

# The “Prevention of Vice and Promotion of Virtue” Law in Afghanistan and Implications for Women’s Rights

August 2025

## Background: Why It’s a Problem

On 21 August 2024, three years after their return to power in Afghanistan, the Taliban issued the Law on the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (PVPV Law). Their Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice had already been enforcing many of its elements before the law was formally codified. This sweeping legislation both entrenches existing restrictions on fundamental rights and introduces new ones that are already being enforced, affecting nearly every aspect of life under Taliban rule. The law impacts men and boys, marginalized ethnic and religious communities, cultural rights, but it most severely impacts women’s rights.

In this factsheet, the provisions that specifically affect women are highlighted to show how the law intensifies systemic discrimination and control over their lives:

- **Some Key Facts**

The PVPV law institutionalizes religious policing by conferring upon the state sweeping powers over nearly every aspect of one’s daily life.

It does so through the appointment of over 3,300 men who have been specifically appointed by the Taliban to enforce the broad range of restrictions the law sets out, including rules that prohibit women from speaking in public.

In effect, the law erodes the right to privacy by empowering its enforcers to monitor individuals and punish them for their perceived transgressions from the law’s requirements.

The law’s restrictions have the overall effect of exacerbating Afghanistan’s ongoing humanitarian crisis by excluding women from education, employment, and public life, which international organizations have already linked to worsening poverty and inequality.

- **Article 13: Injunctions Concerning Women’s Dress and Covering**

This article lays out rigid codes concerning dress and behavior for women, including compulsory full-body and face covering, and the prohibition of women’s voices in public. Women are commanded to cover their entire body and face to prevent fitna (social disorder), wear clothing that is not thin, short, or tight, and conceal themselves from all men who are not close relatives. Women are also obligated to hide their bodies from non-Muslim or “loose” women. Additionally, this article stipulates that women are forbidden to sing, recite, or speak loudly in public, and are barred from looking at unrelated men, just as men are prohibited from looking at them. The law specifically states that even when forced to leave the house for urgent needs, women are obligated to hide their bodies, faces, and voices

- **Article 20: Restrictions on Women's Transportation and Male Guardianship**

This article extends the Taliban's system of control by imposing strict obligations on transportation providers, especially when it comes to the transportation of women. It prohibits drivers from transporting women unless they are fully covered, segregated from unrelated men, and accompanied by an adult male guardian of sound mind. In effect, this article imposes a system of male guardianship that severely restricts women's freedom of movement and consequently also seriously hampers their ability to access education, healthcare, employment, and the enjoyment of a social life.

- **Article 22: Criminalization of Cultural Practices and Personal Freedoms**

This Article criminalizes a wide range of behaviors, including ones that touch on individual freedoms, ranging from cultural practices such as observing "un-Islamic holidays" such as Nawroz, to listening to music, and even aspects of grooming for men (hair styles and length of beard).

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## **The PVPV Law Entrenches and Perpetuates Discrimination**



### **Legal enforcement of religious doctrine**

The law places the Taliban's interpretation of Hanafi jurisprudence above any other legal system, silencing other Islamic schools, minorities, and secular rights.



### **Discriminatory against women**

Women are targeted with stricter requirements than men (**Articles 13–15, 20**), reinforcing systemic gender inequality.



### **Suppression of minorities**

**Article 23** explicitly empowers enforcers to restrict religious minorities from practicing publicly.



### **No checks and balances**

Enforcement is controlled directly by the Amir al-Mu'minin, with no judicial independence or accountability. (**Articles 25–27, 34–35**).



### Politicized Judiciary

All judges from the former government, including around 270 women, have been dismissed and replaced with Taliban-affiliated men, mostly ethnic Pashtuns. These judges generally lack formal legal training and issue rulings based on Taliban edicts rather than established legal principles.



### Powers of the Ministry of Vice and Virtue

The Prevention of Vice and Promotion of Virtue Law empowers the Ministry of Vice and Virtue, which operates outside the judicial system as a separate entity, giving it broad authority to enforce Taliban edicts and impose restrictions on women and marginalized communities.



### Collective punishment

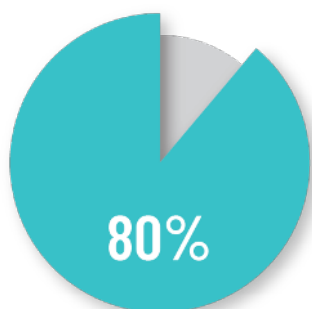
Communities can be punished for non-observance of religious rituals (Article 26).

This framework **turns morality policing into state policy**, perpetuating discrimination against women, minorities, and dissenters.

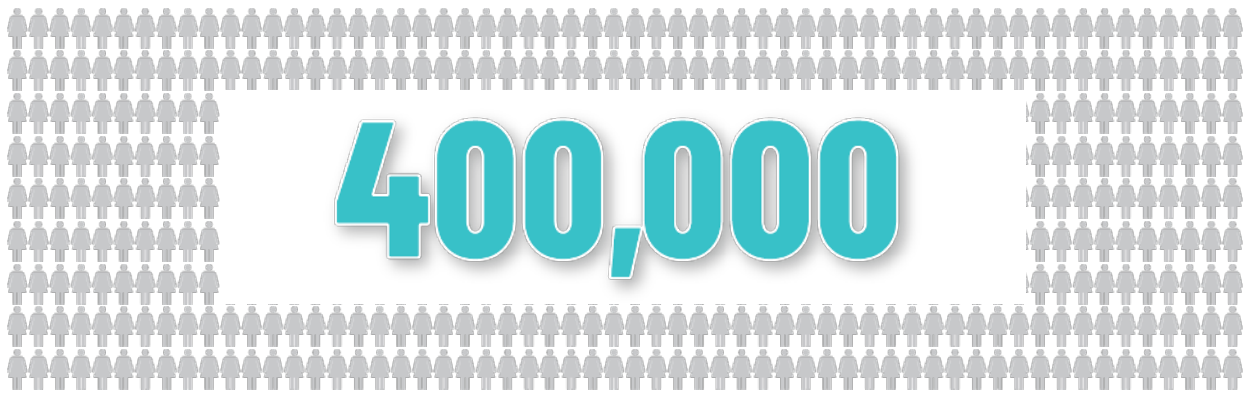
## Statistics

Afghan women had already been enduring extreme restrictions and systemic oppression under Taliban rule, and the Law on the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (PVPV Law) has only intensified their suffering.

Below are some of the ways life has become significantly harder for women since the Taliban codified their restrictions into the PVPV Law:



UN Women's Afghanistan Gender Index 2024 shows that nearly 80% of young women are excluded from education, employment, and training, almost four times the rate for men, and identifies Afghanistan as having the world's second-widest gender gap, with a 76% disparity across health, education, financial inclusion, and decision-making.



A March 2025 UNICEF press release notes that the ban on education has deprived nearly 400,000 additional girls at the start of the new school year, bringing the total to 2.2 million girls barred from secondary education.

## The Guardian

The Guardian reports that the Taliban's vice and virtue laws have created widespread fear in Afghan families, forcing women to fully cover, be accompanied by male relatives, and limiting their interactions. Many men act as unpaid enforcers at home, leading to greater isolation and restricted freedoms for women. The UN Special Rapporteur on Afghanistan's study of Prevention of Vice and Promotion of Virtue Law finds that its enforcement reflects the Taliban's systematic and ideological gender oppression. Many Afghans, especially women, describe this as gender apartheid, a term the Rapporteur agrees is accurate and supports codifying as a crime against humanity.

Femena has documented over 130 Taliban edicts issued from August 2021 through 2024, systematically restricting Afghan women's rights. The Prevention Vice and Promotion of Virtue Law codifies these edicts, imposing severe penalties for non-compliance and further entrenching gender-based oppression.

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## Trends in Practice

Since its codification, the PVPV Law has been systematically enforced across Afghanistan, producing widespread and gendered impacts on women and girls:

- Afghan Witness reported 130 alleged human rights violations linked to the PVPV Law, with 51 incidents where women were the primary victims. These occurred across 16 provinces, including Kabul, Herat, and Kandahar, between 21 August 2024 and 31 January 2025. Reports indicate that women and girls have been subjected to violence, arbitrary arrests, fines, and intrusive inspections in public spaces and workplaces.

- Public punishments, including floggings and executions, have been reported, with recent reports indicating an increase. (UNAMA, 2023–24).
- Female healthcare workers have been barred from participating in house-to-house vaccination campaigns and are now required to obtain travel permits from the PVPV to continue working. They face intensified restrictions, including gender segregation in healthcare facilities. Afghan women have also been banned from medical training.
- Women's mobility is shrinking, with reports of women even being denied health care if unaccompanied by a male guardian.
- Women have been warned not to be biometrically registered to receive humanitarian aid, and aid organizations have been ordered to ensure that men receive aid on behalf of their families.
- The law has led to the dismissal of female media workers, with reports of female anchors being banned from presenting news programs and the prohibition of women's voices on radio broadcasts in certain provinces.
- The morality police have expanded their surveillance to public spaces, transport, workplaces, and even family life, as outlined in Articles 16–22.

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## What Needs to Be Done

Addressing the massive curbs on equality and human rights requires the following steps:



### LEGAL REFORMS

The PVPV law must be abolished and replaced with rights-based legal frameworks in line with international human rights law.



### RESTORATION OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS

There must be a reversal of the 130 edicts issued against women, and their right to education, employment and free movement must be respected and guaranteed.



### RESPECT FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION & RELIGION

Safeguard minorities and media organizations from religious persecution.



### INTERNATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY

Diplomatic recognition and sanctions relief must be linked to concrete human rights improvements.

## Recommendations to Governments and the UN

- Do not recognize the Taliban regime until women's and minority rights are restored and an inclusive government is formed.
- Expand targeted sanctions and travel bans on Taliban leaders responsible for implementing this law.
- Support international legal mechanisms, including the ICC's recent arrest warrants for Taliban leaders, and ICJ avenues, to hold perpetrators accountable for crimes against humanity and systematic gender persecution.
- Provide funding to Afghan women-led civil society groups in exile and inside Afghanistan (where safe).
- Establish an independent accountability mechanism to complement the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on Afghanistan.
- Ensure humanitarian aid bypasses Taliban structures, reaching communities directly through community-based women-led initiatives.

## Recommendations to the Taliban

- Immediately suspend enforcement of the Prevention of Vice and Promotion of Virtue Law.
- Restore girls' and women's rights to education and work without limitations; repeal bans on movement and participation in public life.
- Respect Afghanistan's obligations under international treaties, including CEDAW.

## Recommendations to Afghan Civil Society, Professionals, and the Public

- **Civil society groups (inside and outside Afghanistan):** Document abuses, provide safe networks for women and minorities, and amplify voices internationally.
- **Religious scholars:** Advocate for Islamic interpretations that uphold women's dignity and rights, challenging the Taliban's monopolization of Hanafi jurisprudence.
- **Professionals (lawyers, educators, former civil servants):** Support underground education and community resilience programs.
- **General public & diaspora:** Use secure platforms to share information and maintain international attention on rights violations and broaden alliances across communities both inside and outside the country.