

GLOBAL TORTURE INDEX 2025: AFGHANISTAN FACTSHEET

OVERALL GLOBAL TORTURE INDEX SCORE:

VERY HIGH RISK

The Global Torture Index 2025 represents the first analysis designed to assess the risk of torture and ill-treatment across 26 countries worldwide. The following pages present the 2025 factsheet for Afghanistan, featuring an analysis of the country's overall performance, a breakdown by thematic pillars, and key recommendations for driving meaningful change in the fight against torture and the promotion of human rights.

COLLABORATING ORGANISATIONS IN AFGHANISTAN

Afghanistan Democracy and
Development Organisation (ADDO)

AT A GLANCE

After the Taliban seized power in Afghanistan in 2021, use of torture has been systematic and widespread. For 2025, the Global Torture Index classifies Afghanistan as facing a very high risk of torture and ill-treatment, based on data collected in 2023 and 2024.

The Taliban are not recognised as the legitimate government of Afghanistan by the majority of the international community. Many senior leaders remain under United Nations sanctions, limiting their capacity to formally engage with international mechanisms, including human rights bodies. Beyond these restrictions, the Taliban have demonstrated a **persistent unwillingness** to cooperate with international institutions or to comply with internationally recognised human rights standards.

Since August 2021, Taliban security forces, including the *de facto* General Directorate of Intelligence (GDI), *de facto* Ministry of Interior (MOI), *de facto* Ministry of Defense, and the *de facto* Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (MPVPV), have carried out widespread arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances, beatings, torture, and extrajudicial killings targeting former security and defence personnel, human rights defenders, ethnic and religious minorities, journalists, education advocates, women activists, and social media users.

Between January 2022 and July 2023, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) documented **over 1600 cases of human rights violations committed by the *de facto* authorities** during arrest and subsequent detention of individuals, **with nearly 50% involving torture or degrading treatment**. UNAMA further documented 218 extrajudicial executions, 144 cases of torture or inhumane treatment and 14 cases of enforced disappearances against individuals affiliated with the former government.

Approximately **23,000** individuals are held in **40 official prisons and 226 detention facilities** - including those for women and juveniles but excluding the *de facto* GDI detention facilities - across Afghanistan. The incarceration rate is 54 per 100,000 people. Of these detainees, 52.2% are being held in pre-trial detention. The prison population includes nearly 1,000 women (4.3%), 800 children (3.5%), and 150 foreign nationals (0.7%).

Detention conditions are particularly dire in *de facto* GDI facilities where detainees are held incommunicado, subjected to brutal torture methods such as beatings, electric shocks, waterboarding, and sexual violence, and denied any form of legal safeguards. Torture is not only used to extract confessions but also to **instill fear and punish dissent**, particularly targeting human rights defenders, women, and activists. Conditions inside these facilities are marked by overcrowding, lack of medical care, and constant intimidation, creating an environment of pervasive terror.

There is **no independent monitoring of prisons or detention facilities**, even though **Afghanistan has ratified the Optional Protocol of the Convention against Torture (OPCAT)**. Furthermore, the *de facto* authorities have not implemented their obligations under the Convention against Torture (UNCAT) or the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). They have **annulled the 2004 Constitution, dissolved key oversight institutions** - including the Independent Human Rights Commission and the National Assembly - and **banned political parties**. **Non-governmental organisations** (NGOs) operate under strict control, **civil society** and media face severe restrictions.

Afghanistan's 2017 **review** by the Committee against Torture (CAT) led to important **legal reforms**, but these have not been upheld under the current regime. Instead, legislative and policy decisions are now issued unilaterally through decrees by the Taliban supreme leader or individual ministries, such as the *de facto* MPVPV. At the same time, the legal status of pre-existing legislation remains unclear, creating ambiguity in the legal framework.

Torture victims have little access to justice or support due to the absence of rule of law, mistrust in the *de facto* authorities, and the lack of psychological or legal assistance. **With no independent judiciary, forensic capacity, or trained prosecutors, torture continues to be used as a routine tool of Taliban governance.**

There is a profound lack of access to reliable data and official statistics. While some decrees are published through the *de facto* Ministry of Justice, there is no systematic information on how these are implemented or enforced. The *de facto* authorities do not release official information on key issues such as the number, location, and capacity of prisons; the number of detainees held; or statistics on complaints and outcomes related to torture or ill-treatment. As a result, public knowledge about the justice and detention system remains extremely limited and fragmented.

GENERAL INFORMATION



Type of government:
De facto



United Nations Convention Against Torture:
Ratified



OPCAT ratification:
Ratified



Population:
42.76 million



People deprived of liberty:
23000



Prison population (per 100,000 of national population):
c. 54



Pre-trial detainees / remand prisoners (percentage of prison population):
c. 52.2%



Documented Detained Human Rights Defenders:
116



Alerts Issued by the Observatory for Human Rights Defenders in 2024:
9



Prison Occupancy level:
179.9%



Homicide rate (per 100,000 people):
NA

THEMATIC PILLAR OVERVIEW



I. POLITICAL COMMITMENT

INDEX SCORE: VERY HIGH RISK

The Taliban have made no credible political commitment to fight torture, either in law or in practice.

Although Afghanistan has ratified the UN Convention against Torture (UNCAT), the Optional Protocol of the Convention against Torture (OPCAT), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the *de facto* authorities have actively taken steps to undermine fundamental principles and safeguards enshrined in these instruments.

In May 2022, the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), the only national body with a mandate to investigate abuses including torture and other forms of ill-treatment, **was dissolved.** The [Law on the Prohibition of Torture](#) enacted in 2017 was annulled and replaced by the Decree on Code of Conduct on System Reform Relating to Prisoners (Prison Decree 2022) that contains some limited safeguards for persons in custody but falls short of criminalising torture. **Moreover, the Taliban dismantled the Ministry of Women's Affairs leaving women and girls particularly exposed to abuse and gendered forms of ill-treatment.** When coming to power, the Taliban replaced most [judges](#) with their own Sharia-trained judges without legal education.

Cooperation with the international community is very limited. The *de facto* authorities have banned the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan from entering the country. While UNAMA continues to operate and can access some detention facilities across several provinces, the *de facto* authorities have provided minimal follow-up on its recommendations.



II. ENDING POLICE BRUTALITY AND INSTITUTIONAL VIOLENCE

INDEX SCORE: HIGH RISK

Police brutality in Afghanistan under Taliban rule represents a severe and structural risk and is systematically used as a political tool to silence dissent and impose ideological control. After the Taliban regained power in **August 2021**, women began organising [peaceful demonstrations](#) for legal and social rights. The *de facto* authorities responded with **excessive force**, including **firing shots into the air, beatings, tear gas, electric shocks, and arbitrary arrests.** Demonstrators were often insulted with **demeaning language, threatened with death, and physically intimidated** to deter further dissent.

[The Taliban](#) have largely **retained the structural framework of the former government**, with police forces now functioning under the *de facto* Ministry of Interior. However, they operate in a **legal vacuum**, as most laws enacted by the previous government have been repealed. The Taliban police **lack clear legal authority** and operate with **little to no oversight.** Instead of ensuring public safety, they **enforce Taliban directives through arbitrary arrests, intimidation, and widespread abuse.**

Police detention facilities remain sites of widespread abuse and systemic rights violations. Facilities under the *de facto* Ministry of Interior (MOI) accounted for **708 of the more than 1,600 instances of human rights violations documented by UNAMA from 1 January 2022 to 31 July 2023**, representing 42% of all instances. These include 177 instances of excessive force during arrest and 170 credible cases of torture and ill-treatment, such as beatings and threats. Detainees frequently faced violations of basic procedural safeguards, including **not being informed of the reasons for arrest, denial of access to lawyers or medical care, and coerced confessions.**

Human rights defenders, journalists, and members of minority communities have been particularly targeted. Peaceful protests have been met with violent dispersals, arbitrary detention, and degrading treatment in custody. Between 2022 and 2024, **more than 236 human rights violations against human rights defenders were recorded**. During the same period, over 300 journalists and media activists were arrested and imprisoned, and 17 were killed. Between 2021 and 2023, an estimated 218 extrajudicial executions, 144 cases of torture, and 424 arbitrary arrests and detention of former security forces were documented.

The *de facto* MPVPV functions as a **parallel policing body** tasked to suppress dissent, especially **targeting women and those who do not conform to the Taliban's ideology** and enforcing gender segregation. Its agents routinely harass, beat, and detain people in public spaces, with women and girls disproportionately exposed to abuse.



III. FREEDOM FROM TORTURE WHILE DEPRIVED OF LIBERTY

INDEX SCORE: HIGH RISK

Torture and ill-treatment of detainees have reached an alarming level, leading to a high-risk score in the Index. The Taliban have largely retained the prison infrastructure of the previous government but without clarifying institutional mandates, contributing **to fragmentation and blurred lines of authority across state institutions**. The ordinary prison system falls under the *de facto* Office of Prison Administration (OPA), which manages facilities for individuals sentenced for criminal offences. In contrast, the *de facto* General Directorate of Intelligence (GDI) is responsible for arrests and investigations related to so-called crimes against internal and external security, frequently **targeting human rights defenders, activists, protesters opposing Taliban policies, and political dissidents**.

The Taliban's Decree on Code of Conduct on System Reform Relating to Prisoners (Prison Decree 2022) sets out certain standards for prison conditions, including requirements for **suitable living spaces, access to fresh air, sunlight, and exercise**, as well as provisions for **food, water, hygiene, basic medical care, and religious practice and family visits**. However, the Prison Decree 2022 lacks precise definitions and does not meet basic legislative drafting standards. Moreover, it is **not consistently implemented in practice**.

The **risk of torture is particularly high in facilities run by the *de facto* GDI**. There, detainees are routinely subjected to physical and psychological abuse, sexual violence, and forced confessions. Individuals reported denial of access to adequate medical care, legal representation, and sufficient food, as well as the absence of any lawful mechanism to lodge complaints.

On the other hand, the situation in the *de facto* OPA-run facilities **shows fewer instances of torture and ill-treatment and allows for greater monitoring**. UNAMA documented no solitary confinement, no forced confessions, and no deaths attributable to torture in *de facto* OPA custody, and **only ten instances of abuse** out of more than 1,600 violations recorded nationwide. Unlike the *de facto* GDI, the *de facto* OPA **grants UNAMA access to prisons and has established an internal monitoring body** (Directorate of Monitoring Detention Centers) to monitor detention conditions and collect detainee complaints, two of which have reportedly led to protective measures. While some violations were recorded, detainees generally reported that they had **contact with their families, access to lawyers, and to healthcare**.

Despite OPCAT ratification, a National Preventive Mechanism (NPM) has never been established.



IV. ENDING IMPUNITY

INDEX SCORE: VERY HIGH RISK

Under Taliban governance, the **legal system provides almost no accountability** for abuses committed by *de facto* officials. The current legal system is predominantly based on Sharia, following a rigid interpretation of [Hanafi jurisprudence](#). This is also reflected in the Prison Decree 2022 that invokes the Qu'ran and the words of the Prophet Muhammad. While the Prison Decree 2022 **nominaly prohibits torture and mistreatment of detainees**, it provides **no real mechanism to hold officials accountable**. While it states that any official who mistreats a prisoner "shall face punishment and may also be dismissed," the Prison Decree 2022 **does not define what counts as mistreatment, who investigates allegations, or how punishment is enforced**. There is no guidance on initiating criminal or administrative investigations.

Consequently, there are **no proper or transparent investigations** into gross human rights violations. Dozens of [enforced disappearances](#) have been reported, but *de facto* authorities have **failed to conduct adequate investigations or identify perpetrators**, even when [preliminary evidence exists](#).

The court system consists of **lower courts, appellate courts, and two *de facto* Supreme Courts** based in Kandahar and Kabul, which oversee judicial matters across all provinces and can review lower court decisions. The system is shaped by judges (qadis), who issue binding rulings in civil and criminal cases, and muftis, religious scholars who provide non-binding legal opinions that influence judicial decisions. Most judges and muftis have **only religious training**, with few holding formal legal education, and appointments are **neither standardised nor transparent**.

Legal representation is limited. The Taliban **dismantled the Afghanistan Independent Bar Association** and reestablished a *de facto* Defense Lawyer Department under the *de facto* Ministry of Justice, offering some free legal aid. Female lawyers have been excluded from applying to the new relicensing process to practice law. At the same time, **women detainees are not allowed to speak to a male lawyer without a male member of their family**, which significantly limits effective representation.

In January 2024, the *de facto* government **enacted the Law on Hearing Complaints**, establishing a procedure for submitting grievances. The *de facto* MPVPV is formally responsible for addressing them. Complaints against *de facto* officials must first be submitted to the **relevant *de facto* administrative authority** and, if unresolved, can be escalated to the *de facto* MPVPV, which is required to ensure action and report unresolved cases to higher *de facto* authorities or courts. The law also gives the *de facto* MPVPV **oversight over complaints involving security and intelligence agencies**, including political detention and allegations of torture within the *de facto* GDI. In practice, however, there is no evidence that these provisions are implemented. Given its role as a religious enforcement body upholding the Taliban's strict interpretation of Islamic law, the *de facto* MPVPV is unlikely **to protect against arbitrary detention or torture of human rights defenders, activists, or dissenting voices**.

In April 2024, the Taliban Supreme Court ordered the *de facto* Court of Appeals in Nangarhar to **ban defence lawyers** from representing individuals in criminal cases, citing corruption concerns and the primacy of confessions in judicial decisions. This directive **severely undermines the right to legal representation**.

Survivors of torture furthermore face a profound fear of reprisals, [discouraging](#) them from filing complaints. In *de facto* GDI facilities, detainees are often forced to sign a letter pledging not to communicate with any organisation, submit complaints, or speak out publicly about their treatment after their release.



V. VICTIM'S RIGHTS

INDEX SCORE: VERY HIGH RISK

The Taliban's [legal system](#) **fails to provide support and reparations to torture survivors**. Complaint mechanisms are often **unavailable or ineffective**, especially **for women, children, minorities, and detainees**. There is no legal recognition of "torture victims" in domestic law, and there are no clear legal provisions to guarantee access to reparation and rehabilitation. There is no information as to whether *de facto* officials tasked with handling complaints by torture survivors **receive specialised training**.

Forensic services seem **limited**, and internationally recognised standards, such as the United Nations Manual on the Effective Investigation and Documentation of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment ([Istanbul Protocol](#)), **are neither formally adopted nor applied**. There is a **lack of qualified medico-legal experts**, leaving survivors with minimal access to evidence-based documentation and rehabilitation.

There seems to be **no State-provided rehabilitation programs**. Some local NGOs and UN agencies continue to provide medical and psychological support to victims of torture and domestic violence, but **coverage is limited**.

Furthermore, survivors **do not seem to receive official acknowledgment** of their suffering or restoration of their rights, and communities affected by systematic abuses, including ethnic minorities, receive **no collective reparations**.



VI. PROTECTION FOR ALL

INDEX SCORE: VERY HIGH RISK

Protection of **vulnerable groups against violence** is largely nonexistent. The arbitrary [enforcement](#) of Sharia rulings has resulted in **ethnic, religious, sexual, and linguistic groups being deprived of their fundamental rights**. The [definitions of crimes in Sharia](#) law, such as "apostasy," "corruption on earth," or "moral corruption," remain **vague and broad**, allowing *de facto* authorities to use the law to suppress legitimate freedoms, including freedom of expression and assembly. **Women and girls face serious restrictions** under the *de facto* government. Over **80 edicts** have curtailed education, employment, mobility, and access to justice, **enforcing strict dress codes and requiring male chaperones**. These policies, justified by the Taliban as adherence to Islamic law, are widely seen by experts and [Muslim scholars](#) as rooted in cultural extremism rather than religion. This systemic oppression has led to growing [international recognition](#) of "**gender apartheid**," a term used to describe state-imposed segregation and discrimination based on gender. Advocates are now urging the UN to formally recognise gender apartheid as a crime against humanity.

Religious minorities like Shia Hazaras, Shia Ismailis and Sikhs **face severe discrimination, threats, and violence**. In 2023, at least **29 deadly attacks** targeted Shia educational centers in Kabul, Mazar-i-Sharif, and Daikundi, causing many casualties. These attacks remain **uninvestigated and unpunished**, with the Taliban suspected of ignoring or enabling them. Based on a [Human Rights Watch report](#) in 2022, the Taliban have **failed to take meaningful measures to prevent attacks** by the Islamic State of Khorasan Province (ISKP) against Hazara and other Shia communities, despite repeated incidents targeting mosques, schools, and workplaces injuring more than 700 people.

Individuals with diverse sexual orientations or gender identities (LGBTQIA+) also face heightened security risks, including arbitrary arrest, violence, torture, and even execution. The Taliban, based on Sharia, consider such identities "major sins," and there have been reported cases of **unofficial executions, disappearances and physical punishments such as flogging**.



VII. RIGHT TO DEFEND AND CIVIC SPACE

INDEX SCORE: HIGH RISK

The Taliban have **severely restricted freedom of expression**, including forbidding coverage of certain topics and restricting contact with foreign media. In 2024, the Taliban **closed at least 12 media outlets**, both public and private. Those **violating** orders risk having their **facilities seized**, and their **journalists subjected to detention, assault, and torture**. Many **civil society activists and human rights defenders**, including women's rights advocates, have been forced into **exile or underground activities**. **NGOs** that continue to operate inside Afghanistan face **severe restrictions**. These include forced re-registration, asset confiscation, revocation of licenses, dismissal of female employees, and bans on activities related to human rights or women's empowerment.

The Taliban have imposed **particularly severe restrictions** on advocating for civil and political rights. **Freedom of expression, assembly, and political participation** have been largely **eliminated**, with independent media suppressed, many civil society organisations dismantled, and political dissent met with intimidation, imprisonment, or violence. **Women and minorities** in particular have been **excluded from any form of political decision-making**. The Taliban's primary focus appears to be consolidating political control and silencing opposition, often under the guise of **religious or moral enforcement**.

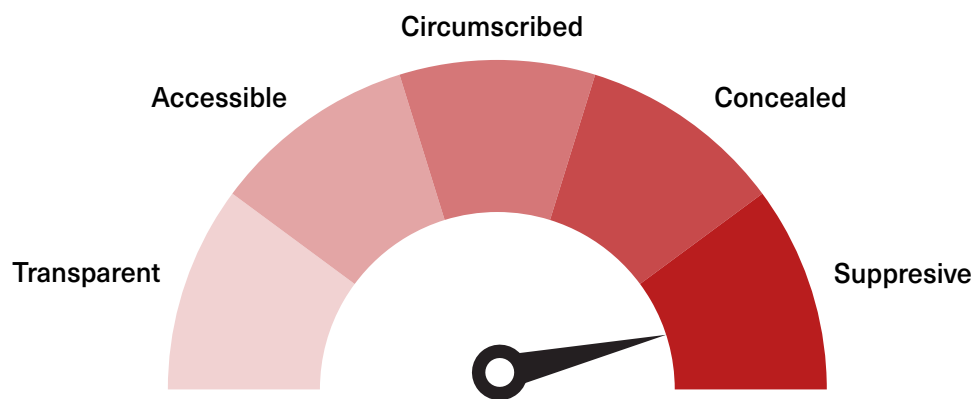
The Taliban have used **arbitrary detention and torture** to suppress civil dissent, particularly **protests led by women**. From early 2022 to mid-2024, at least **65 women protesters, journalists, and human rights defenders were arrested or detained** without due process and subjected to ill-treatment or torture. Political parties, associations, and women activists have been **declared illegal or criminalised**.

The UNAMA documented a total of **336 violations against journalists** between August 2021 and September 2024, including **256 instances of arbitrary arrests and detentions, 130 cases of torture or ill-treatment, and 75 incidents of threats or intimidation**. Approximately 43% of Afghan media outlets that were operating before August 2021 have since shut down, resulting in a loss of media plurality.

TRANSPARENCY AND ACCESS TO INFORMATION

The Global Torture Index rates the access to information and transparency available in each country when measuring and assessing the risks of torture and ill-treatment. It takes into account the availability of information, as well as the obstacles faced by civil society organisations in collecting data and their assessments of accessing information. Access to information must be guaranteed in every society, both in law and in practice, to ensure state transparency and accountability. It enables organisations, journalists, and individuals to request data on public bodies, protocols, and statistics on human rights violations. This indicator reflects the challenges in accessing information within a country, with each country and territory assigned a rating as Suppressive, Concealed, Circumscribed, Accessible, or Transparent.

Afghanistan's score is **suppressive** based on our evaluation of its current level of transparency and access to information.



ADVOCATING FOR CHANGE IN AFGHANISTAN: KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The Index factsheet includes 5 recommendations for Afghanistan, taken from the [Index webpage](#), which will serve as references in upcoming editions to monitor achievements within the anti-torture movement.

1. Comprehensive legal reforms to ensure compliance with international human rights standards should be undertaken. In particular, Afghanistan's 2017 Law on Prohibition of Torture implementing the UNCAT must be actively enforced through practical mechanisms, clear enforcement procedures, and effective accountability systems.
2. A National Preventive Mechanism (NPM) in line with the OPCAT should be created and tasked with preventing torture and ill-treatment in all places of detention. The NPM should have unrestricted access to all detention facilities, including prisons, police stations, and intelligence or security agency sites. Likewise, civil society organisations should be authorised to conduct independent monitoring visits throughout the country to promote transparency and uphold detainees' rights.
3. The *de facto* authorities should engage constructively with the international community. In particular, the decision to deny the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan access to the country should be reversed and recommendations by the UNAMA and UN special procedures should be considered.
4. An accessible and secure mechanism allowing survivors to report torture should be established with strong guarantees of protection and support for survivors and witnesses throughout the investigation process.
5. The United Nations should establish an independent investigative mechanism with a clear mandate to examine all alleged human rights violations and international crimes committed in Afghanistan, including torture.



FURTHER RESOURCES

For further information, the complete 2025 Torture Index—including detailed data visualisations, FAQs, the methodology, and more—can be accessed on our website: <https://www.omct.org/en/global-torture-index>. Should you have any questions, feel free to reach out to us at tortureindex@omct.org.

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