

4.8.4. Hazaras and other Shia groups

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a) Background

The majority of Hazaras in Afghanistan are Shia Muslims (Twelver branch).1737 A significant number follow the Ismaili Shia school of thought, while others are Sunni Muslims.1738 Most Hazaras are Dari speakers.1739

The Hazara community has historically faced discrimination and repression under various rules in Afghanistan,1740 most notably under the rule of Amir Abdur Rahman Khan in the 19th century,1741 when Hazaras were enslaved, subjected to mass killings, and pushed to mass exodus.1742 The Taliban also engaged in massacres of Hazara civilians during their previous rule in 1996–2001.1743 Before the Taliban takeover in 2021, Hazaras were targeted by attacks by both the Taliban and the ISKP.1744 Political influence of Hazaras improved under the Islamic Republic,1745 although they faced discrimination.1746

b) Policies and discrimination by the de facto authorities

Following their takeover, the Taliban held a series of meetings with Shia Hazara leaders from various parts of the country,1747 and pledged to provide security for all citizens, including Hazaras,1748 and expressing their willingness to avoid sectarian divisions.1749 Hazaras' limited participation in de facto government positions1750 has negatively impacted their access to government services,1751 including in obtaining official documents, such as passports.1752 More information on representation of Hazaras is available in section 4.8.1. General situation under Taliban rule. Sources noted a discrepancy between the Taliban leadership's public stance towards Shia Hazaras and the actual treatment of these communities by their rank-and-file.1753 Kerr Chiovenda noted that there are sentiments among parts of the population that Hazaras are not 'proper' Muslims.1754

The Taliban have stated that Shia Muslims are free to practice their beliefs,1755 but they have been restricting 'religious practices that they considered discordant with their views'.1756 Some Shia ceremonies and celebrations were allowed to take place,1757 mainly in private spaces or in Shia mosques.1758 However, the de facto authorities restricted the observance of *Muharram* and *Ashura* commemorations by monitoring celebrations,1759 prohibiting holding ceremonies in open spaces1760 or hindering participation in the ceremonies and removing religious symbols, including in Kabul, Herat, Ghazni, Parwan, Nimruz, Ghor, and Bamyan provinces.1761 In November 2024, the de facto authorities arrested two Shia clerics in Jebrael Herat Province.1762 Although the reason for their arrest was not clarified,1763 local sources told exile Afghan media

that the clerics had previously protested against the restrictions on the *Ashura* commemoration.[1764] In March 2025, the de facto authorities in Ghazni Province instructed members of the Shiite council of scholars to begin Ramadan and hold the Eid prayer according to Hanafi jurisprudence, forcing Shiites to perform Eid prayers one day earlier than their religious practice foresaw, and arresting three Shiite religious scholars for not complying.[1765] In June 2025, similar arrests were reported in Daykundi province.[1766] Furthermore, a local ban on intermarriages between Shias, including Ismailis,[1767] and Sunnis was reported in Paktia, Nimruz,[1768] and Badakhshan provinces.[1769]

Shia Ja'fari jurisprudence has been excluded from the de facto judiciary,[1770] as well as from school and university curricula, being replaced with Hanafi jurisprudence.[1771] The de facto authorities have instructed educational institutions to remove materials and books conflicting with Hanafi jurisprudence and considered contrary to the regime's principles and policies,[1772] particularly those associated with the Shia sect,[1773] including in Bamyan, Daykundi, Ghazni, and Ghor provinces.[1774] In October 2024, the Taliban have distributed a list of 400 banned books to libraries and bookstores prohibiting their sale and mandating their removal,[1775] including those related to the Shia branch of Islam.[1776]

Shia Hazaras have moreover faced discrimination.[1777] Rafiey noted that particularly Hazaras are vulnerable to discrimination in Afghanistan, as they are one of the largest minority, and also due to their historical experiences of facing oppression (including under the current de facto administration) owing to their ethnicity, and their classification as 'infidels' by the Taliban.[1778] Kerr Chiovenda noted that, although no current large-scale massacres have occurred, past violence against the group by the Taliban suggests a possibility that this may recur in the future.[1779]

Sources described a perception that Hazaras benefitted too much under the former government, which needed to be revised,[1780] resulting in Hazaras being 'systematically treated differently' by the local Taliban.[1781] As noted by Kerr Chiovenda, the de facto authorities' treatment of Hazaras has enabled people in ethnically mixed areas 'to express their anti-Hazara prejudice'.[1782] Hazaras have for example been facing derogatory terms relating to their facial features,[1783] and their Shia identity.[1784] Meanwhile, Saleem and Semple also reported on Hazaras being discriminated by the de facto authorities, but suggested that this was only 'tangentially related to sectarian differences' and 'far more plausibly explained by the history of ethnic competition'.[1785]

Some sources suggested that the de facto authorities have intentionally excluded religious and ethnic minorities from humanitarian aid.[1786] For example, Rawadari reported that the de facto Rural Rehabilitation and Development Directorate in Ghazni distributing cash and food aid to nearly 10 000 families in several districts, excluded Hazara and other ethnic and religious minority communities from the initiative.[1787] Likewise, the same source reported on aid mainly being directed to non-Hazara districts in Bamyan and Ghor provinces,[1788] as well as development projects, such as road construction and water systems, being allocated to Pashtun-majority districts in Ghazni Province, while only a few small-scale projects were implemented in Shia- and Tajik-majority areas.[1789] In Badakhshan and Parwan provinces, Ismaili-majority districts were similarly excluded, with development and public projects directed to Taliban-

favoured districts.1790 More information on aid delivery and aid diversion is available in section 3.6. in the 2024 EUAA COI Report: Afghanistan – Country Focus.

Moreover, since 2021, the de facto authorities carried out forced evictions affecting Hazaras.1791 A joint investigation of redevelopment projects in Kabul City between 2021–2024, carried out by the Guardian, AW, Lighthouse Reports and Afghan media outlets, suggested that large areas of the capital were razed and many residential properties and 'informal settlements' often inhabited by poorer or displaced families demolished, with reports alleging deaths and injuries during eviction operations, leaving thousands homeless. The investigation also suggested that there were signs that 'the destruction is in part linked to ethnicity', as three of the six most affected districts were populated predominantly by Hazaras, and two by Tajiks.1792

c) Reported attacks and other incidents

Hazara women have been facing intersecting discrimination due to both their gender and minority status.1793 There have been claims that de facto MPVPV particularly targeted Hazara young women during enforcement operations of the *hijab* decree.1794 Such an operation was reported in January 2024 in predominantly Hazara and Tajik areas of Kabul City and other areas.1795 Some women reported being beaten, abused, and subjected to derogatory anti-Hazara remarks during detention.1796 Kerr Chiovenda noted that over-policing of dress codes was reported in Hazara-populated neighbourhoods, and Hazara women have been disproportionally affected by arrests and imprisonment, and faced derogatory comments and treatment while imprisoned.1797

As mentioned, ethnic and religious minorities have been targeted in attacks often claimed by or attributed to the ISKP,1798 and Human Rights Watch has criticised the de facto authorities for not providing the Shia Hazara community with sufficient protection from such attacks1799 which had killed or injured at least 700 Hazaras as of 2022.1800 These attacks have however declined since its peak in 2022,1801 although sporadic attacks have resurfaced in periods.1802 The UN did not report on any violent attacks targeting the Shia Hazara community within the reference period of this report,1803 although the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in Afghanistan noted that unidentified individuals shot and reportedly beheaded a Shia imam in Nusay District, Badakhshan Province, in June 2025, leaving an ISKP flag at the scene.1804

d) Ismailis

Roughly 90 % of Ismaili Shias in Afghanistan are ethnically Hazara, living mostly in the Hazarajat region; some Ismaili communities also reside in Badakhshan Province and are classified as ethnic Tajiks.1805 Followers of the Ismaili Shia school of thought faced ideological pressure by the de facto authorities, including conversion attempts to Sunni Islam, in Badakhshan1806 (which is predominantly inhabited by Tajiks1807) and Baghlan provinces.1808 As reported by UNAMA, 50 Ismaili men were forced to convert to Sunni Islam by the local de facto authorities in Badakhshan Province in the period 17 January–3 February 2025. The men were 'questioned on religious topics. Those who refused to convert were subject to physical assaults, coercion and death threats'.1809 Rawadari also indicated that, since 2024 and as of the first six months of 2025, at least 203 Ismailis in Shughnan, Ishkashim, Khahan, Nasi, and Maimay districts of Badakhshan Province had been forced to convert.1810 According to Kabul Now, local sources claimed that the de facto authorities link 'the provision of humanitarian aid to this community

with their conversion to Sunni Islam'.1811 Foschini however reported that '[t]he battle for local influence and political survival' in Badakhshan 'also plays out in the field of education', and the de facto authorities have emphasised control of religious schools nationally especially in this province, 'arguably because of concerns about rival or untrusted groups promoting "wrong" tenets or loyalties'.1812 The de facto authorities have established several *madrassas* across Badakhshan Province,1813 in predominantly Ismaili-populated areas, requiring Ismaili children to enrol and follow religious education based on the Sunni faith.1814 They have banned the construction of Ismaili mosques and other Ismaili religious sites in Badakhshan Province.1815 According to media sources, in June 2025 an Ismaili man, working as a security guard in the World Health Organization (WHO), was killed by unidentified perpetrators in Jalalabad, Nangarhar Province, after allegedly being tortured.1816 UNAMA reported that as of 28 October 2025, no one had been arrested in connection with the killing.1817 A prominent member of the Ismaili community was shot and killed in July 2025 by unidentified armed individuals in Badakhshan Province.1818

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