



Boundary representations are not necessarily authoritative.

BACKGROUND

Land and Climate

Located in central Asia, Uzbekistan covers an area slightly larger than Morocco or the U.S. state of California. Mountains dominate the east. The Karakum and Kyzylkum deserts are rich in gold, natural gas, and oil. The fertile Fergana Valley, located between the Tien Shan and Alay mountains, is a favorite herding destination and is home to endangered species such as the bighorn sheep and the snow leopard.

In its drive to produce cotton, the Soviet Union diverted the Aral Sea's primary-source rivers (Amu Darya and Syr Darya) for irrigation. This and other practices severely damaged Uzbekistan's environment. Water and soil are polluted by pesticides and herbicides; soil salinity levels are too high; a once healthy fishing industry has been destroyed; and the Aral Sea has been reduced to a dead sea, unable to support the fish, animals, or humans it once did. Today, the Aral Sea covers only about 10 percent of its pre-Soviet area.

Uzbekistan's continental climate is marked by long, hot summers from May to September and short, cold winters. Summer temperatures often reach above 100°F (40°C), and winter temperatures dip below 20°F (-6°C).

History

Early Nomads and Conquerors

The earliest known inhabitants of what is now Uzbekistan were Iranian nomads. In the sixth century BC, the region now known as Uzbekistan fell under Persian rule and was divided

into the states of Bactria, Soghdiana, and Khorezm. In the late fourth century BC, Alexander the Great conquered Soghdiana and introduced Hellenic culture. He made Samarkand his capital. It, along with Bukhara and Khiva, became important cities on the Silk Road trade route between China and Europe.

In AD 712, Arabian armies introduced Islam and Arabic. A century later, conquering Persian Samanids turned Bukhara into a center of Islamic culture. The rich Silk Road cities were well-known to outsiders, and in 1212, Mongol warrior Genghis Khan invaded and plundered them. The trade route recovered, and Tamerlane (Timur the Great) came to power in Samarkand in 1370. From his many successful military campaigns, he brought home spoils of war and gifted artisans to embellish his capital. His grandson Ulugbek was a brilliant mathematician and astronomer. Subsequent dynasties established the region as a great center of culture and learning.

Khanates and the Great Game

With the discovery of ocean routes, Silk Road cities declined in importance. By the 19th century, they were divided between the Khanate of Khiva, the Emirate of Bukhara, and the Khanate of Kokand. These independent states soon took on strategic value to the Great Powers of Britain and Russia. Britain desired to create markets for its goods and establish a buffer zone between India and potential Russian invaders. Imperial Russia, on the other hand, sought to expand its influence, borders, and markets. As Russia conquered the region, Britain worked to undermine Russian efforts. This conflict between Britain and Russia became known as the Great Game.

Soviet Rule

By 1873, Russia had annexed the major khanates and extended its influence into the region. Not long after the 1917 Russian Revolution, the new Soviet regime divided central Asia (previously called Turkestan) into five separate protectorates, drawing borders that cut through tribes, hunting and herding areas, and agricultural lands. These changes brought instability to the region and Muslim leaders unsuccessfully attempted to establish an autonomous government. Another resistance movement, the Basmachi, used guerrilla tactics to fight Soviet power throughout the region before it was defeated in the 1920s. Between 1924 and 1925, the Communist Party in Russia redrew the central Asian map and Uzbekistan became an official republic of the Soviet Union.

The rule of Soviet leader Joseph Stalin had major impacts on Uzbekistan's food supply, leadership, and ethnic composition. His government organized a collectivization policy that forced nomads and others onto collective, or state-owned, cotton farms. Industrial agricultural practices polluted farmlands and ultimately decreased food production, while the food that was produced was largely sent to cities, resulting in widespread famine for peasants. In the 1930s, Stalin purged many prominent Uzbek leaders and replaced them with politicians loyal to Moscow. Then during World War II, he exiled many ethnic and political groups (including Meskhetian Turks from the Georgian republic) to Uzbekistan as punishment for alleged conspiracy with foreign powers.

With Stalin's death in 1953, many of the leader's totalitarian policies relaxed. The capital city of Tashkent received Western visitors and Uzbeks assumed positions in both local governments and the wider Soviet Union. However, by the 1980s Moscow attempted to regain control over Uzbekistan by purging the entire Uzbek party leadership. Other unpopular policies from Moscow, such as attempts to eradicate Islam and requirements to plant only cotton, inflamed nationalist sentiments. In 1989, Uzbek nationalists killed more than one hundred Meskhetian Turks. The failure of Uzbek party leader Rafiq Nishonov to quell this attack and other riots prompted the new Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, to replace him with Islam Karimov, who was officially elected president in 1990.

Independence and Karimov Rule

With the Soviet Union's collapse in 1991, Uzbekistan declared its independence. A referendum in 1995 extended Karimov's first term until 2000, when he won reelection unopposed. The government banned opposition parties, stifled the press, and instituted forced labor to sustain its state-run cotton industry. Karimov's government ruled with a heavy hand to combat dissent, but violent opposition to his regime escalated when a wave of bombings shook Tashkent in March 2004 and security forces clashed with government opponents in Andijon in May 2005. The government subsequently imprisoned or expelled many activists. President Karimov won presidential elections that many claimed were fraudulent in 2007 and again in 2015. When Karimov died in office in September 2016, elections that December brought Shavkat Mirziyoyev—Karimov's prime minister—to power as president.

Uzbekistan Today

President Mirziyoyev has relaxed some of his predecessor's repressive policies and implemented reforms intended to open the economy and stimulate growth. The government has reestablished diplomatic ties with neighboring countries and invested in new energy sources to encourage economic development. Other changes include freeing political prisoners and reforming Uzbekistan's powerful and oppressive intelligence service.

Despite these changes, the government is still considered an authoritarian regime. No opposition candidates were allowed to run in the 2021 election. Additionally, the legislature and judiciary have limited power and primarily serve the president. Other challenges include a tightly controlled press and widespread corruption.

THE PEOPLE

Population

Uzbekistan is the most populous country in Central Asia. Uzbeks comprise the bulk (84 percent) of the population, though small groups of Tajiks, Kazakhs, Russians, Karakalpaks, Tatars, and Koreans also live in Uzbekistan. Tashkent, the capital, is home to slightly less than 10 percent of the population. Other large cities include Samarkand, Namangan, Andijon, and Bukhara.

Language

Uzbek is the native language of most of the population. It is a Turkic language that is similar to other central Asian languages such as Kazakh and Turkmen. Arabic, Farsi, and Russian have all influenced the Uzbek language. Tajik, a language related to Farsi, is spoken around Bukhara and Samarkand. About 14 percent of all people speak Russian as a native language. It is particularly common in Tashkent. Russian was the official language before 1990 and is still the language of business, government, and cross-border communication. Increasingly, local governments, businesses, and state institutions of higher education are requiring the use of Uzbek. In the 1920s, Uzbek traded its Arabic script for the Latin alphabet. In the 1930s, the Soviets universally implemented a Cyrillic script. Though older Uzbeks continue to use the Cyrillic alphabet, the younger generation mainly uses the Latin one, which is universally used in Uzbek schools.

Religion

The majority (88 percent) of Uzbekistanis are Muslims (mostly Sunni). Russians generally are Eastern Orthodox Christians. During the Soviet era, many mosques and Islamic schools were closed and torn down. Though people ceased to worship publicly, their faith was preserved through private traditional ceremonies such as weddings and funerals.

Upon gaining independence, Uzbekistan lifted most restrictions on public worship. Islam slowly began gaining strength. In the decade after independence, thousands of mosques were built. While many Uzbekistani Muslims are not active worshippers, others are embracing various (even

competing) Islamic sects. Compared to the rest of the population, people in the Fergana Valley tend to be more religious. The government, which is secular, is generally wary of Islamic fundamentalism and has imposed some religious restrictions such as banning Muslim women from wearing the Islamic headscarf in public places. Religious publications not approved by the government are also forbidden.

General Attitudes

Central Asians historically have been and continue to be wary of strangers. However, tradition dictates that guests in the home be treated with utmost respect and that they be given the best a family has to offer. Even unexpected visitors are greeted warmly with *Hush Kelibsiz* (Welcome). The importance of hospitality is captured in the Uzbek phrase *Mehmon otangdan ulug*, which means "A guest is greater than your father."

Uzbekistanis are usually caring and open with their friends. The distinction between different kinds of friends is carefully made in syntax. The word for "friend" (*dost* in Uzbek; *droog* in Russian) indicates a very close relationship. Most Uzbekistanis have only three or four close friends, for whom they will do anything. For example, family and friends often help each other secure jobs or promotions. Most Uzbekistanis also have a large network of acquaintances.

In Uzbekistan, ethnicity is important to one's identity. If a person's great-great-grandparents were born in Tatarstan (in present-day Russia), even though the person has never been outside of Uzbekistan, he or she is, first and foremost, Tatar. Each ethnic group associates other ethnicities with different characteristics, both good and bad. Patriotism is evident in the pride Uzbekistanis show for their history, traditions, holidays, and national dishes.

Uzbek Saying

Mehmon otangdan ulug. ("A guest is greater than your father.")

Personal Appearance

In urban areas, Uzbekistani men and women typically wear a mix of Western-style and traditional clothing. Russian men and women tend to be less conservative and more Western in their choice of clothing and hairstyles.

Men usually wear Western-style suits in formal situations. Casual wear for young men consists of slacks, jeans, or jogging suits. Older men may wear *chaponlar* (long, open, quilted robes), and many men wear a *do'ppi* (squatish skullcap with a traditional design that identifies the wearer's home region). Younger men may wear traditional robes and a skullcap during the winter or for special occasions.

Uzbek women tend to wear long cotton dresses or skirts that cover their knees. In some regions, they often wear colorful headscarves, especially if they are married. Muslim women cover their hair with the Islamic headscarf. Traditional dresses, often worn on special occasions, are made of atlas (colorful patterned silk) and worn over baggy pants. For holidays, women also wear small caps embroidered with sequins and gold thread. Women prefer long hair; they usually wear it up but might arrange it into several small braids on holidays.

CUSTOMS AND COURTESIES

Greetings

Uzbekistanis generally greet each other with a series of questions about the other's well-being and family. Men shake hands with great vigor, and women sometimes hug or kiss both cheeks two or three times. Men often place their left hand over their heart during a handshake to express sincerity. Men usually do not make physical contact with women.

A formal greeting, spoken especially by a person of lower status or age to a higher person, is *Assalaam 'alaikum* (May peace be unto you). The proper response is *Wa 'alaikum assalaam* (And peace be upon you). Informally, greeters may exchange the shorter *Salaam* (Peace). *Yakshimisiz?* (Are you well?) and *Kandaisiz?* (How are you?) are other common Uzbek greetings. Russians are more likely to greet one another with *Zdravstvuyte* (polite form of "Hi") and a handshake.

Uzbeks address strangers using familial labels, though the specific terms used vary by region. If the stranger is close to someone's own age, they may be addressed with the term *aka* (big brother) or *opa* (big sister). *Ota* (father) and *ona* (mother) are used for the elderly. Friends and acquaintances add these terms after the first name of the person they are addressing. Russians usually address each other by first name. In formal situations, they add a patronymic (father's first name with the suffix *-ovich* for a son or *-ovna* for a daughter). Many Uzbekistanis who used this form of address during the Soviet era are dropping the suffixes but retaining their father's first name as a middle name. So, Anver Salievovich becomes Anver Saliev. The youth simply use first names.

Gestures

Men and women tend to avoid public displays of affection. As a gesture of friendship, women often hook arms or hold hands in public, and men may drape their arms around each other's shoulders. Showing or pointing the sole of the foot is considered impolite. It is considered unclean to eat or drink with the left hand.

Visiting

Visiting is essential to Uzbeks' social life. Friends may drop in any time of day. Upon entering a home, guests remove their shoes and might be provided with house slippers. Invited guests may arrive with a gift of bread, sweets, or drinks. Flowers are usually given on special occasions such as birthday or anniversary parties. Gifts are given in even numbers, as odd numbers are considered bad luck. *Choi* (tea, usually green) is always served to guests along with some sort of snack—including non (flat bread), fruits, and nuts.

Choi is extremely important. The host brings the teapot to the table and pours one cup. He ceremonially pours it back and repeats this process two more times. These three rounds signify *loi* (mud), *moi* (butter), and *choi*. The host then serves tea to guests, pouring it into small cups with the right hand and gently supporting the right elbow with the left hand. In

the Tashkent region, it is considered rude to pour a full cup of tea, as this means the host wishes the guest to leave.

Visitors arriving at mealtime are invited to stay and eat. Tea usually is served before and after the meal. Long, elaborate toasts wishing health, long life, success, and happiness to all usually accompany the drinking of liquor.

Eating

Meals are usually a family affair. Most businesses and government offices close from noon to 1 p.m. so people can go home for the main meal. Uzbekistanis serve dishes on common platters set in the middle of a low table or on a dasturkhon (cloth spread on the floor). Individuals sit on patterned korpacha (mats) and lean against pillows. They eat with spoons or sometimes, when eating palov (a rice dish) for example, with the right hand. Russian and some urban Uzbek homes have Western-style tables. Tradition dictates that hosts repeatedly encourage guests to eat more, urging them to Oling, oling (Take, take). Compliments on the food are expected. Non (traditional Uzbek bread) is served at most meals and should be broken with both hands. Placing *non* face down on the table is believed to bring bad luck.

Previously scarce, restaurants are growing in popularity. Many still choose to eat at the more traditional outdoor choihona (tearoom or café). In villages, men are usually the only ones to eat and drink at these cafés. Customers remove their shoes and sit on a suru (raised platform with a table in the center and mats for sitting).

LIFESTYLE

Family

Uzbek families tend to be larger than Russian families, and several generations may share a household. Extended family members often live in the same town. Men are considered the head of the family, but women (usually grandmothers) make daily household decisions. Children are often raised by their grandparents. Children live at home until married, at which time the newlyweds move in with the groom's parents. Urban families may help a couple buy an apartment. The youngest married son is responsible for taking care of aging parents. His wife is the family's least senior member and, as such, does most of the housework.

In urban areas, both wife and husband typically work outside the home. Rural women may work on cotton farms. Uzbekistani women face many challenges, including domestic violence and cultural expectations that limit their rights in marriage, divorce, and education.

Housing

Traditional rural, walled family compounds surround a common courtyard. Different buildings, animal pens, and sheds line the inside of the wall. Children do not usually have their own rooms, and the whole family often sleeps on mats in the same room. In the summer, everyone sleeps and eats on surular (platforms) in the courtyard. Urban families tend to live in Soviet-built "micro-regions" (concrete apartment complexes) that have their own shops and sometimes a small

food bazaar. Some urban dwellers own a small cottage, or dala hovli, in the country, where they can relax and tend a garden. Most Uzbekistanis own their homes or apartments unless they are living away from their hometowns, in which case they may rent. People save for many years to buy land and build their own homes.

Dating and Marriage

Dating and Courtship

Uzbekistanis traditionally do not approve of casual dating, and families arrange marriages. Russians date and choose their spouses. Young people usually meet at school, at work, or through mutual friends. Though some youth might date in secret, normally if a young man is interested in someone, he will let his parents know, and they will arrange a meeting with the girl and her family. If the couple does not know each other, parents will allow the young man and woman to meet a few times, while chaperoned, before they decide to marry. The class, ethnicity, location, and reputation of a girl and her family are considered important when choosing a spouse. If any of these factors differ greatly between the two families, one or both sets of parents are unlikely to approve of the marriage. Parents begin collecting dowry items for the marriage while daughters are still young. Most Uzbekistanis marry in their early to mid-twenties. Sexual relations between same-sex partners are illegal. LGBTQ people have no protections against discrimination.

Weddings

Couples must register their marriage at a government office and sign a marriage license, usually with just a few family members and friends present. Some couples may also have a religious wedding, presided over by a mullah (Muslim religious leader).

On the wedding day, the groom goes to the bride's home to perform some traditional wedding rituals, like praying with a *mullah*. After that, the bride's family and friends send the couple off with well wishes, happy cries, and traditional singing. The couple then drives around and takes wedding pictures. Urban couples place flowers at various monuments in the city. At rural weddings, the couple may perform a traditional dance around a fire. The bride and groom wear elaborate chaponlar (long, open, quilted robes) and traditional square hats during the wedding ceremony and often change into Western clothes (a suit and white dress) for their wedding party.

Uzbek wedding parties are large and expensive affairs held in the family courtyard, in a restaurant, or in a rented wedding hall. Guests dance to live music, eat, give speeches, make toasts, and eat and dance some more. Wealthy families hire popular singers to perform at weddings. In some cases, guests "pay" dancing guests for their "performances," and the dancers pass this money on to the new couple. New brides are kept inside the groom's family compound for about 40 days after the wedding, usually wearing traditional Uzbek attire.

Divorce

Divorced women have more stigmas attached to them than divorced men do. Children of divorced parents usually live with their mother, and the father pays alimony. Divorced men can remarry with ease and often have large weddings, while

divorced women have fewer options. If women do remarry, the ceremony is very simple and private.

Life Cycle

Birth

Births are celebrated life events. Parents usually prefer a boy over a girl, because a son is considered necessary for continuing the family line. Within seven days of a birth, a mullah (Muslim religious leader) visits to read a prayer for the baby. To protect the newborn from the "evil eye," he or she is not allowed to be seen by anyone outside the immediate family for 40 days. If the baby is a family's first child, the maternal grandparents bring clothes, a cot, a stroller, and other gifts. Because a beshik (traditional cradle) is among the presents, the *to'y* (celebration) of the baby's arrival is called the beshik-*to'y*.

A boy's circumcision usually takes place sometime between infancy and age three. At a party in the boy's honor, a sheep is slaughtered, and the boy is dressed in robes adorned with gold embroidery. He is placed on a horse, and guests give him money or place it in a bag on the saddle. To save expenses, many families have the circumcision coincide with the *beshik-to'y*.

Death

Following a death, relatives and close friends gather at the home of the deceased, where the women say their good-byes. The body is then buried in a cemetery by male relatives and friends; women do not attend. Close relatives of the deceased wear traditional attire to the funeral. For 40 days, women cover their heads with scarves and avoid wearing jewelry and brightly colored clothes. Family members also avoid entertainment during this period of mourning. Mourners gather on the third, seventh, twentieth, and fortieth days after the burial to hear a *mullah* read a prayer. Food is prepared for visitors on each of these occasions. On each Thursday during the 40-day period, male relatives read from the Qu'ran (Islamic holy book) together.

Diet

The most important elements in the Uzbekistani diet are rice, potatoes, and meat (usually mutton but also beef and chicken). Common spices include black pepper, cumin, mint, and red chilies. Palov, the national dish, generally is made with rice, meat, and carrots. Another popular dish is Kebob (grilled skewered meat), which is traditionally prepared by men. *Manti* are dumplings with meat or vegetables. *Chalop*, a refreshing cold yogurt soup, is often eaten during the summer, when bazaars are full of vegetables (eggplant, squash, cucumbers) and fruits (berries, melons, quinces, apples, pears, plums, apricots, peaches, grapes, tomatoes). Nearly all families preserve fruits and vegetables for the winter. Many grow their own produce in gardens or on plots of land outside town.

Recreation

Sports

Soccer is the most popular sport, and almost every town has a stadium. Wrestling, boxing, tennis, volleyball, and karate are also common. Boys enjoy basketball and tend to idolize U.S.

basketball stars. Girls and boys play sports in school, but Uzbekistani women do not traditionally participate in organized sports. On special occasions, men play traditional kup-kari, a polo-like sport in which participants on horseback attempt to carry a sheep carcass to a central goal without having it taken away by their competitors.

Leisure

Uzbekistanis like to watch television. Most people prefer Uzbek, Turkish, Latin American, and Korean soap operas and U.S. action movies. Uzbek, Turkic, Indian, and Western pop music are popular. Both young and old Uzbekistanis like playing chess and checkers. Young people enjoy going to a movie, eating ice cream at an outdoor café, and then walking along the streets in the evenings. About once a month, friends meet for a gap, a chance to catch up socially. A person may attend separate *gaps* with each of their social circles, such as work colleagues and school friends.

Vacation

Wealthy Uzbekistanis may travel to places like Russia or Turkey, but not many Uzbekistanis can afford to travel abroad. For vacation, most people visit relatives in different cities or villages, picnic in the mountains, or sightsee at popular historical cities like Tashkent, Bukhara, or Samarkand.

The Arts

Bright colors and symbolic shapes adorn much of Uzbek folk arts and crafts. Embroidery, especially with gold thread, is quite popular and often decorates household goods, linens, and clothing. Other crafts include wood carvings, pottery, and wall hangings. Traditional musical instruments include the doira (drum-like tambourine) and the rubab (two-string guitar). Many children learn to play instruments, sing, or dance at an early age. Instrumental ensembles usually accompany vocalists, who improvise on folk themes. Each region has its own traditional dances that depict aspects of daily life, such as picking cotton. Many ancient structures are characteristic of medieval Islamic architecture. The government encourages the preservation of historic buildings through a restoration initiative.

Holidays

The largest national holiday is Novruz (Persian New Year) in the spring; the town square or park in each community comes alive with speeches, bands, food, and booths from schools and workplaces. Traditional foods like sumalak, a thick porridge made from sprouted wheat, are prepared all day. People continue to celebrate New Year's Eve (31 December) in the Russian tradition, with parties and sometimes a decorated tree. Eastern Orthodox Christians observe Christmas on 7 January. Islamic holidays are set according to the lunar calendar. Among them is a day of feasting at the end of Ramazan, the holy month of fasting, and Qurban-Hait (Day of Sacrifice), which honors Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son. Uzbekistanis observe International Women's Day (8 March) by giving women and girls presents and flowers. Independence Day is 1 September.

SOCIETY

Government

Structure

Uzbekistan is a republic with a strong authoritarian president. The president, who is elected to a five-year term, is head of state and appoints the prime minister, who is head of government. The bicameral parliament (*Oliy Majlis*, or Supreme Assembly) consists of a Senate (the upper house) and a Legislative Chamber (the lower house). In the 100-seat Senate, 84 members are elected by regional councils and 16 are appointed by the president. Members of the 150-seat *Qonunchilik Palatasi* (Legislative Chamber) are mostly elected by popular vote (15 seats are reserved for the new Ecological Movement of Uzbekistan). All Supreme Assembly members serve five-year terms. Women hold almost 20 percent of the seats in the parliament's lower house and nearly a quarter of Senate seats.

Political Landscape

The Supreme Assembly is dominated by the center-right Liberal Democratic Party. Only pro-government parties are allowed to field candidates for parliamentary elections. Opposition parties are illegal, and many opposition groups are forced to operate in exile. Corruption is found throughout all levels of government. The government has faced international criticism for its media censorship, human-rights violations, and harassment of opposition groups. However, reforms under President Shavkat Mirziyoyev have led to some improvements.

Government and the People

Despite recent reforms, the government remains repressive and is still considered a consolidated authoritarian regime. The legislature and judiciary have limited power and essentially serve as instruments of the executive branch. Though guaranteed by the constitution, freedoms of press, assembly, and speech are still restricted in practice. Journalists, protestors, and civil society groups that speak out against the government are sometimes targets of harassment, beatings, and arrests. International monitors have characterized previous elections as unfair and uncompetitive. The voting age is 18.

Economy

Uzbekistan is one of the world's largest producers of cotton and gold. The country also has substantial uranium deposits. Uzbekistan's main exports are cotton, gold, and natural gas. Manufacturing focuses on textiles; food processing; fertilizers; and machinery for irrigation, farming, and textiles. Other industries are not well developed.

After independence, Uzbekistan tried to support inefficient state enterprises and shield consumers from the shocks of rapid economic reform. These policies eventually led to severe inflation and economic crisis. Since the election of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, steps have been taken to expand opportunities for small and medium businesses and to reduce barriers to foreign investment. Other economic reforms include modernizing the agriculture sector and strengthening the independence of the Central Bank. Despite these reforms, state interference in the economy remains the rule. Remittances sent from migrant laborers working abroad, mainly in Russia, are an important revenue source. The

currency is the sum (UZS).

Transportation and Communications

Most of the people in Uzbekistan travel by bus. Larger cities have minibuses, trolleys, and streetcars, and Tashkent has a subway. Personal car ownership is rising. Gasoline is expensive and sometimes difficult to obtain. Since public transportation tends to be overcrowded, all private cars are potential taxis; passengers usually barter for the fee. Official taxis are also available. Most Uzbekistanis can afford the cost of travel by train but usually not by air.

Telephone lines often do not extend to rural areas. However, inexpensive cellular phones are growing in popularity in these areas and throughout the country. Internet usage is becoming more common, with many people going online with their cellular phones. Yet few people own personal computers, and internet connections are usually slow, with limited wireless technology. The most popular news sources include newspapers and television programs. Though coverage of social problems such as corruption has increased, the media continues to be controlled and censored by the government.

Education

Twelve years of primary and secondary education are compulsory. All children begin school at age six or seven, although some attend kindergarten at five. Students attend primary school for four years, followed by two cycles of secondary school. Lower secondary, or secondary general education, consists of grades 5 through 9. Following that, students may attend two to three years of upper education at either general or technical vocational schools.

Common school subjects include math, history, Uzbek, science, art, religion, and odobnoma (etiquette class). Most teachers are women and not well paid. Teachers (instead of parents) are believed to carry the primary responsibility for a child's education. Uzbekistan has both Uzbek and Russian schools, but Russian students are required to learn Uzbek. Students must pass entrance exams for universities and technical schools. Students who get low or average scores on the entrance exam pay tuition each semester, but students with high scores attend university for free.

Health

Citizens of Uzbekistan are entitled to free public health care, and each town has at least one hospital and different specialty clinics. However, most facilities lack modern equipment and medicine, so patients must provide their own medicine and supplies. Many prefer to treat themselves at home rather than risk catching diseases in hospitals or being treated by undertrained doctors. Those who can afford it seek higher-quality medical care at private hospitals or may travel abroad. Some Uzbekistanis consult traditional healers.

AT A GLANCE

Contact Information

Embassy of Uzbekistan, 1746 Massachusetts Avenue NW,

Washington, DC 20036; phone (202) 887-5300; web site
www.uzbekistan.org.

Country and Development Data

Capital	Tashkent
Population	31,104,937 (rank=47)
Area (sq. mi.)	172,742 (rank=56)
Area (sq. km.)	447,400
Human Development Index	107 of 189 countries
Gender Inequality Index	56 of 162 countries
GDP (PPP) per capita	\$7,700
Adult Literacy	100% (male); 100% (female)
Infant Mortality	18.98 per 1,000 births
Life Expectancy	68 (male); 73 (female)
Currency	Uzbekistan Sum