

4.8. Ethnic and religious groups

4.8.1. General situation under Taliban rule

The de facto government is led by a thirty-three-member caretaker cabinet, composed of men who are predominantly ethnic Pashtuns,[1600](#) and Taliban members or individuals loyal to the group.[1601](#) Most senior de facto officials, moreover, originate from Kandahar,[1602](#) and other southern and southeastern Pashtun-majority provinces, whereas northern and central provinces have ‘little to no representation’, as noted by Amu TV.[1603](#) Non-Pashtun members of the cabinet include a small number of ethnic Tajiks and Uzbeks,[1604](#) and three Hazaras serve as deputy ministers.[1605](#) Sikhs and Hindus have no representation in the cabinet.[1606](#) According to the Middle East Institute (MEI), out of approximately 1 185 individuals mapped in the Taliban leadership as of September 2025, around 90 % were Pashtuns, 5.3 % Tajiks, 2.5 % Uzbeks, 0.6 % Hazaras, and 0.4 % Turkmen.[1607](#)

Due to their limited representation in public positions, ethnic and religious minorities face marginalisation in decision-making processes.[1608](#) Local communities are reportedly slightly better represented in the provinces, although they do not necessarily feel represented solely based on shared ethnicity,[1609](#) especially as local officials have often been appointed outside their home areas.[1610](#) In Hazara-dominated areas some local Hazaras were appointed to de facto administration positions on district or provincial level[1611](#) and some low-level de facto government positions.[1612](#) However, Hazaras have largely been excluded from the de facto administration,[1613](#) from senior positions, as well as within the police and intelligence service.[1614](#) Furthermore, in many Ismaili-populated districts of Badakhshan Province, Ismailis have reportedly no representation in local offices.[1615](#)

Rawadari reported that, although the de facto authorities ‘prioritize ideological loyalty and a history of membership over ethnic and religious affiliation in their hiring process’, they have been acting discriminatorily in appointments and dismissals procedures since 2021,[1616](#) relying on religious and ethnic criteria.[1617](#) Primarily Pashtuns have been appointed in hiring processes,[1618](#) and employees of ethnic and religious minorities have sometimes been collectively dismissed.[1619](#) In the first half of 2025, several de facto government departments, including the de facto Ministry of Higher Education and universities, were restructured and many positions eliminated, disproportionately affecting non-Pashtun staff members in provinces such as Kabul, Panjshir, and Bamyan.[1620](#) Collective dismissals of Hazaras from local de facto government offices have been also reported in Daykundi, Bamyan, and Ghazni provinces.[1621](#) During 2025, the de facto authorities dismissed many university professors, including in Bamyan.[1622](#) This reportedly included many Hazara professors who were either dismissed or offered transfer to universities in Pashtun-dominated areas.[1623](#)

Religious freedom has been curtailed since the Taliban takeover, with a de facto government ‘who vigorously assert their interpretation of the Hanafi school of Sunni Islam’, as reported by Freedom House.[1624](#) As a result, religious and ethnic minority groups have faced severe restrictions on their freedoms.[1625](#) Saleem and Semple noted that, while a majority of Afghans adhere to the Hanafi sect, Shias and Salafis constitute two major religious minorities, and they have been ‘affected by the Taliban efforts to favour the Hanafi sect’, including pressure on Salafi *madrassas* to conform with Hanafi doctrines, and excluding Shia jurisprudence from the justice system and removing references to Shia teachings from school curriculums.[1626](#)

The UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in Afghanistan noted that Afghan stakeholders have been voicing concern about ethnic and religious grievances linked to ‘discrimination, exclusion, violence and the lack of protection, as well as lack of recognition of past violations’. Although the de facto authorities have ‘emphasized unity, stability and equal rights’, they appeared ‘unwilling to acknowledge or address such grievances’.¹⁶²⁷ Likewise, sources noted that the de facto authorities have not sufficiently documented or addressed cases of crimes and targeted attacks against minorities.¹⁶²⁸

Sources have also emphasised that women from minority communities face intersecting and various forms of discrimination.¹⁶²⁹ This discrimination was reported in the forms of ‘structural exclusion’, gender-based violence, denial of education on the basis of both gender and ethnicity¹⁶³⁰ and access to healthcare.¹⁶³¹

The UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in Afghanistan noted ‘instances of hate speech and discrimination among Afghans, including online’. De facto officials have also used derogatory terms for ethnic and religious minorities.¹⁶³² This included the de facto Minister of the MPVPV who was cited by media as comparing non-Muslims with ‘four-legged animals’.¹⁶³³

The de facto authorities have increasingly promoted Pashto as the primary language in official communication¹⁶³⁴ – replacing other languages in signs and official correspondence.¹⁶³⁵ Research for RWI suggested that this reflected a broader pattern linked to the predominance of Pashtun officials in the de facto administration, and that Tajiks, Hazaras and other minority groups have been most negatively affected.¹⁶³⁶ In predominately Hazara-populated areas, such as Daykundi, there is a requirement for government interactions to be in Pashto instead of Dari.¹⁶³⁷ According to the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights, speakers of minority languages have further noted that media programming and education in their languages ‘have become rarer’.¹⁶³⁸

In 2024, ISKP attacks targeting members of religious minorities continued to be reported,¹⁶³⁹ especially against Shia Muslims, who are predominantly ethnic Hazaras, and also Sufis.¹⁶⁴⁰ During 2025, the number of ISKP attacks has reportedly decreased, targeting mostly the de facto authorities.¹⁶⁴¹ Within the reference period of this report the UN Secretary-General recorded continuous ISKP attacks targeting the de facto authorities, and one attack targeting ethnic minorities: the Sufi community.¹⁶⁴²

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