

Afghanistan 2024 Human Rights Report

Executive Summary

References to the Taliban in this report do not denote or imply the United States recognizes the Taliban as the government of Afghanistan.

There was significant deterioration in respect for women's rights during the year due to edicts that further restricted access to education, employment, and freedom of movement for women and girls – effectively removing them from public spaces. On August 21, the publication of a so-called morality law codified many previous edicts and placed severe restrictions on the personal lives of all Afghans, especially women and girls. The Taliban instituted such “laws” based on its interpretation of Islam, severely infringing on freedom of religion or belief and effectively outlawing other interpretations of Islam and Islamic practice, as well as the practice of other religions. The Taliban did not purport to formally change laws enacted prior to August 2021; however, they promulgated “laws” and edicts that contradicted existing laws and were inconsistent with the country's obligations and commitments under international law.

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: arbitrary or unlawful killings; disappearances; torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment; serious abuses in a conflict; unlawful recruitment

or use by the Taliban of children in armed conflict; serious restrictions on freedom of expression and media freedom, including violence or threats of violence against journalists and censorship; restrictions on religious freedom; trafficking in persons, including forced labor; significant restrictions on workers' freedom of association; and the significant presence of the worst forms of child labor.

There was widespread disregard for the rule of law and official impunity for those responsible for human rights abuses.

The Taliban and ISIS-K reportedly separately engaged in child recruitment. Armed groups threatened, robbed, kidnapped, and attacked foreigners, medical and nongovernmental organization workers, and other civilians. Members of the Taliban reportedly killed persons in retaliation for their association with the pre-August 2021 government.

Section 1. Life

a. Extrajudicial Killings

There were numerous reports Taliban and ISIS-K members committed arbitrary and unlawful killings, many as retaliation against officials associated with the pre-August 2021 government, according to reports published by the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), the UN special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan, and

human rights groups. ISIS-K targeted the Taliban in an effort to undermine stability in the country. ISIS-K also disproportionately targeted ethnic Hazaras, who were predominantly followers of the Shia branch of Islam.

In a report published on May 13 and presented to the 56th session of the Human Rights Council (HRC), UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan Richard Bennett (SR Bennett) stated the “Taliban’s institutionalized discrimination and segregation has been bolstered by killings committed by its members and supporters, as well as by [ISIS-K]. These killings have occurred in private homes, in public spaces and in detention facilities, and victims have included human rights defenders, lawyers, prosecutors, judges, students, teachers and police officers, many of them female.”

The Taliban did not generally publicize efforts to hold its “police” or militia accountable for these abuses despite the Taliban’s August 2021 public commitment to a “general amnesty” for Republic-era government officials and members of the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF). The Taliban repeated this commitment publicly numerous times during the year.

There were credible reports Taliban security personnel arbitrarily killed civilians in Panjshir, Kunduz, Kabul, Nimruz, Ghazni, Khost, Jawzijan, Faryab, Takhar, Sar-e-Pol, and Herat Provinces, allegedly as collective punishment against communities where the National Resistance Front (NRF) armed

opposition group was active or in retaliation against Republic-era soldiers and government officials in violation of the Taliban's general amnesty decree. UNAMA also recorded cases in which former government officials were arrested or detained on accusations of affiliation with the NRF. In many of these instances, relatives or victims themselves said the allegations were false and that the primary reason for their arrest was their affiliation with the pre-August 2021 government.

On February 6, media reported Taliban security officers killed a former ANDSF soldier and displayed his body in public for hours in northern Kunduz Province. The Taliban reportedly accused the former soldier of being a member of ISIS-K, but also told villagers in Kunduz the former soldier was a kidnapper. Political and civil society activists claimed the Taliban frequently exacted revenge against ANDSF soldiers and Republic-era government employees by alleging an affiliation with ISIS-K.

b. Coercion in Population Control

There were no reports of involuntary sterilization on the part of the Taliban.

Women faced nearly insurmountable barriers to receiving health care due to Taliban restrictions on work, travel, and male-female interactions. Male doctors were generally not allowed to treat female patients except in life-threatening cases because of restrictions imposed by the Taliban on interactions between men and women. In all cases, the Taliban prohibited

male doctors from treating female patients unless they were accompanied by a *mahram* (a male guardian or chaperone). Women could see female doctors, but it was difficult to find them. The Taliban permitted women who were already working as health practitioners to continue, but many women were reportedly afraid to work due to Taliban restrictions on women in the workplace. The ever-smaller number of qualified women health practitioners steeply increased the risk of poor health outcomes for women.

A law enacted prior to August 2021 and adopted by the Taliban required women to obtain their husband's consent to use contraception.

c. War Crimes, Crimes against Humanity, and Evidence of Acts that May Constitute Genocide, or Conflict-Related Abuses

In a report released in June, SR Bennett found that the Taliban's institutionalized system of oppression, established and enforced through its treatment of women and girls, was widespread and systematic, and appeared to constitute an attack on the entire civilian population, amounting to crimes against humanity. The United States had not made a determination by year's end regarding crimes against humanity by the Taliban in the country.

Section 2. Liberty

a. Freedom of the Press

The 2004 constitution provided for freedom of speech, including for the press, but the Taliban did not respect this right. Although the Taliban made public statements asserting press protections remained in place, a series of edicts issued in November 2021 severely limited the exercise of freedom of expression, including for members of the press and other media. These limitations and restrictions led to the closure of several media outlets during the year. According to reporting from UNAMA, media, and other sources, the Taliban used force against protesters and journalists and suppressed political discussion and dissent, which had a severe chilling effect on civil society.

Public criticism of the Taliban – whether by individuals or groups – was largely muted. Public speech was subject to extensive surveillance by Taliban members, both online and offline. Taliban members often confiscated mobile phones and electronics to search for criticism of the group, third-country affiliations, or perceived violations of their edicts. There were reports Taliban also held male family members responsible for the actions of their female relatives, including for criticism of the group.

On August 25, media reported the Taliban detained and imprisoned a social media activist in Nangarhar Province for reportedly criticizing the Taliban's

rules against freedom of speech on the internet. A video published on social media showed the Taliban forcing the social media activist to confess, saying he would not make “negative propaganda” against the Taliban again.

The Taliban selectively restricted access to the internet and blocked websites. There was no expectation of privacy of communications from Taliban monitoring. According to reporting from UNAMA, media, and other sources, Taliban instituted internet blackouts or severe slowdowns in locations of active dissent and following periods of political discord in the population.

Physical Attacks, Imprisonment, and Pressure

There were numerous reports the Taliban subjected journalists to violence, harassment, and intimidation.

On June 20, the Committee for the Protection of Journalists (CPJ) reported the Taliban had severely beaten and physically abused a local journalist after detaining him in Parwan Province a week before. Taliban intelligence forces arrested the journalist on June 13 in Bagram District, Parwan Province, while he was returning from Kabul. He was released two days later. In its report, the CPJ stated the Taliban interrogated the reporter for two days for writing a report critical of the Taliban’s policies on education and for publishing a Facebook post regarding the group’s use of Kapisa schools as military bases.

Threats of detention and violence against journalists drove several media

organizations to close and journalists to flee.

On August 13, the Afghan Journalists' Center (AFJC) released a report on press freedom in the country. According to the report, the AFJC recorded 181 incidents of press freedom violations from August 2023 to August 2024, a slight increase compared with the previous year. The report stated, "This included 133 threats [to journalists], the temporary closure of four media outlets, the permanent closure of four others, the suspension of several media licenses, and the arrest of 48 journalists and media workers, with two still in custody."

Censorship by Governments, Military, Intelligence, or Police Forces, Criminal Groups, or Armed Extremist or Rebel Groups

The Taliban enforced a 2022 decree stating that "defaming and criticizing government officials without proof" and "spreading false news and rumors" were forbidden under Islam and that those who "slander" government employees were unwittingly collaborating with the enemy and would be "punished."

On September 21, the Ministry of Information and Culture introduced new restrictions to regulate the press during a meeting with managers of several media outlets in Kabul. In addition to an eight-point set of regulations, the ministry also provided a list of 68 preapproved individuals, including two women, with whom media organizations could conduct interviews. If a

news program desired to interview a guest outside this list, it was required to submit the person's name and details to the ministry for approval. According to sources, the ministry did not leave behind written copies of the new regulations and requested those present not to publicize the changes. Representatives of the AFJC and Amu TV spoke with some members of the media present during the meeting who expressed concern regarding the restrictions, viewing them as an attempt by the Taliban to control the media.

According to the AFJC, the rules laid out in the "eight-point guideline" required political programs featuring discussions or debates to be prerecorded, not broadcast live. Media organizations had to submit a list of programs and notional guests for political debates each day to the Ministry of Information and Culture and could only record and present a program after receiving approval.

Media were explicitly prohibited from challenging or criticizing Taliban officials, regulations, policies, or decisions. The media head, publication manager, program host, editor, and political expert (guest of the program) would reportedly be held individually responsible for any violations of these guidelines. On April 16, media reported the Taliban had shut down the Noor and Barya television stations for noncompliance with "national and Islamic principles and values," claiming the stations had received repeated warnings for their failure to "respect national interests." Both stations had been

affiliated with banned Republic-era political parties. A member of the Taliban's "Media Violation Evaluation Commission" warned on X that any media not adhering to the Taliban's established principles would face similar consequences. Both stations remained closed at year's end.

b. Worker Rights

Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining

A law enacted prior to August 2021 provided for the right of workers to join and form independent unions and to conduct legal strikes and bargain collectively. The Taliban did not purport to repeal this law, but their actions were not consistent with labor laws and regulations.

International nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) noted unions were largely absent from the informal and agricultural sectors, which accounted for most workers.

In May 28 and 30 meetings in Doha, Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs representatives stated the ministry was working to protect the rights of the country's overseas workers. Ministry representatives said they were carrying forward discussions initiated by the Republic-era government on labor agreements to facilitate the legal movement of the country's expatriate workers to Iran, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Türkiye, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, and other countries. The ministry claimed to employ 1,200

women, including at ministry-run training centers and orphanages, and maintained it incorporated the civil service staff of the Ministry of Women's Affairs, which the Taliban closed in 2021 and replaced with the so-called Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice.

Forced or Compulsory Labor

See the Department of State's annual *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

Acceptable Work Conditions

Wage and Hour Laws

Since August 2021, the Taliban had not taken actions consistent with minimum wage, overtime, or wage or hour standards.

On June 3, the Taliban released a decree from so-called Emir Haibatullah Akhundzada setting a cap on the monthly salaries of women public servants of Afghani (AFN) 5,000 (\$70), down from the AFN 12,000 - AFN 15,000 (\$168-\$210) most public-sector workers had been receiving. The decree led to scattered protests and strikes, as well as strict warnings from the Taliban that protesters would face "severe consequences." Following initial confusion regarding whom the decree applied to, the Taliban issued a letter on July 7, purportedly under the authority of the Ministry of Finance, stating unequivocally that the salary cap applied only to women public servants

required to work from home, not to those going to work in person.

Occupational Safety and Health

According to laws enacted prior to August 2021, the country had no occupational safety and health (OSH) regulations or officially adopted standards. Workers could not remove themselves from health-endangering situations without risking their employment.

Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement

The Taliban did not effectively take actions consistent with minimum wage, overtime, and OSH laws in either the formal or the informal sectors. The International Labor Organization estimated the informal sector accounted for more than 86 percent of the national economy.

c. Disappearance and Abduction

Disappearance

The Taliban were responsible for enforced disappearances. SR Bennett, in his report released ahead of the 55th session of the HRC, stated he received first-hand accounts from victims of enforced disappearances, among other human rights abuses, and included enforced disappearance among the various ways in which the Taliban implemented their rights-violating edicts on the citizens of the country, saying “cases of such disappearances of human rights defenders, legal professionals and protesters, many of them

female, have been documented.” The Office of the UN Coordinator of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team for Afghanistan in its July 3 report to the UN Security Council noted reports of unattributed forced disappearances, adding that the Taliban were not taking efforts to systematically prevent them from happening. In a report released on August 29, Human Rights Watch stated the Taliban “use enforced disappearances to assert control and instill fear in those who oppose them.”

On April 16, a man’s body was reportedly discovered in the provincial capital of Paktika Province. According to media reports, his body showed signs of physical abuse and was found behind a Taliban military base one day after his disappearance.

Prolonged Detention without Charges

The 2004 constitution prohibited arbitrary arrest and detention and provided for the right of any person to challenge the lawfulness of their arrest or detention in court. The Taliban generally did not observe these requirements. The Taliban reportedly frequently detained citizens arbitrarily without a clear legal basis and without regard to substantive or procedural legal protections. Local Taliban “police” reportedly detained persons capriciously on charges without a clear connection to any law.

Between January 1 and June 30, UNAMA documented 98 instances of arbitrary arrest and detention. On September 3, the UN Office of the High

Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) reported media workers and civil society activists, particularly campaigners for girls' education and women's rights, continued to be subject to arbitrary detention. The OHCHR also reported the targeting and detention of workers from Afghan media outlets based abroad had been observed.

In a September 2023 report on the treatment of detainees, UNAMA noted the systematic violation of detainees' right to access lawyers, their families, doctors, and judges, as well as arbitrary and prolonged detention, frequently concluding without charges or judicial process.

d. Violations in Religious Freedom

See the Department of State's annual *International Religious Freedom Report* at <https://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/>.

e. Trafficking in Persons

See the Department of State's annual *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

Section 3. Security of the Person

a. Torture and Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or

Punishment

Although the 2004 constitution prohibited such practices, there were numerous reports of severe physical abuse attributed to the Taliban and ISIS-K. The Taliban stance on the 2004 constitution was ambiguous after retaking control in August 2021. They neither fully accepted nor explicitly rejected it. UNAMA reported punishments carried out by the Taliban included beatings, floggings, and executions. On March 26, Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said stoning was part of sharia and that “if the conditions for stoning arise again, we will undoubtedly implement the sharia decrees.”

Between January 1 and June 30, UNAMA documented at least 20 instances of the Taliban’s use of physical abuse and mistreatment against civilians. Between April 1 and June 30, UNAMA documented at least 179 instances of court-ordered corporal punishment ordered by Taliban-appointed “judges.” Human rights activists documented a total of 364 instances (316 men and 48 women) of Taliban-enforced corporal punishment by August 31, already exceeding the entire number of 217 (185 men; 32 women) documented cases of corporal punishment carried out by the Taliban in 2023.

On June 4, in Sar-e-Pol city, Taliban members publicly flogged 63 individuals (48 men and 15 women) for a range of crimes, including armed robbery, adultery, running away from home, insult, and sodomy. Each person was

lashed between 15 and 39 times.

Impunity was a significant problem among Taliban “police” and soldiers.

The Taliban did not establish a formal system of accountability for abuses or killings. No independent organization was allowed to investigate abuses and killings in the country.

b. Protection of Children

Child Labor

See the Department of Labor’s *Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor* at <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor/findings/>.

Child Soldiers

A 2022 Taliban decree banned child recruitment by Taliban members, and the Taliban claimed it did not allow children younger than 18 to join any of its forces. The UN’s *Children and Armed Conflict Report*, covering the period from January to December 2023, noted progress in engaging with parties to protect children in the country, although it also listed the country as among the countries with the highest number of denials of humanitarian access. In 2023, the United Nations documented the Taliban’s recruitment of 342 boys and their use in combat (150 boys) and support roles (192).

On June 15, multiple media outlets reported Taliban security forces in

northeastern Badakhshan Province recruited approximately 30 children between ages 10 and 18 and provided them with military training in a special military center. According to reports, the so-called district governor warned the families of the children not to make complaints regarding the children's recruitment or interfere in the training process. Local sources in Badakhshan confirmed the training program began in mid-May, approximately a month before it was first reported.

The Secretary of State determined the country had Taliban-supported armed groups that recruited or used child soldiers from April 2023 to March 2024. See the Department of State's annual *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

Child Marriage

According to a law enacted prior to August 2021, the legal minimum age for marriage was 16 for girls, or 15 with the approval of their father or a judge. The legal minimum age for marriage for boys was 18. The Taliban did not enforce the law.

A Taliban decree banned the forced marriage of women. Despite this ban, child, early, and forced marriage was common across the country. In his May 13 report, SR Bennett wrote, "Women and girls barred from the education system in Afghanistan are at increased risk of forced marriage, particularly where their families are under financial pressure. One woman,

living inside Afghanistan, stated that she now had to marry, stating that ‘all of my dreams have shattered.’” SR Bennett noted special concern regarding allegations the Taliban had been involved in forced and child marriages without legal consequences, especially in rural and remote areas, saying “these coerced conjugal relationships, a phenomenon that also predates the Taliban’s administration, may also entail other violations, including rape, torture, forced pregnancy, and forced labor.” He concluded the Taliban were reportedly providing no meaningful protection against either forced marriage itself or violence within marriage.

UNICEF estimated that 38.9 percent of women in the country between the ages of 15 and 49 were married before the age of 18 and noted that teenage girls who were not allowed to go to school were at greater “risk of child marriage.”

In an article published in the *Washington Post* on January 15, the founder of Too Young to Wed, an NGO seeking to empower girls and end child marriage globally, documented 118 girls who had been sold as child brides and 116 families with girls waiting for buyers in a makeshift settlement for displaced persons in Herat Province. The survey found 40 percent of families interviewed had either sold or offered to sell a daughter into marriage. The article cited economic conditions and the Taliban’s restrictions on girls’ education as being among the primary drivers of child marriage in the country.

c. Protection to Refugees

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and other humanitarian organizations provided protection and assistance to refugees and returning refugees, as well as other persons of concern. The Taliban provided their own limited assistance to returnees at certain border points – particularly with the provision of cash and SIM cards to returnees from Pakistan – but obstructed broad efforts by UNHCR and the IOM to streamline internally displaced persons headcount efforts and reach vulnerable returnee populations. The Taliban deployed so-called Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice staff at border points to enforce moral and behavioral restrictions on returnees in line with “virtue directives” released in September.

Provision of First Asylum

A law enacted prior to August 2021 governed applications for asylum or refugee status. The Taliban did not create a system for granting of asylum or refugee status.

d. Acts of Antisemitism and Antisemitic Incitement

There were no confirmed Jews residing in the country. There were no known reports of antisemitic incidents.

e. Instances of Transnational Repression

Efforts to Control Mobility

The Taliban attempted to control mobility to exact reprisal against citizens abroad.

On July 30, the Taliban announced they no longer recognized the country's diplomatic missions operated by Republic-era officials in Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, France, Germany (specifically Berlin and Bonn), Greece, Italy, Norway, Poland, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom (UK), and that they would not honor passports, passport extension stickers, visas, and other documents issued from these missions after July 30. The Taliban did not send officials to these missions to provide basic services to citizens. The country's embassies in Norway and the UK subsequently closed.