

AFGHANISTAN

USCIRF–RECOMMENDED FOR COUNTRIES OF PARTICULAR CONCERN (CPC)

KEY FINDINGS

In 2025, religious freedom conditions in Afghanistan remained extremely poor. De facto Taliban authorities continued to impose a singular interpretation of Islam, affecting all Afghans but particularly women, girls, and religious minorities. To enforce this interpretation of Shari’a, authorities imposed corporal punishment, surveillance, and arbitrary detention.

Throughout the year, Taliban leaders cracked down on Islamic scholars and clerics who publicly criticized official rulings or supported more “moderate” policies or teachings conflicting with its interpretation of Islam. In January, the Taliban’s deputy foreign minister, Sher Mohammad Abbas Stanikzai, fled the country after giving a speech criticizing the continued ban on girls’ education. The Taliban’s supreme leader, Hibatullah Akhundzada, ordered Stanikzai’s arrest and issued a travel ban. Subsequently, in April, the Taliban’s higher education minister stated that criticizing the supreme leader was equivalent to insulting the Prophet Muhammad. In July, authorities forcibly closed the office and religious school of a prominent Shi’a cleric in Kabul, Ayatollah Waezzada Behsudi.

De facto authorities intensely monitored Afghan citizens to ensure compliance with their strict interpretation of Islam, with women and Hazara reporters facing the most severe restrictions. In February, Taliban authorities raided a well-known women’s radio station, arresting two employees and suspending the station for “multiple violations.” In October, the Taliban issued a nationwide internet shutdown to prevent consumption of “immoral” activities. This ban received international backlash and [condemnation](#) from the United Nations (UN). The Taliban also continued to enforce mandatory prayers and regular attendance at mosques, and detained men and their barbers for having hair-styles deemed “un-Islamic.”

Afghan women continued to bear the brunt of the Taliban’s restrictive religious edicts. In addition to the education ban, women remain barred from seeking employment and speaking in public as well as privately reciting the Qur’an in their homes. In July, the UN Mission to Afghanistan [expressed](#) concern about the arrest of dozens of women and girls in Kabul for failing to observe the hijab decree. In September, the Taliban banned books written by women from the university system, claiming they were “anti-Shari’a” and violate Taliban policies.

The Taliban also enforced blasphemy laws and arrested several individuals throughout the year. In July, a Taliban court sentenced [Abdul Alim Khamoosh](#) to death over blasphemy accusations and for allegedly insulting the Prophet Muhammad. The judicial process of this sentencing remains unclear, and it is not reported whether Khamoosh had access to legal representation. The same month, the Taliban’s Supreme Court announced the public flogging of four individuals on allegations of “insulting religious rituals and Islamic values.” In August, the Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (MPVPV) announced the arrest of another man accused of “insulting sacred beliefs.”

More broadly, the Taliban continued to impose restrictions on religious minorities’ ability to publicly practice their faith and facilitated forced conversions to Islam. During the month of Muharram, the Taliban limited public processions across several provinces. It restricted the display of traditional black flags to mark the religious ceremony. Reports also indicate that Taliban officials forced Ismaili Muslims in Badakhshan Province to convert to the Hanafi school of jurisprudence. In Ismaili-majority districts, the Taliban reportedly banned marriages between Ismaili and Sunni families. Salafis also faced increased restrictions, including Taliban officials dismissing imams from mosques, claiming that no Salafi religious leader is allowed to lead prayers.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE U.S. GOVERNMENT

- Designate Afghanistan under the de facto rule of the Taliban as a “country of particular concern,” or CPC, for engaging in systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom, as defined by the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA);
- Impose targeted sanctions on Taliban officials responsible for severe religious freedom violations, including high-level officials of the MPVPV, by freezing those individuals’ assets and/or barring their entry into the United States under human rights-related financial and visa authorities;
- Work with like-minded partners, including the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), to address the Taliban’s religious freedom and other human rights violations;
- Retain the responsibilities of the special representative for Afghanistan and the special envoy for Afghan women, girls, and human rights within the U.S. Department of State and incorporate religious freedom into its priorities; and
- Reinstate Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for Afghans in the United States to extend protection for religious minorities fleeing religious persecution by the Taliban, as the conditions in Afghanistan remain dire.

The U.S. Congress should:

- Introduce and pass legislation to create a Priority 2 (P-2) designation under the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program to include members of religious groups at extreme risk of persecution by the Taliban to allow them to apply for resettlement.

KEY USCIRF RESOURCES & ACTIVITIES

- **Issue Update:** [Afghanistan – Assessing the Law on the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice](#)
- **Hearing:** [Religious Freedom in Taliban-Controlled Afghanistan](#)
- **Frank R. Wolf Freedom of Religion or Belief [Victims List](#) and Appendix 2**

Background

Afghanistan's population is an estimated 40.1 million and includes a wide range of ethnic groups, including Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazaras, Uzbeks, Turkmens, and Baloch. The country is 99.7 percent Muslim (84.7–89.7 percent Sunni and 10–15 percent Shi'a) and less than 0.3 percent other religions.

Many religious minorities fled following the Taliban takeover in 2021. However, small numbers of Shi'a and Ahmadiyya Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, Christians, and Buddhists remain in the country. The last member of the Jewish community left Afghanistan in 2021. Following the takeover, de facto authorities dissolved the country's 2004 constitution and made their interpretation of Shari'a the basis for all law in the country. Under this interpretation, religious minorities, including Christians and Shi'a Hazaras, are considered apostates.

In February, the Taliban announced that it no longer considered the [Doha agreement](#) to be valid, stating that the timeframe for the agreement expired, and called on the United States to remove Taliban leaders from sanctions lists. The 2020 agreement addressed four main issues including a cease-fire between U.S., Taliban and Afghan forces, the withdrawal of foreign troops, negotiations to form a transitional government, and guaranteeing that Afghanistan would not be used for terrorist attacks against the U.S. or its allies.

Repression of Women and Girls

De facto Taliban authorities continued to severely restrict the rights of Afghan women and girls. Religious edicts, including the Law on the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, also known as the "morality law," deem women's voices as immoral, thereby banning them from publicly practicing their faith. Under the law, women are required to completely cover themselves when leaving the home and must be accompanied by a male escort. In many cases, failure to observe these edicts resulted in arrests or fines. Reports indicate that men increasingly enforced restrictions on their female family members to ensure compliance with these policies to prevent Taliban reprisals.

In February, the Taliban's supreme leader defended religiously strict edicts, including the ban on women's education, asserting that such policies are derived from the "commands of Allah." He announced that every religious decree issued is based on consultations with scholars and "derived from the Qur'an and the Hadith." The same month, authorities arrested [Wazir Khan](#), an educator who was vocal in his support for girls' education. In March, the Taliban issued a message claiming that the rights of Afghan women were "secured" under Islamic law. Further defending Taliban policies and dismissing international criticism, the chief spokesperson stated that an Islamic and Afghan society has "clear differences from Western societies and their culture."

Detention and Targeting of Religious Minorities

In 2025, the MPVPV continued enforcing religious edicts and detained those deemed to violate Taliban policies. In January, authorities arrested over 40 people across various provinces on charges ranging from "moral corruption" to witchcraft and violations of Islamic law. In

September, the MPVPV arrested a Sufi leader, [Ibrahim Gailani](#), along with several of his followers. Authorities accused Gailani of "misusing Sufism" and conducting practices "contrary to Shari'a."

The Taliban continued to target religious minority communities and their houses of worship, espoused hateful rhetoric, and justified violent punishment for failing to adhere to its interpretation of Islam. In March, the Taliban's supreme leader declared that obedience to him is a religious obligation for all Muslims to "ensure unity and order." Additionally, in April, the Taliban's supreme leader announced that executions were part of Islam, after four men were convicted of murder. The same month, MPVPV Minister Khalid Hanafi reportedly stated that non-Muslims, including Hindus and Sikhs, were "worse than animals." In October, a delegation of Afghan Hindu and Sikh refugees in India urged Taliban Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi to restore religious sites in Afghanistan.

Key U.S. Policy

Throughout 2025, the Donald J. Trump administration engaged with de facto Taliban officials to coordinate the release of detained U.S. citizens. In January, U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio announced that the United States would place heavy bounties on top Taliban officials for holding U.S. citizens hostage. In March, a U.S. delegation [traveled](#) to Kabul to meet with Taliban officials to discuss the release of U.S. citizen prisoners. This marked the first U.S. delegation to Afghanistan since the 2021 withdrawal. Subsequently, Secretary Rubio [announced](#) the release of George Glezzmann, a U.S. citizen detained for two and a half years, and Faye Hall, who was detained for a month. In September, Secretary Rubio announced the release of U.S. citizen Amir Amiry. Two other U.S. citizens, Ryan Corbett and William McKenty, were released in January 2025.

In January, President Trump signed an executive order suspending the U.S. refugee policy, bringing uncertainty to the future of 2,000 Afghan refugees seeking asylum in the United States, including members of religious minorities such as members of the Shi'a Hazara community. In May, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) [announced](#) that it would not renew [TPS](#) for Afghanistan, based on a review of the country's security risks. The review determined that Afghanistan no longer met the statutory requirements for TPS designation. The same month, DHS sent emails to some Afghans revoking their humanitarian parole and ordering them to self-deport within seven days. TPS for Afghanistan expired in July. The U.S. Department of State noted in [August](#) that it continues to process [Special Immigration Visas](#) (SIVs) for Afghans. However, in [November](#), following the shooting of two National Guard members in Washington, DC by an Afghan national, the Trump administration [halted](#) all immigration-related decisions for [Afghans](#), including SIVs, for security concerns.

The U.S. Department of State did not designate Afghanistan as a CPC under IRFA in its most recent designations on December 29, 2023. However, it did redesignate the Taliban as an Entity of Particular Concern for particularly severe religious freedom violations. Any presidential action taken as a result of this designation terminates by the end of 2025 unless expressly reauthorized by law.