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Home Office

# **Country Policy and Information Note**

## **Afghanistan: Fear of the Taliban**

**Version 1.0**

**October 2021**

# Preface

## Purpose

This note provides country of origin information (COI) and analysis of COI for use by Home Office decision makers handling particular types of protection and human rights claims (as set out in the [Introduction](#) section). It is not intended to be an exhaustive survey of a particular subject or theme.

It is split into 2 parts: (1) an assessment of COI and other evidence; and (2) COI. These are explained in more detail below.

## Assessment

This section analyses the evidence relevant to this note - that is information in the COI section; refugee/human rights laws and policies; and applicable caselaw - by describing this and its inter-relationships, and provides an assessment of, in general, whether one or more of the following applies:

- a person is reasonably likely to face a real risk of persecution or serious harm
- that the general humanitarian situation is so severe that there are substantial grounds for believing that there is a real risk of serious harm because conditions amount to inhuman or degrading treatment as within [paragraphs 339C and 339CA\(iii\) of the Immigration Rules](#) / Article 3 of the [European Convention on Human Rights \(ECHR\)](#)
- that the security situation is such that there are substantial grounds for believing there is a real risk of serious harm because there exists a serious and individual threat to a civilian's life or person by reason of indiscriminate violence in a situation of international or internal armed conflict as within [paragraphs 339C and 339CA\(iv\) of the Immigration Rules](#)
- a person is able to obtain protection from the state (or quasi state bodies)
- a person is reasonably able to relocate within a country or territory
- a claim is likely to justify granting asylum, humanitarian protection or other form of leave, and
- if a claim is refused, it is likely or unlikely to be certifiable as 'clearly unfounded' under [section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002](#).

Decision makers **must**, however, still consider all claims on an individual basis, taking into account each case's specific facts.

## Country of origin information

The country information in this note has been carefully selected in accordance with the general principles of COI research as set out in the [Common EU \[European Union\] Guidelines for Processing Country of Origin Information \(COI\)](#), April 2008, and the Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation's (ACCORD), [Researching Country Origin Information – Training Manual](#), 2013. Namely, taking into account the COI's relevance, reliability, accuracy, balance, currency, transparency and traceability.

The structure and content of the country information section follows a [terms of reference](#) which sets out the general and specific topics relevant to this note.

All information included in the note was published or made publicly available on or before the 'cut-off' date(s) in the country information section. Any event taking place or report/article published after these date(s) is not included.

All information is publicly accessible or can be made publicly available. Sources and the information they provide are carefully considered before inclusion. Factors relevant to the assessment of the reliability of sources and information include:

- the motivation, purpose, knowledge and experience of the source
- how the information was obtained, including specific methodologies used
- the currency and detail of information
- whether the COI is consistent with and/or corroborated by other sources.

Multiple sourcing is used to ensure that the information is accurate and balanced, which is compared and contrasted where appropriate so that a comprehensive and up-to-date picture is provided of the issues relevant to this note at the time of publication.

The inclusion of a source is not, however, an endorsement of it or any view(s) expressed.

Each piece of information is referenced in a footnote. Full details of all sources cited and consulted in compiling the note are listed alphabetically in the bibliography.

## Feedback

Our goal is to provide accurate, reliable and up-to-date COI and clear guidance. We welcome feedback on how to improve our products. If you would like to comment on this note, please email the Country Policy and Information Team.

## Independent Advisory Group on Country Information

The [Independent Advisory Group on Country Information](#) (IAGCI) was set up in March 2009 by the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration to support him in reviewing the efficiency, effectiveness and consistency of approach of COI produced by the Home Office.

The IAGCI welcomes feedback on the Home Office's COI material. It is not the function of the IAGCI to endorse any Home Office material, procedures or policy. The IAGCI may be contacted at:

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Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration  
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London, SW1V 1PN  
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Information about the IAGCI's work and a list of the documents which have been reviewed by the IAGCI can be found on the Independent Chief Inspector's pages of the [gov.uk website](#).

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# Assessment

Updated: 31 August 2021

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Basis of claim

- 1.1.1 Fear of persecution and/or serious harm by the Taliban because the person has opposed, is perceived to have opposed, or does not conform with its moral, religious or political views. In practice, the reasons for fearing persecution or serious harm are potentially wide-ranging (see [Convention reason\(s\)](#)).

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### 1.2 Points to note

- 1.2.1 Where the person made an asylum and/or human rights claim before the Taliban had taken de facto control of Afghanistan, decision makers should (where appropriate) provide them with the opportunity to explain what they fear on return given the significantly changed country circumstances.

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## 2. Consideration of issues

### 2.1 Credibility

- 2.1.1 For information on assessing credibility, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).
- 2.1.2 Decision makers must also check if there has been a previous application for a UK visa or another form of leave. Asylum applications matched to visas should be investigated prior to the asylum interview (see the [Asylum Instruction on Visa Matches, Asylum Claims from UK Visa Applicants](#)).
- 2.1.3 Decision makers should also consider the need to conduct language analysis testing (see the [Asylum Instruction on Language Analysis](#)).

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## 2.2 Exclusion

- 2.2.1 Decision makers must consider whether there are serious reasons for considering whether one (or more) of the exclusion clauses is applicable. Each case must be considered on its individual facts and merits.
- 2.2.2 If the person is excluded from the Refugee Convention, they will also be excluded from a grant of humanitarian protection (which has a wider range of exclusions than refugee status).
- 2.2.3 For further guidance on the exclusion clauses and restricted leave, see the Asylum Instruction on [Exclusion under Articles 1F and 33\(2\) of the Refugee Convention](#), [Humanitarian Protection](#) and the instruction on [Restricted Leave](#).

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## 2.3 Convention reason(s)

- 2.3.1 The person's actual or imputed political opinion – most likely due to their actual or perceived support for the government and/or international forces – and/or, depending on the person's individual profile, their race, religion or particular social group (PSG).
- 2.3.2 In the country guidance case, [NS \(Social Group - Women - Forced marriage\) Afghanistan CG \[2004\] UKIAT 00328](#), heard 21 September 2004 and promulgated 30 December 2004, the Tribunal found that women in Afghanistan form a PSG within the meaning of the Refugee Convention. The country conditions have not significantly changed and as such this still remains the case.
- 2.3.3 Establishing (a) convention reason(s) is not sufficient to be recognised as a refugee. The question to be addressed is whether the person has a well-founded fear of persecution because of that/those convention reason(s).
- 2.3.4 For further guidance on Convention reasons see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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## 2.4 Risk

- 2.4.1 Following the official withdrawal of US troops, which began on 1 May 2021, the Taliban launched a military offensive across the country, quickly gaining control of most districts and ending in the seizure of Kabul on 15 August 2021. The Taliban have assumed de facto control of the country (see [Peace talks and the Taliban takeover \(September 2020 to August 2021\)](#)).
- 2.4.2 The Taliban is a highly conservative political-religious and non-democratic movement which applied a strict interpretation of Sharia (Islamic law) when in power between 1996 and 2001. This included imposing harsh punishments on persons who did not conform to this law. Since entering Kabul, the Taliban have indicated their intention to implement Sharia across the country, albeit with greater respect for women's and human rights. Additionally the group announced a 'general amnesty' on 17 August 2021 for members of the (former) government and international community (see [Ideology, aims and objectives](#), [Taliban declare a 'general amnesty'](#) and [Potentially vulnerable groups](#)).
- 2.4.3 At the time of writing, it is difficult to assess whether the Taliban's claims of a more tolerant and inclusive system than their rule of 1996–2001 is likely, given both the limited time since they have gained control of Kabul (and the country as a whole), the potential that the rhetoric does not match the intention, that there was still international media in Kabul as well as international troops (until 31 August), and that the Taliban have become increasingly adept at using PR (see [Limits on reporting](#) and [Ideology, aims and objectives](#)).
- 2.4.4 Whilst there is some indication of a more pragmatic approach, the Taliban have a core set of values and beliefs that it is highly unlikely they would compromise on. There may be variation by area, which could be down to individual Taliban personnel, commanders or regional command structures (see [Ideology, aims and objectives](#) and [Life under the Taliban](#)).
- 2.4.5 Many reports are also projecting what might happen – based largely on references to the Taliban rule of 1996–2001 and reports from long-held or recently gained Taliban territory, where access for independent and reliable sources is limited and therefore extremely difficult to verify. Such reports are also subject to claim, denial and counterclaim (see [Limits on reporting](#) and [Statements and actions made by Taliban following takeover](#)).
- 2.4.6 There are reports of human rights abuses, in some parts of the country captured over the past few weeks, including summary executions, beheadings and forced marriage of girls. Some protests against the Taliban have occurred in some districts. According to reports, the Taliban responded by firing into the crowds, wounding and killing some protestors (see [Persons who resist or oppose the Taliban](#), [Limits on reporting](#) and [Potentially vulnerable groups](#)).
- 2.4.7 In the past, civilians associated with, or perceived to have supported, the (former) Government, civil society and the international community in Afghanistan – including the international military forces and international humanitarian and development actors – have been subject to intimidation,

threats, abductions and targeted attacks by groups such as the Taliban (see [Limits on reporting](#) and [Potentially vulnerable groups](#)).

- 2.4.8 Other groups, though not exhaustive, may include: members of the security forces; civilians accused of spying; judges, prosecutors and judicial staff; journalists and other media professionals; persons deemed to have transgressed cultural or religious mores; teachers and those involved in the education sector including students; tribal elders and religious leaders who resist the Taliban's doctrine; healthcare workers, humanitarian workers and human rights activists; women in the public sphere; LGBTIQ+ persons; and families supporting or perceived to be associated with the above (see [Potentially vulnerable groups](#)).
- 2.4.9 The country guidance case [AS \(Safety of Kabul\) Afghanistan \(CG\) \[2020\] UKUT 130 \(IAC\)](#) (1 May 2020), heard on 19 and 20 November 2019 and 14 January 2020 held that 'A person who is of lower-level interest for the Taliban (i.e. not a senior government or security services official, or a spy) is not at real risk of persecution from the Taliban in Kabul' (paragraph 253(i)). Given the significant change in country circumstances, at the time of writing there are – as per paragraphs 46 and 47 of [SG \(Iraq\) v Secretary of State for the Home Department \[2012\] EWCA Civ 940 \(13 July 2012\)](#) – very strong grounds supported by cogent evidence to justify a departure from paragraph 253(i) of [AS \(Safety of Kabul\)](#). However, each case must be considered on its facts.
- 2.4.10 The situation is fluid and uncertain, with the Taliban still consolidating its position. It remains unclear precisely how the Taliban will rule the country and if it will change its attitude toward and treatment of different groups as it transitions from insurgent group to de facto government.
- 2.4.11 However, the current evidence suggests that persons likely to be at risk of persecution, because they may be considered a threat or do not conform to the Taliban's strict interpretation of Sharia law, include but are not limited to:
- Former government employees and members of the Afghan National Armed Forces (ANSF), including the police
  - Former employees/those linked to international forces and organisations, including interpreters
  - Women in the public sphere
  - ethnic/religious minorities, in particular Hazara
  - Persons who have credibly resisted, or are perceived to resist, Taliban requests or control, or who do not conform to, or are perceived to not conform to, strict cultural and religious expectations/mores – in particular women
  - journalists critical of the Taliban
  - LGBTIQ+ persons
- 2.4.12 The country guidance case of [AJ \(Risk to Homosexuals\) Afghanistan CG \[2009\] UKAIT 00001 \(5 January 2009\)](#), heard on the 28 October 2008, focussed on the situation for gay men. The findings in [AJ](#) pre-date [HJ \(Iran\)](#).

The Upper Tribunal in [AJ](#) applied the ‘reasonably tolerable’ (to act discreetly and conceal identity) test, which was found to be incorrect and rejected by [HJ \(Iran\)](#), and so much of AJ’s findings cannot now be relied on.

- 2.4.13 The Upper Tribunal’s conclusions in [AJ \(Risk to Homosexuals\)](#) in Headnotes 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 and related paragraphs should therefore not be followed. The test that should be adopted are in paragraphs 35 and 82 in [HJ \(Iran\)](#).
- 2.4.14 If a person does not live openly as LGBTIQ+, consideration must be given to the reasons why they do not. Each case must be considered on its facts with the onus on the person to demonstrate that they would be at real risk on return. [HJ \(Iran\)](#) provides that, even if a person would not be open about their sexuality, if the reason why they would not do so is fear of persecution then they will still be a refugee.
- 2.4.15 Furthermore, if a person chooses to change their behaviour on return to Afghanistan, by modifying their political beliefs, denying their religious faith (or lack of one) or feigning belief, decision makers must consider the reasons why. If it is to avoid persecution then they are likely to require protection. Each case must be considered on its facts with the onus on the person to demonstrate that they would be at real risk on return.
- 2.4.16 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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## 2.5 Protection

- 2.5.1 The Taliban have taken control of virtually every major city in Afghanistan and announced that they intend to re-establish the Islamic emirate and implement (their version of) Sharia law. Given the Taliban have de facto control of the country, where a person has a well-founded fear of persecution from the Taliban, they will not be able to obtain protection.
- 2.5.2 On 1 April 2021, the UK Government launched the [Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy \(ARAP\)](#) scheme, which offers relocation or other assistance to current and former Locally Employed Staff in Afghanistan to reflect the changing situation in Afghanistan.
- 2.5.3 For further guidance on assessing the availability of state protection, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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## 2.6 Internal relocation

- 2.6.1 Where the person has a well-founded fear of persecution from the Taliban, it will, in general, be unduly harsh to expect them to relocate to escape that risk.
- 2.6.2 In regard to internal relocation to Kabul, the country guidance case [AS \(Safety of Kabul\) Afghanistan \(CG\) \[2020\] UKUT 130 \(IAC\)](#) (1 May 2020), held that:

‘Having regard to the security and humanitarian situation in Kabul as well as the difficulties faced by the population living there (primarily the urban poor but also IDPs and other returnees, which are not dissimilar to the conditions

faced throughout many other parts of Afghanistan) it will not, in general, be unreasonable or unduly harsh for a single adult male in good health to relocate to Kabul even if he does not have any specific connections or support network in Kabul and even if he does not have a Tazkera.

‘However, the particular circumstances of an individual applicant must be taken into account in the context of conditions in the place of relocation, including a person’s age, nature and quality of support network/connections with Kabul/Afghanistan, their physical and mental health, and their language, education and vocational skills when determining whether a person falls within the general position set out above. Given the limited options for employment, capability to undertake manual work may be relevant.

‘A person with a support network or specific connections in Kabul is likely to be in a more advantageous position on return, which may counter a particular vulnerability of an individual on return. A person without a network may be able to develop one following return. A person’s familiarity with the cultural and societal norms of Afghanistan (which may be affected by the age at which he left the country and his length of absence) will be relevant to whether, and if so how quickly and successfully, he will be able to build a network’ (paragraphs 253(iii) to 253(v)).

- 2.6.3 Given the significant change in country circumstances, at the time of writing there are very strong grounds supported by cogent evidence to justify a departure from paragraphs 253(iii) to 253(v) of [AS \(Safety of Kabul\)](#). Decision makers must give careful consideration to the relevance and reasonableness of internal relocation taking full account of the individual circumstances of the particular person. While the onus is on the person to establish a well-founded fear of persecution or real risk of serious harm, decision makers must demonstrate that internal relocation is reasonable having regard to the individual circumstances of the person.
- 2.6.4 In the country guidance case of [AK \(Article 15\(c\)\) Afghanistan CG \[2012\] UKUT 00163\(IAC\)](#), heard on 14-15 March 2012 and promulgated on 18 May 2012, the Upper Tribunal held that it would be unreasonable to expect lone women and female heads of household to relocate internally without the support of a male network (paragraph 249B (v)). This was confirmed in the country guidance case [AS \(Safety of Kabul\) Afghanistan \(CG\) \[2020\] UKUT 130 \(IAC\)](#) (1 May 2020) and continues to apply.
- 2.6.5 For further guidance on internal relocation see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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## 2.7 Certification

- 2.7.1 Where a claim is refused, it is unlikely to be certifiable as ‘clearly unfounded’ under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.
- 2.7.2 For further guidance on certification, see [Certification of Protection and Human Rights claims under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 \(clearly unfounded claims\)](#).

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# Country information

Section 3 updated: 31 August 2021

## 3. Taliban – background

### 3.1 Peace talks and Taliban takeover (September 2020 to August 2021)

- 3.1.1 The European Asylum Support Office (EASO) COI Report Afghanistan – Security Situation, dated June 2021, provided a brief history on attempts at a peace agreement leading up to the round of talks, which commenced in September 2020<sup>1</sup>.
- 3.1.2 The US Congressional Research Service (CRS) which provides reports, based on a range of sources, to congressional committees and Members of Congress, noted in its report dated 11 June 2021: ‘Intra-Afghan talks aimed at reaching a comprehensive peace settlement began in Doha, Qatar, in September 2020, representing a major step toward resolving the conflict. The two sides have met sporadically in recent months, but appear to remain far apart on the two key issues that appear to be central to talks – reducing violence and determining the future structure and orientation of the Afghan state.’<sup>2</sup>
- 3.1.3 The EASO security situation report, based on a range of sources, stated: ‘During the intra-Afghan talks, the Taliban demanded the establishment of a strict Islamic government while the Afghan government’s highest priority was the implementation of a ceasefire. The Taliban demanded to implement Hanafi school of Sunni jurisprudence as the main source of legislation in the country in the future. According to the UN Security Council, reporting on 3 February 2021, the peace process was important to “suppressing the long-term threat” of ISKP [Islamic State Khorasan Province] and Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan. According to Salaam Times, a news website sponsored by the US armed forces, there has been a growing division between the Taliban’s military commanders on the ground and the Doha political team. According to a German Federal Government February 2021 report, the peace process with the Taliban “remain extremely fragile” and has been “overshadowed by a sustained high level of violence”.’<sup>3</sup>
- 3.1.4 In its quarterly report to the US Congress, dated April 2021, the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) stated that, despite the peace process, violence continued, ‘On January 31 [2021], several diplomatic missions, including the United States, issued a statement criticizing targeted attacks against civil society, judicial, media, religious, medical, and civilian government personnel... The Taliban denied involvement in these targeted killings.’<sup>4</sup>
- 3.1.5 The EASO security situation report noted the Taliban’s advance across the country, ‘... according to a survey Pajhwok Afghan News conducted from mid-November 2020 until early February 2021, the Taliban controlled 52% of

<sup>1</sup> EASO, ‘[COI Report Afghanistan – Security Situation](#)’, (pages 33 to 36), June 2021

<sup>2</sup> CRS, ‘[Afghanistan: Background and U.S. Policy: In Brief](#)’ (page 8), 11 June 2021

<sup>3</sup> EASO, ‘[COI Report Afghanistan – Security Situation](#)’, (page 36), June 2021

<sup>4</sup> SIGAR, ‘[Quarterly Report to the United States Congress](#)’ (page 91), 30 April 2021

the territory in Afghanistan including 27 districts and the centres of 39 districts.’<sup>5</sup>

- 3.1.6 On 14 April 2021, the President Biden announced that all US troops would withdraw from Afghanistan before 11 September 2021<sup>6 7</sup>. Formal withdrawal commenced on 1 May 2021<sup>8</sup>. The SIGAR quarterly report dated 30 July 2021 noted:

‘After U.S. and Coalition forces officially began drawing down in May, the Taliban launched an offensive, overrunning numerous ANDSF [Afghan National Defence and Security Forces] checkpoints, bases, and district centers... In some districts ANDSF forces put up some level of resistance and conducted a tactical (fighting) retreat, while in others they surrendered or fled in disorder... In other instances, local elders reportedly mediated truces that allowed the ANDSF defenders to leave, abandoning their U.S.-supplied equipment...’<sup>9</sup>

- 3.1.7 BBC News reported that, following the US Government’s announcement in April 2021 that all American forces would leave the country by 11 September, ‘... the Taliban began seizing vast swathes of territory, before once again toppling a government in Kabul in the wake of a foreign power withdrawing. They swept across Afghanistan in just 10 days, taking their first provincial capital on 6 August. By 15 August, they were at the gates of Kabul.’<sup>10</sup>

- 3.1.8 On 15 August 2021, the Taliban seized control of Kabul and took over the Presidential Palace, as President Ghani fled the country<sup>11 12</sup>. Associated Press reported on 16 August 2021 ‘Fearful that the Taliban could reimpose the kind of brutal rule that all but eliminated women’s rights, Afghans rushed to leave the country, lining up at cash machines to withdraw their life savings. The desperately poor – who had left homes in the countryside for the presumed safety of the capital – remained in parks and open spaces throughout the city.’<sup>13</sup>

See also [Situation in Kabul from 16 August 2021](#).

- 3.1.9 The Long War Journal (LWJ), a project by the non-profit policy institute, the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies (FDD), presented maps in the form of time lapse videos showing the Taliban’s advance (weekly time lapse from 13 April 2021 to present and semi-yearly time lapse from November 2017 to present). The LWJ’s [Mapping Taliban Contested and Controlled Districts in Afghanistan](#) is based on open-source information, such as press reports and information provided by government agencies and the Taliban<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> EASO, ‘[COI Report Afghanistan – Security Situation](#)’, (page 49), June 2021

<sup>6</sup> SIGAR, ‘[Quarterly Report to the United States Congress](#)’ (page 55), 30 April 2021

<sup>7</sup> CRS, ‘[Afghanistan: Background and U.S. Policy: In Brief](#)’ (page 2), 11 June 2021

<sup>8</sup> SIGAR, ‘[Quarterly Report to the United States Congress](#)’ (page 49), 30 July 2021

<sup>9</sup> SIGAR, ‘[Quarterly Report to the United States Congress](#)’ (page 51), 30 July 2021

<sup>10</sup> BBC News, ‘[Who are the Taliban?](#)’, 18 August 2021

<sup>11</sup> BBC News, ‘[Afghanistan conflict: Kabul falls to Taliban as president flees](#)’, 16 August 2021

<sup>12</sup> AP, ‘[Taliban sweep into Afghan capital after government collapses](#)’, 16 August 2021

<sup>13</sup> AP, ‘[Taliban sweep into Afghan capital after government collapses](#)’, 16 August 2021

<sup>14</sup> FDD, LWJ, ‘[Mapping Taliban Contested and Controlled Districts in Afghanistan](#)’, no date

- 3.1.10 At time of writing, most districts were under Taliban control. The Taliban were reported to be heading towards Panjshir Valley in a bid to gain control from the anti-Taliban National Resistance Front of Afghanistan (NRF), which claimed it had thousands of fighters<sup>15 16</sup>. According to Al Jazeera reporting on 22 August 2021, 'In the only confirmed fighting since the fall of Kabul on August 15, anti-Taliban forces took back three districts in the northern province of Baghlan, bordering Panjshir, last week.'<sup>17</sup>

See also [Life under the Taliban](#).

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## 3.2 Ideology, aims and objectives

- 3.2.1 In a June 2018 paper by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI), titled 'Life under the Taliban shadow government', which 'examine[d] how the Taliban govern the lives of the tens of millions of Afghans living under their rule.' And was based on face-to-face interviews with '162 individuals, split fairly evenly across three groups: Taliban fighters, commanders, leaders, interlocutors and ex-members; government officials, employees (including teachers and doctors) and aid workers; and civilians who have lived or are currently living under Taliban control.'<sup>18</sup> The ODI considered that 'The Taliban's circumstances have radically changed since 2001, and their objectives and policies have shifted accordingly. They are no longer a revolutionary movement as they were in the 1990s.'<sup>19</sup>
- 3.2.2 In a March 2021 paper for CTC Sentinel, Thomas Ruttig considered that: 'While the Taliban have softened their rhetoric on some issues (for example, on women's rights and education) and there is evidence of real policy change in certain areas (for example, on the use of media, in the education sector, a greater acceptance of NGOs, and an acceptance that a future political system will need to accommodate at least some of their political rivals), their policy adjustments appear to have been largely driven by political imperatives rather than any fundamental changes in ideology.'<sup>20</sup>
- 3.2.3 He added 'the Taliban are a religiously motivated, religiously conservative movement that will not give up what they consider their core "values."<sup>21</sup>
- 3.2.4 AP News noted on 17 August 2021 that 'The Taliban have sought to present themselves as a more moderate force in recent years and say they won't exact revenge, but many Afghans are skeptical of those promises.'<sup>22</sup>
- 3.2.5 In his November 2020 paper for the Combating Terrorism Centre (CTC) Sentinel, Seth G Jones – the Harold Brown Chair and Director of Transnational Threats at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), as well as the author of In the Graveyard of Empires: America's War

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<sup>15</sup> Al Jazeera, '[Taliban says hundreds of fighters heading to take Panjshir Valley](#)', 22 August 2021

<sup>16</sup> BBC News, '[Anti-Taliban resistance group says it has thousands of fighters](#)', 23 August 2021

<sup>17</sup> Al Jazeera, '[Taliban says hundreds of fighters heading to take Panjshir Valley](#)', 22 August 2021

<sup>18</sup> ODI, [Life under the Taliban shadow government](#) (page 6), June 2018

<sup>19</sup> ODI, [Life under the Taliban shadow government](#) (page 10), June 2018

<sup>20</sup> CTC Sentinel, '[Have the Taliban Changed?](#)', (page 1), March 2021

<sup>21</sup> CTC Sentinel, '[Have the Taliban Changed?](#)', (page 1), March 2021

<sup>22</sup> AP News, [EXPLAINER: The Taliban takeover, what's next for Afghanistan](#), 17 August 2021

in Afghanistan<sup>23</sup> – explained that ‘The Taliban’s ideology is deeply rooted in Hanafi school of Islamic jurisprudence. While the ideology of the Taliban has been evolving since the movement’s establishment in the 1990s, Taliban leaders today generally support the establishment of a government by sharia (“Islamic” law) and the creation of an “Islamic Emirate” in Afghanistan.’<sup>24</sup>

- 3.2.6 Reuters reported on 17 August 2021 that ‘Although much had yet to be finalised, [Waheedullah] Hashimi [a senior member of the Taliban] said the country would not be a democracy, “There will be no democratic system at all because it does not have any base in our country,” he said. “We will not discuss what type of political system should we apply in Afghanistan because it is clear. It is sharia law and that is it.”’<sup>25</sup>
- 3.2.7 A France24 news article of 17 August 2021 quoted Enamullah Samangani, a member of the Taliban’s cultural commission, as explaining that “The structure of government is not fully clear, but based on experience, there should be a fully Islamic leadership and all sides should join.”<sup>26</sup>
- 3.2.8 On 17 August 2021, Martine van Bijlert of the Afghanistan Analysts Network (AAN) considered the Taliban as Afghanistan’s new leaders and noted: ‘The Taleban are currently conferring in Doha on what their government will look like: its name and structure and who will lead it. Today, the movement’s deputy, Mullah Baradar, hit a conciliatory tone in his speech, expressing surprise over the swiftness of Kabul’s takeover and calling for humbleness. “Now is the time when we will be tested on how we serve and secure our people and ensure their good life and future to the best of our ability,” he said. Taleban spokesperson Mohammad Naeem reiterated that the Taleban would work for a peaceful transition of power, both domestically and internationally, and would aim to maintain international diplomatic ties: “We ask all countries and entities to sit with us to settle any issues.”’<sup>27</sup>

See [Statements and actions made by Taliban following takeover](#).

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### 3.3 Organisational structure and command

- 3.3.1 In his November 2020 paper for the CTC Sentinel, Seth G Jones cited Antonio Giustozzi who described the Taliban’s organizational structure as ‘...“polycentric,” which indicates more than one center. While it is certainly true that there have been power struggles within the Taliban movement—including between the Rahbari Shura and several of the regional shuras—the Taliban’s organizational structure is still relatively centralized compared to other insurgent groups.’<sup>28</sup>

<sup>23</sup> CTC Sentinel, ‘[Afghanistan’s Future Emirate? ...](#)’, (page 1), November/December 2020

<sup>24</sup> CTC Sentinel, ‘[Afghanistan’s Future Emirate? ...](#)’, (pages 1 to 2), November/December 2020

<sup>25</sup> Reuters, ‘[Exclusive: Council may rule Afghanistan, Taliban to reach out...](#)’, 18 August 2021

<sup>26</sup> France24, ‘[Taliban declares general ‘amnesty’ for Afghan government officials](#)’, 17 August 2021

<sup>27</sup> AAN, ‘[Afghanistan Has a New Government...](#)’, 17 August 2021

<sup>28</sup> CTC Sentinel, ‘[Afghanistan’s Future Emirate? ...](#)’, (page 3), Nov/Dec 2020

- 3.3.2 In a March 2021 paper for CTC Sentinel, Thomas Ruttig – a co-director and senior analyst of the Afghanistan Analysts Network (AAN), an independent research organization based in Kabul and Berlin<sup>29</sup> – explained:
- ‘... the Taliban are structured horizontally as a network of networks and fronts led by military commanders. To operate as part of the movement, the local Taliban fronts (usually called mahaz) must obtain recognition from the Leadership Council. After this is granted, the front commanders have a significant degree of autonomy, including in decision-making in day-to-day affairs. This seems to be a guiding principle of Taliban leadership: an acceptance of commanders operating with a significant degree of autonomy, as long as they do not act against what the leadership considers central principles.’<sup>30</sup>
- 3.3.3 On the Taliban’s structure, the AAN reported on 16 July 2021:
- ‘The Taleban argue that they are an all-Afghan group, most recently in a statement on 23 June [2021]. It is a movement “formed,” the statement said “from the diverse ethnic groups, tribes and regions of the country and is a representative force of all people, ethnicities and strata” and “therefore reassures all citizens that none will be treated in a discriminatory, vindictive, condescending or hostile manner” and again, later in the same statement that it wants to “reassure women, men, minorities, media and all strata that the Islamic Emirate shall hold them in high esteem.” Yet the Taleban are a faction of Sunni Muslims, mainly mullahs and madrassa students. Although there are more Tajik, Uzbek, Aimaq and Sunni Hazara fighters, commanders and officials in Taleban ranks than there were in the 1990s/early 2000s – a reflection of their long-term strategy to co-opt at least the clerics of non-Pashtun populations... – it is still a movement dominated by Pashtuns, especially southern Pashtuns, and especially at the national leadership level... However... Afghanistan’s Shia Muslims are de facto excluded from its ranks, because it is a Sunni Muslim clerical faction.’<sup>31</sup>
- 3.3.4 In a 16 August 2021 article in the Daily Mail, Robert Clark – a defence policy associate at the Henry Jackson Society, who served in the British Army for 13 years and studied the Taliban as part of his MA in conflict studies at King’s College London<sup>32</sup> – claimed that notwithstanding the claims from the leadership, ‘... The Taliban is fuelled from the bottom up by the Wahhabi-inspired religious ideology of the rank and file fighters. So no matter how moderate the Taliban’s leaders may claim they are, the fighters on the ground will feel no compulsion whatsoever to observe the softer rhetoric about protecting women’s rights and human rights.’<sup>33</sup>
- 3.3.5 Talking exclusively to Reuters on 18 August 2021, senior member of the Taliban, Waheedullah Hashimi, said that the country may be governed by a ruling council whilst the group’s supreme leader, Haibatullah Akhundzada, was likely to remain in overall charge. Reuters noted that ‘The power

<sup>29</sup> CTC Sentinel, ‘[Have the Taliban Changed?](#)’, (page 1), March 2021

<sup>30</sup> CTC Sentinel, ‘[Have the Taliban Changed?](#)’, (page 4), March 2021

<sup>31</sup> AAN, ‘[Menace, Negotiation, Attack: The Taleban take more District Centres...](#)’, 16 July 2021

<sup>32</sup> Daily Mail, ‘[Don't be fooled, the Taliban 2.0 are just as barbaric](#)’, 16 August 2021

<sup>33</sup> Daily Mail, ‘[Don't be fooled, the Taliban 2.0 are just as barbaric](#)’, 16 August 2021

structure that Hashimi outlined would bear similarities to how Afghanistan was run the last time the Taliban were in power from 1996 to 2001.”<sup>34</sup>

- 3.3.6 For further information on the structure of the Taliban, see the [EASO Report on Anti-Government Elements](#), August 2020.

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### 3.4 Strength

- 3.4.1 In estimating the total manpower of the Taliban in 2017, Antonio Giustozzi, scholar and author of several books on the Taliban, noted:
- ‘The total manpower of the Taliban, including combatants and support elements, exceeds 200,000. The fighters are about 150,000, of whom around 60,000 are in fulltime, mobile units and the rest are local militias. The mobile units are mostly based in Pakistan and Iran and deploy to Afghanistan during the fighting season, in part for logistical reasons and also because many fighters have family in those countries. The Taliban have moved many of their assets into Afghanistan, including offices, training camps and even stockpiles, so they are increasingly able to keep large numbers of mobile forces inside Afghanistan even during winter. Because of the leave system (Taliban fighters are entitled to 3 months of leave a year) and because some forces are always kept in reserve, rarely if ever the number of full-time mobile Taliban deployed inside Afghanistan exceeds 40,000 at the peak of the fighting season’<sup>35</sup>
- 3.4.2 A June 2021 report by the UN Security Council’s Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team (UNSC) stated that, when estimating the number of armed combatants specifically: ‘Estimates of the current number of armed Taliban fighters range from approximately 58,000 to 100,000, with numbers fluctuating as forces are actively deployed on the battlefield or placed in reserve. Taliban numbers remain robust in spite of significant attrition rates incurred in the past few years.’<sup>36</sup>
- 3.4.3 The June 2021 EASO report on the Afghanistan security situation stated that, ‘In January 2021, the New York Times reported on the estimates made by the Afghan and the US [sources] indicating that the Taliban had an around 50 000 to 60 000 active fighters and tens of thousands of part-time armed men and facilitators in Afghanistan. According to the Council on Foreign Relation (CFR) report of 15 March 2021, there were between 55 000 and 85 000 full time active Taliban fighters in Afghanistan.’<sup>37</sup>
- 3.4.4 A July 2021 report by Al Jazeera noted that: ‘The group is believed to have 85,000 full-time fighters across the country...’<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Reuters, ‘[Exclusive: Council may rule Afghanistan, Taliban to reach out...](#)’, 18 August 2021

<sup>35</sup> Landinfo, ‘[...Report by Dr. Antonio Giustozzi for Landinfo](#)’ (page 12), 23 August 2017

<sup>36</sup> UNSC, ‘[...Taliban...peace stability and security of Afghanistan](#)’ (paragraph 26), 1 June 2021

<sup>37</sup> EASO, ‘[COI Report Afghanistan – Security Situation](#)’, (page 48), June 2021

<sup>38</sup> Al Jazeera, ‘[The Taliban explained](#)’ 25 July 2021

## 4. Life under the Taliban

### 4.1 Limits on reporting

- 4.1.1 In their June 2018 paper, the ODI noted ‘Certainly, what [the Taliban] say on their website often differs from the accounts given by Afghans living under Taliban control. What any change in Taliban policy means for Afghans and the future of Afghanistan requires looking beyond what the Taliban say, or even what they did in the past, and critically examining what they do on the ground now.’<sup>39</sup>
- 4.1.2 On 17 August 2021, the Spokesperson for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights reported ‘As the High Commissioner noted a week ago, and the Secretary-General also pointed out yesterday, there have been chilling reports of human rights abuses, and of restrictions on the rights of individuals, especially women and girls, in some parts of the country captured over the past few weeks. Such reports continue to be received. Unfortunately, for the time being, the flow of information has been considerably disrupted, and we have not been in a position to verify the most recent allegations.’<sup>40</sup>
- 4.1.3 An AFP article in France24 reported that, after the Taliban took control of the northern city of Kunduz in early August ‘Reprisals against former government workers, summary executions, beheadings, and kidnappings of girls for forced marriages are just some of the horrors recounted by those who have escaped the city since the takeover.’. However, the same article noted that ‘AFP had no way of independently verifying these reports and the Taliban deny committing any atrocities in the territory they control.’<sup>41</sup>
- 4.1.4 On 17 August 2021, Frud Bezhan – a Journalist covering Afghanistan for Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty<sup>42</sup> – tweeted that the ‘Taliban largely showing restraint in Kabul, which the world is watching closely. But very different story in other cities/provinces, where there have been summary executions/revenge killings of govt officials, captured soldiers, and civilians affiliated with govt.’<sup>43</sup>
- 4.1.5 The International Crisis Group (ICG) reported on 24 August 2021: ‘So far, the [policy announcements](#) from Taliban spokesmen are crafted to be reassuring, though vague, declaring that there will be no revenge taking, saying girls and women will continue to be allowed education and employment (within unclear parameters), telling journalists that they can continue to report and calling for calm. At the same time, the limited anecdotal reporting of Taliban interactions with the population in areas newly under their control paints a mixed picture. [There appear to be instances of reprisals and intimidation](#), especially directed at Afghans associated with the erstwhile government and its foreign supporters. Kabul, apart from the desperate scenes at the airport related to the rushed and unplanned

<sup>39</sup> ODI, [Life under the Taliban shadow government](#) (p10), June 2018

<sup>40</sup> UN OHCHR, [Briefing notes on Afghanistan](#), 17 August 2021

<sup>41</sup> France24, ‘[Taliban all smiles in captured Afghan city as northern blitz rolls on](#)’, 11 August 2021

<sup>42</sup> Frud Bezhan (@FrudBezhan on Twitter.com), [Profile](#), undated

<sup>43</sup> Frud Bezhan (@FrudBezhan on Twitter.com), [Tweet dated 12:31 UK time, 17 August 2021](#)

evacuation, is reported by some to have been largely quiet in the initial days, though there are also reports of Taliban harassing some of those trying to reach the airport. Information from elsewhere in the country is sparse. The disparate and inconsistent signals do not yet form a clear pattern. Even if they did, it should not be assumed that the current Taliban approach will be long-lasting.<sup>44</sup>

See also [Potentially vulnerable groups](#).

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## 4.2 Taliban declare a 'general amnesty'

- 4.2.1 On 17 August 2021, Al Jazeera reported 'The Taliban has announced a "general amnesty" for government workers across Afghanistan and urged women to join its government, trying to calm nerves as thousands rushed to Kabul airport to get out of the country.'<sup>45</sup>
- 4.2.2 The article quoted Enamullah Samangani, a member of the Taliban's cultural commission, as saying "The Islamic Emirate doesn't want women to be victims"<sup>46</sup> However, France24 noted the Taliban's pronouncements were vague, 'apart from saying it would be in accordance with Islamic "principles".'<sup>47</sup>
- 4.2.3 An article by Gandhara (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty), dated 16 June 2021, reported a similar but conditional Taliban statement '... The Taliban on June 7 issued a statement assuring Afghans who worked with international troops in the past that they will not be targeted if they "show remorse for their past actions and...not engage in such activities in the future that amount to treason against Islam and the country."' But there is widespread mistrust of the Taliban's assurances of safety.<sup>48</sup>
- 4.2.4 Al Jazeera also reported on the Taliban's statement of 7 June 2021, in which they said that those who worked for foreign forces would not be in any danger from the Taliban and that they should not leave the country<sup>49</sup>.

For information on how this 'amnesty' may affect individuals, see [Potentially vulnerable groups](#).

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## 4.3 Statements and actions made by Taliban following take over

- 4.3.1 On 17 August 2021, Al Jazeera reported the Taliban's first official news conference and published an [English transcript](#) of the statement:  
  
'Following the takeover of Afghanistan, the Taliban has held its first official news conference in Kabul, declaring that it wishes peaceful relations with other countries.  
  
'Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid promised ... that the Taliban would respect women's rights, forgive those who resisted them and ensure a

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<sup>44</sup> ICG, '[Taliban Rule Begins in Afghanistan](#)', 24 August 2021

<sup>45</sup> Al Jazeera, '[Taliban announces "amnesty," reaches out to women](#)', 17 August 2021

<sup>46</sup> Al Jazeera, '[Taliban announces "amnesty," reaches out to women](#)', 17 August 2021

<sup>47</sup> France24, '[Taliban declares general 'amnesty' for Afghan government officials](#)', 17 August 2021

<sup>48</sup> Gandhara, '["The Taliban Will Kill Us": Afghans Who Helped Foreign Forces At ...](#)', 16 June 2021

<sup>49</sup> Al Jazeera, '[Taliban says Afghans who worked for foreign forces will be safe](#)', 7 June 2021

secure Afghanistan as part of a publicity blitz aimed at convincing world powers and a fearful population that they have changed.

'The group previously [declared an "amnesty"](#) across Afghanistan and urged women to join its government, trying to calm nerves across a tense capital city that only the day before saw chaos at its airport as thousands mobbed the city's international airport in a desperate attempt to flee.'<sup>50</sup>

- 4.3.2 According to the Al Jazeera English transcript, Mujahid said 'We have pardoned anyone, all those who had fought against us. We don't want to repeat any conflict anymore again. We want to do away with the factors for conflict.' In response to a question about interpreters, he stated 'I would like to assure all the compatriots, whether they were translators, whether they were with military activities or whether they were civilians, all of them have been important. Nobody is going to be treated with revenge.'<sup>51</sup>

See also [Potentially vulnerable groups](#).

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#### 4.4 Situation in Kabul from 16 August 2021

- 4.4.1 On 17 August 2021, Martine van Bijlert of the AAN considered the Taliban as Afghanistan's new leaders, noting that, on 15 August, as the Taliban entered Kabul and police abandoned their posts, they urged the people not to be alarmed<sup>52</sup>. The report added:

'Since then, Kabul city has been largely quiet, as have other cities. Although some people are venturing outside to go to work, run errands or see what the streets look like now, by far, most people seem to be hibernating while waiting to find out what the new normal will be. There have been scattered reports of looting, robberies and attempted break-ins, particularly at night, as well as reports of Taleban (or people pretending to be Taleban) confiscating armoured, police and army vehicles. The Taleban have now set up checkpoints across the city, which may avert chaos and public disorder, but will also have a chilling effect – armed men looking into every car – for those already nervous about how they will be treated under the new regime.'<sup>53</sup>

- 4.4.2 The same report noted that the only part of the city in disorder was the airport as residents attempted to flee the city, otherwise:

'Throughout the day, offices, shops and even schools slowly opened. There have been pictures of girls going to school, but they tended to have been young. The real litmus test for girl's education will be whether girls will also be allowed to attend high school and university and, if so, under what conditions. (Schooling up to the sixth grade was already allowed in several, but not all, parts of the country that were under their control – often depending on local customs).'<sup>54</sup>

See also [Women](#).

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<sup>50</sup> Al Jazeera, '[Transcript of Taliban's first news conference in Kabul](#)', 17 August 2021

<sup>51</sup> Al Jazeera, '[Transcript of Taliban's first news conference in Kabul](#)', 17 August 2021

<sup>52</sup> AAN, '[Afghanistan Has a New Government...](#)', 17 August 2021

<sup>53</sup> AAN, '[Afghanistan Has a New Government...](#)', 17 August 2021

<sup>54</sup> AAN, '[Afghanistan Has a New Government...](#)', 17 August 2021

4.4.3 The same report touched on the media, and noted

‘Television and radio programming have resumed, but music programming has stopped, as have many regular serials. The news program on the national broadcaster RTA now has a very different feel. At least one TV station still had a female presenter showing her face and wearing a simple headscarf. Broadcaster Tolo reported that the Taleban had visited their offices, confiscated the guards’ government-issued weapons, promised protection and had, so far, generally been polite. Independent online media were still running (as was the internet in general).’<sup>55</sup>

See also [Journalists](#).

4.4.4 On 19 August 2021, Martine van Bijlert looked at the ‘Taliban’s emerging strategy and the shifting alliances of Afghanistan’s political elite,’ and noted the arrival in Kabul of the Taliban’s head of its political commission, Mullah Baradar, adding, ‘... throughout the city, Taleban officials engaged in an extended charm offensive that involved visits to government offices, hospitals and even a Shia mourning ceremony in Dasht-e Barchi.’<sup>56</sup>

4.4.5 BBC News posted satellite imagery of large groups of people waiting on the tarmac at Kabul airport on 24 August 2021<sup>57</sup>:



4.4.6 On the same date, imagery was posted by BBC News of Kabul<sup>58</sup>:

<sup>55</sup> AAN, '[Afghanistan Has a New Government...](#)', 17 August 2021

<sup>56</sup> AAN, '[The Taleban leadership converges on Kabul...](#)', 19 August 2021

<sup>57</sup> BBC News, '[21,600 people evacuated in 24 hours, US says](#)', posted 13:31 on 24 August 2021

<sup>58</sup> BBC News, '[21,600 people evacuated in 24 hours, US says](#)', posted 13:31 on 24 August 2021



4.4.7 For updates on the unfolding situation see BBC News [live updates](#).

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#### 4.5 Life in previously-held Taliban territory

4.5.1 Prior to the Taliban's offensive and subsequent capture of district centres, including Kabul, that followed the US drawdown of troops in May 2021, the group already controlled large parts of Afghanistan<sup>59 60 61</sup>.

4.5.2 Between 2018 and 2020, the AAN published a series of studies, 'One Land, Two Rules', which '... took an in-depth look at whether there were schools for children to attend, clinics for residents to take their sick to, electricity and telecommunication access for locals to light their houses and use their phones, or any other services such as small-scale development projects – and how and by whom these services were being governed and administered.'<sup>62</sup>

4.5.3 AAN later published all the research together and noted:

'In vast swathes of Afghanistan's territory, it is often very complicated to determine who exactly governs how services are delivered. These insurgency-affected areas may be ruled by the government or by a shadow Taleban administration, or as usually happens – due to the failure to completely dislodge the other warring side, as well as bitter pragmatic necessity – a combination of both...

<sup>59</sup> BBC News, '[Who are the Taliban?](#)', 18 August 2021

<sup>60</sup> Al Jazeera, '[The Taliban explained](#)', 25 July 2021

<sup>61</sup> USIP, '[Insurgent Bureaucracy: How the Taliban Makes Policy](#)', November 2019

<sup>62</sup> AAN, all studies accessible via '[AAN Dossier XXIX: Living with the Taleban](#)', 12 July 2021

‘One of the main overall findings of this study was that, although service delivery at the district level was generally still financed through and administered by the Kabul government, it was often controlled and supervised by the Taleban in the areas under their influence or control. The exact characteristics of such arrangements varied both by service and district and are described in granular detail in the case studies.’<sup>63</sup>

- 4.5.4 In April 2020, AAN research partners, the United States Institute for Peace (USIP), also published a synthesized report of the AAN’s district-level studies<sup>64</sup>.
- 4.5.5 In 2020 the AAN also undertook 3 separate studies, ‘Living with the Taliban’, based on semi-structured interviews with key informants and residents as well as the authors’ own observations over a period of time during previous visits to the areas, which explored Taliban rule in territories under their control and the impact on local residents in [Andar district](#) in Ghazni province<sup>65</sup>, [Nad Ali district](#) in Helmand province<sup>66</sup>, and [Dasht-e Archi district](#) in Kunduz province<sup>67</sup>.

- 4.5.6 Summarising the ‘Living with the Taliban’ studies, the AAN noted that they: ‘... explored what it was like to live with the Taleban deep in the areas under their domination. The research explored the interactions between locals and the Taleban, looked into local governance structures and probed whether local people had the means to affect policy or hold the Taleban to account at all. The three district-level case studies indicated how in these areas the Taleban had increasingly morphed into a fairly sophisticated local administration, that on the one hand, touched almost all aspects of public life, most notably justice and taxation, but on the other hand lacked fixed offices and a clear military-civilian distinction. The studies also showed that for residents, it was impossible not to be in contact with the Taleban administration and that the balance of power was firmly with the Taleban who used implicit pressure, if not outright coercion.

‘The research found that military priorities remained at the top of the Taleban agenda and that local populations had often learned to adopt a non-confrontational approach to push for their interests (for example, through successful requests to halt the fighting during harvest seasons temporarily). At the same time, the Taleban remained generally unaccountable to the people they governed and it was on the whole impossible to openly protest against their decisions and actions. The research did not find instances of forced conscription by Taleban, mainly because they did not appear to need it. However, demands for food were still made. As to demands for shelter, residents in two of the three districts said these ceased after the United States-Taleban agreement of February 2020. That deal bound the two parties not to target each other, leading to a dramatic reduction in airstrikes

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<sup>63</sup> AAN, ‘[AAN Dossier XXIX: Living with the Taleban](#)’, 12 July 2021

<sup>64</sup> USIP, ‘[Service Delivery in Taliban-Influenced Areas of Afghanistan](#)’, 30 April 2020

<sup>65</sup> AAN, ‘[Living with the Taleban \(1\): Local experiences in Andar district...](#)’, 19 October 2020

<sup>66</sup> AAN, ‘[Living with the Taleban \(2\): Local experiences in Nad Ali district...](#)’, 18 January 2021

<sup>67</sup> AAN, ‘[Living with the Taleban \(3\): Local experiences in Dasht-e Archi district...](#)’, 25 January 2021

and night raids and making it safe for fighters to live at home or stay in village mosques.’<sup>68</sup>

- 4.5.7 In brief, the AAN study found for [Andar district](#) ‘... a Taleban administration which is well-structured, where military men have civilian roles and protest is unimaginable.’<sup>69</sup> In [Nad Ali district](#), on speaking to residents, the author found ‘... a district with a rudimentary governance system, including courts and taxation, indications of corruption – although still less than in the government institutions – and extremely limited means for the population to affect Taleban policy and decision-making.’<sup>70</sup> In the third study of [Dasht-e Archi](#), it was found that:

‘... the district serves as a key organisational centre for the Taleban, with a busy primary court and a functioning committee structure tasked to run day-to-day governance functions. Encounters between residents and the Taleban are wide-ranging, including “taxation” and at least implicit pressure to provide fighters with food, although not shelter and conscription. Generally, the Taleban are not accountable to the population. It is impossible to protest against them, although they sometimes address local concerns. Given the breadth and depth of the Taleban’s control over territory and population in the district, Dasht-e Archi offers important indications about what it is like to live under the Taleban.’<sup>71</sup>

- 4.5.8 In a March 2021 paper for CTC Sentinel, Thomas Ruttig noted:

‘It is important to note that reports from Taliban-controlled areas do not indicate any change from the pre-fall 2001 practices when it comes to political participation. Taliban commanders are fully in power everywhere, and there are no formal bodies – even advisory ones such as shuras – that can influence day-to-day policies. Only in a very limited sense do the Taliban accept community and religious elders as mediators between themselves and the local population and between themselves and the government. Even Afghan media may only enter Taliban-held areas with explicit Taliban permission. “Vice and virtue” police continue to exert social control in “districts under Taliban control,” monitoring “residents’ adherence to Taliban-prescribed social codes regarding dress and public deportment.”’<sup>72</sup>

- 4.5.9 The US National Intelligence Council noted in a memorandum, dated 2 April 2021, that ‘The Taliban remains broadly consistent in its restrictive approach to women’s rights and would roll back much of the past two decades’ progress if the group regained national power. The Taliban has seen minimal leadership turnover, maintains inflexible negotiating positions, and enforces strict social constraints in areas that it already controls.’<sup>73</sup>

- 4.5.10 Particularly in regard to women, the same source pointed out that:

‘Some Taliban officials publicly say that the group will respect women’s rights, but they caveat that these protections must align with Taliban

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<sup>68</sup> AAN, ‘[AAN Dossier XXIX: Living with the Taleban](#)’, 12 July 2021

<sup>69</sup> AAN, ‘[Living with the Taleban \(1\): Local experiences in Andar district...](#)’, 19 October 2020

<sup>70</sup> AAN, ‘[Living with the Taleban \(2\): Local experiences in Nad Ali district...](#)’, 18 January 2021

<sup>71</sup> AAN, ‘[Living with the Taleban \(3\): Local experiences in Dasht-e Archi district...](#)’, 25 January 2021

<sup>72</sup> CTC Sentinel, ‘[Have the Taliban Changed?](#)’, (pages 11 to 12), March 2021

<sup>73</sup> National Intelligence Council, ‘[Afghanistan: Women’s Economic, Political, Social...](#)’, 2 April 2021

interpretations of sharia. The group also claimed during its previous regime that it afforded women all of the rights that Islam guaranteed them.

‘Since the current peace process started in 2019, Taliban officials have issued statements opposing “alien-culture clothes worn by women” and have accused women’s rights advocates of promoting immorality, indecency, and non-Islamic culture.’<sup>74</sup>

- 4.5.11 Covering the period between 22 June and 6 July 2021, the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (IAHRC) found that:

‘... after seizing control of districts in several provinces, including Faryab, Kunduz, Badakhshan, and Takhar, the Taliban imposed restrictions that violate human rights standards and applicable laws, such as prohibiting women from leaving the house without a hijab and legal Mahram (close male family member), closure of girls’ schools and mixed schools, banning health services for women without Maharam, banning the use of television, forcing teachers and students to wear turbans and grow beards. These restrictions have caused serious concerns to citizens of the country. A resident of Shirin Tagab district in Faryab province said to AIHRC: “Following the Taliban’s complete takeover of Shirin Tagab district, members of the group imposed a number of restrictions on women and all doctors, rickshaw drivers, and shopkeepers, telling them that they would be punished if they cooperated with women without a Muharram.”’<sup>75</sup>

- 4.5.12 On 14 July 2021, Gandhara reported on the repressive laws imposed on women by Taliban in newly captured areas, particularly in northern parts of the country. Gandhara cited oppression occurring in some districts in the provinces of Faryab, Jawzjan, Badakhshan, Takhar and Balkh, noting:

‘Residents of Afghanistan’s northeastern countryside – the focus of the Taliban’s blistering military offensive – say the militant group has reimposed many of the repressive laws and retrograde policies that defined its 1996-2001 rule.

‘When it ruled Afghanistan, the Taliban forced women to cover themselves from head to toe, banned them from working outside the home, severely limited girls’ education, and required women to be accompanied by a male relative when they left their homes.

‘Many of those policies have returned in areas now under Taliban control, say residents. That is despite repeated claims by the Taliban that it has changed and that it would not bring back its notorious strictures.’<sup>76</sup>

- 4.5.13 The same report noted: ‘In parts of Faryab, the Taliban has banned shops from selling goods to unaccompanied women. Residents say those who break the rules are often punished, including public beatings, another feature of the former rule of the Taliban. The militants have erected posters in some areas to inform residents of the new regulations. In other places, insurgents

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<sup>74</sup> National Intelligence Council, ‘[Afghanistan: Women’s Economic, Political, Social...](#)’, 2 April 2021

<sup>75</sup> AIHRC, ‘[Escalation of Violent Confrontations and a Rise in Violations...](#)’, 17 July 2021

<sup>76</sup> Gandhara, ‘[Return To The “Dark Days”: Taliban Reimposes Repressive Laws...](#)’, 14 July 2021

have driven around with loudspeakers and made announcements at mosques.’<sup>77</sup>

4.5.14 Gandhara also noted that in some areas, education for girls was banned beyond the fourth grade, women could not work outside their homes, and single or widowed women were being forced to marry Taliban fighters. Men stated that they were banned from trimming or shaving their beards, were forced to pray 5 times a day, and listening to music or watching television was forbidden. Furthermore, residents were ordered to feed and accommodate the Taliban, despite facing poverty themselves. The Taliban rejected they were imposing such harsh laws or mistreating locals in the areas it controlled<sup>78</sup>.

4.5.15 Reporting on the loss of district centres to the Taliban since 1 May 2021, AAN stated on 16 July 2021:

‘The Taleban have been fulsome in relaying how organised, fair and careful they are behaving in the districts which have fallen under their control. Snippets of accounts of life in newly-captured districts have, however, been mixed – government officials called into work, fearing to go, or continuing to work, women banned from working and allowed to only leave the house with a mahram or close male relative, government bureaucracy co-opted, and surrendered soldiers being sent home after giving guarantees or even money – or shot or taken prisoner. In some cases, Taleban district governors have moved into the offices of government’s governors. In some places, government documents were burnt. In places like Pato in Daikundi, there have been accounts of crops and houses burned in areas where there had been resistance.’<sup>79</sup>

4.5.16 In their 2021 Midyear Update on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict in Afghanistan report, UNAMA noted that:

‘In addition to the fear of being harmed by the ever spreading conflict, UNAMA has received reports from communities suggesting the implementation of a number of restrictions on individuals’ rights by the Taliban, including those affecting personal and social freedoms in newly captured areas. These reports exacerbate the fears of many as to how their rights may be respected, how they may be treated, and how their ability to conduct their daily activities may be affected if Taliban control their areas. Communities have expressed fears for certain segments of society, including women, ethnic and religious minorities, human rights defenders and those who speak out against Taliban practices.’<sup>80</sup>

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## 4.6 Taliban justice system

4.6.1 In areas under its control, the Taliban have long since operated a judicial system, based on a strict interpretation of Sharia, although it has been reported that ‘many Taliban commanders impose arbitrary punishments

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<sup>77</sup> Gandhara, ‘[Return To The “Dark Days”: Taliban Reimposes Repressive Laws...](#)’, 14 July 2021

<sup>78</sup> Gandhara, ‘[Return To The “Dark Days”: Taliban Reimposes Repressive Laws...](#)’, 14 July 2021

<sup>79</sup> AAN, ‘[Menace, Negotiation, Attack: The Taleban take more District Centres...](#)’, 16 July 2021

<sup>80</sup> UNAMA, ‘[Afghanistan: Protection of civilians in armed conflict: Midyear report...](#)’ July 2021

without reference to such a system', as reported in the July 2020 EASO report on criminal law and customary justice<sup>81</sup>.

- 4.6.2 An ODI briefing note, based on over 200 interviews with claimants and defendants in civil cases in Taliban courts as well as around 40 legal experts and members of the Taliban, dated May 2020, examined the evolution of the Taliban's post-2001 justice system in areas under its control and influence and explored civilian experiences in its courts, noting it was 'the only justice system millions of Afghans are now able to access.'<sup>82</sup> According to sources consulted for the EASO report, Taliban courts were a preferable alternative to government courts as they were 'perceived as accessible, fast, and less corrupt...'<sup>83</sup>
- 4.6.3 The ODI noted that Taliban courts operated in a 3-tiered system. The first tier – primary courts – operated in most districts under Taliban influence, based in well-known locations with hearings once or twice a week. Provincial level courts (the second tier) heard appeals and complex cases, and final (secondary) appeals were heard at the Taliban's Supreme Court based in Pakistan. It was noted that few people appealed their cases for fear of angering the Taliban. Most people, including women whose cases consisted of a mix of inheritance claims and divorce or family matters, indicated they were happy with the experience and outcome of court judgements<sup>84</sup>.
- 4.6.4 As noted in the July 2020 EASO report, 'Punishments enforced by the Taliban parallel justice system include execution, mutilation and stoning to death.'<sup>85</sup> In 2020, UNAMA documented 6 incidents it classed as cruel inhuman or degrading punishments issued by Taliban courts, reported to be related to transgressing moral or gender norms, such as extramarital relations, which included the executions of 3 men and a woman, and the beating of 2 women and a man<sup>86</sup>.

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Section 5 updated: 31 August 2021

## 5. Potentially vulnerable groups

### 5.1 Overview

- 5.1.1 A BBC News article, 'Who are the Taliban', which was last updated on 18 August 2021, noted:

'In the year following the US-Taliban peace deal of February 2020 - which was the culmination of a long spell of direct talks - the Taliban appeared to shift their tactics from complex attacks in cities and on military outposts to a wave of targeted assassinations that terrorised Afghan civilians.

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<sup>81</sup> EASO, '[Afghanistan: Criminal law, customary justice...](#)' (page 19), July 2020

<sup>82</sup> ODI, '[Rebel rule of law: Taliban courts in the west and north-west...](#)', (page 2), May 2020

<sup>83</sup> EASO, '[Afghanistan: Criminal law, customary justice...](#)' (page 20), July 2020

<sup>84</sup> ODI, '[Rebel rule of law: Taliban courts in the west and north-west...](#)', (pages 4 to 6), May 2020

<sup>85</sup> EASO, '[Afghanistan: Criminal law, customary justice...](#)' (page 21), July 2020

<sup>86</sup> UNAMA, '[Annual Report 2020](#)' (page 59), February 2021

'The targets - journalists, judges, peace activists, women in positions of power - suggested that the Taliban had not changed their extremist ideology, only their strategy.'<sup>87</sup>

- 5.1.2 In a statement made on 17 August 2021, the Taliban spokesman, Zabihullah Mujahid, attempted to reassure Afghans as many attempted to leave the country. According to Reuters, the Taliban said they '... wanted peaceful relations with other countries and would respect the rights of women within the framework of Islamic law...', and also that they '... would not seek retribution against former soldiers and government officials, and were granting an amnesty for former soldiers as well as contractors and translators who worked for international forces.' Mujahid was quoted as saying "Nobody is going to harm you, nobody is going to knock on your doors,"..., adding that there was a "huge difference" between the Taliban now and 20 years ago.'<sup>88</sup>

See also [Life under the Taliban](#) for recent statements made by the group.

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## 5.2 Persons associated with, or supporting, the Afghan government or international community

- 5.2.1 An article published by Human Rights Watch (HRW), dated 30 June 2020, stated:

'A major restriction the Taliban imposes is to prohibit any contact with the Afghan government, either civilians or the military, except in some cases to obtain identity cards (taskeras) that are needed for government services. Taliban commanders and officials have threatened residents whose relatives work in the government or security forces. They have even threatened people for being stopped at government checkpoints. A resident of Wardak who the Taliban accused of providing food to government soldiers was threatened with severe punishment if he did it again, and was told, "you do not have the right to complain."

'...The Taliban have also punished family members or other relatives as a form of collective punishment in violation of international law. A Helmand man whose relatives worked for the police told Human Rights Watch the Taliban accused him of being "a police spy."

'Those accused of being government spies, abducted government officials, and others detained for any contact with the government may be imprisoned indefinitely or summarily executed. Local Taliban commanders have considerable autonomy to carry out punishments, particularly in frontline areas. While credited for offering swift justice, Taliban civil courts have overridden or co-opted local dispute mechanisms and offer few due process protections.'<sup>89</sup>

- 5.2.2 In a tweet from 16 August 2021 by Mustafa Kazemi, an independent journalist based in Afghanistan, noted: 'Taliban started door to door search looking for govt officials, former police & security forces members & those

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<sup>87</sup> BBC News, '[Who are the Taliban?](#)', 18 August 2021

<sup>88</sup> Reuters, '[Taliban pledge peace and women's rights under Islam...](#)', 17 August 2021

<sup>89</sup> HRW, '["You Have No Right to Complain": Education, Social Restrictions, and ...](#)', 30 June 2020

who worked for foreign countries NGOs or infrastructures in Afghanistan. At least 3 journalists' houses were searched in the last hour. Kabul is now becoming deadly.<sup>90</sup>

See also [Members of Afghan National Security Forces \(ANSF\) and Journalists](#).

- 5.2.3 On 17 August 2021, France24 reported on the Taliban's announcement of a 'general amnesty' for government employees, as they urged them to return to work. The report noted that 'Some appeared to take the advice to heart, with white-capped traffic police reappearing on the streets for the first time in days.'<sup>91</sup>
- 5.2.4 The Associated Press (AP) reported on 18 August 2021 that Taliban spokesman, Zabihullah Mujahid, '... reiterated that the Taliban have offered full amnesty to Afghans who worked for the U.S. and the Western-backed government, saying "nobody will go to their doors to ask why they helped." However, the AP report added, 'Kabul residents say groups of armed men have been going door-to-door seeking out individuals who worked with the ousted government and security forces, but it was unclear if the gunmen were Taliban or criminals posing as militants. Mujahid blamed the security breakdown on the former government, saying the Taliban only entered Kabul in order to restore law and order after the police melted away.'<sup>92</sup>
- 5.2.5 However, Taliban were reported to be hunting individuals linked to the previous administration, according to a report seen by Reuters on 19 August 2021, by the non-profit RHIPTO Norwegian Center for Global Analyses, which makes independent intelligence assessments. Reuters cited the report, which had been shared with agencies and the UN, "Taliban are intensifying the hunt-down of all individuals and collaborators with the former regime, and if unsuccessful, target and arrest the families and punish them according to their own interpretation of Sharia law."<sup>93</sup>
- 5.2.6 See [Life under the Taliban](#) for further reportage of treatment of those associated with or supporting the Afghan government and on an 'amnesty' for those who have supported the Afghan government.

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### 5.3 Persons associated with international military forces, including interpreters

- 5.3.1 As reported in the EASO report on AGEs, dated August 2020, 'Article 11 of Taliban's Layeha orders the execution of individuals working for Kofaar (foreign infidels) including Tarjoman (interpreters) and delegates the authority to Taliban provincial shadow judges or in their absence to Taliban's provincial governor to practice such punishments.'<sup>94</sup>
- 5.3.2 An article by Gandhara (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty), dated 16 June 2021, stated:

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<sup>90</sup> Mustafa 47, (@CombatJourno on Twitter.com) '[Tweet dated 11:49am UK time, 16 August 2021](#)'

<sup>91</sup> France24, '[Taliban declares general 'amnesty' for Afghan government officials](#)', 17 August 2021

<sup>92</sup> AP, '[Taliban vow to respect women, despite history of oppression](#)', 18 August 2021

<sup>93</sup> Reuters, '[Taliban are rounding up Afghans on blacklist - private intel report](#)', 19 August 2021

<sup>94</sup> EASO, '[Afghanistan: Anti-Government Elements](#)' (page 26), August 2020

'The Taliban has vowed for years that it will kill any Afghans who have worked for U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan, branding them "traitors." ... An estimated 300,000 Afghan civilians have worked for international forces in some capacity since the U.S.-led invasion in 2001, including as cooks, cleaners, manual laborers, mechanics, interpreters, and security guards...

'Around 300 Afghans who worked for the U.S. military or their family members have been killed since 2016, according to No One Left Behind, a U.S. nongovernmental organization that works with Afghan interpreters to help them relocate to the United States. The group estimates that on average two interpreters a month have been killed this year. The death toll increased to five during May [2021].

'Afghan interpreters working for foreign forces have been particularly susceptible to militant attacks. They are often sought out by militants, who have labeled them "spies" for acting as the eyes and ears of the foreign "occupiers." The Gandhara article further added: 'Afghans who have worked for foreign forces usually hide their identities and keep a low profile. But many have vented their frustration in public recently. Hundreds have staged rallies in the capital, Kabul, in recent weeks [prior to the Taliban entering the city], demanding those Western nations they worked for relocate them outside of Afghanistan.'<sup>95</sup>

- 5.3.3 According to Atalayar, a Spanish news outlet reporting on 24 June 2021, 'Within the translators, women face an even greater risk compared to their male counterparts. As Julie Kornfeld, an asylum lawyer, explains, "while Afghans linked to the US are at great risk of retaliation from the Taliban and other militias, women in particular face constant threats, not only for having worked with the US, but also for working in positions that the Taliban deem unsuitable for women".'<sup>96</sup> (See also: [Women](#))
- 5.3.4 An interpreter working for the US Army was beheaded by the Taliban, according to CNN on 23 July 2021. Sohail Pardis claimed he had received death threats and, whilst travelling to Khost from Kabul, witnesses said he was stopped at a checkpoint by Taliban who accused him of being a spy. The Taliban told CNN they were attempting to verify the incident<sup>97</sup>. On 15 August 2021, CNN reported on a former interpreter for the US Marine Corps, who was attempting to get a visa to the US, stated he and his family had been in hiding for 5 years in fear of retribution by the Taliban<sup>98</sup>.
- 5.3.5 On 30 July 2021 BBC News reported that around 200 Afghan interpreters and their families had arrived in the United States after being evacuated as the Taliban advanced across the country. The Afghans are to be resettled under the Special Immigrant Visa programme aimed at those who worked with the US in Afghanistan. Thousands more applicants were being considered for visas<sup>99</sup>. Other countries, including the UK and Germany, were also evacuating Afghan support staff<sup>100</sup>.

<sup>95</sup> Gandhara, ["The Taliban Will Kill Us": Afghans Who Helped Foreign Forces At ...](#), 16 June 2021

<sup>96</sup> Atalayar, ['Afghan translators targeted by the Taliban'](#), 24 June 2021

<sup>97</sup> CNN, ['Afghan interpreter for US Army was beheaded by Taliban...'](#), 23 July 2021

<sup>98</sup> CNN, ['The Taliban "will kill me and my family," says abandoned Afghan interpreter'](#), 15 August 2021

<sup>99</sup> BBC News, ['First group of evacuated Afghan interpreters arrives in US'](#), 30 July 2021

<sup>100</sup> BBC News, ['Afghanistan: Striking image captures Kabul exodus'](#), 18 August 2021

- 5.3.6 A Home Office Blog, dated 16 August 2021, reported on the UK Government's resettlement scheme for Afghan interpreters and other personnel who worked with the UK in Afghanistan, 'The [Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy](#) (ARAP) launched on 1 April 2021. Under the policy, any current or former locally employed staff who are assessed to be under serious threat to life are offered priority relocation to the UK regardless of their employment status, rank or role, or length of time served.'<sup>101</sup>
- 5.3.7 The Guardian reported on 20 August 2021 that:
- '... a German NGO said it had closed its safehouses for Afghan nationals who worked with coalition forces, calling them "death traps."
- "The Taliban are going door-to-door looking for local forces," said Marcus Grotian, an active German soldier who runs the network. "This was foreseeable, and there has already been a visit to one of the safehouses by the Taliban. Thank God it was empty."
- 'This hunt came despite Taliban promises just days ago that they would seek "no revenge" and that "nobody will go to their doors to ask why they helped".'<sup>102</sup>

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## 5.4 Members of Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF)

- 5.4.1 On 13 July 2021, the New York Post reported on the killing of 22 Afghan special forces. It included a graphic video and described how 'Taliban fighters executed nearly two dozen unarmed members of the Afghan special forces, mowing down the soldiers in a town market after they surrendered when they ran out of ammunition.'<sup>103</sup>
- 5.4.2 Reporting on the Taliban's advance across Afghanistan's provinces, Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported on 3 August 2021 that:
- 'Residents from various provinces told Human Rights Watch that Taliban forces have in areas they enter, apparently identify residents who worked for the Afghan National Security Forces. They require former police and military personnel to register with them and provide a document purportedly guaranteeing their safety. However, the Taliban have later detained some of these people incommunicado and, in cases reported to Human Rights Watch, summarily executed them.'<sup>104</sup>
- 5.4.3 A journalist from Malistan district in Ghazni, which was taken by the Taliban on 13 July 2021, told HRW that '... the Taliban had killed at least 19 security force personnel in their custody, along with a number of civilians.'<sup>105</sup> HRW noted it was unable to verify the exact number of deaths<sup>106</sup>.
- 5.4.4 HRW also claimed that it had '... obtained a list of 44 men from Spin Boldak, Kandahar, whom the Taliban have allegedly killed since July 16 [2021]. All had registered with the Taliban before being summarily executed.

<sup>101</sup> UK Home Office, '[FACTSHEET: UK support to resettle Afghan nationals](#)', 16 August 2021

<sup>102</sup> The Guardian, '[...Thousands stranded in Kabul as Taliban go door-to-door](#)', 20 August 2021

<sup>103</sup> NYPost, '[Graphic video ... Taliban executing unarmed Afghan special forces...](#)', 13 July 2021

<sup>104</sup> HRW, '[Afghanistan: Advancing Taliban Execute Detainees](#)', 3 August 2021

<sup>105</sup> HRW, '[Afghanistan: Advancing Taliban Execute Detainees](#)', 3 August 2021

<sup>106</sup> HRW, '[Afghanistan: Advancing Taliban Execute Detainees](#)', 3 August 2021

Waheedullah, a police commander from Spin Boldak, had obtained a “forgiveness” letter from the Taliban, but Taliban fighters took him from his house and executed him on August 2 [2021], activists and media monitoring these detentions in Kandahar said.<sup>107</sup>

- 5.4.5 On 18 August 2021 Reuters reported that ‘... the Taliban planned to set up a new national force that would include its own members as well as government soldiers willing to join.’<sup>108</sup> Talking exclusively to Reuters, senior Taliban member, Waheedullah Hashimi said, in regard to recruiting soldiers and pilots who had worked for the ANSF, that “Most of them have got training in Turkey and Germany and England. So we will talk to them to get back to their positions,” he said. “Of course we will have some changes, to have some reforms in the army, but still we need them and will call them to join us.”<sup>109</sup>
- 5.4.6 According to a report seen by Reuters on 19 August 2021, by the non-profit RHIPTO Norwegian Center for Global Analyses, which makes independent intelligence assessments, the “Taliban are intensifying the hunt-down of all individuals and collaborators with the former regime, and if unsuccessful, target and arrest the families and punish them according to their own interpretation of Sharia law,” said the report, “Particularly at risk are individuals in central positions in military, police and investigative units.”<sup>110</sup>
- 5.4.7 Reuters added that ‘Separately, a senior member of the security forces of the ousted administration sent a message to journalists saying that the Taliban had obtained secret national security documents and Taliban were arresting former intelligence and security staff.’<sup>111</sup>
- 5.4.8 The Associated Press (AP) reported on 18 August 2021 that ‘Kabul residents say groups of armed men have been going door-to-door seeking out individuals who worked with the ousted government and security forces, but it was unclear if the gunmen were Taliban or criminals posing as militants. Mujahid blamed the security breakdown on the former government, saying the Taliban only entered Kabul in order to restore law and order after the police melted away.’<sup>112</sup>

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## 5.5 Women

- 5.5.1 UNAMA noted that the number of women casualties due to targeted attacks by Anti-Government Elements (AGEs) more than trebled in 2020 compared to 2019, causing 85 deaths and 85 injured. These figures included the mass shooting by unknown AGEs at a maternity ward in Kabul on 12 May 2020, which killed 19 women and injured 12 others<sup>113</sup>. UNAMA added ‘... women were killed by Anti-Government Elements, mostly the Taliban, for supporting or working for the Government of Afghanistan, including female police

<sup>107</sup> HRW, ‘[Afghanistan: Advancing Taliban Execute Detainees](#)’, 3 August 2021

<sup>108</sup> Reuters, ‘[Exclusive: Council may rule Afghanistan, Taliban to reach out...](#)’, 18 August 2021

<sup>109</sup> Reuters, ‘[Exclusive: Council may rule Afghanistan, Taliban to reach out...](#)’, 18 August 2021

<sup>110</sup> Reuters, ‘[Taliban are rounding up Afghans on blacklist - private intel report](#)’, 19 August 2021

<sup>111</sup> Reuters, ‘[Taliban are rounding up Afghans on blacklist - private intel report](#)’, 19 August 2021

<sup>112</sup> AP, ‘[Taliban vow to respect women, despite history of oppression](#)’, 18 August 2021

<sup>113</sup> UNAMA, ‘[Annual Report 2020](#)’ (page 28), February 2021

officers with civilian status, or for being related to a member of the Afghan national security forces.’<sup>114</sup>

5.5.2 In a March 2021 paper for CTC Sentinel, Thomas Ruttig noted, with regard to the Taliban treatment of women since 2001:

‘The wide-ranging exclusion of Afghan women from the social and political spheres was a major feature of Taliban rule before the fall of 2001. The Taliban’s public rhetoric on this issue has changed significantly, but it is important to note that they have not followed through with visible practical steps regarding the social and political inclusion of women in the areas they control, except on some improvement of girls’ education... It is also important to note that, as a June 2020 Human Rights Watch report put it, “strict social norms regarding dress – especially for women – and women’s movements are common among communities in much of rural Afghanistan, including in conservative government-held areas.” Here, the Taliban often act not against but in conformity with the majority of public opinion.’<sup>115</sup>

5.5.3 On 3 August 2021, The National, a UAE-based news source reporting on issues in the Middle East, reported that:

‘... In the days after the Taliban arrived in her village [Mazar-e-sharif], the militant group started imposing draconian rules, particularly ones that restrict women’s freedom.

“They announced that the women would not be allowed outside without a chadari,” she said, referring to a full face veil. “Soon after, they closed the girls’ school,” Gulpari told The National, adjusting her traditional blue burqa to cover most of her face while she spoke.

‘... “Most of the clinic and medical facilities were also shut and women were forbidden from visiting even the female doctors and midwives, unless they were accompanied by a mahram,” she said, referring to a male escort, which the Taliban strictly insists upon for all women.’<sup>116</sup>

5.5.4 The article continued, with reference to forced marriages by the Taliban:

“A statement bearing the militant group’s insignia was shared widely on social media, calling for religious leaders in the captured districts in Badakhshan and Takhar to refer girls older than 15 and widows younger than 45 to the “Mujahideen Cultural Commission”.

“These sisters will be married to the [Taliban fighters] and taken to Waziristan [in Pakistan] to be returned to Islam”, implying that women would be forced to adhere to the insurgents’ religious edicts.

‘While Taliban members have denied accusations of forced marriage, calling them “baseless” and “propaganda”, women activists across the country are reporting such stories.

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<sup>114</sup> UNAMA, ‘[Annual Report 2020](#)’ (page 28), February 2021

<sup>115</sup> CTC Sentinel, ‘[Have the Taliban Changed?](#)’, (page 6), March 2021

<sup>116</sup> The National, ‘[Taliban trying to force girls as young as 13 into marriage](#)’, 3 August 2021

“Women are being married off as sexual slaves – this would be the term I would use,” said Pashtana Durrani, an education activist from Kandahar province in the south, where she has encountered similar cases.<sup>117</sup>

- 5.5.5 In considering the Taliban’s claimed position on women since the group regained control of Afghanistan, in an interview with a Taliban leader on 12 August 2021, following the recapture of many major cities in Afghanistan, the BBC noted that:

‘Haji Hekmat, a local Taliban leader and our host in Balkh, is keen to show us how daily life is still continuing.

‘Young schoolgirls throng the streets (though elsewhere there are reports of girls being banned from attending). The bazaar remains crowded, with both male and female shoppers.

‘We had been told by local sources that women were allowed to attend only with a male companion, but when we visit that does not seem to be the case. Elsewhere Taliban commanders have reportedly been far stricter.

‘All the women we see, however, are wearing the all-encompassing burqa, covering both their hair and face.

‘Haji Hekmat insists no-one is being “forced” and that the Taliban are simply “preaching” that this is how women should dress.’<sup>118</sup>

- 5.5.6 The author of the BBC article continued, that, despite these assurances: ‘...I’ve been told taxi drivers have been given instructions not to drive any woman into the town unless she’s fully veiled. The day after we leave, reports emerge of a young woman being murdered because of her clothing. Haji Hekmat, though, rejects allegations Taliban members were responsible.’<sup>119</sup>

- 5.5.7 An article by the Associated Press of 17 August 2021 reported that, following the Taliban’s regain of control of Kabul: ‘The Taliban ... urged women to join their government ..., seeking to convince a wary population that they have changed...’ The report continued:

‘Samangani addressed the concerns of women, saying they were “the main victims of the more than 40 years of crisis in Afghanistan.”

“The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan is ready to provide women with environment to work and study, and the presence of women in different (government) structures according to Islamic law and in accordance with our cultural values,” he said.

‘That would be a marked departure from the last time the Taliban were in power, when women were largely confined to their homes. Samangani didn’t describe exactly what he meant by Islamic law, implying people already knew the rules.

‘In another sign of the Taliban’s efforts to portray a new image, a female television anchor on the private broadcaster Tolo interviewed a Taliban official on camera Tuesday in a studio — an interaction that once would

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<sup>117</sup> The National, ‘[Taliban trying to force girls as young as 13 into marriage](#)’, 3 August 2021

<sup>118</sup> BBC, ‘[Afghanistan war: Taliban back brutal rule as they strike for power](#)’, 12 August 2021

<sup>119</sup> BBC, ‘[Afghanistan war: Taliban back brutal rule as they strike for power](#)’, 12 August 2021

have been unthinkable. Meanwhile, women in hijabs demonstrated briefly in Kabul, holding signs demanding the Taliban not “eliminate women” from public life.<sup>120</sup>

- 5.5.8 Despite the positive assurances by the Taliban, there are a small number of unverified reports that the Taliban continue to target women in Afghanistan. In an interview facilitated by BBC Woman’s Hour, Homira Rezai, an Afghan-born activist, detailed how contacts in Afghanistan are reporting that the Taliban have already begun targeting women in Kabul who had enjoyed more freedoms under the Afghan government, such as bloggers and activists, stating ‘They’re going door to door, marking the doors with bright pink or bright-coloured paint to ensure that, “this is the house that we need to come back to and to do something about them.”’<sup>121</sup>

- 5.5.9 On 15 August 2021, Reuters reported:

‘In early July, as Taliban insurgents were seizing territory from government forces across Afghanistan, fighters from the group walked into the offices of Azizi Bank in the southern city of Kandahar and ordered nine women working there to leave. The gunmen escorted them to their homes and told them not to return to their jobs. Instead, they explained that male relatives could take their place, according to three of the women involved and the bank’s manager...

‘When they last ruled Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001, women could not work, girls were not allowed to attend school and women had to cover their face and be accompanied by a male relative if they wanted to venture out of their homes. Women who broke the rules sometimes suffered humiliation and public beatings by the Taliban’s religious police under the group’s strict interpretation of Islamic law...

‘Two days after the episode at Azizi Bank, a similar scene played out at a branch of another Afghan lender, Bank Milli, in the western city of Herat, according to two female cashiers who witnessed it. Three Taliban fighters carrying guns entered the branch, admonishing female employees for showing their faces in public. Women there quit, sending male relatives in their place.’<sup>122</sup> (See also: [Life under the Taliban](#))

- 5.5.10 Journalist Amie Ferris-Rotman of The Fuller Project, a non-profit news room reporting on women, tweeted on 16 August 2021 that, ‘Over the past hour, several Afghan female friends in Kabul told me the Taliban are in their neighbourhoods, going house to house, looking for women in govt [government] and media, making lists. One sent me a photo from her living room showing armed Talibs outside.’<sup>123</sup>
- 5.5.11 Another former Afghanistan-based reporter tweeted to claim that ‘Young and educated Afghan women tell me they are burning their degree certificates and diplomas, so that they won’t be targeted by the Taliban fighters going door to door.’<sup>124</sup>

<sup>120</sup> AP, ‘[Taliban announce ‘amnesty’, urge women to join government](#)’, 17 August 2021

<sup>121</sup> BBC WH, (@BBCWomansHour on Twitter) ‘[Tweet dated 6:16am UK time, 17 August 2021](#)’

<sup>122</sup> Reuters, ‘[Afghan women forced from banking jobs as Taliban take control](#)’, 15 August 2021

<sup>123</sup> Amie Ferris-Rotman, (@Amie\_FR on Twitter) ‘[Tweet dated 12:49pm UK time, 16 August 2021](#)’

<sup>124</sup> Amruta Byatnal (@amrutabyatnal on Twitter), [Tweet dated 15:54 UK time, 16 August 2021](#)

- 5.5.12 On 16 August 2021, The Wall Street Journal reported that: ‘Turban-clad insurgents searched the phones of passersby for evidence of government contacts or compromising material they might deem un-Islamic. Bridal dress advertisements that showed women with exposed strands of hair were covered in fresh white paint.’<sup>125</sup> It was not clear if these advertisements were painted before or after the Taliban entered Kabul<sup>126</sup>.
- 5.5.13 In a video broadcast on Gandhara’s website on 17 August 2021, Liza Karimi, a freelance reporter for Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty’s (RFE/RL) Russian-language partner Current Time, described life in Kabul 3 days after the Taliban entered the city, ‘She says many people – especially women – remain fearful, despite Taliban reassurances and calls for people to resume their normal lives. She says only a few women are venturing out with their husbands or male family members, and that many people are still desperately looking for a way out of the country.’<sup>127</sup>
- 5.5.14 On 17 August 2021, France24 reported on the Taliban’s announcement of a ‘general amnesty’ for government employees, as they urged them to return to work. ‘Women would also be allowed to join the government in accordance with sharia law’, according to Enamullah Samangani, a member of the Taliban’s cultural commission<sup>128</sup>.
- 5.5.15 See also [Limits on reporting](#) for further reportage of treatment of women since the Taliban takeover of Kabul. For information on the general treatment of women, see the COI section in the Country Policy and Information Note: Women fearing gender-based violence, March 2020.

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## 5.6 LBGTIQ+ persons

- 5.6.1 On 14 July 2021, before the Taliban took control of Kabul, Pink News, a UK-based online newspaper focusing on LBGTIQ+ rights around the world, reported that:
- ‘The Taliban claim they have already taken over 80 per cent of the country; while this is likely an exaggeration, the BBC Afghan service estimates that around a third of Afghanistan is indeed under Taliban control, with strict Sharia law punishments reimposed throughout these areas.
- “That was our goal and always will be,” said Gul Rahim, a Taliban judge who spoke frankly about his vision of justice to the German newspaper Bild.
- ‘His face remained impassive as he detailed the shockingly cruel penalties for gay people in Taliban territory. “There are only two penalties for gays: Either stoning or he has to stand behind a wall that falls on him. The wall must be 2.5 to 3 meters high,” he said.’<sup>129</sup>
- 5.6.2 A further article by Pink News, dated 17 August 2021 following the takeover of the Afghan government, stated: ‘The Taliban is expected to enforce its extreme interpretation of Sharia law across Afghanistan, which would see

<sup>125</sup> WSJ, ‘[Kabul Under Taliban Control: Checkpoints, Beatings, Fear](#)’, 16 August 2021

<sup>126</sup> Independent, ‘[Ads depicting women “painted over” after Taliban enters Kabul](#)’, 15 August 2021

<sup>127</sup> Gandhara, ‘[“Every Woman Is Really Scared,” Says Reporter...](#)’, 17 August 2021

<sup>128</sup> France24, ‘[Taliban declares general ‘amnesty’ for Afghan government officials](#)’, 17 August 2021

<sup>129</sup> Pink News, ‘[Taliban-controlled Afghanistan will ‘crush gay men...](#)’ 14 July 2021

many women, LGBT+ people persecuted. Under it, queer people and women could be sentenced to death... Queer people have been forced to keep their identities “under wraps” in an effort to survive. Taliban rule will make it even harder for the LGBT+ community to live their lives in secret.’<sup>130</sup>

- 5.6.3 Vice News, a current affairs media platform, reporting on 19 August 2021, stated:

‘LGBTQ+ people have always lived secret lives in Afghanistan because homosexuality is condemned as immoral and un-Islamic. For young Afghans who already have a bloody conflict to live through, queer identities are rarely discussed. Under the Afghan penal code, “pederasty” – a sexual act between two men – was punishable with long imprisonment. Some Taliban officials previously told the media that gay men would be punished with death under their regime. Sharia laws in other Islamic countries such as Indonesia and Malaysia also ban homosexuality, but their methods of punishment pale in comparison with those of the Taliban, which include stoning, mutilation, and hanging.’<sup>131</sup>

- 5.6.4 Reuters, reporting on 19 August 2021 stated:

‘Gay and lesbian sex is illegal under Afghanistan’s 2017 penal code and the death penalty is technically allowed under sharia law by the constitution, but has not been enforced since 2001, according to LGBT+ advocacy group ILGA-World. Under the Taliban’s first regime, from 1996 to 2001, there were reports that men accused of having gay sex were sentenced to death and crushed by walls pushed over by tanks. A Taliban judge has said that gay sex should be met with a death sentence of stoning or a toppled wall, according to an interview published last month by German newspaper “Bild”.’<sup>132</sup>

- 5.6.5 On 20 August 2021, India Today reported: ‘With homosexuality considered immoral under Sharia law, the LGTBQ+ community in Afghanistan now lives in the constant fear of persecution.’<sup>133</sup> Speaking to the Business Insider after the Taliban took Kabul, 3 gay men living in Afghanistan, who had previously been able to enjoy the ‘underground’ gay scene or meet with partners, expressed their newfound fear of being identified as gay and put to death<sup>134</sup>.

- 5.6.6 See the COI section within the previous Country Policy and Information Note on Afghanistan: Sexual orientation and gender identity or expression, February 2020.

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## 5.7 Ethnic and religious minorities

- 5.7.1 For information on Shia Muslims in Afghanistan, who are predominantly ethnic Hazara, see the COI section in the Country Policy and Information Notes available via [ecoi.net](http://ecoi.net) on Afghanistan: Hazaras. For information on

<sup>130</sup> Pink News, ‘[Taliban will ‘weed out and exterminate’ LGBT+ people in ...](#)’, 17 August 2021

<sup>131</sup> Vice News, ‘[If They Find Out I’m Gay, They Will Kill Me on the Spot: Life ...](#)’, 19 August 2021

<sup>132</sup> Reuters, ‘[LGBT+ Afghans in hiding, fearing death under Taliban](#)’, 19 August 2021

<sup>133</sup> India Today, ‘[Earlier we could be jailed, now we will be shot dead: Queer ...](#)’, 20 August 2021

<sup>134</sup> Business Insider, ‘[Men from Afghanistan’s secret gay community say...](#)’, 21 August 2021

Sikhs and Hindus, see the COI section in the Country Policy and Information Note on Afghanistan: Hindus and Sikhs.

a. Hazaras/Shia

- 5.7.2 In November 2018, the AAN reported in response to the Taliban attacks on the Hazara community in October 2018 that:

‘The Taleban attacks on Hazara areas in districts in Uruzgan and Ghazni provinces were unprecedented – at least in recent times – in terms of the number of incursions, the number of casualties and the level of coordination (three areas at more or less the same time). The initial attack on the largely self-governing Hazara enclave in the northeast of Khas Uruzgan was in response to Shujai’s visit – and possibly his behaviour towards Pashtuns while he was there. At the same time, it came in the context of increased pressure by the Taleban on the Hazara population in areas they had so far largely left alone. Coming at a time when the government and the Taleban are talking about a possible peace process, the Taleban suddenly seemed keen to show their reach and to increase their local revenue streams. The attacks appeared to fly in the face of local agreements between Hazara populations and the Taleban to largely leave each other alone. The level of violence and the slowness of the government to respond have, moreover, fed into fears of ethnic targeting by the Taleban and ethnic bias from the government.’<sup>135</sup>

- 5.7.3 However, as outlined in a EASO COI query response dated 29 July 2020, based on a range of sources, ‘The Taliban denied involvement in recent attacks on Shias and at occasions condemned them. Nevertheless, local populations reportedly do not necessarily distinguish between the Taliban and the IS, which also includes former Taliban members.’<sup>136</sup>

- 5.7.4 The EASO query response also noted that:

‘Even though predominantly Pashtun, the Taliban started to recruit members from another ethnic groups over the last ten years. In May 2020, Taliban appointed a Shia Hazara man as its “shadow district governor in Sar-e Pul province”. Sources indicate that this was a political move to show that the group is inclusive of all Afghan ethnic groups and a first such appointment in the group’s history. In a video released on 22 April 2020, the new Hazara leader called out to all Afghans to unite and fight against the “Jewish and Christian invaders”. In May 2020, Arab News quoted a Taliban spokesman saying that “[w]e have clear targets such as an end to the occupation of Afghanistan and the (establishment of) an Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. All ethnicities which accept these targets are to enjoy equal rights in any future settlement.” After the appointment of the Shia leader, the Taliban issued a statement highlighting the role of Hazaras in the Taliban’s past operations. Previously, after an attack on Shias in November 2018, the Taliban stated that its aim was not to target any “specific race, ethnicity or sect” but rather to attack anyone abetting the government.’<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> AAN, ‘[Taleban Attacks...A new and violent push into Hazara areas](#)’, 28 November 2018

<sup>136</sup> EASO, ‘[COI query: Hazaras, Shias](#)’, 29 July 2020

<sup>137</sup> EASO, ‘[COI query: Hazaras, Shias](#)’, 29 July 2020

- 5.7.5 In their June 2021 report on the Afghanistan Security situation, EASO noted that, in 2019:
- ‘According to two international sources interviewed by Landinfo in October 2019, 10 to 15 kilometres on the Kabul-Bamyan Highway had been controlled by the Taliban for several years... Roadblocks/checkpoints and IED emplacement by armed opposition groups have been reported, as well as people being killed, kidnapped, (passengers working for the Afghan government, NGOs or international troops) and/or extorted by Taliban militants. The victims were mainly Hazaras travelling on this route between Kabul and the Hazarajat region.’<sup>138</sup>
- 5.7.6 The United States Department of State (USSD) annual report on religious freedom in Afghanistan in 2020 (USSD IRF 2020 report) noted that, in 2020, ‘...the Taliban targeted and killed individuals because of their religious beliefs or their links to the government.’<sup>139</sup>
- 5.7.7 The USSD IRF 2020 report also noted that:
- ‘Shia Hazara leaders said the Afghanistan Peace Negotiations in Doha offered a chance for a peaceful future but were concerned a post settlement Taliban would “turn back the clock” to a time when human rights, including religious freedom, were not respected in Afghanistan. Hazara leaders expressed concern that, if the Taliban established an Islamic emirate in the country, the Taliban would not accept Shia Islam as a formal religion and would ignore laws currently in place that protect Shia’<sup>140</sup>
- 5.7.8 In an article published June 2021 by Time magazine, it was noted with reference to attacks on Hazaras, that:
- ‘ISIL-K wants these Shia “heretics” dead. Perhaps surprisingly, Taliban attacks on civilians generally avoid Hazaras, but they are not their protectors. A Taliban spokesman explained their plans to Islamicize the country in their image, while Taliban military gains led a commander to boast, “When we arrive in Kabul, we will arrive as conquerors.”
- ‘These are ominous signs for all minorities and human rights advocates in Afghanistan. But for the Hazara and their youth, the stakes surrounding the U.S. withdrawal are existential...’<sup>141</sup>
- 5.7.9 UNAMA outlined in its Annual Report 2020 that most recorded attacks committed against religious minorities throughout 2019 were perpetrated by ISIL-KP<sup>142</sup>. UNAMA noted, ‘In 2020, UNAMA documented ten incidents resulting in 308 civilian casualties (112 killed and 196 injured), targeting mainly the Shi’a Muslim religious minority population, most of whom also belong to the Hazara ethnic group. UNAMA also documented attacks targeting the Sikh religious minority and Sufi Muslim religious minority.’<sup>143</sup>

<sup>138</sup> EASO, [Afghanistan security situation. Country Information Report](#), (page 139) June 2021

<sup>139</sup> USSD, [2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Afghanistan](#), (page 1), 12 May 2021

<sup>140</sup> USSD, [2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Afghanistan](#), (page 15), 12 May 2021

<sup>141</sup> Time, [‘My Future Is Now.’ An Afghan Woman from a Threatened Minority...](#), 28 June 2021

<sup>142</sup> UNAMA, [‘Annual Report 2020’](#) (page 55), February 2021

<sup>143</sup> UNAMA, [‘Annual Report 2020’](#) (page 55), February 2021

- 5.7.10 On 19 August 2021, Amnesty International reported that between 4 to 6 July 2021, ‘Taliban fighters massacred nine ethnic Hazara men after taking control of Afghanistan’s Ghazni province.’ Amnesty International stated it interviewed eye witnesses and reviewed photographic evidence of the events, which saw 6 men shot and another 3 tortured to death<sup>144</sup>.

#### b. Hindus and Sikhs

- 5.7.11 In a query response dated 5 August 2020 in regard to Sikhs and Hindus in Afghanistan, EASO noted:

‘A survey released in February 2019 by the Porsesh Research and Studies Organisation (PRSO), a Kabul-based independent non-profit research organisation, showed that almost all Hindus and Sikhs in Afghanistan fear for their personal safety (96.8 %). The survey has also found that more than half of the Hindu and Sikh respondents fear participating in peaceful demonstrations. Most of the Sikh and Hindu respondents indicated that they would fear to encounter the ISKP (90.6 %), the Taliban (68.9 %) and the Afghan National Police (53.1 %).’<sup>145</sup>

- 5.7.12 Despite Sikh and Hindu communities’ fear of the Taliban, in the sources consulted, CPIT could not find any instances of attacks perpetrated by the Taliban against Sikhs and Hindus between 2018 and 2020 (see the COI section in the Country Policy and Information Note on Afghanistan: Hindus and Sikhs). Additionally, the Taliban recently denied any connection to the abduction of the Sikh leader, Mr Nidan Singh Sachdeva, who was kidnapped in June 2020<sup>146</sup>, also stating that they would punish the perpetrators of the abduction<sup>147</sup>.

- 5.7.13 In a response dated 5 August 2020, EASO did note incidents of violence against Sikhs and Hindus (occurring between 2018-2020), perpetrated by ISKP<sup>148</sup>.

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## 5.8 Journalists

- 5.8.1 Journalists and other media workers have been targeted by Taliban forces as they are seen as being aligned with the Afghan government or international military forces. An article by Human Rights Watch (HRW), dated 30 June 2020, stated, ‘... Afghan media usually may only enter Taliban-held areas with explicit Taliban permission. Taliban officials in their political office in Doha, Qatar, have said that they only require that journalists respect Islamic values. But Taliban commanders have threatened and attacked journalists for critical reporting.’<sup>149</sup>

- 5.8.2 HRW claimed in a further article dated 1 April 2021 that they had:

‘... found that Taliban commanders and fighters have engaged in a pattern of threats, intimidation, and violence against members of the media in areas

<sup>144</sup> Amnesty International, ‘[Taliban responsible for brutal massacre of Hazara men](#)’, 19 August 2021

<sup>145</sup> EASO, ‘[COI Query Response](#)’ (page 5), 5 August 2020

<sup>146</sup> Ministry of External Affairs (India), ‘[On safe return of Shri Nidan Singh](#)’, 18 July 2020

<sup>147</sup> The Hindu, ‘[Taliban says it will punish kidnappers of Afghan Sikh, denies role...](#)’, 25 June 2020

<sup>148</sup> EASO, ‘[COI Query Response](#)’ (page 6), 5 August 2020

<sup>149</sup> HRW, ‘[“You have no right to complain”...](#)’ (page 4), 30 June 2020

where the Taliban have significant influence, as well as in Kabul. Those making the threats often have an intimate knowledge of a journalist's work, family, and movements and use this information to either compel them to self-censor, leave their work altogether, or face violent consequences. Provincial and district-level Taliban commanders and fighters also make oral and written threats against journalists beyond the areas they control. Journalists say that the widespread nature of the threats has meant that no media workers feel safe...

'Women journalists, especially those appearing on television and radio, face particular threats. The recent wave of violent attacks has driven several prominent women journalists to give up their profession or leave Afghanistan altogether. Female reporters may be targeted not only for issues they cover but also for challenging perceived social norms prohibiting women from being in a public role and working outside the home.'<sup>150</sup>

5.8.3 The same HRW article from April 2021 added:

'Human Rights Watch interviewed 46 members of the Afghan media between November 2020 and March 2021, seeking information on the conditions under which they work, including threats of physical harm. Those interviewed included 42 journalists in Badghis, Ghazni, Ghor, Helmand, Kabul, Kandahar, Khost, Wardak, and Zabul provinces and four who had left Afghanistan due to threats.

'In a number of cases that Human Rights Watch documented, Taliban forces detained journalists for a few hours or overnight. In several cases they or their colleagues were able to contact senior Taliban officials to intercede with provincial and district-level commanders to secure their release, indicating that local commanders are able to take decisions to target journalists on their own without approval from senior Taliban military or political officials.'<sup>151</sup>

5.8.4 On 18 August 2021, the AP cited Taliban spokesman, Zabihullah Mujahid, who said, '... private media should "remain independent" but that journalists "should not work against national values."<sup>152</sup>

5.8.5 On 20 August 2021, the Guardian reported that, 'A German broadcaster said a family member of one of its reporters had been shot and killed by the Taliban when they came looking for the journalist, who had already fled the country.'<sup>153</sup>

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## 5.9 Transgressors of religious, cultural and social norms

5.9.1 A June 2020 Human Rights Watch (HRW) report based on 138 interviews including 120 in-person interviews with Taliban officials, commanders, and fighters, as well as interviews with teachers, doctors, elders, students, and other local residents, which focussed on the everyday experiences of people living in Taliban-held districts in Helmand, Kunduz and Wardak provinces,

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<sup>150</sup> HRW, '[Afghanistan: Taliban Target Journalists, Women in Media](#)', 1 April 2021

<sup>151</sup> HRW, '[Afghanistan: Taliban Target Journalists, Women in Media](#)', 1 April 2021

<sup>152</sup> AP, '[Taliban vow to respect women, despite history of oppression](#)', 18 August 2021

<sup>153</sup> The Guardian, '[...Thousands stranded in Kabul as Taliban go door-to-door](#)', 20 August 2021

noted, 'As the Taliban has gained control of districts across Afghanistan, "vice and virtue" officials again have a role in enforcing social norms.'<sup>154</sup>

5.9.2 The same report explained:

'These officials patrol communities to monitor residents' adherence to Taliban prescribed social codes regarding dress and public deportment, beard length, men's attendance at Friday prayers, and use of smartphones or other technological devices. The rigidity or flexibility with which the Taliban impose these rules varies by province and district, with Kunduz among the most flexible and Helmand among the least. Violating the rules can result in a warning for a first-time or relatively minor offense. While public punishment for infractions is infrequent compared to the 1990s, for offenses deemed more serious, Taliban officials have imprisoned residents and inflicted corporal punishments such as beatings.'<sup>155</sup>

5.9.3 The HRW report also noted:

'The Taliban's experience in provinces like Helmand, where the rural population generally wears traditional dress, has influenced their approach to local variations in dress and appearance elsewhere in Afghanistan. In Kunduz province, particularly in more urban areas, and to some extent in Wardak, men (but very seldom women) sometimes wear more Western clothes. As the Taliban has gained control of districts in these provinces, some residents have switched back to more traditional clothes to avoid facing threats or punishment by the Taliban...'<sup>156</sup>

5.9.4 Furthermore, HRW stated, 'Taliban officials prohibit watching television in some districts and residents who watch TV do so in secret. Similarly, some Taliban officials impose restrictions on smartphones or ban them outright, limiting residents' access to information and their ability to communicate, study, or work using the internet.'<sup>157</sup>

5.9.5 The USSD HR Report 2020 noted, 'Women in some areas of the country said their freedom of expression in choice of attire was limited by conservative social mores and sometimes enforced by Taliban in insurgent-controlled areas as well as religious leaders.'<sup>158</sup>

5.9.6 In 3 separate studies exploring Taliban rule in territories under their control, published in October 2020 and January 2021, the Afghanistan Analysts Network (AAN) looked at Andar district in Ghazni province<sup>159</sup>, Nad Ali district in Helmand province<sup>160</sup>, and Dasht-e Archi district in Kunduz province<sup>161</sup>. The AAN noted that the vice and virtue (religious police) had been replaced

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<sup>154</sup> HRW, ["You have no right to complain"...](#) (page 37), 30 June 2020

<sup>155</sup> HRW, ["You have no right to complain"...](#) (page 5), 30 June 2020

<sup>156</sup> HRW, ["You have no right to complain"...](#) (page 38), 30 June 2020

<sup>157</sup> HRW, ["You have no right to complain"...](#) (page 4), 30 June 2020

<sup>158</sup> USSD, ["2020 Human Rights Report"](#) (section 2a), 30 March 2021

<sup>159</sup> AAN, ["Living with the Taleban \(1\): Local experiences in Andar district..."](#), 19 October 2020

<sup>160</sup> AAN, ["Living with the Taleban \(2\): Local experiences in Nad Ali district..."](#), 18 January 2021

<sup>161</sup> AAN, ["Living with the Taleban \(3\): Local experiences in Dasht-e Archi district..."](#), 25 January 2021

by the outreach and guidance (dawat aw ershad) committee and its restrictions were not as harsh as its predecessor<sup>162 163</sup>.

- 5.9.7 Referring to Helmand, Kunduz and Wardak provinces, the HRW report claimed that in some districts the Taliban monitored men's beards and hair styles and had imposed punishments for violations, including beating and detention<sup>164</sup>. Such monitoring was not always consistent and varied between districts and commanders<sup>165</sup>.
- 5.9.8 Similarly, an Afghanistan Analysts Network (AAN) study exploring Taliban rule in territories under their control, indicated that, in Nad Ali district, Helmand province, the Taliban enforced rules for men such as growing a beard and not growing long hair<sup>166</sup>. In another study in Andar district, Ghazni province, the AAN noted that the Taliban did not enforce such rules<sup>167</sup>. In a third study on Dasht-e-Archi district, Kunduz province, the AAN noted that the Taliban's outreach and guidance committee was active in Kunduz, but did not refer to any monitoring of attire, beards or hair<sup>168</sup>.

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## 5.10 Persons who resist or oppose the Taliban

- 5.10.1 An article published by Human Rights Watch (HRW), dated 30 June 2020, stated 'Criticizing Taliban military activities is strictly forbidden; fear of retaliation keeps residents from advocating for their own protection. Although deploying forces in populated villages without taking all feasible precautions to protect civilians from attack is a violation of the laws of war, the Taliban have sometimes punished residents who have complained about Taliban forces entering their homes and firing on government troops.'<sup>169</sup>

- 5.10.2 On 18 August 2021, The Indian Express reported:

'As thousands of Afghans attempt to flee Taliban rule following their brutal takeover, videos emerged on social media of a small group of women holding placards and demanding equal rights on the streets of Kabul — reportedly the first agitation of its kind since the militant group seized control of the country.

'Four women in black abayas and hijabs were seen holding up signs and shouting slogans even as Taliban fighters patrolled nearby. In another clip, shared by an Al Jazeera correspondent, more women were seen marching through the streets, chanting slogans. The armed men seem to be pointing and speaking to the women, but don't appear to be getting in the way of their protest.'<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> AAN, '[Living with the Taleban \(1\): Local experiences in Andar district...](#)', 19 October 2020

<sup>163</sup> AAN, '[Living with the Taleban \(2\): Local experiences in Nad Ali district...](#)', 18 January 2021

<sup>164</sup> HRW, '["You have no right to complain"...](#)' (pages 42, 46, 48 and 49), 30 June 2020

<sup>165</sup> HRW, '["You have no right to complain"...](#)' (pages 7, 37 and 48), 30 June 2020

<sup>166</sup> AAN, '[Living with the Taleban \(2\): Local experiences in Nad Ali district...](#)', 18 January 2021

<sup>167</sup> AAN, '[Living with the Taleban \(1\): Local experiences in Andar district...](#)', 19 October 2020

<sup>168</sup> AAN, '[Living with the Taleban \(3\): Local experiences in Dasht-e Archi district...](#)', 25 January 2021

<sup>169</sup> HRW, '["You Have No Right to Complain": Education, Social Restrictions, and ...](#)', 30 June 2020

<sup>170</sup> The Indian Express, '[...Afghan women hold street protest as Taliban fighters...](#)' 18 August 2021

- 5.10.3 On 18 August 2021, Social media users<sup>171</sup> and Pajhwok News<sup>172</sup> reported that the Taliban fired on a crowd celebrating Afghan Independence Day in Jalalabad. Reports indicated 3 people were killed and 10 wounded<sup>173</sup>. The crowd were reported to be flying the internationally-recognised flag of Afghanistan in defiance of the Taliban. There were reports of similar protests elsewhere, including Khost and Kunar<sup>174 175</sup>.
- 5.10.4 On 18 August 2021, The Guardian reported that the Taliban's '... talk of moderation and peace was punctured by allegations of women and children being beaten and whipped by Taliban fighters as they tried to reach Kabul airport, protesters in several cities being beaten and shot dead, and the statue of an enemy figure being blown up.'<sup>176</sup>
- 5.10.5 On 19 August 2021, The Washington Post reported that Afghan citizens continued to protest against the Taliban rule, '...Afghan protesters defied the Taliban for a second day Thursday, waving their national flag in scattered demonstrations, and the fighters again responded violently as they faced down growing challenges to their rule.'<sup>177</sup>
- 5.10.6 The article continued:
- '... a procession of cars and people near Kabul's airport carried long black, red and green banners in honor of the Afghan flag — a banner that is becoming a symbol of defiance. At another protest in Nangarhar province, video posted online showed a bleeding demonstrator with a gunshot wound. Onlookers tried to carry him away.
- 'In Khost province, Taliban authorities instituted a 24-hour curfew [on 19 August] after violently breaking up another protest, according to information obtained by journalists monitoring from abroad. The authorities did not immediately acknowledge the demonstration or the curfew.
- 'Protesters also took the streets in Kunar province, according to witnesses and social media videos that lined up with reporting by The Associated Press.'<sup>178</sup>
- 5.10.7 Journalist Saleem Mehsud tweeted photos of deserted streets in Khost city following a '...Taliban imposed Curfew in the City for indefinite period'<sup>179</sup>:

<sup>171</sup> [https://twitter.com/HDK\\_75/status/1427896285160517637?s=20](https://twitter.com/HDK_75/status/1427896285160517637?s=20)

<sup>172</sup> Pajhwok Afghan News (@pajhwok on Twitter), [Tweet dated 18 August 2021 @ 08:08 UK Time](#)

<sup>173</sup> AJ+ (@ajplus on Twitter), [Tweet dated 18 August 2021 @ 14:12 UK Time](#)

<sup>174</sup> Saad Mohseni (@saadmohseni on Twitter), [Tweet dated 18 August 2021 @ 15:54 UK Time](#)

<sup>175</sup> The Afghan Report (@TheAfghanReport on Twitter), [Tweet dated 18 Aug 2021 @ 15:54 UK Time](#)

<sup>176</sup> The Guardian, '[Former Afghanistan president Karzai talks with Taliban...](#)' 18 August 2021

<sup>177</sup> Washington Post, '[Afghans protest Taliban in emerging challenge to their rule](#)', 19 August 2021

<sup>178</sup> Washington Post, '[Afghans protest Taliban in emerging challenge to their rule](#)', 19 August 2021

<sup>179</sup> S Mehsud (@SaleemMehsud on Twitter.com) '[Tweet dated 9:45am UK time, 19 August 2021](#)'



5.10.8 On 19 August 2021, Reuters reported, with reference to the protests against the Taliban rule:

‘Protests against the Taliban’s takeover in Afghanistan have spread to more cities, including the capital Kabul, while the militant group called on the country’s imams to urge unity at Friday prayers, the first since they seized control.

‘Several people were killed when the militants fired on a crowd in Asadabad in the eastern province of Kunar, a witness said. Another witness reported gunshots near a rally in Kabul, but they appeared to be Taliban firing into the air.

“‘Our flag, our identity,” a crowd of men and women waving black, red and green national flags shouted in Kabul, a video posted on social media showed, on the day Afghanistan celebrates independence from British control in 1919.’<sup>180</sup>

5.10.9 The article continued:

“In Asadabad, several people were killed during a rally, but it was unclear if the casualties resulted from Taliban firing or from a stampede.

“‘Hundreds of people came out on the streets,” witness Mohammed Salim said. “At first I was scared and didn’t want to go but when I saw one of my neighbours joined in, I took out the flag I have at home.

“‘Several people were killed and injured in the stampede and firing by the Taliban.”

‘Protests flared in the city of Jalalabad and a district of Paktia province, also both in the east.

‘On [18 August], Taliban fighters fired at protesters waving flags in Jalalabad, killing three, witnesses and media reported.

“‘Salute those who carry the national flag and thus stand for dignity of the nation,” First Vice President Amrullah Saleh, who is trying to rally opposition to the Taliban, said on Twitter.’<sup>181</sup>

<sup>180</sup> Reuters, ‘[Afghan protests spread to Kabul in early challenge to the Taliban](#)’, 19 August 2021

<sup>181</sup> Reuters, ‘[Afghan protests spread to Kabul in early challenge to the Taliban](#)’, 19 August 2021

## 5.11 Persons who refuse to join the Taliban as fighters

### 5.11.1 Referring to recruitment by the Taliban, the EASO report on Anti-Government Elements, dated August 2020, noted:

‘The Taliban typically recruit young males from rural communities who are unemployed, educated in madrasas and ethnically Pashtun, according to independent Afghanistan expert, Borhan Osman. Recruitment usually occurs through the group’s Military Commission and outreach in mosques, as well as through personal networks and families of fighters, many of whom are motivated by “deep loathing for the Western institutions and values the Afghan government has taken up from its allies”. Rather than paying salaries, the Taliban cover expenses; while the movement has become entrenched in crime and narcotics as fighters keep the spoils of these activities.’<sup>182</sup>

### 5.11.2 UNAMA noted in its Annual Report for 2020 that, throughout the year, children continued to be recruited by the Taliban<sup>183</sup>. UNAMA verified the recruitment and use of 196 boys in 2020, mostly in the north and northeast of the country, and 172 recruits were attributed to the Taliban<sup>184</sup>. In 2019, UNAMA verified 58 children were recruited by the Taliban<sup>185</sup>.

### 5.11.3 In 3 separate studies exploring Taliban rule in territories under their control, the Afghanistan Analysts Network (AAN) looked at Andar district in Ghazni province<sup>186</sup>, Nad Ali district in Helmand province<sup>187</sup>, and Dasht-e Archi district in Kunduz province<sup>188</sup>, and in each study, referred to Taliban recruitment methods, which indicated that the Taliban did not use direct force to recruit young male conscripts although some may be coerced.

### 5.11.4 A BBC report dated April 2020, indicated that some teenagers were inspired to join the Taliban or Islamic State after viewing their propaganda videos or attending madrassas in Taliban-controlled areas<sup>189</sup>.

### 5.11.5 CPIT was not able to find relevant information on Taliban recruitment since their takeover of Kabul in August 2021 (see [Bibliography](#)).

### 5.11.6 For further information on recruitment by the Taliban see the COI section in the Country Policy and Information Note on Afghanistan: unaccompanied children.

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<sup>182</sup> EASO, ‘[Anti-Government Elements](#)’ (page 21), August 2020

<sup>183</sup> UNAMA, ‘[Annual Report 2020](#)’ (page 33), February 2021

<sup>184</sup> UNAMA, ‘[Annual Report 2020](#)’ (pages 33-34), February 2021

<sup>185</sup> UNAMA, ‘[Annual Report 2019](#)’ (page 24), February 2020

<sup>186</sup> AAN, ‘[Living with the Taleban \(1\): Local experiences in Andar district...](#)’, 19 October 2020

<sup>187</sup> AAN, ‘[Living with the Taleban \(2\): Local experiences in Nad Ali district...](#)’, 18 January 2021

<sup>188</sup> AAN, ‘[Living with the Taleban \(3\): Local experiences in Dasht-e Archi district...](#)’, 25 January 2021

<sup>189</sup> BBC News, ‘[Afghanistan: The detention centre for teenage Taliban members](#)’, 21 April 2020



# Terms of Reference

A 'Terms of Reference' (ToR) is a broad outline of what the CPIN seeks to cover. They form the basis for the [country information section](#). The Home Office's Country Policy and Information Team uses some standardised ToR, depending on the subject, and these are then adapted depending on the country concerned.

For this particular CPIN, the following topics were identified prior to drafting as relevant and on which research was undertaken:

- Taliban
  - Strength, aims, command structure
  - Recent statements
  - Parallel justice
- Targeted groups
  - Persons associated with the Afghan government or international community
  - Persons associated with international military forces, interpreters
  - Persons perceived as against cultural and religious mores
  - Members of the Afghan security forces
  - Women
  - Ethnic and religious minorities
  - LGBTI
  - Journalists

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# Version control

## Clearance

Below is information on when this note was cleared:

- version **1.0**
- valid from **6 October 2021**

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### **Official – sensitive: Start of section**

The information in this section has been removed as it is restricted for internal Home Office use.

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### **Official – sensitive: End of section**

## Changes from last version of this note

First version of CPIN following Taliban takeover of Afghanistan on 15 August 2021

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