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Assessing the Law on the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice in Afghanistan

Introduction

In August 2024, the Taliban introduced the Law on the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice. Also referred to as the “morality law,” or the PVPV law, this law reinforces and expands the Taliban’s discriminatory policies enacted since its takeover of power in 2021. The law severely restricts religious freedom for all Afghans but is particularly egregious for Afghan women, whom the law forbids from speaking and engaging in public life. Throughout the first half of 2025, the Taliban has continued to enforce this law, impacting all aspects of Afghan society and forcing individuals to conform with its singular interpretation of Islam and Shari’a.

In March 2025, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) held a [hearing](#) on Afghanistan examining current religious freedom conditions, including the use of the morality law. Witnesses emphasized that conditions in Afghanistan are not safe for religious minorities or those with differing views of Islam, including Sunni Muslims. This factsheet examines the Taliban’s enforcement of the morality law and its impact on religious freedom throughout Afghan society. It considers the role of the Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (MPVPV) in implementing and enforcing the law, as well as responses from religious leaders regarding the law.

USCIRF’s Mission

*To advance international
freedom of religion or
belief, by independently
assessing and unflinchingly
confronting threats to this
fundamental right.*

The PVPV Law Violates International Human Rights Standards

The PVPV law violates Article 18 of the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights \(ICCPR\)](#) pertaining to freedom of religion or belief (FoRB). Afghanistan is a [party](#) to the ICCPR and [other international human rights treaties](#). As the Taliban has assumed control of the country, it is obligated to fulfill commitments under international treaties in which Afghanistan is a party, regardless of the Taliban’s international recognition.

Under Article 18 of the ICCPR, FoRB is a fundamental right. It includes the freedom of thought and conscience, the freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of one’s choices, and the right to manifest one’s religion, in public or in private, alone or

in community with others, including through worship, teaching, practice, and observance. The PVPV restricts these rights in various ways, including by prohibiting or restricting specific religious beliefs or practices, imposing religious values and practices, and coercing adherence under threat of punishment. The ICCPR also protects freedom of opinion or expression under Article 19, a right that often intertwines with religious freedom. The PVPV restricts freedom of religious expression in various ways, including through provisions that restrict religious dress for both men and women, diversity in religious ideology, and discussions about religion.

How the PVPV Law Restricts Religious Freedom

The PVPV law came into effect in August 2024. The law contains 35 articles in total, including many provisions that restrict and erode the right to FoRB by imposing the Taliban's singular interpretation of Sunni Islam. It provides broad powers to authorities to arrest, detain, and monitor Afghans who are perceived to have violated its provisions.

Strict Restrictions on Islamic Religious Practices

The law firmly regulates the religious practices of Muslims. [Article 6](#) declares that the law is based on Hanafi jurisprudence and applies to “all offices, public places and people residing in the territory of Afghanistan.” It further mandates religious practices for Muslims and prohibits the practice of other religions or beliefs that are perceived as different from the Taliban's singular interpretation, including Shi'a, Ahmadiyya, or Sufi Muslims. The law also limits free discussion about religion by prohibiting the publication of content deemed contradictory to the Taliban's interpretation of Islam. The law further punishes individuals for failing to pray, delaying prayers, or not praying in congregation.

Criminalization of Non-Islamic Practices and Faiths

Among its many articles, the law criminalizes adherence to religions other than Sunni Islam. Specifically, it punishes any act deemed “un-Islamic” and forbids “befriending non-Muslims and assisting them.” Non-Muslims, according to the law, include Christians, Jews, Hindus, and Sikhs as well as Ahmadiyya and Shi'a Muslims. Small numbers of these religious minority communities remain in the country since the 2021 Taliban takeover. Non-Muslims are forced to practice in secret or risk arrest and torture. In April, the Taliban's Minister for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, Khalid

Hanafi, reinforced this sentiment by referring to non-Muslims, including Hindus, Jews, Christians, and Sikhs, as “worse than four-legged animals,” emphasizing that they hold “beliefs that go against Sharia and the Qur'an.”

Restricting Religious Expression by Mandating Dress Codes and Appearance

Article 13 of the law describes specific requirements for men and women's appearance, violating FoRB by mandating religious practices on all under the threat of punishment. It requires all Afghan women to cover their entire body and face, emphasizing that failing to do so is a “wrongful act.” This mandatory dress code and hijab requirement restricts not only Muslim women but women of other faiths as well. The law additionally characterizes women's voices as intimate and therefore something to be concealed, forbidding them from singing or reciting the Qur'an. It further instructs Muslim women to cover themselves in front of “non-believing” women and enforces the requirement that women be accompanied by a male guardian when leaving the house.

The law also includes provisions targeting men and boys' appearance. For example, the law mandates that a man's knees must be covered and criminalizes the act of shaving one's beard to “less than the width of a fist.” Both men and women are forbidden from styling their hair in an “un-Islamic manner.” It further explicitly restricts religious practice by criminalizing the “wearing and popularizing crucifixes ... and other such un-Islamic symbols.”

How the PVPV Is Enforced

The MPVPV is largely responsible for overseeing and enforcing the morality law and other religious edicts. The ministry was re-established following the Taliban's rise to power in 2021, and its mission is to “reform society” such that there is strict adherence to the Taliban's interpretation of Shari'a and Islam. Since its re-establishment, the ministry has issued a range of laws and decrees through writing, media, social media, or sermons. It also outlines seven “stages of punishment,” including “providing advice” or “admonishment,” fines, and detention of up to three days. The law also empowers ministry authorities with broad power to enforce its provisions.

In January 2025, Taliban leader Hibatullah Akhundzada outlined the role of the MPVPV's “morality police” as “reformers of society” through enforcement of Islamic principles, as interpreted by the Taliban. In March 2025, Akhundzada praised the MPVPV for “striving to combat

all types of corruption.” The law describes an “enforcer” as an individual who is “bound by Islamic tenets” and has knowledge of “the Islamic injunctions which he is promoting.”

More broadly, however, the MPVPV largely operates without judicial oversight. According to the United Nations (UN) special rapporteur on Afghanistan, there are [approximately](#) 3,330 male enforcers employed throughout Afghanistan in 28 out of 34 provinces. Female inspectors reportedly operate only in Baghlan Province. The UN reports that monitoring and enforcement of the morality law took place at a variety of locations, including regular visits to nongovernmental organizations, educational centers, markets, mosques, restaurants, and parks. In October 2024, the Taliban’s Minister for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice reportedly made visits to different provinces to emphasize the strict enforcement of the morality law. In March 2025, enforcers were reportedly conducting nighttime patrols in Farah Province, detaining individuals and forcing them to perform prayers.

Implementation of the Morality Law

Following the announcement of the morality law, senior Taliban officials and members of the MPVPV have taken measures to urge compliance at the national and provincial level. This includes establishing greater surveillance mechanisms in Kabul and pressuring Afghans to comply with the law’s provisions during Eid. The Taliban has also gone so far as to limit public celebrations of religious holidays and to detain those who fail to adhere to the morality law.

Enforcement Mechanisms and Surveillance

Enforcement of the morality law varies across Afghanistan. In some areas, the provisions detailed in the morality law are already social norms, including women wearing the hijab or burqa. During Eid holidays, however, some Afghan women described increasing social pressure and interrogations from authorities, who stopped them in public spaces to question them for not traveling with a male guardian. In September 2024, the Taliban’s Ministry of Hajj and Religious Affairs reportedly issued a letter to imams across the country, instructing them to enforce the law and emphasize its importance in sermons.

The Taliban has also established a more elaborate monitoring system in Kabul with the ability to track individuals using facial recognition. Human rights groups are concerned that such a monitoring system may be used

to target those who are perceived to violate the morality law. Additionally, the UN argues that under the Taliban, the legal, judicial, and social sectors are weaponized to oppress and restrict women and girls, as well as religious minorities, and their right to FoRB.

Restriction of Religious Holidays and Teachings

Under the morality law, the Taliban has severely restricted the observation of other faiths, including public holidays. In March, for example, the Taliban blocked annual celebrations of Nowruz in Kabul and closed off roads leading to the Sakhi Shrine, a central site for celebrations. In June during Muharram, members of the Shi’a community engaged in Ashura celebrations—but on a limited scale and under the Taliban’s surveillance. Some communities reported not being able to raise traditional black flags or conduct public processions.

The Taliban has also increased efforts to collect books deemed “banned” for contradicting its interpretation of Islam. In May 2025, for example, the Taliban confirmed that hundreds of books have been banned and removed from libraries and bookstores throughout Afghanistan.

Forced Conversions and Attacks on Ismaili Muslims

Under de facto Taliban rule, religious minorities have been targets of violent attacks or forced conversion attempts. The UN [reports](#), for example, that between January and February, as many as 50 Ismaili men were forced to convert to Sunni Islam. Those who refused were reportedly subjected to physical assault and death threats. In May, an Ismaili man, Sayed Qiyamuddin, who worked as a security guard for the World Health Organization, was killed in Badakhshan Province. Qiyamuddin was severely tortured prior to his death. While the Taliban did not issue a response to the news of Qiyamuddin’s death, Afghans describe the killing as an example of religious persecution. According to the UN, the Taliban has also forced Ismaili children to receive education based on Sunni Islam.

Arbitrary Arrests and Detention

Human rights groups have reported increasing arrests and detainments since the introduction of the morality law. Reports indicate that in January 2025 alone, as many as 40 people were arrested, including many women and girls, for violating the morality law. Religious clerics who publicly criticized the Taliban’s edicts also faced arrest or were disappeared. In May, for example, the Taliban arrested Qari Sirajuddin, an imam in Kabul, after he delivered a statement that was critical of the Taliban.

As of August 2025, there has been no additional reporting on Sirajuddin's status. Additionally, in May authorities detained Bashir Ahmad Hanafi, a religious cleric who had previously been arrested by the Taliban. Sources indicate that weeks prior to his arrest, Hanafi had participated in a radio interview discussing Sufism. Hanafi has also been critical of the Taliban's ban on girls' education. Additional reporting suggests that Hanafi will be imprisoned for eight months.

According to human rights groups, while in Taliban custody, individuals' ethnic or religious identity influenced the severity of torture inflicted, including for Christians and Hazaras. Hazara Shi'a, in particular, have been subjected to insults and humiliation on the basis of both their ethnic and religious identities, emphasizing that the Taliban view them as "infidels." Afghan refugees in exile have further described to USCIRF being stopped by the Taliban on roads and having their phones confiscated and checked for "blasphemous" or "un-Islamic" material.

De facto authorities have also detained individuals for failing to comply with the dress code mandate outlined in the morality law. In December 2024, the MPVPV arrested two journalists, one male and one female, for trimming his beard and not covering her head. In July, enforcers from the MPVPV detained at least 50 men in southern Kandahar for reportedly shaving their beards. While some were immediately released, others spent days in custody. For women, their release from detention requires a "male guardian" to sign a declaration that they will not allow the so-called punishable behavior to occur again. Afghan men are therefore forced to comply with the morality law or risk beatings, detention, or other forms of punishment for failing to enforce the edict imposed on their female relatives.

Impact of PVPV Law on Women and Education and Health Sectors

While the morality law impacts all Afghans, it disproportionately affects Afghan women and girls. As of 2025, Afghan women and girls are still barred from attending school beyond age 12. The education ban, coupled with the morality law, makes it impossible

for Afghan women and girls to participate in public life, including religious expression. *Madrasas* are now considered one of the only options available for women and girls to receive an education. By criminalizing women speaking in public, including for reciting Quranic verses, this provision further restricts women's ability to participate in religious events. Afghan women initially responded by protesting the law, both through singing and by campaigning on the streets of Kabul. The Taliban responded to criticism by stating that the law is "in accordance with Islamic Shari'a law."

The requirement of a male guardian, reinforced under the morality law, has created significant barriers for Afghan women. This disproportionately impacts Afghan widows, who may not have any male relations. The MPVPV has also required female healthcare workers to be accompanied by a male guardian and to carry an official permit from the department. This limitation is further exacerbated by the Taliban's December 2024 ban on women attending private medical institutions.

Since the 2021 Taliban takeover, women have also been removed from Afghanistan's justice sector as judges, prosecutors, and defense lawyers. In July 2025, the UN General Assembly passed a resolution describing concerns about conditions in Afghanistan, including the "worsening, widespread and systematic oppression" of women and girls. The resolution additionally urged the Taliban to reverse its repressive policies.

Conclusion

Religious freedom conditions in Afghanistan continue to decline dramatically under Taliban rule. The new morality law reinforces a systematic and overt erasure of religious freedom in Afghanistan and facilitates the ongoing repression of religious minorities. Any actions deemed "un-Islamic" under the Taliban's singular interpretation risks severe punishment, including arbitrary detention, torture, and capital punishment. While the morality law impacts all Afghans, it disproportionately affects religious minorities and women, eradicating their participation in public life and systematically eliminating their right to FoRB.



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