

COUNTRY PROFILE: TAJIKISTAN

June 2008



BASIC FACTS:

- Population (July 2008 est.): 7,211,884, annual growth (2008 est.): 1.893%
- Infant mortality rate – 42.31 deaths/1,000 live births
- Human Development Index rank : 0.673 (medium) (122nd)
- Literacy rate: 99.5% over the age of 15
- Average life expectancy: 64.97 years (2008 est.)

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT:

The Tajik people came under Russian rule in the 1860s and 1870s, but Russia's hold on Central Asia weakened following the Revolution of 1917. Bolshevik control of the area was fiercely contested and not fully re-established until 1925. Much of present-day Sughd province was transferred from the Uzbekistan SSR to newly formed Tajikistan SSR in 1929. Ethnic Uzbeks form a substantial minority in Sughd province. Tajikistan became independent in 1991 following the breakup of the Soviet Union, and it is now in the process of strengthening its democracy and transitioning to a free market economy after its 1992-97 civil war. There have been no major security incidents in recent years, although the country remains the poorest in the former Soviet sphere. Attention by the international community in the wake of the war in Afghanistan has brought increased economic development and security assistance, which could create jobs and increase stability in the long term. Tajikistan is in the early stages of seeking World Trade Organization membership and has joined NATO's Partnership for Peace. A rugged, mountainous country, with lush valleys to the south and north, it now faces the challenge of strengthening peace and reviving its ruined economy.



The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

*Dotted line represents approximately the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir agreed upon by India and Pakistan. The final status of Jammu and Kashmir has not yet been agreed upon by the parties.

AT A GLANCE:

- Full name: Republic of Tajikistan
- Population: 7,211,884
- Capital: Dushanbe
- Largest city: Dushanbe
- Area: 143,100 sq km
- Major languages: Tajik (official), Russian widely used in government and business
- Major religion(s): Sunni Muslim 85%, Shi'a Muslim 5%, other 10% (2003 est.)
- Life expectancy: 61.95 years (men), 68.15 years (women)
- Monetary unit: 1 Tajik somoni = 100 dirams
- Main exports: aluminum, electricity, cotton, fruits, vegetable oil, textiles
- GDP per capita: \$1,800 (2007 est.)
- Internet domain: .tj
- International dialling code: +992

POLITICS:

Almost immediately after independence, Tajikistan was plunged into a civil war that saw various factions, allegedly backed by Russia and Iran, fighting one another. All but 25,000 of the more than 400,000 ethnic Russians, who were mostly employed in industry, fled to Russia. By 1997, the war had cooled down, and a central government began to take form, with peaceful elections in 1999. Presidential elections in November 2006 resulted in a landslide victory of 79% for the incumbent, President Rahmon, who has effectively been in power since 1992. As a result of a constitutional referendum in 2003, Rahmon could run for a further term of office, potentially allowing him to remain President until 2020. The last Parliamentary elections, which were held in February 2005, resulted in an overwhelming majority for the President's party, the People's Democratic Party (PDP). International observers concluded that neither Presidential nor Parliamentary elections had been fully in accordance with international standards. While a façade of democracy is in place, in practice power is concentrated in the hands of the President. Nevertheless, President Rahmon retains genuine popularity as the man seen as being responsible for bringing peace to the country and managing to retain its stability.

Tajikistan to this date is one of the few countries in Central Asia to have included an active opposition in its government. In the Parliament, opposition groups have often clashed with the ruling party, but this has not led to great instability.

On October 11, 2007, the Assembly of the Council Commission of the Ministry of Culture issued a decision to ban Jehovah's Witnesses in the Republic of Tajikistan. Following the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and after the breakup of the Soviet Union, the activity of Jehovah's Witnesses was legally recognized by many post-Soviet republics. Since that time, however, this is the first Soviet republic to ban the activity of Jehovah's Witnesses.

Recently Tajikistan also gave Iran its support in the membership bid to join the SCO, after a meeting with Tajik President and Iranian foreign minister.

ECONOMY:

Tajikistan has one of the lowest per capita GDPs among the 15 former Soviet republics. Only 7% of the land area is arable. Cotton is the most important crop, but this sector is burdened with debt and an obsolete infrastructure. Mineral resources include silver, gold, uranium, and tungsten. Industry consists only of a large aluminium plant, hydropower facilities, and small obsolete factories mostly in light industry and food processing. The civil war (1992-97) severely damaged the already weak economic infrastructure and caused a sharp decline in industrial and agricultural production. While Tajikistan has experienced steady economic growth since 1997, nearly two-thirds of the population continues to live in abject poverty. Economic growth reached 10.6% in 2004, but dropped to 8% in 2005, 7% in 2006, and 7.8% in 2007. Tajikistan's economic situation remains fragile due to uneven implementation of structural reforms, corruption, weak governance, widespread unemployment, seasonal power shortages, and the external debt burden. Continued privatization of medium and large state-owned enterprises could increase productivity. A debt restructuring agreement was reached with Russia in December 2002 including a \$250 million write-off of Tajikistan's \$300 million debt. Tajikistan ranks third in the world in terms of water resources per head, but suffers winter power shortages due to poor management of water levels in rivers and reservoirs. Completion of the Sangtuda I hydropower dam - built with Russian investment - and the Sangtuda II and Rogun dams will add substantially to electricity output. If finished according to Tajik plans, Rogun will be the world's tallest dam. Tajikistan has also received substantial infrastructure development loans from the Chinese government to improve roads and an electricity transmission network. To help increase north-south trade, the US funded a \$36 million bridge which opened in August 2007 and links Tajikistan and Afghanistan.

Sources:

CIA World Factbook - <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ti.html>

BBC News - http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/country_profiles/1296639.stm

Wikipedia - Wikipedia - <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tajikistan>