



Afghanistan 2019 Crime & Safety Report



This is an annual report produced in conjunction with the Regional Security Office at the U.S. Embassy in Kabul, Afghanistan.

The current U.S. Department of State [Travel Advisory](#) at the date of this report's publication assesses Afghanistan at Level 4, indicating travelers should not travel to the country due to armed conflict, terrorism, crime, and civil unrest.

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

The U.S. Embassy in Kabul does not assume responsibility for the professional ability or integrity of any persons or firms referenced in this report. The American Citizens' Services unit (ACS) cannot recommend a particular individual or location, and assumes no responsibility for the quality of service provided.

Review OSAC's [Afghanistan-specific webpage](#) for original OSAC reporting, consular messages, and contact information, some of which may be available only to private-sector representatives with an OSAC password.

Lack of key infrastructure, government services, and limited emergency health facilities contribute to making Afghanistan an exceptionally dangerous country.

Crime Threats

There is serious risk from crime in Kabul. Criminal activity is widespread and includes the operation of several local, regional, and international terrorist organizations and organized criminal syndicates. Transnational organized crime (related to the drug trade) remains a serious problem. Criminal activity extends into lower-level street crimes (e.g. theft, home invasion, assault). Criminals typically work in groups and are prone to use deadly force against victims.

The security situation remains volatile and unpredictable. Insurgents routinely plot high-profile attacks against official international and private-sector institutions and personnel, making it difficult to differentiate between traditional illegal activities, politically motivated criminal behavior, and terrorism. While narcotics trafficking accounts for a large portion of crime, Afghanistan faces a myriad of criminal terrorist threats, many of which target foreigners.

All foreigners and Afghans associated with foreigners are potential targets (e.g. NGO employees, clergy, local medical staff, aid/rehabilitation workers). Remain vigilant against assault, kidnapping, and all forms of theft.

Appropriately secure and fortify your housing accommodations with barriers and vetted armed guards. Maintain a low profile. Avoid public markets, crowded areas, demonstrations, or bazaars. When possible, conduct travel in armored vehicles with the doors locked. Strongly consider back-up communication systems (radios), personnel tracking, and locator devices. In addition, organizations should obtain as much voluntary information from their personnel as possible (e.g. biographic data, photographs, cell phone data such as IMEI and SIM card numbers). Notarized letters from the individuals authorizing their next of kin to use that collected data are necessary to ensure no delay in response in the event of a crisis. File a travel plan with someone you trust that includes where you are traveling, routes you intend to use, and times of the travel, to include waypoints for check-in.

Other Areas of Concern

Remain vigilant to the threat of unexploded ordnance (UXO). UXO includes mines, ammunitions, and explosives stored or strewn throughout Afghanistan. UXO is present in all areas, including urban centers. While many de-mining operations continue, there are un-cleared minefields and battlefields throughout the country. Colored flags or rocks indicate whether an area is clear; however, areas do not always have proper identification and markings:

- Red: field is not clear of UXO.
- White: field is swept of UXO. Note this is not an assurance that the field is entirely clear. White-flagged fields are generally 90% clear.

Transportation-Safety Situation

For more information, review OSAC's Report, [Security in Transit: Airplanes, Public Transport, and Overnights](#).

Road Safety and Road Conditions

Road conditions outside of Kabul vary greatly in quality. Within Kabul, there are a handful of functioning traffic lights. The roads are replete with potholes, and there are no lane demarcations. Afghan National Police (ANP) traffic control is generally poor or ineffective. It is common to see drivers going the wrong way around traffic circles or driving at night without headlights.

Road conditions throughout the country are hazardous. Those hazards are compounded by, among other things, the large number of commercial vehicles and their unsafe operation, and a lack of rules or regulations governing the transport of hazardous materials. All roads are of an inferior quality. Exercise great caution while driving. While some roads in Kabul and other large cities might accommodate normal sedans, a four-wheel drive vehicle is essential outside of major cities. Many roads outside the capital are unimproved and can become impassable during the winter, especially considering difficult terrain.

Locals involved in an accident with foreigners expect them to pay for damages, no matter who is at fault. If Afghans are seriously hurt or killed in traffic accidents, violence could occur against Western drivers as a result.

During colder months, mountain roads/passes can become inaccessible due to snow. Avalanches can occur; travelers need to be aware of the high risk of eroding roads along precipitous mountain thoroughfares. The Salang Pass between Jabal-Sarag and Mazar-e-Sharif is one of the most commonly snowed-in passes.

Roadblocks and checkpoints controlled by the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF), and random insurgent checkpoints remain a problem. ANDSF will shoot at vehicles that do not stop at their checkpoints and have so in the past. Appropriate identification is generally sufficient to permit passage through government-run checkpoints. Officers may demand bribes due to corruption, poor pay, and lack of discipline with rural police and army forces.

Other Travel Conditions

Nefarious actors use improvised explosive devices (IEDs) with great frequency throughout Afghanistan, especially in Kabul, and mostly in the form of magnetically attached improvised explosive devices (MAIEDs). MAIEDs remain a serious threat to Afghan security forces and members of the international community. MAIEDs, improperly attached, routinely fall off and detonate in traffic. Given the possibility of IEDs, small-arms fire, and other forms of attack, travel in armored vehicles, keep doors locked, and wear personal protective equipment (e.g. body armor, helmets).

Terrorism Threat

Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns

There is serious risk from terrorism in Kabul. Decades of disorder and warfare have made Afghanistan fertile territory for international terrorism. During Taliban rule, Afghanistan was a safe haven for several organizations including al-Qa'ida, which benefited from the regime's tolerance of international terrorist organizations. Al-Qa'ida, ISIS-Khorasan Province, and a number of others remain active.

Politically motivated terrorism is a major concern. Attacks against foreigners are a continuing trend. The 2018-19 winter has not brought a lull in violence, as the season had in the past, with insurgent activity showing no sign of abating. The risk of direct fire, IEDs, and IDF (indirect fire) rocket attacks remains very high. Insurgents often combine multiple tactics to attack a fixed location in a "complex attack." There have also been several successful insider threat attacks resulting in Afghan government and U.S. military personnel casualties.

Kabul is a high-profile target for large-scale insurgent attacks, as successful operations tend to generate greater media coverage. Overall, significant activity operational tempo did not decrease in 2018. In 2018, the use of vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED), suicide vests, and MAIED events remained constant. The number of IDF events remained consistent. Below are some examples of more recent high profile attacks:

Date	Event
01/20/2018	The Taliban claimed credit for a complex attack against Kabul's Intercontinental Hotel, killing at least 22 civilians, including 14 foreigners. Four U.S. citizens were among those killed (see OSAC reporting).
11/28/2018	A Taliban suicide bomber detonated himself and the large truck he was driving close to a G4S compound, followed by gunfire exchange between militants and security forces. The attack killed 10 people, including five G4S employees, among which was a British national.
12/24/2018	Insurgents conducted a complex attack against the Afghan Ministry of Public Works. A VBIED detonated in an attempt to breach the compound. Shortly after the explosion, several armed insurgents attempted to storm the facility

	before security forces killed them. There were only four reported Afghan civilian casualties. There was no official claim of responsibility.
01/14/2019	A VBIED detonated outside of Kabul's Green Village compound, a secure housing facility for expatriate personnel working for international companies and development organizations—a few of them OSAC constituents. The Taliban claimed credit for the attack, which reportedly injured more than 110 people and killed four, including a U.S. citizen (see OSAC reporting).

Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

Civil Unrest

There is a serious risk from civil unrest in Kabul. Political violence ranges from targeted attacks against Afghan government facilities, local security, and international security forces to attacks against hotels and guesthouses where foreigners reside. The principal method of attack in 2018 was IEDs in various forms.

Remain alert for the possibility of civil unrest. While the government has formalized and implemented a system for legal and orderly protests, spontaneous and potentially dangerous demonstrations do occur. In 2018, various insurgent groups targeted several significant demonstrations, resulting in mass casualties. Make every effort to avoid large groups – particularly political or religious gatherings. Even demonstrations intended to be peaceful can turn confrontational and possibly escalate into violence.

Religious/Ethnic Violence

Religious and ethnic violence remains relatively common. Religious violence tends to be sectarian. The periods around Shia holidays can bring increased tension and threats of violence.

Post-specific Concerns

Environmental Hazards

Afghanistan is mountainous and experiences all four seasons. Summers are very hot with droughts and lack of water throughout the country. Winters are generally very cold, and travel can be difficult to treacherous with snow and ice on roads. In the mountains, avalanches are possible and rescue response would be limited and untimely.

Afghanistan is a high-risk earthquake zone, and seismic activity is common. More than 100 earthquakes occur each year. The largest in 2018 occurred in the Hindu Kush mountain range, measuring 6.1 on the Richter scale and killing two people. Earthquakes frequently hit northeastern Afghanistan, especially in the Hindu Kush, which lies at the confluence of the Eurasian and Indian tectonic plates. Rudimentary construction techniques contribute to the possibility of severe injury or death due to earthquakes.

Personal Identity Concerns

Those openly proselytizing or promoting non-Muslim faiths put themselves at extreme risk. For more information, review OSAC's Report [Putting Your Faith in Travel: Security Implications](#).

Same-sex sexual activity is punishable by jail time or, in more conservative, rural areas, by death. Advocating for LGBT rights is illegal.

Drug-related Crimes

The growth of opium production and the associated smuggling industry constitute a major threat to the rule of law. The illegal narcotics trade undermines the integrity of Afghan law enforcement and funds insurgent/terrorist activity. Informal arrangements between drug trafficking organizations and local power brokers govern which groups or individuals profit from poppy cultivation in a given area. This environment fuels conflict between drug traffickers, often resulting in fighting between opposing groups. Additionally, opium growers may guard their territory by employing violent militias.

Kidnapping Threat

Kidnapping remains a constant threat, particularly against foreigners working for NGOs. Locals who work with foreigners are also at risk, with insurgents often sending messages threatening to kidnap family and friends. Virtually every foreigner is wealthy relative to local standards and is, therefore, a potential kidnapping victim. The motivation for these attacks is primarily financial, but there is a potential that criminal kidnappers might sell captives to terrorist groups, with potentially lethal consequences. Proselytizers and reporters can be high-value targets for kidnappers with a political agenda. For more information, review OSAC's Report, [Kidnapping: The Basics](#).

Police Response

The local law enforcement authorities are generally ineffective in deterring crime and responding to distress calls and alarms. Response times are significantly longer than Western norms, resulting in many criminals being able to carry out their crimes and a mediocre record in apprehending suspects.

Officers openly solicit bribery at all levels of local law enforcement. In some cases, officers carry out crimes themselves, resulting in civilian lack of confidence in local law enforcement.

How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

Contact the American Citizens Services unit at the U.S. Embassy immediately to report the arrest of a U.S. citizen.

Crime Victim Assistance

If you are the victim of a crime, the ACS unit may be able to assist you. Review [Help for American Victims of Crime Overseas](#).

Police/Security Agencies

- National Directorate of Security (NDS): The national intelligence agency with internal and external responsibilities.
- Ministry of Interior (MOI): Supervises interior security/law enforcement entities. It controls the Afghan National Police.
- Afghan National Police (ANP): The primary police organization. It contains the Afghan Border Police, Afghan Uniformed Police, Afghan Highway Police, and the Criminal Investigations Department. The ANP has five regional commands (i.e. north, south, east, west, and central) and the Afghan National Civil Order Police. Other forces falling under the command and control of the ANP include local traffic police departments and fire department.
- Afghan Border Police: Conducts land and airport immigration and border security.
- Afghan Uniformed Police: The primary civil law enforcement agency.
- Criminal Investigations Department: Tasked with investigation, crime scene forensic procedures, documentation of crime, and assisting other agencies, including the use of the crime lab housed at the Ministry of Interior.
- Afghan Public Protection Force (APPF): Established in 2009 under the Presidential Decrees that mandated the dismissal of all private security contract agencies. The APPF has not prospered as intended; many NGOs and foreign businesses still maintain the use of armed contractors—some of which have dubious qualifications—for protection of their personnel and property.

Medical Emergencies

Medical services are generally of poor quality. Facilities often lack basic cleanliness, diagnostic/treatment equipment, and even the most common medications. Individuals without government licenses or medical degrees often operate private clinics; no public agency monitors these operations. If eligible, seek care on a Coalition Forces military base.

Contact Information for Available Medical Services

The Consular Section of the U.S. Embassy in Kabul maintains a [list of medical providers in Afghanistan](#).

Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance

The CDC offers additional information on vaccines and health guidance for [Afghanistan](#).

OSAC Country Council Information

The Country Council in Kabul meets monthly. Interested private-sector security managers should contact OSAC's [South and Central Asia team](#) with any questions.

U.S. Embassy Location and Contact Information

Embassy Address and Hours of Operation

Great Massoud Road, Wazir Akbar Khan (neighborhood), Kabul
Hours of Operation: 0800-1600, Sunday-Thursday

Embassy Contact Numbers

(When using the country code, omit the first zero. Within Afghanistan, dial zero without the country code.)

Embassy Operator: +93 (0)700-10-8000

After Hours Consular Emergency Duty Line: +93 (0)700-201-908

Overseas Citizen's Services Hotline: +1-888-407-4747

Website: <http://af.usembassy.gov>

Embassy Guidance

U.S. citizens are strongly urged to avoid travel to Afghanistan. If U.S. citizens plan to travel to Afghanistan, or if they already reside there, they are strongly encouraged to register with the Embassy through the State Department's [Smart Traveler Enrollment Program \(STEP\)](#) to receive the latest travel updates and information, and to obtain updated information on travel and security issues. U.S. citizens in Afghanistan are instructed to regularly monitor the Embassy's Security Alerts as well as the State Department's [Bureau of Consular Affairs website](#), where the Worldwide Caution, Country Specific Information, and the Travel Advisory for Afghanistan are found.

Additional Resources

[Afghanistan](#) Country Information Sheet