3.7. Critics of the Taliban including protesters, activists, human rights defenders, and human rights lawyers

COMMON ANALYSIS
Last update: June 2026

This profile addresses the topic of perceived criticism of the Taliban. It also refers to individuals who engage in activities aimed at promoting, protecting or enforcing human rights and fundamental freedoms (such as freedom of expression or the right to education, for example teachers advocating for women and girls' education). It encompasses, *inter alia*, human rights defenders, human rights lawyers, and protesters publicly advocating for human rights. It also includes criticism expressed via social media. Situation of family members is also addressed.

The analysis below is based on the following EUAA COI products: COI Update 2026, 1.; Country Focus 2026, 1.1.1., 1.1.2., 1.2.1., 1.3., 4.1.5., 4.7.; Country Focus 2024, 1.1.3., 4.1.7., 4.8., 4.10., 4.11.; Country Guidance should not be referred to as a source of COI.

Since the Taliban takeover, the space for civil society in Afghanistan has drastically shrunk, with many organisations closing, suspending activities, or limiting their work to humanitarian and development efforts under strict restrictions. Human rights defenders have been targeted, forcing many to flee, while those who remain are unable to operate openly. In the immediate aftermath of the takeover, protests led largely by women's rights activists were violently suppressed, and broader opposition mostly disappeared.

Criticism of the *de facto* authorities is not tolerated and may attract retaliation. Even moderate dissent, including through media and online platforms, can lead to reprisals, creating a climate of fear and widespread self-censorship. A 2022 ban on defamation and unproven criticism of officials further restricted freedom of expression. Repression intensified in 2025 with the adoption of stricter policies. The GDI plays a central role in suppressing dissent, while the authorities rely on intelligence gathering, surveillance, and community reporting to identify critics, leading many individuals to go into hiding or flee the country.

Additionally, in 2026, the *de facto* government issued a 'Criminal Procedure Code for Courts'. Although there is currently no available information about its implementation, it is reported that the code authorises the de facto authorities to kill opponents, critics, and human rights activists. It also prescribes six months imprisonment and corporal punishments for those insulting the

Taliban leaders. Those who witness or have knowledge of “subversive” meetings and activities of “opponents of the regime”, but do not report to the Taliban are considered as ‘criminals’ and may be sentenced to two years imprisonment.

Step 1: Do the reported acts amount to persecution?

Acts to which human rights defenders, including human rights lawyers, activists, protesters and other critics of the Taliban could be exposed are of such severe nature that they would amount to persecution. Human rights defenders and activists have been subjected to extrajudicial killings, torture and other ill-treatment, arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances, and destruction of property. Arrests, disappearances and torture have been used to silence and deter civil engagement, with non-violent opponents reportedly targeted in a systematic manner. Since February 2023, there have been reports of increased surveillance and targeting of LGBTIQ+ activists and community members, including through arrest, violence and other forms of humiliation. There are moreover no protection mechanisms or laws in place for human rights defenders under the *de facto* government, which controls and monitors ‘any remnant of civil society’.

The *de facto* authorities have also violently suppressed protests, including those related to women’s rights, through arrests and, in some cases, the use of live ammunition against protesters. Protesters have reportedly faced torture, including sexual violence, imprisonment, threats against family members, and other forms of severe physical and psychological ill-treatment.

Individuals who criticise the Taliban online may be confronted with threats, house searches, arbitrary arrests and detentions. In the first half of 2025 numerous arrests were documented of individuals posting critical content on social media or for illegitimate activities online, and content creation. Afghans speaking out against the Taliban ‘face arbitrary arrest, physical and sexual violence, arbitrary and indefinite detention’, as well as torture and other ill-treatment. Some critics have been subjected to arbitrary arrest and detention, harassment, intimidation, and violence.

Harassment, intimidation and detention have also been reported against individuals, including teachers, advocating for girls’ education and modern education. A high school teacher was sentenced to death for alleged blasphemy after making comments on modern education.

Human rights lawyers in Afghanistan reportedly face a dire situation, characterised by significant risks and hardship in the exercise of their profession, and have been targeted due to their role in defending human rights.

Family members of perceived critics have also been targeted through threats, detention, and reprisals. Sources report that relatives of, *inter alia*, human rights defenders and activists have faced threats, intimidation, detention, and other forms of retaliation aimed at silencing critics. Some family members have been arrested together with women activists, including due to the fact that men may be held accountable for women’s activities.

Step 2: What is the level of risk of persecution?

Due to the persistent crackdown of the Taliban on activities related to human rights, a **well-founded fear of persecution** would in general be substantiated for **human rights defenders, including human rights lawyers and activists as well as protesters publicly advocating for human rights**.

For other individuals perceived as critics of the Taliban the individual assessment of whether there is a reasonable degree of likelihood to face persecution should take into account **risk-impacting circumstances**, such as:

- **Sensitivity of the topic**: persons publicly criticising the de facto authorities, e.g. on issues related to women's rights or general human rights or expressing critics that may be considered as un-Islamic are particularly vulnerable.
- **Extent of public nature**: in light of the lack of a sophisticated digital surveillance system available to the Taliban, the extent of the public nature and the outreach of the online content may be taken in consideration.
- **Visibility**: having a visible position when voicing criticism increases the risk.
- **Being known to the authorities** may increase the risk.

Family members of individuals under this profile may also have a well-founded fear of persecution. Family members of female activists may be particularly at risk, as they may also face repercussion, and men may be held accountable for women who do not follow the Taliban's edicts.

In the case of a female applicant under this profile, it is reminded that in light of the current situation, a well-founded fear of persecution would in general be substantiated for Afghan women and girls.

For additional information, see 3.13. Women and girls

Step 3: Is there a ground for persecution?

Where well-founded fear of persecution is substantiated for individuals under this profile, persecution is highly likely to be for reasons of **political opinion** and/or **religion**, as being a human rights defender, activist, protester, (perceived as) critical of the Taliban would be seen as opposing their 'theocratic police state'.

© European Union Agency for Asylum 2026 | Email: info@euaa.europa.eu