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World Report 2022 - Afghanistan

After the Taliban takeover of the country in August, the protracted Afghanistan conflict abruptly gave way to an accelerating human rights and humanitarian crisis. The Taliban immediately rolled back women's rights advances and media freedom—among the foremost achievements of the post-2001 reconstruction effort. Most secondary schools for girls were closed, and women were prohibited from working in most government jobs and many other areas. The Taliban beat and detained journalists; many media outlets closed or drastically scaled back their reporting, partly because many journalists had fled the country. The new Taliban cabinet included no women and no ministers from outside the Taliban's own ranks.

In many cities, the Taliban searched for, threatened, and sometimes detained or executed former members of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), officials of the former government, or their family members.

As the Taliban entered Kabul on August 15, thousands of people tried to flee the country, but chaos and violence at the airport impeded the evacuation of many at-risk Afghans.

The Taliban victory propelled Afghanistan from humanitarian crisis to catastrophe, with millions of Afghans facing severe food insecurity due to [lost income](#), cash shortages, and [rising food costs](#).

In the six months before the takeover, fighting between government forces and the Taliban caused a [sharp rise](#) in civilian casualties from improvised explosive devices (IEDs), mortars, and airstrikes. The Islamic State of Khorasan Province (the Afghan branch of the Islamic State, known as ISKP) carried out attacks on schools and mosques, many targeting minority Hazara Shia.

Unlawful Killings, Enforced Disappearances, Violations of Laws of War

The United Nations reported that Taliban forces were responsible for nearly [40 percent](#) of civilian deaths and injuries in the first six months of 2021, although many incidents were unclaimed. Women and children comprised [nearly half](#) of all civilian casualties. Attacks by the ISKP included assassinations and a number of deadly bombings.

Many attacks targeted Afghanistan's Hazara Shia community. [On May 8](#), three explosions at the Sayed al-Shuhada school in Kabul killed at least 85 civilians, including 42 girls and 28 women, and injured over 200—the vast majority from the Hazara community. The attack was unclaimed but occurred in a predominantly Hazara neighborhood that ISKP had repeatedly targeted. On October 8, a suicide bombing during Friday prayer at a Shia mosque in Kunduz killed [at least 72 people](#) and injured over 140; the ISKP claimed responsibility. On March 4, gunmen fatally shot [seven Hazara laborers](#) at a plastics factory in Jalalabad.

Taliban forces in several provinces carried out retaliatory killings of at least dozens of former officials and security force personnel. After the Taliban took control of Malistan, Ghazni, in mid-July, they killed [at least 19](#) security force personnel in their custody, along with a number of civilians. Advancing Taliban forces killed at least [44 former security force members](#) in Kandahar after the Taliban captured Spin Boldak in July. All had surrendered to the Taliban. There were credible reports of detentions and killings in other provinces as well as Kabul.

Both the Taliban and ISKP carried out targeted killings of civilians, including government employees, journalists, and religious leaders. On January 17, 2021, unidentified gunmen fatally shot [two women judges](#) who worked for Afghanistan's high court and wounded their driver. ISKP claimed responsibility for [killing nine polio vaccinators](#) in Nangarhar between March and June. On June 9, gunmen killed 10 humanitarian deminers in Baghlan; ISKP claimed responsibility. In August, an ISKP suicide bombing at Kabul's airport [killed 170 civilians](#), including many Afghans trying to flee the country.

Taliban forces also [forcibly evicted](#) people from their homes in a number of provinces including Daykundi, Uruzgan, Kunduz, and Kandahar, in apparent retaliation for the residents' perceived support for the former government. In the largest of these expulsions, in September, [hundreds of Hazara families](#) from the Gizab district of Uruzgan province and neighboring districts of Daykundi province were forced to abandon their homes and flee.

Both the Taliban and Afghan government security forces were responsible for killing and injuring civilians in indiscriminate mortar and rocket attacks, and civilian casualties from the former government forces' airstrikes [more than doubled](#) in the first half of 2021 compared with the same period in 2020. In one incident, [on January 10](#), an airstrike in Nimroz killed 18 civilians, including seven girls, six women, and four boys; two civilian men were injured.

On August 15, as the Taliban entered Kabul, a strike force unit from the former government's National Directorate of Security captured and executed 12 former prisoners who had just been released, according to witnesses.

On August 29, the US [launched a drone strike](#) on a car it claimed was filled with explosives headed for Kabul's airport. The car was actually driven by an NGO employee scheduled for evacuation to the US. Two weeks later the US Defense Department admitted the strike had been a "[tragic mistake](#)," killing 10 civilians, including seven children.

Women's and Girls' Rights

In the weeks after the Taliban takeover, Taliban authorities announced [a steady stream of policies](#) and regulations rolling back women's and girls' rights. These included measures severely curtailing access to employment and education and restricting the right to peaceful assembly. The Taliban also searched out high-profile women and denied them freedom of movement outside their homes.

The Taliban [have said](#) they support education for girls and women, but on September 18 they ordered secondary schools to [reopen](#) only for boys. Some secondary schools for girls subsequently reopened in a few provinces, but as of October the vast majority remained shut. On August 29, the acting [minister](#) of higher education announced that girls and women could participate in higher education but could not study with boys and men. A lack of female teachers, especially in higher education, likely means this policy will lead to de facto denial of access to education for many girls and women.

Women who had taught boys in classes above sixth grade or men in mixed classes at university [have been dismissed](#) in some areas because teaching males is no longer allowed. In many parts of Afghanistan, Taliban officials have banned or restricted female humanitarian workers—a move that could likely worsen access to health care and humanitarian aid. The Taliban have also [dismissed](#) almost all female government employees. In September, the Taliban's Ministry of Rural Development [ordered](#) only men to return to their jobs, saying women's return to work was "postponed" until it prepared a "mechanism for how they will work." When women have been allowed to return to work, they have faced requirements for gender segregation in their workplaces.

In September, the Taliban [eliminated](#) the Ministry for Women's Affairs and repurposed its building as the Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, an institution mandated to enforce rules on citizens' behavior, including how women dress, and when or whether women can move outside the home unaccompanied by a male relative. The [shelters](#) that had been established for women fleeing violence have been closed, and some the women who lived in them have been transferred to women's prisons.

Freedom of Media, Speech, and Assembly

The Afghan media came under growing threat since the beginning of the year, principally from the Taliban. The ISKP also carried out a number of deadly attacks on journalists.

On December 21, 2020, Rahmatullah Nekzad, head of the Ghazni journalists' union, [was fatally shot](#) as he walked from his home to a local mosque. Although the Taliban [denied](#) responsibility, Nekzad had previously received threats from local Taliban commanders.

The ISKP took responsibility for killing [Malala Maiwand](#), a TV presenter for Enikass News in Jalalabad, along with her driver, Tahar Khan, on December 10, 2020. In two separate attacks in Jalalabad on [March 2, 2021](#), gunmen fatally shot three women who worked at Enikass News dubbing foreign language news reports.

After the Taliban takeover, [nearly 70 percent](#) of all Afghan media outlets closed, and others were operating under threat and self-censoring. In September, the Taliban authorities imposed [wide-ranging restrictions](#) on media and free speech that included prohibitions on "insulting national

figures” and reports that could have a “negative impact on the public’s attitude.” On September 7, Taliban security forces [detained](#) two journalists from the Etilaat-e Roz media outlet and severely beat them in custody before releasing them. The reporters had been covering protests by women in Kabul. The Taliban detained [at least 32](#) journalists after taking power in Kabul.

Beginning on September 2, Afghan women carried out demonstrations in several cities to protest against Taliban policies violating women’s rights. In Herat, Taliban fighters lashed protesters and fired weapons indiscriminately to disperse the crowd, [killing](#) two men and wounding at least eight more. The Taliban subsequently [banned](#) protests that did not have prior approval from the Justice Ministry in Kabul. Some protests nevertheless continued.

On July 6, the former Afghan government announced it was [unlawful](#) to broadcast news “against the national interest.” On July 26, four journalists [were arrested](#) by the former government’s intelligence agency after they returned from Spin Boldak, Kandahar, where they had been [investigating](#) the Taliban’s takeover of the district. They were not released until after Kandahar fell to the Taliban on August 13.

International Justice and Investigations into Abuses

On September 27, the prosecutor for the International Criminal Court filed an application before the court’s judges seeking authorization to resume an investigation in Afghanistan following the collapse of the former Afghan government. Prosecutor Karim Khan stated, however, that his investigation would focus only on crimes allegedly committed by the Taliban and the Islamic State and [deprioritize](#) other aspects of the investigation, namely alleged crimes committed by the forces of the former Afghan government and US military and CIA personnel.

On August 24, the UN Human Rights Council held a [special session](#), requested jointly by Afghanistan and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), but the negotiations—led by Pakistan as OIC coordinator—failed to create any new monitoring mechanism. At its next regular session, the [UN Human Rights Council](#) adopted on October 7 a European Union-led [resolution](#) establishing a special rapporteur on Afghanistan, supported by experts, including on “fact-finding, forensics, and the rights of women and girls.”

In June, Afghan witnesses testified by video link in the defamation trial against Australian newspapers brought by former Australian SAS officer Ben Roberts-Smith. In 2018, *The Age*, *Sydney Morning Herald*, and *Canberra Times* had [published accounts](#) of alleged killings of civilians and other abuses by SAS units, and by Roberts-Smith himself. Those abuses are being examined by Australian investigators.

Key International Actors

On April 14, US President Joe Biden [announced](#) a full US troop withdrawal from Afghanistan. The expedited withdrawal did not include plans for evacuating many Afghans who had worked for the US and NATO forces or for programs sponsored by donor countries.

Canada, the EU, United Kingdom, United States, and other countries [evacuated](#) several hundred thousand Afghans who had worked directly with those governments, their military forces, or organizations they supported. Thousands more Afghans remained at risk—including human rights defenders, women’s rights activists, journalists, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people—with no way of exiting the country safely. Although EU members evacuated some Afghans, as of November, [none had made commitments](#) to take in more refugees. Member states pledged one billion euros in humanitarian aid.

After the Taliban takeover, the New York Federal Reserve [cut off](#) the Afghanistan Central Bank’s access to its US dollar assets. The International Monetary Fund [prevented](#) Afghanistan from accessing funding including Special Drawing Rights. In August, donors stopped payments from the World Bank-administered Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund, previously used to pay civil servants’ salaries, accelerating Afghanistan’s economic collapse.

In September, the UN Security Council authorized a six-month renewal of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). The future of the mission, which among other things is mandated to promote the rights of Afghan women and girls and to monitor, investigate, and report on alleged human rights abuses, is uncertain. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres is expected to make recommendations to the council in early 2022 on UNAMA’s future.

As of November, the Taliban government [had](#) not been formally recognized by any other country. In September, the EU [set five benchmarks](#) for engagement with the Taliban government, among them, respect for human rights, in particular those of women and girls, and establishing an inclusive and representative government.

At the G20 meeting on September 23, [China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi](#) called for an end to all economic sanctions on Afghanistan, said that China expected the Taliban government to eventually become more inclusive, and called on the Taliban to “resolutely” fight international terrorism.

As of November 1, Russia, Turkey, and Iran [stated](#) they would not acknowledge a Taliban-led government until they formed an “inclusive” administration. Russia invited [Taliban](#) representatives to international talks on Afghanistan in Moscow on October 20.

While Pakistan stopped short of recognizing the Taliban government, it called for greater international engagement with the Taliban, while also urging them to create a more “[inclusive](#)” government.

Throughout the year, the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan was [repeatedly addressed](#) by UN special procedures, treaty bodies, and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

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Austrian Red Cross Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation (ACCORD)	Wiedner Hauptstraße 32, 1041 Wien T (Telefon) +43 1 589 00 583 F (Fax) +43 1 589 00 589 info@ecoi.net	Contact Imprint & Disclaimer F.A.Q. Data Protection Notice
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