CULTURAL ORIENTATION

PASHTO

Pashtun man carrying firewood with young boy walking behind, Musa Qala, central Helmand Province
Flickr/ResoluteSupportMedia

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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.

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- Rapport is also available at AKO, DKO, NKO, and Joint Language University

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Pashtun man, Kabul *Flickr/Jeremy Weate*

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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 Ahmed Shah, 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). Its rugged physical environment has served to isolate communities within the country, resulting in a great variety of customs and traditions between and within tribal groups.[1] The

vast majority of Afghans practice Islam, one of the few unifying forces in this multiethnic nation. Pashtuns, who speak Pashto and form the largest ethnic group in the country, have played a significant role in the growth of the nation. They are predominant in the south and southeast. For the most part, Pashtuns controlled power after Afghanistan assumed a form of statehood. Their culture, therefore, became synonymous with Afghan culture. Until the 20th century, the term "Afghan" applied only to Pashto-speaking peoples.[2]

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 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]

Map of Afghanistan Graphic/DLIFLC

Climate

Afghanistan's typically harsh climate is a product of its geography and extreme landscape. Its weather is marked by dramatic differences in day and night, and summer and winter temperatures. The country is mostly arid or semiarid, with sudden seasonal transitions, but conditions vary according to region.[6] Highs above 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, dry, cold winters. 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 sandstorms that sweep across the arid southern deserts.

Geographic Divisions

Afghanistan can be divided into three distinct geographic regions: the Central Highlands, the Southern Plateau, and the Northern Plains. The Central Highlands include the 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 Shebar Pass and the legendary Khyber Pass. Earthquakes, which frequently trigger destructive landslides, occur in the Badakhshan area, where an average of 50 occur each year.[11, 12]

Snow-covered Hindu Kush mountains, Ghazni Province
Wikimedia/US Embassy Kabul Afghanistan

To the north of the Central Highlands lie the Northern Plains. 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 in this region. 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 feet) 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 mountain system, 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.

Several mountain ranges shoot off from the Hindu Kush, spreading out from the central area of the country, south and west. Extending southwest, the Baba mountain 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 Ḥeṣar ranges.[18]

The Safed Koh (White Mountain) range, running along the border with Pakistan, Nangarhar Province
Wikimedia/The U.S. Army

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 out 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, and international water-sharing disputes are common.[23, 24, 25, 26] The Amu Darya, which forms a large section of the northern border, 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, and the Farah are important resources for irrigation water in the south. Flowing westward from the central mountains, the Harirud passes near the large 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 typically saline. Streams and lakes are only active after periods of rainfall or during the spring snowmelt.[27]

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 is situated 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 frequently arise.[34, 35] From Kabul city, there are major routes that lead to Kandahar, Herat, Jalalabad, and Mazar-e Sharif, and others that link to Pakistan, via the Khyber Pass, or through the Hindu Kush to Uzbekistan.

Abdul Rahman Mosque, also known as the Grand Mosque of Kabul US Government Public Domain

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 is situated 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 major regional fruit crops, such as grapes and pomegranates. Kandahar Province is also Afghanistan's third largest producer of opium.[38] With a population of approximately 400,000 people, it is the second largest city in Afghanistan.[39] Historically, the city's strategic location on major trade routes made it prone to frequent invasion. The city served as Afghanistan's first capital after Ahmad Shah Durrani unified the tribal nation in the 18th century. His mausoleum is found in the city, as is the Khirqah Shrine, which is believed to house the cloak of the Prophet Muhammad.[40] As a major center for Pashtun peoples, the city is home to the Kandahari dialect of Pashto, the soft-voice form of the language.[41]

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 some oil and natural gas production.[42, 43] 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 303,300–400,000 people consists mainly of Uzbeks, Tajiks, and Turkmens.[44, 45, 46]

Shrine of Hazrat Ali ibn Abi Talib in Mazar-e Sharif, Balkh Province Flickr/Resolute Media

Mazar-e Sharif, which means "tomb of the saint," is revered by Shi'a Muslims as the burial site of the Prophet Mohammad's cousin, Ali ibn Abi Talib, who established the Shi'a branch of Islam. Whether his remains are housed in the shrine is a matter of dispute, but the site remains a significant draw for Shi'a Muslims.[47] The shrine, also known as the Blue Mosque, draws hundreds of pilgrims annually to commemorate Ashura.[48, 49] Shi'a Muslims are often the target of violent sectarian extremists during this time.[50]

Herat

Overlooking the city of Herat Flickr/Todd Huffman

Herat is Afghanistan's third or fourth largest city (population estimates range from 272,800 to 477,452).[51, 52] Located on the Harirud River, Herat sits in a fertile agricultural region that is the economic center of western Afghanistan. Summer months bring extremely strong northwesterly winds to the region, and these can evolve into destructive dust storms.[53] The Iranian border is less than 80 km (50 mi) away, and Persian culture influences daily life.[54]

Herat was once the capital of the Timurid Empire, situated 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. Most Herat residents are Tajik and speak Dari as well as Pashto.

Jalalabad

Jalalabad, the capital of Nangarhar Province, is located in a strategically important region of eastern Afghanistan. Situated on the Kabul River, the city lies on the major trade and transportation route that runs through the Khyber Pass from 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 United States have stationed troops in Jalalabad, which was also a Taliban stronghold until 2001.[55, 56, 57]

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 major crops.[58, 59]

Khost

The city of 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

US Army captain above Khost, Khost Province
Flickr/ResoluteSupportMedia

residents are predominantly Pashtun, as is Khost Province as a whole. Khost is a major transit hub 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 eight years; in recent years, 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.[60] 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.[61, 62]

History

Early History

Portrait miniature of Ahmad Shah Durrani in 1757 *Wikicommons/ Public Domain*

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 an important trade route that cut through the Hindu Kush Mountains of modern-day Afghanistan. This route formed a section of what would later be known as the Silk Road.

The Persians were one of the first major powers to control the region. Later, in the 4th century B.C.E., Alexander the Great and his forces conquered the area for the Greeks. After several centuries of various powers fighting for

control of the area, 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 would be appropriated centuries later by a branch of the Islamic State—ISIL-Khorasan.)[63, 64, 65] 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.

The Afghan State and the Colonial Era

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

Shah Shuja, Emir of Afghanistan, Bala Hissar, Kabul, 1839 The British Library Online Gallery

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, incursions by the British, who were then based in colonial India, led to three Anglo-Afghan wars. These wars occurred as part of the "the Great Game," a prolonged battle for Central Asia waged between Russia and Britain. Due to the strong resistance of Afghan armies, the British failed to fully colonize the country, although they exerted various levels of control on Afghan leaders. In the late 19th century, the British established the Durand Line, the boundary that marks the modern Afghan-Pakistani border. This demarcation created serious and longstanding tensions, as it divided a cohesive Pashtun area into two different countries. Opposition to the Durand Line later prompted unsuccessful attempts to unify the Pashtun region and create an independent state of "Pashtunistan." Such efforts strained relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan in the 20th century. To date, no Afghan government has officially recognized the Durand Line. [66, 67]

20th Century

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

Zahir Shah (1914-2007) in military uniform Wikimedia/ Haji Amin Qodrat, Kabul

In 1978, the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan, a communist group, seized power in a violent coup. The group had strong ties to the Soviet Union, which provided financial assistance and military support. Various tribal insurgencies mounted a fierce resistance against the communist government. In 1979, the Soviets invaded in an effort to solidify communist rule. Aided by the U.S. and other countries, the mujahideen, or resistance fighters, fought for more than a decade to end communist rule in Afghanistan. In 1989, the Soviets officially withdrew from the war-torn country, leaving hundreds of thousands dead and millions more displaced. However, the Afghan communist government remained in power, and the civil war continued. The communist government fell in 1992, but power struggles between various competing factions prolonged the internal conflict.

The Taliban Regime and U.S. Intervention

In 1996, the Taliban, an extremist Islamic group dominated by Pashtuns, seized power over much of the country, including the nation's capital, Kabul.During its time in power, the Taliban regime implemented policies that had a detrimental effect on the country and its impoverished, war-weary population. The fundamentalist group's strict code of law deprived Afghans of basic human rights, with women, in

Taliban handing over weapons in a disarmament program, Ghor Province Flickr/ResoluteSupportMedia

particular, subject to severe restrictions and punishments.[68] The Taliban also destroyed non-Islamic cultural artifacts, such as two massive Buddha statues located outside the city of Bamiyan.[69] Moreover, as the country's infrastructure and economy remained in a state of collapse, the resource-poor Taliban government offered few services to the populace.

After taking power, the Taliban allowed various terrorist organizations, including Osama Bin Laden's Al Qaeda network, to base their operations in Afghanistan. After the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, the U.S. and a coalition of international forces entered Afghanistan to remove the Taliban from power and combat the Al Qaeda forces based in the country. The U.S.-led operation quickly toppled the Taliban regime, allowing other Afghan political groups to assume power. They formed a transitional government and drafted a democratic constitution.

Constitutional Reform

In January 2004, Afghanistan ratified a new constitution that established a modern, democratic, Islamic state.[70] On 9 October that same year, Afghanistan held its first democratic presidential election. Hamid Karzai, an ethnic Pashtun, won the election. Meanwhile, Taliban insurgents regrouped, taking refuge in areas outside the limited control of the Afghan government, as well as in safe havens in nearby Pakistan.[71] By December 2008, a resurgent Taliban had once again extended its influence over a large share of the country.[72] 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.[73] In 2009, Karzai was appointed by the Independent Election Commission (IEC) to a second five-year term, after a controversial race against Abdullah Abdullah.

Afghan presidential candidates Abdullah Abdullah and Asraf Ghani during the formation of the Unity Government 2014
Flickr/US Department of State

Since 2014, the National Unity Government (NUG) of President Ashraf Ghani and his chief executive officer Abdullah Abdullah have governed Afghanistan. The United States 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.[74] The NUG worked to bolster its national forces with local militias and continued the trend of appointing warlords to positions within the government. 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 five-year term.[75, 76] As of late 2016, the Taliban controlled more areas of Afghanistan than at any time since 2001.[77]

Village elders, with boys observing, at a shura, Deh Chopan, Zabul Province Flickr/ResoluteSupportMedia

Government

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 House of Elders (Meshrano Jirga) and the House of the People (Wolesi Jirga).

Village elder participating in a planning shura to build a bazaar and repair a school damaged by Taliban Flickr/ResoluteSupportMedia

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, as 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.[78, 79]

The government in Kabul continues to face growing security threats from Taliban militants and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), the lasting effects of decades of war, and the region's long-standing tribal divisions.[80] With the departure of most U.S. and coalition troops in 2014, Afghanistan began to experience setbacks against the Taliban and other armed opposition groups as well as the war on opium. Reconstruction efforts were also negatively impacted. Despite $115 billion in aid provided by the U.S. toward reconstruction, counternarcotics, and training since 2002, Afghanistan has lost territory to the insurgency, unemployment remains high, and poverty persists.[81] Many blame endemic corruption and Afghanistan's inability to sustain its progress without continued international support for these continuing problems.[82]

Ethnicity continues to play a dominant role in Afghan politics, with Pashtuns and Tajiks leading the current government.[83] 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, tribal councils, or jirgas, 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.[84]

Media

Afghan news media Flickr/USAID Afghanistan

Conditions for press freedom in Afghanistan have improved since 2014 but journalists still face challenges. The government has enacted five media laws since 2002, including the 2014 Access to Information Law aimed at improving transparency and accountability.[85] The government continues to restrict content considered "contrary to the principles of Islam or offensive to other religions and sects."[86] Furthermore, interference by government agencies is an ongoing problem, and violence and threats of violence against journalists continues, undermining objective reporting.[87, 88] With the reduction of foreign troops since 2014, the physical safety of journalists in the field remains a serious problem.

In 2016, there were 83 local and national television channels, 161 radio stations, and 12 news agencies in Afghanistan.[89] However, 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 Pashto and Dari are aired from Kabul, including Deutsche Welle, BBC World Service, Voice of America, and Radio France Internationale.[90, 91]

Economy

Afghan Economic Trends

Afghanistan is among the poorest countries in the world.[92] Over the last two decades, armed conflict and political upheaval have set the Afghan economy on a roller coaster of downward and upward swings.[93] Widespread poverty, unemployment, and political corruption are ongoing economic challenges. Until recently, the country experienced a period of steep economic decline following the cutbacks in coalition forces that began in 2011.[94] Between 2011 and 2014 the number of registered new firms dropped by over 50%.[95] As of late 2016, increasing regional instability hindered recovery and reconstruction efforts.[96] 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.[97, 98, 99] 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.[100]

Carpet weaver, Kaldar District, Balkh Province
Flickr/Hand in Hand International

Industries and Manufacturing

Industrial production of any significant size in Afghanistan is limited, as much of its infrastructure remains crippled by war.[101] But services and small-scale industry, such as brick and textile production, account for the bulk of Afghan GDP.[102] 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 region's deposits remain largely unexploited.[103] Additionally, illegal mining and

nonpayment of royalties limit the mining profits that make it to the treasury.[104, 105] In terms of textiles, Afghanistan is famous for its exquisite handmade rugs and carpets, which are major exports, as well as for the production of karakul, a silky wool made from the pelts of Karakul lambs.

Agriculture

USAID-funded grape-trellising project, Parwan Province Flickr/USAID Afghanistan

As they have been for centuries, farming and animal husbandry are the main sources of income for most Afghans.[106] In recent decades, droughts, prolonged conflict, and the poor state of its infrastructure have severely limited the country's 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.[107, 108, 109] Banks and aid organizations have worked to bolster the agriculture sector through education, microfinance, mine-clearing, and irrigation projects.[110, 111] 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.

Opium Drug Trade

US Marine patrolling an opium poppy field, Garmsir District, Helmand Province Flickr/ResoluteSupportMedia

In recent years, there has been a resurgence of opium poppy cultivation.[112] 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. It has also been a primary source of capital and financing for the Taliban insurgency. Afghanistan's massive opium-smuggling network is organized by the Taliban, who also levy fees on other smuggling operations, such as cigarettes.[113, 114] The opium trade, which generates revenues

that far exceed the Afghan government's entire annual operating budget, jumped 43% in 2016.[115, 116] 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 overall it is a less lucrative crop. Poppies are highly profitable in many areas of southern Afghanistan, and farmers claim the profit from poppies is 324 times the profit from wheat.[117] In the absence of an alternative livelihood for Afghan farmers, poppy cultivation remains difficult to eradicate.

Electricity

Sayedabad substation switchyard, Wardak Province Flickr/ USAID Afghanistan

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. Backup generators, found in many households, 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. However, many of the larger plants, built in the 1950s and 1960s, have fallen into disrepair.[118, 119] Existing dams currently generate only a quarter of the power used domestically.[120] The Afghan government, with assistance from the international community, is working to build additional dams, for both hydropower and irrigation.[121] In the meantime, Afghanistan continues to import 75% of its electricity from neighboring countries. As of 2016, at least two major powerline projects were underway, one from Turkmenistan through the Salang Pass to Kabul, and another larger project from Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. But such power lines have become a favorite target for the Taliban, who persistently sabotage the power supplies to cities and outlying regions.[122, 123, 124, 125]

Ethnic Groups

As a historic crossroads for diverse populations, Afghanistan is home to 40 major ethnicities who speak over 50 separate languages or dialects.[126] 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 tribe, family, and geographic region, or even occupation. 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.[127, 128]

Pashtuns

Nearly half the Afghan population is made up of Pashtuns. They are the largest, most influential, and historically most significant ethnic group in the country.[129, 130] Although they live pockets throughout the country, Pashtuns dominate a large crescent-shaped region that stretches from the western frontier, across much of the south, to the eastern highlands. Many Pashtuns also populate the nearby northwestern region of Pakistan.

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani, speaking at the London Conference on Afghanistan, December 2014 Flickr/DFID - UK Department for International Development

Afghan Pashtuns are Sunni Muslims whose social structure is based on the Pashtunwali code—a mix of a tribal code of honor and local interpretations of Islamic Law. While there are at least seven tribal subgroups, the largest confederations are the Ghilzai and the Durrani.[131] Apart from current President Ashraf Ghani, who is Ghilzai Pashtun, Afghanistan's rulers have nearly all been from the Durrani tribe.[132] 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. Pashtuns are also known as fierce warriors. The Taliban is comprised almost completely of Pashtuns—and its leaders are mostly Ghilzai Pashtuns.[133]

Tajiks

In contrast to the Pashtun, tribal identities have largely broken down among Tajiks, due to a variety of social processes.[134] The 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 occupational group for those who have migrated to a city.[135] In general, urban and plains-dwelling Tajiks are well-educated

Tajik girls in the northern village of Khwahan, Badakhshan Province Wikimedia/The U.S. Army

and work in commerce or as artisans; those living in the mountains are herdsmen and farmers.

Within Afghanistan, other Afghan groups may use the term "Tajik" to refer "de-tribalized" Afghans living in the north, or to urban Afghans.[136, 137] There is also a tendency to assume that all Dari speakers are Tajiks.[138] Often referred to as *Farsiwans*, (Persian Farsi speakers), Tajiks are well-represented in the upper-middle class, and have key positions in the NUG.[139] Roughly a quarter of all Afghans are Tajik and most are Sunni Muslims.[140, 141, 142, 143]

Other Ethnic Groups

The mountainous region of central Afghanistan is home to the Hazaras. About 9% of Afghans are Hazara, and most are Shi'a Muslims.[144] Their close cultural and religious links to Iran have at times put them at odds with Sunni Afghans. Hazaras are seasonal migrants who typically fill the lowest-level jobs in cities.[145] They claim to be descendants of Genghis Kahn's soldiers.[146]

Buzkashi players (chapandaz) in Paryan District, north-eastern Panjshir Province Flickr/ResoluteSupportMedia

Turkmen and Uzbeks occupy the greatest share of Afghanistan's arable land in the north, and are mostly farmers and herders. The Uzbeks, the largest of Afghanistan's Turkic ethnic groups, account for approximately 9% of the population. Uzbek men are considered to be the champions of *buzkashi*, a horse-mounted sport, while Uzbek women are known for making high-quality rugs.[147, 148]

Though Turkmens number only about 200,000, they are economically important; their carpets and pelts made from karakul sheep wool are among Afghanistan's most important exports. Formerly nomadic and warlike, most Turkmen today are seminomadic. The Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Turkmen share

the great plains of the north with the seminomadic Aimaq and Kyrgyz. Aimaq are herders and farmers concentrated from Herat into the mountains of Ghowr and Badghis Provinces.

A river valley in the Wakhan corridor, Badakhshan Province, northeastern Afghanistan Flickr /Hans Birger Nilsen

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. The Kyrgyz 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.[149, 150] The Nuristani also live in relative isolation in communities perched at high elevations along the river valleys south of the Wakhan Corridor, along the Pakistani border. Nuristan Province was formerly known as Kafiristan, or "Land of the Infidels," as 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.[151, 152, 153]

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, Baloch are seminomadic and famed for camel breeding.[154, 155, 156]

Languages

US Army MP, his interpreter, and a villager, Logar Province Flickr/ResoluteSupportMedia

More than 30 languages are spoken in Afghanistan. Pashto, also known as Pashtu or Pakhtu, is one of Afghanistan's two official languages. The other is Dari, or Afghan Persian, which is more widely spoken; it is the primary language of communication between speakers of different languages. Dari is especially dominant in the north and west. Both Pashto and Dari belong to the Iranian branch of the Indo-European

linguistic group, but they are not mutually understood.[157] Tajiks speak Dari, and many minority ethnic groups in the north are fluent in Dari or various related dialects.[158]

Pashto

Pashtun boys Flickr/Gustavo Montes de Oca

Pashto, an Indo-European language, is spoken primarily by Pashtuns, but not all Pashtuns speak it as their first language. Many non-Pashtun groups (particularly those in the south and southeast) are capable Pashto speakers. The language is dominant in the eastern and southern regions of Afghanistan, as well as in the northwestern region of Pakistan. In Pashtun majority areas, it may be difficult to find Dari speakers outside of educated circles. Pashto is written with a modified Arabic alphabet, and its literature is largely represented by tribal histories, folk tales, and love poems.[159, 160] Pashto gained prominence in the 20th century as the Pashtun-dominated government promoted it as the official national language.

Other Languages

Potato farmer, Bamyan Province, central highlands, Afghanistan Flickr/USAID Afghanistan

A variety of other languages are spoken among the country's many ethnic groups, including Balochi, Pashai, and the Turkic languages of Turkmen, Uzbek, and Kyrgyz. 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.[161] 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.[162] The Hazara people speak Hazaragi, a dialect of Persian, mutually intelligible with Dari. The Baloch speak Balochi, which is closely related to Dari.[163, 164, 165]

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Pashto Cultural Orientation

Chapter 1 | Profile

Assessment

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

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

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

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

5. Ethnicity continues to play a dominant role in Afghan politics.

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

An imam, or spiritual leader, reading from the Quran, Helmand Province DVIDS/US Department of Defense

Religion

Introduction

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

The area that is today western Afghanistan is regarded as a birthplace of Sufism, and

it is home to a large number of Sufis who practice this mystical form of Islam. The city of Herat and its surrounding area is a major center for Sufi practice. But Sufi groups live throughout Afghanistan, including in the Pashtun-dominated south and east.[166] The Sufis' legacy remains in Pashtun regions, as evident in song and dance.[167] Both the Sunni and Shi'a schools in Afghanistan have Sufi practitioners.

Non-Muslims comprise less than 1% of the country's population. There are small minority populations of Hindus and Sikhs, whose sites of worship are located mainly in the urban centers of Kabul, Jalalabad, and Kandahar. Through the middle of the last century, there was a small Jewish community in Afghanistan. Nearly all its members have since migrated to Israel or the United States. There are also very small Christian and Buddhist populations.[168]

Islam

Abdur Rahman Khan, Emir of Afghanistan from 1880 to 1901 Wikimedia/British India

Islam is a monotheistic religion, meaning its followers profess faith in a single God. In the Muslim community, or *ummah*, God is known as Allah. The Arabic term Islam means "to submit" or "to surrender." A Muslim, therefore, is one who submits to the will of Allah. Muslims believe that Allah revealed his message to the Prophet Muhammad, a merchant who lived in Arabia from 570 to 632 C.E. They consider Muhammad the last of a long line of prophets that included Abraham (Ibrahim), Moses (Musa), and Jesus (Esa). In this way, Muslim beliefs share some of the basic elements of the Judaic and Christian traditions. However, Muslims believe that the message relayed by Muhammad is the final and definitive revelation of the faith. This message is recited in the Quran, the sacred scriptures of Islam. Muslims regard the printed Arabic text of the Quran as holy, and desecrating a copy is a serious offense.[169] After the Quran, there are other texts sacred to Muslims. These 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.

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: 2) performing a ritual prayer five times per day; 3) giving alms (money or other assets) to the poor and needy, traditionally through a tax on income; 4) fasting during the holy month of Ramadan; and 5) making a pilgrimage to the Islamic holy city of Mecca.[170] Muslims believe in a Day of Judgement, when Allah will determine whether each individual will spend their afterlife in heaven or hell.[171]

Care and Treatment of the Quran

Afghan National Police training center graduates kissing copies of the Quran, Qalat, Zabul Province
US Government/US Air Force

Muslims regard the Quran as sacred. Treat Islam’s holy book 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 will keep Quranic texts on the highest shelf of a bookcase.) Finally, keep Qurans out of latrines. If conducted with respect, old or damaged copies may be burned. Texts should not be burned with trash or other items. Another method of disposal is burial. Before burying the text, it should be wrapped in cloth, such as linen, and then buried where people do not walk.[172, 173, 174]

Sunni and Shi’a Divide

Islam has two major branches: Sunni and Shi’a. The two sects formed shortly after the initial spread of Islam in the 7th century C.E. They divided over disagreements about the selection process for a successor, or caliph, to the Prophet Muhammad, who died in 632 C.E. The Sunni believed that Muhammad had not clearly chosen a successor. This group decided to elect the first caliph from among the leaders of the Muslim community. They chose Abu Bakr, Muhammad’s father-in-law, as the first caliph. The opposing group, later known as the Shi’a, believed that Muhammad had designated his son-in-law, Ali ibn Abi Talib, as his successor. Accordingly, they believed only Muhammad’s descendants held rightful claims to the caliphate.

The unresolved issue of rightful succession created a deep divide between the two groups, leading to infighting and the eventual assassination of Ali.[175] While the two

sects share a belief in the fundamental tenets of Islam, their split resulted in diverging practices and beliefs. Over time, several additional sects emerged. Today, Sunnis make up roughly 85% of the global Muslim community.In Afghanistan, Sunni Muslims make up 85–90% of the population, while Shi'a account for 10–15%. [176]

Overall conflicts between the Sunni and Shi'a schools of Islam have not destabilized Afghanistan. But there is a history of persecuting Shi'a Muslims, especially the Hazaras. Tensions between Sunnis and Shi'a occasionally lead to violence in central provinces, where substantial numbers of Hazaras live. Pashtuns are predominantly Sunni, and they have historically been involved in such conflicts. [177]

Sufism

Sufism is a mystical form of Islam. The basic practice is to obtain a direct, personal connection with Allah. Sufi practices include ritual prayer, meditation, and various ascetic or ecstatic activities. The central figure 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 heredity 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. [178, 179]

Sufi leader Sayyid Ahmed Gailani and US Ambassador James Cunningham at the signing of the 2014 Bilateral Security Agreement U.S. State Department

The Role of Religion in Government

Islam is the state religion of Afghanistan, and it has a strong influence on the country's government and legal system. The Afghan constitution states that "no law can be contrary to the beliefs and provisions of the sacred religion of Islam." It also requires the president and vice president of Afghanistan to be Muslim. The constitution does, however, provide freedom of religion, so long as non-Muslim religious minorities practice their faith "within the limits of the provisions of the law."[180] It also provides for an independent judiciary, but Islamic and tribal traditions remain strong, even within the formal court system.[181]

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.[182]

Emblem of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Wikimedia/Sodacan

The Taliban's years in power led to a strict interpretation and application of Islamic law.[183] Overall, because the country lacks a strong independent judiciary, it has been difficult to enforce certain provisions of the Afghan constitution, including its stated commitment to human rights.[184] Islamic and tribal traditions remain prevalent.

Influence of Religion on Daily Life

Prayer

The daily routine of Afghans is heavily influenced by Islam. 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. Muslims are called to prayer by the muezzin, who typically announces the call for prayer from the minaret of the local mosque.

Noontime prayer during a shura in Lacey village, Kunar Province Wikicommons/Public Domain

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

Exchange 1

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. On this day, 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.[185]

Cleansing

Before prayer, Muslims are required to perform a ritual cleansing, known as *wudu*. This purification process typically involves washing one's hands, face, arms, neck, and feet, as well as rinsing out the mouth and nose.[186] 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 U.S. Navy lieutenant helps an Afghan man wash his hands before an iftar dinner, Farah Province Flickr/ ResoluteSupportMedia

Religious Schools

In Afghanistan, mosques and madrassas, or Muslim schools, provide primary- and secondary-level religious studies, respectively. In 2015, there were 3,224 government-registered madrassas and "Quran learning centers," including some

for girls.[187, 188] Located mostly in Kabul, Balkh, Nangarhar, and Herat provinces, these madrassas served roughly 340,000 students. Madrassas run by the Ministry of Education are required to have 60% religious instruction and 40% general instruction. 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.[189, 190, 191]

In addition to Muslim schools, 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, who do not have separate schools, sometimes send their children to Sikh schools. There are no Christian schools in Afghanistan.[192]

First-graders and teachers at Abu Herera School, Paktika Province Flickr/ResoluteSupportMedia

Religion and Gender

In 2008, Afghan women gained the right to enter mosques in Kabul and other large cities. However, they are only allowed to attend certain mosques where they can pray in segregated spaces.[193] In general, mosques in rural communities have not yet allowed women to worship in their facilities. Traditionally, Afghan women have instead exercised their religious faith through activities related to shrines, known as *ziarats*. Women visit such shrines to pray for blessings of a protective or curative nature.[194] It is also common for women to pray at home.

Religious Events and Holidays

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

Ramadan

Ramadan (or *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.

In addition to fasting, many people perform extra prayers during Ramadan. Muslims take care to avoid any wrongdoing during this time of devotion. 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.

Prayer before iftar, here attended by Afghan dignitaries, Helmand Province Flickr/Helmand PRT Lashkar Gah

A large meal, *iftar*, is typically served after sunset to offset the strict demands of the daytime fast, which can cause fatigue and irritability. In general, the pace of everyday life slows considerably during this holy month. Non-Muslims, including foreigners, are not required to fast, but they are expected to refrain from eating, drinking, smoking, or chewing gum in public. Keep in mind that fasting can be difficult and people may become easily agitated or react more slowly.

Eid

Eid means "festival" in Arabic, and Eid al-Fitr or Eid Ramazan (The Festival of the Breaking of the Fast) marks the end of Ramadan. In Pashto, this festival is known as Kurbaneyy Akhtar. Muslims celebrate the end of the fast with a large, multiday feast with family and friends. One of the holiest days in Islam, Eid al-Adha or Eid-e-Qurban (The Festival of Sacrifice) marks the 12th month of the Islamic calendar. Pashtuns refer to this festival as Loy Akhtar, and it traditionally marks the end of the Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca, or hajj. The festival commemorates Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son in obedience to Allah. Muslim families typically slaughter a goat or sheep and divide it into three shares, giving one share to relatives and another to the poor.

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

Ashura

Ashura commemorates the martyrdom of Hussein ibn Ali, the son of Ali and grandson of Muhammad, who was killed in the Battle of Karbala in 680 C.E. amid power struggles for the caliphate. This day is recognized by all Muslims, but it is especially important to the Shi'a community. 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.[195]

Kabuli men and women at prayer on Ashura Flickr/Naseer Najwa

Hajj

Performing the hajj is one of five core duties for Muslims who are able and can afford to go. The pilgrimage ritual begins on the 7th day of Dhu al-Ḥijjah (the last month of the Islamic year) and ends five days later. If a person is unable to make the journey, he or she can appoint a relative or friend to go on the pilgrimage 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 in Saudi Arabia with subsidies from the Afghan and U.S. governments.[196, 197] Those who have made the pilgrimage may add the title *haji* to their names.[198]

Elder with the title Haji, Nawa Flickr/ResoluteSupportMedia

Buildings of Worship and Sacred Sites

Mosques

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

The Jama Masjid, also known as the Great Mosque of Herat Flickr/Jim Kelly

Shrines and Cemeteries

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

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.

Cemetary with green flags marking the graves of Afghan shahids, or those killed in civil war Flickr/Ryan Whitney

Behavior in Places of Worship

Mosques

Ziarat-e Shah Maqsud Shrine, northern Kandahar Province
Flickr / ResoluteSupportMedia

Muslims regard mosques as 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:	kawalaay sham che jomaat ta oor nanowzom?	May I enter the mosque?
Local:	ho	Yes.

Exchange 2

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

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

Exchange 3

In Afghanistan, women traditionally do not visit mosques, but 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:	majboor yam che iKhbul sar pit krim?	Do I need to cover my head?
Local:	ho	Yes.

Exchange 4

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

Kabuli men and women at prayer on Ashura, which marks the death of Hussein ibn Ali, grandson of Muhammad Flickr/Naseer Najwa

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Pashto Cultural Orientation

Chapter 2 | Religion

Assessment

1. Most Afghan Muslims are Shi'a.

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

3. Islam is Afghanistan's state religion.

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

5. Women can enter most mosques in Afghanistan.

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

An Afghan family, female members in burqas walking behind the male Flickr/Kenneth Taylor, Jr

Traditions

Introduction

Afghan traditions are deeply rooted in Islamic and tribal customs, many of which have been in practice for centuries. The term "Afghan" was originally a synonym for "Pashtun," and Pashtun culture has greatly influenced today's Afghan society. From Pashtunwali tenets woven into the current Afghan legal system, to the concept of equality as represented by the jirga, Pashtun influence is evident throughout the country.[199] Ranging from basic manners of interaction to codes of honor and responsibility, these tribal and religious traditions make Afghanistan a conservative, traditional society. Attempts at social reform have been made in Afghanistan in the modern era. In many cases, such reforms were overturned following fierce resistance

from the nation's tribal and Islamic fundamentalist factions.[200] Although attitudes vary throughout the country, such resistance to change demonstrates the strength of Afghan traditions.

The foremost priority of the Pashtun social code is the preservation of individual and family honor, which are deeply connected and valued above all else. Perceptions of character not only affect every day social relations, but also political and economic matters within the community. An Afghan's honor is directly linked to whether he or she conforms to customary views and practices. It is especially contingent on a person's adherence to the rules that enforce the clear distinction and segregation of the sexes.

Panjwai District governor greeting district elders before a local shura, Kandahar Province Flickr/ResoluteSupportMedia

Greetings and Codes of Conduct

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

Handshakes are a typical greeting between men in Afghanistan. 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.[201] This gesture should be returned. Afghans will also stand when a leader or elder enters the room.

Men greeting one another, Shakardara District of Kabul Flickr/Anna Maria Adhikari UNAMA

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

Exchange 5

It is customary to exchange a series of friendly greetings before conducting any business. Expressing concern about health and family, and making time for light conversation are important. The length of 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. Afghan men typically stand closer to one another than Westerners when communicating. Stepping back may be considered offensive.

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

Exchange 6

Titles are used to greet persons in formal situations.

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

Exchange 7

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

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

Women holding hands, a sign of friendship
Flickr/Afghanistan Matters

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

Exchange 8

Afghan men do not make physical or eye contact with women while greeting, as such contact is a serious offense. Verbal greetings may be used between men and women in some circumstances. However, it is more common for men and women to not be introduced at all, 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 as a sign of aggression. Such looks may also be interpreted as the "evil eye," which is considered extremely offensive. Members of the opposite sex do not look each other in the eye, including in some cases within the extended family.[202] Male foreigners should avoid making eye contact with Afghan women, as it could cause offense.

Rural schoolgirl breaking eye contact, a sign of modesty USAID

Right Hand vs. Left Hand

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.

U.S. Army major shaking hands with a villager
Flickr/ResoluteSupportMedia

Male-Female Interactions

Muslims, shoes removed, at the Jama Masjid of Herat
Flickr/Marius Arnesen

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

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

It is a serious offense for a man to compliment a woman on her looks or her clothing. Unless the person voicing such sentiments is also female, this type of compliment may offend the woman and her family. For the same reason, Afghan men do not welcome questions about their wives and daughters. One should ask about their family as a whole instead.

How is your family?		
Soldier:	koraney da changa da?	How is your family?
Local:	Khada, manana	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 decide over a female's life. The head of the household will make all major 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. A male Pashtun, in particular, adheres to a code of behavior that stresses honor and its defense. His dignity is defined by his ability to control and defend his property, his household, and his wife and female relatives.[203]

Afghan family, village of Chil Gazi, Balkh Province
Flickr/DVIDSHUB

Afghan women are the custodians of family honor, and their actions reflect on themselves and the family. As such, Afghan women face the contradiction between the freedoms and opportunities they have under Afghan law, and what is actually acceptable in practice. Women have the right to vote, drive, go to school, and pursue a career. But, many women continue to face severe abuse or discrimination if they do not follow traditional Islamic and tribal customs.[204] The extent to which a woman observes such traditions, either forced or freely chosen, varies according to her occupation and education, and where she lives. Regardless, veiling and seclusion are commonplace in many Afghan communities.[205]

Segregation and Seclusion

Afghan social norms and traditions require separate spaces for men and women in many aspects of daily life. Additionally, they restrict women's freedom of movement. These practices are meant to control women and to shield them from outside forces, such as tribal enemies or unfamiliar men. Male family members are responsible for protecting and supervising their female relatives, especially in public. In Afghanistan, as in many Muslim societies, the public realm is a male-dominated space, as well as a space that is prone to danger. When given permission to go out in public, women are typically required to be escorted by their male relatives.

Reclaiming Family Honor

Family honor is inseparably bound to the preservation of a woman's virginity before marriage. Even events that are beyond a woman's control, such as cases of assault, will

be viewed as bringing disgrace to her family and community.[206] In extreme instances, "honor killings" occur in Afghanistan. These killings are carried out in cases in which a woman or girl is thought to have shamed her family. Serious offenses include committing adultery, engaging in premarital sex, refusing an arranged marriage, or suffering rape. 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 in the effort.[207, 208]

Social Codes: Pashtunwali

Pashtunwali is the ancient tribal code adhered to by Pashtun peoples, especially those living in rural areas effectively beyond the reach of the central government.[209] Pashtunwali is defined by its emphasis on community consensus and local decision-making. The code outlines the social responsibilities of Pashtuns, and is traditionally the basis for local law in Pashtun communities. Within these communities, it is often associated with Islamic legal codes and traditions, even though there are contradictions between the two.[210] When Pashtunwali conflicts with stricter interpretations of Islam (Sharia), most Pashtuns will observe their traditional code of conduct, as they believe that Muslim and Pashtun are equivalent.[211] However, the Taliban, who are largely composed of Pashtuns, base their rule of law on a combination of Pashtunwali and a strict interpretation of Islam.[212] Overall, the strength of the Pashtunwali tradition varies according to region. The following are its major principles.

Shura with 180 village elders and locals, Nad-e Ali District of Helmand Province Flickr/ResoluteSupportMedia

Honor (Nang)

For Pashtuns, and the Afghan people as a whole, honor (*nang*) is the defining characteristic of an individual's self-worth and reputation within society. The Afghan concept of honor is closely related to bravery (principally in battle), self-respect, and responsibility. A Pashtun's honor is deeply connected to that of his or her family and the tribe as a whole. Under Pashtunwali, men have an absolute duty to protect

the respectability of women and to safeguard the integrity of the homeland. Honor demands maintaining sexual propriety. Complete chastity among female relatives is imperative. Without honor, a Pashtun is no longer respected or accepted. Accordingly, Pashtuns are quick to defend their honor. Insults upon a Pashtun's honor are taken extremely seriously and may be cause for violence, including murder and prolonged blood feuds between tribes.[213]

Hospitality (Melmastia)

The generous display of hospitality (*melmastia*) is one of the most important principles in the Pashtunwali code. Pashtun hospitality extends to both guests and strangers. Pashtun hosts traditionally offer food, shelter, and, in some cases, gifts to their guests. Meals prepared for guests will often be more lavish than those the Pashtun family regularly eats. A closely related Pashtunwali principle is *nanawati*. This principle requires the defense and protection of anyone during their stay with a Pashtun family. It may also involve the mediation of a dispute in which the guest may be involved. For Pashtuns, it is a great honor to provide hospitality and protection to their guests.[214]

U.S. reconstruction team members and local Afghan officials at iftar dinner, Farah, Farah Province Flickr / ResoluteSupportMedia

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

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

Afghan woman with khaal markings, a beauty sign women receive before marriage, near Charikar Flickr/DVIDSHUB

Namus is primarily tied to the protection and control of women and the preservation of their

chastity. The concept of *parda* (*purdah*), or the veiling and seclusion of women, is closely linked to *namus*, as is the general practice of segregating the sexes. Male and female Pashtuns are required to respect the established gender boundaries, and they may face shame and punishment for not doing so. In extreme cases, a man may be forced out of the community, while a woman's punishment may be far more severe.[215, 216, 217] In a very broad sense, *namus* may also refer to the protection of land or property, which is closely linked with women in some Pashtun tribes.[218]

Revenge (Badal)

Badal is revenge or retribution for insults or attacks made upon one's honor, family, or tribal assets. According to Pashtunwali, a person who violates another's *namus* is subject to punishment, generally of an equivalent nature. It is a Pashtun's duty to exact revenge when his honor has been insulted, and other Pashtuns may look down on him if he does not seek retaliation. This mandate for retribution is strong among Pashtun communities, and it has led to long-running blood feuds between tribes. However, conflict mediation and reconciliation is possible through some channels, including the jirga, or tribal council.[219]

Tribal Council (Jirga)

The jirga is a council of tribal leaders, usually composed of elder men known for their adherence to the Pashtunwali code. The jirga acts as the local legislative and judicial body and thus oversees disputes or addresses important issues within the community. In judicial matters, the council interviews those involved and considers relevant evidence. Its members reach decisions based on consensus, and the persons involved are required to abide by the council's decision. This process provides a relatively democratic and peaceful way to resolve disputes within or between tribes. However, the council's decision may override a person's individual rights, particularly in the case of women.[220]

Provincial Grand Jirga, Muqur District, Ghazni Province
Flickr/ResoluteSupportMedia

Escort (Badragga)

The concept of *badragga* is important because it applies to strangers passing through Pashtun tribal lands. *Badraggas* are armed escorts that accompany travelers (or even fugitives) on their trek through Pashtun territory. The traveler must first ask permission from the tribe and pay for the services of the *badragga*. When under the escort of a *badragga*, travelers are guaranteed safe passage. It is against Pashtunwali code for other Pashtun tribes, including enemies of the traveler, to harm the traveler when under the protection of the *badragga* of another tribe.[221]

Hospitality and Gift-Giving

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

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

Exchange 10

City elders drinking tea during a shura, Marjah, Helmand Province Flickr/ResoluteSupportMedia

The most basic form of Afghan hospitality is an invitation for tea. It is customary for Afghans to drink at least three cups of tea. While guests should accept the offered tea, they may leave it without drinking and not cause offense. When visiting an Afghan home for tea or a meal, it is appropriate to bring a small gift such as fruit or pastries.[222] Gifts are not expected, however, as it is the host's honor to provide for the guest. Guests should present any gift in a subtle way, by setting the gift aside, perhaps near the door or seating area. Such gifts will not be opened in front of the giver. When giving gifts, foreigners should respect Islamic dietary customs that prohibit Muslims from consuming pork or alcohol.[223]

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

Exchange 11

Traditional Jobs and Economy

Young shepherd with elder, Tarok Kolache village, Arghandab River Valley, Kandahar Province Flickr/ResoluteSupportMedia

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. Cows, sheep, goats, donkeys, and horses are typical breeds of livestock. The first three are especially important for milk production. Other varieties include camels, buffalo, and mules.[224] 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.

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

Exchange 12

Traditional Pastimes

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

Kite-fighting is another competitive pastime in Afghanistan. The 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, with the last kite in the sky winning. Young boys will try to capture the cut kites (kite-running).[225]

Kite fighter launching his kite Flickr/ Afghanistan Matters

Traditional Dress

Following Islamic and tribal customs, traditional Afghan dress is conservative. Afghan men generally wear loose-fitting, full-length pants and a long shirt that reaches down to their knees (*shalwar kameez*). Vests may be worn over the shirt, and it is common for men to carry a shawl-like garment on their shoulders. This piece of cloth is often used as a rug for prayer. Turbans, which consist of a long strip of cloth wrapped around the head, are customary among Pashtun men, who often leave a loose end hanging. *Pakul*, round-topped wool hats, and skullcaps are other popular forms of headgear.[226]

In public, Afghan women are often completely concealed in accordance with local custom. Many wear a blue *chadri*, an extensive, loose-fitting garment that covers the entire body. Latticework openings near the eyes allow them to see out. This piece of clothing is meant to shield women from the view of strangers. In recent years however, fewer women are wearing it. Instead, they wear baggy cotton pants and a long, loose-fitting shirt (*kameez partug* or *kaalee*).[227] A headscarf or shawl (*chador* or *saader*) is used to cover the hair and, when necessary, the face. It is not uncommon, especially in Pashtun families, to see women with tattoos on their chin, forehead, and cheeks. These green dots, or *khaal*, are considered a sign of beauty, and most women get them before marriage.

Foreigners should respect the Afghan tradition of conservative attire.

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

Exchange 13

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

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

U.S. Army combat medic and Afghan girl, Urgun District, Paktika Province Flickr/DVIDSHUB

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

Exchange 14

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.

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

Exchange 15

In general, an Afghan meal usually consists of tea, bread (*naan*), rice, and a main dish containing some type of meat, such as lamb, goat, chicken, or beef. Stews (*qorma*) are popular dishes. Afghan Muslims must ensure that their food, particularly their meat, is halal (much like kosher).

Kabobs, naan, and tea Flickr/Munir Squires

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

Exchange 16

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

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

Exchange 17

Kebabs, skewered chunks of seasoned meat, are another popular meal in Afghanistan, although they are mostly found in urban centers. They are typically accompanied by *naan* or, sometimes, vegetables. Meat dumplings, noodle soups, and lamb stews are also popular. Fruits and nuts typically complement all meals, as they are common Afghan agricultural products. Yogurt, eggs, and other animal products are also staples. Alcohol and pork are strictly avoided in accordance with Islamic tradition.[228]

Chopan kebab (lamb) being prepared
Wikicommons/Iain Cochran

Eating at an Afghan Home

An invitation for a meal is a customary form of Afghan hospitality. This will certainly occur if one is visiting an Afghan village as a guest. Meals will often be given in the village *hujra*, or guesthouse. In many cases, the host will slaughter an animal for the meal as a sign of his generous hospitality. If the guest is male, the meal will likely

be attended only by men. The women will eat separately. 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 generally direct the guest where to sit, and guests should wait for them to do so. Guests should sit cross-legged and take care not to show the soles of their feet or point them at other persons. This is considered offensive.[229] Before the meal, it is customary to wash one's hands.

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.

Qurutob, a traditional Tajik dish, eaten with the right hand from a communal plate Wikicommons/Zlerman

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

It is polite to compliment the quality of the food.

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

Exchange 18

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 that they are full. Otherwise,

the host will continue to offer food, as his honor is tied to his ability to provide for guests.

Non-Religious Holidays

Wreath-laying ceremony in honor of Afghan Independence Day Flickr/ResoluteSupportMedia

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

Will you be celebrating the festival?

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

Exchange 19

Another important holiday is *Jashn*, or Independence Day, which is celebrated on 19 August. This event commemorates Afghanistan's formal independence in 1919, when the British relinquished control over the region.[230]

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

Weddings

Afghan marriages, which are typically 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.[231, 232]

While weddings remain traditional affairs in which parents select the partners of their children, the celebrations are full of color and as lavish as budgets permit. Guests often bring their entire families. In villages, it is necessary to invite everyone or risk losing face in the community. In the cities, weddings have become 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 and the circumstances, the bride price alone can reach the equivalent of tens of thousands of U.S. dollars.[233, 234] As the wedding ceremony is an important display of social status, even poor Afghans will go to great lengths to arrange an elaborate celebration.[235]

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

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

Exchange 20

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

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

Exchange 21

Men and women generally celebrate in different rooms or banquet halls, as Islamic and tribal custom requires them to be segregated. In some tribal communities, "proof" of

the bride's virginity will be required on the wedding night; evidence to the contrary may result in a broken marriage contract.[236]

Funerals

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

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

Exchange 22

In Pashtun communities, male and female mourners are segregated at the burial site. Women often perform loud wailing as a demonstration of their grief. If related to the deceased, Pashtun women are prohibited from wearing colored clothing or jewelry for three days. After this period, widows may wear white or black. Male and female graves are marked differently. Stones are lined on men's graves from side to side, while on women's graves, they run from end to end.[237]

Cemetary overlooking Shahr-e Gholghola, Bamiyan
Flickr/Tracy Hunter

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

Exchange 23

Celebrating with Guns

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 critically injured by falling bullets, so 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.

Insurgents surrendering weapons, Badghis Province, northwestern Afghanistan Flickr/ResoluteSupportMedia

Dos and Don'ts

- **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.
- **Don't** use the OK sign; it could be taken by some 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; they consider this a rude gesture.
- **Don't** wag your finger at somebody; this is perceived as threatening.

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Chapter 3 | Traditions

Assessment

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

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

3. Female family members are considered custodians of the family's honor.

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

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

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

Overview of a section of Kabul City Flickr/Ahson Wardak

Urban Life

Introduction

While Afghanistan's population remains predominantly agrarian, rural Afghans have been relocating to urban centers in increasing numbers. In 2015, more than one in four Afghans lived in cities, reflecting a trend toward urbanization of almost 4.5% a year since 2000.[238, 239, 240] Many of these urban settlers are laborers who have migrated to the cities to escape the violence, poverty, and drought-ridden conditions that have afflicted provincial areas. But much of the urban growth has been driven by the return of over 5.8 million Afghan refugees from Pakistan and Iran since 2002.[241, 242]

Most of Afghanistan's city populations live in informal—or unplanned—settlements in or around the major cities of Kabul, Herat, Mazar-e Sharif, Jalalabad, and Kandahar.[243] They are generally a mixture of people from different ethnic and tribal groups, of which nearly a quarter are youths between 15 and 24 years old.

The Afghan capital, Kabul, has grown quickly since the fall of the Taliban in 2001, from a population of 2 million to an estimated 5 million in 2016. Twice the size of any other major Afghan city, Kabul contains 41% of the country's total urban population.[244] Security issues in urban areas, particularly in Kabul, have increased significantly. Vehicle-born improvised explosive devices are being used with greater frequency. These are a serious threat to civilians, Afghan security forces, and members of the international community.[245, 246, 247, 248]

Urban Issues

IDPs and Economic Refugees

Refugee camp in Kabul *Flickr/NATO Training Mission - Afghanistan*

Afghanistan has experienced a steady stream of returnees since 2002, when nearly 2 million Afghans returned from Iran and Pakistan after the fall of the Taliban. Many had fled during Soviet occupation 20 years earlier. Nearly half of 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, nearly half of Kabul residents live in encampments on the city's outskirts.[249]

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 have no access to clean water or healthcare and are dependent on food assistance.[250, 251, 252]

Income Gap

Afghan cities, most notably Kabul, have experienced high-end development projects since 2001. Some observers have noted that most of these projects have benefited a small class of wealthy citizens and upper-level government and military officials.[253] 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 lack of waste treatment facilities.[254] Traditional pit latrines are the most common form of sanitation, even in cities.[255] While most urban residents have access to electricity, it is irregular and unreliable.

Water well development in Kabul
DVID/US Government Public Domain

Kabul has turned into a two-tiered city. While some Afghans found well-paying jobs with international companies or NGOs (non-governmental organizations), most work for only a dollar or two a day.[256, 257, 258] Unemployment is critical and a growing concern, especially among poor urban families.[259]

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 major role in this process; they have established clinics in various locations throughout the country. Maternal, infant, and under-five mortality rates have improved, but still are far higher than international averages.[260] The country continues to face medical challenges—lack of qualified personnel, run-down facilities, lack of proper equipment, and shortages of clean drinking water and electricity.

Afghan women at a hospital in Kabul, Afghanistan
Wikimedia/Ben Barber (USAID)

In general, urban residents have access to better and more advanced medical services than those living in small towns and villages. Kabul, for example, is home to several

hospitals and multiple private clinics staffed with Western-trained medical personnel. But urban hospitals and rural clinics are targets of the Taliban and, most recently, the Islamic State militant group. Between 2015 and 2016, roughly 240 health facilities or medical staff were attacked. Moreover, 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.[261] 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?

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

Exchange 24

Is there a hospital nearby?

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

Exchange 25

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.[262]

Afghan midwife, Kabul Flickr/USAID Afghanistan

Do you know what is wrong?

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

Exchange 26

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, as the educational opportunities for children in cities depend on the financial status of their families. Children who live in squatter settlements are far less likely to be enrolled than those from families of means, typically because their families need them to work. A family's proximity to a school is also a major factor in whether children receive an education. In these cases, and many others, girls are more likely to be kept at home than boys due to cultural norms that prioritize male education.[263]

High school science teacher, Khost Province Flickr/USAID Afghanistan

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

Exchange 27

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—were attending school. While this figure represented a significant increase, some 6 million children remained out of school.[264, 265] 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.[266, 267]

Students at Aschiana School, Kabul Flickr/ ResoluteSupportMedia

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 only 7 in 2007, to 82 in 2014.[268] Many of

these are privately funded, and provide much needed 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, with the number increasing by 5–10% annually (2016).[269, 270] Cellular phone coverage reached over 80% of the country's population in 2016, although financial limitations prevented many Afghans from subscribing to it.[271]

Roshan Telecom cell tower, Daykundi Province Flickr/Institute for Money, Technology and Financial Inclusion

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

Exchange 28

The Taliban has also disrupted coverage through attacks on cell towers and nightly blackouts on cell phone service in areas that it controls.[272] It has achieved the latter by intimidating service providers—through attacks on infrastructure and personnel—to comply with its demands.[273] Fixed line services and mobile communication are best in larger cities. In rural areas, satellite phones are required for communication.

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

Exchange 29

Following a leap in the number of internet users in 2009–2010, internet access is rapidly expanding while the cost is dropping.[274] More than 4 million Afghans have access to the web as of 2016, up from an estimated 300,000 users in 2006.[275] Public internet access is available in Kabul and other larger urban centers in internet cafés and some coffee houses, although electrical outages often interrupt service.[276]

Female Afghan engineer with USAID's Afghanistan Infrastructure Rehabilitation Program Wikimedia/USAID Afghanistan

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 remain 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.[277, 278]

Construction of the Gardez-Khost National Highway linking eastern Afghanistan with the Ghulam Khan Highway in Pakistan Flickr/USAID Afghanistan

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 through the heart Afghanistan and connects many of the provincial capitals. As such, it is a frequent target for Taliban roadblocks and attacks.[279] Most of Afghanistan's major national and private airlines are designated as unsafe by the United States and various foreign entities.

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

Exchange 30

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

Exchange 31

Urban Roads

Kabul street market *Wikimedia/Scott Clarkson*

Road conditions throughout Afghanistan are hazardous. Urban roads are often in poor condition and may be unlit at night. Accidents frequently occur as many Afghan drivers are unlicensed and traffic rules are often neither obeyed nor enforced. The mixture of vehicles, pedestrians, cyclists, military convoys, and animals provides for crowded and dangerous conditions for drivers and pedestrians.[280] Continuous road work and a high volume of vehicles have created immense traffic jams in urban areas. Traffic is notoriously bad in Kabul, where there are few traffic lights, virtually no signage, and no lane demarcation.[281] 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. [282, 283]

In 2014, an estimated 700,000 vehicles were on the narrow streets of Kabul, which can only accommodate about 30,000.[284, 285] Most imported vehicles are used or salvaged and often do not meet basic safety and emissions standards, thereby contributing to pollution.[286, 287]

Taxis

Kabul streets Flickr/Ahson Wardak

Shared taxis are one of the most common forms of public transportation in Afghanistan. Service within major Afghan city limits 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 the 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 route. Extra precaution should be used when hailing cabs in Afghanistan, especially near sensitive locations like military bases. Private taxis are available for hire in some of the larger cities; passengers are expected to haggle, and foreigners may pay an "inflation" rate on top of the regular price. When entering a taxi, it is customary for women to sit in the back seat.[288, 289]

Where can I get a cab?		
Visitor:	cheree kawalaay sham che yo taksee wooneesam?	Where can I get a cab?
Local:	lahaa ghezaay na	Over there.

Exchange 32

Buses

Milli buses are the glue that holds Afghanistan together. These government-run buses and shared taxis can be found at transport depots. Milli buses don't have a fixed departure time; they leave as soon as they have collected enough passengers. Milli buses have a per-seat fare that is cheaper than any other form of transportation, but there are usually more passengers than seats. [290]

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

Exchange 33

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

Exchange 34

Restaurants and the Marketplace

Restaurants

Restaurants and teahouses are popular social venues in urban areas, although many Afghans may not have the financial means to visit them. The variety of available cuisine has expanded, especially in Kabul, where Italian, French, German, and other styles of restaurants can be found.

Food stalls specializing in kebabs are common in cities. Care should be taken when purchasing food at these stalls as conditions may be unsanitary. Again, such places are often too expensive for many Afghans to afford.[291]

Street market in Herat, a regional hub in western Afghanistan Flickr/ResoluteSupportMedia

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

Exchange 35

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

Exchange 36

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

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

U.S. reconstruction team members and local Afghan officials at iftar, Farah, Farah Province Flickr/ ResoluteSupportMedia

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

Exchange 37

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

Exchange 38

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

Exchange 39

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

Exchange 40

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

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

Exchange 41

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

Exchange 42

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

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

Afghan bank notes
Flickr/Ian Barbour

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

Exchange 43

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 open-air markets, or bazaars. Pul-e Khishti Bazaar is the main open-air market in Kabul; Chicken Street is popular for its tourist fare of carpets, carvings, knives, and antiques.

City Center Mall, Kabul Flickr/Jim Kelly

These busy markets are usually located in old city centers and districts populated by craftsmen and skilled artisans. Different regions specialize in different products.[292]

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

Exchange 44

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

Exchange 45

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

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

Exchange 46

For the most part, prices in Afghan markets are not fixed, and customers are expected to haggle over the price with the vendor. 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.

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

Exchange 47

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

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

Bazaar vendor, Kabul Flickr/ResoluteSupportMedia

Do you sell shawls?		
Visitor:	taase patkee Khar tsaawee?	Do you sell shawls?
Local:	ho	Yes.

Exchange 48

Can I buy a carpet with this much money?		
Visitor:	dee day paysoo sara kawalaay sham che yo qaaleena waKhlam?	Can I buy a carpet with this much money?
Local:	na	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:	kowalaay shee che daa paysee maa ta maayda kree?	Can you give me change for this?
Local:	na	No.

Exchange 50

Money and ATMs

Afghan bank notes: 5 Afghanis, 20 Afghanis Flickr/Erik

The main currency of Afghanistan is the Afghani (AFN). In late 2016, the AFN had an average conversion rate of USD 1 to 70 AFN.[293] Most of the Afghan economy operates on a cash-only basis, though the use of credit cards has become more common in major cities. ATMs that accept international cards can be found around Kabul, and most dispense Afghanis and U.S. dollars. However, access to banking facilities is limited and unreliable, and ATMs are not dependable, so it is a good idea to carry a small amount of cash at all times. Credit cards such as Visa and Mastercard can only be used in some establishments in larger cities, usually airline offices, travel agencies, and top-end hotels.[294, 295]

Vendors and Beggars

Due to a surging population and widespread unemployment, informal street vendors and beggars are common in urban areas. Beggars are often women (especially widows) and small children from poor, rural areas. Many who have not found work have resorted to begging or selling odds and ends on the street to support themselves and their families.

Afghan woman begging Flickr/Todd Huffman

Afghanistan's 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.[296, 297] 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 quite persistent.[298, 299]

Despite the government's efforts to crack down on begging, it remains widespread.[300]

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

Exchange 51

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

Exchange 52

Urban Crime

Violent crime, such as kidnapping, car theft, highway robbery, and drug-related violence, has become more common in city streets. In some cases, these acts are carried out by people posing as law enforcement or Afghan Army officers.[301] While Afghan cities are generally safer than rural areas, violence has increased in recent years, primarily as a result of increased insurgent activity, civil unrest, and poverty.[302] 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.[303, 304]

Suicide bomb protection outside of a building in Kabul
Flickr/Jeremy Weate

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Pashto Cultural Orientation

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Assessment

1. Nearly half of Afghanistan's urban population lives in and around Kabul.

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

3. Commuter trains are the most common form of public transportation in Afghanistan.

4. In recent years, girls have begun to outnumber boys in most schools.

5. The number of universities and higher education institutions has increased since 2009.

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

A rural road a few miles from the town of Surobi, east of Kabul Flickr/Afghanistan Matters

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 organizations. The jirga or *shura*, which is a local council, traditionally exercises authority within each community. Together with the *malik* (executive authority) and mullah (religious authority), they provide the foundation of informal political order throughout most Afghan villages.[305] 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 continues today. While rural communities remain relatively independent, they generally lack access to resources

and modern services. Services such as electricity, waste disposal, and water treatment are nonexistent in many outlying regions, especially in remote, isolated villages. Healthcare and education are often inadequate or only available at remote distances.[306] Other forms of infrastructure, such as paved roads or modern irrigation systems, are uncommon in the countryside 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 situation 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 the country have experienced heavy insurgent activity in recent years.[307, 308]

Tribal Divisions

Pashtun tribal elders in a Zambar village shura, Khost Province Flickr/ResoluteSupportMedia

Afghanistan's rural areas are often divided along tribal lines. Among the Pashtun-dominated areas, the eastern region of the country is heavily populated by the Ghilzai Pashtun tribes. The southern and western areas of the country are dominated by Durranis, who form the other major Pashtun tribe.[309] These areas are further divided among subtribes, although they also contain pockets of other ethnic and tribal factions, such as the Hazaras and Tajiks. This tradition of fragmented tribal rule has historically made it difficult for the central government to consolidate power.

Pashtuns make a distinction between two types of Pashtun tribal regions: those that are predominantly free from government control (*yaghistan*) and those that receive greater oversight from the state (*hukamat*). For the Pashtuns, these areas correspond, respectively, with the mountainous tribal regions, which are more remote and inaccessible (and thus more independent), and the plains, which are exposed to greater government influence and other external forces. In the *hukamat* areas, which extend to urban centers, Pashtuns follow more modern socioeconomic practices, such as paying taxes to the state and paying rent to wealthy landowners. On the other

hand, Pashtuns in the *yaghistan* generally do not observe these practices. A Pashtun proverb speaks to the difference between the two regions: "Honor (*nang*) ate up the mountains; taxes (*qalang*) ate up the plains." In other words, while taxes and rent may exhaust the resources of the *qalang* Pashtuns, blood feuds and inter-tribal conflicts often exhaust the resources of the *nang* Pashtuns. As the proverb suggests, Pashtuns in the *yaghistan*, or independent regions, are more likely to follow a strict interpretation of the traditional Pashtun tribal code, Pashtunwali.[310]

Rural Economy

Afghan boy washing his hands in an irrigation canal, Dubazai village, Logar Province Flickr/ResoluteSupportMedia

For centuries, most rural Afghans have subsisted as farmers and livestock herders. But only 12% of the land in Afghanistan is arable and resources are limited. Approximately 45% of the country is pastureland, which supports livestock owned by settled farmers and nomadic herders.[311, 312] Historically, the primary farming obstacle is 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 a Persian technique known as the *karez*. The *karez* consists of an underground tunnel intersected with numerous vertical shafts that open to the surface. Fed by the shafts, the underground canal collects runoff from the hillside and carries it toward the fields below. Both techniques demand frequent and labor-intensive maintenance.[313, 314]

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

Exchange 53

Prolonged conflict has left much of the country's irrigation infrastructure in disrepair. Farm and grazing lands are unsafe, as landmines and unexploded ordnance are scattered throughout the countryside. Furthermore, severe drought frequently hampers agricultural production. After the Taliban was overthrown, reconstruction teams worked to reduce crop vulnerability to drought.[315, 316] Such efforts have entailed

repairing irrigation systems and introducing drought-resistant seeds.[317] To further develop the country's agricultural sector, conventional crop farming must become more financially attractive to Afghan farmers.

Markets in Rural Areas

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

Market in the city of Gardez, Paktya Province, eastern Afghanistan Flickr/Afghanistan Matters

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

Land Ownership

Afghanistan lacks a clear and consistent national policy for registering and validating land ownership claims. This is due in large part to the population's historical reliance on informal customs and local legal systems. However, a history of unjust land distribution policies—many of which benefited the Pashtun majority—also complicates matters.[318] Property disputes are a frequent cause of conflict within or between families, villages, and tribes. Such conflicts often stoked ethnic or tribal tensions, and led to violent clashes.

Afghan farmer ploughing in preparation for cultivation, Keshem, Badakhshan Province Flickr/United Nations Photo

In the last three decades, this situation has worsened because of successive wars and repeated changes in government.[319] Political and social upheaval led to large-scale migration and routine changes in official land tenure policy. Foremost, as many Afghans were forced to flee their lands, the status of their property often became unclear. In many cases, refugees have returned to Afghanistan to find their property inhabited or redistributed without their permission, typically by those who assumed "squatter's rights" in the owner's absence.[320]

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

Exchange 54

Afghan refugees, many who had fled to Pakistan years earlier, Kabul Flickr/ResoluteSupportMedia

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 due to ethnic tensions.[321] With little help from the central government, some warring tribes rely on Taliban insurgents, who provide weapons and money, to support their feuds.[322] 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 at the expense of the less powerful. Overall, as a considerable percentage of the population remains landless, such disputes will remain a source of contention in the absence of an impartial resolution mechanism and enforceable rule of law.[323, 324]

Self-Protection and Gun Ownership

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

themselves in the absence of any rule of law. This is particularly true 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.[325] These weapons are typically rifles and older Soviet Kalashnikovs (AK-47s), but in recent years Afghans locals (and insurgents) have acquired more sophisticated assault rifles (M-16s, M-4s), machine guns, and rocket-propelled grenades.[326] In most cases, weapons are carried for self-defense, and it is not uncommon for men to arm themselves for long treks between villages.[327]

Women of the Afghan Uniform Police practicing conducting a high-risk traffic stop, Khost Province DVIDS/dvidshubnet

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

Exchange 55

Nomadic Tribes

Afghanistan is home to several nomadic or seminomadic groups, although their numbers have decreased. Traditionally, Afghan nomads are pastoralists 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

Kuchi nomads migrating with livestock Flickr/ Tracy Hunter

villagers they encounter. In the past, their migratory practices played a major role in regional trade.[328]

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

Exchange 56

Kuchi girl herding sheep outside Kandahar Flickr/43rd Sustainment Brigade Public Affairs

The Kuchi, a Pashtun group of nomads, is the largest nomadic tribe in the country. Their population is estimated at roughly 1.5 million, but the number of those who actually maintain a nomadic lifestyle may be much lower.[329, 330] Traditionally, the Kuchi moved their herds throughout the Afghan-Pakistani border region.[331] However, their way of life is compromised by a number of pressures, including war, drought, ethnic tension, environmental degradation, and changes in commerce and transportation.[332] As one Kuchi who had given up the nomadic lifestyle observed, "The grazing land is not there, trade and transportation have changed so much. Kuchis are not needed."[333] The Kuchi who remain nomadic must contend with the prevalence of landmines.

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 chronic malnutrition.[334]

Rural health clinic doctor writing a prescription, Kunar Province Flickr/ResoluteSupportMedia

Of those Afghans who have access to medical services in outlying areas, most are served

by small healthcare facilities or mobile health clinics. These facilities provide services to rural Afghans who previously had to travel long distances for treatment.

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

Exchange 57

Afghan doctor examining a young child at a health clinic in Danishmand, outside of Kabul Flickr/DFID-UK Dept for International Devleopment

But intensified conflict is causing a steady erosion of humanitarian activities.[335] 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 safer areas.[336] At the same time, an increasing number of Afghans are fleeing conflict areas and seeking refuge and treatment in cities. However, fighting and roadblocks have made it extremely difficult or impossible for many to travel, and they are left without access to healthcare of any kind. Those that are able to get to urban hospitals and clinics are faced with facilities that lack the space and staff to treat them.[337]

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

Exchange 58

Prenatal and Neonatal Care

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.[338] Nonetheless, two-thirds of all women give birth at home without the assistance of a midwife or trained medical practitioner; infant and maternal mortality in Afghanistan remains among the highest in the world.[339]

Sickness and death among new and expecting mothers is worsened by the high birth rate, early child bearing, and pregnancies at close intervals. Afghan women bear more than five children during their lifetimes, more than twice the global average.[340] In addition, estimates indicate that 60% of girls are married before the age of 16.[341] Among babies born to young mothers, stillbirths and death in the first week of life are 50% higher. Many of the babies who die succumb to preventable birth complications, including prolonged labor and infection.[342, 343]

Midwifery project in Bamiyan Flickr/USAID Afghanistan

Malnutrition and disease afflict most of the country, but rural areas are most vulnerable. In 2016, an estimated 1.8 million Afghans suffered severe, acute malnutrition, most of them children under age 5. Malnutrition causes one-third of child deaths in Afghanistan. Marginal living conditions, poor sanitation, and little access to clean water also expose Afghans to acute diarrhea, cholera, and measles.[344, 345, 346, 347, 348]

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, a student would get his education in a village *hujra,* or community room.

Afghan girls from Ali Haydar village in class outside a mosque, Paktika Province DVIDS/dvidshubnet

In rural areas today, various factors continue to contribute to low enrollment rates, especially for girls. Traditional gender stereotypes are strong in the countryside, where schooling is often reserved for boys. Poverty, disability, and lack of local schools prevent many children from getting an education. In many provinces, a major cause for low enrollment has been an increasing number of attacks on schools. There, a resurgent Taliban has used violent means to restore its restrictive policies concerning education—destroying school buildings, killing teachers, and disfiguring female students.[349] 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.[350, 351, 352] Many young men without education or job opportunities fall prey to Taliban recruitment.[353]

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

Exchange 59

Gender Roles in Rural Areas

The respective roles of Afghan men and women vary according to their socioeconomic background, location, and age. A factor in determining these roles is the extent to which the sexes are segregated, which varies from area to area. For Pashtun peoples, segregation is typically more strictly enforced by *qalang* Pashtuns (those who own land and live in the plains or urban areas) than by *nang* Pashtuns (those who live in remote, mountainous regions).[354]

Afghan tailor and child, Balkh Province Flickr/Hand in Hand International

When the sexes are thoroughly segregated, they each maintain their own spaces and duties. Women are restricted to the home, where they perform tasks such as cooking, cleaning, child-rearing, and household maintenance. They also engage in handicrafts, horticulture, crop or animal product processing, and other tasks that can be performed in the family compound. Women also manage food resources, including collecting water. Though often hidden from view and subordinate to

male family members, rural women are sharp observers and knowledgeable about goings-on in the village; within the home, they wield some influence.[355]

Men are generally responsible for ensuring the economic welfare of the family, providing protection, instilling discipline, and engaging in social, political, and financial interactions outside the home.[356] They are more likely than women to perform agricultural duties and tend to livestock, but this is not always the case. For example, in less segregated areas, women may be heavily involved in various tasks related to crop production and animal husbandry. This includes activities that take place outside the family compound, such as harvesting. Widows take on a wide range of duties because they must provide for their family.

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 in certain areas, many roads remain in a state of disrepair.[357] There were no passenger rail lines as of 2016, although two short cross-border cargo lines now connect northern cities to Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, and more were in development.[358, 359] The Amu Darya River is the only major waterway used for transport.[360] A major reconstruction goal is developing an extensive highway network linking Afghanistan's major cities—Kabul, Kandahar, Herat, and Mazar-e Sharif. Highway 1, also known as the "Ring Road," has experienced a number of setbacks due to roadblocks and bombings.[361]

USAID-funded roadwork, Gardez-Khost National Highway linking eastern Afghanistan with Pakistan's Ghulam Khan Highway Flickr/USAID Afghanistan

Rural Roads

Road conditions are particularly poor in outlying areas. Destruction to the nation's roads and bridges have left 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 been worn away by overuse or damaged by IEDs.[362] 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. 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.[363]

Road construction in Helmand Province, part of 10,000 miles of roads and highways built between 2002 and 2014 Flickr/USAID Afghanistan

Although accurate, updated maps have been published recently, 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.

Security Issues

Military convoys also share Afghan roads, and drivers should never try to pass a military vehicle; approaching with speed or driving too close may be interpreted as a threat.[364] While some roads in Kabul and other large cities are acceptable for normal sedans, a four-wheel drive vehicle is essential outside major cities. That said, driving off-road or at night is extremely dangerous.

Cargo transport vehicles, part of a combat logistics patrol, mine sweepers in front, Helmand Province Flickr/ Defence Images

Many roads are not completely cleared of landmines, and roads and highways are often newly planted with improvised explosive devices (IEDs). That, coupled with the risk of kidnapping and attacks by militants and insurgents, makes travel in all areas of Afghanistan increasingly unsafe.[365, 366] The Afghan Defense Ministry has shifted many Afghan National Defense and Security Forces from roadblocks and checkpoints to offensive operations, leading to undermanned checkpoints that have become an increasing source of casualties.[367, 368] Finally, criminal activity, particularly robbery, has become common on highways outside urban areas.[369]

Rural Leadership

Rural Afghan communities traditionally turn to local non-government groups, such as councils (jirgas or *shuras*), village leaders (*maliks* or khans), and religious leaders (mullahs or *pirs*), for legal matters, conflict resolution, and issues concerning social and economic needs. This is the basic Afghan localized system of governance. The *malik*, is selected through consultation by the community jirga or *shura*. He represents the village's needs and interests to external parties and deals with any internal matters. Very rarely do village Afghans benefit from or seek out parliament or its electoral processes. They do not believe that the central government works in the interest of ordinary Afghans, but rather, in individual political interests.

Does your leader live here?

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

Exchange 60

Shura and Jirga

In traditional Pashtun tribal areas, the jirga is the main forum for decision-making processes. 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.[370] In vilages and small towns, more than 90% of issues are solved through jirgas. In general, rural Afghans have less confidence in the formal justice system.

District Governor conducting a shura in Saidabad, Wardak Province Flickr/Defence Images

Members of a *shura* local council are elected for longer periods. During the last three decades, several kinds of *shura* could be found in each district: those for military council or community development, and others made up of religious scholars or elders.[371, 372, 373]

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

Exchange 61

Meetings with local leaders or councils often take place in the village *hujra*, or guesthouse. The *hujra* may be at the home of the village *malik* or maintained by the village as a separate building. Mosques may also be used for meetings.

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

Exchange 62

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 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.

U.S. captain speaking with the headmaster of a school in Logar Province, after donating supplies to 300 students Flickr/ResoluteSupportMedia

- **Do** remove shoes in an Afghan home.
- **Do** wear appropriate, conservative clothing; for Western women, a *chador* or *saader* (head covering) is appreciated.
- **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.

Checkpoints

Roadblocks and checkpoints controlled by the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces and random insurgent checkpoints are set up throughout Afghanistan; Afghans who travel are familiar with them.[374]

Searching for illegal drugs or weapons, vehicle checkpoint inspection, Trek Nawa, Helmand 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.

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

Exchange 63

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

Exchange 64

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

Exchange 65

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

Exchange 66

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

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

Exchange 67

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.[375] While many demining operations continue, the amount

of land known to be mine-contaminated has risen in the last three years. These areas are sometimes marked with red-painted rocks, although many hazardous areas are unmarked. The resurgent Taliban place mines and pressure-plate IEDs along main roads and highways. [376] Vehicle-borne IEDs are being used with greater frequency throughout Afghanistan, especially in the capital where they are a serious threat.[377, 378]

There is also widespread abandoned and unexploded ordnance across the country, though eastern and southern Afghanistan are the most affected areas, particularly the provinces of Helmand and Kandahar.[379] In 2014, there were 1,296 deaths due to mines, IEDs, and explosive remnants of war.[380]

Laying out minefield control markers, Bagram, Parwan Province
Flickr/Babak Fakhamzadeh

Landmine contamination has displaced Afghan communities and prevented them from farming and herding in certain areas.[381]

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

Exchange 68

Confiscated insurgent antipersonnel mines, drugs, and detonation cord, Baghran District, Helmand Province
Flickr/ResoluteSupportMedia

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Pashto Cultural Orientation

Chapter 5 | Rural Life

Assessment

1. Rural communities in Afghanistan generally lack access to public healthcare and other services.

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

3. The central Afghan government has historically lacked a strong presence in rural areas.

4. Due to extremely high maternal, infant, and under-5 mortality rates, rural health initiatives have focused on women and children.

5. Road conditions in rural areas have improved in recent years.

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

Rural well by a road, Shiring Tagab, Faryab Province Wikicommons/Didiervbergh

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 support network for Afghan people. Broad networks of families and family members support the financial and social needs of the extended family or tribe as a whole. These networks are essential in political or commercial affairs. Afghan family solidarity is strong, and nepotism is commonplace.

Because personal honor is tied to family honor, an individual's identity is tied to those 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 the assets, labor, and support of their members. In many regions of the country, it is simply not possible to subsist on one's own.

Familial and Tribal Relations

The Afghan extended family is the tribe, which is both a political and social institution. Families have a very strong sense of maintaining their honor and any perceived wrongdoing brings shame on the entire family. In this context, loyalties to family and tribe come before all other relationships. The loyalties of a Pashtun nuclear family (*koranay*) extend far beyond the walls of the home: the extended family (*kahol*), the clan (*khel*), the tribe (*qawm*), and finally the confederation of tribes in which it exists.[382, 383]

Nuristani tribal elders at an intertribal Jirga in Jalalabad, Nangarhar Province Flickr/UNAMA News

Qawms

Afghan family networks extend into larger social units based on lineage, ethnicity, tribal affiliation, location, or other shared traits or interests. This basic network of affiliations 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 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, or to a profession or other social or economic factors the group has in common.[384] 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.

Pashtun and Hazara tribal elders at a shura to discuss an unsanctioned intertribal marrriage, Uruzgan Province Flickr/ResoluteSupportMedia

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

Exchange 69

Feuds

Competition for power or resources is a frequent 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 major source of dispute in rural Afghanistan. Adult males may also disagree over who should become the family's authority figure. In particular, violent disputes between male cousins are quite common. (In Pashto, the term for hostile dislike between two persons is *tarburghanay*, which is derived from the word *tarbur*, meaning male cousin.) In any case, such conflicts may force extended families to divide into separate households.[385]

Loya Jirga in Muqur calling together locals and regional leaders, Badghis Province, western Afghanistan Flickr/ResoluteSupportMedia

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

Exchange 70

On a larger scale, a dispute between clans or tribes over resources or a breach of honor may lead to violent clashes and vendettas. Sometimes these feuds can take years to resolve.[386] Nonetheless, it is not uncommon for tribal factions to unite against an outside threat, even if they are involved in an internal feud.

Right: Elders at a shura in Gereshk, Helmand Province Flickr/ResoluteSupportMedia

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

Exchange 71

Afghan Homes

In urban areas, families may live in modern houses or apartments. Poor migrants often live in makeshift structures in city slums. In outlying areas, traditional mud-brick and stone houses predominate, although wooden structures are in some regions. The clusters of houses that make up a village are traditionally fortified with exterior walls and, in some cases, towers. Nomadic populations generally live in tents or yurts.

Earthquake-damaged homes in Badakshan Province
Flickr/USAID Afghanistan

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.[387] In families where there are multiple wives, each wife has her own room with her own belongings. A courtyard provides space for household activities and entertainment in which the entire extended family takes part.[388] 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.

Hujra (Guesthouse)

The *hujra,* or guesthouse, is significant in the life of many Pashtun families, especially in villages. The *hujra* is the essential symbol of *melmastia*, or Pashtunwali honor. It consists of a room or separate building in family compound or village where a guest is welcomed and free food and lodging is provided. A *hujra* more commonly serves as a site for male village members to receive male guests and friends. It also serves as the center of learning, music, and storytelling, and as a decision-making forum where the jirga will meet. While *hujras* exist in settled districts as well, they have lost much of

their functional importance. The mosque has replaced the *hujra* in many cases, and families who can afford it will have a guest room or drawing room instead.[389, 390, 391]

The Typical Household

Extended Family

A traditional rural Afghan household contains an extended family, usually consisting of multiple generations and may include 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, cousins and their children.[392]

Afghan children in the city of Asadabad, near the Afghan-Pakistani border, Kunar Province
Flickr/ResoluteSupportMedia

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 may also be grouped within extended family settings. Younger members of wealthy families are more likely to move out and start their own households.[393]

How many people live in this house?

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

Exchange 72

Polygamy

In some cases, an Afghan man will have multiple wives. (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 provided him with a son. In other instances, a man will marry a second wife of his choosing after marrying the first in an arranged marriage, or he will marry a young woman in the hopes of producing more children.[394] According to Islamic law,

the husband must treat the wives equally.[395] The practice of taking more than one wife, however, has become less common over the last 20 years.

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

Exchange 73

Widows

With large numbers of Afghan men killed in conflict, widows are common in Afghanistan. In 2016, the number of Afghan widows was estimated at over 2 million.[396] 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."[397] 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.[398]

Widow and her son begging in the street, Kabul
Flickr/Jeremy Weate

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

Exchange 74

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. In an effort to combat this trend, Western aid organizations have targeted these women, helping them by offering literacy classes and job skills training.[399]

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

Exchange 75

As women are often restricted to the home, men act as the family's representatives in the public sphere. In urban areas, this involves working a paid job. In rural areas, men often perform 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. Child-rearing, caring for the family, and the many tasks involved in operating the household are women's primary responsibilities. In some cases, women 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.[400]

Pashtun man thumbing tasbih prayer beads, Arghandab River Valley near Kandahar 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, with marriage between cousins being a preferred practice among many Afghans. (Such an arrangement keeps resources within the family.) Marriage is also used to build alliances.[401] Arranged marriages involving minors remain common, despite laws that prohibit girls younger than 15 from marrying.[402, 403] This is especially true in villages, where marriages are often arranged to settle tribal disputes or debts between families (*baad*).[404] Grooms are usually older than their brides; in some cases, they may be significantly older.

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

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, men can divorce their wives simply by declaring their intent to dissolve the union three times; consent of the wife is not required. Men may suffer some financial loss, as they are expected to return the bride price that was given to the wife as part of the marriage contract. This does not always take place.[405]

Officially, women can initiate divorce for various reasons, but this occurs less frequently because the effects of separation are often damaging for them. Both men and women involved in a divorce will likely suffer social censure. But the outcome can have 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 women to remarry, especially if they are older and unable to produce 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.[406]

Women in blue chadri and child, Herat Flickr/ Marius Arnesen

Birth

USAID-trained midwife handing newborn to mother
USAID/USAID.gov

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.[407] This is to ensure that 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, after the Muslim tradition. Urban Afghans usually have a baby shower; in rural areas, this may be celebrated simply. The Muslim rite of passage for male children is circumcision. Most Afghan boys are circumcised between the ages of two and five, and the event marks the beginning of a boy's life as an adult.[408, 409]

Baby Afghan boy recovering after mother gave birth via emergency cesarean section *Flickr/ResoluteSupportMedia*

Children are valued as a source of social security in Afghanistan, and the average Afghan woman has five children.[410] Large families ensure that some children will survive to provide for its elderly members. Because many Afghan women lack access to proper medical care, childbirth can be dangerous. Afghanistan has one of the world's highest maternal mortality rates. In 2015, nearly 40% of women died during pregnancy or childbirth.[411] Views on shame and honor contribute to the high mortality rate. To address the shortage of trained female doctors in outlying areas, the Afghan government has launched a program to train more midwives throughout the country.[412]

Superstition

It is a common belief in Afghanistan that one should not admire or compliment someone's children or a loved one, unless you use the expression *mashallah* ("what God has willed"). 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 also recite a *surah* (chapter) from the Quran to ward this off.

In rural areas, Afghans blend Muslim beliefs with superstitions that predate Islam. Women and children often wear protective charms or *tawiz* amulets; cowives may wear wolf claws to promote harmony.[413] Some talismans are hung in homes. Many Afghans also believe in good and bad 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.[414, 415, 416]

Life Stages

Status of the Elderly

The elderly are well-respected and cared for by their children and grandchildren, and they maintain important roles within the family throughout old age. For example, elderly women often help raise the family's young children, and they are frequently in charge of allocating food resources.[417] Overall, older members have authority over younger ones, with the eldest male having authority over the family as a whole.

Afghan villager and girl reading the Koran, southern Afghanistan DVIDS/dvidshubnet

Status of Children

Children are highly valued but boys have a much higher status than girls. This is due to several reasons. Foremost, 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.[418] 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?		
Soldier:	daa staasee kochneeyaan dee?	Are these your children?
Local:	ho	Yes.

Exchange 76

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 however, 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.

Pregnant woman and child, Naw Abad village Flickr/ResoluteSupportMedia

Date of Birth

As a result of the displacement and confusion Afghans experienced during the wars of the last 30 years, many do not have a record of their actual birth date. As a result, they may not know the day they were 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.[419]

Naming Conventions

Afghans usually use only a first name and lack a middle or last name. Instead they are often distinguished 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 Ahmad Youness. The less common name is considered the proper name—in this case, Youness. In formal situations, Afghans are identified by their first name(s) and their father's name. For example, Ahmad Youness walade Muhammad Moqim

translates to Ahmad Youness son of Muhammad Moqim. Ahmad Youness is the first name, and *walade* means "son of."

Herati boys working as baggage handlers, Herat International Airport Flickr/Jim Kelly

Within the family and larger community, family members, particularly women, are sometimes referred to using 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." It is also considered polite to address older men as *baaba* (father) or *kakaa* (uncle). Honorific titles are given to those who have earned it, and it is important to address such men with their honorific titles, such as Ghazi (military rank), Kahn (leadership position), or Mullah (religious position), as in Mullah Mohamad Omar.[420]

For Pashtuns, first names are often the names of valued objects or qualities, such as Batoor, one of many male names meaning "brave," or Sarbaz, which means "eagle." For girls, names such as Ranrha, meaning "light," or Gulalai, which means "beautiful," are popular. Last names are often Pashtun tribal names.[421]

Today, using a family name is becoming more popular among Afghans who have traveled abroad or have had contact with international visitors.[422] Some are using their tribe's name as their family name. Foreigners should be aware of possible spelling variations when transliterating names from Pashto to English. A name spelled differently on two documents may nonetheless refer to the same person.

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Pashto Cultural Orientation

Chapter 6 | Family Life

Assessment

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

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

3. A typical Afghan household consists of a husband, wife, and their children.

4. Marriages are often arranged to build alliances between families or settle tribal disputes.

5. Divorce is common in Afghanistan.

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

Further Readings and Resources

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Final Assessment

1. Pashtuns dominate the eastern and southern regions of Afghanistan.

2. Pashtuns form the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan.

3. The Afghan state was founded by a Pashtun leader in the 18th century.

4. Most Pashtuns are Shi'a Muslims.

5. Shi'a Muslims in Afghanistan have avoided persecution by their Sunni neighbors.

6. Islam is the state religion of Afghanistan.

7. Pashtun beliefs prohibit men from belonging to Sufi groups.

8. Afghan families are patriarchal.

9. Displays of affection, such as kissing on the cheek, are only appropriate between members of the same sex.

10. Roughly 80% of Afghan marriages are arranged.

11. Since the fall of the Taliban, millions of girls who were previously barred from education are now attending school.

12. Less than 10% of all Afghans live in urban areas.

13. Many urban Afghans now have access to primary healthcare, such as vaccinations.

14. In Afghanistan, only about one-tenth of the land can be used as pastureland.

15. In rural areas, the ancient tribal code of Pashtunwali is still closely followed.

16. In recent years, the large number of Afghan refugees returning to Afghanistan has contributed to job growth.

17. To get a divorce, Afghan men must gain permission from the local mullah.

18. Feuds are a common occurrence among Pashtuns.

19. Afghan custom restricts a man from having more than one wife.

20. An Afghan's network of affiliations is known as his *qawm*.

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