



# Women in Afghanistan

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## 1. Background on Afghanistan

Before the Taliban takeover in 1996, hundreds of thousand girls were in schools in Afghanistan, dozens of thousands were teaching, and nearly ten thousand were enrolled in higher education. After 5 years of Taliban rule, the amount of girls in schools fell to none<sup>[10]</sup>. In 2001, following the September 11 attacks in the US, Afghanistan was invaded and occupied as a consequence of their willful harboring of the perpetrators of the terror attack<sup>[17]</sup>.

In the 20 years between the fall of the first Taliban state and the rise of the current regime, Afghanistan began to make progress towards democratic governance and social development<sup>[7]</sup>. Afghanistan's progress however was hindered by a lack of substantial investment, corruption, and the continued insurgent activity of the Taliban, with assistance from Pakistan<sup>[7]</sup>.

In 2020 the Trump administration signed a peace deal with the Taliban which paved the way for the US withdrawal from the country the following year<sup>[18]</sup>. The Afghan defense forces however were totally dependent on the US for their survival, and the departure of US troops in 2021 led to the swift collapse of the internationally backed government and the return of the Taliban<sup>[19]</sup>, where we find ourselves today.

## 2. Role of Women

One of the key concerns of the international community and the UN is women's rights in Afghanistan. While the Taliban initially promised to respect girls rights to education, that promise was quickly broken as the Taliban banned women from universities and middle and high schools, resulting in 80% of girls in 2022 not receiving any sort of education<sup>[9]</sup>.

The UN has stated that the Taliban's exclusion of women from society, including aid

work, has also severely hampered Afghanistan's ability to rebuild, which compounds an already dire humanitarian crisis in the country<sup>[3]</sup>.

In addition to restrictions on work and education opportunities, women have also been outright banned from many aspects of public life such as going to the gym or even going to parks, resulting in a de-facto mass house arrest of all women in Afghanistan<sup>[10]</sup>.

Despite the aforementioned pledges by the Taliban, the situation of women in Afghanistan has only deteriorated since their takeover with no sign of progress<sup>[6]</sup>.

## 3. Foreign and Future perspectives

The responses to the takeover of the Taliban were very different by country. Some countries, such as China and Pakistan were eager to quickly resume diplomatic relations<sup>[11]</sup>, though Pakistan has recently had a worsening of diplomatic relations with the new government due to a rise in armed attacks on Pakistan's territory originating from groups in Afghanistan<sup>[12]</sup>. Meanwhile, EU countries' relations with the Taliban were more skeptical, not intending to give any form of legitimacy to the new leaders<sup>[13]</sup>. The United States, while maintaining limited engagement with Afghan authorities for counterterrorism purposes, has not decided whether to recognize the Taliban or not<sup>[14]</sup>. Iran, in a water conflict with the Taliban has gone into a potential situation of war with Afghanistan over a river flowing in both countries<sup>[15]</sup>. Though Russia continues to keep contacts, they stated that respect for women's rights is the key to recognition<sup>[16]</sup>.

The UN's strategy towards women's rights in Afghanistan has been to make recognition and subsequent legitimacy of the Taliban contingent on them respecting girl's rights<sup>[4]</sup>. Despite the differences in their political motivations, the involved nations may find the right answers to the challenges at hand.

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