49

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

Can you give me change for this?		
Visitor:	metawaaned een raa baraayam poole seeya beedaheed?	Can you give me change for this?
Local:	neh	No.

Exchange 50

Do you accept U.S. currency?		
Visitor:	shuma daalar aamreekaayee raa qabool meekened?	Do you accept U.S. currency?
Local:	neh maa faqat poole afghaanee raa qabool meekeeneem	No we only accept Afghanis.

Exchange 51

Money and ATMs



*Money changing in a bazaar, Daykundi Province
Flickr/Institute for Money, Technology and Finance*

The main currency of Afghanistan is the Afghani (AFN). In early 2017, the AFN averaged USD 1 to AFN 67.³⁵⁹ Most of the Afghan economy operates on a cash-only basis, though the use of credit cards has become more common in larger cities. ATMs that accept international cards are scattered around Kabul, and most dispense Afghanis and U.S. dollars. But access to banking facilities is limited and unreliable, and ATMs are also not dependable, so it is a good idea to keep

a small amount of cash on hand. Credit cards such as Visa and MasterCard can only be used in a few establishments in major cities—usually airline offices, travel agencies, and top-end hotels.^{360, 361}

Vendors and Beggars

Because of 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 from poor, rural areas. Many who have not found work have resorted to begging or selling odds and ends on the street in order to support themselves and their families.

Give me money.

Visitor:	beh man pool beedaheed	Give me money.
Local:	man heech pool nadaaram	I don't have any.

Exchange 52



U.S. Army corporal greeting an Afghan boy, Khowst Province Flickr/The U.S. Army

Afghan street children are the legacy of decades of war and a system struggling to cope with the swelling numbers of jobless in urban areas. Afghanistan has one of the world's youngest populations. Nearly half of its 33 million people are under the age of 15.^{362, 363} In Kabul alone, tens of thousands of children as young as 6 years old beg and hawk assorted items on the street. Primarily boys, these young street vendors can be persistent.^{364, 365} Despite the government's efforts to clamp down on begging, it remains widespread.³⁶⁶

Please, buy something from me.

Visitor:	lutfan, yek cheezee az man beKhareed	Please, buy something from me.
Local:	muta-asif hastam, pool peysham neest	Sorry, I have no money left.

Exchange 53

Urban Crime



Afghan National Police officers from the Anti-Narcotics Quick Reaction Force (ANQRF) carrying out a stop and search scenario exercise intended for drug traffickers Flickr / Jordi Bernabeu Farrús

Violent crime, such as kidnapping, car theft, highway robbery, and drug-related violence, has become more common in cities. In some cases, these acts are carried out by people posing as law enforcement or Afghan Army officers.³⁶⁷ While Afghan cities are generally safer than rural areas, violence has risen since 2014, in large part due to increased insurgent activity, civil unrest, and poverty.³⁶⁸ Suicide bombings and coordinated attacks against government offices, foreign embassies, and U.S. military installations are on the rise. Marketplaces are

also vulnerable. Foreigners and Afghans associated with them are potential targets, including NGO employees, local medical staff, and aid workers.^{369, 370}

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Dari Cultural Orientation

Chapter 4 | Urban Life

Assessment

1. Over 70% of Afghanistan's population has no access to telephones.
2. While a free education is constitutionally mandated, enrollment levels remain low.
3. Secondary medical care, such as emergency care, is available for most urban residents at public hospitals.
4. Accidents are very common on the roads of Kabul and other urban centers.
5. The largest city in Afghanistan, Kabul, still has fewer than 1 million residents.

Assessment Answers: 1. False; 2. True; 3. True; 4. False; 5. False



A woman in a burqa rides along a rural road, a man at her side Flickr/Afghanistan Matters

Chapter 5 | Dari Cultural Orientation

Rural Life

Introduction

The central Afghan government has historically lacked a strong presence in rural areas, which have long been locally administered by traditional tribal or community organizations. In rural areas, the *jirga* or *shura* (assembly) traditionally exercises authority within each community; when assembled, every man has an opportunity to be heard.³⁷¹ Together with select elders of the community, they provide the foundation of informal political order throughout most Afghan villages.³⁷² Numerous efforts by central administrations to influence, control, or eliminate these customary organizations have been largely unsuccessful. Thus, the pattern of local governance in Afghanistan remains today.

While rural communities remain relatively independent, they generally lack access to resources and modern services. Electricity, waste disposal, and water treatment are nonexistent in many regions, especially in remote, isolated villages. Healthcare and education are often inadequate or only available at great distance.³⁷³ Other forms of infrastructure, such as paved roads or modern irrigation systems, are uncommon in outlying areas.

As such, rural Afghans are resourceful and fiercely independent. Making up nearly two-thirds of the country's population, they lead a life deeply rooted in tradition. Tribes and families are responsible for protecting their own, and they rely on ancient modes of subsistence to survive. This often lends itself toward poverty and hardship, but also hardiness and relative autonomy. Accordingly, remote 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 Afghanistan have experienced heavy insurgent activity in recent years.³⁷⁴



Provincial and district leaders and tribal elders from Kunar and Nuristan provinces conducting a jirga, Kunar Province Flickr/ResoluteSupportMedia

Rural Economy

For centuries, most rural Afghans supported themselves and their families as farmers and livestock herders. Approximately 45% of the country is pastureland, which supports livestock owned by settled farmers and nomadic herders.^{375, 376, 377} But only 12% of the land in Afghanistan is suitable for growing crops and resources are limited. Historically, the primary farming obstacle has been water, which is most plentiful in the spring. Long ago, farmers developed a variety of techniques to capture water and channel it to their crops. In the northern plains, dams diverted water into irrigation schemes. Throughout much of the rest of the country, Afghans used *karez*, a Persian technique in which an underground tunnel intersected with numerous vertical shafts



Women planting seeds in at a Qalat nursery greenhouse, Zabul Province Flickr/ResoluteSupportMedia

that open to the surface. Fed by the shafts, the underground canal collects runoff from the hillside and carries it to the fields below. Both techniques demand frequent and labor-intensive maintenance.^{378, 379}

Where do you work, sir?		
Visitor:	saahib, dar kujaa kaar meekeneed?	Where do you work, sir?
Local:	man yek dehqaan astam	I am a farmer.

Exchange 54



New two-wheel tractors, replacing oxen and human labor, allowing for multiple crops per year Flickr/DVIDSHUB

Prolonged conflict has left much of the country’s irrigation infrastructure in disrepair. Farm and grazing lands are unsafe because of landmines and unexploded ordnance. Furthermore, severe drought frequently hampers agricultural production. After the Taliban was overthrown, reconstruction teams worked to reduce crop vulnerability to drought.^{380, 381} Such efforts have entailed repairing irrigation systems and introducing drought-resistant seeds.³⁸² To further develop

the country’s agricultural sector, conventional crop farming must become more financially attractive to Afghan farmers.

Markets in Rural Areas



Bustling market in the Panjwai District of Kandahar Province, southern Afghanistan Flickr/Arctic Wolves

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.

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

Land Ownership

Afghanistan lacks a clear and consistent national policy for registering and validating land ownership claims. This is due in great part to the population’s historical reliance on informal customs and local legal systems. Furthermore, a history of unjust land distribution policies—many of which benefited the Pashtun majority—also complicates matters.³⁸³ Property disputes are a common cause of conflict within or between families, villages, and tribes. Such conflicts often stoked ethnic or tribal tensions, leading to violent clashes.



An Afghan girl with a herd of goats on her family’s farm in Dand District, just outside Kandahar City Flickr/ Arctic Wolves

In the last three decades, this situation has worsened because of successive wars and frequent changes in government.³⁸⁴ Political and social upheaval led to large-scale migration and changes in official land tenure policy. As many Afghans were forced to flee their lands, the status of their property often became unclear. In many cases, refugees have returned to find their property inhabited or redistributed without their permission, typically by those who assumed squatter’s rights in the owner’s absence.³⁸⁵

Do you own this land?		
Visitor:	shuma sahib een zaymeen asteed?	Do you own this land?
Local:	baleh	Yes.

Exchange 55

In this context, it can be difficult for returnees to reassert their property rights; land titles are difficult to verify or may be rejected outright by local leaders, sometimes owing to ethnic tensions.³⁸⁶ With little help from the central government, some warring tribes rely on weapons and money from Taliban insurgents to support their feuds.³⁸⁷ Moreover, multiple claims on a single plot of land make land rights difficult to resolve, leaving members of the community with no place to farm. Some people,

such as local warlords, take advantage of the unclear land tenure system to expand their own holdings. Overall, because a considerable percentage of the population is landless, such disputes will remain a source of contention in the absence of an impartial resolution mechanism or enforceable rule of law.^{388, 389}

Self-Protection and Gun Ownership

Centuries of intertribal strife and conflict have instilled Afghans with a sharp 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 counterinsurgency. Under these circumstances, vast stores of weapons have been brought into the country, and Afghans have been forced to defend themselves in the absence of any rule of law. This readiness to safeguard one’s own is prevalent in rural areas, where the government lacks a strong security presence and local militias wield power. As a result, many men in towns and villages routinely carry firearms and keep personal weapons in their home, despite wide-scale disarmament efforts.³⁹⁰



Weapons captured during a counterinsurgency operation in Helmand Province Flickr/Defence Images

Are you carrying any guns?		
Visitor:	shuma tufangee baakhood daareed?	Are you carrying any guns?
Local:	baleh	Yes.

Exchange 56

These weapons are typically rifles and older Soviet Kalashnikovs/AK-47s, but in recent years, Afghan locals (and insurgents) have acquired more sophisticated assault rifles (M-16s, M-4s), machine guns, and rocket-propelled grenades.^{391, 392, 393, 394}

Nomadic Tribes

Afghanistan is home to several nomadic or seminomadic groups, although their numbers are declining. Traditionally, Afghan nomads are shepherds who engage in seasonal migration. They base their livestock herds in lowland pastures during winter and move them to higher elevation grazing lands for spring and summer. Sheep and goats are the most common stock, and dogs are used as fellow sheepherders. 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 villagers they encounter. In the past, their migratory practices played an important role in regional trade.³⁹⁵

Rural Healthcare

Historically, lack of healthcare and sanitation services, the physical effects of war, and the maintenance of strict cultural taboos all contributed to serious health risks for the country’s population, particularly in outlying areas. For example, Afghanistan has one of the highest levels of child malnutrition in the world—about 41% of children under 5 suffer from malnutrition.³⁹⁶



Afghan doctor writing a prescription for a patient, Farah Province Flickr/ResoluteSupportMedia

Small healthcare facilities or mobile health clinics provide medical services to Afghans in outlying areas. These facilities provide services to Afghans who previously traveled long distances for treatment.

Please help me!		
Visitor:	lotfan komakom koneen	Please help me!
Local:	sabR ko ba zoodee daaktaR too Ra meebeena	Hold on. You will soon be seen by a doctor.

Exchange 57

Is there a medical clinic nearby?		
Visitor:	dar een nezeekahaa yek kleeneek tibee wujood daarad?	Is there a medical clinic nearby?
Local:	baleh, dar aanjaa	Yes, over there.

Exchange 58

But intensified conflict is causing a steady erosion of humanitarian activities.³⁹⁷ Attacks on healthcare clinics and medics rose 50% from 2015 to 2016, and NGOs and international aid organizations have been forced to close facilities, or move them to areas that are safer but less accessible.³⁹⁸ Concurrently, an increasing number of Afghans are fleeing conflict areas and seeking refuge and treatment in cities. For

many, fighting and roadblocks have made it extremely difficult or impossible to travel, and they are left without access to healthcare of any kind. Those who are able to get to urban hospitals and clinics are faced with facilities that lack the space and staff to treat them.³⁹⁹

My arm is broken, can you help me?		
Visitor:	baazeeyam shikasta, metawaaned komakam kuneed?	My arm is broken, can you help me?
Local:	baleh, man metawaanam shuma raa kumaka kunam	Yes, I can help you.

Exchange 59

Prenatal and Neonatal Care



Afghan women near Kabul Airport Flickr/Afghanistan Matters

Since 2002, moderately successful efforts have expanded medical services to rural areas, focusing on providing reproductive healthcare. Training female doctors and midwives was a central goal of these initiatives since cultural prohibitions prevent Afghan women from receiving healthcare services from men. As a result, between 2002 and 2015 pregnancy-related mortality dropped from 1,600 to 396 deaths for every 100,000 live births.⁴⁰⁰ Nonetheless, two-thirds of all women give birth at home

without the assistance of a midwife or trained medical practitioner, and maternal mortality in Afghanistan remains among the highest in the world.⁴⁰¹



Female Afghan National Army doctor providing medicine to a mother for her infant at a free clinic in Ahmadi village Flickr / ResoluteSupportMedia

Illness and death among expecting and new mothers is worsened by Afghanistan’s high birth rate, early child bearing, and pregnancies at close intervals. Afghan women bear more than five children on average during their lifetimes, over twice the global average.⁴⁰² In addition, estimates indicate that 60% of girls are married before the age of 16.⁴⁰³ Of those that give birth, especially in rural, conservative areas with no access to healthcare, 12% end in fatal complications. Stillbirths and

death in the first week of life are 50% higher among babies born to young mothers, and many of the babies die as a result of preventable birth complications, including extended labor times and infection.^{404, 405} Furthermore, long-lasting physical injuries sustained by young mothers can result in a slim chance of later conceiving a healthy baby. This remains a contributing factor to infant mortality in Afghanistan, which is the highest in the world. More than 1 in 10 infants die before they turn one month old.^{406, 407, 408, 409, 410}

Rural Education

Like the nation’s health services, Afghanistan’s education system suffered greatly from prolonged conflict and the fundamentalist policies of the Taliban. For years, 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. Before madrassas, students were educated in a village *hujra*, or community room.



Students sit in the boys’ section of an outdoor school in Bamozai, near Gardez, Paktya Province Wikimedia/Capt. John Severns

Outside of the city, various factors contribute to low enrollment rates, especially for girls. Traditional gender stereotypes are strong in rural areas, where schooling is often reserved for boys. Poverty, disability, and lack of local schools prevent many children from getting an education. In many provinces, low enrollment is the result of an increasing number of attacks on schools. The resurgent Taliban has used violent means to restore its restrictive policies concerning education—destroying school buildings, killing teachers, and disfiguring female students.⁴¹¹ In 2015 alone, these attacks forced more than 369 schools to close, and compelled many parents to keep their children, especially their daughters, at home.^{412, 413, 414} Many young men left without education or job opportunities are recruited by the Taliban.⁴¹⁵

Do your children go to school?		
Visitor:	atfaaletaan maktab meerawand?	Do your children go to school?
Local:	baleh	Yes.

Exchange 60

Gender Roles in Rural Areas

The respective roles of Afghan men and women vary according to their social and financial background, location, and age. A factor in determining gender roles is the extent to which the sexes are segregated, and this varies from area to area. Rural women are typically restricted to their own spaces and daily tasks; they are responsible for raising children, collecting water, cooking, and helping care for animals. Though often hidden from view and subordinate to



Women and child, Herat Flickr/Marius Arnesen

male family members, these women are sharp observers and knowledgeable about goings-on in the village; within the home, they wield some influence.⁴¹⁶ An exception is Bamiyan Province, where the Shi'a Hazara minority predominates. Here, women have greater freedom than their counterparts in other areas of the country; they work in the fields, and play a greater role in local politics and policing.^{417, 418}

Men typically handle all matters involving money, including selling crops at the market, buying essential goods, and holding legal ownership of the family's assets.⁴¹⁹ They also provide protection, instill discipline, and engage in social and political interactions outside the home.⁴²⁰ Men are more likely than women to help with farming 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



Fruit and vegetable vendor outside his store in the Wardak Province central market, Maidan Shar Flickr/ResoluteSupportMedia

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 because they must provide for their family. Female-headed households are at much greater risk of falling below the poverty line.⁴²¹ Thus, when presented with the opportunity, most rural women are eager to learn a skill, such as embroidery, that can provide a domestic-based income in the absence of a male breadwinner.⁴²²

Transportation

Prolonged conflict in Afghanistan has severely damaged the existing transportation network and slowed development of new infrastructure. Although reconstruction teams have made substantial progress in building new roads, many roads are in a state of disrepair.⁴²³ The Amu Darya River is the only principal waterway used for transport.⁴²⁴ A major reconstruction goal is developing an extensive highway network linking Afghanistan’s major cities—Kabul, Kandahar, Herat, and Mazar-e Sharif. Insurgent roadblocks and bombings have set back construction of Highway 1, or the “Ring Road.”⁴²⁵



*Building the Gardez-Khost road in Jadran, Paktia Province
Flickr/USAID Afghanistan*

Rural Roads

Beyond city limits, road conditions are particularly bad. Destruction of the nation’s roads and bridges leave large sections of the country physically isolated. While over 10,000 miles of roads and highways were built between 2002 and 2014, much of it has since worn away or been damaged by improvised explosive devices (IEDs).⁴²⁶ Most roads in rural areas are unpaved; 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.



*U.S. National Guard convoy escorting Afghan-owned cargo trucks along Highway 1, one of Afghanistan’s most dangerous roads, Parwan Province
Flickr/DVIDSHUB*

Traffic rules are not regularly obeyed or enforced. Pedestrians, animals, and carts also present hazards to drivers. Many roads outside the capital can become impassable during the winter.⁴²⁷

Updated, accurate maps are available, though it may be difficult to find an Afghan who can read one. 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.

Do you know this area very well?		
Visitor:	baa een atraaf be Khobee aashnaa asteed?	Do you know this area very well?
Local:	baleh	Yes.

Exchange 61

Security Issues



Convoy of British tactical support vehicles, northeast of Lashkar Gah, Helmand Province Flickr/Defence Images

Military convoys also share Afghan roads, and drivers should never attempt to pass a military vehicle; speeding up to these vehicles or driving too close may be interpreted as a threat.⁴²⁸ While some roads in Kabul and a handful of other cities are acceptable for standard sedans, a four-wheel drive vehicle is indispensable outside major cities. That said, driving off-road or at night is extremely dangerous.

Many roads are not completely cleared of landmines, and roads and highways are often newly planted with IEDs. That, coupled with the risk of kidnapping and attacks by militants and insurgents, makes travel in all areas of Afghanistan increasingly unsafe.^{429, 430} The Afghan Defense Ministry has shifted many Afghan National Defense and Security Forces from roadblocks and checkpoints to offensive operations, leading to unmanned checkpoints that have become an increasing source of casualties.^{431, 432} Finally, criminal activity, particularly robbery, is common on highways outside urban areas.⁴³³

Rural Leadership

Rural Afghan communities traditionally turn to local NGOs, such as jirgas, village leaders, landowners, and religious leaders, for legal matters, conflict resolution, and issues concerning social and economic needs. This is the basic Afghan localized system of governance. In Pashtun-dominated areas, tribal leaders include the malik (clan leader) and mullah (religious authority). In non-Pashtun communities, jirgas play an important role as well, but cultural identity is often associated with family and geography rather than tribe. In areas dominated by Tajiks and Uzbeks for example, landowners (*zamindars* or *khans*) play a central role in village organization. Among the Hazara, local religious authorities within the community (*sayyeds* and *shayks*)

hold political power.⁴³⁴ In general, rural Afghans have less confidence in the formal justice system, and more than 90% of conflicts are solved through jirgas.^{435, 436}

Does your elder live here?		
Visitor:	reesh safeed yaa ra-eese qaryataan dar eejaa zendagee meekunad?	Does your elder live here?
Local:	baleh	Yes.

Exchange 62

Because leadership structures vary from region to region, foreigners may need to speak with multiple villagers or attend a jirga to identify the village leader. The members will know and identify those who hold influence.

Can you take me to your elder?		
Visitor:	metawaaned maraa peeshee ra-aese qaryataan bebareed?	Can you take me to your elder?
Local:	baleh	Yes.

Exchange 63

Respected elder, we need your help.		
Visitor:	jinaab ra-eeseb, maa beh kumak / nasyhat / 'aqeeda shuma zaroorat daareem	Respected elder, we need your help / advice / opinion.
Local:	baleh	Yes.

Exchange 64

Local Defense

In traditional Pashtun tribal areas, the jirga is the main decision-making forum. Jirgas decide the necessity of using various local tribal forces, such as *arbakai* (community police), *tsalweshtai* (tribal guard force), or *lashkar* (offensive regional-level force) to implement their decisions.^{437, 438, 439}

In the Tajik-, Uzbek-, and Turkmen-dominated rural areas of western and northern Afghanistan, small militias are prevalent and increasing in number. These local “irregular” armed groups



A tribal leader wrapping a turban around a former insurgent’s head as a sign of his acceptance back into society, Tarin Kot, Uruzgan Province Flickr/NATO Training Mission Afghanistan

are forming in response to the onslaught of the Taliban and the deteriorating security situation.⁴⁴⁰ In contrast to jirga-directed tribal forces that are typical in Pashtun areas, these private militias do not usually fall under the community authority. Rather, the militias answer to an outside authority, such as powerful local strongmen or warlords. Many of these authorities have been accused of human rights abuses over the years, and the actions of their militias are often predatory.^{441, 442, 443, 444} That said, some warlord governors have proved effective in combating the opium trade, bolstering security, and developing the local economy.⁴⁴⁵



Provincial Governor of Paktia Province with a British Army major discussing insurgent and Taliban reintegration in Paktia province
Flickr / ResoluteSupportMedia

Dos and Don'ts

- Do show respect to each Afghan.
- Do stand when a tribal elder enters; placing the palm of your right hand on your heart conveys respect and sincerity.
- Do greet or serve seniors first.
- Do be patient; expect small talk and for things to take time.
- Do keep your composure; emotions are a sign of weakness.
- Do keep your promises.
- Do shake hands gently *with the same gender only*; a limp shake conveys humbleness, not insincerity.
- Do remove shoes in an Afghan home.
- Do wear appropriate, conservative clothing; for Western women, a head covering is appreciated.



U.S. Army Lt. Colonel with with a local leader in Farah Province Flickr / The U.S. Army

- Do keep the soles of your shoes/feet hidden from public view when seated.
- Don't speak loudly; it conveys anger or domination.
- Don't rush to close a meeting, it is considered rude; ask to reschedule if pressed for time.
- Don't wave farewell; it is inappropriate.
- Don't show a picture of your wife when developing personal relationships. You may show a picture of your children (including girls) to establish trust.
- Don't use you left hand for eating, passing things to others, or gesturing.⁴⁴⁶

Checkpoints

Roadblocks and checkpoints controlled by the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces and random insurgent checkpoints are common throughout Afghanistan; Afghans who travel are familiar with them.⁴⁴⁷



Afghan Border Police searching an individual at a checkpoint near Waza Khwa, Paktika Province Flickr/ResoluteSupportMedia

Because of unclear jurisdictional boundaries, some checkpoints in close proximity are administered by different regional leaders. At checkpoints run by U.S. or international forces, Afghans will anticipate the need to step out of the vehicle and show identification, if available. Unrelated males and females should be kept in separate areas for body pats, which should be conducted by a person of the same gender. Checkpoints are insurgent targets and Afghans may feel tension when dealing with local enforcement agents of a different ethnic background.

Where is the nearest checkpoint?		
Visitor:	nazdeektareen nuqtay taftesh kujaast?	Where is the nearest checkpoint?
Local:	doo keelo meter az eenjaa	It's two kilometers.

Exchange 65

Please get out of the car.		
Visitor:	lutfan az motor paa-een shaweed	Please get out of the car.
Local:	Khoob	OK.

Exchange 66

Show us the car registration.		
Visitor:	waraqahaay jawaaz sa ray motor taan raa beh ma neshaan beedaheed	Show us the car registration.
Local:	Khoob	OK.

Exchange 67

Is this all the ID you have?		
Visitor:	eenhaa hama waraqahaay haweeet shumaast?	Is this all the ID you have?
Local:	baleh	Yes.

Exchange 68

Why is traffic being stopped here?		
Visitor:	motaRaa cheRaa da eenja estaada meeshan?	Why is traffic being stopped here?
Local:	ee jaaye talaashee amneeyatees	This is a checkpoint.

Exchange 69

Landmines and IEDs

From the Soviets to the Taliban, numerous factions have used landmines and IEDs in Afghanistan. High estimates place the number of landmines scattered throughout the country in the millions.⁴⁴⁸ While aggressive demining operations continue, the amount of mine-contaminated land increased between 2014 and 2015.^{449, 450} The resurgent Taliban continue to place mines and pressure-plate IEDs along main roads and highways, and around



Minefield, Bamiyan Flickr/Carl Montgomery

cities. These areas are sometimes marked with red-painted rocks, although many hazardous areas are unmarked.⁴⁵¹ Vehicle-borne IEDs are being used with greater frequency, especially in the capital where they are a serious threat.^{452, 453}

Is this area mined?		
Visitor:	een saaha mayn daarad?	Is this area mined?
Local:	baleh	Yes.

Exchange 70



Large weapons cache in Kandahar city, confiscated by Afghan and coalition forces Flickr/The JIDA

There is also widespread abandoned and unexploded ordnance in the country; the most affected areas are eastern and southern Afghanistan, particularly Helmand and Kandahar provinces. In 2014, there were 1,296 deaths from mines, IEDs, and explosive remnants of war, though experts believe these numbers are underreported.⁴⁵⁴

Landmine contamination has displaced Afghan communities and prevented them from farming and herding in certain areas.⁴⁵⁵

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Dari Cultural Orientation

Chapter 5 | Rural Life

Assessment

1. In Afghanistan, approximately 45% of the land can be used for farming.
2. Women in rural areas typically play a large role in farming outside the home.
3. Afghans typically carry rifles or other weapons.
4. Rural communities in Afghanistan generally lack access to public healthcare and other services.
5. Transportation of any sort is difficult and time-consuming in Afghanistan.

Assessment Answers: 1. False; 2. False; 3. True; 4. True; 5. True



A former opium poppy farmer (now grape farmer) and his family standing beside a tractor, Lashkar Gah, Helmand Province Flickr/Defence Images

Chapter 6 | Dari Cultural Orientation

Family Life

Introduction

The extended family is the single most important social institution in Afghanistan. In a country that has historically lacked nationwide public welfare, security, and education systems, the extended family is the primary social network for Afghan people. Family networks support the financial and social needs of the extended family or tribe. These broad networks are essential in political and business affairs. Afghan family solidarity is strong, and nepotism is common.

Because personal honor is tied to family honor, an individual's identity is tied to that of his or her family members. The reputation and actions of each family member reflects

on the whole family. Ideally, this creates a tight bond between relatives, but it can have negative consequences, 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 each other's assets, labor, and support. In many regions of the country, it is simply not possible to subsist on one's own.

Familial and Tribal Relations

Qawms

Afghan family networks extend into larger social units based on lineage, ethnicity, tribal affiliation, location, or other shared traits or interests. This extended solidarity network is known as an Afghan's *qawm*. This term is somewhat fluid and varies according to tribe, ethnic group, and region. Foremost, a person's *qawm* is often based on his or her family or clan, or tribal affiliation. Members of a *qawm* may trace their heritage to a common ancestor. A *qawm* may also refer to a specific village or region. In cities, *qawm* can refer to a profession or other common identity, such as Dari-speaking *qawms* in the west.^{456, 457} Finally, Afghans may identify with more than one *qawm*. These social units have historically organized and identified Afghans and provided cooperative social bonds. A *qawm* is typically governed by a council of elder males, or *jirga*.^{458, 459, 460}



Local village elders from the Surri area of the Shinkai District in Zabul Province, at a shura Flickr/NATO Training Mission Afghanistan

Feuds

Competition for power or resources is a common cause for conflict among groups. For example, when the head of a family dies, the brothers and male cousins of the family may disagree over the distribution of resources among them. Specifically, the allocation or division of land is a leading source of conflict in rural Afghanistan. Adult males may also disagree over who should become the family's authority figure. Violent disputes between male cousins are quite common and such conflicts may force extended families to divide into separate households.⁴⁶¹

Does your family live here?		
Visitor:	faameel shama dar eenjaa zandagee meekunad?	Does your family live here?
Local:	baleh	Yes.

Exchange 71

Is this your entire family?		
Visitor:	aya een hama familee shuma hastan?	Is this your entire family?
Local:	baleh	Yes.

Exchange 72



Afghan tribal elders in the village of Shabo Khel, Khost Province Flickr/ResoluteSupportMedia

On a larger scale, a dispute between clans or tribes over resources or a breach of honor may lead to violent clashes and vendettas, primarily among Pashtun families and tribes. While the tradition of honor-based revenge (*intaqam* in Dari) is Pashtunwali, other ethnic groups, such as Tajiks and Uzbeks, also become embroiled in such conflicts.⁴⁶² Sometimes these feuds can take years to resolve.⁴⁶³ Nonetheless, tribal factions will unite against an outside threat, even if they are involved in an internal feud.

Afghan Homes



Houses on the road to Herat Flickr/Marius Arnesen

In urban areas, families may live in modern houses or apartments. Poor migrants often live in makeshift structures in city slums. In rural areas, traditional mud-brick and stone houses predominate and are built in clusters. Rural villages are traditionally fortified with exterior walls and, in some cases, towers. Nomadic populations generally live in tents or yurts.

Traditional housing compounds for an extended Afghan family consist of individual structures with flat or domed roofs built around a courtyard and surrounded by reinforced walls. In conservative areas where strict segregation of the sexes is practiced, these compounds have specific male and female spaces.^{464, 465} In families with more than one wife, each wife has her own room, with her own belongings. The courtyard provides space for children to play, women to cook, and all family members to socialize, play music, and tell stories.⁴⁶⁶ When entering a residence in a noncombat situation, foreigners should respect the division of these spaces by knocking before entering both exterior and interior doors.

The Typical Household

Extended Family

A traditional rural Afghan household contains an extended family, usually consisting of multiple generations including dozens of family members. In a family compound, it is not unusual for there to be a husband and wife, their sons, their sons’ wives and children, their unmarried daughters, in-laws, elderly grandparents, and cousins and their children.

How many people live in this house?		
Visitor:	dar een Khaana chand nafar zandagee meekunad?	How many people live in this house?
Local:	dah	Ten.

Exchange 73



An Afghan Pashtun family sitting together in their home in Kabul Wikimedia/U.S. Department of Defense

Once married, a woman moves into the home of her husband’s family. From that point on, she belongs to that family and must obey, in particular, her husband and the senior female. Of course, the composition of a household may vary according to tribe and socioeconomic status. Nuclear family households grouped within extended family settings are also common. Younger members of wealthy families are more likely to move out and start their own households.⁴⁶⁷

Are these people related to you?		
Visitor:	ee kasaa chee taan meshah?	Are these people related to you?
Local:	ee faameelem maaz	These people are my family.

Exchange 74

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.) In general, a man may marry more than one woman if he is wealthy and can support them or if a man’s existing wife has not borne a son. In other instances, a man will marry a second wife of his choosing after marrying the first in an arranged marriage; a man may also marry a young woman in the hopes of producing more children.⁴⁶⁸ According to Islamic law, the husband must treat his wives equally.⁴⁶⁹ The practice of taking more than one wife, however, has become less common over the last 20 years.



A group of women wearing burqas Wikimedia/USAID

Widows

With the high numbers of Afghan men killed in conflict, widows are common in Afghanistan. In 2016, there were an estimated 2 million Afghan widows.⁴⁷⁰ Such circumstances expose widows to a variety of difficulties. As an expert observed, “In Afghanistan’s patriarchal society, the death of a husband not only diminishes a woman’s financial independence, but also damages her sense of social protection.”⁴⁷¹ In most instances, young widows remarry, typically to a brother or cousin of their deceased husband. Sometimes a man will take a widow as a second wife or simply provide her a place within the larger household.⁴⁷²

The Afghan government offers a small stipend to war widows, but many women are either unaware or do not have the skills to apply for it. Many widows who cannot remarry live in extreme poverty and are forced to beg or take other measures to support themselves and their children. To combat this trend, Western aid organizations have targeted these women, helping them by offering literacy classes and job skills training.⁴⁷³

Gender Roles

Afghan families 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 financial security, safety, and strict adherence to traditional social codes.

Do you have any brothers?		
Visitor:	shuma baraadar daareed?	Do you have any brothers?
Local:	baleh	Yes.

Exchange 75

Because women are often restricted to the home, men act as family representatives in the public sphere. In urban areas, this involves working a paid job. In rural areas, men often perform most of the agricultural labor 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. Women's primary responsibilities are child-rearing, caring for the family, and the many tasks involved in operating the household. In some cases, a woman 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.⁴⁷⁴



*In Adraskan, Herat Province, a woman stands in the corner of her mud house
Flickr/ResoluteSupportMedia*

Married Life, Divorce, and Birth

Marriage

In Afghanistan, marriages are social and financial contracts between families, rather than romantic unions between individuals. Parents arrange marriages for their children. Marriage between cousins is a preferred practice among many Afghans because it keeps resources in the family. Marriage is also used to build alliances.⁴⁷⁵

Are you married?		
Visitor:	izdewaaj kardeheed?	Are you married?
Local:	neh	No.

Exchange 76

Arranged marriages involving minors are common, despite laws that prohibit girls younger than 15 from marrying.^{476, 477} This is especially true in rural areas, where marriages are often arranged to settle tribal disputes or debts between families (*baad*).⁴⁷⁸ Grooms are usually older than their brides; in some cases, they may be significantly older.

*Husband, wife and child, walking a street in Kabul
Flickr/Step*



Divorce

In Afghanistan, divorce is uncommon because of the social stigmatization. Current Afghan laws regarding divorce are restrictive and unevenly applied to men and women. For example, under Islamic law, a man can divorce his wife by declaring his intent to dissolve the union three times; consent of the wife is not required. Men may suffer some financial loss because they are expected to return the dowry to the wife as part of the marriage contract. But this does not always take place.^{479, 480}

Officially, women can initiate divorce for various reasons, but this is less common and the effects of separation are often damaging for a woman. Both men and women involved in a divorce will likely suffer social censure. But the outcome has especially devastating effects on women, who lose the financial support and community security provided by the extended family, which remains the husband's domain. It is more difficult for



Judges, prosecutors, members of the Criminal Investigation Department, and members of the Ministry of Justice at a seminar focusing on the Constitution of Afghanistan and the Elimination of Violence Against Women Law, Farah Flickr/ResoluteSupportMedia

women to remarry, especially if they are older or have not produced children. Women, in many cases, will also lose custody of their older children, particularly if they remarry. Suicide among unhappily married wives is not uncommon, with physical abuse being a primary motivating factor.⁴⁸¹

Birth

The birth of a child is a joyous event, especially when the child is a boy. Traditionally, Muslim fathers whisper the *shahada* (Muslim declaration of faith) into the baby's right ear.⁴⁸² This is to ensure these are the first words the newborn hears. In many areas, celebrations include the firing of guns and a feast with family and friends. After the seventh day, Afghans celebrate the shaving of the infant's head, in the Muslim tradition. The Muslim rite of passage for male children is circumcision. Most Afghan boys are circumcised between the ages of two and five. Whether it is celebrated elaborately or simply, it marks the beginning of a boy's life as an adult.^{483, 484}



Afghan girl and boy, Kandahar Flickr/ResoluteSupportMedia

Superstition

It is a common belief in Afghanistan that one should not admire or compliment someone's children or a loved one, unless the expression *mashallah* ("what God has willed") is used. Many believe that invoking thankfulness to God when giving a compliment provides protection. Otherwise, calling attention to a child or loved one may bring the individual bad luck. The belief is that the child may fall ill, or some other harm may befall them. A family member may recite a *surah* (chapter) from the Quran to ward off bad luck.

In rural areas, Afghans blend Muslim beliefs with superstitions that predate Islam. Women and children often wear *tawiz* amulets (protective charms); cowives may wear wolf claws to promote harmony.⁴⁸⁵ Some



Silver tribal Afghan necklace with etched pendant and mango-shaped amulets Flickr/Ann Porteus

talismans are hung in homes. Many Afghans also believe in benevolent and evil spirits, such as angels and *jinn*—demon-like beings who create mischief. References to both appear in the Quran, and belief in them is widespread throughout the Muslim world.^{486, 487, 488}

Life Stages

The Elderly



The elderly are well respected and cared for by their children and grandchildren, and they hold important roles in the family. For example, elderly women often help raise the young children, and they are frequently in charge of allocating food resources.⁴⁸⁹ Overall, older members have authority over younger ones, with the eldest male having authority over the entire family.

Elderly, Mazen Ahmadi village Flickr/ResoluteSupportMedia

Children

Children are highly valued but boys have a much higher status than girls. Familial descent is traced through the male line and inheritance passes to the male children. Afghan women are supposed to receive a portion of the inheritance, but this does not always occur.⁴⁹⁰ In this way, male children propagate the family and accumulate its wealth, whereas female children become members of other families through marriage. Overall, this makes investment in boys more socially and financially practical than investing in girls.

Are these your children?		
Visitor:	eenhaa atfaal shumaast?	Are these your children?
Local:	baleh	Yes.

Exchange 77

Did you grow up here?

Visitor:	shuma dar eenjaa kalaan shodeheed?	Did you grow up here?
Local:	baleh	Yes.

Exchange 78



A family at the the Shrine of Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib feeding white pigeons, considered to be sacred, Mazar-e Sharif
Flickr/Afghanistan Matters

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 cook, wash, and care for younger family members. Educational opportunities vary according to a family's means and location, with priority given to sending boys to school. Often the family is faced with the difficult choice between an education for their child and keeping the

child home to help support the family. Many children split their days between work and school.

Dates of Birth

Because of the displacement and confusion during the last 30 years of war, many Afghans do not have a record of their actual birth date. A person may not know the day he or she was born, just the season. To complete legal documents, these Afghans chose their own birth dates. A significant number picked the western New Year's Day, January 1. Young Afghans have rallied around this idea, and many celebrate a mass birthday that is also an acknowledgment of their country's difficulties.⁴⁹¹



Graphic/DLIFLC

Naming Conventions

Afghan names consist of only a first name (there are traditionally no family names). People are distinguished instead by their tribal affiliation, place of birth, profession, or an honorific title. Often, first names consist of two parts: a common name (typically an Islamic or Arabic component) followed by a less common name, such

as Mohamad Nasim. The less common name is considered the proper name—in this case, Nasim; informally, Afghans usually use this first name. In formal situations, Afghans are identified by their first name(s) and their father’s name. For example, Mohamad Nasim walade Amad Khan translates to “Mohamad Nasim son of Amad Khan” (*walade* means “son of”).



Boys from the Allaudin Orphanage in Kabul
Flickr/ResoluteSupportMedil

In the family and larger community, family members, particularly women, are sometimes referred to with a kinship name. For example, a woman has a son named Nasim. Instead of using her first name, which would be impolite and disrespectful, she would be referred to, and even addressed as, “mother of Nasim” (*maader-e-Nasim*). In addition, it is polite to address older men as *baaba* (father) or *kakaa* (uncle).

Honorific titles such as Ghazi (military rank), Sardar or Khan (leadership position), or Agha or Mir (religious position) are earned; men and women alike should use these titles when addressing such men, as in Sardar Mohammad Ismail Khan.⁴⁹² Finally, *sayb* (sir) and *sayb-e* (ma’am) are often added to the end of a name or title out of respect, such as Mir-sayb or Smith-sayb.



Children playing with kites given to them by Afghan Local Police officers in a village in Farah Province
Flickr/U.S. Department of Defense

Today, the practice of using a family name is becoming more popular among Afghans who have traveled abroad or had contact with international visitors.⁴⁹³ Some are using their tribe’s name as their family name. Foreigners should be aware of possible spelling variations when transliterating names from Dari to English. A name spelled differently on two documents may nonetheless refer to the same person.

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Chapter 6 | Family Life

Assessment

1. A typical household in rural Afghanistan consists of a husband, wife, and their children.
2. In rural areas, conservative attitudes about women prevail.
3. In Afghanistan, a feud between families is referred to as a *qawm*.
4. Afghanistan has the highest infant mortality rate in the world.
5. Most Afghans use only their first name.

Assessment Answers: 1. False; 2. True; 3. True; 4. False; 5. True

Further Readings and Resources

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Dari Cultural Orientation

Final Assessment

1. Dari is a lingua franca for most Afghans.
2. Farsiwan are nontribal Afghans.
3. Most Afghans have access to electricity.
4. The mujahideen groups that resisted Soviet occupation were made up largely of ethnic Uzbeks and Hazaras.
5. Most Afghans are Shi'a Muslims.
6. In Afghanistan, the village mosque is usually used as a school for Islamic education.
7. Red or green flags on a tomb indicate a martyr is buried there.
8. Looking an Afghan straight in the eye might be interpreted as aggressive.
9. You should always maintain some distance from Afghans of the same gender as yourself.
10. In Afghanistan, a man should never compliment an Afghan woman on her beauty or attire.
11. Centuries of intertribal strife and conflict have made Afghans very inhospitable towards Visitors.

12. All Afghan madrassas are run by the Ministry of Education, which establishes guidelines on curriculum and provides oversight.
13. The capital city, Kabul, has grown from 500,000 in 2001 to over 5 million people in 2016.
14. Muslim men must gain permission from the local mullah to get a divorce.
15. If an Afghan woman's husband dies, she usually marries one of his relatives.
16. Profits from poppy cultivation in Afghanistan are a main source of funding for the Taliban.
17. In recent years, there are nearly as many girls as boys in most schools.
18. The central Afghan government has historically lacked a strong presence in rural areas.
19. Cricket is Afghanistan's national sport.
20. Many Afghans do not know their actual birth date.

Assessment Answers: 1. True; 2. False; 3. False; 4. False; 5. False; 6. True; 7. True; 8. True; 9. False; 10. True; 11. False; 12. False; 13. True; 14. False; 15. True; 16. True; 17. False; 18. True; 19. False; 20. True