

Policy Brief

The Taliban's Gender Governance Model: Implications and Future Prospects

Based on the Taliban's decrees and actions violating women's rights (2021 to 2026)

Summary

Since the Taliban's return to power in August 2021, Afghanistan has witnessed fundamental changes in its political and social structure. One of the most striking features of this period is the issuance of a broad set of decrees and directives that have directly restricted the rights and freedoms of women and girls. An examination of the list of these decrees indicates that Taliban's actions are not merely ad-hoc or short-term decisions, but part of a it is a ongoing process to redefine the role of women in society and limit their presence in the public sphere.

These policies cover various areas of social life, including access to education, economic participation, freedom of movement, media presence, and social participation. Restrictions on girls' education from secondary to university levels, banning women from working in many government departments and non-governmental organizations, imposing broad restrictions on women's freedom of movement, and monitoring their social dress and behavior are among the most important of these measures. In addition to these restrictions, the role of the Ministry of Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice and the implementation of public punishments have also been used as tools for social surveillance and control.

An analysis of these policies shows that the Taliban have gradually developed a type of gender governance model that is based on gender segregation, control of social behavior, and limitation of women's role in the public sphere. In this context, women have been increasingly excluded from the education system, labor market, public spaces, and social decision-making processes.

The consequences of these policies are not limited to women's rights but also have far-reaching implications for Afghanistan's social and economic development. Reduced women's access to education can lead to a shortage of skilled manpower in sectors such as education and health in the long run. The exclusion of women from the labor market has also led to a decrease in economic participation and an increase in poverty among families. In addition, women's social freedoms are restricted. It can have other social consequences, such as increased social isolation and an increase in early marriages or an increase in maternal mortality.

If this trend continues, it is likely that the gender gap in Afghanistan will deepen further, increasing its negative consequences on the country's economic development, social stability, and overall well-being. At the same time, domestic economic pressures, the need to engage with the international community, and development requirements may pose challenges to the Taliban in maintaining this level of constraints in the future.

Given these circumstances, the international community and humanitarian organizations can play an important role in mitigating the consequences of this situation. Supporting girls' education, strengthening women's economic opportunities, expanding health services for

women, and documenting violations of women's rights are among the measures that can help mitigate the negative effects of these policies.

Ultimately, the future of the situation of women in Afghanistan will largely depend on the interplay between the Taliban's domestic policies, international pressures, and the capacities of Afghan civil society to support women's rights.

Key findings

1. The formation of a systematic model of gender governance:

An analysis of the decrees issued by the Taliban and their actions shows that the restrictions imposed on women are part of a systematic pattern of gender governance. These policies have gradually limited the presence of women in various spheres of social life, including education, employment, media, and public spaces, and have limited their role to the private sphere. The family has been reduced.

2. The gradual exclusion of women from the education system

One of the most notable developments after 2021 is the restriction of women's access to education. The ban on girls' education at secondary levels and the restrictions imposed on women's higher education have deprived millions of girls of continuing education. In the long term, this trend could lead to a decline in human capital and a shortage of skilled workers in the country.

3. Significant Decline in Women's Economic Participation

The restrictions imposed on women's employment in government offices, non-governmental organizations, and some economic activities have led to a significant decrease in women's economic participation. In addition to increasing women's economic dependence, this situation has also negatively affected the income of families and the country's economic growth.

4. The Taliban's

policies on freedom of movement, presence in public spaces, and the use of social services have significantly reduced women's presence in society. Restrictions such as the requirement to accompany a mahram on travel, a ban on entering some public places, and restrictions on the use of public transportation are among these measures.

5. The expansion of the social monitoring and control mechanism

Ministry of Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice has become one of the most important tools for monitoring social behaviors. This institution plays an important role in the implementation of the Taliban's policies by monitoring the coverage, social behavior, and media activities of citizens. Such a mechanism has created an atmosphere of constant surveillance and increased self-censorship in society.

6. The use of public punishments to exercise political authority

The implementation of public punishments such as flogging in public and public executions has been used as one of the Taliban's tools to exert social authority and control. In addition to the judicial aspect, these measures also have a deterrent and symbolic function and help create an atmosphere of fear in society.

7. The broad social and economic consequences

These policies have had significant consequences for Afghan society. Reduced women's access to education, limited economic opportunities, and increased social constraints can lead to increased poverty, weakening the education and health system, and widening gender gaps in society in the long term.

8. Institutionalization and normalization of the restrictions

The increasing trend of issuing decrees and converting some restrictions into formal regulations, it is likely that many of these policies will be institutionalized in the Taliban's governance structure. If this trend continues, women's presence in many social and economic spheres may be further restricted, for example, women's access to education may be permanently blocked.

1. Context and Framework

The Taliban's return to power in 2021 was a turning point in Afghanistan's political developments. After the collapse of the republican system, the Taliban re-established their political system based on a special interpretation of Sharia. Within this framework, Taliban have implemented a series of policies and guidelines to regulate social relations and gender roles in society.

One of the significant features of this period is the continuous issuance of decrees on women and girls. These edicts have affected various areas of social life, including education, employment, freedom of movement, and social participation. Many of these policies, such as banning girls' and women's education, were initially introduced as temporary measures, but over time they were gradually established in the form of formal guidelines and regulations.

An examination of this trend shows that the Taliban have gradually developed a specific pattern of gender governance that aims to limit women's presence in the public sphere and redefine their role, mainly within the framework of the family and the private sphere.

2. Key Dimensions of the Taliban's Policies

2.1. Restricting women's access to education

One of the most important areas of the Taliban's policy has been to restrict women's access to education, which has incrementally been institutionalized in the form of various measures. As a result, after the Taliban's return to power, a series of decisions and decrees gradually reduced women's and girls' educational opportunities. In September 2021, it was announced that girls would not be able to go to school in secondary school. This decision deprived millions of girls of continuing education.

In December 2022, the Taliban announced that women would not be allowed to study in universities. This decision directly cut off women's access to higher

education. Continuing this trend, in 2024, women's education in medical fields was also stopped, a field that was previously one of the few remaining career paths for women, while Afghanistan has been and continues to need female specialists more than ever due to the high rate of female mortality during childbirth.

These restrictions have far-reaching implications for Afghan society. Reducing the level of women's education can lead to a shortage of skilled manpower in the long run, especially in the education and health sectors. In addition, the exclusion of women from the educational system reduces the country's human capital and weakens the process of social development.

2.2. Removing women from the labor market

Taliban's policies in the field of employment have also had a significant impact on women's economic participation. In March 2022, many women were banned from working in government offices. In December 2022, women's work in many NGOs was also banned.

In 2023, the Taliban ordered the closure of women's hairdressers, which were considered one of the limited sources of women's employment in Afghanistan. This decision deprived thousands of women of their source of income.

Limiting job opportunities for women has important economic implications. The decrease in the income of families, the increase in poverty, and the increase in women's economic dependence on men are among the results of these policies. Also, the exclusion of women from the labor market can negatively affect the country's economic growth.

2.3 Restrictions on freedom of movement

The Taliban have imposed strict regulations on women's movement and presence in public. One of the most important of these regulations is the ban on women traveling long distances without a male companion (*Mahram*), which was announced in December 2021. In addition, women were barred from entering parks, sports clubs, and some recreational facilities. Restrictions were also imposed on women's use of public transportation.

Such restrictions reduce women's access to basic services such as education, health, and employment. As a result, women's presence in the public sphere has decreased significantly, and many of them have faced a form of social isolation.

2.4 Control of women's clothing and body

Another important area of the Taliban's policies is control of women's clothing.

In May 2022, Taliban issued a strict hijab order, and burqa (*chadori*) was introduced as the most appropriate type of clothing. Women TV announcers were also required to cover their faces while appearing in the media.

Controlling women's clothing within this framework has become a tool to implement the social order desired by the Taliban. Such policies restrict women's individual freedoms and make their bodies a symbol of the state's ideological order.

2.5 Limiting the presence of women in the media

The Taliban have also imposed broad restrictions on women's presence in the media. In November 2021, it was announced that women would not be allowed to appear in TV films. In addition, guest women on TV shows were required to cover their faces.

Such restrictions reduce women's presence and voices in the public sphere and limit the diversity of views in the media.

2.6 Expansion of the system of social surveillance and lack of access to justice

The Ministry of Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice plays a key role in monitoring social behavior. This body is responsible for monitoring coverage, social behavior, and media activities of citizens.

The expansion of such a system has created an atmosphere of constant surveillance in society. In this situation, many citizens regulate their behavior for fear of punishment or social consequences, which can lead to an increase in self-censorship in society.

One of the important developments in the legal structure of the Taliban government is the adoption and implementation of the Criminal Code of the Taliban Courts (*Usulnama*), which creates a new framework for judicial proceedings and punishments in the judicial system of the interim government. This code, which includes more than 100 articles, has been the basis for many judicial decisions in Afghanistan under the Taliban rule, and the authority to implement it has been directly vested in the Taliban courts.

In this Code, many crimes and penalties are defined based on the system of *ta'zir* punishments, which are largely left to the judge or the leader of the Taliban. For example, it emphasizes that *ta'zir* punishments can be applied even in circumstances where there is doubt about the occurrence of the crime, while in the case of *hudud* punishments in the case of There is no doubt that the execution of the punishment will be stopped.

The social and judicial implications of this code for women are significant. First, the widespread focus on *ta'zir* punishments and the judge's high authority

in determining punishments can lead to broad and different interpretations of laws, thereby increasing the likelihood of discrimination or tasteful encounters. Second, some of the articles of the code are directly related to family relations and social behaviors, including provisions that require a wife to obey her husband and normalize domestic violence or behavioral restrictions in social relationships. Such regulations can undermine women's legal status in family and social litigation and limit their ability to pursue their rights in the judicial system.

From the perspective of access to justice, this Code can also create additional barriers for women. While women's presence in the judicial system, legal education, and social activism is severely restricted, the implementation of laws that emphasize strict interpretations of social and moral order can make it more difficult for women to access courts and legal mechanisms. In such a framework, many women may be reluctant to file complaints or pursue their rights, thus they should refrain from doing so, because it is likely that the judicial system will judge their behavior and social status instead of supporting them.

Overall, this Taliban doctrine not only creates a new legal framework for the Afghan judicial system but also redefine the situation of women in society. In this framework, women are defined more as subjects of social and moral order than as citizens with equal rights in the legal system. This situation can affect women's access to justice, their participation in public life, and their social status in society in the long run. Afghanistan should have a profound impact.

2.7 Enforcement of public punishments

The Taliban have used public punishment as one of the important tools to exert authority and social control. Various reports indicate public flogging and public executions in different parts of Afghanistan.

In addition to the judicial aspect, such punishments also have a deterrent function and create an atmosphere of fear in society.

2.8. Increased social pressure to force marriage

While women's access to education and employment has been restricted, social pressure to marry has also increased. Many families may view marriage as a way to protect girls from restrictions or moral accusations. This situation can lead to an increase in early or forced marriages, which have serious health and social consequences for women and girls.

3. The Broad Implications of these policies

Overall, the Taliban's policies have led to the formation of a social system in which women's presence in the public sphere has been severely restricted. This situation not only affects women's individual lives, but also has far-reaching implications for Afghan society.

The decline in women's economic participation, the decline in the level of education in society, the increase in poverty, and the weakening of the health system are among the most important consequences of these policies. Moreover, such a trend increases gender gaps in society and can negatively impact Afghanistan's social stability and economic development in the long run.

4. Policy recommendations

To mitigate the consequences of this situation, the international community and humanitarian organizations can consider the following measures:

- Supporting alternative education programs for girls, including online education and non-formal education programs
- Boosting women's economic opportunities by supporting small businesses
- Expanding health services for women, especially in rural areas
- Women's rights violations continue to be documented to raise global awareness
- Supporting civil society organizations working in the field of women's rights

5. Future prospects

Given the increasing trend of issuing restrictive decrees, it seems that the Taliban's policies in the area of gender governance are moving towards greater institutionalization. Many of the restrictions that were initially introduced as temporary measures have been established over time in the form of formal guidelines and policies.

If this trend continues, it is likely that restrictions will be extended to remaining areas such as economic activity, media and telecommunications. At the same time, domestic economic pressures and the need to engage with the international community may present the Taliban with challenges in maintaining this level of restrictions.

As a result, the future of gender governance in Afghanistan is likely to fall between two opposing trends: the consolidation of restrictive structures on the one hand, and domestic and international pressures to reform these policies on the other.

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