

1.2.5. Actors of enforcement

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The de facto MPVPV is responsible for propagating virtue and preventing vice based on the de facto authorities' interpretation of *sharia*,²³³ and has been enforcing instructions that regulate the private lives of Afghans.²³⁴ It is an influential institution that reports directly to the Taliban Supreme Leader on important issues.²³⁵ Although the de facto MPVPV in principle has more of a guiding role,²³⁶ its enforcers (*muhtasibin*) enjoy extensive powers, allowing them to move beyond advising the population²³⁷ and detain individuals failing to comply²³⁸ or issue extra-judicial punishment.²³⁹ Enforcers may issue any punishment they consider appropriate as long as it is not 'the exclusive prerogative of a court of law'.²⁴⁰ Enforcement is to follow a 'sliding scale',²⁴¹ where 'advise' should be the first response to a 'wrongful act'. Only if the act continues, enforcers may resort to more forceful means (e.g. threats, fines and detentions).²⁴² However, this has not always been followed in practice, with for example women failing to comply with the *hijab* decree being arrested as a first response. The de facto MPVPV also cooperates with the de facto GDI, whose mandate allows for further coercive measures.²⁴³

Following the launch of the 'Morality law', the de facto MPVPV deployed additional enforcers across Afghanistan,²⁴⁴ claiming that they had deployed 4 500 enforcers by October 2024.²⁴⁵ Meanwhile, UNAMA reported that 3 300 enforcers operated across 28 provinces as of January 2025, with an average of 118 inspectors per province. Numbers varied depending on the size of the province and its population. For example, Paktya and Paktika had 14 enforcers each, while approximately 540 enforcers were operating in Kabul Province.²⁴⁶ Almost all enforcers are male,²⁴⁷ and they commonly wear white long coats (*perahan tunban*).²⁴⁸

There have been continuous reports on de facto MPVPV enforcers using force, including verbal intimidation, arrests, harassment, and physical violence.²⁴⁹ An Afghan analyst who regularly conducts field-based research in Afghanistan told the EUAA that enforcers at times also resort to 'financial damage', such as destroying mobile phones.²⁵⁰ UNAMA reported on an 'apparent lack of accountability' of de facto MPVPV staff, despite a complaint's mechanism being in place.²⁵¹ In an article, Rahimi argued that the de facto government's 'desire to turn the MPVPV into a police force that ensures compliance with a strict code of conduct' had diluted several legal safeguards to 'keep the ministry consistent with other canonical rules on Islamic governance in protecting privacy, due process, jurisprudential plurality, and equal application of *sharia* for the ruler and the ruled'.²⁵²

Despite the relatively small number of de facto MPVPV enforcers,²⁵³ many Afghans have adapted to restrictions²⁵⁴ through self-regulation,²⁵⁵ social pressure, and reportedly also community surveillance by family members, religious leaders and neighbours.²⁵⁶ Such measures are reportedly taken to avoid confrontations with enforcers.²⁵⁷ Some women avoid going outside their home,²⁵⁸ due to the risk of being spoken to, insulted, or arrested by an unknown man in the capacity of a de facto MPVPV official, which has a strong deterrent effect, as it would be considered a grave dishonour,²⁵⁹ bringing shame on the woman's family and community²⁶⁰ and triggering rumours.²⁶¹ Families also resorted to 'self-policing' their female family members,²⁶² and some families as well as NGOs and businesses 'pre-emptively' placed restrictions on women, according to UN Women, 'even in the absence of formal decrees'.²⁶³

Men also restrict women relatives as they may be held accountable²⁶⁴ and face reprisals for the behaviour of female family members.²⁶⁵ As per a 2022 decree mandating women to cover their faces, failure to comply may lead to the closest male relative facing reprimands, imprisonment or job dismissal.²⁶⁶ As noted by an anonymous source interviewed by ACCORD, the de facto MPVPV usually ‘advises’ close male relatives, such as a husband, father or brother, but may also turn to cousins or brothers-in-law.²⁶⁷ Some men have also become more conservative,²⁶⁸ as restrictions have been ‘embedding norms into everyday behaviour’.²⁶⁹

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