

Afghanistan

Country name	Afghanistan
State title	Islamic Republic of Afghanistan ¹
Name of citizen	Afghan
National official languages	Persian (Dari) (<i>prs</i>); Pashto (<i>pus</i>)
Country name in official language	Afghānistān (<i>prs</i> and <i>pus</i>) ^{2, 3}
State title in official language	Jumhūrī-ye Islāmī-ye Afghānistān (<i>prs</i>) Dê Afghānistān Islāmī Jumhūrīyat (<i>pus</i>)
Writing system	Perso-Arabic script
Romanization System	National system for Afghanistan
ISO-3166 code (alpha-2/alpha-3)	AF/AFG
Capital (English conventional name)	Kabul
Capital in official language	کابل (Kābul)
Population / Area	41,128,771 ⁴ / 652,860km ²

Introduction

Afghanistan is landlocked and mountainous, neighbouring China, Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. It has seen a prolonged period of great instability and conflict over more than 40 years.

¹ There has been some mention of the regime replacing this title with Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. HMG continues to use Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.

² ISO 639-3 codes are given for languages mentioned in this Factfile.

³ These are romanizations according to the BGN/PCGN romanization systems for Persian (Dari) and Pashto respectively. Note, though, that as described in *Policy* and *Languages*, the policy for names within the country is to apply the national romanization system for Afghanistan. The 'Afghan' romanization for the state title is Jumhūrī-ye Islāmī-ye Afghānistān (matching the Dari (*prs*)). The '-ye' here indicates the relational suffix (*izāfah*). The *izāfah* is used to connect and can appear between e.g. two nouns, or a noun and adjective, and is commonly occurring in geographical names between a generic term and a specific. Simplistically, *izāfah* is romanized -e or -ye after consonant or vowel, respectively. For more complete guidance see the [romanization system](#).

⁴ UN data as of 2022.

Geographical names policy

PCGN policy for geographical names in Afghanistan is to apply the [BGN/PCGN national romanization system for Afghanistan](#) to official Perso-Arabic script place names. This system and policy acknowledge the 'Afghan' character of many geographical names, sometimes comprising features of different languages (see more in *Languages*, below). Such apparently hybrid linguistic forms are treated by the national system⁵ to retain features of both Dari and Pashto if they so appear in a single name. This policy was developed from 2001 when military engagement underlined the requirement for the previous policy to be reconsidered.

The national romanization system can be applied either as a conversion tool from the Roman script that appears on Fairchild Aerial Surveys mapping, which was produced in the 1960s and until 2001 was certainly the most complete and accurate available mapping across the country, or as a romanization system from native script.

The US [Geographic Names Server](#) is a good source of names in Afghanistan, and UK and US government produced mapping (post 2008) is also a good source.

PCGN has written a great deal on geographical names policy for Afghanistan, on both the pre-2001 policy and the evolution from 2001 to the development and implementation of the currently applied romanization policy. For further specific or in-depth detail, please contact PCGN.

Languages

Afghan Persian (also known as Dari) (*prs*) (spoken by some 77% of Afghanistan's population) and Pashto (*pus*) (48%) are both official languages across the country. Other minority languages include: Uzbek (*uzb*) 11%, Turkmen (*tuk*) 3%, and Urdu (*urd*) 3%. Dari, which broadly is spoken as a first language in the northwest of the country⁶, serves as the inter-ethnic *lingua franca*.

People

Current, reliable statistical data on ethnicity in Afghanistan is not available: Afghanistan's 2004 Constitution cited over 10 ethnicities of which Pashtun, Tajik, and Hazara were the most numerous.

Romanization

The national romanization system for Afghanistan developed and agreed by BGN and PCGN accommodates the linguistic complexity of Afghanistan as manifest in its geographical names, considering the names as 'Afghan', rather than treating them as either Persian (Dari) or Pashto and romanizing them according to these two separate romanization systems. Names themselves sometimes contain features of more than one language, and usually exist in only one form so that

⁵ This 'national' approach follows the style employed on the 1960s Fairchild Aerial Surveys mapping which uses the 'Yaghoubi' system of romanization. It is a native official system designed to reflect Afghan names, both Dari and Pashto.

⁶ Pashto primarily being the first language in the east and south.

their treatment as either Dari or Pashto (or both) would be to create an incorrect spelling or spurious name⁷.

If they should be required, BGN and PCGN also have romanization systems for Persian (Dari) (available on request) and [Pashto](#) respectively.

Inventory of characters (and their Unicode encodings⁸)

The BGN/PCGN national romanization system for Afghanistan contains the following special characters in addition to the unmodified letters of the basic Roman script.

Upper-case characters	Unicode encoding	Lower-case characters	Unicode encoding
‘	2018	’	2019
Ā	0100	ā	0101
Á	00C1	á	00E1
Ď	0044+0031	ď	0064+00031
Ē	0112	ē	0113
Ê	00CA	ê	00EA
Ĥ	1E28	ĥ	1E29
Ī	012A	ī	012B
Ŋ	1E48	ŋ	1E49
Ō	014C	ō	014D
Ŕ	0052+0031	ŗ	0072+0031
Ş	015E	ş	015F
Š	0053+0304	š	0073+0304
Sh	0053+035F+0068	sh	0073+035F+0068
Ţ	0054+0031	ţ	0074+0031
Ț	0162	ț	0163
Ū	016A	ū	016B
Ẓ	005A+0327	ẓ	007A+0327
Ẓ	005A+0304	ẓ	007A+0304
Ẓ	005A+0331	ẓ	007A+0331
Zh	005A+0048+035F	zh	007A+0068+035F

For those characters for which there is no single encoding, the combined forms have been shown, e.g. S plus combining macron to give Š.

For those digraphs with a double underline, e.g. sh, the display in many fonts is inadequate or missing, so a different font has been used to display these correctly in the table above. Please contact PCGN for further guidance on the display of these characters.

⁷ To illustrate, the pre-2001 US/UK ‘dual language’ policy led to a request for Dari names, meaning that names such as Spīn Ghar (lit. ‘white mountain’ in Pashto) were ‘translated’ to become Kūh-e Sefīd in Dari, a name that would never be used in practice.

⁸ See www.unicode.org

Administrative structure

Afghanistan is divided into 34 provinces (*wilāyat*) at the first-order (ADM1) level. Provinces are sub-divided into districts at ADM2 level: for further information on these, please contact PCGN.

Administrative division (ADM1)	Administrative division (Perso-Arabic script)	ISO 3166-2 code	Administrative centre (romanization)	Administrative centre (Perso-Arabic script)	Location of centre
Badakhshān	بدخشان	AF-BDS	Faīzābād	فیض آباد	37°07′00″N 70°34′48″E
Bādghīs	بادغیس	AF-BDG	Qal’ah-ye Now	قلعه نو	34°59′14″N 63°07′44″E
Baghlān	بغلان	AF-BGL	Pul-e Khumrī	پل خمری	35°56′40″N 68°42′54″E
Balkh	بلخ	AF-BAL	Mazār-e Sharīf	مزار شریف	36°42′33″N 67°06′39″E
Bāmyān	بامیان	AF-BAM	Bāmyān	بامیان	34°49′18″N 67°49′38″E
Dāykundī	دایکندی	AF-DAY	Nīlī	نیلی	33°43′18″N 66°07′49″E
Farāh	فراه	AF-FRA	Farāh	فراه	32°22′28″N 62°06′59″E
Fāryāb	فاریاب	AF-FYB	Maīmanah	میمنه	35°55′17″N 64°47′03″E
Ghaznī	غزنی	AF-GHA	Ghaznī	غزنی	33°33′03″N 68°25′21″E
Ghōr	غور	AF-GHO	Fayrōz Kōh ⁹	فیروز کوه	34°31′10″N 65°15′03″E
Helmand	هلمند	AF-HEL	Lashkar Gāh	لشکر گاه	31°35′38″N 64°22′18″E
Herāt	هرات	AF-HER	Herāt	هرات	34°20′53″N 62°11′59″E
Jowzjān	جوزجان	AF-JOW	Shibirghān	شبرغان	36°40′03″N 65°45′10″E
Kandahār	کندهار	AF-KAN	Kandahār	کندهار	31°36′48″N 65°42′36″E
Kāpīsā	کاپیسا	AF-KAP	Maḥmūd-e Rāqī	محمود راقی	35°00′59″N 69°20′40″E
Khōst	خوست	AF-KHO	Khōst	خوست	33°20′22″N 69°55′13″E
Kunar	کنړ	AF-KNR	Asadābād	اسد آباد	34°52′23″N 71°08′49″E

⁹ Chaghcharān was renamed Fayrōz Kōh in 2014.

TOPONYMIC FACTFILE

Kunduz	کندز	AF-KDZ	Kunduz	کندز	36°43'44"N 68°51'25"E
Kābul	کابل	AF-KAB	Kābul	کابل	34°31'00"N 69°11'00"E
Laghmān	لغمان	AF-LAG	Mehtar Lām	مهنتر لام	34°40'17"N 70°12'34"E
Lōgar	لوگر	AF-LOG	Pul-e 'Alam	پل علم	33°59'43"N 69°01'22"E
Nangarhār	ننگرهار	AF-NAN	Jalālābād	جلال آباد	34°25'35"N 70°27'06"E
Nīmrōz	نیمروز	AF-NIM	Zaranj	زرنج	30°58'00"N 61°53'00"E
Nūristān	نورستان	AF-NUR	Pārūn	پارون	35°25'14"N 70°55'21"E
Paktikā	پکتیکا	AF-PKA	Sharan	شرن	33°10'32"N 68°43'50"E
Paktiyā	پکتیا	AF-PIA	Gardēz	گردېز	33°35'51"N 69°13'33"E
Panjshayr	پنجشیر	AF-PAN	Bāzārak	بازارک	35°18'47"N 69°30'55"E
Parwān	پروان	AF-PAR	Chārīkār	چاریکار	35°01'00"N 69°10'26"E
Samangān	سمنگان	AF-SAM	Aībak	ایبک	36°15'53"N 68°00'56"E
Sar-e Pul	سر پل	AF-SAR	Sar-e Pul	سر پل	36°12'56"N 65°55'57"E
Takhār	تخار	AF-TAK	Tāluqān	تالقان	36°44'03"N 69°32'01"E
Uruzgān	اروزگان	AF-URU	Tarīn Kōṭ	ترین کوټ	32°37'36"N 65°52'24"E
Wardak	وردک	AF-WAR	Maīdān Shahr	میدان شهر	34°23'44"N 68°51'58"E
Zābul	زابل	AF-ZAB	Qalāt	قلات	32°06'21"N 66°54'30"E

Other Significant Locations

PCGN Approved Name ¹⁰	Name in Afghanistan (and Afghan romanization)	Conventional Name	Location	Feature Type
Amu Darya	امو دریا (Amū Daryā)	Amu Darya (classical name: Oxus)	44°06'30"N 59°40'52"E	River (Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan)
Arghandāb Rōd	ارغنداب رود (Arghandāb Rōd)	-	31°26'53"N 64°23'12"E	River
Helmand or Helmand Rōd	هلمند رود (Helmand Rōd)	Helmand River	30°48'40"N 46°23'13"E	River (Afghanistan, Iran)
Hindu Kush	هندو کش (Hindū Kush)	Hindu Kush	35°00'00"N 71°00'00"E	Mountain range (Afghanistan, Pakistan, Tajikistan)
Band-e Kajakī	بند کجکی (Band-e Kajakī)	Kajaki Dam	32°19'19"N 65°07'08"E	Dam
Khyber Pass	کوئل خیبر (Kōtal-e Khaībar)	Khyber Pass	34°07'20"N 71°05'37"E	Pass (Afghanistan, Pakistan)
Noshaq	نوشاخ (Nōshākh)	Noshaq	36°26'05"N 71°50'23"E	Afghanistan's tallest mountain (7492m) (Afghanistan, Pakistan)
Spīn Ghar	سپین غر (Spīn Ghar)	-	33°59'15"N 70°22'23"E	Mountains
Tōrah Bōrah	توره بوره (Tōrah Bōrah)	Tora Bora	34°07'12"N 70°12'50"E	Area/Cave complex
Wākhān or Wakhan Corridor	واخان (Wākhān)	Wakhan Corridor	37°08'32"N 73°04'00"E	Geographical region (Afghanistan's panhandle)

¹⁰ PCGN recommends use of conventional names for international features where they exist. If there is no conventional name, then the relevant name can be shown on the appropriate side of the international boundary on cartographic products.



Map produced by PCGN for illustrative purposes only, and is not to be taken necessarily as representing the views of the UK government on boundaries or political status.

Useful references

- BBC Country Profile: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-12011352>
- CIA World Factbook: [Afghanistan - The World Factbook \(cia.gov\)](https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/docs/afghanistan.html)
- Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) Travel Advice: <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice>
- Historical and Political Gazetteer of Afghanistan, (6 vols), Ludwig Adamec, 1980
- International Organization for Standardization (ISO): www.iso.org
- ISO Online Browsing Platform (OBP): <https://www.iso.org/obp/ui>
- Languages: <https://www.ethnologue.com/>, www.omniglot.com
- Unicode Consortium: www.unicode.org
- US Board on Geographic Names Server: [Geographic Names Server](https://geographic-names.usgs.gov/)

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