

1.1.1. Political opposition and civic space

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The Taliban have established a de facto government with political monopoly similar to a one-party state.⁷⁴ Political parties are outlawed⁷⁵ 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 fear⁸² and suppressing 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 beings¹⁰⁴ 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

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