

Afghanistan 101

A Brief Introduction to History, Language, and Culture

Harris 2018

To Keep In Mind...



“The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story.” - Chimamanda Adichie

Source: https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story

Where is Afghanistan?

- Asia
- Bordered by Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan
- The people are NOT Arabs.
- Considered the “Middle East” by Americans.



Photo Source: <https://www.worldatlas.com/webimage/countrys/asia/af.htm>

Geography & Climate

- Mountainous terrain
- Areas of fertile land as well as desert areas
- Dry climate
- Hot summers, cold winters



Photo Source: http://www.afghanistan.no/English/Afghanistan/Geography_and_climate/index.html

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Why & How are Afghans coming to the United States?

- Most Afghans are here on SIVs (Special Immigrant Visas) after working with U.S. Forces or the U.S. Embassy in Afghanistan
- Safety at risk because they worked with U.S.
- They consider themselves refugees as they flee from the war in Afghanistan.
- No One Left Behind helps obtain SIVs for Afghans and helps them get set up in the U.S. with an apartment, basic furnishings, medical care, school enrollment, and sometimes a car



Photo Source: <http://nooneleft.org/who-we-are/>

History of Foreign Power in Afghanistan

- Long ago, under control of the Persian empire
- Afghanistan has been its own nation since 1747.
- Proximity to India leads to positioning for power by Great Britain and Russia.
- Two Anglo-Afghan wars from 1838-1842 and 1878-1881
- Britain again tries to gain control after World War I, and loses.
- In 1964 a constitutional monarchy is established.
- The monarchy is overthrown in 1978 and a new regime along communist lines is established
- Soviet occupation 1979-1989 - in the span of 10 years many guerilla groups fight against Soviet control

History of Conflict in Afghanistan

- Seven guerilla groups join together to fight Soviet control - become infamously known as the Mujaheddin
- Conflict between the Mujaheddin and the Soviets cause 2 million refugees to flee the country to Pakistan and Iran.
- In 1992 the Soviets lose power to the Mujaheddin. An Islamic state is immediately declared. Guerilla fighting continues and 75% of the population flees the capital of Kabul.
- The Taliban emerges in 1994 and gains strength. They impose sharia (Islamic) law and deny women many rights. In early 2000 the Taliban become more and more extreme in Islamic fundamentalism and develop contacts with Al-Qaeda.

The "War in Afghanistan"

- The 2001 Al-Qaeda terrorist attacks on the United States changed the course of history again for Afghanistan. Taliban leadership refuses to give up Osama Bin-Laden and Al-Qaeda, and so begins the "War on Terror."
- The United States bombing wipes out many Al-Qaeda bases across the country, with many civilian casualties.
- 2003-2005 NATO sets up security in the country and presidential and parliamentary elections are held; Taliban resurgence
- 2010 Total 150,000 international troops in the country
- In the past fifteen years, terrorist insurgencies have continued to wreak havoc across the country (by the Taliban and more recently, ISIS)
- Today, the Taliban and ISIS (ISKP is the Afghani branch) are both threats to the safety and stability of the country. These terrorist groups are being fought by both the Afghan government and U.S. troops.

The ethnic breakdown of Afghanistan...

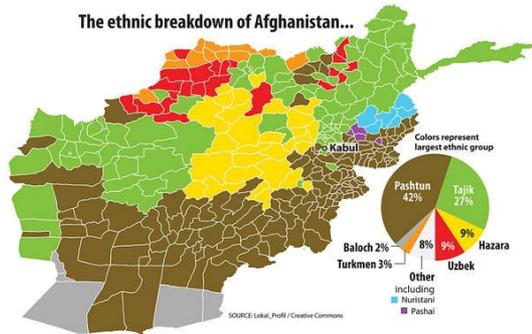


Photo Sources:

- <https://chellaney.net/2013/03/01/afghanistans-partition-might-be-unpreventable/>
- <http://pashtunsociety.cfsites.org/custom.php?pageid=35100>
- <http://www.hazarapeople.com/2012/11/12/sinless-death/>

Major Ethnic Groups in Afghanistan

- Pashtun are the majority ethnic group; in southern Afghanistan (Pashto)
 - 42% of the population
 - Have held power as the majority ethnic group for many years
 - Made up of many tribes
 - Way of life is ruled by Pashtunwali - unwritten ethical/honor code
 - Follow the Sunni sect of Islam
- Tajiks are along the northern border (Dari)
 - 27% Tajik
 - Originally from Iran and Tajikistan
 - Follow the Sunni sect of Islam
- Hazaras are in the central highlands (Hazaragi)
 - About 10% of the population
 - Said to be descendants of Genghis Khan
 - Follow the Shia sect of Islam, and some belong to the even smaller Ismaili sect

Ethnic Relationships

- The Taliban was made up of many Pashtuns, and gave preference to Pashtuns during their regime. The Taliban denied rights and international aid to Tajiks and Hazaras, and this caused ethnic tension.
- Ethnic ranking/prejudice: Pashtun at the top, Tajik below, and Hazara as a social outcast/low caste in society
- Lighter skin and "European" facial profile is highly valued

Languages in Afghanistan

- Two official languages (Pashto and Dari)
- Dari is sometimes called "Afghan Persian"
- Dari and Farsi/Persian are dialectically different in the same way as American and British English are.



- For translation purposes, "Persian" or "Farsi" is understood by almost all Afghani immigrants here

Photo Source: <https://ouwbmmsa.wordpress.com/2015/06/23/surah-an-nisa-ayah-86/>

Dari-English Language Transfer

- Dari uses Arabic script but is read/pronounced differently
- Dari script reads right to left

خ ح ج ث ت ب ا

- 2 additional consonant sounds that are not present in English*
- Dari has 6 vowels and 3 diphthongs (all present in English)
- No initial consonant clusters (i.e., pronouncing school as eskool)
- “Th” “W” and “ing” are sounds that don’t exist in Dari
- Difficulty differentiating between long E and short I
- Difficulty differentiating between “oo” and short u

Photo Source: <http://www.joaleitao.com/names-arabic/arabic-alphabet-abc/>

Dari Grammar and Syntax

- There is no true equivalent to the word “the” in Dari; this may cause difficulty
- Plural suffixes -ha and -an, similar to adding -s in English
 - Pesar (boy) pesaran (boys)
- When a cardinal numeral precedes a noun, the noun stays singular
 - Du ketab (two book)
- Third person singular has the same pronoun in Dari, so many confuse he/she
- In Dari, adjectives follow the noun instead of precede it (as in English)
- In Dari verbs are usually at the end of the sentence, and everything else, including adverbs, come before the verb.

Phrases in Dari

Salam. **Hello.**

Chitoristi? Hubasti? **How are you?**

Ma Hoobastam. **I'm good.**

Ha. **Yes.** Nei. **No.**

Ta Shakur. **Thank you.**

Khoodafis. **Goodbye.**

Ob. **Water.**

Tashnab. **Bathroom.**

Bishi. **Sit down.**

Lutfan. **Please.**

Bislar Hub. **Good Job.**

Mactab. **School.**

Days of the Week

Shambay: **Saturday**

Yak Shambay: **Sunday**

Du Shambay: **Monday**

Say Shambay: **Tuesday**

Char Shambay: **Wednesday**

Panj Shambay: **Thursday**

Jama: **Friday**

Numbers

Yak: **One** Du: **Two**

Say: **Three** Char: **Four**

Panj: **Five** Shash: **Six**

Haft: **Seven** Hasht: **Eight**

Nu: **Nine** Da: **Ten**

Yaz Da: **Eleven**

Doraz Da: **Twelve**

History of Education in Afghanistan

- Originally, education was up to each family individually - some chose to pay for their children's education by sending them away to a school elsewhere, paying for a private tutor, or religious education. Some chose not to educate.
- Free/public mandatory education has only existed in Afghanistan since 1969.
- During Soviet rule, the Soviets tried to build up the education system, but when they left Afghanistan the education infrastructure fell apart.
- During Taliban rule, boys received religious education and girls were forbidden from receiving any education at all.

Education Today

- Education today has risen significantly from past numbers, but there are still many barriers to children attending school, including safety, funding, and cultural norm. Quality of education is an issue as well. Classrooms may be underfunded, without adequate supplies, and there is a lack of qualified teachers.
- Most children start school at age 7
- 12 grades in school
- Pre-K and Kindergarten are not compulsory; 9 years of compulsory education
- Private and government schools - private is better quality but not free
- English classes offered in high school
- Classes in both Pashto and Dari
- Parents may seem uninvolved compared to American parents, but the laid-back style of trusting teachers to take care of education is a cultural norm

Interrupted Education

- 30 years of war have devastated Afghanistan's education system
- Many students stop attending school for safety reasons.
- Students arriving from Afghanistan may have limited or interrupted formal education, but don't make assumptions - each family's experience is different.
- Middle and upper class families sometimes pay for English tutors.
- Afghans who lived outside the country (often in Pakistan, India, or Iran) may also have a differing educational experience, or interrupted education from moving around.

Trauma

- Families have almost 30 years of experiencing violence and civil war
- Parents of our students have suffered from loss of family members from Mujaheddin, Taliban, and ISIS
- Extremely high fear of rape and violence against women
- Students may be familiar with violence and talk about war at a young age
- Mental health issues/therapy are commonly taboo - grief is accepted but explicitly expressing feelings of depression or trauma are not
- Faith in God and support from family and friends are coping tools
- Survivor's guilt may exist with the families that are here in the U.S. while their families are left behind in Afghanistan

Religion

- Islam
- Majority Sunni
- Minority Shia (Hazara/Tajik)
- Some but not all women wear hijab
- No pork
- Prayer 5 times daily
- Ramadan (fasting)



Photo Source: <https://pjmedia.com/blog/is-islam-a-religion/>

Gender/Familial Roles

- Traditional gender roles still exist .
- Some people are more progressive in terms of gender equality.
- Girls are expected to help with housework at home.
- Boys are more valued and have more freedom.
- Gender expectations may depend on educational level.
- Marriage may be arranged or a love match
- Kids go to bed when parents do, no bedtime



Photo Source:
<https://www.intelligentfaith.com/morning-glory-evening-grace/2016/08/gender-roles-dilemma.html>

Traditional Dress

- Men wear western dress as well as traditional Afghani dress.
- Traditional dress for men is called peraan wa tunban.
- Women wear modest pants and tops. All women wear hijab outside the home.
- In rural regions women may wear full covering of the burka (and in some cases city dwellers as well). This was required under Taliban rule.



Photo Sources:
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Clothing_worn_by_most_Pashtun_males.jpg
<http://www.afgclassics.com/shop/ladies/afghan-dresses.html>

Afghani Food

- Kabuli Palow - seasoned rice with carrots and raisins
- Chicken, beef, goat, sheep
- Yogurt
- Chips (fries)
- Potatoes, beans
- Naan bread
- Dates, raisins, nuts
- Green or black tea



Photo Source:
<http://www.whats4eats.com/grains/kabuli-pulao-recipe>

