

1.2.7. Enforcement of selected restrictions on personal freedoms

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This chapter describes the enforcement of selected restrictions. Information on how some of these and other restrictions impact women's and girls' freedom of movement and access to work, education and state service is provided in chapter 4.4. Women and girls.

a) Gender segregation

The necessity of gender segregation is a central idea within the Taliban movement, which impacts the decisions of the de facto government.[302] From their perspective, as described by an analyst interviewed by Landinfo in 2022, gender segregating restrictions are needed for women to be able to leave their homes at all, as gender segregation must be maintained for women to access public spaces.[303] In order to uphold gender segregation, women have been barred from parks, gyms, public baths,[304] and from accessing secondary education.[305] Restrictions have moreover been put on some women-led business, and women shopkeepers have been relocated to designated floors at some markets, including in Mazar-e Sharif,[306] and Herat City.[307] Female and male staff have also been segregated in public offices,[308] and at many health facilities patients are only to be treated by health staff of the same sex.[309]

The 'Morality law' forbids unrelated men and women from looking at each other. It further instructs women not to leave their home unless there is an 'urgent need', and in such cases she is 'duty bound to hide her voice, face and body'. Unaccompanied or uncovered women are, moreover, not to be offered transport by commercial vehicles, nor are they to 'sit or mingle' with unrelated men.[310] According to the Afghan analyst, the restrictions on intermingling do not apply to public settings where many people are present at the same time.[311] However, a de facto MPVPV official interviewed by the AAN described women presence in markets in Kabul City as a problem, citing it as evidence that their approach of enforcing *sharia* through advisory measures was not being effective in the capital.[312]

In some more conservative areas, restrictions generally conform with local customs,[313] and have therefore not brought a notable difference.[314] In more conservative areas, women would already barely go outdoors due to social norms,[315] including many women in southern provinces who live in *purdah* – meaning that they are secluded from all men except close relatives.[316] Nevertheless, some women also in conservative areas have been noting some stricter enforcement, being particularly upset over the de facto MPVPV's authority to advise and

question them,317 and conservative families told the AAN that they were concerned about the de facto MPVPV enforcers' authority to question their relationships and interrogate female family members.318

A joint telesurvey with women and men across Afghanistan, carried out by UN Women, IOM and UNAMA, suggested that the enforcement of gender segregating restrictions significantly intensified within months following the introduction of the 'Morality law' in 2024,319 including women's access to public spaces, mostly being felt in the Western, Central, and Southeastern regions.320

b) Dress codes and appearance

Dress codes for women

Women were instructed to cover their faces (preferably with a *burqa*) through a decree in May 2022.321 The 'Morality law' of 31 July 2024, reiterated that women should cover their entire body and faces, and that women's clothes should not be 'thin, short or tight'.322 The enforcement of restrictions on women's clothing has varied depending on the local context.323 As described by a de facto government official, the interpretation of *hijab* differs across the country, although according to him most interpretations were in conflict with *sharia*.324 In more conservative areas the obligations generally conform with local customs,325 as women in general already wear fully covering garments,326 for example in Kandahar Province.327

The joint telesurvey with women and men across Afghanistan, carried out by UN Women, IOM and UNAMA, suggested that the enforcement of the restrictions on wearing 'proper *hijab*' intensified following the introduction of the 'Morality law', mostly being felt in Western, Central Highland north, and Northeastern regions.328 Sources identified the *hijab* requirement as one of the most policed aspects in 2025.329 A woman from a village in Baghlan Province told the AAN that women were forced to wear *burqa* when going outdoors,330 and in some areas in the provinces of Bamyan and Ghazni, women had reportedly been instructed to wear black gloves, which is more restrictive than the attire outlined in the 'Morality Law'.331

Kabul City remained distinct from other parts of Afghanistan as regards appearance, with many women continuing to wear *hijab* covering their hair together with a medical facemask to cover their faces.332 There was reportedly also a new trend among young women in city areas dressing in the fully covering Arab-style *abaya*.333 Melissa Kerr Chiovenda, owner and lead researcher of Ereuna Research and Consulting (LLC) and affiliated faculty of anthropology at George Mason University, Fairfax, Virginia, stated that there was a bit of 'breathing space' for women in the centre of Kabul City as women did not wear 'full *hijab*' and did generally not face harassment for it.334 Meanwhile, in interviews with the AAN in 2025, some de facto MPVPV enforcers complained about how many Kabuli women were not wearing 'proper' *hijab*, and that many women would push back and respond rudely to their advice.335

The *chador* is mandatory in Herat City since May 2025, according to the UN Secretary-General's report, and non-compliance has reportedly 'led to detention and restricted access to markets and public transport'.336 The local de facto authorities reportedly issued further restrictions on 5 November 2025 requiring women entering public hospitals to wear a *burqa*.337 A local

journalist suggested to BBC News on 12 November 2025, that the restrictions had laxed following criticism,338 while Human Rights Watch, citing exile media, reported on the restrictions expanding to all de facto government offices and to female teachers in primary schools. The same source, again citing exile media, reported on a female surgeon being arrested for hours earlier the same month for not wearing a *burqa*.339

There have been sporadic targeted enforcement campaigns of the *hijab* requirement, in Kabul City and other areas in the country, where women have been arrested for not wearing 'proper hijab' in January 2024,340 and again in Kabul City341 and Herat City in July–September 2025.342 According to UNAMA, more than 60 women and girls were arrested by the de facto MPVPV in 16–19 July 2025 in Kabul City. Some were arrested for a few hours and others overnight, and all were released upon the arrival of male relatives signing written guarantees of their future behaviour. UNAMA further reported on a group of women being detained in Herat City in September 2025, and on the de facto MPVPV establishing checkpoints to monitor women's *hijab* in the Jebrael area of the city,343 which is mainly inhabited by ethnic Hazaras.344 Sources suggested that these intermittent enforcement efforts are applied to spread fear and, in turn, make people abide to the restrictions.345

Dress codes for men

In the 'Morality law' from July 2025, men are instructed to cover their bodies from the waist down to their knees, knees included. It moreover indicates that men are not to wear very tight clothes or clothes that make certain parts of the body apparent during 'pastimes and exercise'. The law further stipulated that one is not to imitate non-Muslims in one's appearance or character, or wear non-Islamic symbols such as crucifixes and neckties.346 The de facto MPVPV has also issued advisory instructions for barbers not to cut men's beard or do 'western style' haircuts.347 The 'Morality law' also identified the 'wrongful acts' of 'shaving one's beard or reducing it to less than the width of a fist', and 'styling one's hair in an un-Islamic manner'.348 Since March 2025, high school students and teachers must wear traditional uniforms as per a directive of the de facto Ministry of Education; reportedly a light-blue *shalwar kameez* and a cap or turban depending on their age.349 The directive was reportedly enforced to a varying degree in initial months.350

Some men have started to dress traditionally to avoid problems with the de facto authorities,351 or to gain benefits by looking like the power elite.352 A de facto MPVPV enforcer, however, told the AAN in 2025 that the city street view of Kabul City had not changed much in recent years, as men were still clean-shaved and 'copying female styles'.353 In 2025, sources reported that men's beards had become one of the most policed aspects.354 UNAMA noted that half of all arbitrary arrests made by the de facto MPVPV in the six months following the enactment of the 'Morality law' were related to non-compliant beards and hairstyles.355 A man from Ghazni Province, interviewed by the AAN in 2025, stated that he had lost his job for violating beard and clothing restrictions, as he liked to wear 'the latest fashion' at the time. He had been stopped twice and threatened with prison for slightly trimming his beard and had thereafter chosen to adapt to the restrictions.356 According to UNAMA, hundreds of men were arrested in Kandahar City in 1–12 July 2025 for shaving or trimming their beards. Their time in arrest ranged from a few hours up to three days, and they were reportedly released after promising to grow their

beards. UNAMA further reported on a public trial in Kunar Province in September 2025, against three barbershop owners charged with providing grooming services. The accused were sentenced to imprisonment ranging from three to five months.357 Afghan media in exile, Amu TV, reported on a barber being detained in Faryab Province in July 2025, along with his customers, for shaving a beard.358

Some men have reportedly continued to cut their beards, clean shave and wear 'western style haircuts' in Kabul City, but there have been a general trend among men to dress more conservatively and to grow a beard.359 Some Afghan athletes were clean-shaved or had trimmed beards and wore 'western-style' haircuts in 2025, for example members of the Afghan Futsal team,360 and the Afghan U19 cricket team.361

c) The ban on images of living beings

The 'Morality law' of 31 July 2024 instructed media not to publish reports that 'contain pictures of animate objects',362 and proscribes 'making pictures or videos of any animate object on computers or mobile phones, or any other such device'.363 The ban has not been uniformly enforced and some de facto officials have continued to appear in news broadcasts and post photographs on social media.364

The ban has been implemented by TV stations closing down or altering their content.365 This primarily concerns local branches of the state broadcaster Radio Television Afghanistan closing down as reported by AW,366 but there have also been reported cases of local television outlets shifting to radio broadcasting367 or only displaying natural landscapes with voice-over368 or only airing audio.369 National TV has reportedly continued to air visual content, such as TOLOnews and Ariana.370 Afghan media in exile reported on the ban being enforced in 23 provinces, with a complete ban of broadcasting images of living beings being enforced in Paktya,371 Nuristan, Sar-e Pul, Bamyan, Laghman, Zabul, Uruzgan, Helmand, Jawzjan, Faryab, Badghis, Farah, Daykundi, Kapisa, Panjsher, Kandahar, and Maidan Wardak.372 Inconsistent broadcasting was reported in seven provinces (Nimruz, Kunar, Logar, Nangarhar, Kunduz, Badakshan, Samangan), while media in remaining provinces still displayed images of people.373 Other sources suggested that the ban had also been enforced in Takhar Province.374 As noted by Ruttig in an interview with ACCORD in October 2024, the difficult information environment make certain issues 'impossible' to investigate on a national scale, as much information is anecdotal – including on the ban on images of living beings.375

d) Congregational prayer

The 'Morality law' sets out several provisions on religious practice, including praying. It *inter alia* identifies the 'wrongful acts' of not praying, delaying one's prayers, omitting mandatory prayers, not praying in congregation, or neglecting obligatory fasts. The law further specifies that the de facto MPVPV is to make sure that public transport adjust timetables so that people can observe prayers. People may be referred to court if, 'without any valid excuse', they 'repeatedly omit[s] saying daily obligatory and mandatory prayers', 'repeatedly omit[s] joining in congregational prayers'. This also applies to communities who 'collectively omit[s] saying the call to prayer or offering congregational prayers'. People may also be referred to court if they do not fast during Ramadan, or fail to 'perform all the virtuous acts that are required of him or do[es] not avoid all

the iniquitous acts from which he should refrain'.376

The AAN reported on congregational prayer for men as one of the most policed aspects of the de facto MPVPV.377 Businesses have been subject to regular inspections to ensure that they close during prayer times,378 and to record staff attendance.379 Local aid organisations have also been facing such routine visits to control gender segregation and staff attendance at prayers. 380 The Afghan analyst explained that in areas with large populations, such as Kabul City, not everyone attends the mosque when there are calls for prayers (*azan*), and those who omit prayers do not typically face consequences. In contrast, inhabitants in smaller villager or more conservative areas could experience greater control and pressure to attend prayers.381

e) Music

In the initial years following the Taliban takeover, music was only unofficially banned,382 and 'taken for granted'383 as the Taliban movement perceived music as prohibited by *sharia*.384 The 'Morality law' from 31 July 2024, however, specified music 'emanating from any gathering or from the home' as a 'wrongful act'. The same law instructed de facto MPVPV officials to ensure that drivers of commercial vehicles do not play music.385

Many musicians left Afghanistan after the Taliban takeover386 or stopped performing,387 and music generally stopped being played in public spaces.388 After the Taliban takeover, music schools closed,389 and in some instances, Taliban fighters subjected musicians to public shaming, physical violence, and arrests.390 Music instruments were also destroyed391 and burned.392 In August 2024, the de facto MPVPV claimed that it had destroyed over 21 000 instruments in the past year alone.393

The enforcement of the 'Morality law's' provisions on music has been inconsistent, although the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in Afghanistan noted that it increased in 2025, 'in particular in the south-eastern, eastern and western regions'. This included forced shutdown of several radio stations that had been playing music.394 Music has continued to be played in some closed settings,395 in private homes396 and at wedding halls.397 Sometimes people reportedly managed to pass arrangements with local de facto authorities to play music at a wedding parties for instance.398 Meanwhile, arrests of individuals playing or listening to music have continued to be reported.399 For example, 14 individuals were reportedly arrested in July 2025 for having played music in a private home in northern Takhar Province,400 and according to Amnesty International young men have been flogged in public for listening to music.401

The de facto authorities have encouraged musicians to shift to reciting religious songs or poems. 402 This is a form of unaccompanied sung poetry, which they perceive as permissible. *Nasheeds* 403 or *taranas* are variants of sung poetry, the latter being the most popular form according to AAN expert Sabawoon Samim, with 'melodies and texts deeply rooted in Pashtun folk culture'. Samim further explained that it is 'the closest permissible thing to music', frequently heard in weddings, taxis, and radio shows in the absence of other forms of allowed music. Some new variants duplicate 'musical compositions of Pashto, Dari and Hindi songs' accompanied by beatboxing instead of instruments. Such variants have however been officially banned, although they have 'a wide fanbase' including among Taliban members.404

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