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AFGHANISTAN

USCIRF–RECOMMENDED FOR COUNTRIES OF PARTICULAR CONCERN (CPC)

KEY FINDINGS

In 2024, Afghanistan experienced a continual and significant [decline](#) in religious freedom conditions under de facto Taliban rule. The Taliban continued to enforce its strict interpretation of Shari'a throughout the country, directly impacting the religious freedom of all Afghans—including those with differing interpretations of Islam. Its draconian religious edicts continued to disproportionately target women and girls as well as religious minorities who remain in the country, including Ahmadiyya and Shi'a Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus, and Christians. Human rights advocates have increasingly [warned](#) of the “devastating impact” of Taliban rule on these vulnerable communities through its “widespread and systematic” use of physical and sexual violence (in particular against women and children), arbitrary detention, torture, corporal punishment, and other egregious abuses.

De facto Taliban authorities continued to impose their interpretation of religion to severely restrict the religious freedom and daily lives of Afghan women, limiting their movement, dress, education, and speech. Beginning in January, authorities reportedly detained dozens of women in Kabul and Daykundi Province for failing to observe what the Taliban deemed “proper hijab,” as outlined in a May 2022 decree that mandated women and girls to fully cover themselves in public. Before releasing the detained women, authorities [required](#) male guardians to sign letters promising future compliance with the decree. The Taliban also continued to enforce its religiously justified ban on education for women and girls over the age of 12.

In August, the Ministry of the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (MPVPV) [issued](#) a new “morality law,” expanding and reinforcing religious policies for all Afghans, including gender

segregation in public spaces. The law grants the ministry broad powers to arrest and detain individuals perceived to have violated the Taliban's religious edicts. It further prevents women from speaking or singing outside of their homes and imposes mandatory dress and appearance codes for men, including beard length. It severely restricts the rights of religious minorities by forbidding all “non-Islamic” religious ceremonies and preventing association with “non-believers,” including Shi'a Muslim and Christian communities. The law additionally criminalizes wearing or “popularizing” crucifixes, neckties, and other “un-Islamic” symbols.

Taliban authorities also resumed using corporal and capital punishment to penalize violations of their interpretation of Shari'a. Punishments included public executions, lashings and floggings, stoning, beatings, and acts of public humiliation, such as forced head shaving. In February, for example, the Taliban carried out a public double execution of two men at a stadium in Ghazni city “according to the Islamic concept of *qisas*, or retributive justice.” In April, Taliban officials publicly flogged 63 individuals, allegedly for adultery, apostasy, same-sex relations, and other acts considered to be “immoral.” In August, the Taliban publicly flogged a man accused of blasphemy and “insulting religious sanctities.”

Throughout the year, the Islamic State of Khorasan Province (ISIS-K) conducted violent attacks against Shi'a Muslim communities and their places of worship, including Hazara communities whom both ISIS-K and the Taliban consider “infidels” and “unbelievers.” For example, ISIS-K claimed responsibility for an explosion near the Abu Muslim Khorasani Mosque in January, and it attacked a mosque in a predominantly Shi'a community of Herat Province in April, killing six worshippers.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE U.S. GOVERNMENT

- Designate Afghanistan under the de facto rule of the Taliban as a “country of particular concern,” or CPC, for engaging in systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom, as defined by the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA);
- Impose targeted sanctions on Taliban officials responsible for severe religious freedom violations, including members of the MPVPV, by freezing those individuals' assets and/or barring their entry into the United States under human rights-related financial and visa authorities—citing religious freedom violations—and coordinate with allies to impose similar sanctions;
- Work with like-minded partners, including the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), to address the Taliban's religious freedom and other human rights violations;
- Re-Appoint a Special Representative for Afghanistan and Special Envoy for Afghan Women, Girls, and Human Rights to engage with Afghan religious minorities and encourage their inclusion in international meetings on Afghanistan and expand the Special Envoy's mandate to explicitly include advocating for religious minorities; and
- Update the [2019 Strategy on Women, Peace, and Security](#) to include explicit

reference to protecting women's right to religious freedom, prioritize security for women belonging to religious minority communities, and make Afghanistan a focus country for related program implementation.

The U.S. Congress should:

- Introduce and pass legislation to create a [Priority 2](#) (P-2) designation—reserved for groups of special humanitarian concern—to include members of religious groups at extreme risk of persecution by the Taliban to allow them to apply for resettlement to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program.

KEY USCIRF RESOURCES & ACTIVITIES

- **Country Update:** [Religious Freedom under Taliban-Controlled Afghanistan](#)
- **Frank R. Wolf Freedom of Religion or Belief** [Victims List](#) and [Appendix 2](#)

Background

Afghanistan's population is an estimated 39.2 million and encompasses a wide range of ethnic groups, including Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazaras, Uzbeks, Turkmens, and Balochs. The country is 99.7 percent Muslim (84.7-89.7 percent Sunni and 10-15 percent Shi'a) and less than 0.3 percent other religions.

While many religious minorities fled following the Taliban takeover in 2021, small numbers of Shi'a and Ahmadiyya Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, Christians, and Buddhists remain in the country. Following that takeover, de facto authorities dissolved the country's 2004 constitution and made their interpretation of Shari'a the basis for all law in the country. In 2024, Taliban spokesperson Zabiullah Mujahid emphasized this ideological stance by insisting that the group's form of Shari'a has "specified everyone's duty in society." The MPVPV, which existed during previous Taliban rule from 1996 to 2001 and was recreated following the 2021 takeover, enforces the Taliban's religious edicts and decrees.

Attacks and Abuses against Religious Minorities

Both de facto Taliban authorities and ISIS-K continued to target religious minority communities in 2024, particularly the Shi'a Hazara population. In September, for example, ISIS-K attacked a group of Hazara pilgrims in Daykundi Province upon their return from Karbala in Iraq, killing 14 people. Meanwhile, Taliban authorities arrested Hazara women throughout the year on charges of "bad hijab" and subjected them to harassment, torture, and violence while in custody. The country's other, dwindling religious minority communities also experienced attacks; in May, for example, an ISIS-K gunman opened fire on Christians and Shi'a Muslims at a market in Bamiyan Province, killing two Afghans and three Spanish nationals.

According to the United Nation's (UN) [Special Rapporteur on Afghanistan](#), Taliban security forces conducted arbitrary house searches in Shi'a majority areas and neighborhoods during the month of Muharram, which involved beatings, destruction of property, and unlawful killings. The Taliban further imposed restrictions on the Shi'a minority prior to that month, banning religious processions and ceremonies in public spaces and flag-raising for Ashura rituals—activities that the Taliban's information and culture department described as "political heresy" from abroad. In addition, it reportedly pressured Ismaili Shi'a Muslims to convert to Sunni Islam and detained 15 members of that community in May. In June, the acting minister of higher education denied the existence of other Muslim communities in the country, stating that every Afghan follows Hanafi Sunni jurisprudence.

Control of Literature and Education

The Taliban expanded its efforts to censor religious ideas that differ from its official interpretation of Islam and to restructure Afghanistan's education sector to conform with that ideology. The education minister declared in 2024 that questioning Taliban policies was a punishable act. Throughout the year, the Taliban's Ministry of Higher Education enforced a December 2023 decree to review and remove books from

university libraries and bookstores that conflict with its interpretation of the Hanafi school of Islamic jurisprudence. In January, de facto authorities seized thousands of books from bookstores and publishing houses in Kabul, claiming they violated "national and Islamic values." The Taliban's deputy minister of information and culture justified these actions as preventing the spread of "harmful ideologies."

Even as it repressed higher education, the Taliban continued to facilitate the establishment of Islamic schools (*madrasas*) that promulgate its interpretation of Islam throughout the country, increasing the total four-fold to an estimated 7,000—ostensibly designating 380 of them for girls. In March, Taliban officials announced they may never reopen secondary schools for Afghan girls, despite global criticism from Muslim clerics that such a restrictive education ban was un-Islamic. In December, the Taliban reportedly extended the education ban to prevent women from attending medical school, which was widely viewed as women's last opportunity for higher education in the country.

Broadly, human rights defenders, academics, lawyers, journalists, and members of civil society continued to face threats, intimidation, harassment, arrest, and detention. Authorities have particularly targeted journalists for reporting on religious freedom issues and criticizing the Taliban's religious edicts. Notably, in February, authorities sentenced university professor Mohammed Atef Daie to a year in prison for his advocacy for women's rights, including girls' education.

Key U.S. Policy

While the U.S. government did not recognize de facto Taliban authorities as the official government of Afghanistan, several delegations of U.S. officials participated in international forums with Taliban members in 2024. In February, then U.S. Department of State Special Representative for Afghanistan Tom West and then Special Envoy for Women, Girls, and Human Rights in Afghanistan Rina Amiri traveled to Qatar for the second round of UN-lead Doha meetings on Afghanistan. Both officials participated in subsequent meetings in Doha in June, which drew criticism from human rights groups for excluding Afghan women and religious scholars. Then U.S. Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken, then Special Representative West, and then Special Envoy Amiri all testified before separate congressional hearings on Afghanistan during the year, including one on the rights of [women and girls](#). In December, U.S. special representatives for Afghanistan met with international partners and [condemned](#) the Taliban's edicts preventing women from receiving medical training.

Throughout the year, U.S. government officials, including Ambassador Dorothy Shea, [reiterated](#) support for UN Security Council [Resolution 2721](#), which calls for a UN Special Envoy for Afghanistan. Additionally, in November, the Coordinator for Afghan Relocation Efforts (CARE) Authorization Act ([H.R. 8368](#)) passed the House of Representatives with bipartisan support, requiring the State Department to appoint a Coordinator for Afghan Relocation Efforts responsible for relocating and resettling eligible Afghan allies.

On December 29, 2023, the State Department last [redesignated](#) the Taliban as an Entity of Particular Concern (EPC) for particularly severe religious freedom violations.