

4.8.3. Blood feuds

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In August 2025, AAN expert Sharif Akram described blood feuds or revenge killings as closely connected to notions of honour, pride and shame ‘as seen through tribal customs and centuries-old traditions in Afghan society’. Although blood feuds exist to some extent among all ethnic groups in Afghanistan, they ‘have been historically widespread’ among Pashtun tribes, especially in the south, east and southeast, representing a ‘defining feature’ of Pashtun tribal tradition’. Blood revenge is enshrined in *Pashtunwali* (traditional social, cultural, and quasi-legal code regulating the Pashtun way of life) and is called *badal*.1714 Blood feuds sometimes can start with minor incidents or disagreements escalating into long-lasting enmities.1715 These feuds do not have a specific time limit to end1716 and may last for generations.1717 Blood feuds that are not resolved, often gradually involve more family members, while they can expand from family to clan and tribe level.1718 They are frequently initiated by disputes linked to honour-related issues, often involving women or girls, the killing of a relative, land disputes, 1719 inheritance,1720 water rights, and family conflicts.1721

Akram, based on research carried out in Khost province, suggested that, in the past decades, there had been ‘shifts in cultural norms’ in Afghan society which had led to a noticeable decline in blood feuds. The same source however highlighted that, due to lack of data and documentation information, ‘as well as the complex and deeply personal nature of these conflicts’, estimating this decline is challenging. Moreover, the nature of blood feuds has reportedly changed, with their frequency and length decreasing and becoming more ‘contained’ in terms of persons involved. Increased ‘access to education, exposure to other cultures and values and inter-tribal connectivity’ were identified as some of the main factors of this change. 1722 However, since the Taliban takeover in 2021, blood feud cases had been re-emerging,1723 while confidential sources interviewed by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2023 indicated that cases previously processed by the former government were being reconsidered under the de facto authorities.1724

Blood feuds and retaliation killings are mainly resolved through informal *jirga* resolution, and in some cases through judicial proceedings.1725 Residents of Khost Province interviewed for the 2025 AAN report noted that, although new blood feuds were rare, many such conflicts remained from previous generations. However, these unresolved feuds had become less violent as tribal elders, youth and *jirgas* were ‘playing a more active role in mediation and conflict resolution’. 1726 In February 2024, the de facto Ministry of Borders and Tribal Affairs (MoBTA), as cited by local media, claimed to have resolved 1 271 disputes with the help of religious scholars and elders across the country since the Taliban takeover in 2021.1727 In certain cases blood feuds

can be resolved or averted through the practice of ‘blood price’, which refers to a form of compensation paid by a person or a member of a family whose rights have been violated,1728 or through compensation in form of property or land.1729 They may also be resolved through the practice of *baad*, which refers to the exchange of girls and women between families or clans.1730 For instance, the family of the person accused of murder or manslaughter gives a bride to a male member of the victim’s family in order to end the feud.1731 In 2022, AAN expert Ali Mohammad Sabawoon noted that *baad* marriages were relatively rare and had become rarer in recent years.1732 However, the Austrian Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum in a 2024 report, indicated that forced marriage of girls to settle feuds was ‘still common among Pashtuns’, who ‘believe that this principle can keep families safe and imposes a heavy penalty on the violator’.1733 In December 2021, the de facto authorities issued a decree on Women’s Rights,1734 outlawing some traditional practices, including *baad*,1735 as un-Islamic.1736

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