

Shadow Brief  
The Human Rights Situation of Women and Girls in  
Afghanistan  
January 2024 – August 2025

Submitted to the United States Congress  
By  
U.S Policy Advocates for Afghan and Women and Girls  
Working Group

## Executive Summary

This shadow report is submitted to the U.S. Congress and Department of State by the U.S. Policy Advocates for Afghan Women and Girls Working Group, a coalition of humanitarian and human rights organizations formed in 2021 in response to the Taliban's return to power. The Working Group is committed to ensuring that U.S. policy toward Afghanistan prioritizes the rights and protection of women and girls, in accordance with its longstanding, bipartisan commitment to defending human rights and international law through its foreign policy. This report is intended to supplement the U.S. Department of State's congressionally mandated 2024 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices (commonly referred to as the Human Rights Reports or HRRs), released on August 12, 2025. Specifically, it aims to provide a more accurate account of the human rights situation for women and girls under Taliban rule.

Following the Taliban's return to power in August 2021, women and girls in Afghanistan have endured unprecedented, systematic human rights violations, amounting to what they have described as “gender apartheid”. They are campaigning for the crime of gender apartheid to be codified under international law. At the same time, the International Criminal Court has brought charges for the crime against humanity of gender persecution. These abuses are enforced through formal decrees, institutionalized mechanisms, and a deeply embedded system of structural discrimination.<sup>1</sup> The result is a totalized system of oppression and domination that has stripped women and girls of nearly all rights, including access to education, employment, freedom of movement, and public participation, resulting in systematic violations of human dignity and human rights as protected under international law.

This regime of gender-based oppression was rapidly solidified following the signing of a peace agreement between the United States and the Taliban, known as the Doha Agreement, on February 29, 2020<sup>2</sup>. Women of Afghanistan were largely excluded from that process. Since then, the Taliban has reneged on virtually every commitment it made to the international community, including to U.S. counterparts, and especially on commitments regarding human rights, including the rights of women and girls. These rights violations unfold amid a deepening humanitarian and economic crisis, with 22.9 million people, nearly half of Afghanistan's population, in need of assistance. It is imperative to ensure that any future U.S. government policy toward Afghanistan fully reflects and prioritizes the protection and promotion of the rights of women and girls, as well as broader human rights obligations.

The 2024 HRR on Afghanistan, however, does not fully reflect this reality. It is the result of a troubling policy of making editing cuts across HRRs, thereby excluding critical issues from the State Department's discussion of human rights. Indeed, the 2024 version has eliminated approximately two-thirds of the content

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<sup>1</sup> Afghan Justice Archive, “The Decree Database”, <https://afghanistanjustice.org/>

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of State, “Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan between the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognized by the United States as a state and is known as the Taliban and the United States of America”, February 29, 2020, <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Agreement-For-Bringing-Peace-to-Afghanistan-02.29.20.pdf>

previously included in the HRRs<sup>3</sup>. Additionally, it was finalized as the Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (DRL) significantly reduced its staffing capacity, closing entire offices within the bureau that had expertise on the rights of women and girls in Afghanistan. This undermines its future ability to produce in-depth reporting.

In light of these developments, this shadow report aims to fill the critical information gaps on the rights of women and girls in Afghanistan left by the official HRR. To that end, it adopts the more comprehensive structure of the previous HRR. However, it is intended as a supplement to other civil society and multilateral efforts to document the ongoing human rights crisis in Afghanistan and, as such, does not address all human rights concerns. Drawing on documentation and analysis from the United Nations, the Human Rights Council, and Afghan and international human rights organizations, this submission outlines the extensive and totalized system of gender-based repression enforced by the Taliban.

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<sup>3</sup> NPR, "State Department slashes its annual reports on human rights", August 12, 2025, <https://www.npr.org/2025/08/12/nx-s1-5495621/state-department-human-rights-reports-slashed#:~:text=Two%2Dthirds%20of%20content%20cut,the%20reports%20%22more%20readable.%22>

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## Methodology

This shadow report is based on a comprehensive desk review and analysis of secondary sources documenting the human rights situation of women and girls in Afghanistan. Unlike the HRR 2024, which refers only to that calendar year, the reporting period spans from January 2024 to August 2025. Sources include documentation from Afghanistan and international human rights organizations, the United Nations, the Human Rights Council, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan and media reports.

The methodology centers on qualitative analysis of civil society and human rights organizations' documentation, institutional reports, and official statements that reflect ongoing patterns of repression against women and girls under Taliban rule.

To facilitate ease of use by those familiar with the U.S. Department of State's Human Rights Reports (HRRs), this shadow report broadly follows the structure of the HRR used prior to the revised 2024 HRRs. While some sections may appear in a different order to improve narrative flow and ensure adequate contextual detail, those original HRR headings have been retained throughout. To facilitate comparison to the 2024 HRR, the report indicates where the relevant topics appear within the new report, if at all.

This shadow report focuses on violations of the rights of women and girls, which are emblematic of broader patterns of systemic discrimination, legal exclusion, and social marginalization. These reflect the Taliban's intention to dominate and subordinate women, both practically and ideologically, as crucial to the regime's sustainability. The report is intended to supplement, not replace, official government, multilateral, and civil society efforts to document human rights violations, and, in particular, to fill critical gaps in the U.S. Department of State's 2024 HRRs.<sup>4</sup>

## Discrimination and Societal Abuse

*In prior HRRs, the matter of "Discrimination and Societal Abuse" appeared under Section 6. In the 2024 HRR, as revised under the Trump administration, there is no longer a section with this title, nor any dedicated focus on gender-based human rights violations. Nevertheless, this shadow report adopts the former section heading and places it at the beginning of the report. This choice to forefront discussion of the status and nature of discrimination against women and girls in Afghanistan provides a necessary foundation for understanding broader rights violations subsequently discussed.*

Women and girls in Afghanistan face systematic exclusion from social, economic, and political life under Taliban rule.

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<sup>4</sup> U.S. Department of State, "2024 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Afghanistan", 2024, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2024-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/afghanistan/>

Since their 2021 takeover, the Taliban have implemented a systematic and institutionalized regime of gender-based discrimination in Afghanistan, stripping women of their human rights and personal freedoms. Through a series of sweeping decrees, they have excluded women from nearly all aspects of public life, banning their access to education, employment, freedom of speech and movement, and even regulating their clothing and ability to leave their homes.<sup>5</sup> Any long-distance travel, for example, is only allowed if accompanied by a male guardian (*mahram*). Already in March 2023—before all of these decrees had been issued—the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) had described Afghanistan as “the most repressive country in the world regarding women’s rights.”<sup>6</sup>

Although these oppressive policies affect all women, those with intersecting marginalized identities are disproportionately impacted. They include women from the Hazara ethnic group and Tajik women from regions like Panjshir, known for strong resistance to outside forces. Their experiences are shaped by multiple forms of discrimination, on ethnic, political, and gender grounds, and can result in persecution, political retribution, imprisonment, disappearance, torture, and sexual violence<sup>7</sup>.

Credible reports of sexual violence highlight the extreme vulnerability many women face in Taliban-controlled regions. One notable example was the horrific video of the rape of a woman activist in a Taliban prison, which was released in July 2024 by *The Guardian* and *Rukhshan Media*.<sup>8</sup> However, all acts of violence, including horrific cases such as this, often remain uninvestigated and unpunished due to the deepening climate of fear and repression and the impunity Taliban members enjoy<sup>9</sup>. As a result, even if women have and can access mechanisms to report incidents of violence, they are often discouraged from using them, which obscures the true scale of the problem.

#### a. Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice

On August 21, 2024, the Taliban formalized many of these oppressive policies by codifying the relevant decrees in the Law on the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice (PVPV law).<sup>10</sup> Officially

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<sup>5</sup> Afghan Justice Archive, “The Decree Database.”

<sup>6</sup> The United Nations, “The UN in Afghanistan Calls for an Immediate End to Draconian Restrictions on the Rights of Women & Girls by the De Facto Authorities”, March 8, 2023, <https://afghanistan.un.org/en/222237-un-afghanistan-calls-immediate-end-draconian-restrictions-rights-women-girls-de-facto>

<sup>7</sup>Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan, A/HRC/55/80, February 29, 2024, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/country-reports/ahrc5580-situation-human-rights-afghanistan-report-special-rapporteur>

<sup>8</sup> The Guardian, “Video appears to show gang-rape of Afghan woman in a Taliban jail”, July 3, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/article/2024/jul/03/video-appears-to-shows-gang-rape-of-woman-in-a-taliban-jail>

<sup>9</sup> Amnesty International, “Afghanistan: Authorities must reinstate formal legal frameworks, rule of law and end four years of injustice and impunity.”, August 15, 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/08/afghanistan-four-years-of-injustice-and-impunity/>

<sup>10</sup> Source?, “Law on the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice”, August 21, 2024, [https://afghanistanjustice.org/media/2024/07/AJA\\_DEC12.07.31.2024-2.pdf](https://afghanistanjustice.org/media/2024/07/AJA_DEC12.07.31.2024-2.pdf)

published in the national gazette, the law imposes some restrictions on the general population but primarily targets women and girls.

The Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice (MPVPV)—first established by the Taliban in 1996 and restored in September 2021—is tasked with enforcing the PVPV law across the country. This state agency thus plays a central role in implementing Taliban restrictions and carries responsibility for the resulting atrocities. The Taliban members who enforce the rules, known as *muhtasibs*, have broad and vaguely defined authority.

The PVPV law contains an introduction and four chapters across 35 articles. Articles 3 and 13 impose a mandatory dress code requiring women and girls to cover their entire bodies and refrain from wearing clothing that is “thin,” “short,” or “tight.”

The law also imposes restrictions on women’s voices being heard— even the sound of women singing or reading aloud in public is considered *awrah* and thus to be concealed.

The law restricts women’s freedom of movement and effectively criminalizes their very presence outside the home. The law also stipulates that drivers should not provide transport to women unaccompanied by a *mahram*. This expanded the previous instruction issued on 31 December 2021 requiring women to be accompanied by a *mahram* only if travelling a distance over 78 km from their home.<sup>11</sup>

Although Article 4 states that the law applies in “public places,” the term is undefined, granting authorities broad discretion on enforcement. In practice, there is little distinction between public and private spheres, with officials reportedly even entering homes and inspecting individuals’ mobile phones.

The law also raises serious concerns about the minimum age of criminal responsibility. The Taliban reject the international standard of 18 years, instead defining a child as anyone who has not shown signs of puberty. As a result, children and adolescents under age 18 may face the same severe punishments as adults, including corporal punishment. The subjective definition provides cover for arbitrary application of the law, creating serious legal and protection gaps.

The February 2025 report by UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights, Richard Bennett, on the PVPV law in Afghanistan found that it is enforced with violence, harassment, arbitrary detention, and public beatings, particularly targeting women.<sup>12</sup> Punishments are swift and brutal, lack due process, and reportedly included stoning and amputation.

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<sup>11</sup> United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, “Report on the Implementation, Enforcement and Impact of the Law on the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice in Afghanistan”, April 2025, [https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/unama\\_pvpv\\_report\\_10\\_april\\_2025\\_english.pdf](https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/unama_pvpv_report_10_april_2025_english.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan, “Study on the so-called “Law on the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice”, February 25, 2025, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2025-02/a-hrc-58-74-pvpv-study.pdf>

In January 2024, the Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (MPVPV) said it had arrested women for wearing what it deemed “bad hijab.”<sup>13</sup>

Human Rights Watch reported that from July 16–19, 2025, the Taliban arrested dozens of “women and girls” in various parts of Kabul for allegedly violating Taliban dress codes and *mahram* restrictions.<sup>14</sup> The arrests targeted women in public spaces, including grocery shops and hospitals.

## b. Education

Upon taking power, the Taliban authorities gradually expanded restrictions on women’s and girls’ education. The ban began with secondary schools and high schools, later extended to universities, and eventually encompassed even midwifery education, which had initially remained open as an exception. . Even some alternative educational programs provided by international organizations and NGOs have been banned.

Afghanistan is now the only country in the world that systematically denies girls access to formal education. According to UNICEF, the start of Afghanistan’s school year in March 2025 saw nearly 400,000 more girls affected by these bans, bringing the total number of girls excluded from education to approximately 2.2 million.<sup>15</sup> If the ban on girls’ secondary education persists until 2030, over four million girls will have been deprived of their right to education beyond primary school. Researchers and UN experts have linked the lack of educational prospects to rising rates of early and forced marriage and widespread depression and suicide among adolescent girls.<sup>16</sup>

The 2024 UNAMA report states that, in August 2024, radio stations in at least two provinces—Khost and Paktya—were instructed to stop broadcasting educational programs for girls beyond grade six, thereby blocking women from accessing alternative forms of education.<sup>17</sup> In August 2024, local radio stations in at least two provinces—Khost and Paktya—were instructed to stop broadcasting educational programs for girls beyond grade six.

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<sup>13</sup> The Hill, “Taliban arrest women for ‘bad hijab’ in the first dress code crackdown since their return to power”, January 4, 2025, <https://thehill.com/homenews/ap/ap-international/ap-taliban-arrest-women-for-bad-hijab-in-the-first-dress-code-crackdown-since-their-return-to-power/>

<sup>14</sup> Human Rights Watch, “Afghan Women Continue to Fight for Bodily Autonomy”, July 25, 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/07/27/afghan-women-continue-to-fight-for-bodily-autonomy>

<sup>15</sup> UNICEF, “Afghanistan Girls Education Ban”, March 21, 2025, <https://media.un.org/unifeed/en/asset/d335/d3353551>

<sup>16</sup> Amnesty International, “Death in Slow Motion: Women and Girls Under Taliban Rule”, July 27, 2022, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/research/2022/07/women-and-girls-under-taliban-rule-afghanistan/>; Education Cannot Wait, “Education Cannot Wait Interviews UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Afghanistan Richard Bennett”, December 2024, <https://www.educationcannotwait.org/news-stories/featured-content/education-cannot-wait-interviews-richard-bennett-un-special>

<sup>17</sup> United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, “Update on the human rights situations in Afghanistan: July - September 2024 Update”, October 31, 2024, [https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/english\\_-\\_unama\\_-\\_update\\_on\\_hr\\_situation\\_in\\_afghanistan\\_-\\_july-sept\\_2024.pdf](https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/english_-_unama_-_update_on_hr_situation_in_afghanistan_-_july-sept_2024.pdf)



### c. Employment

Women in Afghanistan are now barred from nearly all forms of employment outside of healthcare and primary education, and very few work in areas such as airport security and prisons. The Taliban have prohibited women from holding government positions, participating in decision-making, or working for international organizations. Small entrepreneurship opportunities, like sewing, handicraft, or tailoring, largely exist in name only—it has become virtually impossible for women to seize them given strict restrictions on their movement and inability to access financing.

In August 2024, in Takhar province, Taliban officials from the Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (MPVPV) halted a handicraft exhibition, alleging that women vendors were not wearing proper hijab and were interacting with male vendors, whose stalls were located in a separate hall.<sup>18</sup>

The ongoing ban on women working with NGOs and United Nations agencies not only deprives women of their livelihoods but exacerbates the country's dire humanitarian crisis. Without women workers and providers, women's access to aid and essential services is severely limited due to Taliban restrictions on men-women interactions.

Although the Taliban had previously granted limited exceptions for some women UN staff to continue working, UN agencies report those are no longer guaranteed, as employees face increasing harassment and intimidation. For example, in May 2025, explicit death threats were made against dozens of women working for the United Nations in Afghanistan, according to a new UN report.<sup>19</sup> A UNAMA employee told Amo TV: "When the Taliban came to our office, we were terrified. They pointed weapons at us. All of us were in shock. After that, they came to our house several times in civilian clothes. They warned my father and made him sign a pledge, saying that if we returned to work, we might be imprisoned — and even threatened with death."<sup>20</sup>

### d. Access to Health Care

The Taliban's repressive policies have severely restricted women's access to healthcare, both by law and in practice. Restrictions on women's freedom of movement and employment, as well as the requirement that women be accompanied by a male guardian (*mahram*) when seeking treatment, have had a devastating impact on women's ability to access care. Women who are permitted to continue working in healthcare are often required to have a *mahram* not only while commuting to work but even while at work. As of 29 July

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<sup>18</sup> United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, "Update on the human rights situations in Afghanistan: July - September 2024 Update", October 31, 2024.

<sup>19</sup> Al Jazeera, "UN report says its female staff in Afghanistan have received death threats", August 10, 2025, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/8/10/un-report-says-its-female-staff-in-afghanistan-have-received-death-threats>

<sup>20</sup> Amo TV, "Taliban threaten families of UN female staff in effort to block their work, employees say", June 6, 2025, <https://amu.tv/178869/>

29, 2025, new rules in Kandahar require women health workers and their male guardians to have a “Mahram Card” to prove their relationship, with the male guardian required to be physically present at the workplace throughout the day.<sup>21</sup> Several women have reported being unable to work due to this policy, emphasizing that the requirement for a male guardian to be present throughout the day is a major obstacle. Additionally, obtaining a Mahram Card is burdensome, requiring approval from multiple Taliban authorities and taking up to three days. Women healthcare workers must also comply with strict dress codes. As described in a February 2024, Human Rights Watch report, these conditions make both providing and receiving care extremely difficult for women.<sup>22</sup>

In December 2024, Taliban leader Hibatullah Akhundzada issued a decree barring women from attending medical and semi-professional institutes, cutting off one of the last remaining paths to higher education.<sup>23</sup> The UN Human Rights Office (OHCHR) warned that the effect of this ban could be to increase the already high maternal mortality risk by 50 percent as a result of fewer women healthcare workers being trained.<sup>24</sup>

### Women's Mental Health

According to UN Women and other accounts, the effects of the Taliban’s policies—namely, the near-total exclusion of women from the public sphere; institutionalized, gender-based discrimination; and reinforced, misogynistic attitudes and practices—have driven many women into distress and despair.<sup>25</sup>

By September 2024, UN Women reported that 90% of Afghan women and girls rated their mental health as “bad” or “very bad,” with conditions worsening by the quarter.<sup>26</sup> And eight percent reported knowing at least one other woman or girl who had attempted suicide.

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<sup>21</sup> Etilaatroz, “UNAMA: Taliban in Kandahar issue ‘muharram cards’ to men accompanying female health workers”, August 10, 2025, <https://www.etilaatroz.com/237806/taliban-in-kandahar/>

<sup>22</sup> Human Rights Watch, “A Disaster for the Forseeable Future”, February 12, 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2024/02/12/disaster-foreseeable-future/afghanistans-healthcare-crisis>

<sup>23</sup> Doctors Without Borders, “Excluding Afghan women from medical institutes threatens the future of health care in the country”, December 6, 2024, <https://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/latest/excluding-afghan-women-medical-institutes-threatens-future-health-care-country>

<sup>24</sup> UN City Copenhagen, “Afghanistan: UN condemns Taliban ban on women attending medical classes”, December 5, 2024, <https://un.dk/afghanistan-un-condemns-taliban-ban-on-women-attending-medical-classes/>

<sup>25</sup> UN Women, “Afghanistan Gender Country Profile 2024”, 2024, <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-06/Gender-country-profile-Afghanistan-en.pdf>; Radio Free Europe, “Empty Shell’: Extreme Depression, Suicidal Thoughts Haunt Afghan Women Under Taliban Rule”, November 4, 2021, <https://www.rferl.org/a/depression-suicide-afghan-women/31546048.html>; Journal of Affective Disorders, “Mental health and suicidality in Afghan students after the Taliban takeover in 2021, June 15, 2022, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0165032722003342>, Vol. 307, page 178-183

<sup>26</sup> United Nations, “Afghanistan - Security Council, 9726th meeting”, September 22, 2024, <https://webtv.un.org/en/asset/k1s/k1sn95oayy>

Notably, women suicide rates have continued to increase since the Taliban takeover<sup>27</sup>. In November 2024, Ramza, a 22-year-old engineering student, died by suicide.<sup>28</sup> According to reports, after seeing pictures of her former male classmates attending classes she was no longer allowed to join, Ramza retreated to her room in tears. Later, her family found her lifeless; she had ingested rat poison, and ended her life.

## Respect for the Integrity and Justice of People

*In the original structure of the report, respect for the integrity and justice of people appears under Section 1. In the 2024 HRR, some of these topics are covered in sections throughout, while others are omitted.*

### a. Arbitrary Deprivation of Life and Other Unlawful or Politically Motivated Killings

In an audio broadcast on March 25, 2024, Taliban leader Hibatullah Akhundzada declared: “We will flog the women ... we will stone them to death in public [for adultery].”<sup>29</sup>

In a report published on August 27, 2024, the Centre for Information Resilience documented at least 332 cases of femicide in Afghanistan between January 2022 and June 2024.<sup>30</sup> More than half of the reported cases implicated Taliban officials, including members of the so-called morality police and intelligence services. Other cases were the indirect result of multiple layers of violence and restrictions imposed by the Taliban system of impunity and absence of access to justice. The organization emphasized that these figures represent only a fraction of the actual scale of violence.

As one telling example, *8am Media* reported that a 55-year-old woman named Gol Bibi died after being severely beaten by Taliban fighters in Takhar province on November 3, 2024.<sup>31</sup> The assault was reportedly ordered by Omar Farooq, the Taliban’s district police chief, following a dispute in which Gol Bibi and three other women resisted attempts by the Taliban to seize their land.

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<sup>27</sup> Zan Times, “Despair is settling in: female suicides on rise in Taliban’s Afghanistan”, August 28, 2023, <https://zantimes.com/2023/08/28/despair-is-settling-in-female-suicides-on-rise-in-talibans-afghanistan/>

<sup>28</sup> KabulNow, “Rising suicide rate among women lay bare the impact of Taliban’s oppression”, November 20, 2024, <https://kabulnow.com/2024/11/rising-suicide-rate-among-women-lay-bare-the-impact-of-talibans-oppression/?tzt=1>

<sup>29</sup> The Guardian, “Taliban edict to resume stoning women to death met with horror”, March 28, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2024/mar/28/taliban-edict-to-resume-stoning-women-to-death-met-with-horror>

<sup>30</sup> Centre for Information Resilience, “Afghan Witness report reveals ‘daily occurrence’ of gender-based violence under Taliban rule as women suffer ‘systemic erasure’ from public life”, August 14, 2024, <https://www.info-res.org/afghan-witness/articles/afghan-witness-report-reveals-daily-occurrence-of-gender-based-violence-under-taliban-rule-as-women-suffer-systemic-erasure-from-public-life/>

<sup>31</sup> Afghanistan International, “55-year-old woman allegedly beaten by Taliban police commander in Takhar dies”, November 3, 2024, <https://www.afintl.com/en/202411033094>

## b. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, and Other Related Abuses

### - Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Since the Taliban regained power, women in Afghanistan—including human rights defenders, activists, civil servants, journalists, politicians, and students—have consistently protested against the regime’s discriminatory laws. The Taliban have met their widespread demonstrations with violent repression, arresting protest leaders and participants and even raiding private homes and safe houses. Many women activists have been detained and imprisoned as a result. Amnesty International, in turn, documented widespread and systematic abuses against women in detention, including rape, sexual assault, physical confinement, and prolonged solitary confinement.<sup>32</sup>

The UN Special Rapporteur on Afghanistan published a report in July 2025 with testimonies detailing abuses, including the sexual assault of women while in Taliban custody.<sup>33</sup> Many detainees reported being beaten, verbally harassed, stripped of their hijabs and clothing, and sexually assaulted.

On July 3, 2025, Femena released the report “Afghan Women in Taliban Prisons,” based on interviews with twelve women human rights defenders.<sup>34</sup> The report details their experiences of torture, including sexual violence, and harsh interrogation in Taliban detention centers. Several women noted harsher treatment due to their Hazara ethnicity and Shia faith. Five described enduring solitary confinement in cold, dark, and wet conditions.

Karima, one of the report participants who spent 47 days in solitary, shared: “With each interrogation by the Taliban, it felt as though I was dying and coming back to life. They interrogated me twelve times, and during each session, they tortured me with electric shocks. They beat me, humiliated me, insulted me, and called me obscene and vulgar names. The room I was held in was damp, and they poured water on the carpet to ensure I couldn’t rest, intensifying my suffering.”

Similarly, a Rawadari research report from June 2025 documented testimonies from seven women who reported physical torture, with several of them describing incidents of sexual harassment.<sup>35</sup> They also reported experiencing prolonged solitary confinement and detention in private prisons, deliberate

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<sup>32</sup> Amnesty International, “Afghanistan 2024”, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/asia-and-the-pacific/south-asia/afghanistan/report-afghanistan/>

<sup>33</sup> United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan, “Access to justice and protection for women and girls and the impact of multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination”, June 11, 2025, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2025-06/a-hrc-59-25-auv-1-en.pdf>

<sup>34</sup> Femena, “Afghan Women in Taliban Prisons”, July 3, 2025, <https://femena.net/2025/07/03/afghan-women-in-taliban-prisons/>

<sup>35</sup> Rawadari, “Torture and ill-treatment: The state of prisons in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan”, June 2025, [https://rawadari.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/RW\\_TortureReport\\_English-Final.pdf](https://rawadari.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/RW_TortureReport_English-Final.pdf)

deprivation of health and medical services, denial of access to legal counsel, insufficient food, and other humiliating and inhumane conditions. The report indicates that in some cases, the Taliban, primarily the employees of the General Directorate of Intelligence (GDI), tortured victims for amusement and recreation and continued to harass some survivors after their release.

### c. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention - Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees

On February 29, 2024, a group of UN experts issued a statement expressing concern about reports of “scores of women and girls in Afghanistan hav[ing] been arbitrarily detained and subjected to ill-treatment since early January for allegedly violating the Taliban’s dress code for women.”<sup>36</sup> It reported that de facto authorities arbitrarily detained women and girls, making arrests in public places then holding them incommunicado and without access to legal representation. Authorities often subjected detainees to ill-treatment, including physical and psychological abuse, and only released them after their *mahram* provided assurances, typically in writing, of future compliance with the Taliban’s dress code.

In July 2024, UNAMA published a report further detailing the impacts on human rights and fundamental freedoms of the authorities’ enforcement of decrees governing physical appearance and attire.<sup>37</sup> It described tactics used by the Ministry for the PVPV and PVPV Directorates, and invited the authorities to respond to the report’s content.

However, the abuses did not stop. In July 2025, media reported that the Taliban conducted a wave of mass detentions of women in Kabul and other cities.<sup>38</sup> Nearly 100 women were arrested in Shahr-e Naw, Dasht-e Barchi, Pul-e-Surkh, and District 14 of Kabul. These women were forcibly removed from streets, markets, hospitals, and vehicles, even while wearing clothing consistent with Taliban dress codes. Footage shows the use of force by the so-called morality police during the raids. Most detainees were held overnight and, once again, only released after family members signed written pledges to comply with the law going forward. The whereabouts of many detainees remain unknown, and families are increasingly alarmed.

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<sup>36</sup> United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, “Afghanistan: Taliban’s arbitrary arrests and detention of women and girls over dress code must end immediately, UN experts say”, February 2, 2024, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/02/afghanistan-talibans-arbitrary-arrests-and-detention-women-and-girls-over>

<sup>37</sup> United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, “De Facto Authorities’ Moral Oversight in Afghanistan: Impacts on Human Rights”, July 2024, [https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/moral\\_oversight\\_report\\_english\\_final.pdf](https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/moral_oversight_report_english_final.pdf)

<sup>38</sup> Amo TV, “Sources: Detained women transferred to Taliban security posts and Interior Ministry”, July 19, 2025, <https://amu.tv/187166/#:~:text=Women%20arrested%20last%20Wednesday%2C%20July,in%20front%20of%20their%20children.%E2%80%9D>

Women journalists have also been under particular threat.<sup>39</sup> They have largely been barred outright from newsrooms or forcibly expelled by raids. For example, on December 5, 2024, Taliban intelligence agents raided the office of Arezo TV in Kabul. Seven journalists were detained, including women who were expelled from the premises before the station was forcibly shut down. The whereabouts of those women remained unknown at the time of this report. On February 4, 2025, the Taliban forces raided the offices of Radio Begum, an Afghan women-led radio station in Kabul, detaining two women staff members.<sup>40</sup>

#### d. Denial of Fair Public Trial - Trial Procedures

Since its takeover in August 2021, the Taliban have dismantled Afghanistan's justice system to such a degree that women have no avenues to seek legal redress for the harm caused by policies violating their rights. The result is, effectively, a nationalized system of institutionalized discrimination that gives unchecked power to the Taliban to prosecute individuals without regard to the principles or standards of fair trial. It has created a culture of impunity for Taliban members, shielding them from accountability for their abuses.

One of the Taliban's first acts was to dissolve the Ministry of Women's Affairs and its 27 support centers, including women's shelters, across the country.<sup>41</sup> The ministry was replaced with the so-called Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice. In addition, the Taliban abolished the constitution and the Law on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (EVAW Law) and disbanded the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission. They also eliminated the office of the special prosecutor for cases involving violence against women and children within the Attorney General's structure, which is now replaced by the High Directorate of Supervision and Prosecution of Decrees and Orders. All specialized courts, including those handling cases of violence against women, juvenile justice, anti-corruption, and national security, were also disbanded.

The Taliban have annulled all prior laws and regulations, including the Constitution and penal code, which had been developed in alignment with Afghanistan's international human rights obligations. In their place, the Taliban have instituted decrees (oral and written orders and fatwas) and distorted interpretations of Islamic jurisprudence, which vary depending on the individual issuing them.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Freedom Now, "Where Press Freedom Dies: Afghan Women Journalists Face a Dark Reality", May 29, 2025, <https://www.freedom-now.org/where-press-freedom-dies-afghan-women-journalists-face-a-dark-reality/>

<sup>40</sup> Amnesty International UK, "A radio by Afghan women, for Afghan women", July 1, 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/blogs/amnesty-feminist-network-blog/radio-afghan-women-afghan-women>

<sup>41</sup> Human Rights Watch, "For Afghan Women, the Frightening Return of 'Vice and Virtue'", September 29, 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/09/29/afghan-women-frightening-return-vice-and-virtue>

<sup>42</sup> American Society of International Law, "Taliban Weaponize Afghanistan's Justice System Against Women, UN Finds", June 17, 2025, <https://www.asil.org/ILIB/taliban-weaponize-afghanistan%E2%80%99s-justice-system-against-women-un-finds>

In July 2024, a joint report by UN Women, IOM, and UNAMA surveyed 776 women across all 34 provinces of Afghanistan.<sup>43</sup> The report found that 79 percent of women had no contact with formal legal services in the past year, with most citing the Taliban’s refusal to admit women to courts and public legal offices without a male guardian. Even when admitted, women’s cases were frequently dismissed or ignored.

On May 23, 2022, the Taliban issued Circular Number 15 providing guidelines on how to handle Republic-era legal decisions.<sup>44</sup> Namely, it authorized Taliban tribunals to review and overturn past rulings. One effect of this policy was to enable men whose wives had legally divorced them to demand the women’s return. As a result, thousands of women were forced back into abusive or unwanted marriages they had lawfully escaped. Stories of women facing this plight continued to emerge during the reporting period, as in the case of Nazdana.<sup>45</sup> The BBC published her story on September 28, 2024, describing how she had fought to be released from an arranged marriage when she was underage, only to have a Taliban court later revoke the divorce at her former husband’s request.

## Respect for Civil Liberties

*In the original structure of the report, respect for civil liberties comes under Section 2.*

### a. Freedom of Expression, Including for Members of the Press and Media

The State Department’s 2024 HRR notes there are “serious restrictions on freedom of expression and media freedom, including violence or threats of violence against journalists and censorship.” However, it fails to highlight how women in Afghanistan’s media sector are disproportionately affected by profound and multifaceted challenges that severely restrict their ability to work freely and safely. Since the Taliban’s return to power, bans on women’s employment, restrictions on freedom of movement, mandatory hijab rules, and the requirement to be accompanied by a *mahram* (male guardian) have compounded the difficulties confronting women journalists. Women journalists report being followed, harassed, or threatened with death if they continued their work.<sup>46</sup> Any work allowed to continue has been largely confined to women-only media or segregated spaces.

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<sup>43</sup> United Nations Women, International Organization for Migration and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, “Summary of Countrywide Consultations with Afghan Women”, July 2024, [https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-10/af-c1242-final-consulation-report\\_july-2024-en-r02.pdf](https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-10/af-c1242-final-consulation-report_july-2024-en-r02.pdf)

<sup>44</sup> Afghanistan Justice Archive, “Circular Number 15”, March 4, 2023, <https://afghanistanjustice.org/decrees/dec3-03042023/>

<sup>45</sup> BBC, “A child bride won the right to divorce - now the Taliban say it doesn't count”, September 28, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cx24evnk5d2o>

<sup>46</sup> Al Jazeera, “‘Why are you out?’: Afghan women journalists recall Taliban sweep”, September 14, 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/9/14/afghanistan-women-journalists-taliban-media-reporters>



According to the 2024 UNAMA report, women journalists are routinely denied equal access to information, excluded from press conferences, refused interviews, or required to obtain special authorization to access reporting sites.<sup>47</sup> In April 2024, the Taliban prohibited the broadcast of women's voices across all media and even prevented women from calling media outlets.<sup>48</sup>

The 2024 Afghanistan Journalists Support Organization (AJSO) report states that there are no women journalists or media workers in 19 of Afghanistan's 34 provinces, and that 95 percent of media organizations do not employ women.<sup>49</sup> The report further highlights that women are prohibited from laughing or joking on media programs and that certain topics, including pregnancy, birth, marriage, and divorce, are entirely banned.

On February 27, 2024, Taliban PVPV Minister Mohammad Khalid Hanafi warned media executives that women could be entirely banned from media work if they do not fully cover their faces on TV or in video interviews.<sup>50</sup> Although women have been required to wear niqabs or masks since May 2022, the new rules are stricter, demanding black, head-to-toe coverage with only the eyes visible. Hanafi illustrated these requirements with photos of fully veiled women.

In November 2024, a UNAMA report documented human rights violations affecting journalists and media workers, including the arbitrary arrest and detention of seven women, torture and ill-treatment of eight women, and threats or intimidation directed at nine women.<sup>51</sup>

Taliban threats against journalists have also turned deadly. In August 2024, Zan Times published an investigative report revealing that the Taliban killed 25-year-old YouTuber Hora Sadat.<sup>52</sup> On July 13, 2023, Sadat and her two sisters, who assisted her in producing videos, were arrested by the Taliban on charges of "moral corruption." Following their release, the Taliban issued a 20-minute video documentary in which they coerced Hora Sadat's family into publicly endorsing a narrative that Zan Times found to be false.

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<sup>47</sup> United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and United Nations Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights, "Media Freedom in Afghanistan", November 2024, [https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/unama\\_report\\_on\\_media\\_freedom\\_in\\_afghanistan.pdf](https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/unama_report_on_media_freedom_in_afghanistan.pdf)

<sup>48</sup> United States Institute of Peace, "Tracking the Taliban's (Mis)Treatment of Women", <https://www.usip.org/tracking-talibans-Mistreatment-women>

<sup>49</sup> Afghanistan Journalists Support Organization, "A Report on the Status of Afghan Women Journalists in Afghanistan and Exile", March 2024, <https://ajso.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/ENGLISH-REPORT-WOMENS-DAY.pdf>

<sup>50</sup> Zan Times, "How Taliban restrictions on women and media are crushing women journalists?", March 18, 2024, <https://zantimes.com/2024/03/18/how-taliban-restrictions-on-women-and-media-are-crushing-women-journalists/>

<sup>51</sup> United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and United Nations Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights, "Media Freedom in Afghanistan", November 2024

<sup>52</sup> Zan Times, "The Taliban killed a female Youtuber, then invented a story to cover up the murder", August 5, 2024, <https://zantimes.com/2024/08/05/the-taliban-killed-a-female-youtuber-then-invented-a-story-to-cover-up-the-murder/>



## b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The Taliban continues to oppress women's groups protesting systemic discrimination through arbitrary arrests, imprisonment, and torture. In November 2022, the Ministry of Interior established an anti-riot women's police force in Kabul, staffed by women officers.<sup>53</sup> It appears specifically designed to suppress women's protests under the guise of gender inclusion.

In March and July 2025, respectively, *8am* and *Femena* published two independent reports documenting the experiences of women protesters arrested and imprisoned by the Taliban in Kabul.<sup>54</sup> According to the testimonies, the women were subjected to brutal interrogation methods, psychological and physical torture, including sexual assault. They endured verbal abuse, including vulgar insults, and were called prostitutes. Five women who were held in solitary confinement described staying in cold, wet, and dark rooms for days at a time and being blindfolded whenever escorted to and from the bathroom. Many of these women continue to suffer from severe mental and physical health issues, including chronic joint pain.

In response to the Taliban's repressive tactics, protests adapted by moving online or behind closed doors. However, the Taliban have continued to find and target protestors—throughout 2024 and 2025, they cracked down on nearly all women's gatherings or associations to prevent any form of congregation or planning, even in spaces not directly protesting their laws, such as women-only beauty salons or cafés.

On August 5 and 6, 2025, the Taliban's so-called morality police raided four women's beauty salons operating secretly in Kabul, including locations in Dasht-e-Barchi and Shahr-e-Naw.<sup>55</sup> The women had been running these clandestine salons since the Taliban formally banned the industry in 2023 under an edict issued by Supreme Leader Hibatullah Akhundzada. In May 2024, the "Dream of Women Coffee Shop and Library," which had been founded by four women, was raided on its inaugural day.<sup>56</sup> Several women attended the opening but were forcibly dispersed by armed Taliban fighters.

On December 28, 2024, the Taliban supreme leader, Hibatullah Akhundzada, issued a decree that newly constructed buildings must not have any windows through which areas used by women are visible.<sup>57</sup> This

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<sup>53</sup> Afghanistan Justice Archive, "DEC8-11012022 Decree", November 1, 2022, <https://afghanistanjustice.org/decrees/dec8-11012022/>

<sup>54</sup> 8am Media, "The Plight of Women in Taliban Prisons: Forced Confessions Through Stripping and Abuse", March 1, 2025, <https://8am.media/eng/the-plight-of-women-in-taliban-prisons-forced-confessions-through-stripping-and-abuse/>; Femena, "Afghan Women in Taliban Prisons", July 3, 2025, <https://femena.net/2025/07/03/afghan-women-in-taliban-prisons/>

<sup>55</sup> Amo TV, "Exclusive: Taliban raid underground women's beauty salons in Kabul, sources say", August 6, 2025, <https://amu.tv/190785/>

<sup>56</sup> 8am Media, "Taliban disrupts opening ceremony of a 'women's coffee shop' in Kabul", May 29, 2024, <https://8am.media/fa/the-taliban-disrupted-the-opening-ceremony-of-a-womens-coffee-shop-in-kabul-city/>

<sup>57</sup> France 24, "Taliban leader bans windows overlooking places 'usually used by women'", December 29, 2024, <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20241229-taliban-leader-bans-windows-overlooking-women-s-areas>

further confines women to their homes, compounding existing restrictions on their freedom of movement and the enforcement of mahram controls.

### c. Freedom of Religion

The Taliban have severely curtailed religious freedom for women. Following a strict Deobandi interpretation and implementing Hanafi jurisprudence, the Taliban control the religious practices of all in different ways, but women have been disproportionately affected. Women from other sects, including Shia, Ismaili, Hindus, Ahmadi and other religious communities, face even harsher restrictions.

Under the 2024 PVPV law, women are banned from reciting the Quran aloud, even in the presence of other women.<sup>58</sup> Minister of PVPV, Hanafi, stated that women are not permitted to recite aloud the *takbir* (“Allahu Akbar”) or call the *azan* (the call to prayer), both essential elements of Muslim prayers. In March 2025, during Ramadan, the Taliban’s so-called morality police banned women from praying in mosques in Kandahar and Herat.<sup>59</sup> During evening prayers, women were expelled from several mosques, and morality police now stand at mosque entrances, preventing them from attending Tarawih prayers.

One telling example demonstrates how discrimination on the basis of religion impacts individuals’ legal rights. In November 2024, the Fourth District Court of Kabul refused to issue an Afghan national identity card, known as Tazkira, to the child of Shibba Attaie, a Sunni woman married to a man from the Shiite sect, and confiscated her original identity cards.<sup>60</sup> The court also directed the relevant branches and directorates not to issue new or duplicate identity cards for the individuals involved until further notice.

## Conclusion

From January 2024 through August 2025, the Taliban’s systematic and institutionalized oppression of women and girls in Afghanistan has persisted and intensified, resulting in near-total exclusion from education, employment, justice, and public life. Legal protections are routinely denied; arbitrary detention, harassment, and threats are widespread; and enforcement of gender-based restrictions has become increasingly harsh and rigid. This shadow report aims to fill critical gaps left by the U.S. State Department’s 2024 Human Rights Report, providing a more accurate account of the ongoing crisis and the deeply entrenched system of oppression and repression of women and girls. It is hoped that this documentation will support policymakers, human rights advocates, and the international community in fully recognizing and responding to the pervasive violations suffered by women and girls in Afghanistan under Taliban rule.

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<sup>58</sup> Afghanistan Justice Archive, “DEC12-10262024 Decree”, October 26, 2024, <https://afghanistanjustice.org/decrees/dec12-10262024/>

<sup>59</sup> Afghanistan International, “Taliban Ban Women From Mosques In Kandahar & Herat During Ramadan Prayers”, March 12, 2025, <https://www.afintl.com/en/202503126068>

<sup>60</sup> Afghanistan Justice Archive, “DEC6-11252024 Decree”, November 25, 2024, <https://afghanistanjustice.org/decrees/dec6-11252024/>