

1.2.6. Impact on the education sector

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A main aim of the Taliban Supreme Leader is reportedly to implement *sharia* in order to 'purify' Afghan society.270 The education sector has been impacted by efforts to eradicate some secular subjects,271 while religious topics have been expanded272 and promoted.273 Women and girls have gradually been restricted from accessing education, starting with secondary education in 2022,274 followed by university education later that year,275 and most recently, from attending medical education in December 2024.276 The de facto authorities have been working to revise the school curriculum for private and public schools,277 removing topics deemed 'against' Islamic rites and Afghan culture.278 According to Rahimi, the curriculum has not been completely overhauled, but rather, more recent additions have been removed, such as social subject or civic education related to democracy themes.279 Nevertheless, universities have been instructed to stop teaching 18 subjects considered to be in conflict with *sharia*, including topics on gender, women,280 democracy and human rights.281 Human Rights Watch reported that the absence of female teachers had led to a reduced range of subjects being taught to boys, and that subjects such as sports, art, civics and culture had been replaced with religious studies.282

In Afghanistan, *madrassas* are religious institutions that have historically played an important role in educating children.283 At the time of writing, *madrassas* were the only option for many girls and women to receive education after primary school.284 Madrassas provide religious education, but generally also teach non-religious subjects,285 such as mathematics, science, physics, geography, and languages.286 Before the Taliban takeover, about 5 000 *madrassas* were formally registered with the then government,287 although thousands more operated without registration.288 The de facto authorities have made efforts to regulate the *madrassa* sector,289 including by registering informal *madrassas*.290 These efforts have led up to almost 23 000 *madrassas* being formally registered as of August 2025, according to the de facto authorities.291 Only a limited number of these are newly established institutions – about 316 according to the Afghanistan Human Rights Center (AHRC).292 Most *madrassas* continue to be privately run,293 although a few public so-called *jihadi madrassas* have been established.294

Some commentators worry that *madrassas* may fuel extremism,295 and function as 'centres for religious indoctrination'.296 The Taliban have been using the education sector to reinforce their ideology within the young generation,297 but Afghanistan experts Haroun Rahimi and Andrew Watkins noted that the name *jihadi madrassa* has caused 'profound confusion' as the term is associated with violent religious extremists. Although Rahimi and Watkins could not 'rule out the extent to which some jihadi madrassas may serve as conduits for future employment in the DFA

offices, including enlistment in DFA security forces', they did not find evidence for these *madrassas* engaging in militarised training or education. They also noted that the *jihadi madrassas* apply the same curriculum as other *madrassas*.298 On the contrary, CNN reported that public *madrassas* almost exclusively teach religious subjects.299 AHRC reported that male students of some public *madrassas* had been promised 'good positions and jobs in government' upon their graduation.300 According to individuals interviewed by Rahimi and Watkins, people educated in *madrassas* were easy to recruit into the de facto administration, as they often support the Taliban, although governmental service was not mandatory.301

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