

Afghanistan



Location	Afghanistan is part of Southern Asia. It borders Pakistan to the east, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan to the north, and Iran to the west. The capital city of Afghanistan is Kabul. Map: https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/af.html
Climate	Afghanistan is semi-arid to arid, with cold winters (lows around minus ten degrees) and hot summers (highs around 30 degrees). Earthquakes, droughts and flooding frequently occur.
Geography	Afghanistan is slightly smaller than Alberta and has tall, snowy mountains that rise in the northeast. Dry plains spread across the northwest and southwest. ¹
Government	Since its creation in 1747, Afghanistan has changed hands from local kings, to foreign powers to authoritarian regimes. It became independent in 1919, but was invaded by the Soviet Union from 1979-1989. The Taliban, an Islamist militia group, took over the country in the mid-1990s. Following the attacks on September 11, 2001, a US-led mission resulted in the replacement of the Taliban with a democratically elected government. However, internal divisions and war continue to destabilize the country.
Environment	Current environmental issues in Afghanistan include: A lack of fresh water and clean drinking water, soil erosion, deforestation, desertification (areas becoming more desert-like), endangered species and pollution.
Economy	After decades of conflict, Afghanistan's economy remains weak and unstable. It has improved since the fall of the Taliban in 2001. However, the country is still very poor, and highly dependent on international aid and agriculture.
People	Afghanistan contains multiple ethnic groups that speak many different languages. Its population reached nearly 33 million people in 2015, with an average life expectancy of 50.87 years. ² Afghans face an intermediate risk of major infectious diseases like hepatitis and typhoid fever. Water shortages, poor health care, unemployment and violent conflict make daily life extremely difficult for many Afghans.
Novels <i>The Breadwinner</i> by D. Ellis; <i>Wanting Mor</i> by R Khan	Under the Taliban, Afghan women lost most of their rights and freedoms, including the right to work, attend school and university, travel without male companions and express themselves. Although these rules are no longer in place, women still fear punishment from Taliban supporters. Afghan children also face considerable challenges to their human rights. One in five children die before their fifth birthday (primarily from easily preventable diseases), five million do not attend school (three million of whom are girls) and most are not registered with the government (leaving them unprotected by law). ³ Anti-government groups have used children to carry out suicide attacks, plant explosives and carry ammunition. ⁴
Issue Rights of women and children	

1 The Central Intelligence Agency World Factbook, "Afghanistan," available from <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/af.html>

2 The Central Intelligence Agency World Factbook.

3 The United Nations Children's Fund, "Unicef calls for comprehensive Child Act in Afghanistan," available from http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/media_56977.html.

4 The Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, "Developments in Afghanistan," available from <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/countries/afghanistan/>