

1.1.1. Political opposition and civic space

1.1.1. Political opposition and civic space

The Taliban have established a de facto government with political monopoly similar to a one-party state.[74] Political parties are outlawed[75] and civic space has been severely limited by restrictions on international and local media,[76] as well as by arrests of critics.[77] Many individuals opposing the Taliban have left the country,[78] gone into hiding or resorted to self-censorship.[79] The general human rights situation has gradually deteriorated,[80] and sources described the de facto administration as moving towards becoming a theocratic police state,[81] ruling through a climate of fear[82] and supressing dissent.[83] In this context, there is no space for political opposition,[84] and Human Rights Watch reported on 'deepened' repression in 2025.[85]

There were protests against the de facto government's policies right after the Taliban takeover,[86] and women's rights activists stood at the forefront of this movement.[87] General opposition, however, largely dissipated during the Taliban's second year of rule.[88] As women protesters faced violent reprisals,[89] including detentions and torture,[90] protests dwindled.[91] More information is available in section 4.4.2 Freedom of expression and assembly.

The de facto government has continued to violently suppress protests, including by arrests and shooting directly at protesters.[92] Amid protests against the opium poppy eradication campaign in Badakhshan Province in 2025,[93] de facto security forces shot into protesting crowds which caused deaths and injuries.[94] This included the death of eight persons in Khash District over the course of two days in June 2025, as well as instances of arrests and ill-treatment, as noted by the UN Secretary-General.[95] Protests have also been staged without reported violence from the de facto authorities, including by retirees previously working for the former government that regularly stage street protests to demand their pensions to be paid.[96] The UN Secretary-General also noted that the population staged protests against, *inter alia*, poppy eradication, taxation of agricultural products, and the destruction of Shia symbols during the holy day of Ashura in Herat City.[97]

As mentioned, several restrictions have been introduced on local media and on content criticising the de facto government.[98] Media outlets accused of violating these restrictions have been suspended or shut down,[99] including for content perceived as contrary to 'national and Islamic values'[100] and for having collaborated with exile media.[101] Some media offices stated that their closure was politically motivated.[102] Journalists and media workers have also been facing arbitrary arrests and detentions, torture and ill-treatment, and threats and intimidation by the de facto authorities.[103] Further restrictions have been implemented within the reference

period of this report, including the ban against showcasing images of living beings[104] which has forced television stations in some provinces to close or only air audio content.[105] Moreover, since September 2024, live political debates are not allowed, and media are required to seek prior approval before airing political talk shows and may only invite experts as per a pre-approved list of experts – or seek prior permission.[106]

The de facto authorities have become increasingly intolerant to criticism,[107] and the space for voicing concern has decreased further within the reference period of this report.[108] Sources have reported on even moderate differences of opinion not being tolerated,[109] and individuals considered as loyalists and aligned with the Taliban movement being discouraged from speaking in public on 'controversial issues'.[110]

According to Haroun Rahimi, Associate Professor and Chair of Law Department at the American University of Afghanistan, the de facto authorities have been clamping down on dissent and have been trying to limit public discourse around governance issues.[111] The UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan reported on the suppression of dissent as taking place in all areas of public discourse, affecting 'journalists and media workers, human rights defenders, members of civil society and protesters, academics, writers, artists, booksellers and educators, as well as their family members.'[112] Islamic scholars and clerics have also reportedly been arrested after publicly criticising the Taliban or 'merely supporting more moderate policies', according to Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL).[113]

Nevertheless, some individuals have continued to voice critical concerns, including on girls' access to higher education and governance issues.[114] Such criticism has however become much less frequent, and as explained by Rahimi 'people on the margin' – not considered anti-Taliban but still raising concerns – have become much less visible. According to him, the new rule of conduct is to not criticise the de facto government publicly, although there have been moments of public conversation involving both senior de facto government officials and the general public voicing concerns amid major events, such as the internet shutdown and Pakistani airstrikes against Kabul City in the second half of 2025.[115] In early 2025, Mohammad Abbas Stanikzai, the de facto deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, fled Afghanistan soon after having delivered a public speech in which he criticised the ban on higher education for girls. In response, the Taliban Supreme Leader reportedly ordered his arrest and issued a travel ban.[116] Meanwhile, on the other hand, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, leader of the political party Hezb-e Islami, has been publicly questioning the de facto government's legitimacy and its capability to ensure security in Afghanistan.[117]

- 74

  Saleem, M. A. and Semple, M., Peace Matrix for Afghanistan, PeaceRep, 11 November 2024, url, p. 8

- 75

  VOA, Taliban Ban Afghan Political Parties, Citing Sharia Violations, 16 August 2023, url; RFE/RL, Taliban Bans

- 76

RFE/RL, Taliban Broadens Crackdown With Detention Of Critical Religious Scholars, 5 June 2025, url

- 77

  UN Human Rights Council, Situation of human rights in Afghanistan, 20 February 2025, url, para. 24; RFE/RL, Taliban Broadens Crackdown With Detention Of Critical Religious Scholars, 5 June 2025, url; AI, The State of the World's Human Rights, Afghanistan 2024, 29 April 2025, url

- 78

  UN Human Rights Council, Situation of human rights in Afghanistan, 20 February 2025, url, para. 24; Rawadari, Afghanistan Human Rights Situation Report 2023, March 2024, url, p. 6

- 79

  UN Human Rights Council, Situation of human rights in Afghanistan, 20 February 2025, url, para. 24

- 80

  Sweden, Swedish Migration Agency, Afghanistan, Styre och rättskipning [Andrew Watkins, senior expert on Afghanistan], 6 July 2023, url, p. 13; UNAMA, Dignity, freedom and justice must be upheld in Afghanistan, 10 December 2022, url

- 81

  Sweden, Swedish Migration Agency, Afghanistan, Styre och rättskipning, 6 July 2023, url, p. 13; Economist (The), Afghans are suffering. Don’t expect any tears from the Taliban, 14 August 2024, url; PRIO et al., Pathways towards Strengthening Girl’s Education in Afghanistan, December 2023, url, p. 4

- 82

  Sweden, Swedish Migration Agency, Afghanistan, Styre och rättskipning, 6 July 2023, url, p. 13; RFE/RL, The Azadi Briefing: Thousands Of Afghans Detained By Taliban's Morality Police, 23 August 2024, url; UN Human Rights Council, Situation of human rights in Afghanistan, 20 February 2025, url, para. 24

- 83

  Saleem, M. A. and Semple, M., Peace Matrix for Afghanistan, PeaceRep, 11 November 2024, url, p. 8

- 84

  Nishat, Z. et al., Why Do People in Afghanistan Object to Taliban Rule?, Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, 22 September 2022, url; Ahmad, J. and London, D., America Should Recognize Afghanistan’s Taliban Government, FP, 23 May 2023, url; Amu TV, Afghanistan

ranked world’s most authoritarian country in 2024 Democracy Index, 28 February 2025, url

- 85

  HRW, Afghanistan Relentless Repression 4 Years into Taliban Rule, 5 August 2025, url

- 86

  HRW in: France 24 English [YouTube], 'Afghan women are leading the resistance against the Taliban,' researcher says, 25 August 2025, url, 2:37–2:50

- 87

  CIVICUS, Protests Escalate in Afghanistan as Frustration with Taliban Rule and Abuses Grow, 28 November 2022, url

- 88

  AW, Two years of Taliban rule: documenting human rights abuses using open source, 15 August 2023, url, p. 3

- 89

  Al Jazeera, Afghan women stage rare protests, braving Taliban reprisals, 8 March 2024, url

- 90

  BBC News, What happened to the women who took on the Taliban?, 14 June 2024, url

- 91

  Rawadari, Afghanistan Human Rights Situation Report 2023, March 2024, url, p. 21; AW, Two years of Taliban rule: documenting human rights abuses using open source, 15 August 2023, url, p. 4; AW, The Erasure of Women, 15 August 2024, url, pp. 13–14

- 92

  Rawadari, Afghanistan Mid-Year Human Rights Situation Report: January-June 30, 2025, August 2025, urlhttps://rawadari.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/RW_MidYear2025_Human_Rights_Report_ENG.pdf, p. 37

- 93

  UN General Assembly and UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 5 September 2025, url, para. 9; Bjelica, J. and Foschini F., Opium Cultivation in Badakhshan: The new national leader, according to UNDOC, AAN, 13 November 2024, url

- 94

  UN General Assembly and UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 5 September 2025, url, para. 31

- 95

  UN General Assembly and UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 5 September 2025, url, para. 31

- 96

  Sabawoon, A. M., Where Are My Rights? Afghan retirees appeal for their pensions, AAN, 22 May 2024, url; UN General Assembly and UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 6 December 2024, url, para. 10; UN General Assembly and UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 11 June 2025, url, para. 10

- 97

  UN General Assembly and UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 5 September 2025, url, para. 9

- 98

  RSF, Afghanistan : the disturbing, escalating censorship suffocating the free press, 27 February 2025, url; HRW, Afghanistan: Taliban Trample Media Freedom, 23 October 2025, url

- 99

  UNAMA, Media Freedom in Afghanistan, November 2024, url, p. 15, AFJC, 2024 Annual Report on Media Freedom in Afghanistan, 26 December 2024, url, pp. 25–26

- 100

  RSF, Afghanistan: press freedom at its lowest point as Taliban closed 12 media outlets in less than a year, 20 December 2024, url; IFJ, Afghanistan: Media continues to erode under three years of Taliban rule, 15 August 2024, url

- 101

  AFJC, 2024 Annual Report on Media Freedom in Afghanistan, 26 December 2024, url, pp. 21, 26; RSF, Afghanistan: Taliban prohibit journalists from collaborating with Afghanistan International news channel, 14 May 2024, url

- 102

  AFJC, 2024 Annual Report on Media Freedom in Afghanistan, 26 December 2024, url, p. 26

- 103

  UNAMA, Media Freedom in Afghanistan, November 2024, url, p. 3

- 104

Afghanistan, De facto authorities, The Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice Law [unofficial translation by the AAN], August 2024, url, art. 17

- 105

Just Security, The Taliban’s Slow Dismantling of Afghan media, 10 July 2025, url

- 106

AFJC, Taliban Imposes Stricter Regulations on Afghan Media, Raising Concerns Over Press Freedom, 23

- 107

UN Human Rights Council, Situation of human rights in Afghanistan, 20 February 2025, url, para. 24; RFE/RL, Taliban Broadens Crackdown With Detention Of Critical Religious Scholars, 5 June 2025, url; Rahimi, H., online interview, 30 October 2025. The interview was conducted by the EUAA in cooperation with the Belgian and Romanian COI units.

- 108

Rahimi, H., online interview, 30 October 2025. The interview was conducted by the EUAA in cooperation with the Belgian and Romanian COI units.

- 109

UN Human Rights Council, Situation of human rights in Afghanistan, 20 February 2025, url, para. 24; RFE/RL, Taliban Broadens Crackdown With Detention Of Critical Religious Scholars, 5 June 2025, url

- 110

Rahimi, H., online interview, 30 October 2025. The interview was conducted by the EUAA in cooperation with the Belgian and Romanian COI units.

- 111

Rahimi, H., online interview, 30 October 2025. The interview was conducted by the EUAA in cooperation with the Belgian and Romanian COI units.

- 112

UN Human Rights Council, Situation of human rights in Afghanistan, 20 February 2025, url, para. 24

- 113

RFE/RL, Taliban Broadens Crackdown With Detention Of Critical Religious Scholars, 5 June 2025, url

- 114

Rahimi, H., online interview, 30 October 2025. The interview was conducted by the EUAA in cooperation with the Belgian and Romanian COI units; SAK, Emiren stärker kontrollen över hela landet, 17 March 2025, url

- 115

  Rahimi, H., online interview, 30 October 2025. The interview was conducted by the EUAA in cooperation with the Belgian and Romanian COI units.

- 116

  Guardian (The), Taliban minister ‘forced to flee Afghanistan’ after speech in support of girls’ education, 3 February 2025, url

- 117

  Afghanistan International, Hekmatyar Warns Of Rising Instability, Calls For Legitimate Government In Afghanistan, 24 February 2025, url; Ariana News, Hekmatyar: We need a legitimate government in Afghanistan, 24 February 2025, url

© European Union Agency for Asylum 2026 | Email: info@euaa.europa.eu