



Module 6.

Central Asia

This module introduces you to central Asia and the OSCE's work in:

- Kazakhstan
- Turkmenistan
- Uzbekistan
- Kyrgyzstan
- Tajikistan

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CHAPTER 1

Overview



Central Asia

There are OSCE missions in each of these five independent republics of Central Asia:

- Kazakhstan
- Turkmenistan
- Uzbekistan
- Kyrgyzstan
- Tajikistan

Borders, politics and geography

All these republics are modern creations. Soviet officials brought them into existence as union republics of the USSR in the 1920s and 1930s, drawing the boundaries between them to correspond roughly with the pattern of ethnic settlement. These boundaries do not correspond either to natural or to traditional cultural divisions, nor do they correspond to the borders of states that existed before the Soviet period.

Natural divisions

Central Asia has four basic natural landscapes:

- Northern Kazakhstan is steppe—that is, open grassland. Further south, the steppe gradually turns into semi-desert scrub and finally into desert.
- Desert covers most of Turkmenistan and much of Uzbekistan and southern Kazakhstan.
- The fertile areas of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and southern Kazakhstan are saved from the desert by being close to large rivers, the Syr Darya, the Amu Darya, or the Zeravshan, or a big canal such as the Kara Kum Canal in southern Turkmenistan. One such area is the Fergana Valley, which extends from eastern Uzbekistan into northern Tajikistan and southwestern Kyrgyzstan.
- To the east and southeast, mountains occupy most of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan as well as the southeastern fringes of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.





A silt filled Amu Darya river, Uzbekistan (Kimberley Bulkley)



Snow on the mountains in Naryn, Kyrgyzstan (Kimberley Bulkley)

Cultural divisions

Nomadic or Settled Cultures

The oldest division was between the nomadic herders of the steppe and desert and the settled farmers and city-dwellers of the river valleys and oases. Nomads traveled with their livestock—sheep, goats, cattle, horses, and camels—in search of water and new pasture. (In addition, there was a third intermediate way of life. Many mountain dwellers migrated between high summer pastures and protected winter pastures at lower altitudes.)

Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, and Turkmen were traditionally nomadic, while Tajiks were settled. Uzbeks were

also originally nomadic, but have been settled since the 16th century.

Turkic and Persian influences

A second old division is that between people of Turkic origin and language and people belonging to Persian culture. All the languages of Central Asia belong to the Turkic family except for Tajik, which is close to Persian.



*A sheep herder's yurt in the Kyzyl Kum desert in Uzbekistan
(Kimberley Bulkley)*

Russian and European impact

The 19th and 20th centuries brought Russian and European cultural influences into Central Asia. This gave rise to new divisions within each ethnic group. Those who have been deeply affected by European culture are divided from those who remain loyal to tradition, while those attached to European culture in its Russian-Soviet form are divided from those more influenced by the West. So far the Russian language has retained its position as the main common language used in inter-ethnic communication, but it is being studied and spoken decreasingly by youth.

States before the Soviet period

The nomadic peoples had tribal leaders, but they did not have states in the modern sense. However, the core area of Central Asia, the land along and between the Syr Darya and the Amu Darya Rivers that used to be called [Transoxiana](#), is home to an ancient civilization that has known many kingdoms and empires. These states were generally based on dynastic loyalty, not ethnic identity.

Khiva, Bukhara, and Kokand

In the period preceding the Russian conquest, there were three states, ruled from the cities of [Khiva, Bukhara, and Kokand](#). Although all these cities are situated in present-day Uzbekistan, the territories controlled by the states straddled the borders of neighboring states.

When Czarist Russia conquered these parts of Central Asia in the 19th century, the [Khivan Khanate](#) and the [Bukharan Emirate](#) were left in place as Russian protectorates. Only the [Kokand Khanate](#) was destroyed (in 1876). The Khivan Khanate and the Bukharan Emirate were abolished in the early 1920s, when the Soviet regime redrew the map of Central Asia to the pattern it still has today.

The impact of "national delimitation"

This Soviet redrawing of the map, known as the process of "national delimitation," involved two kinds of decisions. First, it had to be decided which ethnic groups would receive a union republic, and which would get only an autonomous republic. However, this designation was somewhat artificial, since people in the region did not possess ethnic identities as understood today.

At the initial stage, Soviet ethnographers created Kazakh, Turkmen, and Uzbek union republics, and several autonomous republics: they were designated for the Kyrgyz within the RSFSR (Russia), the Tajiks within Uzbekistan, and the [Karakalpaks](#) within Kazakhstan and later Uzbekistan. The Tajik autonomous republic was upgraded to a union republic in 1929, followed by the Kyrgyz autonomous republic in 1936, while the [Karakalpaks](#) never got a union republic of their own.

Borders roughly fixed along ethnic settlement lines

Second, the borders between the new republics had to be fixed. This was done in a way that corresponded roughly with settlement and based on linguistic and cultural commonalities. It was impossible to make the correspondence exact because of the region's diversity and lack of ethnic identity. In some cases, people were given a group label but placed in the "wrong" republic. For example, the mixed Uzbek-Tajik areas in south-central and southeastern Uzbekistan remained within Uzbekistan even though they included [Bukhara](#) and [Samarkand](#), the traditional centers of Tajik culture. Many Tajiks argue that this is why the Tajiks failed to develop a cohesive national identity, which might have saved them from the tragedy of civil war. Over several generations, people began internalizing the national identities imposed by the Soviet system.

Inter-ethnic tensions

In several other places—southern Kazakhstan, eastern Turkmenistan, northern Tajikistan, and southwestern Kyrgyzstan—substantial Uzbek populations remained outside Uzbekistan. In



southwestern Kyrgyzstan, a [conflict over land between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks exploded in 1990](#) into large-scale ethnic violence (reoccurring in 2010). By establishing political units on a mono-ethnic basis in a region where various peoples have historically lived side by side, the Soviet process of national delimitation sowed the seeds of today's inter-ethnic tensions.



International organizations

Central Asian states belong to many international organizations that promote cooperation in the economic, security, and other spheres. Membership or participation in these organizations provide the Central Asian countries opportunities to foster bilateral and multilateral relations with a number of countries:

- The United Nations provides links with all countries. In addition, the UN Regional Center for Preventive Diplomacy based in Ashgabat (Turkmenistan) provides a structure for limited regional activities.
- The OSCE links the Central Asian countries to Europe, the U.S. and Canada.
- The Partnership for Peace provides links with NATO.
- The CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) and its associated groupings—in particular, the Eurasian Economic Community and the Collective Security Treaty Organization—provide links with Russia and other post-Soviet states.
- The Shanghai Cooperation Organization links Central Asian states except Turkmenistan with China and Russia.
- The Economic Cooperation Organization provides links with Azerbaijan, Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan.
- The Inter-State Coordinating Commission for Water Resources links the Central Asian states with each other.

Security links primarily with Russia and NATO

Some Central Asian states rely on Russian assistance in border defense, and participate in the CIS air defense system.

At the same time, they receive assistance from NATO in reforming, equipping, and training their armed forces. Initially, a joint Kazakh-Uzbek-Kyrgyz peacekeeping battalion, known as [CENTRASBAT](#), was trained within the framework of NATO's Partnership for Peace program. Unit elements took part in annual exercises during 1996-2002. Since then, the three states have preferred to focus on training of their forces alone.

The Central Asian states have provided use of their airspace and facilities for logistical support to U.S. forces in Afghanistan. The Northern Distribution Network's various routes were moving 40% of NATO material and 85% of its fuel to Afghanistan by 2011. The Network is likely to be a primary route for the eventual withdrawal of NATO equipment as well.

A few Central Asian countries also have security ties with China.



Caspian Oil

In the 1990s, substantial new oil deposits were discovered under the Caspian Sea.

Oil extraction

Oil extraction is most advanced in two parts of the sea:

- The area near the port of Atyrau, Kazakhstan in the northeastern part of the Caspian
- The area east of Baku, Azerbaijan, in the southwestern part of the Caspian

Oil extraction is also being developed off the Caspian coasts of Russia and Turkmenistan—although gas is more important for Turkmenistan.

Two disputes

Disputes of two kinds have arisen among the countries involved in developing Caspian oil.

- One dispute concerns whether and how the Caspian seabed should be divided up among the five coastal states—Russia, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, and Iran.
- The other dispute concerns the routes to be used to get the oil out for sale on the world market.

Disputes over the southern seabed

The main dispute is between Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and Iran over division of the southern part of the seabed. Both Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan lay claim to some oilfields situated midway between their coasts. Iran and Azerbaijan have an ongoing dispute over their offshore borders. In July 2001, an Iranian gunboat challenged two Azerbaijani vessels surveying for oil in the contested area.

In 2003, Russia, Azerbaijan, and Kazakhstan signed an agreement on the division of the northern and central parts of the seabed. This covered about 64% of the seabed.

The leaders of the five Caspian littoral states attended a summit meeting in Tehran in 2007, but failed to make progress in resolving the outstanding border and legal issues dividing them.

The littoral states met again in Baku in 2010 to discuss Caspian Sea issues. They could not resolve the dispute over who owns what oil.

In 2011, Caspian Sea region officials met in Moscow. Participants formed a working group to draft a convention on the legal status of the Caspian Sea. Russia, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan signed an agreement on demarcation of the northern part of the sea. These countries—the ‘Caspian coalition’—advocate that seabed borders be an equal distance from the coastal countries’ territories. This would give Kazakhstan 30% share, and Russia, Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan – about 19% each, and Iran – 14%. Such a solution is the most favorable to the ‘Caspian coalition’ states.

Iran is a vocal opponent of the proposal. Iran, having consistently insisted that the Caspian is a



lake, claims to possess an equal share (20%) of the seabed. This would require Azerbaijan to transfer 1/3 of its Caspian sea territory to Iran, which is totally unacceptable to Baku. One month prior to the Moscow meeting, Iran announced that it had made its first oil discovery in the Caspian Sea in more than 100 years, breaking a 2001 agreement with Azerbaijan not to develop resources in the Caspian Sea until demarcation issues were settled.

The latest flare-ups between Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan took place in 2012. Turkmenistan announced plans to start geographic sampling at one of the oil fields in dispute. Azerbaijan asserted that this violated a bilateral agreement that banned work in the field until the ownership issue was resolved. Subsequently, an Azeri patrol boat stopped a Turkmen vessel it claimed was carrying out scientific work in another part of the Caspian.



Getting the oil out

The northern export route

In the Soviet period, oil from Azerbaijan was pumped to Russia via Chechnya (Baku to Grozny, then further northwest). In the post-Soviet period, some pipelines have been extended and new ones have been constructed. A section of pipeline bypassing Chechnya was added, so that Russia's oil supply would no longer be hostage to events in Chechnya. A new section west to the port of Novorossiysk on the Black Sea coast was also completed, enabling Russia to export oil from Azerbaijan. A connecting east-west link from Kazakhstan enables Russia to export Tengiz oil from Atyrau (Kazakhstan) out of Novorossiysk as well. From Novorossiysk tankers can ship the oil across the Black Sea, through the straits (the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles) into the Mediterranean Sea, and then either through the Straits of Gibraltar into the Atlantic Ocean or through the Suez Canal to the Red Sea and Indian Ocean.

Development of southern alternative export routes

Meanwhile, the West heavily promoted alternative export routes further to the south that did not go through Russia. A pipeline from Baku through Tbilisi to Supsa, a port on Georgia's Black Sea coast, has been in use for several years. In 2005, a pipeline carrying oil from Baku, through Tbilisi, to Turkey's Mediterranean coast at Ceyhan, was inaugurated. Kazakhstan is considering providing access to the southern route for its oil, either by tanker or by building an underwater pipeline to Baku from the new Caspian port of Kuryk.

Alternative export route farther south

A third alternative exists to routes through Russia and through Georgia. A pipeline could be built even further south to connect the oil fields in Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan to Turkey through Iran. This might make sense from the economic point of view, but reliance on Iran has been strongly opposed by the United States.

Economic and geopolitical rivalry

The choice between the northern export route through Novorossiysk and the southern route through Supsa and, now, Ceyhan has been the object of economic and geopolitical rivalry between Russia and the West.

Energy summits seek to reduce Russian leverage

The presidents of Azerbaijan, Georgia, Ukraine, Poland, and the three Baltic states, and officials from other European and Caspian region governments, the EU and the U.S., met in Kyiv for a summit on energy security, in 2008. It was the third in a series of summits of this group, seeking ways to reduce Russian leverage on the energy security of the European countries involved.

In early 2010 the Georgian Prime Minister called together key countries to discuss the options for European countries to decrease their dependence on Russia regarding oil. Although the presidents of Ukraine, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland did not attend, the summit went forward. No binding decisions were made but much of the discussion centered on the Nabucco project (Turkey to Austria pipeline project).



Meanwhile, Turkey confirmed in 2012 that it hopes to add Turkmen gas to the planned TANAP pipeline. A deal would see the Turkish project revitalizing the EU's "southern corridor" plan to feed Caspian gas to Europe while bypassing Russia. The pipeline route will be agreed by Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan without contradicting the political status of the sea.

Alternate gas export projects

Turkey confirmed in 2012 that it hopes to add Turkmen gas to the planned (Trans-Anatolian gas pipeline (TANAP). A deal would see the Turkish project revitalizing the EU's "southern corridor" plan to feed Caspian gas to Europe while bypassing Russia. The pipeline route would be acceptable to Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan without contradicting the political status of the sea. native Central Asian gas export routes.

There is also a proposal developed by the Asian Development Bank to build a Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipeline to export Turkmen gas through Afghanistan to India and Pakistan. The project still must attract commercial partners to finance it.



Over-fishing and pollution

Long before oil or gas was found beneath the seabed, the sea was a rich source of fish and caviar. These resources have been severely depleted by over-fishing. Pollution from oil development poses new risks. Leaks from underwater pipelines would be especially harmful to the Caspian ecosystem.

In 2003, the five coastal states concluded the Framework Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment, the purpose of which is to prevent, reduce, and control pollution of the Caspian Sea.

In 2006, the UN banned trade on wild caviar in order to save the endangered Caspian sturgeon. The ban was lifted in 2007, despite opposition from conservation groups.

The Caspian Summit in Baku in 2010 brought this issue back into focus. The Summit participants decided to institute a ban on fishing within three months, which would last five years to enable sturgeon to repopulate.

In 2012 Kazakhstan proposed that the Caspian Sea be divided into five territorial and fishing zones, one for each littoral state, and to have a common zone open to all five states.



Water

Central Asia needs water even more than it needs oil. Water, like oil, is an important source of competition and conflict.

Why is the Aral Sea drying up?

The largest body of water in Central Asia—the fourth largest inland body of water in the world—used to be the Aral Sea. But the Aral Sea has been drying up.

The cotton monoculture used up so much water that the rivers almost dried up before reaching the Aral Sea. Since 1960, the Aral Sea has received so little water that it has lost 80% of its volume. All that remains of the original sea are a few shallow stretches, surrounded by the exposed seabed. The wind lifts the dry dust of the seabed— which contains poisonous fertilizer and pesticide residue—and carries it in immense quantities over long distances, ruining the health and livelihood of people living in its path.

At various places on the exposed seabed one can see "ship graveyards" of what were once the fishing fleets of bustling ports.

Kazakhstan completed a 7-mile-long dam in 2007 to enclose a northern section of the sea, which it hopes will be preserved by inflow from the Syr Darya. A second dam is scheduled. The southern half of the sea controlled by Uzbekistan will then dry up completely unless it takes steps of its own.



July - September, 1989

August 12, 2003

Aral Sea, 1989 (left) and 2003 (right) (NASA)



An old fishing vessel in what used to be the Port at Moynak, Karakalpakstan, Uzbekistan (Kimberley Bulkley)

The anthrax threat

The drying up of the Aral Sea posed a threat of the spread of spores from anthrax buried on Vozrozhdeniya island where the Soviet military tested biological weapons. In 2002, through a project organized by the United States in cooperation with Uzbekistan, 10 [anthrax](#) burial sites were decontaminated. According to the [Kazakh Scientific Center for Quarantine and Zoonotic Infections](#), all burial sites of anthrax were decontaminated. Vozrozhdeniya (Rebirth) island, due to the receding sea waters, is today no longer an island.

Water sources

Central Asia gets almost all its water from the mountains on the region's eastern flank. In Kyrgyzstan, southeastern Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Afghanistan abundant rainfall, thawing snowfields and huge glaciers feed the streams that flow into the two great rivers, the Syr Darya and the Amu Darya. These rivers and their tributaries flow west across southern Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan, and previously emptied into the Aral Sea. Now the inflow from the Syr Darya is much reduced, while the Amu Darya no longer reaches the sea at all.

Network of irrigation canals support cotton monoculture

The Aral Sea receives only whatever water is left after evaporation, seepage, and human consumption. The biggest use of water continues to be irrigation for the cultivation of cotton. Soviet central planners had focused the region on producing cotton, neglecting other branches of agriculture.

Mountain glaciers melting as a result of global warming

In the years since the Central Asian states became independent, the river flow has increased a little. This is partly because the area under cotton has been somewhat reduced, but the main reason appears to be that the mountain glaciers have begun to melt as a result of global warming. That means that the relief is temporary. When the glaciers melt away, less water than ever will be flowing through the rivers of Central Asia.

Conflicts over water

Efforts have been made to improve the joint management of the region's water. In 1992 the five Central Asian countries set up the Interstate Coordinating Commission for Water Resources. The World Bank, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the European Union, and OSCE also provided assistance.

In 2006, the OSCE, in cooperation with the Geneva-based UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and the Bangkok-based UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) worked with Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan to establish the Chu-Talas River Commission. The joint project implements a bilateral agreement, where Kazakhstan has agreed to pay part of the operating and maintenance expenses for a number of Kyrgyz dams and reservoirs that supply water to both countries. It is hoped that Kazakh-Kyrgyz cooperation can be duplicated and applied to other trans-boundary river basins in Central Asia and thereby increase the all-around capacity of the region to meet its water needs.

Nevertheless, disputes over the use of water have caused tensions both between and within the various countries:

- Kazakhstan complains that Uzbekistan is not leaving enough water in the Syr Darya River to meet the needs of southern Kazakhstan.
- Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan disagree over when water should be released from Kyrgyzstan's Toktogul reservoir. Kyrgyzstan wants to release water in the winter to provide hydroelectric power for heating, while Uzbekistan wants water in the summer for irrigation.
- Water-short Uzbekistan wants more water from water-surplus states Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan.
- Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan disagree over Turkmenistan's plan to divert Amu Darya waters to a large artificial lake outside Ashgabat.
- The Karakalpaks of western Uzbekistan, who live closest to the Aral seabed and have been affected the worst by the drying up of the sea, resent the upstream users who deprive them of the water they need.





CHAPTER 2

Kazakhstan



Geography

Item	Description
Area	1.05 million square miles
Natural resources	Petroleum, natural gas, coal, iron ore, manganese, chrome ore, nickel, cobalt, copper, molybdenum, lead, zinc, bauxite, gold, uranium.



People

Item	Description
Population	17.5 million (July 2012 est.)
Ethnic groups	Kazakh 63.1%, Russian 23.7%, Uzbek 2.8%, Uighur 1.4%, Tatar 1.3%, German 1.1%, other 4.5% (1999 census)
Religions	Muslim 47%, Russian Orthodox 44%, Protestant 2%, other 7%
Languages	Kazakh, Russian



Government

Item	Description
Capital	Astana
System of government	Republic. Authoritarian presidential rule.
Head of state	Nursultan A. Nazarbayev
Currency	Tenge



Before Russian rule

Nomadic tribes calling themselves Kazakhs first appeared on the steppes of present-day Kazakhstan during the 15th century. According to their own folk tradition, the Kazakhs descend from a legendary founding father called Alash.

Islamic Missionaries

Over the centuries, missionaries from the Muslim civilization of Transoxiana brought Islam to the steppe nomads. By the time the Kazakhs took shape as an ethnic group, they were nominally Muslim, though still under the influence of their old animistic beliefs, centered on the cult of [the sky god Tengri](#).

Kazakh tribes were ruled by Khans

A loose network of tribal leaders called khans, nobles or sultans, who claimed descent from Genghis Khan, ruled the Kazakh tribes. In the 16th century the tribes split up into the three Juz each led by its own khans. Each Juz moved within a distinct geographical zone—the Senior Juz in the southeast, the Junior Juz in the northwest, and between the two, the Middle Juz.

Jungar raids

In the mid-17th century, a nomadic Mongol people from the east called [Jungars](#) began raiding Kazakh lands. In the early 18th century, the Jungars occupied much of the Syr Darya basin. Divided among themselves, the [Kazakh khans](#) failed to repel the invasion, and appealed to Russia for protection. Although Chinese armies defeated the Jungars in the 1750s, bringing southeastern Kazakh lands for a few years under the Chinese empire, the Kazakhs were exposed to increasing Russian pressure. In the first half of the 19th century, Russia annexed the Kazakhs' lands and did away with their khans.



Under Russian and Soviet rule

The inflow of settlers from other parts of the Russian Empire deprived the Kazakhs of much pastureland, making it increasingly difficult to sustain the nomadic way of life. Industry, and especially mining, developed. Russian and European culture began to influence Kazakh society. A new Kazakh literature and intelligentsia appeared. The first Kazakh writer of modern times was the *jadid* or "enlightener" [Shokan Valikhanov](#) (1835-65).

1916-1920

In 1916, during World War I, Czarist forces suppressed an uprising against conscription. Thousands of Kazakhs fled with their livestock to China. In the wake of the Russian Revolution, a Kazakh nationalist movement called [Alash Orda](#) (named after Alash) proclaimed a short-lived independent republic. Civil war continued until 1920, when the Kazakh lands were brought under the firm control of Soviet Russia.

Kazakh SSR

The Soviet regime at first gave the Kazakhs an autonomous republic within Russia. It was not until 1936 that the Kazakh Autonomous Republic became the [Kazakh SSR](#) (Soviet Socialist Republic.)



The flag of the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic

Soviet repression

Between 1929 and 1932, Stalin forced the Kazakhs to give up the nomadic life and join collective farms. Many resisted and were imprisoned or shot. Famine ensued. Many more refugees fled to China. In the course of the 1930s, over 40% of Kazakhs died from starvation, epidemics, and executions.

Inflow of Non-Kazakhs

In their place came millions of non-Kazakhs. Stalin used Kazakhstan as the destination for deported Russian and Ukrainian kulaks (well-to-do peasants) as well as for peoples he deported during the Second World War—Chechens, ethnic Germans from the Volga region, and Koreans from the Russian Far East. Later, at the time of Khrushchev's Virgin Lands' campaign, a new wave of Russian-speaking migrants came to cultivate the Kazakh steppe. The share of Kazakhs in the population fell from 57% in 1926 to 30% in 1959.

Kazakhstan used for nuclear and chemical weapons testing

A nuclear weapons test site was set up near [Semipalatinsk](#), with dire effects on the health of the local inhabitants. Semipalatinsk (now called the National Nuclear Center of Kazakhstan) was the site of 456 nuclear tests - 116 atmospheric and 340 underground - from 1949 to 1989. The regions high frequency of diseases, now affecting a third generation, is primarily due to fallout. Chemical weapons were tested near the River Emba in western Kazakhstan.

One of the Soviet Union's two space centers (cosmodromes) was built at Baikonur in southern Kazakhstan.



From Perestroika to independence

In December 1986, Gorbachev replaced [Dinmukhamed Kunayev](#), party boss in Kazakhstan throughout the Brezhnev period, with [Gennady Kolbin](#). While Gorbachev was right in viewing him as corrupt, Kunayev was popular among Kazakhs as a Kazakh leader who cautiously promoted Kazakh culture and placed Kazakhs in many important posts. The appointment of Kolbin, an ethnic Russian with no previous connection to Kazakhstan, angered Kazakhs and set off [demonstrations and riots](#) in Almaty and other cities. The unrest was suppressed, with at least 200 deaths, and political liberalization in Kazakhstan was halted.

Nursultan Nazarbayev

The situation began to change in 1989. In June, [Nursultan Nazarbayev](#), Kazakhstan's Prime Minister since 1984 and a Kazakh replaced Kolbin.

In August, a law was passed making Kazakh the state language. Independent political organizations developed. The largest was the [Nevada-Semipalatinsk movement for nuclear disarmament](#), initiated by the Kazakh writer [Olzhas Suleimenov](#). This movement achieved its goal of closing down the Semipalatinsk testing site.

Kazakhstan declares independence

Unlike other Soviet republics, Kazakhstan did not declare independence immediately after the collapse of the hard-line coup in Moscow in August 1991. Nazarbayev hoped that the Soviet Union might still be saved. Only when Gorbachev resigned in December did Kazakhstan declare itself independent. In presidential elections held the same month, Nazarbayev stood unopposed and was elected by an overwhelming majority.



Domestic politics

While there remains some scope for independent political activity in Kazakhstan, the country has gradually evolved into a presidential dictatorship. The first post-independence parliament was dissolved in 1993, and for the next two years Nazarbayev held unlimited power.

Only after the adoption by referendum in [1995 of a new constitution](#) that greatly increased the president's powers was a new parliament elected. The same referendum extended Nazarbayev's term in office to 2000.

Media acquired by President's daughter

In 1997, Nazarbayev's control over the media was tightened. The President's son-in-law Rakhat Aliev gained control over the popular newspaper Karavan. [Dariga Nazarbayeva](#), the President's daughter, had already acquired much of the country's media. The remaining independent (mainly print) media began to suffer harassment and intimidation. Journalists who exposed top-level corruption involving oil money were arrested on doubtful charges.

Restrictive provisions in a [draft media law](#) aroused international concern. Nazarbayev signed a law tightening government control over the media in 2006.

Political opposition

Opposition parties that are not considered capable of winning power, such as the [Communist Party of Kazakhstan](#) (CPK), are tolerated. However, action is taken to block the activity of parties that are thought to pose a serious challenge to Nazarbayev, such as the [Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan](#) and the [Republican People's Party of Kazakhstan](#) (RPPK) of former Prime Minister [Akezhan Kazhegeldin](#). Unknown assailants have beaten opposition leaders. The [law on political parties passed in 2002](#) set such high requirements for parties' participation in elections that few parties can satisfy them.

1999 presidential elections

Presidential elections finally took place in January 1999. Nazarbayev won 81% of the vote. His sole opponent, Serikbolsyn Abdildin of the CPK, got 12%. Former Prime Minister Akezhan Kazhegeldin was not allowed to run, and was later charged with corruption during his time in office. Although he took refuge abroad, he was tried in his absence in 2001 and found guilty. The OSCE expressed doubts concerning the fairness of the trial and the impartiality of the court.

1999 parliamentary elections

The pro-presidential [Otan \(Fatherland\) Republican Party](#) came in first in the 1999 parliamentary elections with 31% of the vote, and the CPK second with 18%.

Only two non-communist opposition parties were allowed to take part: the Azamat Democratic Party, which received 5% of the vote, and the Kazakh nationalist party Alash, which received 3%. Neither was able to enter parliament, for which a minimum of 7% was required.

The OSCE, which opened a "centre" in Almaty in 1999, commented that the election was far from meeting international standards but was nonetheless "a step toward democracy."



2004 parliamentary elections

Pro-presidential parties won a strong majority in the elections for the Mazhilis (lower house of parliament). The pro-presidential Otan won 43 seats, the newer pro-presidential Asar four seats, and the pro-presidential AIST bloc of the Civic and Agrarian Parties 11 seats. The moderate opposition party Ak Zhol won one seat. Seventeen independents also won election to the 77-member Mazhilis. The OSCE saw some improvements over past elections, but the electoral process fell short of OSCE commitments and international standards.

Ak Zhol party leader [Altynbek Sarsenbaev](#) was given a ministerial post in Nazarbayev's government but resigned it, as well as his parliamentary seat, to protest alleged fraud in the elections. Ak Zhol did not fill its seat in parliament until 2006.

Nazarbayev's daughter Dariga had less political success. Her [Asar party](#) fared poorly in the 2004 elections. She led a merger of the Asar and Otan Parties in 2006, signaling her continuing ambitions.

2005 presidential election

In August 2005, the Constitutional Council resolved a dispute on the scheduling of the presidential election and ordered it held in December. Five candidates were officially registered, including former parliamentary chairman and head of the opposition bloc [For a Just Kazakhstan](#), [Zharmakhan Tuyakbai](#) (who broke with the ruling party after the 2004 parliamentary elections) and [Ak Zhol](#) leader, [Alikhan Baimenov](#).

The Constitutional Council also overruled a law proposed by parliament aimed at tightening restrictions on the activities of nongovernmental organizations. Nonetheless, Nazarbayev warned that foreign-sponsored NGOs, in particular, would be closely monitored to ensure their compliance with state law.

Nazarbayev landslide

Nazarbayev won an overwhelming victory in the December presidential election, with official results giving him more than 90% of the vote with a 70% turnout. The OSCE stated the elections had failed to meet a number of OSCE commitments and other international standards for democratic elections.

Political violence

Opposition [Naghyz Ak Zhol](#) party co-chairman Altynbek Sarsenbaev and two aides were found murdered outside of Almaty in 2006. Five members of the National Security Committee's (KNB) special forces unit were arrested for involvement, and the head of the Senate administration was arrested as the alleged ringleader. In the aftermath, KNB head Nartai Dutbaev resigned. Sarsenbaev's murder came three months after the death of Zamanbek Nurkadilov, who had accused Nazarbayev of corruption and had threatened to publish evidence proving his accusation.

Observers remain skeptical that all the facts regarding these murders have been revealed.

Nazarbayev falls out with son-in-law



Tensions between Nazarbayev and his son-in-law [Rakhat Aliyev](#) exploded in 2007. Aliyev was accused of involvement in the kidnapping of two Kazakh bankers, and his KTK television channel was taken off the air and Karavan newspaper closed for three months. He was fired from his post as Kazakh Ambassador to Austria. His wife, Dariga Nazarbayeva, divorced him. Finally, Kazakh authorities issued an international arrest warrant for Aliyev, allegedly for running an organized crime network and for the reported kidnapping. An Austrian court decided against Aliyev's extradition.

Presidential term limit removed

Meanwhile, Nazarbayev proposed a series of constitutional amendments, most importantly, removing term limits for the sitting president (i.e., himself). The package quickly passed parliament and was signed by Nazarbayev, enabling him to remain as president for as long as he wishes.

2007 parliamentary elections

The election created a one-party parliament. Nazarbayev's [Nur-Otan Party](#) won all 98 seats at stake, with a reported 88% of the vote. None of the other six parties contesting the elections passed the 7% threshold. Another 9 seats in parliament were chosen by the appointed Assembly of Peoples of Kazakhstan, which represents the country's ethnic groups.

The OSCE/ODIHR International Election Observation Mission (IEOM) reported that these elections reflected welcome progress in the pre-election process and during the conduct of the vote. Nevertheless, a number of OSCE commitments and Council of Europe standards were not met, namely in the legislation and vote counting process. The vote count was not transparent, and the counting process was assessed negatively in 43% of polling stations visited. A wide range of irregularities was observed, according to the IEOM.

2011 early presidential election

After a proposed referendum to extend his presidential term to 2020 was strongly criticized in the West, Nazarbayev moved up the election scheduled for 2012. He reportedly garnered 95.5% of the vote on a turnout of 89.5%. The opposition boycotted the vote.

The OSCE/ODIHR International Observation Mission reported that in order to hold genuine democratic elections, reform was needed as this election revealed shortcomings similar to those previously noted. The election was technically well administered according to the IOM, but the absence of opposition candidates and lack of vibrant political discourse created a non-competitive environment.

Nazarbayev issued a decree in late 2011 to dissolve the lower house of parliament (Mazhilis) and hold early elections in January. The apparent goal was to have a new parliament that looked less like a one-party rubber stamp for the regime. Changes in the election law in 2009 provided that minimums of only two parties are needed to form a parliament.

December 2011 labor dispute goes violent

A 7-month strike by oil workers for higher pay and better working conditions in the western Kazakhstan city of [Zhanaozen](#) was followed by the dismissal of 2,000 workers by the state oil firm KazMunaiGaz. In turn, widespread rioting erupted resulting in the deaths of at least 16 persons,



injuries to over a hundred, and widespread arson and damage in the city.

Nazarbayev reemployed the fired workers, [prosecuted the rioters and police for the use of disproportionate force](#), prosecuted officials for corruption, and fired senior regional and industry officials, including his son-in-law Timur Kulibayev (considered a candidate for prime minister and even a possible successor to Nazarbayev), who headed the Samruk-Kazyna investment fund, which owns KazMunaiGaz.

2012 parliamentary elections

Nazarbayev's Nur Otan Party won an overwhelming majority of 83 of the Mazhilis' 93-seats in the January election. The only other parties to win seats were Ak Zhoi with 8 and the Communist People's Party with 7 seats; neither could be considered an opposition party.

The OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission reported that the election failed to meet fundamental principles of democratic elections. For example, political parties were refused registration; parties were de-registered, as were candidates. The processing of election results also lacked transparency.

In August 2012 the trial of [Vladimir Kozlov](#), leader of the unofficial political [party Alga](#), began. Kozlov was accused of orchestrating dissent among striking oil workers leading up to the deadly rioting that took place in Zhanaozen. He was sentenced in October 2012 to seven and a half years in prison.



Ethnic relations

Kazakhstan is officially viewed both as the homeland of the ethnic Kazakhs (including those living abroad, who are encouraged to return) and as a state of all "Kazakhstanis" regardless of ethnic origin.

In fact, while members of other ethnic groups still occupy some important government positions, real power is concentrated in Kazakh hands.

Ethnic balance

Time is working against the Russians in Kazakhstan. The ethnic balance is shifting in favor of the Kazakhs as more Russians leave the country.

Potential ethnic problems

Kazakh-Uzbek tensions are a potential problem in southern Kazakhstan, against a background of tense relations between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. In recent years, an increasing number of Uzbek migrants (regular and irregular) migrated to Southern Kazakhstan to pick tobacco and other crops. Often undocumented, they bring their entire families, including children to also work in the fields. These families are vulnerable to exploitation. Female labor migrants have been sexually exploited. Employers have refused to pay wages, and collude with police to have them deported. These migrants almost always have no access to medical services, and their children are not allowed access to education.

There were reports of interethnic violence in 2007 between Kazakhs and Uighurs, as well as Kazakhs and Kurds in southern Kazakhstan.

Juz, tribal, and clan divisions

There have been local political confrontations along clan lines, and party politics interacts with Juz rivalry. The ruling regime is widely perceived as a form of Senior Juz domination, while the opposition is seen as representing Middle Juz interests. Some, however, see the importance of the Juz factor as having declined. More significant is the clash of elites, each focused on self-interest, and looking to their position in the post-Nazarbayev era.



Internal security

There were four suicide bombings in Kazakhstan in 2011. These took place in the cities of Atrou, Aktoba and Taraz. The [Jund al-Khilafah](#) group claimed responsibility for some of these incidents. The most recent event in November 2011 claimed seven lives, including five police.



Foreign relations

Kazakhstan as an independent state

Kazakhstan was the least eager of all the post-Soviet states to want full independence. Nazarbayev feared that without the supporting framework of the Soviet Union a country as diverse as Kazakhstan might not be able to hold together.

Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan signed a Treaty of Eternal Friendship in 1998.

Nazarbayev campaigned for a time to transform the CIS into an effective "Eurasian Union" of post-Soviet states. While this idea was eventually abandoned, Kazakhstan was actively involved in founding the Union of the Four, the precursor of the Eurasian Economic Community created in 2000 (the founding members being Russia, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan).

In 2007, during a visit to Kyrgyzstan, Nazarbayev proposed a Central Asian Union (CAU) that would deal primarily with interstate border issues such as trade, visas, tourism and security. Such an organization could compete with the Russian-led Collective Security Organization and the Chinese-led Shanghai Cooperation Council. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan wanted to create a multilateral-Supreme Council. Uzbekistan President Karimov, reacted negatively to the CAU proposal, perhaps seeing it as Kazakhstan's effort to compete with Uzbekistan for regional leadership.

Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus established a Customs Union in 2010.

Kazakhstan security and energy cooperation with Russia

Kazakhstan's most important security cooperation is with Russia, which is also the country's main trading partner. In 2003, Nazarbayev announced that Kazakhstan would continue to route its oil exports through Russian territory. In 2004, Russia and Kazakhstan agreed to pursue joint exploration and development of Caspian Sea resources. In 2005, they signed a long-term production sharing agreement to develop the Kazakh Kurmangazy oil field, involving \$23 billion in investments. In 2006, Russia agreed to provide \$160 million to develop infrastructure on the Russia-Kazakhstan border.

Nazarbayev agreed with his Russian and Turkmen counterparts at a summit meeting in Turkmenbashi City in 2007 on a declaration of intent to expand gas transport pipelines along the Caspian coast. (This seemed to exclude participation in the Western-backed Trans-Caspian pipeline that would lead to the Caucasus and the West, bypassing Russia.) Separately, he declared his intent to modernize the Uzbek section of the existing Turkmenistan-Uzbekistan-Kazakhstan gas pipeline leading to Russia.

Russia and Kazakhstan agreed to allow the Russian Federation to lease the Baikonur Cosmodrome from Kazakhstan until 2050. Russia is paying \$115 million in rent annually. Rental of Baikonur may come to an end, as Russia is building a new Vostochny Cosmodrome in the Russian Far East. Kazakhstan has blocked three Russian satellite launches because of a dispute over the drop zone for rocket debris. The Kazakh government has requested an additional agreement concerning the drop zone.

Penetration of extremist Islamic organizations into Kazakhstan



Russia, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan share opposition to Islamic extremism. Although a smaller threat to Kazakhstan than to Uzbekistan, extremist Islamist organizations have supposedly penetrated from Uzbekistan into southern Kazakhstan.

In 2004, the Kazakh government announced the arrest of thirteen alleged members (including nine Kazakh citizens) of a terrorist group that had carried out attacks in Uzbekistan earlier that year.

In 2012, a court in [Kazakhstan](#) sentenced 47 people to prison terms of up to 15 years on charges of forming a terrorist group, financing extremist activity and organizing a series of attacks. The case concerned a 2011 suicide attack on the southern city of Taraz, where a bomber shot seven people dead before blowing himself up. The other five defendants were linked to attacks in the western oil city of Atyrau.

Kazakhstan-Uzbekistan tensions

Shared interest in fighting terrorism has not prevented tensions between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan over border, water, and other issues. Their relations were especially strained by an incursion of Uzbek forces across the disputed border in 2000. In 2002, a compromise was reached on the border issue. Nevertheless, the two states have continued their rivalry to be the paramount regional superpower in Central Asia.

Kazakhstan's broad relationship with China

Chinese President Hu Jintao and President Nazarbayev signed a strategic partnership agreement between their two countries in 2005. There is considerable trade between the two countries. China financed an \$800 million oil pipeline to connect the oilfields in western Kazakhstan to northwestern China. The 1,000 km Atashu-Alashankou pipeline opened in 2005 with an initial capacity of 10 million tons. By 2011, the pipeline was expected to double in length and triple in capacity. Kazakhstan is likely to seek continuing Chinese investment in its energy sector, while avoiding Chinese control over it.

Another visit by Chinese President Jintao to Kazakhstan in 2011 was to increase their economic and strategic partnerships to new levels.

Border issues have been resolved in the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Nevertheless, Kazakhstan has grievances against China, such as the nuclear testing at the Lop Nor site not far across the border in Xinjiang Province.

Cross-border ethnic ties

Cross-border ethnic ties are a source of potential conflict, as well as a possible basis for security cooperation. A million Kazakhs live in Xinjiang, while 200,000 Uighurs live in eastern Kazakhstan. In order to placate China, Kazakhstan remains silent about the treatment of ethnic kin in Xinjiang, and does not allow Uighurs in Kazakhstan to assist the separatist movement of Uighurs in Xinjiang. The two governments also have a common interest in containing Islamic extremist Uighurs associated with the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan reportedly coming from Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Kazakhstan and the West



Kazakhstan's relations with the West got off to a good start. Unlike Ukraine, Kazakhstan agreed early on to give up the Soviet nuclear weapons on its territory. Kazakhstan and the West shared the strategic goals of reducing the country's dependence on Russia and warding off the threat of Islamic extremism.

Exploitation of Kazakhstan's oil wealth required cooperation with Western oil companies. But there have been problems in the relationship. Western concern about the human rights situation in Kazakhstan has irritated the Nazarbayev government.

There have also been disputes between Kazakhstan's government and Western companies managing local enterprises and utilities, stemming from disappointment with the performance of these companies and their lack of investment in Kazakhstan. Companies are now required to rely on local products, labor, and contractors.

Since 9/11, Kazakhstan has increased its military ties with NATO and the U.S. In 2004, Kazakhstan contracted with a British firm to upgrade its air defenses. Kazakhstan sent a small contingent of troops to Iraq. In 2006, Kazakhstan concluded an Individual Partnership Action Plan with NATO. Kazakhstan also designated an air assault battalion for potential deployment in NATO-led peace support operations, under UN Security Council mandates. Battalion elements have participated in NATO live fire exercises. One of the major PfP projects is the expansion of this force into a brigade structure (KAZBRIG), giving Kazakhstan the capability to sustain a battalion-size peacekeeping contribution through rotation.

After Kyrgyzstan announced in 2009 that it planned to end U.S. use of Manas airbase, Kazakhstan concluded an agreement with the U.S. on the shipment of nonmilitary supplies by rail from Russia through its territory to Afghanistan.

While concerns about corruption and lack of democracy—as well as Nazarbayev's own fear of foreign destabilization—have continued to put a strain on U.S.-Kazakh relations, the cancellation of the U.S.-Uzbek strategic partnership led to the strengthening of the U.S.-Kazakh relationship. In 2006, Nazarbayev visited the U.S, where President Bush balanced hopes for future cooperation, while lightly stressing the desire for democratic reforms.

Nazarbayev has never let his interest in good relations with the U.S. and the West damage the cordial relations between Kazakhstan and Russia.

OSCE

An [OSCE Centre](#) was opened in Almaty in 1999 to promote OSCE principles and commitments, and greater regional cooperation.

Kazakhstan became OSCE chair in 2010, culminating a long campaign started four years earlier. Kazakhstan eventually won over countries like the U.S. that had advocated delay because of Kazakhstan's poor observation of OSCE commitments. The U.S. decided to give its support after Kazakhstan pledged to reform its election law, handling of the media, and treatment of political parties, as well as safeguard ODIHR, the OSCE election monitoring body. The Kazakh government had in the past supported Russian efforts to weaken ODIHR's monitoring mandate.





A workshop was organized by the OSCE Centre in Almaty to train repatriated women on leadership and business skills and to raise their awareness on human rights, Turgen, Almaty, 15 September 2004. (OSCE/Gulnara Yessirgepova)



Heads of State and Government listen to proceedings during the first day of the OSCE Summit in Astana, 1 December 2010. (OSCE/Vladimir Trofimchuk)



Kazakhstan culture

Since 1997 the capital of Kazakhstan has been [Astana](#) (formerly Akmola), a medium-sized town on the windswept plains in the north of the country. The former capital, Almaty, remains Kazakhstan's main commercial and cultural center and its only city with a population over one million. Most foreign embassies have moved to Astana, with a handful still in Almaty.

Almaty

[Almaty](#) is located in the country's southeastern corner. Towering over the city are the snow-topped Mountains of Heaven (Tianshan), over which lie neighboring Kyrgyzstan and China. Unfortunately, the mountains trap the traffic smog, so you may not be able to see them clearly through the haze. To get a better view, climb the foothills to the new suburb of Medeu, where Almaty's wealthy live. Medeu hosts the Voice of Asia Rock Festival every August and is home to the world's largest ice skating rink.

Most of Almaty was developed in the late Soviet period. Two sets of long parallel streets running east-west and north-south divide the city into rectangular blocks. There are many tree-lined boulevards and parks, one of which hosts the Great National Kazakh Circus. The recently created business centers, luxury hotels, restaurants, nightclubs and big stores like the Tsum supermarket, are located in the city center. The outlying residential areas consist mainly of five-story cement buildings built around large yards, often with trees and children's playgrounds. Among the few historical buildings are the small wooden Zenkov Cathedral in Panfilov Park and the nearby Arasan Baths.

Bazaars

Besides ordinary stores, local goods as well as those from China and the West are sold from thousands of street kiosks and a number of open-air bazaars. The biggest outdoor market is the huge Chinese Bazaar (also called Barakholka), which occupies several fields on the city outskirts. One field is devoted solely to selling used cars.

Geography

Kazakhstan is large but sparsely populated with many different landscapes and ways of life. The countryside around Almaty is fertile, but northwest into the middle of the country lays a vast and monotonous expanse of semi-desert scrub, interrupted only by metal-ore and coal mining settlements.

Beyond Almaty lie the decaying industrial cities of northern Kazakhstan and the open plains. In the south, near the border with Uzbekistan, are the Kyzyl Kum (Red Sand) Desert and the irrigated lands along the banks of the Syr Darya River. And in the west of the country, arid semi-desert pastureland—and the booming oilfields on the Caspian Sea coast.

A new Silk Road

Construction has continued on an ambitious program to build a 1,700-mile road from Khorgos on the border with China to Aqtobe near the border with Russia. Completion of the Kazakh section is planned for 2013, and its goal is to contribute to Kazakhstan's greater inclusion into the global economy.



Nomads

The Kazakhs used to live as nomads, migrating with the seasons in family groups (auls) from one pasture to another. The auls joined together to form clans, tribes, and hordes (Juz), all based on common descent. Most Kazakhs are still aware of belonging to these groups, though how important they are in everyday life is unclear. But people in Kazakhstan—not only ethnic Kazakhs—do very much rely on informal support networks of friends and relatives to survive under conditions of economic disarray and near-universal corruption.



Modern day Kazakh nomads (Paul Knipe)

Muslim holidays

Important Muslim holy days include Eid-ul-Fitr, the celebration marking the end of Ramadan, and Eid-ul-Azha, the feast of sacrifice. But the ancient pagan spring festival of Nauruz (New Year's Day in Persian) is by far the biggest holiday, with traditional games and sports, music and drama festivals. Some of the sports are played on horseback. Kökpar is a kind of polo using a headless goat carcass instead of a ball, while qyz quu is a boy-girl horse chase.

Cuisine

Traditional Kazakh cuisine relies mainly on animal products that the Kazakh nomads kept as livestock—cattle, sheep, goats, horses, and camels. All parts are consumed. Meat is boiled to make a broth or—together with rice and apples, apricots, raisins or prunes—the dish called plov. Popular dishes are qazy (smoked horsemeat sausage served sliced with cold noodles) and chebureks (pastries stuffed with lamb and onion). There are many kinds of milk—for example, kumys (fermented mare's milk), shubat (fermented camel's milk), kатык (baked sour clotted milk), and irkit (fermented sour milk). Tea is also drunk. Bread is eaten as flat cakes such as boursak (fried unleavened dough with eggs and sugar). [Further information on traditional foods in Kazakhstan.](#)



CHAPTER 3

Turkmenistan



Geography

Item	Description
Area	188,456 square miles
Natural resources	Petroleum, natural gas, sulfur, salt



People

Item	Description
Population	5.04 million
Ethnic groups	Turkmen 85%, Uzbek 5%, Russian 4%, other 6% (2003)
Religions	Muslim 89%, Eastern Orthodox 9%, unknown 2%
Languages	Turkmen 72%, Russian 12%, Uzbek 9%, other 7%



Government

Item	Description
Capital	Ashgabat
System of government	Terms itself a secular democracy, but is highly authoritarian and power is tightly concentrated within the presidential administration.
Head of state	Gurbanguly Berimuhamedov
Currency	Manat



Basic geography

The five provinces of Turkmenistan coincide with economic and ecological zones, and also with the main Turkmen tribal groups.

- Akhal Province is in the south of the country. It includes the capital and the western section of the Kara Kum Canal, and has more industry and better infrastructure than any other province. Fertile valleys in the southern part of the province give way to semi-desert pasture further north. Most inhabitants belong to the Teke tribal group.
- Mary Province is in the southeast. It includes the fertile areas along the eastern section of the Kara Kum Canal. Most inhabitants belong to the Teke tribal group.
- Lebap Province is in the northeast, around Chardzhou. The lands along the Amu Darya River are fertile. The main tribal group is Ersari. It is here that the Uzbek minority lives.
- Tashauz Province is in the north of the country, around Tashauz. It includes fertile lands along the Amu Darya River. Most inhabitants belong to the Yomud tribal group.
- Balkan Province is situated in the west of Turkmenistan, along the Caspian Sea coast. It is mostly desert, inhabited mainly by herders of the Yomud tribal group. The Kazakh minority lives in the north of the province.



Historical background

The Turkmen trace their ancestry to the legendary figure of [Oguz-Khan](#), who in the distant past migrated from Lake Issyk-Kul, located far off to the east in what is now Kyrgyzstan. In fact, today's Turkmen are partly descended from mainly Persian local populations that were absorbed by the original Turkmen.

In the 11th century, the Turkmen founded the [Seljuk Empire](#) at the oasis of [Merv](#) (now Mary). From the 14th century, following the Mongol conquest, Turkmen lands came under the control of the non-Turkmen Khivan Khanate. The Turkmen nobility entered into the khans' military service.

Turkmen

The Western Turkmen, who opposed the Khivan Khanate, first sought Russian protection in the mid-18th century, but only in the late 19th century did Russia conquer the area, taking Khiva in 1873 and finally defeating the Turkmen in 1881 with the storming of the great fortress at [Geok-Tepe](#) (near Ashgabat).

In 1916, the Turkmen rose in revolt against an attempt to conscript them to fight in World War One.

Turkmen SSR established in 1924

Under the leadership of [Junayd Khan](#), the Turkmen expelled the Bolsheviks from Ashgabat and took over the Khivan Khanate during the weak early years of Soviet Russia. The Turkmen were independent—for the first time in several hundred years—from 1918 until 1920, when the Red Army retook Khiva. The Turkmen SSR was established in 1924.

The nomadic way of life

When the Turkmen were forced to give up the nomadic way of life and join collective farms, there was widespread resistance. Many continued to fight the Soviet regime into the 1930s.

Industrial and cultural development

Industrial and cultural development during the Soviet period was limited in Turkmenia (as it was then called). The country remained impoverished, backward, and dependent—a condition aggravated by imposition of the cotton monoculture.

Independence

Independence came to Turkmenistan not through the action of any local political movement, but resulted from the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Communist Party, renamed the Democratic Party of Turkmenistan (DPT), remained in place, and the Communist Party First Secretary, [Saparmurat Niyazov](#), became president of the new state in 1992.



Domestic politics

Niyazov appointed all ministers, provincial governors, judges, and the general prosecutor. He headed the cabinet of ministers, the Council of Defense and National Security and the Council of Elders. He entrusted leadership of the DPT to Onzhik Musayev, former director of the Institute of Marxism-Leninism.

Parliament

Parliament was reduced from 125 to 65 deputies, four-fifths of whom were members of the president's party, the DPT. Niyazov had the power to disband parliament if it expressed lack of confidence in the cabinet. Moreover, the supreme representative body was not parliament but the People's Council, a very large super-parliament headed by the president.

A [constitution](#) was adopted in 1992 and amended in 1995, 1999, and 2003. There is no constitutional court.

In [2008 a new constitution](#) was adopted. The number of members serving in Parliament was increased again to 125, and the People's Council was abolished.

Censorship and control

There is no freedom of expression in Turkmenistan. Although freedom of speech and the press are guaranteed in the constitution, all media are subject to strict state censorship and control. There were a few independent periodicals in the early post-independence period, but by 1994 all had been closed down. Newspapers are filled mainly with official announcements and advertising.

Human rights

In 2003, the United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution expressing concern over the human rights situation in Turkmenistan.

The International Crisis Group warned in 2004 that deteriorating conditions in Turkmenistan constituted an "unfolding catastrophe," and that Niyazov's destruction of state and civil society institutions had increased.

The High Commissioner on National Minorities paid a brief visit to Turkmenistan in 2003 and again in 2004 to observe the situation of minorities in the country.

In 2006, Turkmenistan received international condemnation when it became known that [Ogulsapar Muradova](#), a journalist imprisoned in August on dubious grounds, had died under mysterious circumstances. The European Parliament also voted against a trade agreement with Turkmenistan in 2006 because of human rights concerns.

No organized internal political opposition

There have been some sporadic spontaneous protests. In 1995, a thousand people marched in Ashgabat to complain about bread shortages, water, and electricity. There were two similar demonstrations in 2002.

There is no apparent organized political opposition inside the country. The four major opposition



groups that operate abroad united in 2003 to form the [Union of Democratic Forces of Turkmenistan](#). The leaders of the opposition in exile include several former government officials. Niyazov accused them of masterminding an alleged coup. Numerous arrests followed.

In 2006, claiming to have foiled a coup plot, Niyazov had several journalists and opposition activists arrested.

Niyazov dies

President-for-Life Niyazov died suddenly in 2006. He had held all key government posts and left no designated heir. Deputy Prime Minister Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov was named acting head of state, with the constitution quickly amended to allow him to run for president. New elections were scheduled. Top officials and state media expressed a clear preference for Berdymukhamedov.

2007 presidential election

Berdymukhamedov was elected president in the 2007 elections, reportedly garnering 89.23% of the vote. Authorities claimed that 98% of registered voters cast their ballots.

OSCE's ODIHR sent a needs assessment mission to Turkmenistan prior to the election, followed by an election support team. This team reported that while the new presidential election law met some OSCE commitments, there was room for substantial improvement in the right of citizens to stand as candidates and the candidate's rights in general. Despite the fact that the election support team had no formal observation or monitoring role, and did not issue a report, the visit was seen as the first step in a dialogue with Turkmen authorities on election issues. A delegation from the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly was also present during the election.





President of Turkmenistan, Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov (Embassy of Turkmenistan in Washington website)

Continuity and measured change

Berdymukhamedov followed up his campaign promises with agricultural, education and health reforms. There has been little sign, however, of political reform. Society remains tightly monitored and controlled.

Two government-sponsored internet cafes have been opened in Ashgabat, but at rates few Turkmen can afford. Although, it is possible to have internet at home, the connection is often extremely slow and service unreliable.

Berdymukhamedov acted more decisively in making governmental personnel changes to strengthen his position. Less than two months after taking office, he fired Minister of Interior Akrammed Rakhmanov, blaming him for the corruption and failures of the police. He also removed the powerful head of the presidential security service, [Akmurad Rejepov](#), from office.

Niyazov's ban on opera and circus entertainment was ended. Plans were announced in to reopen the opera house and circus, build a cinema and add books to libraries.

In 2008, government officials reiterated their commitments to education reform and announced a major increase in the budget for schools and universities.

New 2008 Constitution

A new constitution increased presidential powers as well as formally those of parliament. The president can name regional governors and mayors, as well as appoint the electoral commission. Parliament can amend the constitution, censure the president and increase its size. The increased powers of both the president and parliament are due to the distribution of the former powers given to the People's Council.

2012 presidential election

A 2011 law stated that presidential candidates must be backed either by a political party or collect at least 50,000 signatures to qualify. The law attempts to put a more democratic façade on a very authoritarian political process.

Berdymukhamedov easily won the February presidential election with a reported 97.14% of the vote and 96.7% voter turnout. Turkmenistan did not invite OSCE/ODIHR to observe the election. The December 2011 ODIHR Needs Assessment Mission concluded that Turkmenistan continued to limit fundamental freedoms, failed to allow genuine political competition, and had not progressed in developing a legal framework in line with OSCE commitments for democratic elections.

Parliamentary elections in 2013

Parliamentary elections are scheduled for December 2013.



Ethnic relations

Discrimination against Russians has increased ethnic tensions. Most parts of the country, though, have no significant ethnic minorities.

Population pressures on land and water may give rise to tension between Turkmen and Uzbeks in Lebap Province. Lebap Province borders Uzbekistan and has a large Uzbek minority and a high rate of unemployment. In recent years, international organizations focusing on issues concerning illegal labor migration and trafficking in persons have seen an increase in victims coming from this province.

Dual citizenship

The government initially made a few conciliatory gestures toward Russian-speakers, whose skills it did not want to lose too quickly. Turkmenistan was the only central Asian country that for some years offered its Russians the option of dual citizenship. Nevertheless, by 2002 two-thirds of Russian-speakers living in Turkmenistan had left.

In 2003, the right to dual citizenship was revoked. Russians in Turkmenistan had to decide which citizenship to opt for. While it has been unclear how strictly the new rule is being enforced, the departure of the remaining Russians is likely to accelerate.

Tribal tension

Much more dangerous are tensions between different tribal groups of Turkmen. There have been reports of Teke officers in the army providing food only to soldiers who are fellow Teke. A struggle for power between the main tribal groups may destabilize the country in the future.

Possible Islamic extremism

Turkmenistan security forces suffered casualties in a gun battle with alleged armed drug traffickers in Ashgabat in 2008, according to official sources. Other sources, however, question the official version and suggest that the armed group may have been Islamic or other opponents of the regime. There are also claims that the clash involved infighting between different clans within the security forces.



Foreign relations

Niyazov's foreign policy had been embodied in the Declaration of the Permanent Neutrality of Turkmenistan, adopted by the People's Council in 1995. Turkmenistan is nominally a member of the CIS, but kept its distance both from those member states that cooperate closely with Russia and from those that opposed Russian domination. In 2005, Turkmenistan downgraded its participation in the CIS to “associate” member status.

Niyazov became increasingly isolated and insecure on the international scene. In response, he fortified Turkmenistan's borders and coastal defenses and engaged in a troop buildup and rapid modernization of the army and air force.

Bilateral ties with Russia

Turkmenistan has maintained important bilateral economic and military relationships with Russia. Above all, it exports oil and gas to and through Russia—a crucial form of dependence.

In 2006, Russia's gas monopoly Gazprom agreed to buy 50 billion cubic meters of gas from Turkmenistan annually from 2007 to 2009.

Berdymukhamedov hosted a summit with his Russian and Kazakh counterparts in Turkmenbashi City in 2007, agreeing on a declaration of intent to construct a new gas pipeline along the Caspian coast. (This seemed to exclude participation in a Western-backed Trans-Caspian pipeline to the Caucasus and Europe that would bypass Russia.) He also made his first trips out of Turkmenistan to Russia and Kazakhstan.

Strengthening links with neighbors and the West too

Much more interested in international contacts than Niyazov, Berdymukhamedov visited Brussels to meet with EU officials in 2007.

Berdymukhamedov visited Turkey in 2008, the first high-level contact between the two states in seven years. There were no statements of possible energy transit cooperation, such as on the U.S. backed Trans-Caspian Pipeline (that would bypass Russia). He also visited Uzbekistan, warming the chilly bilateral relations that had existed prior to Niyazov's death. His talks with Karimov focused in improving bilateral economic cooperation, including gas and oil transit. The two states continued to differ over the use of water from the Amu Darya River, and how to share the Kokdumalak gas condensate deposits on their shared border.

Berdymukhamedov also attended NATO's 2008 Bucharest Summit, suggesting that he is serious about balancing his country's security relationships. (Turkmenistan has been a member of NATO's Partnership for Peace since 1994.)

Also in 2008, EU officials visited Ashgabat to conclude an agreement to export natural gas to Europe through the Nabucco pipeline. This visit was part of the EU central Asian Strategy, which seeks to deepen ties while advancing human rights and democratization in the area, and contribute to Europe's energy security. Earlier, in 2006, the EU and Turkmenistan had signed a Memorandum of Agreement to strengthen energy cooperation.

Berdymukhamedov made a state visit to Uzbekistan in 2009, signaling an improvement in relations between the two states. He announced during the visit that he had agreed to open



Turkmen airspace for the transit of nonmilitary cargo to the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan.

The end of Russia's export monopoly over Central Asia gas exports

The presidents of Turkmenistan and China inaugurated an 1833-km gas pipeline in 2009, joined by the presidents of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan (whose territory the pipeline also transited). The pipeline is scheduled to reach full capacity of 40 bcm by 2012. The two states have already signed agreements to raise the capacity by another 10 bcm. This was the first high-volume gas export route that did not go through Russia, essentially ending Russia's near monopoly over Central Asian gas exports.

Turkmenistan and Iran inaugurated the new Dauletabad-Sarabs-Khangiran gas pipeline in 2010, which complements the Korpeje-Kurt Kut line laid in 1997. When the pipeline is up to full capacity, Turkmenistan will be able to deliver 20 bcm annually to Iran.

Turkmenistan also maintains a close energy relationship with Ukraine, which relies on Turkmenistan for about half of its gas imports.

In 2012, Turkmenistan's state gas company Turkmengaz signed gas sales and purchase agreements with Pakistan's Inter State Gas Systems and Indian state-run utility GAIL. This is a significant signal that Turkmenistan will be an active partner in supplying gas to the Trans-Afghanistan Pipeline (also known as Turkmenistan–Afghanistan–Pakistan–India Pipeline, TAP or TAPI). The Asian Development Bank is funding the development of the proposed 1,735-km (1,085-mile) [natural gas pipeline](#), which has the capacity to carry 1 trillion cubic meters of gas over a 30-year period, or 33 billion cubic meters a year. The pipeline will transport Caspian Sea natural gas from Turkmenistan through Afghanistan into Pakistan and India.

OSCE

An OSCE Centre was opened in [Ashgabat](#) in 1999 to promote the implementation of OSCE principles and commitments in all dimensions.

In spite of the invocation of the Moscow mechanism to investigate human rights violations and attacks on journalists, Turkmenistan resisted OSCE pressures to reform its political system or human rights practices.

The OSCE Centre has been more active in organizing seminars in Turkmenistan since Niyazov's departure from the scene. The Centre has also provided assistance in border security and countering trafficking.



OSCE Centre in Ashgabat (OSCE)

Law students from Magtymguly Turkmen State University attend an OSCE-organized course on comparative criminal law, 19 December 2012. (OSCE/Svetlana Ostroushenko)

Visit of OSCE CiO in 2011

The OSCE Chair-in-Office, Lithuanian Foreign Minister Audronius Azbulis, visited Turkmenistan in 2011 and urged Turkmen officials to lift restrictions on registering nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). There are no genuine NGOs in Turkmenistan.



-r: The OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, Lithuanian Foreign Minister Audronius Azbulis, Foreign Minister of Turkmenistan Rashid Meredov, and the Head of the OSCE Centre in Ashgabat, Ambassador Sergei Belyaev, Ashgabat, 2 June 2011.

(OSCE/Tatyana Baeva)

Visit of OSCE Freedom of the Media Representative in 2011

OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media Mijatovic visited Ashgabat in 2011 and met with senior Turkmen officials to highlight the OSCE Centre's two-day event on media legislation reform.



OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, Dunja Mijatović, with journalism students after a lecture on the activities of her office, at the Institute of International Relations, part of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan, Ashgabat, 19 September 2011 (OSCE).

Turkmenistan culture

Ashgabat

Ashgabat, the capital, means City of Love. About 10% of Turkmenistan's population lives there. The city was destroyed in an earthquake in 1948 and has been completely rebuilt. The wide Kara Kum Canal passes through the middle of Ashgabat and keeps the desert at bay

Ashgabat's architecture reflects massive structures built during the Soviet and since the Niyazov period, all in white marble. The style reflects the grandness and power of the state, and its overwhelming relationship to the individual. The Arch of Neutrality with a 12-meter high stature of Niyazov which revolves to follow the sun throughout the day, is one of the many structures that stand out. Niyazov transformed Ashgabat from a dusty Soviet provincial outpost into a marble and gold citadel of luxury hotels, mosques and monuments to himself. But the veneer of prosperity is thin.

The huge Tolkuchka bazaar is held weekends 8 km. outside the city. Amid trucks, camels, and goats, traders offer for sale everything from jewelry and car parts to pistachios and the traditional Turkmen dark red carpets. There are also smaller bazaars open daily in the city.

Along the canal there is a strip of cultivated and irrigated land, but if you go north from the canal you soon hit the desert. The Kara Kum (Black Sand) Desert fills over four-fifths of the country with great crescent-shaped sand dunes and cracked baked-clay surfaces. The air temperature soars to over 120 degrees Fahrenheit, while the sand surface may reach 160 degrees Fahrenheit. As the desert's name suggests, the predominant colors are ochre, gray, and black—except in April, when the spring rain makes the desert bloom briefly in an explosion of red, orange, and yellow.



Downtown Ashgabat (Kimberley Bulkley)



Ashgabat street scene, 2013. (USIP/Ted Feifer)

Geography

South of the capital the land rises toward the Kopet Dag mountain range. On the lower slopes there is an underground hot water mineral lake. If you don't mind the smell of sulfur, you may like to take a dip. To the west lie the turquoise waters of the Caspian Sea. Along the pocked desert shoreline the sand is gray and frosted with salt. There is a dusty port town of single-story, pastel-painted buildings named Turkmenbashi (Father of the Turkmen), in honor of the previous president.

Parthians

[Nisa](#), some 18 kilometers southwest of Ashgabat, is described as one of the first capitals of the Parthians. An earthquake destroyed Nisa in the first decade B.C. UNESCO declared the Nisa fortress a World Heritage Site in 2007

There are also ancient buildings and archeological ruins in other parts of Turkmenistan. Old Urgench boasts two mausoleums and the tallest minaret in Central Asia (220 feet). (A minaret is the mosque tower from which the faithful are called to prayer.) The oldest ruins are those at the site of the ancient oasis of Merv.

Suleiman Demeril Mosque

Suleiman Demeril Mosque, which was built with the help of Turkey, was modeled after the Blue Mosque in Istanbul, and is located in Ashgabat.



*The Suleiman Demirel Mosque in Ashgabat, at night, 2013.
(USIP/Ted Feifer)*

Nature reserve

If you are interested in cobras, scorpions, and tarantulas, the [Repetek desert nature reserve](#) in eastern Turkmenistan is the place for you.

In the extreme eastern corner of the country is the beautiful mountainous landscape of the Gaurdak region with caves, gorges, and waterfalls.

The Kugitang reserve, right on the Uzbek border, is a geological research center, the pride of which is a rock plateau imprinted with hundreds of dinosaur footprints.

Nomads

Turkmenistan's people are only a couple of generations removed from the nomadic life. They love horses and pride themselves on their hospitality. Tribal identities remain very important. You can tell which tribe people belong to by their dialect and the style of their clothing and carpets.

Traditional dress is still often worn—baggy blue pants, cherry-red and gold-striped silk jackets, and shaggy wool hats for men, ankle-length silk dresses of wine red and maroon over striped pants for women. A woman's hair is always tied back and concealed under a kerchief or scarf.



*Turkmen ladies wearing the Turkmen national costume
(Kimberley Bulkley)*

Holidays

Important Muslim holy days include Eid-ul-Fitr, the celebration marking the end of Ramadan, and Eid-ul-Azha, the feast of sacrifice. The originally Persian spring festival of Nauruz (New Year's Day) is also a big holiday.



*Turkmen ladies celebrating International Women's Day on the
8th of March (Kimberley Bulkley)*

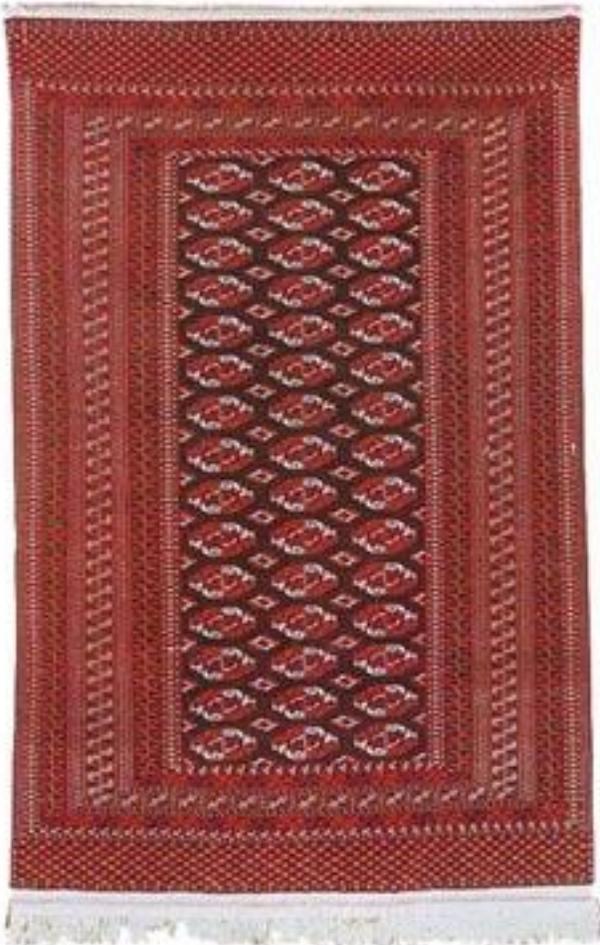
Economy

Turkmenistan is potentially a rich country, having a huge income from its reserves of oil and natural gas. However, the average person is very poor. Cotton, fruit, vegetables, and grains are

grown on the lands irrigated by the Kara Kum Canal and by the Amu Darya River along the northeastern border.

Carpets

The Turkmen are justly proud of their [carpets](#). Geometric designs vary from tribe to tribe. The largest carpet in the world is located in the Turkmen Carpet Museum in Ashgabat.



Traditional Turkmen carpet (Turkmenistan Embassy in Washington website)

Cuisine

Many common dishes are vegetarian, such as herb-filled pastries, cornmeal pancakes, and dried fruit plov (pilaf). Porridge of mung beans, cornmeal and pumpkin, or rice, milk, and yoghurt, can make a meal.



CHAPTER 4

Uzbekistan



Geography

Item	Description
Area	172,742 square miles
Natural resources	Natural gas, petroleum, coal, gold, uranium, silver, copper, lead and zinc, tungsten, molybdenum



People

Item	Description
Population	28.3 million (July 2012 est.)
Ethnic groups	Uzbek 80%, Russian 5.5%, Tajik 5%, Kazakh 3%, Karakalpak 2.5%, Tatar 1.5%, other 2.5% (1996 est.)
Religions	Muslim 88% (mostly Sunni), Eastern Orthodox 9%, other 3%
Languages	Uzbek (official) 74.3%, Russian 14.2%, Tajik 4.4%, other 7.1%



Government

Item	Description
Capital	Tashkent
System of government	Republic. Authoritarian presidential rule
Head of state	Islam Karimov
Currency	Som



Basic geography

Uzbekistan is divided administratively into 12 provinces, the capital city of Tashkent, and the Karakalpak Autonomous Republic (Karakalpakstan). The 6 broad regions can be distinguished as follows:

- Starting in the east is Uzbekistan's section of the Fergana Valley, watered by the Syr Darya River.
- West from the Fergana Valley, is the central region around the capital Tashkent, also watered by the Syr Darya River.
- Further west, is the region of the Kyzyl Kum Desert, including much of Karakalpakstan.
- Next is the southwestern region along the border with Turkmenistan, watered by the Amu Darya River. This region includes part of Karakalpakstan. Together with the neighboring area across the border in Turkmenistan, it comprised the core area of the old Khivan Khanate.
- The south-central region comprises the areas around the ancient cities of Bukhara and Samarkand, which are on the River Zeravshan.
- Uzbekistan's mountainous far southeast is near the borders with Tajikistan and Afghanistan.



Historical background

In the mid-seventh century, the Arab invasion brought Islam and the Arabic script. In the ensuing centuries, a flourishing Muslim civilization developed with its centers in Bukhara and Samarkand.



The Muslim civilization of Bukhara and Samarkand

The Muslim civilization of medieval Bukhara and Samarkand prospered from camel-borne trade along the famous "Silk Road" that linked China with Europe. Its scholars researched and taught history, geography, philosophy, mathematics, and astronomy. Poetry, music, and architecture were also highly developed, while agriculture benefited from an extensive irrigation system.

Ghengis Khan

The Mongol conqueror Ghengis Khan captured and razed Bukhara and Samarkand about 1221, but his descendants rebuilt them.

13th century

In the 13th century, Turkic tribes first arrived in Transoxiana.

Timur: a "just Uzbek ruler"

The government of present-day Uzbekistan has established a nationalist myth around the figure of [Timur](#), who ruled in Samarkand in the late 14th century. In the rest of the world, Timur (also known as Timurlane) is remembered as a bloodthirsty conqueror, but in Uzbekistan he is praised as a "just Uzbek ruler" and parallels are drawn between him and President Karimov.

Ulug-Bek

A lesser myth surrounds Timur's grandson [Ulug-Bek](#), who patronized scholarship and the arts and sciences and was a great astronomer. Ulug Bek's contribution to the science of astronomy is comparable with Copernicus and Kepler. His work did not become known in the West until 1648, when a copy of his Catalogue of Stars was discovered in Oxford's Bodleian Library. He calculated the position of the moon, planets and 1018 stars with amazing precision.



The Turko-Persian civilization

During the reign of Ulug-Bek, the Uzbeks were advancing into the region from the north. In 1431, the Uzbek tribal leader Abul Khayr Khan took Khwarazm (Khiva). In 1450 he married a granddaughter of Timur, thereby forming an alliance with the Mongol nobility. His grandson Abdal-Latif Khan was the first Uzbek khan to rule in Samarkand, in the first half of the 16th century.

Uzbek tribes settle and mix with peoples of Transoxiana

As their khans rose to power, the previously nomadic Uzbek tribes began to settle and to mix with the other peoples of Transoxiana. The result was a Turko-Persian civilization that combined Turkic and Persian elements. Court politics were conducted in the Turkic language called Chagatai, while Persian was the language of literature and scholarship.

[Alisher Navoi](#) (1441-1501), considered the father of Uzbek literature, lived in this period.

1860s - 1870s conquered by Czarist Russia

In the 17th and 18th centuries, the Uzbek khanate declined, fragmenting into the smaller kingdoms of the Bukharan Emirate, the Khivan Khanate, and the Kokand Khanate. In the 1860s and 1870s, Czarist Russia conquered the region.



Under Russian and Soviet rule

The policy of Russian Czarist administrators was to leave local government in the hands of traditional institutions and not to interfere with native religion and customs. There were few Russian settlers in the countryside, but large Russian populations did appear in the cities, especially in Tashkent, the administrative center of Russian rule. The main changes were the building of railroads and a great expansion of cotton cultivation.

Resistance to Russian and Soviet rule

In 1916, the [Basmachi Revolt](#), an uprising of local Muslims against Russian Czarist (and later Soviet) rule, began in response to the seizure of land and grain and efforts to impose new laws on the population. It spread throughout central Asia before being crushed by the Bolsheviks in 1932. Following the Russian Revolution, a Congress of Central Asian Muslims, held in 1917 in Kokand, elected a national council and declared autonomy. In 1918, Soviet troops from Tashkent seized Kokand.

Uzbek SSR in 1924

Initially, Soviet rule in the region manifested itself in the formation of Turkestan ASSR and nominally independent "people's republics" at Bukhara and Khwarazm. The Uzbek SSR replaced these in 1924.

Industrialization during the Soviet period

Uzbekistan underwent considerable industrialization during the Soviet period, although the new industries relied heavily on workers and engineers from other parts of the USSR. The USSR was also responsible for major social and cultural changes such as: the spread of literacy, the weakening of Islam, and the abolition of the veil for women, although many customary practices survived under the surface. At the same time, the economy was distorted and the environment harmed by the imposition of the cotton monoculture.



Perestroika and independence

In 1988, an umbrella movement for democracy and independence was formed under the name of Birlik (Unity). Birlik rapidly won popular support. Its 1989 demonstration in Tashkent to demand that Uzbek be made the state language attracted 50,000 people—and soon thereafter Uzbek was indeed made the state language. An offshoot of Birlik called Erk (Freedom) also appeared.

Path to power blocked

When elections were held in 1990 for a new Supreme Soviet of the Uzbek SSR, neither Birlik nor Erk were permitted to participate, with the result that most of those elected were loyal to the Communist Party.

Ethnic and political disturbances

In 1989, Uzbeks in the Fergana Valley attacked Jews and the Meskhetian Turks, an ethnic minority that had been deported from southern Georgia by Stalin. The clashes resulted in the deaths of 150 people, and approximately 15,000 Meskhetian Turks fled from the Fergana Valley. It was after this that Islam Karimov was named party boss. In 1990, the Supreme Soviet appointed Karimov President. After the collapse of the hard-line coup in Moscow in 1991, the Supreme Soviet declared Uzbekistan independent.



Domestic politics

The Communist Party of Uzbekistan, renamed in 1991 the [People's Democratic Party of Uzbekistan](#) (PDPU), became the ruling party under Karimov's leadership. Later, the presidency became the dominant institution, and the PDPU lost its central role. In 1996, Karimov gave up his membership in the party.

The crushing of opposition

In the immediate post-independence period, there was still some room for opposition politics. In 1991, Erk chairman Muhammad Salih was allowed to stand against Karimov in the first presidential election, winning 14% of the vote. Birlik was refused official registration, but was able to continue public activity. Karimov's own vice-president, [Shakrulla Mirsaidov](#), adopted a critical stance.

The crackdown began in 1992. Mirsaidov and his associates were removed. Opposition figures were beaten up by anonymous assailants, imprisoned, or just disappeared. By late 1993, Birlik and Erk were banned and their leaders fled into exile.

Almost all media state-owned

Almost all media are state-owned. State censorship, though banned by the 1992 constitution, continued to operate until 2002. Independent publications have been outlawed since 1993. Journalists investigating sensitive subjects are harassed and arrested.

Parliament

In 1994, the Supreme Soviet was replaced by a new rubber-stamp 250-seat parliament. Deputies were elected on a competitive basis, although all competing candidates had to support the government.

Illusion of human rights

In 1995 the OSCE was allowed to establish a regional office in Tashkent and even to sponsor a human rights seminar in which opposition activists took part.

In 1997 Karimov, alarmed by the rise of the Taliban to power in Afghanistan, returned to a more repressive policy.

1999 parliamentary elections

Parliamentary elections held in 1999 were termed by the OSCE as "far from democratic."

Civil society institutions

At the same time, a façade of concern for human rights was created. A government supporter was appointed to a new position of human rights ombudsman, and a National Human Rights Center was opened, likewise staffed by loyalists. In 1997, the Foreign Minister concluded an agreement with the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights to implement programs "to promote democracy and civil society."

Opposition disappears



Open opposition disappeared in 1998 when the Democratic Opposition Coordinating Council shut down.

2000 presidential election

Karimov was re-elected with 92% of the vote. The other handpicked candidate, PDP leader Abdulkhafiz Jalolov, received 4%.

2002 Referendum

In 2002 the president's term of office was extended from 5 to 7 years.

The referendum also approved creation of a new parliament of two chambers: a 100-member upper chamber (Senate) representing the regions (and filled by representatives appointed by regional councils and the president) and a 120-member lower house (Majilis).

Temporary liberalization

A temporary swing toward liberalization occurred in 2002. While arrests and harassment of opposition activists continued, Birlik was allowed to resume public activity under police supervision. Erk was permitted to hold a congress in Tashkent in 2003.

2004-05 parliamentary elections

Two rounds of parliamentary elections were held in 2004 and 2005. All seats were won by pro-presidential parties and unaffiliated candidates.

A limited OSCE monitoring team found very minor improvements over previous elections, concluding that the elections fell far short of OSCE and international standards. Among other problems, the observers noted that the platforms of the competing parties were virtually identical, thereby not offering the voters any real choice. In addition, the two main opposition parties, Erk and Birlik, had not been allowed to register and run in the elections.

2007 presidential election

Although there were questions regarding Karimov's constitutional eligibility to run, he was reelected as the Liberal Democratic Party's candidate with 81% of the vote, according to the Central Election Commission, with 91.6% of the voters participating. Asliddin Rustamov of the Uzbekistan People's Democratic Party received 3.17%, Dilorom Toshumuhamedova of the Justice Social Democratic Party received 2.94%, and Akmal Saidov, nominated by a citizens' group, received 2.85% of the vote.

OSCE/ODIHR's Limited Observation Mission reported that the election took place in a tightly controlled political environment that failed to meet OSCE election commitments. While there were four candidates (including the first woman to run for president in Uzbekistan, and a candidate nominated by an initiative group of voters), there was an absence of a real choice as all candidates running supported the positions of the incumbent president Karimov. Legal and administrative obstacles had prevented opposition candidates from running. Moreover, recommendations for improving the electoral framework that had been made after the 2004 elections were not implemented.

Karimov's monopoly of power

Government power has been concentrated in Karimov's hands. All ministers and provincial governors, and in practice even the president of the Karakalpak Autonomous Republic, are appointed by him. Officials are often moved to new positions or fired to ensure that opposition groups cannot form. Local government is entrusted to the traditional neighborhood institution of the mahalla, which provides an effective means of social control. The main source of opposition resides within the regime itself, in the form of regional groups, sometimes called "clans," the most prominent of which are the Tashkent, Samarkand, and Fergana groups.

The president's daughter, Gulnora Karimova, is prominent in business and politics, leading to speculation that she could be Karimov's successor. Both Gulnora and the president's other daughter, Nola, have been active in government-established charitable associations.

Civil society and opposition parties marginalized

A new party, the [Sunshine Coalition](#), emerged in 2005, claiming to represent a united opposition and offering alternative policies to Karimov. However, shortly after announcing the group's intentions, its leaders, Sanjar Umarov and Nodira Hidoyatova, were arrested and charged with embezzlement and money laundering. Umarov was convicted in 2006 of heading a criminal group laundering money through offshore companies, tax avoidance, and hiding foreign currency. He was sentenced to 14 years in prison (reduced to 10 years under an amnesty agreement) and over US\$8 million in fines. In 2009 [Umarov](#) was granted amnesty and received asylum in the U.S.

Western and local NGOs have come under increased pressure in recent years. In 2005 the government mandated a process of re-registration of NGOs, which led to a significant reduction in the number in the country. The government also requires all external funding to be channeled through a commission instead of paid directly to local NGOs.

International organizations have been accused of violating Uzbek national legislation as a pretext to being forced to shut down. Human Rights Watch was closed by a court decision in 2011.

2009/2010 parliamentary elections

Elections for the Majlis began in 2009. The only candidates allowed to run were from the four registered parties supporting the president/government: the Adolat Social-Democratic Party of Uzbekistan, the Milliy Tiklanish Democratic Party of Uzbekistan, the People's Democratic Party of Uzbekistan, and the Liberal-Democratic Party of Uzbekistan. A new Ecological Movement was granted 15 seats in the Majlis by law. A quota of 30% for women members was also set by law. A second round was held in 2010 in those districts in which candidates did not receive 50% of the vote.

Summing up the results, the Central Elections Commission said the Liberal Democratic Party received 53 seats, People's Democratic Party 32 seats, Milliy Tiklanish 31 seats, and Adolat 19 seats. Some 33 deputies who were elected were women; 47 deputies (31.3%) were elected for the second time. ODIHR deployed an election assessment, rather than a monitoring mission.



Economics and politics

Much of the economy remains in state hands. The state retains control over land and water. A move was taken toward economic liberalization in 2003 when the national currency, the Som, was made fully convertible. Efforts to assert greater control over the informal bazaar sector in late 2004 led to localized unrest.

Uzbekistan's economy depends heavily on agricultural production. Cotton accounts for 40 percent of the gross value of agricultural production and is often referred to as the country's "white gold." After the fall of the Soviet Union, collective farms were broken up into small household plots, farms and agricultural cooperatives. Farmers, due to the huge pressure to meet the yearly cotton quotas, overuse fertilizers, which damage the soil quality over time and leads to salinization. Inability to get fuel in a timely manner, the inability to withdraw cash from their own bank accounts, coupled by recent droughts have contributed to the farmer's hardships because they cannot meet the state ordered quota. Despite international criticism, Uzbekistan continues to offer a rather low wholesale price for cotton and grain; in 2011, a kilogram of grain was valued at 2000 som (about US \$1.50), farmers were paid only several hundred som by the state (about 10 cents).

Unemployment has forced many rural Uzbeks to seek work abroad. Uzbek agricultural laborers work legally mainly in Russia, Kazakhstan and South Korea, but the number of workers who can work abroad is controlled by the government, who negotiate a quota with the receiving country.

Illegal migrants can be found also in Russia and Kazakhstan, but increasingly migrate to southern Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to work in the agricultural sector, replacing Tajik and Kyrgyz farmers who have also migrated to Russia in search of work. Children feel duty bound to help their parents, and join their parents to work in the fields.

Child labor also remains a problem in Uzbekistan, but due to international criticism the government is discouraging the practice, although no official statements concerning the problem have been issued. In 2012 UNICEF, which monitored the fields during the cotton-picking season, reported a decrease in child workers. Growing rural poverty and no adequate social welfare protection system, leaves rural children vulnerable to trafficking for sexual exploitation. Children are typically recruited by women from their own village and trafficked to Kazakhstan. Local NGOs report that internal trafficking of women from villages to Tashkent is also increasing, although the government prefers not recognize the problem.



Islam and politics

Although Uzbekistan is officially a secular state, the government makes great efforts to co-opt and control Islam. Control is exercised through the same institutions as in Soviet times—the Muslim Spiritual Directorate or Muftiate and the government Committee for Religious Affairs. Clerics who assert their independence from these institutions have been removed, arrested, and even assassinated. A law on "freedom of conscience" passed in 1998 made it illegal to establish a religious organization, to build a mosque, or to teach theology without official permission. It also made it illegal to wear religious clothing, including veils, in public. Karimov established the Tashkent Imam Ismail al-Bukhari Islamic Institute in 1999 to train religious leaders according to the principles of state-sanctioned Islam.

Islamists involved in numerous terrorist acts

Despite strict state control, Islamist extremists are believed responsible for numerous assassinations, bombings, and other terrorist acts committed since 1997. Explosions rocked the center of Tashkent in 1999, and several incursions by militants from the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) occurred over the next few years. The Karimov regime responded with mass arrests and increased monitoring of religious activity. There was a series of suicide bombings and shootouts in Tashkent and elsewhere in 2004, but it is unclear whether banned religious groups were responsible. Thousands of people were jailed for participation in banned Islamist groups, particularly the IMU and the Hizb ut-Tahrir (Party of Liberation).

The IMU's bases in Afghanistan were destroyed during the 2001 U.S. invasion. Some surviving IMU fighters fled to the Afghanistan/Pakistan border area. By 2007 many had become embroiled in fighting between Pakistani authorities and rival groups, far from the organization's origins in Uzbekistan. The co-founder and leader of the IMU, [Tahir Yuldashev](#) was killed in the border area in 2009.

The IMU announced that Yuldashev's successor, Osman Adil, was killed in a U.S. drone attack in Pakistan in 2012.

Andijon, May 2005

An armed attack by supporters of 23 local businessmen on trial for membership in a banned extremist Islamist group precipitated [a bloody series of events in Andijon](#), a town in the Fergana Valley, on May 12-13, 2005.

During the night of May 12, attackers occupied a police station and military base, seized the prison and released the businessmen and hundreds of other prisoners. They also seized the regional administrative building, but failed to capture the local offices of other security forces.

During May 13, a large demonstration formed in the Andijon Central Square. Subsequently, Uzbek troops opened fire on people in the Square as they took control of the area. According to unofficial reports, as many as 1000 people may have been killed. Karimov, giving the official version, focused on the casualties of the security forces. The official death toll of 169 was much lower than unofficial reports.

In the trial that followed, 15 alleged organizers of the jailbreak were sentenced to 14 to 20 years in prison (although they could have been sentenced to harsher verdicts). An unusual moment in the



otherwise well-orchestrated trial occurred when a female witness for the prosecution testified that government forces had indeed opened fire on innocents.

Overall, over 100 people were convicted for participating in the events.

Government authorities have continued to harass, detain and imprison opposition and human rights activists, as well as journalists, investigating or reporting on the Andijon events.



Ethnic relations

While non-Uzbeks living in Uzbekistan have not been denied citizenship, the official concept of Uzbekistan as the state of the Uzbeks leaves little scope for ethnic minorities to express their separate identities. However, as Russians have always played a major role in the Uzbek economy and the Russian language is predominant among Uzbek officials, Russian schools and cultural institutions have not been suppressed.

Uzbek-Tajik tensions

It is hard to gauge the potential for unrest of the largest minority, the Tajiks. Many in Bukhara and Samarkand are bilingual in Uzbek and Tajik, and value their Tajik culture. Protest demonstrations in those cities in 1988 suggest that some Tajik speakers do have deeply felt grievances, even if they have been much more cautious about voicing them.

Uzbek security forces reportedly drove IMU militants out of the Surkhandarya area in 2000, minefields were placed on the border, and about 5,000 residents (mostly Tajiks) of border villages were resettled. Some residents were convicted and jailed for aiding the IMU. Subsequently, border and customs controls were eased, and exiles from Surkhandarya were allowed to return to their villages. There were a number of incidents where Tajik herders unaware of the mines planted in the border area were accidentally killed. This created tensions between Tashkent and Dushanbe.

Conflict among regionally based sub-groups of Uzbeks

Perhaps more important than inter-ethnic tension is the potential for conflict among regionally based sub-groups of Uzbeks. Politics in Uzbekistan as a struggle between three groups of politicians:

- The eastern group, from the Fergana Valley
- The western group, from Bukhara or Samarkand
- The Tashkent group
- These groups are also said to predominate in each of the power ministries, specifically the Tashkent group in the SNB (former KGB) and the Samarkand/Bukhara group in the Ministry of Internal Affairs.



Foreign relations

Following a pro-Russian orientation in the early 1990s, Uzbekistan turned toward the West in the second half of the decade. In 1999, Uzbekistan withdrew from the CIS Collective Security Treaty Organization and joined GUAM, a group of post-Soviet states opposed to Russian domination. Uzbekistan remained a member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which provides a forum for security cooperation for Russia, China and four Central Asian states.

Uzbekistan returned to a pro-Russian orientation as a result of arguments with the West over human rights, a breakdown in Uzbekistan's relations with the IMF; and concerns over the Taliban in Afghanistan.

Following 9/11, Uzbekistan turned toward the West again. It allowed the U.S. to use its military facilities for the war in Afghanistan. In 2002, Presidents Bush and Karimov signed a declaration declaring a strategic partnership. In 2004, however, the U.S. sharpened its criticism of Uzbekistan's human rights practices. In 2005 the U.S. joined with the EU, UN and others in calling for an independent investigation of the events in Andijon.

Reacting negatively to U.S. pressure, Uzbekistan gave the U.S. six months in 2005 to close the Kharshi-Khanabad air base and announced an end to counterterrorism cooperation. The U.S. vacated the base.

Karimov's constant realignments

A turn to Russia

Realignment with Russia was spurred by the 2005 regime change in Kyrgyzstan, which heightened President Karimov's fear that Western states intended to destabilize non-democratic governments in the region. Russian understanding for the crackdown in Andijon also contributed to the strengthening of their relationship. In November, Uzbekistan and Russia signed an "unprecedented" (in Karimov's words) mutual security pact that allowed for the stationing of Russian military troops in Uzbekistan. Uzbekistan also formally left GUAM in 2005. In 2006 Uzbekistan joined the Russian-dominated Eurasian Economic Community, and signed several agreements with Gazprom to develop Uzbekistan's gas fields. Uzbekistan also reinstated its membership in the CIS Collective Security Treaty in 2006.

A 2007 Russian-Turkmen-Kazakh summit agreed to expand gas transport pipelines along the Caspian coast (seemingly excluding participation in the Western-backed Trans-Caspian pipeline). Although not present at the summit, Karimov added to the agreement a declaration of intent to modernize the Uzbek section of the Turkmenistan-Uzbekistan-Kazakhstan gas pipeline bound for Russia.

A turn to NATO

In a sign of improving relations with the West, the Uzbek government announced in 2008 a new agreement that would allow Americans attached to NATO to use the German air-bridge through Termez Air Base to Afghanistan.

Karimov (in his first foreign trip since the 2005 Andijon events) attended the 2008 NATO Bucharest Summit. His address in Bucharest focused on Afghanistan – the key issue at the Summit. He emphasized his country's strategic importance with regard to the war there, balancing



himself between the U.S. and Russia.

Uzbekistan also withdrew from the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Community in 2008, ostensibly due to that organization's lack of efficiency.

Subsequently, U.S. Central Command Commander General Petraus made a high profile visit to Tashkent in 2009 for meetings with President Karimov and Defense Minister Berdiyev.

After Kyrgyzstan announced in 2009 the closure of Manas airbase, the Uzbek government agreed to allow the U.S. to ship non-lethal supplies by rail from Russia through its territory to Afghanistan. Uzbekistan also announced that NATO non-lethal cargo would be allowed to transit Navoi Airport on the way to Afghanistan. South Korea handled a major renovation of the airport.

At the request of the Obama Administration, the U.S. Congress voted in 2011 to remove restrictions on military aid to Uzbekistan. The restrictions had been in effect for seven years in an effort to press Uzbek authorities to improve their human rights record and to implement political reforms.

EU sanctions lifted

The European Union decided in 2007 to lift the remaining travel bans on eight senior Uzbek officials instituted after the 2005 Andijon crackdown. The arms embargo was lifted in 2009, with the EU adding that it would assess the human rights situation in Uzbekistan within a year.

European Commissioner for Development Andris Piebalgs visited Tashkent in 2010 and met with top Uzbek officials. The Commissioner's visit demonstrated the strengthening of relations between the EU and Uzbekistan following the 2007 adoption of the EU Strategy on developing a new partnership with Central Asia.

Influence of Iran and Saudi Arabia not welcome

Uzbekistan's relations with the Muslim world are influenced by the conflict between the Karimov regime and its domestic Islamist opposition. The influence of Iran and Saudi Arabia, strongholds of politicized forms of Islam, is not welcome. Turkey offers a relatively more acceptable model of the role of religion.

Anti-IMU operations in neighboring countries

Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan incursions through Tajikistan in 1999 and 2000 were intercepted in Kyrgyzstan with military assistance from Uzbekistan.

Tense relations with Central Asian neighbors

Uzbekistan is the most populous of the central Asian states and has the strongest army. Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan view Uzbekistan's quest for regional dominance as a threat to their own independence.

Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan are rivals for the leading role in the region. There have also been twenty shooting incidents between the two countries' border guards in recent years. The delimitation of the Uzbek-Kazakh border is now complete and in 2004 the first border checkpoint was erected. Uzbekistan tightened its borders with Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan to prevent smuggling, but this only increased the opportunities for corruption and harassment of shuttle



traders.

Uzbekistan and Tajikistan have traded accusations about the harboring of Islamic militants. The two also have differences regarding water and energy issues. Uzbekistan is concerned by Tajik plans to build the world's highest dam to control the flow of the Amu Darya River, which is essential for irrigation of Uzbekistan's cotton cultivation. Indeed, during a visit by Russian President Medvedev to Tashkent in 2009, Karimov publicly asked Russia to "influence" Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan on water issues. Both states reportedly will be releasing less water downstream due to their own domestic needs. Uzbekistan appears to have stepped up its pressure on Tajikistan in 2009 by withdrawing from the Central Asia Electricity Grid, as well as periodic stoppages of rail traffic into Tajikistan.

Asia

China expressed full understanding for Uzbekistan's handling of the Andijon events during Karimov's visit to meet his Chinese counterpart in Beijing in 2005.

Karimov has also held high-level meetings with the leaders of South Korea, Japan, and India in order to diversify economic ties and increase foreign investment.

OSCE

An OSCE Liaison Office in Central Asia was established in Tashkent in 1995 to link the five central Asian participating states with OSCE activities. The office changed its name to the OSCE Centre in Tashkent following the decision to open OSCE Centres in the other central Asian countries.

The Centre in Tashkent promotes OSCE principles and commitments in Uzbekistan. Training courses organized involved policing borders, the treatment of prisoners, promoting tourism within the region, leadership training for women, and training in election monitoring.

In 2006, the OSCE Centre in Tashkent was renamed the [OSCE Project Co-ordinator in Uzbekistan](#). The Office supports the government's efforts to ensure security and stability, including the fight against terrorism, violent extremism, illegal drug trafficking and other transnational threats and challenges. The Office has also supported projects that foster the development of national human rights institutions, anti-trafficking efforts, capacity-building of national institutions and non-governmental organizations, and legal education.





Participants at an OSCE-supported workshop on women’s leadership in policing, Tashkent, 5 November 2012.(OSCE/Ildar Fayzullin)



Participants at an OSCE-supported workshop on women’s leadership in policing, Tashkent, 5 November 2012. (OSCE/Christoph Opferman)



Uzbekistan culture

The capital Tashkent, situated in the east of the country, is home to about one-tenth of Uzbekistan's inhabitants. The old town is a maze of narrow dusty streets lined by low mud-brick houses, mosques, and medressas (Islamic colleges), a few dating from the 15th or 16th century. Here also is the huge Chorsu Bazaar, which draws crowds of people from the countryside, many in traditional dress. However, the city's architecture is predominantly late Soviet in style. This is largely the result of reconstruction after the destructive 1966 earthquake. A variety of ancient artifacts have been preserved in the museums, especially the Museum of Fine Arts.



Chorsu Bazaar, Tashkent. April 2005 (USIP/Ted Feifer)

Monuments

Most of Uzbekistan's historic monuments are not in Tashkent but in other places, and especially in the three ancient cities of the Silk Road—Samarkand, Bukhara, and Khiva. Here are the great mosques with their majestic shining turquoise domes, elegant minarets, intricate tile mosaics, and geometrically proportioned spaces, as well as medressas, mausoleums, palaces, fortresses, and ancient public baths. Other famous sights include [Shahi-Zinda](#), the street of decorated tombs in Samarkand, and the plaza of [Labi-hauz](#) in Bukhara, built around a natural spring (Hauz in Uzbek).



Samarkand, 2005 (USIP/Ted Feifer)

Geography

The rocky Kyzyl Kum (Red Sand) Desert and arid plains take up over two-thirds of Uzbekistan. Most of the country's people live in three intensively cultivated and irrigated valleys that occupy only one-tenth of the land area—the valleys of the Amu Darya, Syr Darya, and Zeravshan Rivers.

Uzbekistan is flat except in the far southeast, where the terrain rises toward the mountains of neighboring Afghanistan and Tajikistan. In the west are some stretches of shallow water, surrounded by an expanse of loose sand swirling in the wind—all that remains of the inland Aral Sea. The drying-up of the sea has ruined the health and livelihood of the local people who used to fish in it. The fishing boats of the once thriving port of Moynaq lie rusting in the sand beside depressions marking the town's futile efforts to keep channels open to the receding water.

Attire

Uzbek men usually wear somber colors, except for the bright-colored sash that older men use to close their long quilted coats. Outside of the capital, older men wear the dopy, a square black skullcap embroidered in white. Most women wear knee-length cloth dresses over cloth trousers. In Tashkent, both men and women dress in western styles.



Uzbek man and women walking in Samarkand. (photo: Kimberley Bulkley)

Holidays

The usual Muslim holy days are observed. The most popular holiday is the spring festival of Nauruz (New Year's Day) on March 21-22. A traditional vitamin-rich dish called sumalyak is prepared and given to friends and family. A wedding or circumcision is likely to be celebrated by the whole mahalla—the neighborhood unit that serves as the basis of community and local government. In some places, local harvest festivals take place in December.

Cuisine

Typical Uzbek dishes include plov (pilafs), kebabs, noodles and pasta, stews, and elaborate breads, sweets, and pastries. Preparing Plov is traditionally considered a man's job. Most Uzbeks are too poor to afford meat, except on special occasions. Tea is ubiquitous, usually served without milk. The local teahouse is always a gathering place for Uzbek men. But many Uzbeks drink alcohol as well, even vodka (outside of the conservative Fergana Valley), at least when they entertain guests, despite their Muslim heritage.



An Uzbek vendor bakes local bread in a traditional Uzbek oven in Tashkent. 17 October 2001 (© AP/Wide World Photo/Sergei Grits)





CHAPTER 5

Kyrgyzstan



Geography

Item	Description
Area	77,201 square miles
Natural resources	Abundant hydropower; significant deposits of gold and rare earth metals; locally exploitable coal, oil, and natural gas; other deposits of nepheline, mercury, bismuth, lead, and zinc



People

Item	Description
Population	5.5 million (July 2012 est.)
Ethnic groups	Kyrgyz 64.9%, Uzbek 13.8%, Russian 12.5%, Dungan 1.1%, Ukrainian 1%, Uighur 1%, other 5.7% (1999 census)
Religions	Muslim 75%, Russian Orthodox 20%, other 5%
Languages	Kyrgyz (official) 64.7%, Uzbek 13.6%, Russian (official) 12.5%, Dungan 1%, other 8.2% (1999 census)



Government

Item	Description
Capital	Bishkek
System of government	Republic
Head of state	Almazbek Atambaev
Currency	Som



Basic geography

Kyrgyzstan is divided administratively into seven provinces plus the capital, which is treated as a separate unit. It is useful to distinguish three broad regions:

- The north contains the capital, most of the country's industry, and most of the remaining Russian-speaking population.
- The mountainous south and southeast, along the borders with Tajikistan and China, are undeveloped. The population is overwhelmingly Kyrgyz.
- The southwest, along the border with Uzbekistan, includes Kyrgyzstan's section of the Fergana Valley. Here lies Osh, the country's second largest city. About one-third of the region's population belongs to the Uzbek minority.



Historical background

The Kyrgyz are probably descended from indigenous people, Turkic, and Mongol migrants. The [Manas epic](#) tells of the early struggle of the Kyrgyz against conquerors who were probably the Mongol Oirats.

Subjugated in the early 19th century by the Kokand Khanate

After a brief period under Chinese rule in the late 18th century, the Kokand Khanate subjugated the Kyrgyz in the early 19th century. It was under Kokand domination that Islam took root among the Kyrgyz, though their old beliefs and customs were not erased. It was at this time a Kyrgyz woman named Kurmanjan was recognized by the Kokand Khanate as the ruler of Alai (southern Kyrgyzstan). She was given the title of "Datka" as is also known as the "Alaiskaya Tsaritsa" or the Tsarina of Alai. When Russia destroyed the Kokand Khanate and annexed southern Kyrgyzstan, [Kurmanjan Datka](#) was instrumental in persuading her people to live peacefully under Russian rule.

The heavy tax burden led the Kyrgyz to rebel against Kokand in 1845 and again in 1870-71. The Russian army captured the fortress at Pishpek (now Bishkek) in 1862, and finally defeated the Kokand Khanate in 1876.

Under the Czars

Under the Czars, the Kyrgyz lost much of their best land to Russian and Ukrainian settlers. In 1916, they also rose up against conscription during World War One. Many fled to China to escape the ensuing repression.

Kyrgyz under the Soviets

The Soviet authorities created a Kyrgyz Autonomous Republic within the RSFSR (Russia) in 1926. It was upgraded to the Kyrgyz SSR in 1936. It was in the 1930s that the Kyrgyz were forced to give up the nomadic way of life and join collective farms, from which many again fled to China.

The 1930s also saw industrialization on a large scale, mainly in the north of the republic and especially around the capital. It was accompanied by a massive influx of Russian-speaking people from other parts of the USSR. [Frunze](#) (as Bishkek was then named) developed as a mainly Russian city.

New public organizations and independent political groups

Despite the onset of Perestroika in the late 1980s, permission to register as an independent political group was only reluctantly granted by the communist authorities to Ashar, a pressure group concerned with housing problems. Over the next year, many new public organizations appeared, the largest being the [Democratic Movement Kyrgyzstan](#), formed in 1990 by Kyrgyz groups seeking democracy and national revival.



The Osh conflict and the ‘Silk Revolution’

The sudden political freedom that came with the collapse of the Soviet Union generated unrest, Kyrgyz communist leaders, who were used to working within a strictly regimented system, were unable to cope. The activity of the new public organizations, most of which had memberships drawn from a single ethnic group, fuelled ethnic confrontation.

Violent conflict between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks

The results were especially tragic in the mixed Kyrgyz-Uzbek areas of Osh Province in the southwest, where a local dispute in 1990 over the allocation of land for housing triggered a [violent conflict between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks](#) in which hundreds died. Order was restored only by the intervention of Soviet troops from outside the republic.

Uzbeks and Kyrgyz both nursed grievances. Uzbeks resented the lack of official recognition of their language and the Kyrgyz near-monopoly of government employment in the province. The Kyrgyz resented Uzbek control of trade. These resentments were aggravated by lack of land and youth unemployment.

Askar Akayev

In 1990, the Supreme Soviet of the Kyrgyz SSR created the position of president. They chose a democratically inclined non-party figure, [Askar Akayev](#), a physicist who had worked in Leningrad for twenty years and was then chairman of the Kyrgyz Academy of Sciences, to serve as the country's first president.

Akayev elected first president of Kyrgyz Republic

In what became known as Kyrgyzstan's "silk revolution," Akayev peacefully dismantled the communist power structure. During the attempted hard-line coup in Moscow in 1991, Akayev supported Yeltsin. Following the collapse of the coup, Kyrgyzstan's parliament declared independence.

Akayev was confirmed by popular election as the first president of the Kyrgyz Republic. Unlike the other Central Asian states, Kyrgyzstan had a president who was not a former Communist Party leader.



Ethnic relations

The most serious ethnic problem remains the tension between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in southwestern Kyrgyzstan. Another outbreak of inter-ethnic rioting took place in 2010, which left up to 2,200 dead and a reported 100,000 ethnic Uzbek refugees who had temporarily fled to Uzbekistan.



An Osh neighbourhood badly damaged during the violent unrest in southern Kyrgyzstan in June 2010. Osh, Kyrgyzstan, 2 March 2011. (OSCE/Sonya Yee)

Kyrgyz and Russians in the north

There has also been tension between Kyrgyz and Russians in the north of the country, especially over the language issue. In 1989, Kyrgyz was made the state language, with Russian relegated to the status of “language of inter-ethnic communication.” In 2001, however, Russian was given equal standing with Kyrgyz. Other conciliatory gestures toward Russian-speakers were also made, such as the opening of the [Kyrgyz-Russian Slavonic University in Bishkek](#) in 1993.

Tension between regional groups of Kyrgyz

There are also tensions between different regional groups of Kyrgyz, especially between those living in the north and those living in the south of the country. This division is pronounced in spheres such as ministerial appointments and is a popular theme in the media, but it matters little to most ordinary people.

Domestic politics

Parties that played important roles in the early 1990s lost electoral support or disappeared completely, while the party that won the largest number of seats in the 1995 elections—the [Social Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan](#)—did not win any seats in the parliamentary elections of 2000. In contrast, pro-presidential parties set up since 1991 received substantial support, but none held together for long. Over half the deputies elected in successive parliamentary elections lacked any party affiliation.

2000 parliamentary elections

The results were:

- The [Party of Communists of Kyrgyzstan](#) came in first with 15 seats
- Two pro-presidential parties—Union of Democratic Forces and My Country—won 5 seats between them
- The Democratic Party of Women of Kyrgyzstan won 2 seats
- The Party of War Veterans won 2 seats
- [Ata Meken](#) (Fatherland), a centrist party, won 1 seat
- Three radical Kyrgyz nationalist parties—[Erkin Kyrgyzstan](#) (Free Kyrgyzstan), Asaba, and Manas—took part in the elections, but failed to enter parliament.

Reputation as oasis of democracy increasingly tarnished

Kyrgyzstan used to enjoy the reputation as an oasis of democracy in central Asia. Since 2000, however, this reputation has been badly tarnished. Media outlets too critical of the government were harassed. OSCE observers noted serious abuses in the conduct of the 2000 parliamentary and presidential elections, in which Akayev was re-elected president with 74% of the vote.

Persecution of prominent politicians

Politicians with the stature to pose an effective challenge to Akayev were persecuted, together with their supporters, associates, and relatives.

[Felix Kulov](#), leader of the [Ar-Namys](#) (meaning Honor or Dignity) Party, who in the 1990s was successively vice-president, a provincial governor, interior minister, and mayor of Bishkek, was repeatedly prosecuted and imprisoned, preventing him from running against Akayev.

In 2002, parliamentarian Azimbek Beknazarov was arrested on charges of abuse of office after he opposed Akayev over an agreement that ceded to China some territory in the high Tien Shan range. The arrest sparked demonstrations in Aksy, Beknazarov's home district. Protestors were fired on by security forces. Six were killed and over sixty injured.

First ethnic Russian prime minister

The violence in [Aksy](#) led to the resignation of the government. A new government was formed in



2002 with [Nikolai Tanayev](#) as prime minister.

Confrontation defused but political tensions continued

As protests continued, confrontation between the government and the opposition escalated. It was also perceived as a confrontation between the north and the south of the country. A dialogue between Akayev and the opposition prevented an escalation of the conflict. An agreement was reached in 2002. Becnazarov was freed after two months in jail, and provincial officials responsible for the shootings were tried and convicted (though released on appeal in 2003).

Relations remained tense between the Akayev regime and the main opposition, united under an umbrella organization called the Movement for the Resignation of Akayev and Reforms for the People.

Constitutional referendum

On Akayev's initiative, [a constitutional referendum was held in 2003](#). As a result, the upper chamber of the parliament (the Assembly of People's Representatives) was abolished, while the remaining chamber of 75 deputies acquired greater oversight power over the executive, including the right to votes of no confidence.

Islamists banned

In 2003 the Supreme Court banned a number of Islamist organizations. It is believed that this step was connected with the arrest of three Kyrgyz on suspicion of planning a terrorist attack on the recently established U.S. airbase.

In 2006, a group of armed men in Tajikistan attacked a checkpoint on the Kyrgyz border and killed several guards. Kyrgyz soldiers sent to the area killed or captured most of the attackers. It is not known whether the assault was political in nature or drug-related.

Also in 2006, the Kyrgyz National Security Services killed a popular imam, whom they claimed was a terrorist, in a shootout in southern Kyrgyzstan. His followers protested, claiming that he was not a member of the IMU.

2005 parliamentary elections

The first round of voting produced 32 winners, with 45 races to be run again in a second round. OSCE election monitors pointed out a number of violations and failures to meet democratic standards.

The second round resulted in a landslide victory for pro-government candidates in the 75-seat parliament, according to official returns. President Akayev's daughter, [Bermet Akayeva](#) and his son, Aider Akayev, each won a seat. The opposition won only 6 seats. Opposition leader Bakiyev was defeated.

OSCE election monitors noted the same concerns, including lack of voter access to various information sources, bias in the media, continued deregistration of candidates on minor grounds, and inaccurate and poorly maintained voter lists.

2005 uprising - The Tulip Revolution



Protests that started even before the February elections mushroomed after the opposition complained that the election results had been rigged. Protesters first seized the southern cities of Jalal-Abad and Osh, and then moved on to Bishkek. As opposition leaders were planning their next moves, protesters unexpectedly seized the president's office. Akayev fled the country as his rule disintegrated in what became known as the [Tulip Revolution](#).

By the end of March, former opposition leaders were in power. [Kurmanbek Bakiev](#) became acting president and prime minister. Arranging an orderly and legal succession became a high priority. After an initial stalemate, the old parliament resigned, making way for the new parliament chosen in the recent elections.

Tense run-up to presidential elections

Supporters of presidential candidate Urmat Baryktabasov briefly seized the main government building in Bishkek to protest his not being registered as a candidate because he held joint Kyrgyz-Kazakh citizenship.

2005 Presidential election

Bakiev won a landslide victory, garnering almost 90% of the 75% voter turnout. He ran very strongly in his home region in the country's south, and his alliance with northerner Felix Kulov won him strong support there as well. Bakiev promised to name Kulov prime minister.

The OSCE evaluated the election as marking tangible progress toward meeting OSCE and international commitments for democratic elections, although there were problems with the vote count.

New public chamber

A new public chamber of 45 politicians, intellectuals, war veterans, and NGO leaders was formed in 2009 and, according to President Bakiev, was to bridge the gap between government and leaders.

The new chairman of the public chamber claimed that "the body will make suggestions to the government in accordance with the people's wishes."

Still, the public chamber appeared to have little impact or influence.

Electoral Violence

The presidential elections were marked by several politically-motivated murders, raising questions about the stability of the regime and the power of organized crime. A month before the presidential election, parliamentarian and businessman [Jyrgalbek Surabaldiev](#) was killed. Parliamentarian [Bayaman Erkinbaev](#), who was at the center of the June conflict in Osh, was killed in a shootout and 12 others were wounded in September. The next month, [Tynychbek Akmatbaev](#), a third parliamentarian and brother of an influential criminal kingpin, Rysbek, was killed in a prison riot. [Rysbek](#) himself was assassinated in Bishkek.

Tynychbek's killing prompted protests demanding the resignation of Prime Minister Kulov, while pro-Kulov demonstrators demanded that he remain in office. Attempts to relocate prisoners who were involved in the murder only resulted in more riots that were forcibly suppressed.



Continuing political instability

President Bakiev and the mostly pro-Akaev parliament were unable to work together, prompting parliamentary speaker [Omurbek Tekebaev](#) to resign in protest.

Within a year of the Tulip Revolution, many were disappointed with how Bakiev had dealt with crime and corruption. An alliance of opposition businessmen and activists formed and began organizing demonstrations with thousands of protesters.

Meanwhile, Tekebaev was arrested in Poland for carrying heroin. He was released when evidence was presented that it had been planted. Parliament began an inquiry into the incident and Bakiev's brother Janysh, the head of the National Security Service, was implicated.

The anti-Bakiev alliance led a series of street protests, resulting in the adoption of a new constitution. The document strengthened parliament at the expense of the president, and provided that half the members of the legislature would be elected by party lists.

Bakiev and Kulov split

Kulov served as prime minister until 2006, and then failed to receive parliamentary confirmation after being renominated by Bakiev in 2007. Bakiev then named Azim Isabekov, a close associate, to head the government. Isabekov's firing of seven cabinet ministers was not supported by Bakiev, and Isabekov resigned after two months in office. Bakiev then asked [Almaz Atambaev](#), the leader of the Social Democrats and until then the opposition For Reforms movement, to become prime minister. Meanwhile, Kulov joined the opposition United Front for a Worthy Future for Kyrgyzstan, which had called for Bakiev to resign and for early presidential elections to be held.

2007 referenda

In October, 75% of voters approved a new constitution and electoral law submitted by Bakiev that strengthened the president's authority in picking key government officials and dissolving parliament. Only 4% of voters reportedly voted against. The constitutional amendments also changed the election process from a single-constituency system to a proportional all-party list, with a 5% overall threshold and a 5% threshold in each of the country's seven regions and two cities. OSCE criticized the vote counting and use of state resources to take voters to the polls.

2007 parliamentary elections

Bakiev moved quickly to dissolve parliament and hold new elections in December. The Central Elections Committee said Bakiev's Ak Zhol Party won 71 seats, the pro-Bakiev Social Democrats 11, and the Communists 8. The opposition Ata-Meken received no seats despite its second place finish, allegedly because it did not win the minimum number of votes in Osh.

The OSCE election mission reported that the elections failed to meet a number of OSCE commitments. Legal actions had been taken against specific parties, vote counting and tabulation challenged transparency, candidate registration procedures were unequally applied, and the media did not provide adequate information for voters to make an informed choice. The new legal framework also contained ambiguous provisions that were still unclear even after election day.

Opposition under pressure



Opposition members were put under house arrest, journalists attacked or brought before politicized trials, and newspapers shut down. Bakiev opponents formed a [United People's Movement](#) to oppose government repression and to oust the regime.

Bakiev initiated a dialogue meeting with the opposition, which consisted of an exchange of known positions. Subsequently, another leading member of the opposition, former Foreign Minister Alikebek Jekshenkulov, was arrested.

A former head of the Presidential Administration, [Medet Sadyrkulov](#), was killed along with his driver and policy adviser Sergei Slepchenko, in a reported 2009 automobile accident, where all three were burned beyond recognition. At the time the accident, Sadyrkulov had recently resigned to join the anti-Bakiev opposition. Motorist [Omurbek Osmonov](#) was tried and found guilty of the traffic accident. He was sentenced to 12 years in jail. He was stabbed to death in his prison cell within a year. (After the 2010 revolution, an internal investigation concluded that Janysh Bakiev, the President's brother and head of the Kyrgyz security services organized the murder. Janysh Bakiev later fled to Belarus to join his brother in exile. Kyrgyzstan has repeatedly asked Belarus to extradite [Janysh Bakiev](#), who has been put on the Interpol wanted list. Belarus has refused the extradition request.)

2009 presidential election

Bakiev reportedly won 76% of the vote in the presidential election, running far ahead of his closest competitor, former Prime Minister Almazbek Atambaev, who came in with 8.7% of the vote. The opposition claimed the results were fraudulent.

The OSCE/ODIHR monitoring mission asserted that the election failed to meet key OSCE commitments for democratic elections, in particular the commitment to guarantee equal suffrage, to ensure that votes are reported honestly and that political campaigning is conducted in a fair and free atmosphere as well as to maintain a clear separation between party and state.

Another political murder

A journalist, [Gennady Pavlyuk](#), was murdered in 2009; thrown from a building in Almaty, Kazakhstan with his hands and feet tied. He was working with opposition Ata-Meken (Fatherland) Party leader Omurbek Tekebaev to create a website and newspaper. Kazakh media reported that senior Kyrgyz security officials were involved in the murder.

Bakiev overthrown

Bakiev was ousted following violent clashes between protestors and police in Bishkek in 2010, precipitated by public anger over electricity hikes, poor governance and corruption, accompanied by sharp criticism by the Russian media. At least 88 were reportedly killed and over a thousand injured. An interim government was formed, headed by former Foreign Minister [Roza Otunbayeva](#).

Kyrgyz-Uzbek ethnic violence

The worst ethnic violence in Kyrgyzstan's history began in the south in June 2010. Multiple versions have been put forward to explain what led to the violence, which resulted in the death of an estimated 3,000 (mostly Uzbeks) and the temporary creation of hundreds of thousands of



displaced persons and refugees. The violence appears to have started in Osh, against the background of simmering Kyrgyz-Uzbek tensions. Some have claimed that supporters of ousted President Bakiev sought to inflame the situation in an effort to bring him back, others pointed to the involvement of Kyrgyz security forces in the pogroms and atrocities against ethnic Uzbeks. Criminals also may have had a role.

An International Commission of Inquiry (which included the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly's Special Representative for Central Asia, [Kimmo Kiljunen](#)) was set up as a Nordic initiative with the support of President Otunbayeva. The report focused on the involvement of some of the Kyrgyz security forces in attacks on Uzbek communities and the direct or indirect complicity of others in the violence. Many in the Kyrgyz government and parliament were infuriated by the report and rejected it as unbalanced and pro-Uzbek. Following the riots, many Uzbek community and religious figures were arrested and tried.



An Osh neighbourhood badly damaged during the violent unrest in southern Kyrgyzstan in June 2010. Osh, Kyrgyzstan, 2 March 2011. (OSCE/Sonya Yee)

2010 referendum precedes elections

A referendum in June 2010 approved the shift from a presidential to a parliamentary system, making it the first one in central Asia. Parliament will choose the prime minister and play a key role in forming a new government.

Parliamentary elections were held in October 2010, but no party won strong popular support. The Kyrgyz nationalist Ata Zhurt Party led by Kamchybek Tashiyev won 8.89% of the vote (28 seats), campaigning for the return of Bakiev and a presidential system; the Social Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan led by Almazbek Atambaev won 8.04% (26 seats), supporting the interim government; the al Namys Party led by Felix Kulov won 7.74% (25 seats) also seeking reinstatement of a presidential system; Respublika led by Omurbek Babanov won 7.24% (23 seats); and the Ata Meken Party led by Omurbek Tekebayev won 5.6% (18 seats), also in support of the interim government. Presidential elections were to be held at the same time, but were postponed until October 2011. Interim President Otunbayeva remained in office until December 2011.

The OSCE-led International Election Observation Mission noted that the elections were conducted peacefully, and that they constituted a further consolidation of the democratic process. Despite the positive remarks there remained an urgent need for profound electoral legal reform.



ODIHR Director Ambassador Janez Lenarcic (l) and his adviser Bernhard Knoll (r) speak with election officials at a polling station in Osh, Kyrgyzstan, during parliamentary elections on 10 October 2010. (OSCE/Jens Eschenbaecher)

2011 presidential election

[Alamzбек Atambayev](#) of the Social Democratic Party, a northerner, won in the first round, with 63.2% of the vote, easily defeating Adahan Madumarov of the Butun Kyrgyzstan (One Kyrgyzstan) Party, a southerner, (with 14.7% of the vote) and Kamchybek Tashiyev of the Ata Zhurt Party, also a southerner (with 14.3 % of the vote).

The OSCE/ODHIR International Election Observation mission's preliminary report stated that the election was conducted in a peaceful manner, but shortcomings underscored the fact that the integrity of the electoral process needed to be improved in line with international commitments. Candidate registration was inclusive, giving voters a wide choice, and the electoral campaign was open and respected fundamental freedoms. This was overshadowed by significant irregularities on election day, especially during the counting and tabulation of votes. Measures needed to be taken to improve voter lists, to amend electoral legislation and strengthen the polling process. Election day was calm and the voting process was assessed positively overall. A considerable number of voters were not on the voter lists, which became an issue on election day. The report noted that during counting and tabulation the situation deteriorated, and as a result, observers assessed a significant number of polling stations negatively. In many cases, observers were restricted from observing the counting and tabulation.

OSCE Roundtable on inter-ethnic relations

In March 2011, the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities and the OSCE Centre in Bishkek supported discussion of a draft Concept for Ethnic Development and Consolidation of Kyrgyzstan's Society at a roundtable organized by the Kyrgyzstan Presidential Administration.

The roundtable brought together parliamentarians, representatives of the Presidential Administration and independent experts, who discussed the draft Concept as well as international norms and best practices in managing inter-ethnic relations through legislative and other tools.

South Kyrgyzstan continues to be volatile

Nationalism and intolerance continue at high levels in south Kyrgyzstan. The Kyrgyz nationalist Mayor of Osh, [Melis Myrzakmatov](#), remains the dominant figure in the area and pays little attention to the capital. Uzbeks continue to be marginalized and their role in the economy diminished. They are vulnerable to illegal detention and abuse by security forces. The sense of physical and social isolation has increased anger among Uzbek youth. Meanwhile, Myrzakmatov appears to retain the support of local Kyrgyz, who blame Uzbeks for the 2010 events.

Economy

Approximately 35% of the population lives below the poverty line, and due to high unemployment, approximately 1 million Kyrgyz work abroad as labor migrants, mainly in Kazakhstan and Russia. Their remittances made up approximately 28% of GDP in 2010.

The Kyrgyz economy is mainly agricultural with cotton and tobacco as its main agricultural sector exports. Industrial exports include gold, mercury, uranium, natural gas, and electricity. Gold exports in 2011 made up 12% of GDP - mainly from output from Kumtor mine owned by the Canadian company Centerra Gold. After the 2010 revolution some Kyrgyz villagers threatened to destroy or take over international mining operations unless their demands for greater profit-share or employment were met. While the government was able to temporarily appease these groups, threats against mining operations have continued, leading many companies to halt exploration. In 2012, the Kyrgyz Parliament narrowly voted against nationalizing Kumtor. Instead, Parliament commissioned a report, which called for a revision of the 2009 Agreement that governs Kumtor's relationship with Kyrgyzstan. While Centerra owns Kumtor and its output completely, the 2009 Agreement gives Kyrgyzstan one-third ownership of Centerra. Parliament is no longer satisfied with the ownership terms of the 2009 Agreement.

In an attempt to move the country beyond its reliance on its income from the Kumtor mine, legislation was amended in 2012 to require all small concessions to be auctioned publicly to the highest bidder, eliminating the complex licensing system mired in corruption. The auction system aims to attract foreign investors who could develop mineral deposits mapped by Soviet geologists, but never brought into production. The first auction was broadcast live on television at the end of August and disrupted by 50 protesters.

The water/energy nexus

Kyrgyzstan is building the Kambarata 1 hydroelectric power plant which will dam the Naryn River, which flows west into Uzbekistan. The Russian government is financing the project, making Russia the key investor in supplying electricity throughout the region. Uzbekistan relies on water flowing from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan for irrigation of cotton. The Uzbeks are also concerned that the Tajik Rogun dam project and Kambarata will cut them off from irrigation waters. In return for water, the Uzbeks provide both Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan with natural gas. The Uzbek government has cut gas supplies to both countries in the past. Uzbekistan President Karimov recently warned of a possible serious confrontation over water resources.



Foreign relations

Russia

Kyrgyzstan has been one of the post-Soviet states willing to cooperate closely with Russia on economic and security issues. Together with Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan, it was a founding member of the Union of the Four, the precursor of the Eurasian Economic Community created in 2000. Kyrgyzstan gave Russia a substantial share in its industry in exchange for debt relief.

Kyrgyzstan's border guard service has been dependent on international and bilateral donors to sponsor its training and equipment. In 1999 and 2000, Kyrgyz border guard clashed with armed Uzbek Islamists that had crossed over into Kyrgyzstan from Tajikistan on their way to Uzbekistan from Afghanistan. This incident left the Kyrgyz feeling particularly vulnerable to cross-border incursions.

In 2007 Parliamentary Speaker, Marat Sultanov raised the issue of bringing Russian border guards back Kyrgyzstan. The Kyrgyz government claimed that Kyrgyzstan's military budget was too small to pay personnel to protect the southern borders, which are also the borders of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). Russia withdrew its border guard from Kyrgyzstan in 1999. In 2010, Russia agreed to station 40 Russian border guards in Osh to assist Kyrgyz authorities in preventing illegal migration, human trafficking, extremism, and terrorism along part of its border with Uzbekistan. Another 20 other Russian border guards are stationed in the northern region of Chui, not far from Bishkek.

Russia was allowed to establish an airbase at Kant, near Bishkek, in 2003. Russia reportedly maintains three squadrons of ground attack and fighter aircraft, as well as transport, helicopter, and training aircraft, at Kant. In addition, Russia maintains a torpedo testing facility on Lake Issyk-Kul, a communications facility at Chaldovar, and a seismic station at Mailuu-Suu.

President Atambayev expressed unhappiness with the Russian bases in early 2012, and complained about Russian non-payment of rent and failure to provide promised training.

In September 2012 Russia agreed to assist Kyrgyzstan with the long-stalled Kambarata-1 hydroelectric dam project and to write off two-fifths of Kyrgyzstan's roughly \$500 million debt. In return, Bishkek promised Moscow a 15-year extension on its military facilities in the country after the current lease expires in 2017.

June 2010 riots an internal matter

Russia turned down Kyrgyzstan's request for peacekeepers during the June 2010 ethnic rioting in the south of the country, suggesting that this was an internal conflict which it could not help to resolve.

Military relations with other states

Kyrgyzstan has balanced its relationship with Russia through military cooperation with the U.S. and China.

The U.S. has been allowed to use Bishkek's Manas International Airpor to support its forces in Afghanistan. During the last year of Bakiev's rule, there was much uncertainty whether the U.S. would be allowed to continue to use the facility. There were allegations of corruption in granting



contracts to supply fuel to the base. Atambayev said in November 2011 that he wanted to close the base when its lease runs out in 2014. Still, Kyrgyzstan Defense Secretary Tobaldiyev told visiting U.S. Central Command Commander Mattis that Bishkek was prepared to let the U.S. use Manas beyond 2014, apparently in return for greater military assistance and training.

Agreement on Kyrgyzstan's border with China was reached in 2001. Kyrgyzstan and China have held joint military exercises, usually within the context of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.



Russian pilots disembark from a Su-27 fighter jet at Kant air base in Kyrgyzstan. The Russian planes are testing facilities at the base for the eventual deployment of a rapid-reaction force. 5 December 2002 (© AP/Wide World Photo/Burt Herman)

Relations with Uzbekistan strained

Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan have disputes over borders, the supply of gas from Uzbekistan to Kyrgyzstan, and the flow of water from Kyrgyzstan to Uzbekistan.

Kyrgyzstan's willingness to give asylum to Uzbeks fleeing their country after the 2005 Andijon events and to allow the UN to fly them out to a third country, rather than return them to Uzbekistan, complicated their relationship. In response, Uzbekistan temporarily cut off gas supplies to northern Kyrgyzstan. Kazakhstan agreed to supply gas to Kyrgyzstan instead.

Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan agreed in 2009 to restart an intergovernmental commission on the delimitation and demarcation of their border. The two countries recognize about 900 kilometers (560 miles) of their joint border, but some 600 kilometers (372 miles) remain in dispute.

In 2012, a Kyrgyz border guard officer was killed and two Kyrgyz citizens injured when Uzbek and Kyrgyz border guards exchanged gunfire at an undemarcated border area. The incident was sparked by road works that residents of Kyrgyzstan's Bulak Bashi village began in the border area despite warnings from Kyrgyz border guards. Uzbek border guards, who arrived at the area demanded that road works be stopped immediately.

Also in 2012, Kyrgyz parliamentarians discussed the disputed status of Kyrgyzstan's Severniy

Sokh and Chongara-Galcha enclaves in the southern Batken province. The two enclaves hold recoverable gas and oil reserves as well as subterranean gas storage facilities. Ownership of the enclaves has been under dispute since the 1950s, but Soviet-era authorities largely left resolution of the issue up to the two countries. Because the enclaves are located on Kyrgyz territory, the Kyrgyz government argues they de jure belong to Kyrgyzstan, while Uzbek authorities insist they belong to Uzbekistan, which has developed oil and gas fields in the enclaves for years. From Kyrgyzstan's perspective, it is time to return the leased territories to Kyrgyzstan. The Kyrgyz parliamentarians urged the government to begin [using](#) the gas storage in Severniy Sokh.

Security relations with Uzbekistan

Bakiev sought common ground with Uzbekistan in the area of security. Kyrgyzstan has at times arrested and extradited suspects wanted in Uzbekistan.

OSCE

The OSCE Centre in Bishkek opened in 1999 to promote OSCE principles and commitments, and regional cooperation.

The Centre also holds seminars and training courses dealing with border security, the rule of law, good governance, and legislation. The Centre has a field office in Osh, as well a local staff members in each region of Kyrgyzstan.

In addition, the OSCE opened an OSCE Academy in Bishkek as a regional educational and research institution at the end of 2002.



Participants at a workshop on developing requirements for training modules on the ethics of governmental officials, organized by the OSCE Centre in Bishkek in co-operation with the NGO Institute of Human Engineering. Professors of higher educational institutions and those involved in developing state employees took part in the discussion. An expert from Estonia shared international standards and practices. Bishkek, 6 July 2012.(OSCE/Svetlana Levina)



OSCE Centre in Bishkek (OSCE)



OSCE Academy in Bishkek (OSCE)



Culture

The capital [Bishkek](#) is home to over one in seven of the country's inhabitants. (The capital's name comes from the word for a wooden churn used to make fermented mare's milk.) The city was founded in 1825. Most of it was built in the late Soviet period. The main streets are wide and lined with trees. Industrial plants are on the outskirts of the city. In the background loom the mountains of the Alatau range. A few miles south of the capital is the Ala-Archa Canyon nature reserve.



Kyrgyz National University, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan (Kimberley Bulkley)

High mountains

High mountains cover most of Kyrgyzstan. Besides the Alatau, there are the Tian Shan (Heavenly) Mountains in the middle of the country, which are the main range, and the Pamir-Alau range in the far south. Kyrgyz pasture cattle, sheep, and goats on grassy meadows at high altitudes during the summer, bringing them down into the valleys when the cold rains and snow start in late fall. The peaks, which in the Tian Shan reach 24,000 feet and above, are covered by huge snowfields and glaciers, which are now under threat from global warming.



The Ala Madin Gorge (Kimberley Bulkley)

Lowlands

The main lowland areas are the temperate valleys of the Talas River (in the northwest) and of the Chu River (in the north), and the much hotter fertile region in the southwest, which is the easternmost section of the Fergana Valley. Here lies Osh, the country's second largest city—and one that, unlike Bishkek, dates back to ancient times. Grains and sugar beet are grown in the valleys, and in the Fergana Valley also cotton. The third important river, besides the Talas and Chu, is the Naryn, which originates in the Tian Shan Mountains and joins with other streams to form one of central Asia's two great rivers, the Syr Darya.



Chui Valley (Kimberley Bulkley)

Mountain lakes

Kyrgyzstan also has some 3,000 mountain lakes. The best known is Lake Ysyk-Kol in the northeast. Over 5,000 feet above sea level, it is the second largest alpine lake in the world. Along the lakeshore are health spas and thermal springs, and also the summer homes of the new rich.



Son-kul Lake, Kyrgyzstan (Kimberley Bulkley)

Natural resources

Natural resources are limited to some deposits of coal, gold, mercury, and antimony, and abundant hydroelectric power. Most people are desperately poor, especially in the undeveloped mountainous south and southeast along the borders with China and Tajikistan.

Literature

The great Kyrgyz national epic in honor of the legendary hero Manas is twenty times longer than Homer's *Odyssey*.

The most famous contemporary Kyrgyz writer is Chingiz Aitmatov, whose masterpiece "The Day Lasts Longer Than 100 Years" mixes folklore with science fiction.

Osh

The culture of the south, centered in [Osh](#), differs from that of the rest of the country. The people of this region lack a nomadic past; they have long been settled on the land. Islam is more strongly entrenched here, and social customs are more restrictive.

Holidays

Besides the usual Muslim holy days, the traditional spring festival of Naurus (New Year's Day) is an occasion for celebration. Large-scale festivities are devoted to the Manas epic.



Eid celebrations in Bishkek end with prayer on the public square in front of parliament next to the statue of Lenin. The annual event attracts approximately 10,000 worshippers (Kimberley Bulkley)

Cuisine

The food eaten in Kyrgyzstan has developed from the subsistence diet of the nomads—meat, spices, milk products, potatoes and bread. People generally drink tea without milk. Other drinks, which are the mildly alcoholic, are kumys, fermented mare's milk, and bozo, a thick yeasty concoction made from fermented millet.



MODULE 6

Tajikistan



Geography

Item	Description
Area	55,251 square miles
Natural resources	Hydropower, some petroleum, uranium, mercury, brown coal, lead, zinc, antimony, tungsten, silver, gold



People

Item	Description
Population	7.8 million (July 2012 est.)
Ethnic groups	Tajik 79.9%, Uzbek 15.3%, Russian 1.1%, Kyrgyz 1.1%, other 2.6% (2000 census)
Religions	Sunni Muslim 85%, Shia Muslim 5%, other 10% (2003 est.)
Languages	Tajik, Russian



Government

Item	Description
Capital	Dushanbe
System of government	Republic
Head of state	Emomali Rahmon
Currency	Somoni



Four regions of Tajikistan

Tajikistan is divided into 11 administrative units, but consists of four broad regions:

- Leninabad Province is in the northern salient. It forms part of the Fergana Valley, and is connected to the rest of the country by a mountain pass open only in the summer months. The main city is Khujand, Tajikistan's second largest city.
- Khotlon Province is in southwestern Tajikistan. Until recently, this region comprised two provinces, Kulob and Qurghonteppa, which have now been merged.
- The region of the Pamir Mountains in eastern Tajikistan is commonly known as Mountainous (or Gorny in Russian) Badakhshan. It constitutes an autonomous political unit called the Pamiri Republic of Badakhshan.
- The remaining central western parts of Tajikistan, including the capital, are directly subordinate to the central government.



Historical background

The Tajiks are of Persian origin, and were known to be farming the great river valleys of the region 3-4,000 years ago. Modern literary Tajik, written in the Arabic alphabet, emerged under the great Muslim civilization of Bukhara and Samarkand ([Transoxiana](#)) in the 9th century. It was also at this time that the Tajiks adopted Islam. By the 11th century Persian and Chagatai had replaced Tajik as the main languages of the civilization of Bukhara and Samarkand.

The Bukharan Emirate—including most Tajiks (although not the Pamiris)—became a Russian protectorate in the mid-19th century.

Tajikistan a union republic in 1929

In 1924, Tajikistan became an autonomous republic within the Uzbek SSR. It became a union republic separate from Uzbekistan in 1929.



Flag of the Tajik Soviet Socialist Republic

Perestroika slow to impact Tajikistan

Independent political groups began to appear in 1989, but were not allowed to take part in the 1990 elections to the Supreme Soviet.

Polarized society

Tajikistan faced the collapse of the Soviet Union as a deeply polarized society. When the hard-line coup was mounted in Moscow in August 1991, the Tajik party boss supported the hardliners. Following the failure of the coup, mass demonstrations in Dushanbe forced him to resign. In September 1991, the Supreme Soviet of the republic declared Tajikistan independent.

Presidential elections of 1991

[Rohman Nabiev](#), a former party boss and chairman of the Supreme Soviet, won with 58% of the vote. An opposition candidate, a well-known cinematographer named [Davlat Khudonazarov](#), received 25%, but charged that the result had been falsified.

The civil war

The civil war of 1992-97 in Tajikistan was the bloodiest armed conflict that accompanied the breakup of the Soviet Union. About 750,000 people were uprooted from their homes and the economy was devastated, while estimates of the number killed range from 70,000 to 100,000.

Rival demonstrations in Dushanbe spark violence

The [Tajik civil war](#) was triggered by rival demonstrations in Dushanbe in 1992. In response to the non-stop opposition demonstration on Shohidon Square, Supreme Soviet speaker [Safarali Kenjayev](#) summoned supporters from Kulob Province to a counter-demonstration on Ozodi Square.

President Nabiev reached a compromise with the opposition, providing for a new coalition government and replacement of the unrepresentative Supreme Soviet by a new assembly. A coalition government was set up, but the old Supreme Soviet refused to disband. Instead, arms were given to demonstrators on Ozodi Square, who returned to Kulob Province ready to fight.

Popular Front: a pro-Soviet paramilitary force

In the summer of 1992, violence spread to the southwest of the country. A pro-Soviet paramilitary force called the Popular Front attacked migrants from Garm and other mountain districts, which it assumed to be opposition supporters.

Reign of terror against the opposition

In November 1992, the old Supreme Soviet re-convened in Khujand and chose a new government that excluded the opposition. The presidency was abolished, and the new Supreme Soviet speaker [Emomali Rakhmon](#), who was associated with the Popular Front, was nominated head of state. In December 1992, the Popular Front, aided by the intervention of Uzbekistan military forces, captured Dushanbe, installed the new government in the capital, and embarked on a reign of terror against the opposition.

CIS "peacekeepers" deployed

While activists in the democratic wing of the opposition took refuge in Moscow, those belonging to the Islamist wing—together with many ordinary refugees—crossed into Afghanistan. From there they returned to Tajikistan and joined the armed resistance in the mountain districts. The Russian military deployed forces in Tajikistan in an effort to seal off the border with Afghanistan. (This job was taken over later by a CIS "peacekeeping force" that consisted mainly of Russian troops, but included small Kazakh, Kyrgyz, and Uzbek contingents. Border control was turned over to Tajik forces in 2004. In spite of these efforts, Tajikistan continues to be a major transit point for drugs from Afghanistan.)

Impasse

Neither side could achieve victory. The opposition could not topple a government that had the military and economic backing of Russia and Uzbekistan. The government was unable to secure effective control over large areas of Tajikistan.



1994 presidential election

Meanwhile, the government side split between politicians from Kulob Province, represented by Rakhmanov, and politicians from Leninobod Province (Khujandis), led by Abdumalik Abdullojanov.

The Presidency was restored and elections held in 1994, together with a referendum on a new constitution. Abdullojanov stood against Rakhmonov, who won with 58% of the vote to Abdullojanov's 40%. Power shifted from the formerly dominant Khujandi leaders to the new Kulobi elite.

1995 parliamentary elections

Elections for a new 181-seat parliament followed in 1995. Almost all the deputies elected were supporters of the government.



Nature of the war

The [Islamic Revival Party](#) (IRP), representing traditional Islamic values and customs, was the largest and best-organized force in the opposition.

Allied with the IRP were a number of organizations advocating democracy and national independence, the most important being the [Democratic Party of Tajikistan](#) (DPT).

The Pamiri organization [La'li Badakhshon](#) (Ruby of Badakhshan) was concerned primarily with enhancing the autonomy of Badakhshan.

Conflict between regionally based Tajik sub-groups

The war can best be understood as a conflict between regionally based Tajik sub-groups, with Khujandis and Kulobis on the post-communist side confronting Garmis, Pamiris, and other sub-groups on the opposition side. As a result of the uneven development of Tajikistan during the Soviet period, people in some parts of the country, especially Leninobod and Kulob Provinces, were deeply influenced by the Soviet system, while the inhabitants of many mountain districts remained attached to traditional ways.



Negotiations and the peace process

The parties were pushed to negotiate due to the military stalemate, Russian pressure to reach a settlement, and the advance of the Taliban in Afghanistan (who were feared by Tajiks of all political persuasions).

Intra-Tajik peace talks took place mainly under the aegis of Russia, with the United Nations playing a mediating role. In late 1994 a ceasefire was agreed, and the [United Nations Mission of Observers in Tajikistan](#) (UNMOT), consisting of 40 military observers and their support staff, was deployed to monitor it. The ceasefire did not hold.

National Peace Accord

The real breakthrough came in December 1996, when Rakhmonov and leader of the [United Tajik Opposition](#) (UTO), [Said Abdullo Nuri](#), met in Afghanistan and Moscow, agreed on a new ceasefire and basic principles of a peace and reconciliation agreement.

The National Peace Accord brought an end to the war, and was signed by the government of Tajikistan and the UTO in Moscow in June 1997.

The peace accord provided for the:

- Immediate creation of a coalition government
- Legalization of opposition parties and a transition to multiparty democracy
- Resettlement of refugees
- Integration of opposition fighters into the national army

Accord implemented

The accord was by and large been implemented. A coalition government was formed and remains in office. Opposition figures were appointed to a number of important positions. For example, the highly respected Moslem religious leader Hoji [Akbar Turajonzoda](#) (He served as the Qazi Qalon, the highest Muslim authority in Tajikistan, from 1988 to 1991) was made first deputy Prime Minister.

Opposition parties were legalized in 1999. Refugees returned to their homes, though many suffered intimidation and discrimination at the hands of local authorities. The military forces of the two sides were formally integrated, but particular army units retained informal links with one or another political grouping.

The peace accord and Islamist extremists

The continued confrontation between Islamists and governments elsewhere in the region placed the peace accord under strain, especially given the presence of an Islamist party, the IRP, in the government coalition. The IRP, the only legal Islamic party in Central Asia, has distanced itself from radical Islamism and has not blocked action against foreign and Tajik radical Islamists based in Tajikistan. Government forces crushed some Tajik Islamists who had rejected the peace accord and continued fighting. Training camps that the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan had in northern



Tajikistan were shut down.

Armed insurgents a continuing problem

More recently, an attack on an army convoy in Eastern Tajikistan in 2010 in which at least 23 Tajik soldiers were killed illustrated the continuing challenge of Islamic insurgents to the government. During 2011 at least six armed clashes reportedly occurred between Tajik security forces and suspected Islamic militants and/or drug traffickers near the border with Afghanistan.

Russia lacks confidence in the Tajik government to effectively contain a low level Islamic insurgency with the country and illegal heroin entering the country from Afghanistan. The fear is that both these issues could intensify when the International Security Assistance Force pulls out of Afghanistan in 2014.

The Tajik government has rejected Russia's overtures to again place its border guard on the Tajik-Afghan border. . In 2011 Russia and Tajikistan signed an extension of the Border Cooperation Agreement, which preserves Russian presence in Tajikistan as part of the Border Cooperation Group. Russia's representatives participate in upgrading state border protection and Tajikistan's operational border security, providing professional training for Tajikistan's border agency, as well as cooperation on terrorism, religious extremism, illegal migration and transnational organized crime.

Russia leases three bases in Tajikistan (Dushanbe, Qurghonteppa and Kulab). In 2012, the Tajik government extended the lease in exchange for increasing quotas and providing more favorable terms for Tajik labor migrants working in Russia.

OSCE

An OSCE Centre was established in Tajikistan in 1994. The Centre monitored implementation of the 1997 peace accord and was one of its guarantors. Following Tajikistan's first multiparty parliamentary elections in 2000, implementation of the peace accord was considered complete.

The Centre was renamed the [OSCE Office in Tajikistan](#) in 2008. It has five regional field offices: in Garm, Khujand, Kulyab, Kurgan-Tyube and Shaartuz.



The OSCE Centre in Dushanbe opened a new Field Office in Kulyab, some 200 km. to the southeast of the capital, on 27 February 2003.(OSCE)

OSCE Office in Tajikistan activities

The Office has facilitated dialogue and confidence-building between political and regional forces, promoted respect for human rights and development of civil society, and helped create democratic political and legal institutions.

Priorities are the rule of law, separation of powers, human rights, freedom of the media, modernization of legislation and reforms toward building a market economy.



Ambassador Ivar Vikki, Head of the OSCE Office in Tajikistan (third from the left) (OSCE)



Larisa Aleksandrova of the Human Rights Center NGO, addresses women's access to justice during the OSCE Office in Tajikistan's Preparatory Human Dimension Implementation Meeting, Dushanbe, 2 July 2012. (OSCE/Nizom Kalandarov)

OSCE Border Management Staff College

OSCE established an [OSCE Border Management Staff College in Dushanbe](#) in 2009. The college

holds seminars and courses for border- customs and other officials from OSCE participating States and Partners for Co-operation, including Afghanistan. Since 2009, 310 senior officials from border, customs and police agencies, coming from 21 countries, have completed these courses.



Participants at an opening ceremony for the sixth staff course for senior border officials held at the OSCE Border Management Staff College, Dushanbe, 1 October 2012. (OSCE/Gennady Ratushenko)

Domestic politics

New political framework established in 1999

The [1999 referendum](#) approved creation of a new parliament consisting of a lower house filled by popular election and an upper house whose members are appointed either by the president or by regional governing bodies. As the president selects the members of regional governing bodies, he is effectively in full control of the upper house. There are 97 total members of the two houses; both serve for five-year terms.

1999 presidential election

Four of the five candidates who tried to run against Rakhmonov in the 1999 presidential election were denied registration. The fifth, [Davlat Usmon](#) of the IRP, announced his withdrawal to protest against restrictions on campaigning, but his name was left on the ballot. According to the official result, Rakhmonov won 97% of the vote.

The Constitution was amended by [referendum in 2003](#) to allow Rakhmonov to stand for another two 7-year terms—that is, to possibly stay in office until 2020.

2000 parliamentary elections

The 2000 parliamentary elections were won by the ruling [People's Democratic Party of Tajikistan](#), with 65% of the vote. The Communist Party received 21% and the Islamic Revival Party 7%. Three other parties failed to cross the five percent barrier to entry into parliament. Although irregularities were reported, international observers concluded that the elections were a step forward toward democracy for Tajikistan.

2004 pre-election arrests

Opposition parties faced government pressures in the run-up to the parliamentary elections, and two prominent figures from opposite sides of the political spectrum were arrested.

Counter-narcotics head [Gaffor Mirzoev](#), a prominent Kulobi general and former commander of the presidential guard, was arrested on various charges, including murder and abuse of power; Rakhmonov subsequently accused Mirzoev of plotting a coup against him.

In December, opposition Democratic Party leader [Makhmadruzi Iskandarov](#) was detained in Moscow at the request of the Tajik government, which accused Iskandarov of organizing attacks on government facilities, and embezzlement while earlier serving as head of the state gas company.

2005 parliamentary elections

The ruling People's Democratic Party of Tajikistan won 49 of 63 seats in the 2005 lower house legislative elections. Two opposition parties won seats—the Communist Party with 3 and the Islamic Revival Party with 2. The other winners were independents, most with ties to the regime.

Opposition parties refused to recognize the results, and threatened to boycott parliament if President Rakhmonov did not respond to their complaints.

OSCE observers said the elections failed to meet many key OSCE commitments and other



standards on democratic elections.

Government control tightens

Following the elections, independent media was suppressed and opposition figures and journalists arrested. Although Russian authorities released Iskandarov after the parliamentary elections, he was taken to Dushanbe and sentenced to 23 years in jail in 2005. European and U.S. authorities voiced concern regarding the arrests and media restrictions.

In the run-up to the 2006 presidential election, the government harassed the opposition and sought to control the media. The main opposition group, the Islamic Renaissance Party, decided not to run a candidate in the presidential election.

2006 presidential election

Rakhmonov defeated his four opponents, reportedly winning 79 percent of the 3 million votes cast, which represented 91 percent of the electorate. His nearest competitor won just over five percent of the vote.

The OSCE assessed that the election “did not fully test democratic electoral practices...due to a lack of genuine choice and meaningful pluralism. The election process also revealed substantial shortcomings.”

The next presidential election is scheduled for November 2013.

2010 parliamentary elections

Parliamentary elections held in 2010 resulted in a strong majority for the parties supporting the government: the People’s Democratic Party of Tajikistan won 71.04% of the vote (55 seats); the Communist Party of Tajikistan won 7.01% (2 seats); the Agrarian Party of Tajikistan won 5.11% (2 seats); and the Party of Economic Reform of Tajikistan won 5.06% (2 seats). The opposition Islamic Renaissance Party won 8.20% (2 seats).

The OSCE-led International Election Observation Mission reported that the elections failed to meet many key OSCE commitments and other standards for democratic elections. Neither was domestic legislation fully respected. Serious irregularities took place on election day, including a high incidence of proxy voting.

A weak economy

Tajikistan has one of the lowest per capita GDPs among the 15 former Soviet republics. Because of a lack of employment opportunities in Tajikistan, as many as a million Tajik citizens work abroad, almost all of them in Russia, supporting families in Tajikistan through remittances.

Less than 7% of the land area is arable. Cotton is the most important crop, and its production is closely monitored, and in many cases controlled, by the government. The government is taking steps to prevent child labor in the cotton-picking season.

A reform agenda is underway, according to which over half a billion dollars in farmer debt is being forgiven. This will be good news for farmers required to fulfill the yearly cotton quota and are tied to the land through a complicated system of debts and obligations. Cotton farmers are typically compensated for their crop a year later once the state has sold the cotton.



Industry consists only of a large aluminum plant, hydropower facilities, and small obsolete factories mostly in light industry and food processing. Electricity output expanded with the completion of the [Sangtuda I hydropower dam](#), finished in 2009 with Russian investment. The smaller [Sangtuda-2](#), built with Iranian investment, began operating in 2011. The [Rogun dam project](#), which is expected to be the world's largest dam, still needs significant investment to be completed.

Increased dependence on outside powers

The civil war increased Tajikistan's dependence on outside powers. The post-communist elites managed to hold on to power thanks to economic support from Russia and military assistance from Russia and Uzbekistan.

Large-scale famine was averted largely thanks to humanitarian aid from the international community.

Less dependence on Uzbekistan

There has been an important change in Tajikistan's foreign relations. The old Khujandi elite, which included members of the Uzbek minority, had very close relations with the Karimov regime in neighboring Uzbekistan. The Kulobi ruling group, by contrast, includes no Uzbeks and has decreased Tajikistan's dependence on Uzbekistan.

Improved relations with the West

Tajikistan allowed the U.S. and other NATO states to use its military facilities after 9/11.

In 2002, the U.S. lifted its ban on arms sales to Tajikistan. It also funded the creation of a Drug Control Agency to combat trafficking in drugs from Afghanistan, as well as a \$36 million Tajik-Afghan bridge across the Pyanzh River that will substantially increase transport links between the two countries.

Since 2009, the U.S. has increased the shipment by rail and truck of nonmilitary supplies from Uzbekistan or Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan through Tajikistan to Afghanistan.

Cooperation with Russia continues

Tajikistan continues to cooperate with Russia on security and economics. Russia has 20,000 troops in Tajikistan and controls the [Nurek Space Surveillance Center](#) (OKNO).

Russian border guards were replaced by Tajik border guards along the 1,344 kilometer Tajik-Afghan border in 2005. While Tajik government officials had complained that the Russians were not providing effective security on the border, the departure of the Russian border guards led to concerns that their absence has facilitated a substantial increase in the already considerable flow of drugs into Tajikistan from Afghanistan. Since 2005, only Russian military advisors have been deployed on Tajik borders.

Meanwhile, the Tajik government has concerns regarding the treatment of Tajik migrant workers in Russia.





A satellite image of the Nurbek Space Surveillance Center (OKNO) (Google Earth)

Border issues

Tajikistan has border disputes with Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. In 2004, Uzbekistan agreed to de-mine sections of the Tajik-Uzbek border area. After gunmen attacked a border post in 2006, the countries agreed to strengthen cooperation in policing the border. Still, Tajikistan border guards shot and killed an Uzbekistan border guard in 2006, and a Uzbekistan border guard was wounded in an incident in September 2012.



Kenneth E Gross, US Ambassador to Tajikistan (on the right) and Ivar Vikki, OSCE Ambassador to Tajikistan (on the left) standing in front of a demining equipment purchased in the framework of a 2010 manual demining project supported by OSCE, the United States Office of Defense Cooperation and

the Tajik authorities. (OSCE)



Tajikistan culture

Dushanbe

The capital, Dushanbe, is home to about one in ten of the country's inhabitants. Tree-lined avenues of pale buildings stand against a backdrop of mountains. The city, previously just a village, was made into the capital and built up during the Soviet period. There are several interesting museums. At the Museum of Ethnography, Tajik pottery, carpets, jewelry, and musical instruments are on display.

In the city center you will find the Barakat Market. Just about anything is on sale, reflecting the extreme poverty brought about by the Soviet collapse and the civil war. Many people are trying to sell their old clothes or any other old odds and ends that they can find.



The spice market in Dushanbe. (OSCE/Lubomir Kotek)

Mountain ranges

Most of the country is mountainous. Eastern Tajikistan is completely covered by the [Pamir range](#). A few thousand people farm in the mountain valleys, while another few thousand nomads pasture their sheep and goats on the high plateau. There are several other mountain ranges in Western Tajikistan.

Travel

Travel from one part of the country to another is always difficult and at times impossible. Roads, where they exist, are poorly surfaced, often no more than rutted tracks of frozen mud precariously perched on narrow mountain ledges. Landslides and avalanches are a constant danger. The high mountain passes are open only for a few months in the summer. At other times you have to take roundabout routes passing through neighboring countries. Towns in the mountain areas are small, few and far between. In the Pamirs there is only one town, Khorog, with a population barely exceeding 20,000.

Energy problem

Tajikistan faces power shortages every winter, despite having a greater hydroelectric capacity than any other country in Central Asia. Half of its electric output is reportedly used to power one factory, the Tajikistan Aluminum Plant (TALCO).

Disputes over energy and water usage complicate Tajikistan-Uzbekistan relations.

Rahmonov becomes Rahmon

In 2007 Tajik President Rahmonov announced that he was dropping the Slavic-style “-ov” suffix from his name, and called on all Tajiks to do the same. How this break with Tajikistan’s Russian and Soviet past will impact on ordinary Tajiks remains to be seen. A majority of Tajiks live below the poverty line, and this cultural issue may not be important for most. More significant changes may be in store for the future. It is possible the official Cyrillic alphabet will be changed to a Latin script. Efforts may be made to develop stronger cultural or other links with neighboring countries with which it shares an essentially common language – Afghanistan and Iran. Time will tell.

Lowlands

Lowland Tajikistan is divided in two by the [Fan Mountains](#). To their south lie the Dushanbe region and the southern province of Khotlon. To their north is Leninobod Province, a salient sticking out into the fertile Fergana Valley. Here is Khujand, the country's second largest city.

Unlike Dushanbe, Khujand is a very ancient city, founded by Alexander the Great more than 2,300 years ago, and has an old mosque, medrassa (religious college), and mausoleum. The goods in the bazaar suggest that Khujand is much more prosperous than Dushanbe. That is partly because it largely escaped the ravages of the civil war, although even before the civil war it was more prosperous.

Natural resources

Despite the poverty of most of its people, Tajikistan has significant natural resources. In addition to hydroelectric power, there are rich deposits of uranium, zinc, lead, and other minerals and metal ores. But the economy is in ruins. Everything is in short supply, and in many places trade is by barter rather than cash.

Attire

Older Tajik men wear long quilted jackets and embroidered caps. Women of all ages favor multicolored long dresses with striped trousers underneath and head scarves to match.





Two Tajik women wear traditional clothes in a park in central Dushanbe. (OSCE/Astrid Evrensel)

Cuisine

Most Tajiks can afford to eat only vegetable dishes, such as soup made from beans, milk, and herbs, flat bread, chickpea porridge, *tuhum barak* (egg-filled ravioli coated with sesame seed oil), and *chakka* (curd mixed with herbs). When meat—usually lamb—is available, it's often made into *tushbera* (steamed dumplings), served plain or with vinegar or butter. A popular drink is *sher chay*—tea with goat's milk, salt, and butter.