



AFGHAN WITNESS

A project by



CENTRE for
INFORMATION
RESILIENCE

VARIATION IN THE TALIBAN'S
IMPLEMENTATION OF RESTRICTIONS ON
WOMEN AND THE MEDIA

An AW investigation Into Enforcement Across Institutions,
Provinces, and Restriction Types

VARIATION IN THE TALIBAN'S IMPLEMENTATION OF RESTRICTIONS ON WOMEN AND THE MEDIA

An AW investigation Into Enforcement Across Institutions,
Provinces and Restriction Types

3 August 2026

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	3
2. INTRODUCTION	4
3. METHODOLOGY	5
3.1 DATA COLLECTION & PRESERVATION	7
3.2 A NOTE ON CATEGORISATION	7
3.3 ANALYSIS AND VERIFICATION	8
3.4 CASE STUDY SPECIFIC ANALYSIS	9
4. CHAPTER 1: TALIBAN GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE AND INTERNAL DYNAMICS	10
4.1 FACTIONS WITHIN THE TALIBAN RANKS IMPACT THE IMPLEMENTATION OF RESTRICTIONS	10
4.2 IMPLICATIONS	13
5. CHAPTER 2: IMPLEMENTATION OF RESTRICTIONS CONCERNING THE MEDIA	13
5.1 OVERVIEW OF KEY RESTRICTIONS	13
5.2 ISSUING AND ENFORCING ENTITIES	17
5.3 IMPLEMENTATION PATTERNS AND ENFORCEMENT PRACTICES	20
5.4 GEOGRAPHIC AND INSTITUTIONAL VARIATION	21
5.5 LEADERSHIP INFLUENCE AND PROVINCIAL GOVERNANCE	22
5.6 KEY INCIDENTS ILLUSTRATING ENFORCEMENT	23
5.7 KEY FACTORS SHAPING VARIATION	24
5.8 CASE STUDY: BAN ON IMAGES OF LIVING BEINGS	25
6. CHAPTER 3: IMPLEMENTATION OF RESTRICTIONS CONCERNING WOMEN AND GIRLS	28
6.1 OVERVIEW OF KEY RESTRICTIONS	28
6.2 ISSUING AND ENFORCING ENTITIES	31
6.3 THE MPVPV	33

6.4 IMPLEMENTATION PATTERNS AND ENFORCEMENT PRACTICES.....	34
6.5 GEOGRAPHIC AND INSTITUTIONAL VARIATION	34
6.6 KEY INCIDENTS ILLUSTRATING ENFORCEMENT.....	36
6.7 KEY FACTORS SHAPING VARIATION.....	37
6.8 CASE STUDY: RESTRICTIONS ON FEMALE NGO WORKERS.....	38
7. CHAPTER 4: COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS: WOMEN VS MEDIA RESTRICTIONS....	40
7.1 KEY DIFFERENCES IN IMPLEMENTATION AND ENFORCEMENT.....	40
7.2 KEY SIMILARITIES IN IMPLEMENTATION AND ENFORCEMENT	41
7.3 FACTORS DRIVING VARIATION ACROSS BOTH DOMAINS.....	42
7.4 ROLE OF GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES, INSTITUTIONS, AND LOCAL DYNAMICS	42
8. CONCLUSION	43
ANNEX 1: AFGHAN WITNESS' METHODOLOGY	45

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since the Taliban's return to power in August 2021, numerous restrictions have been imposed on women and the media. Although these restrictions have been well documented, less attention has been given to their practical implementation and the reasons behind the variability in their implementation across Afghanistan. Drawing on Afghan Witness's (AW) monitoring of restrictions and implementation-related incidents from January 2022 to April 2026, this report examines not only the restrictions themselves but also their issuance, implementation, and enforcement.

A key finding of the report is that variation in implementation should not necessarily be interpreted as inconsistent Taliban policy. Rather, AW's analysis suggests that it reflects a governance system in which nationally issued restrictions are implemented through multiple institutions operating at both national and provincial levels. While implementation varies across Afghanistan, it appears to stem from differences in governance structures, institutional arrangements, provincial leadership, local dynamics, and reporting environments, rather than from inconsistencies in national policy.

AW identified a broad and evolving framework of restrictions concerning women and the media. Restrictions on women affect almost all areas of public life, including education, employment, healthcare, freedom of movement, and civic participation. Restrictions on the media are more narrowly focused on regulating the information environment through censorship, controls on reporting, and restrictions affecting journalists and media organisations. Across both domains, restrictions are introduced through a combination of laws, decrees, directives, and verbal instructions, before being implemented by ministries, provincial authorities, and public institutions, and enforced through a range of regulatory and coercive measures.

The report also finds important differences in how restrictions on women and the media are implemented. Restrictions on women are issued by a broad range of ministries and authorities, implemented through provincial departments, public institutions, and other administrative actors, and enforced primarily by provincial departments of the Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (MPVPV), alongside other ministries and local authorities.

Media restrictions are primarily issued by the Ministry of Information and Culture (MoIC), the MPVPV, the Supreme Leader and, in some cases, provincial authorities. Their implementation relies on provincial departments, media organisations, and other administrative actors. At the same time, enforcement is closely associated with the General Directorate of Intelligence (GDI), provincial authorities, and, increasingly, the MPVPV following the adoption of the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (PVPV) Law.

Implementation is not uniform across Afghanistan. Kabul, Kandahar, and Herat consistently record comparatively high numbers of reported implementation- and enforcement-related incidents across both domains. While stronger reporting environments likely contribute to this pattern, AW's analysis suggests that governance structures, institutional presence, provincial leadership, and local dynamics also influence the implementation of restrictions. Across both domains, responsibilities for issuing, implementing, and enforcing restrictions frequently overlap, contributing to variation in how nationally issued restrictions are applied in practice.

Overall, the report demonstrates that examining implementation provides a more complete understanding of the de facto authorities' governance than examining policy alone. Rather than viewing implementation as the uniform application of nationally issued restrictions, the findings show how those restrictions are translated into practice through multiple institutions operating within different provincial contexts. This provides new insight into how the Taliban de facto authorities exercise authority across Afghanistan while pursuing broadly consistent national policy objectives.

2. INTRODUCTION

Since August 2021, the Taliban de facto authorities have imposed dozens of restrictions on women and girls, heavily limiting their right to education, work, freedom of movement, and access to public spaces and services. The de facto authorities have also significantly curtailed media operations through restrictions at national and provincial levels.

Drawing on AW's OSINT dataset, this report examines how the de facto authorities have implemented restrictions on the media and women between January 2022 and April 2026. The report analyses how internal Taliban power dynamics, governance structures, local leadership, and other contextual factors, to be further detailed, contribute to differences in implementation and enforcement outcomes. The report will compare implementation patterns across both domains to identify similarities, differences, and the factors contributing to variation.

[Chapter 1](#) of this report provides background and analysis of the de facto authorities' governance structure and internal dynamics, providing an analytical framework for understanding variation in the implementation of restrictions on the media and women. [Chapter 2](#) examines variation in the enforcement of media-related restrictions by analysing key patterns, identifying institutional and geographic differences, and the factors that contribute to them. Similarly, [Chapter 3](#) focuses on the enforcement of restrictions on women to understand variation in implementation, using the same approach as the section on media. [Chapter 4](#) provides a comparative analysis of the differences and similarities in the implementation of restrictions in both domains and explores the key drivers of variation. It also outlines how governance structures,

institutions and internal dynamics have shaped the outcomes.

3. METHODOLOGY

The processes underpinning AW's methodology have been developed and replicated across CIR's other projects, including [Eyes on Russia](#) and [Myanmar Witness](#). [CIR's methodology](#) has been guided by best practices in the open-source field and reviewed by leading practitioners. For further detailed information on AW's methodology, please see Annex 1 or visit [CIR's website](#).

To produce this report, AW drew on data collected from 1 January 2022 to 30 April 2026 as part of its human rights violations (HRVs) dataset, which contains reports and claims of HRVs in four categories, including the media and women. AW understands the category 'media' to encompass formal media outlets, journalists, and media workers based and operating in Afghanistan. This is inclusive of television, radio, print media, and digital media outputs. The entries for this report do not include 'Youtubers', social media activists, or individuals disseminating information via social media platforms.

Data was manually collected from public sources using open-source intelligence (OSINT) techniques. Data sources included media reports, social media posts, official de facto authorities' announcements, and reports from human rights organisations. Social media platform sources were primarily X, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube, and, in some instances, Telegram.

Table 1 provides an overview of working definitions and their scope for key terms used throughout this report:

DATA COLLECTION & PRESERVATION	
Claims	A claim is an allegation, assertion, report, or statement describing an event, action, restriction, policy, or other development relevant to the scope of the report. Claims may originate from individuals, organisations, media outlets, or official actors and may be accompanied by supporting evidence or provided without corroborating material.
Communication	Written or verbal transmission of information on a measure, policy, regulation, or directive.
Enforcement	Actions taken by government entities to ensure compliance and respond to perceived non-compliance, such as monitoring, inspections, punitive measures, and others.
Entry	One entry in AW's database represents one incident. Entries mentioning several provinces were separated, and each was counted individually.
Implementation	The adoption and execution of a law, policy, regulation, or directive into action by responsible government entities.
Incidents	An incident is a reported or observed event relevant to the scope of this report that has been identified through the

	monitoring and analysis of public sources. Each incident, 'entry', represents an occurrence and may be documented through one or more sources, including user-generated content (UGC), media reporting, and official communications. In the context of this report, this includes documented occasions in which restrictions affecting women, media actors, or media organisations were communicated, implemented or enforced by the de facto authorities.
Issuance	The formal introduction of a policy, law, regulation, or directive by government entities.
Public Sources	Refers to information that is openly accessible without requiring privileged access, including content published on social media platforms, news websites, official government or institutional channels, public statements, reports, and other publicly available digital repositories. This includes user-generated content and material produced by media organisations, civil society actors, public authorities, and other entities available on open-source platforms.
ANALYSIS & VERIFICATION	
Allegiance	'Allegiance' assessments, where relating to the de facto authorities, are based on the individuals' political appointment histories, their public statements, documented relationships with senior leadership, reporting from reputable sources, and AW analysts' contextual expertise.
Attribution	Refers to the actor identified by a source or an analytical assessment as responsible for an action, decision, restriction, incident, or policy. Attribution may be made at varying levels, ranging from broad references (e.g. "Taliban de facto authorities") to named entities, offices, or groups (e.g. "MPVPV ombudsmen"). Attribution reflects available evidence and source reporting.
Reputable	Sources demonstrating a consistent record of accurate, transparent, and reliable reporting or information sharing over time related to the situation in Afghanistan. Source reputation assessments consider factors including editorial standards, sourcing transparency, historical accuracy, consistency with independently corroborated information, expertise or proximity to Afghanistan's realities, and any known biases or conflicts of interest. However, reputability does not guarantee that every piece of information from the source is accurate, as each claim is evaluated individually.
Restrictions	In this report, restrictions refer to restrictive policies issued by the de facto authorities that hinder the media's ability to operate and limit women's rights, such as access to education, work, freedom of movement, and other rights. AW's HRV database contained only entries in which regulation in some way limited an individual or group's personal or collective rights and freedoms.

Verified	Information or content is considered verified when analysts can independently corroborate one or more material elements of a claim using available evidence and established open-source investigative techniques. Verification may involve visual analysis, contextual indicators, official documentation, witness accounts, or other independent confirmation. While location and dates may be established where relevant and feasible, verification does not require every aspect of a claim to be confirmed. Rather, it indicates that available evidence supports the reported event or claim with a high degree of confidence.
----------	---

Table 1: Afghan Witness key working terms and definitions.

3.1 DATA COLLECTION & PRESERVATION

AW established its HRVs dataset in January 2022 as part of monitoring HRVs in Afghanistan. The data includes claims and reports of HRVs in the following four categories:

- Alleged HRVs concerning the right to life, liberty, freedom from torture and others
- Alleged HRVs concerning the ability of media, civil society and human rights defenders to operate
- Alleged HRVs concerning minorities and vulnerable groups
- Alleged HRVs concerning women and girls

The data used in this report is part of AW's HRVs data, with all entries classified as HRVs. Based on this foundational data, AW analysts created a dataset dedicated to entries related to media and women, with separate sheets for restrictions and incidents in each category. Investigators analysed 760 entries, relying on qualitative and quantitative methods. The numbers across the four categories fall as follows:

- 55 media-related restrictions
- 156 enforcement-related incidents of restrictions concerning the media
- 191 women-related restrictions
- 358 enforcement-related incidents of restrictions concerning women

Five of the enforcement-related incidents concerning the media did not specify a location, resulting in only 151 incidents being recorded geographically.

3.2 A NOTE ON CATEGORISATION

NATIONAL VERSUS PROVINCIAL (ANNOUNCEMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION)

AW classified restrictions as either "national" or "provincial" based on where they were reported to have been issued or intended to be implemented. The categorisation was historically distinct, with no overlap recorded.

MULTIPLE CATEGORISATION

Several entries were assigned to multiple categories. For instance, an enforcement incident might be listed under both hijab and freedom of movement categories. AW considered these overlapping categories separately. This overlap indicates that the sum of entries across categories could be higher than the number of unique categories.

MULTIPLE ISSUING AND ENFORCEMENT ACTORS

Entries were assigned to multiple actors within each distinct category, such as issuing or enforcement bodies. For instance, when reports named more than one entity issuing a restriction or more than one government body involved in enforcing a restriction, the database entry was attributed to all actors involved.

Attributions were recorded as either reported or claimed. Entries at the provincial level were attributed to the relevant provincial government bodies. AW then combined the provincial and national attributions to produce the charts in this report.

3.3 ANALYSIS AND VERIFICATION

Assessments were often a combination of data analysis, contextual and historical knowledge, and the extensive expertise of AW analysts. The analysis in this report is based on a mixed-methods approach, triangulating social media analysis and open-source intelligence with information gathered from media outlets, academic research, and the research team's knowledge.

AW has not independently verified every incident included in the data set. However, where possible, entries related to restrictions in both categories were cross-checked against multiple independent sources and assessed for consistency and credibility. Only reports from reputable independent media, especially Afghan media, and from humanitarian organisations with a focus on Afghanistan were included in the datasets when collecting and analysing data.

Many of the entries in the dataset lacked precise attribution in the reporting, potentially preventing other actors from being identified. For instance, several reports in the dataset used the general terms *“the Taliban”* and *“the authorities”* to attribute the incidents to the perpetrators.

It is important to note that the actual number of restrictions and incidents may be higher than what OSINT research captures. For example, incidents involving women often go unreported in public sources because of social stigma, fear of retribution, and the [limited internet access](#) for Afghan women. There is also a risk of bias, as regions with better connectivity and media coverage are more visible than peripheral and rural areas. Therefore, a higher number of reported incidents does not necessarily be interpreted as indicating more intensive implementation or enforcement.

QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

Quantitative analysis was used to identify patterns, frequencies, and geographic and institutional variation in implementation. Meanwhile, qualitative analysis provided insights into implementation practices, enforcement dynamics, attribution, and the roles of Taliban entities.

Within the data subset on restrictions, AW analysed the issuing source, restriction type, and content. For enforcement-related incidents, AW analysed the institutions responsible for implementing and enforcing restrictions, the enforcement measures employed, and the applicable human rights categories.

In several cases where the reports did not provide specific information about the actors involved or other categories, they were marked as “Not specified”. All graphs in this report displaying institutional and geographic variation include only entries with counts above two per area and institution. This decision was made to ensure the legibility of figures with larger data sets.

3.4 CASE STUDY SPECIFIC ANALYSIS

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BAN ON IMAGES OF LIVING BEINGS

To analyse the implementation of the ban on images of living beings, AW analysts manually analysed the X accounts and websites of 11 ministries and administrations of the de facto authorities, as well as the X and YouTube accounts of the provincial branches of the state-run Radio Television Afghanistan (RTA).

The accounts of the 11 ministries and administrations were initially documented by the [Afghanistan Journalists Centre](#) (AFJC) as those of the affected administrations. This reporting, however, did not provide analysis of potential links between the ban's impact and leadership allegiances.

THE DE FACTO AUTHORITIES' GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES

To analyse the de facto authorities' governance structures, AW identified the institutions responsible for issuing, implementing, and enforcing restrictions. This assessment was based on the reported roles of the de facto authorities' entities in each restriction or incident, as documented in their official announcements, media reports, and reports from human rights organisations. Where available reporting did not identify the responsible institution or official, this was recorded as "Not specified."

Where sufficient information was available, AW also considered the positions and reported affiliations of senior Taliban officials to assess how governance structures and leadership dynamics may influence implementation. Assessments of the allegiance of Taliban officials were based on appointment history, public statements, documented relationships with senior leadership, and patterns of implementation across specific ministries and provinces.

4. CHAPTER 1: TALIBAN GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE AND INTERNAL DYNAMICS

The de facto authorities announced their first cabinet in Kabul in [September 2021](#), formalising their governing structure. Subsequent observations have revealed a complex governance system characterised by multiple centres of authority whose mandates and interests occasionally diverge. Among the most significant aspects are tensions between the policies of the Supreme Leader, Sheikh Hibatullah Akhundzada, and the central cabinet, the rivalry between the Haqqani and Kandahari factions, and the influence of various former senior military commanders on the governance structure.

This chapter outlines the de facto authorities' governance structure and internal dynamics, providing an analytical framework for understanding variations in the implementation of restrictions on women and the media. It examines how authority is distributed between central and provincial actors, how competing centres of power interact, and how these dynamics shape policy implementation across Afghanistan.

4.1 FACTIONS WITHIN THE TALIBAN RANKS IMPACT THE IMPLEMENTATION OF RESTRICTIONS

Since the Taliban's takeover of power in August 2021, authority within the movement has been [divided](#) between the Kandahari and Haqqani factions. The Kandahari faction includes several influential leaders, including the Supreme Leader Akhundzada, the Minister of Defence Mullah Mohammad Yaqoob, and the Deputy Prime Minister Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar. All of them exercise [considerable influence](#) over the governance structure. In contrast, the Haqqani faction is led by Sirajuddin Haqqani, one of Akhundzada's three deputies and the Minister of Interior since September 2021.

After assuming power, the Taliban de facto authorities established a central government by [announcing a cabinet](#) that largely consisted of the same ministries that had existed under the former Afghan Republic. At the provincial and district levels, they retained the previous administrative structure through various directorates. They also granted key provinces regional influence over their respective areas. This arrangement was particularly evident in Balkh in the north, Nangarhar in the east, Kandahar in the south, and Herat in the west.

This decentralised operational structure is particularly important when examining the implementation of restrictions on women and the media. Although many restrictions originate from central authorities, their enforcement often depends on provincial actors, leading to significant geographic variation.

At the provincial level, the governor serves as the chief executive authority. Various provincial directorates, which constitute the basic units of provincial governance,

operate under the governor's administration. In practice, however, these directorates are often not fully subordinate to the governor and frequently manage their affairs with considerable autonomy. This creates an implementation environment in which governors, directorates, security actors, and ministerial representatives may simultaneously influence how restrictions are applied at the local level.

From the outset, Haqqani maintained a form of [parallel influence](#) alongside Akhundzada. As Minister of Interior, he exercised authority over the [appointment](#) and transfer of provincial and district governors. His influence also extended to the appointment of directors at the provincial and district levels. However, since 2021, Akhundzada has moved to curb Haqqani's expanding influence within the governance structure. He sought not only to confine Haqqani's authority to his ministry but also to exert greater control over its internal affairs.

At present, Akhundzada [directly intervenes](#) in even minor appointments and transfers within the Ministry of Interior. There are now purportedly instances where Akhundzada has personally issued orders for the appointment of police station chiefs. In such cases, the appointed officials cannot be removed, even by the Minister of Interior.

THE KANDAHARIS ARE NOT A UNIFIED BLOC AND OCCASIONAL PRAGMATISM EMERGES

Most of the key leadership positions within the Taliban de facto authorities' governance structure, including the Prime Minister and most cabinet members, are held by Kandaharis. However, the Kandaharis are not a unified bloc operating under a single leadership structure. After Akhundzada, the most influential figures include Prime Minister Mullah Mohammad Hassan Akhund, Minister of Defence Yaqoob, and Deputy Prime Minister Baradar.

Compared with Akhundzada, these leaders have at times [shown a preference for more pragmatic measures](#) to preserve the regime. This has occasionally [put them at odds](#) with Akhundzada's more rigid and ideologically driven policies. A notable example was Akhundzada's order banning girls' education. Initially, these leaders, along with Haqqani and several cabinet members, reportedly [expressed their opposition](#) internally.

Nonetheless, Akhundzada remained firm on enforcing the ban. As the issue became a source of [internal tension](#) in 2023, these influential leaders gradually softened their opposition and ultimately remained silent on the matter.

Another example emerged in late September 2025, when Akhundzada reportedly sent an order to the Kabul cabinet imposing a ban on [internet](#) use. This marked the first known instance in which one of his directives was rejected. According to the [BBC](#), senior Taliban leaders held discussions with Prime Minister Akhund, arguing that internet access was indispensable for governance and the functioning of the country. Following these discussions, internet services were reportedly reinstated.

This marked an unprecedented development under the of the de facto authorities, as it involved rejecting a directive issued by the Supreme Leader. Although such cases appear exceptional, they demonstrate that internal negotiation and pragmatic considerations persist in certain areas of governance.

SUPREME LEADER APPOINTS LOYALISTS TO CONSOLIDATE HIS NATIONAL AND PROVINCIAL INFLUENCE

Alongside these influential leaders, Akhundzada has increasingly relied on a network of unconditional loyalists who support his directives and policies without hesitation. He has appointed many of these individuals to key positions across the cabinet, government, and security sector. Based on observations by AW analysts, one of the most significant strategies Akhundzada adopted after 2022 was the systematic placement of loyalists throughout the governance structure, enabling him to gradually expand and consolidate his influence at both national and provincial levels.

Among them, [Mullah Mohammad Yusuf Wafa](#), the Governor of Balkh Province, is particularly noteworthy and widely regarded as [the de facto head](#) of northern Afghanistan and a [Supreme Leader loyalist](#). Another prominent figure is Neda Mohammad Nadeem, a senior cabinet member and a staunch supporter of Akhundzada.

Former Higher Education Minister Sheikh Abdul Baqi Haqqani reportedly called on Akhundzada to lift the ban on girls' education, mentioned above, during a meeting of the Taliban Supreme Council in Kandahar in 2023. Shortly afterwards, Haqqani was removed from his position and replaced by Nadeem, who firmly supports Akhundzada's policies and has consistently defended the ban.

As a result, many Taliban officials who had initially opposed more hardline policies became increasingly silent. Fear of dismissal discouraged public dissent, including among those aligned with the Haqqani faction and other so-called pragmatic leaders.

ENFORCEMENT THROUGH RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS

In addition to support from influential Kandahari commanders, Akhundzada relies on an extensive network of like-minded religious leaders across Afghanistan. This network has strengthened his political authority and religious legitimacy. Since 2023, as part of this effort, [Ulema Councils](#) have been established in every province to monitor the implementation of the de facto authorities' policies and report directly to Akhundzada.

Formally, these councils are tasked with monitoring the implementation of Sharia. In practice, however, they also serve as mechanisms for assessing whether provincial and local officials comply with Akhundzada's directives. Based on their reports, recommendations, and complaints, Akhundzada frequently intervenes in provincial affairs from Kandahar and exercises significant authority over appointments and dismissals.

Several examples illustrate this dynamic. In 2024, Shabir Ahmad Usmani, the Director of Information and Culture in Khost Province, was [dismissed](#) after publicly criticising the ban on girls' education and allowing young girls to participate in departmental events. Similarly, in Nangarhar in 2025, Qari Sajid Khogyani, head of the provincial Directorate of Information and Culture, was [dismissed after organising](#) a [poetry festival](#) attended by critics of Akhundzada's policies.

4.2 IMPLICATIONS

While the precise balance of power within the de facto authorities remains difficult to assess due to limited transparency, available evidence indicates that Akhundzada has progressively consolidated authority since 2022 while preserving a governance model that depends on provincial actors for implementation.

Within the de facto authorities' governance structure, Supreme Leader Hibatullah Akhundzada holds ultimate authority and can intervene at any level of policymaking and administration. However, policy implementation is mediated by ministries, security institutions, provincial governors, and local directorates, which retain varying degrees of operational influence.

While internal tensions and competing power centres persist, Akhundzada has progressively constrained dissent by appointing loyalists and expanding central oversight mechanisms. The resulting governance system is therefore characterised by highly centralised decision-making combined with decentralised implementation. This dynamic helps explain the variation observed in the enforcement of restrictions on women and the media across Afghanistan,

5. CHAPTER 2: IMPLEMENTATION OF RESTRICTIONS CONCERNING THE MEDIA

5.1 OVERVIEW OF KEY RESTRICTIONS

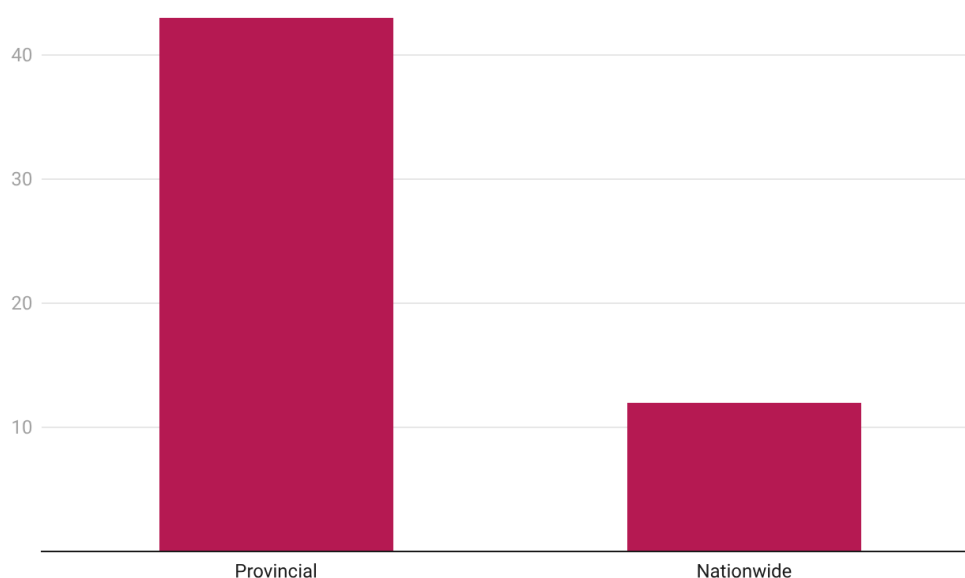
Since seizing power in August 2021, the Taliban de facto authorities introduced extensive surveillance and censorship measures targeting Afghanistan's media sector. While they have not formally abrogated the [Mass Media Law](#) or the [Access to Information Law](#) enacted under the former Afghan government, they have issued a growing body of restrictions that operate alongside, and in practice often supersede, the existing legal framework.

A 25 December 2025 report from the [AFJC](#) indicates that the de facto authorities have issued at least 24 media-related directives since 2021. In parallel, AW's tracking of reported incidents between January 2022 and April 2026 identifies 55 restrictions at both [national](#) (12) and [provincial](#) (43) levels (see figure 1). It is important to note that the actual number of restrictions may be higher than that which can be collected through open-source channels.

These include the Law on the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (PVPV Law), issued in August 2024, a decree by the Supreme Leader, formal directives, verbal instructions, and others. The number, shown in figure 1, does not include the enforcement of the ban on images of living beings under the PVPV Law, as they are part of the measures to implement the ban codified in the law.

Geographic Scope of Restrictions

Nationwide vs provincial



Source: Afghan Witness • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 1: Graph showing the number of reported incidents related to media restrictions on a provincial versus nationwide level.

The geographic distribution of recorded restrictions also highlights uneven implementation. A significantly higher proportion of reported restrictions occur at the provincial level (see figure 1). This indicates that local authorities play a key role in implementing and enforcing media restrictions, including how they interpret and apply media controls.

This variation reflects a wider pattern in which centrally issued directives are mediated through provincial governance structures, resulting in variations in enforcement, interpretation, and consistency nationwide.

As seen in figure 2, Kabul, Kandahar, Helmand, and Chazni provinces have the most restrictions on the media.

Taliban Restrictions per Province

Number of restrictions issued by the Taliban de facto authorities per province, between January 2022 and April 2026.

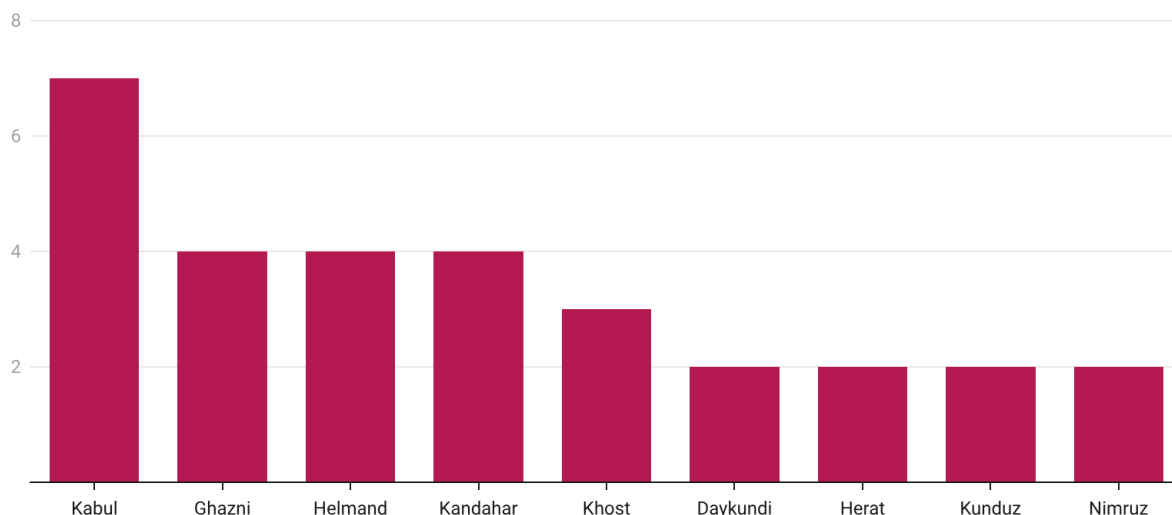


Chart: Afghan Witness • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 2: Graph showing the top nine provinces with the highest number of reported media restrictions issued by the Taliban de facto authorities.

The data analysed by AW (see figure 3) indicate that media restrictions are not confined to formal legislation or centrally issued decrees but also emerge through a broader system of directives and ad hoc implementation and enforcement practices at both national and provincial levels. This dual structure contributes to variation in how restrictions are interpreted and applied across different contexts.

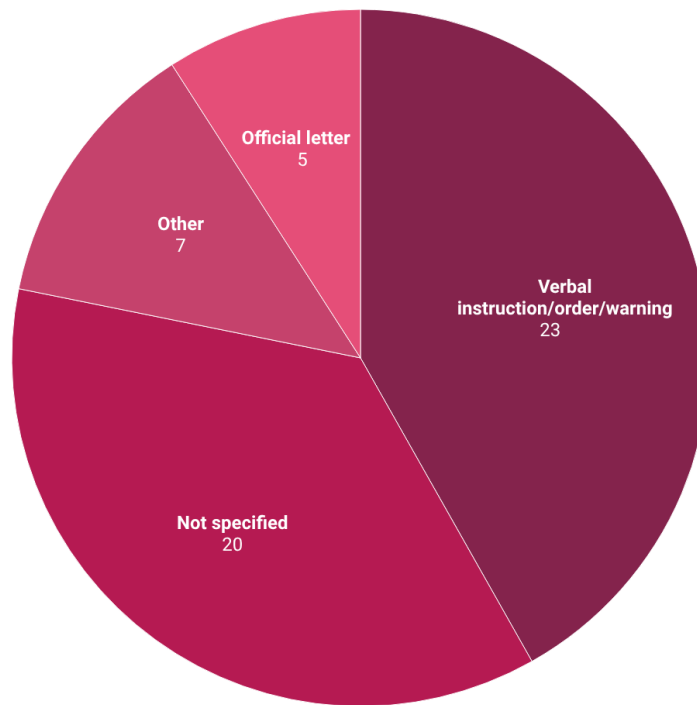
As shown in figure 3, 23 out of 55 restrictions were issued in the form of verbal communication, mainly instructions given to media personnel during joint meetings. These restrictions vary and include [demands for prior approval of content](#) by Taliban officials before publication, bans on [criticising officials](#), [prohibitions on women's voices](#) and [music](#), requirements for media staff to follow specific [dress codes](#) and [appearance standards](#).

Notably, the recorded restrictions at the provincial level are mostly verbal, while those at the national level are formal documents, such as [laws](#), [official decrees](#), and [directives](#), among other formats.

Types of Restrictions

Number of restrictions per type (e.g. Law, decree, verbal instruction, etc)

Verbal instruction/order/warning Not specified Other Official letter



Source: Afghan Witness • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 3: Graph showing the number and format of reported media restrictions.

In addition to the two laws ratified by the former Afghan government — the [Mass Media Law](#) and the [Access to Information Law](#) — the PVPV Law also includes provisions affecting the media, particularly Article 17, which addresses the publication of images of living beings. Furthermore, in July 2025, the [MoIC](#) reportedly issued a directive regulating political talk shows and establishing an oversight committee to monitor their content. On 5 January 2026, the official X account of the [High Directorate of Supervision and Prosecutions of Decrees and Edicts](#) published a new decree from Supreme Leader Akhundzada, prohibiting public and media criticism of Taliban officials. The decree states:

"On 5 January 2026, the official X account of the High Directorate of Supervision and Prosecution of Decrees and Edicts published a new decree issued by the Supreme Leader, Hibatullah Akhundzada, prohibiting public and media criticism of Taliban officials. According to subsequent reporting, the decree prohibits what it describes as "unrealistic" or "unfounded" criticism of Taliban officials and makes criticism of Taliban courts and judicial proceedings a punishable offence when expressed publicly or through the media."

5.2 ISSUING AND ENFORCING ENTITIES

ISSUING ENTITIES

Media restrictions are issued by a multi-layered governance structure involving both central and provincial actors, while their implementation and enforcement rely on a range of national and local institutions.

At the national level, key actors involved in issuing media-related restrictions include the **MoIC, the MPVPV, GDI, and the Supreme Leader**. These bodies are responsible for establishing formal directives, issuing guidance, and defining the overall regulatory approach to media activity.

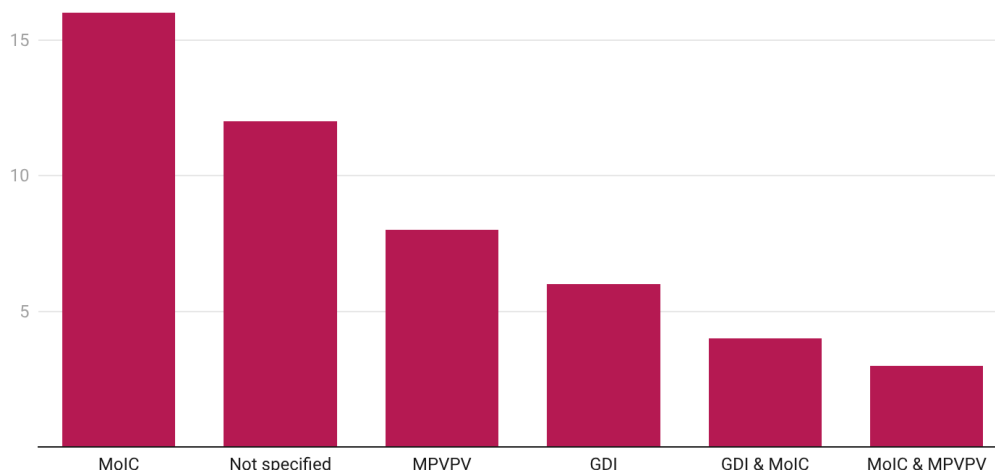
The de facto authorities' provincial authorities, including provincial departments within key administrations, also play a significant role in both issuing and enforcing restrictions. In some cases, provincial actors transmit or reinforce national directives; in others, they introduce additional restrictions or interpret existing policies to reflect local priorities and conditions.

AW notes that provincial power dynamics between governors and civil and military departments largely depend on the governor's influence. Governors who are influential, often because of ties to the Taliban de facto authorities' leadership or local support, such as in Kandahar, Balkh, and Herat, can shape the decisions of provincial institutions. By contrast, governors whose authority is more formal than substantive, such as in Helmand, Farah, and Logar, tend to have limited sway, with provincial departments primarily reporting to their respective ministries in Kabul.

Combining the data at the national and provincial levels (see figure 4), [MoIC](#) (16) is the key entity, followed by the [MPVPV](#) (8) and the [GDI](#) (6). There are also instances of interdepartmental cooperation between the GDI and MoIC, the MoIC and the MPVPV, and between provincial governors and these ministries.

Taliban Restrictions per Issuing Administration

Number of media related restrictions issued by each Taliban department, between January 2022 and April 2026



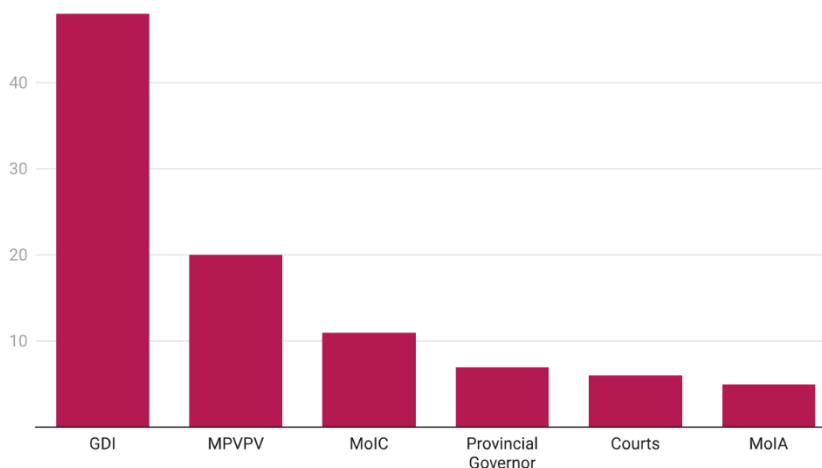
Source: Afghan Witness • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 4: Graph showing the number of media-related restrictions issued by each Taliban department.

Alongside these administrative bodies, intelligence and security actors also play an important role in enforcement. These include security and intelligence structures at both national and provincial levels, which monitor compliance with policies, respond to violations, and apply coercive measures where necessary.

Key Enforcement Bodies

Number of alleged enforcement incident per enforcement body, between January 2022 - April 2026



Source: Afghan Witness • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 5: Graph showing the number of reported incidents of media restrictions enforcers per department.

In many cases, there is overlap and institutional ambiguity among these actors. Responsibilities may intersect among ministries, provincial authorities, and security

structures, particularly in monitoring and enforcement activities. This overlap can create uncertainty about which institution is responsible for specific enforcement actions, as well as variation in how restrictions are applied.

Overall, while central authorities define the formal regulatory framework for media restrictions, provincial authorities and security actors play a decisive role in determining how these restrictions are implemented in practice. This central–provincial dynamic directly contributes to uneven enforcement across different regions and institutions.

5.2.2 THE MINISTRY OF INFORMATION AND CULTURE

The de facto authorities' MoIC has functioned as the regime's principal instrument for controlling mass media, and its leadership embodies the movement's insurgent origins: for most of the post-2021 period it was headed by acting Minister Khairullah Khairkhwa, a 1994 co-founder of the Taliban and former spokesperson who was [held](#) at Guantánamo Bay for twelve years before his 2014 release as one of the "Taliban Five."

The Supreme Leader [demoted](#) Khairkhwa and appointed him as the governor of Maidan Wardak in September 2025. The Ministry is currently led by [Sheikh Sher Ahmad Haqani](#).

AW's analysis suggests that the MoIC implements media restrictions through a layered administrative structure in which the ministry's provincial directorates serve as the frontline censors. For example, a March 2022 report by [Human Rights Watch](#) found that in seventeen of the country's thirty-four provinces, journalists were required to submit their reports to the provincial Information and Culture Directorate for approval before publication, with directorate officials in provinces such as Takhar routinely forwarding draft reports to the intelligence directorate for clearance, and reporters in Panjshir and Helmand describing how authorities "edit and filter" their stories and bar them from contacting any office other than the MoIC. At the national level, the ministry has acted as a direct censorship body, [suspending](#) Radio Azadi's FM broadcasts across thirteen Afghan cities and halting Voice of America transmissions, while also sharply [restricting](#) the use of Persian/Dari in official documents, signage, and state media.

Provincial directorates have also imposed gendered restrictions independent of central decrees. The Nangarhar Information and Culture Directorate [barred](#) female journalists from attending their workplaces without a mahram (male guardian) and from appearing in live programmes alongside men. The ministry purged its own staff, dismissing more than 300 employees of National Radio and Television, including 90 women, from central and provincial offices.

AW's findings suggest that implementing media restrictions is not the MoIC's exclusive responsibility. While the ministry plays the leading regulatory role through issuing directives, communicating restrictions, and overseeing provincial implementation, other institutions also contribute to their implementation and

enforcement. Most notably, the PVPV Law expanded the role of the MPVPV by [codifying](#) restrictions on the publication of images of “living beings” under Article 17, alongside prohibitions on content deemed “contrary to Islamic law”. As discussed below, the GDI also plays a central role in monitoring compliance with media restrictions and enforcing them through surveillance, detention and other coercive measures.

THE GENERAL DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

The GDI is the de facto authorities’ national intelligence and security agency, re-established following their takeover in August 2021. It is answerable directly to the Supreme Leader and operates outside the oversight of other government institutions. Since 2021, the agency has been headed by Abdul Haq Wasiq, a long-standing senior Taliban figure, with Taj Mir Jawad serving as First Deputy Director responsible for counterintelligence and internal security.

The GDI plays a central role in enforcing restrictions concerning the media. Unlike the MoIC, which primarily regulates media activity through directives, licensing, and engagement with media organisations, the GDI is responsible for monitoring compliance and responding to perceived violations. Public reporting since 2021 has repeatedly linked the GDI to the surveillance, detention, interrogation, and intimidation of journalists, media workers, and social media users, particularly following reporting on politically sensitive issues or criticism of the de facto authorities.

The agency maintains a nationwide presence through provincial intelligence offices, specialised security units, and an extensive civilian informant network, enabling it to monitor the implementation of the de facto authorities’ policies across Afghanistan and intervene where restrictions are considered to have been breached. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) has documented thousands of GDI “verification visits” involving threats, intimidation, and physical violence. In addition, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Afghanistan on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan has documented allegations of sexual violence against women held in GDI detention facilities.

The GDI therefore represents the principal coercive arm of the de facto authorities’ media governance system. Its role illustrates the overlap between regulatory and security institutions, with media organisations often engaging with the MoIC on regulatory matters while simultaneously facing monitoring or enforcement action from the GDI. This overlap contributes to variation in how media restrictions are implemented across Afghanistan.

5.3 IMPLEMENTATION PATTERNS AND ENFORCEMENT PRACTICES

During the reporting period, AW recorded 151 alleged enforcement-related incidents concerning the media across 26 provinces. The recorded incidents include [detentions](#) (69), implementation of the [ban on images of living beings](#) (22), [suspension](#) of media

organisations (14), [violence](#) (14), [imprisonment](#) (6), [threats](#) (5), [prevention of media coverage](#) (5), and other reported measures. Some incidents involved more than one form of enforcement.

AW's findings indicate that media restrictions are implemented through a combination of formal legal instruments, informal administrative practices, and coercive enforcement measures. While nationally issued laws, decrees, and directives establish the overall regulatory framework, implementation frequently occurs through verbal instructions issued during meetings with journalists and media organisations, inspections, monitoring activities, and direct intervention by Taliban authorities.

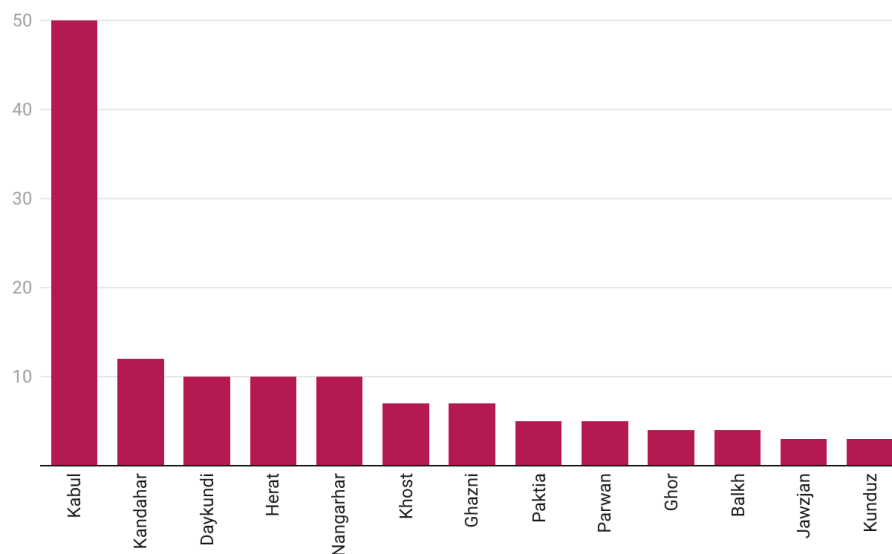
The recorded incidents also demonstrate that enforcement extends beyond regulating media content. Journalists and individuals from media organisations have reportedly been detained, threatened, suspended from operating, prevented from covering events, and subjected to violence or imprisonment following alleged violations of the de facto authorities' restrictions. Together, these findings suggest that implementation relies not only on formal regulation but also on direct enforcement measures intended to secure compliance with Taliban policies.

5.4 GEOGRAPHIC AND INSTITUTIONAL VARIATION

AW's analysis indicates that the implementation of media restrictions varies considerably across provinces. Kabul, Kandahar, Nangarhar, Herat, and Daykundi recorded comparatively high numbers of reported enforcement incidents during the reporting period. While no single factor explains these patterns, the variation appears to be shaped by a combination of institutional concentration, leadership dynamics, local governance structures, demographic factors, and reporting visibility.

Incidents related to the enforcement of restrictions concerning the media per province

Number of alleged incidents related to the enforcement of restrictions by the de facto authorities per province, between January 2022 - April 2026



Source: Afghan Witness • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 6: Graph showing the top provinces with the highest number of reported incidents related to the enforcement of media restrictions.

URBAN AND INSTITUTIONAL CENTRES

Several provinces with high numbers of reported incidents are major urban and administrative centres. Kabul, Herat, and Nangarhar host a significant proportion of Afghanistan's media outlets, civil society organisations, and public institutions. The concentration of media actors in these provinces creates more opportunities for both enforcement and documentation of incidents.

Kabul is also home to central ministries, regulatory bodies, intelligence institutions, and national media organisations, which place journalists and media outlets under closer scrutiny by multiple actors involved in monitoring and enforcement. Similarly, Herat and Nangarhar have historically served as important regional hubs with active media sectors and stronger reporting environments than in many rural provinces.

5.5 LEADERSHIP INFLUENCE AND PROVINCIAL GOVERNANCE

Provincial leadership appears to be one of several factors shaping implementation patterns across Afghanistan. Alongside institutional concentration, local governance structures, demographic factors, and reporting visibility, the influence and allegiances of provincial leaders may contribute to variations in how media restrictions are interpreted and enforced.

Kandahar occupies a unique position within the de facto authorities' governance structure as the seat of the Supreme Leader and centre of his political and religious network. Provincial authorities in Kandahar may therefore face stronger incentives to demonstrate compliance with directives associated with the leadership.

A similar dynamic may be observed in Herat, which is governed by Mawlawi Ahmad Noor Islamjar. He is one of the few provincial governors to have remained in office since the Taliban returned to power, and AW's analysis indicates that he has consistently implemented directives associated with the leadership in Kandahar. Nangarhar Province is led by [Mullah Mohammad Naem Akhund](#), an influential Taliban commander with strong ties to senior Taliban figures. These examples suggest that provincial implementation may be influenced not only by formal directives but also by the political position and allegiances of local leaders.

LOCAL DEMOGRAPHIC AND CONTEXTUAL FACTORS

Not all provinces with elevated numbers of incidents fit the pattern of major urban centres or leadership strongholds. Daykundi, for example, recorded multiple incidents linked to the closure and targeting of [Radio Nasim](#). The province's prominence appears to be driven primarily by specific enforcement actions against local media rather than its institutional importance.

Daykundi's predominantly Hazara population may also provide important contextual background. While ethnicity is not captured as a variable within AW's dataset and cannot be treated as a direct causal factor, local demographic and social dynamics may shape how restrictions are perceived, implemented, and reported.

REPORTING VISIBILITY AND DOCUMENTATION

Variation in incident numbers may also reflect differences in reporting environments. Provinces with larger media sectors, greater civil society presence, and stronger access to information are more likely to generate publicly documented reports of enforcement actions. Conversely, incidents occurring in areas with limited media presence or reporting access may be less likely to appear in open-source reporting.

Overall, geographic variation appears to result from the interaction of multiple factors rather than a single explanatory variable. Institutional concentration, leadership allegiances, provincial governance structures, local demographic dynamics, and reporting visibility all appear to influence how media restrictions are interpreted, prioritised, and enforced across Afghanistan.

5.6 KEY INCIDENTS ILLUSTRATING ENFORCEMENT

Several key incidents that illustrate the de facto authorities' enforcement efforts include the reported detention of journalists and the suspension of a media organisation in Khost province for charges of broadcasting music and interacting with female audiences on air.

On 8 February 2023, a post on X from journalist [Abdul Haq Omeri](#) said the Department of Information and Culture in Khost had warned media officials at a joint meeting that the broadcast of music had been prohibited. Similarly, on 25 February 2024, [Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty](#) reported that police authorities in the province had banned women from contacting radio and television shows. Subsequently, on 25 April 2024, [Independent Persian](#) reported that the Department of the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (DoPVPV) in Khost province had detained three journalists affiliated with three local radio stations for broadcasting music and interacting with female listeners.

The [AFJC](#) reported another incident related to the ban on 8 November 2024, saying that the de facto authorities had closed the local radio station Lawang for “violating bans on girls calling media and broadcasting music”.

Other key incidents include the implementation of the ban on images of living beings, which is covered in Section 5.8 of the report.

5.7 KEY FACTORS SHAPING VARIATION

LEADERSHIP ALLEGIANCES

AW’s analysis suggests that the ideological tendencies and allegiances of Taliban officials at both ministerial and provincial levels contribute to variation in implementation and enforcement concerning the media. This assessment is based on AW’s governance analysis, which considers leadership appointments, known factional affiliations reported in open sources, and patterns of implementation associated with specific ministries and provinces.

Among the provinces recording comparatively high numbers of enforcement-related incidents, Nangarhar is governed by a provincial leadership associated with the Kandahari faction, while Kabul hosts several central institutions led by figures closely aligned with the Supreme Leader. By contrast, Ghazni and Khost are governed by, or fall under the influence of, leaders associated with the Haqqani network. AW has recorded several incidents of local authorities detaining journalists and suspending media organisations for violating the restriction on the broadcast of music and interacting with female audiences.

The rift is more evident as the de facto authorities roll out the implementation of the ban on images of living beings. The analysis in Section 4.2 suggests that entities under the leadership of ministers and governors from the Kandahari faction have largely complied with the restriction. Detailed analysis is provided in the section below.

INSTITUTIONAL OVERLAP

Several government entities serve as enforcers of rules concerning the media, such as the MoIC, the GDI, the MPVPV, provincial governors, the MoIA, and courts. In most cases, the distinctions among the roles of each entity are blurred, and the enforcement

falls under the authority of several actors, leading to institutional overlap and hence varied implementation. For instance, provincial departments of both the [MPVPV](#) and the [MoI](#) reportedly suspended media outlets in Khost for two different charges in 2024 and 2026, respectively.

CENTRAL VERSUS PROVINCIAL GOVERNANCE DYNAMICS

As stated above, the majority of media-related restrictions are issued at the [provincial](#) level. Local authorities play a key role in communicating and implementing the rules issued at both national and provincial levels. The dynamics impact how enforcement is carried out across the country. The differences are notable in the enforcement of the ban on images of living beings, which is explored further in the following section.

URBAN VERSUS RURAL CONTEXTS

The concentration of media institutions, civil society organisations, and international organisations in urban centres and big cities such as Kabul, Kandahar, and Nangarhar could have contributed not only to the higher number of incidents concerning the media but to a greater likelihood of reporting and documentation.

5.8 CASE STUDY: BAN ON IMAGES OF LIVING BEINGS

Article 17 of the PVPV Law, published in August 2024, specifically outlines rules for “press and news organisations”. The Law stipulates that officials must prevent the media from publishing images of living beings, content that contradicts religion and Sharia, and content that insults or humiliates Muslims. Article 18 bans businesses from selling items with pictures of living beings or using such pictures in advertising, as well as “making pictures” of living beings on personal computers or mobile phones.

On 14 October 2024, [Agence France-Presse](#) reported that the MPVPV announced it would begin implementing and enforcing a ban on the media’s capture and publication of images of living beings. MPVPV spokesperson Saiful Islam Khyber said the ban would be implemented gradually through “advice” and “convincing people” without “coercion.”

The gradual implementation of the ban has so far affected approximately half of the country's provinces. The [AFJC](#) stated in its annual report, published on 26 December 2025, that the ban on images of living beings had officially been announced in 23 provinces, including Kandahar, Takhar, Badghis, Helmand, Nangarhar, Nuristan, Farah, Nimroz, Badakhshan, Baghlan, Jawzjan, Zabul, Parwan, Kunduz, Bamyan, Daykundi, Faryab, Panjshir, Laghman, Sar-e-Pul, Balkh, and Herat.

AW has documented the ban being announced and imposed to varying degrees in 19 provinces (see figure 7), including [Kandahar](#), [Takhar](#), [Maidan Wardak](#), [Badghis](#), [Daykundi](#), [Helmand](#), [Zabul](#), [Uruzgan](#), [Logar](#), [Nangarhar](#), [Paktia](#), [Herat](#), [Kunar](#), [Panjshir](#), [Nuristan](#), [Paktika](#), [Sar-e Pul](#), [Balkh](#), and [Kapisa](#).

The Implementation of the Ban on Images of Living Beings in Provinces

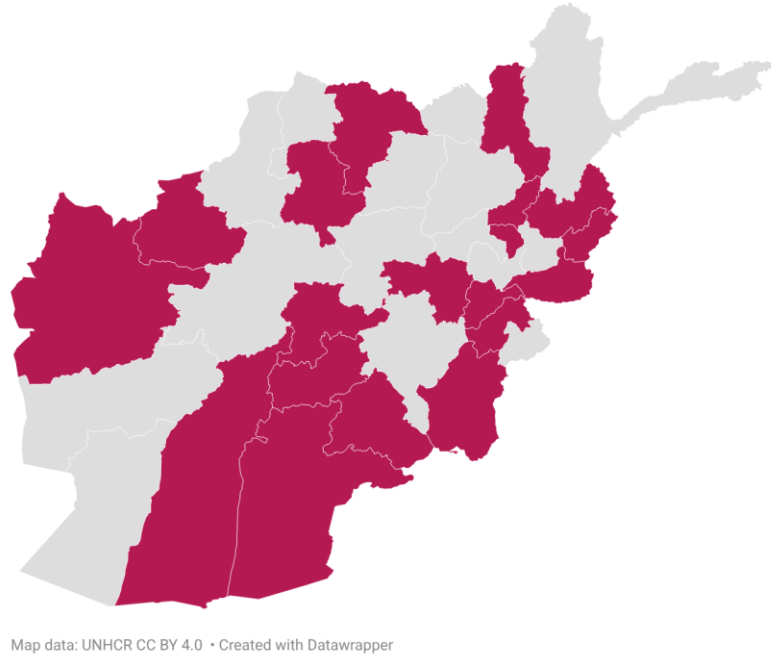


Figure 7: Map showing the provinces where the ban on living images was implemented following the announced restriction.

According to the AFJC, due to the enforcement of the restriction, provincial branches of the state-run RTA have shut down or converted to radio programmes in the affected provinces. The AFJC also noted that the de facto authorities had extended the ban to 11 government ministries and agencies in Kabul, including the [MPVPV](#), the [Ministry of Higher Education](#) (MoHE), the [Ministry of Education](#) (MoE), the [Ministry of Justice](#) (MoJ), the [Ministry of Finance](#) (MoF), the [Ministry of Urban Development](#) (MoUD), the [Ministry of Water and Energy](#) (MoWE), the [Afghanistan National Disaster Management Authority](#) (ANDMA), the [Technical and Vocational Education and Training Authority](#) (TVETA), the [Supreme Court](#), and the Administrative Reforms and Civil Service Office, which is part of the [Administrative Office](#) of the de facto authorities.

AW investigators examined the websites and X accounts of the ministries and administrations mentioned. The findings suggest a possible correlation between the leadership allegiances of the said entities and the implementation of the ban, as the entities, which are mostly led by individuals widely perceived to be closely aligned with the Supreme Leader, have largely refrained from publishing images of living beings.

The MPVPV, led by Mawlawi Sheikh Mohammad Khalid al-Hanafi, the [MoHE](#), led by Neda Mohammad Nadeem, the [Supreme Court](#), led by Sheikh Mawlawi Abdul Hakim Haqqani, the [MoJ](#), led by Abdul Hakim Sharai, [TVETA](#), led by Mullah Ghulam Haidar

Shahamat, and the [Administrative Office](#), led by Mawlawi Nooralhaq Anwar, appear to have largely complied with the ban both on their websites and their official X accounts. The [MoJ](#) and [Supreme Court](#) have, however, retained photos of the leaders on the respective entities' biography pages.

Moreover, the [MoE](#), led by Mawlawi Habibullah Agha, and the [MoF](#), led by Mullah Mohammad Naser Akhund, have images of people on the [ministries' websites](#), whereas on X, it is the opposite. Both individuals are known for their close ties with the Supreme Leader. It is worth noting that most images on the MoF website are from 2024, and new reports are published without images of people.

On the other hand, the [ANDMA](#), led by Mullah Nooruddin Turabi and the [MoWE](#), led by Mullah Mohammad Yonus Akhundzada, display images of living beings on their [websites](#) (and ANDMA on [X](#)). [Nooruddin Turabi](#), from Kandahar, is one of the key and senior Taliban members who previously served as the deputy of the late Taliban leader Mullah Mohammad Omar, and [Justice Minister](#) during the first Taliban rule in the 1990s. [Mullah Mohammad Yonus Akhundzada](#), appointed to the position in January 2026, is also from Kandahar.

The only entity on the list that is run by a minister from the Haqqani faction is the [MoUDH](#), led by Mawlawi Najibullah Hayat Haqqani. Although the [MoUDH](#) website displays a segment dedicated to videos published on its [YouTube](#) channel, on X, they do not post such content and blur human images.

Furthermore, AW analysed existing X accounts of RTA branches in provinces where the ban on living beings had reportedly been implemented: [Kandahar](#), [Maidan Wardak](#), [Takhar](#), [Badghis](#), [Daykundi](#), [Helmand](#), [Nangarhar](#), [Kunar](#), [Paktia](#), [Panjshir](#), [Nuristan](#), [Paktika](#), [Herat](#), [Zabul](#), [Uruzgan](#), [Logar](#), [Sar-e Pul](#), [Balkh](#), and [Kapisa](#).

AW's analysis shows that, from the 19 provinces mentioned above, only Kandahar, Helmand, and Balkh appear to largely adhere to the restriction on displaying images of living beings. Kandahar and Helmand are two key provinces under the direct influence of the Supreme Leader, while Herat and Balkh are led by loyalists to the leadership in Kandahar, Mullah Mohammad Yusuf Wafa. Although RTA Kandahar and Balkh do not share posts that display images of living beings, they reshare posts from the main RTA branches that include such images.

[Farah](#) and [Parwan](#), as documented by [AFJC](#), are two other provinces with the RTA branches adhering to the policy. RTA Parwan's X account had [published](#) visuals showing human faces before mid-January 2026. The shift coincides with the change in the provincial leadership from Mufti Mohammad Idris Anwari to [Sheikh Azizul Rahman Mansoor](#), announced on 31 January 2026.

The ban is still to be implemented in Kabul, where the largest number of media restrictions and incidents have been documented. Main RTA accounts on X in [Dari](#), [Pashtu](#) and [English](#) have not adhered to the policy as of yet.

According to a report by [Afghanistan International](#), published on 21 October 2024, at the national level, several key Taliban figures, including Defence Minister Yaqub Mujahid, Interior Affairs Minister Sirajuddin Haqqani and two Deputy Prime Ministers — Mullah Baradar and Abdul Salam Hanafi — have opposed the ban, viewing it as detrimental. The report also states that members of the Haqqani faction see the ban as an attempt by the Supreme Leader to isolate Haqqanis, as they control most of the regime's propaganda outlets.

The case study suggests that both the implementation and enforcement of the ban on images of living beings are shaped by factors extending beyond the formal directive itself. Leadership allegiances, provincial governance dynamics and the extent to which local actors are aligned with the Supreme Leader appear to influence how the ban is communicated, prioritised and applied in practice. Other factors, including administrative capacity, local media ecosystems and enforcement resources, may also contribute to variation across provinces.

6. CHAPTER 3: IMPLEMENTATION OF RESTRICTIONS CONCERNING WOMEN AND GIRLS

6.1 OVERVIEW OF KEY RESTRICTIONS

Since the Taliban takeover in August 2021, the de facto authorities have introduced extensive restrictions affecting women's access to education, employment, healthcare, freedom of movement, and participation in public life. What began as a series of administrative measures has progressively evolved into a comprehensive system of legal and social control that regulates nearly every aspect of women's lives.

The trajectory of these restrictions has been cumulative rather than static. Early measures focused on limiting women's participation in specific sectors through travel restrictions, classroom segregation, and dress code requirements. Over time, however, successive decrees progressively narrowed women's access to education, employment, and public spaces, before many of these measures were consolidated through the [PVPV Law](#) in August 2024 and subsequent legal instruments.

The de facto authorities have communicated and implemented restrictions through a range of formal and informal mechanisms, including official statements, written directives, announcements at mosques, and instructions issued directly to institutions such as schools, universities, healthcare facilities, markets, and businesses.

The restrictions can broadly be grouped into five categories:

- **Education:** [school closures](#), [university ban](#), [university entrance examination](#) restrictions, exclusion of female graduates from the [medical exit exam](#), and a ban on [midwifery and nursing](#) courses

- **Employment and economic participation:** restrictions on [employment within NGOs](#), [UN agencies](#), [government institutions](#), and [women-led businesses](#).
- **Freedom of movement:** [mahram](#) requirements, [long-distance travel](#) limitations, and restrictions on [access to public transport](#).
- **Public participation and visibility:** restrictions affecting [access to parks, public spaces](#), [conferences](#), and [media participation](#)
- **Bodily autonomy and social regulation:** [hijab](#) requirements, [gender segregation](#) measures, [reproductive health](#) restrictions, and broader morality regulations.

Overall, the restrictions have evolved from a series of sector-specific measures into an interconnected governance system regulating women's participation in Afghan society. The following sections examine the actors, mechanisms, and local dynamics shaping differences in implementation and enforcement. The graphs below show discrepancies between [national](#) (41) and [provincial](#) (150) restrictions on women, indicating that most restrictions are issued at the provincial level.

Geographic Scope of Restrictions

Nationwide vs provincial

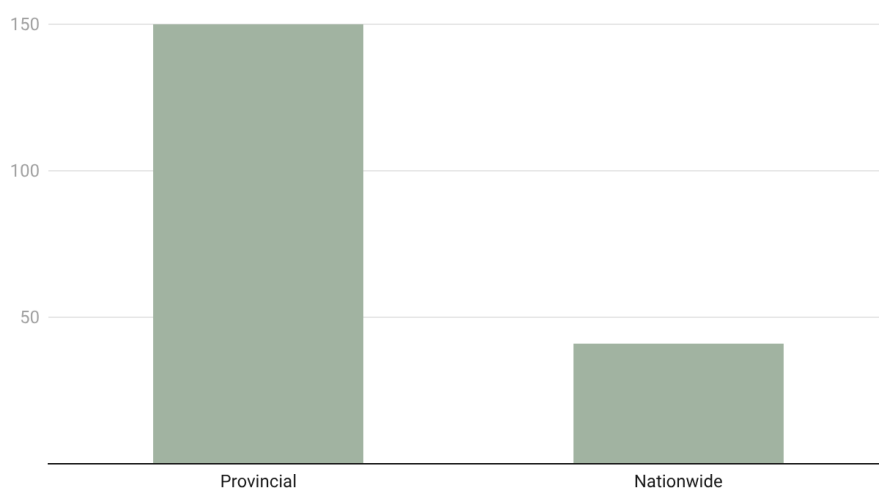


Chart: Afghan Witness • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 8: Graph showing the number of reported incidents related to restrictions on women at the provincial versus nationwide level.

There are further differences in the number of restrictions issued at the provincial level (see figure 8). AW's analysis of recorded restrictions shows that [Herat](#), [Kabul](#), [Kandahar](#), [Balkh](#), and [Chazni](#) are key hotspots where more provincial restrictions have been issued against women between January 2022 and April 2026. The number of incidents involving restrictions on women is distributed relatively evenly across provinces.

Provincial restrictions concerning women

Number of restrictions concerning women issued by the de facto authorities per province, between January 2022 and April 2026

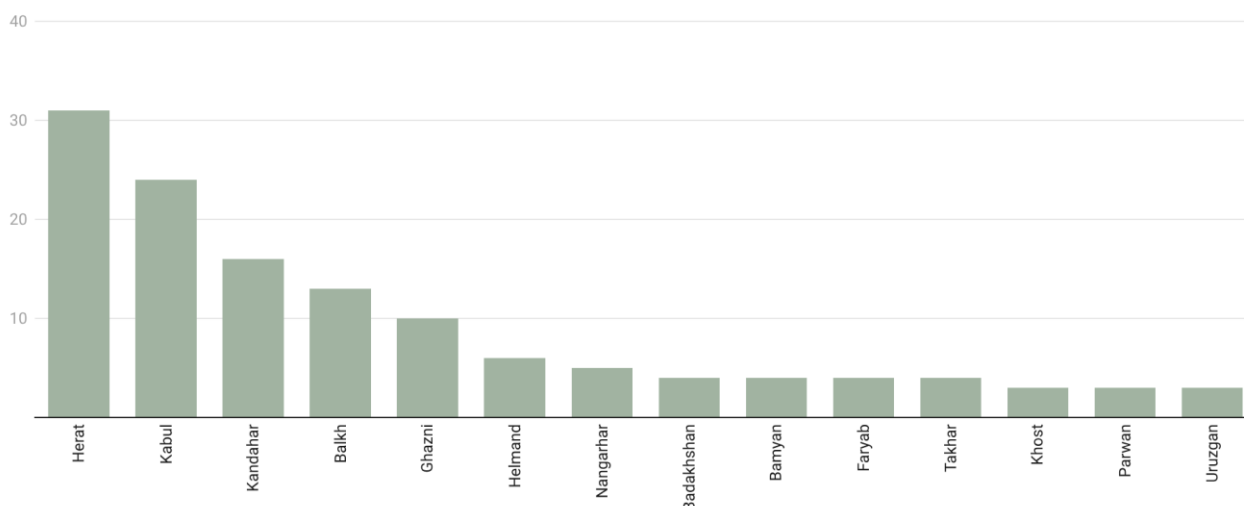


Chart: Afghan Witness • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 9: Graph showing the provinces with the highest number of reported women-related restrictions issued by the Taliban de facto authorities.

AW's analysis also indicates that although a considerable number of restrictions concerning women are verbal, unlike those concerning the media, the de facto authorities have conveyed the restrictions concerning women more via formal and official documents, such as [official letters](#), and [public announcements](#), among others (see figure 9). Data compiled by AW suggest that restrictions conveyed [verbally](#) have mainly been at the provincial levels, while nationwide restrictions have been formal, such as [decrees](#) issued by the Supreme Leader and [official letters](#) published by ministries.

Types of restrictions

Number of restrictions per type

Verbal instruction/warning/order Not specified Official letter Announcement Order Other

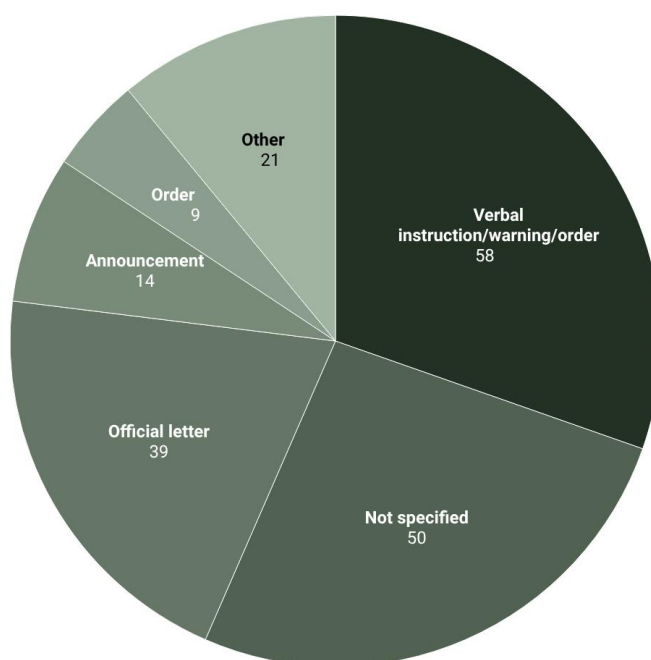


Chart: Afghan Witness • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 10: Graph showing the number and format of reported women-related restrictions.

6.2 ISSUING AND ENFORCING ENTITIES

Restrictions concerning women are issued by a broad range of ministries and authorities. Unlike media restrictions, which are primarily regulated by a small number of institutions, restrictions concerning women are implemented through a broad ecosystem of actors operating across multiple sectors. Their implementation relies on provincial departments, educational institutions, healthcare facilities, transport providers and other public and private institutions. While the Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (MPVPV) serves as the principal enforcement body, it also plays a central role in issuing and implementing restrictions through its nationwide provincial network. Alongside the MPVPV, provincial authorities and other government bodies are responsible for implementing and enforcing restrictions within their respective sectors. As a result, restrictions are not implemented or enforced through a single chain of command but through overlapping governance structures involving multiple institutions. This contributes to geographic and institutional variation, as local authorities retain significant discretion in how nationally issued directives are interpreted, prioritised and applied in practice.

Combining the data at the national and provincial levels (see figure 11), the MPVPV (78) is the key issuing entity, followed by the MoHE (20), the MoE (12) and the MoIC (10). It is important to stress that the Supreme Leader is the ultimate authority behind the restrictions, however, figure 11 highlights only a number of decrees directly linked to him.

Taliban Women Related Restrictions per Issuing Administration

Number of alleged enforcement incident per enforcement body, between January 2022 - April 2026

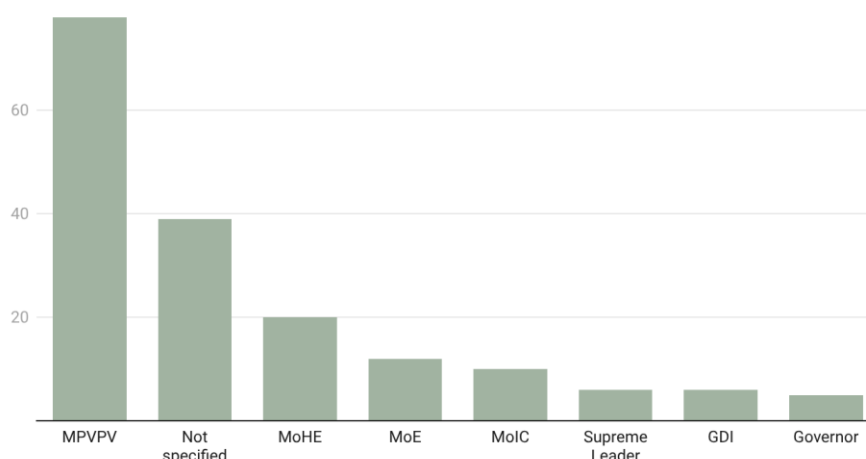


Chart: Afghan Witness • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 11: Graph showing the number of women-related restrictions issued per enforcement body.

As seen in figure 11, the MPVPV (142 incidents) stands as the principal enforcement body, followed by the Ministry of Education (20 incidents) and other administrations, such as the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA), the Government Media Centre (GMC), the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) and others, with a much lower level of involvement compared to the MPVPV. It is important to note that of the 358 incidents recorded, 157 were not attributed to any specific enforcement entity, as reports used general terms, such as “the Taliban” and “de facto authorities,” and did not attribute the incidents to specific government entities. These incidents include the enforcement of restrictions on female university students before the de facto authorities banned women from universities in December 2022. The lack of exact attribution in reporting could have led to the lack of identification of other actors, such as the MoHE, which, after the MPVPV, stands as a key restriction-issuing body. The lack of attribution of the incidents to the MoHE could also be due to the incidents reportedly occurring at universities, and the reports did not specify if the enforcers were MoHE authorities or university staff.

Key Enforcement Bodies

Number of alleged enforcement incidents per enforcement body, between January 2022 - April 2026

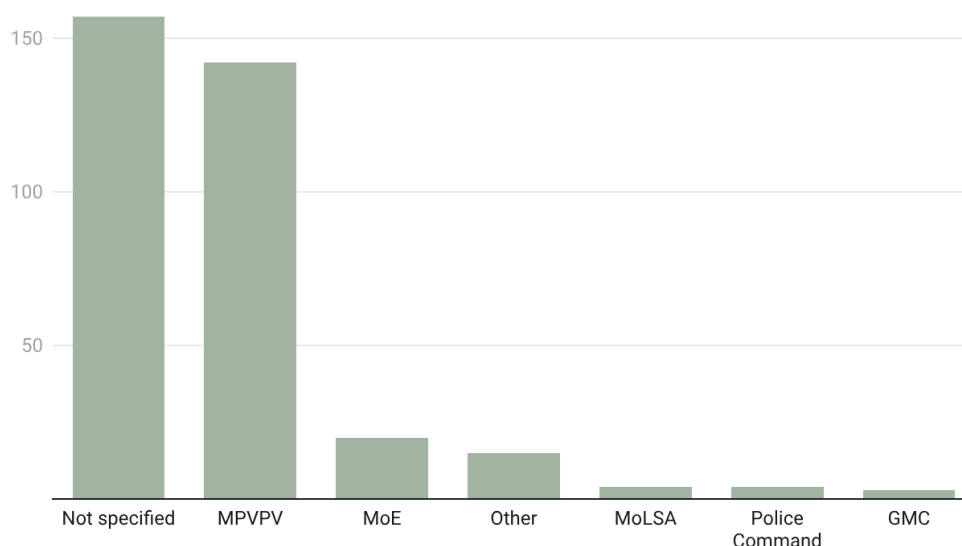


Chart: Afghan Witness • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 12: Graph showing the number of reported incidents of women-related restrictions enforced, per department.

6.3 THE MPVPV

AW assesses that the MPVPV is the de facto authorities' primary morality enforcement institution and the principal body responsible for implementing restrictions affecting women and girls. Re-established in September 2021 in place of the former Ministry of Women's Affairs, it [reports](#) directly to Supreme Leader Akhundzada and operates through an extensive provincial network of officials (muhtasibs) across Afghanistan. According to the Ministry's [website](#), since its re-establishment, the Ministry has been led by Mawlawi Sheikh Mohammad Khalid Hanafi, a long-standing Taliban figure and close Akhundzada ally.

The MPVPV plays a central role in issuing, implementing and enforcing restrictions related to gender segregation, hijab and dress requirements, freedom of movement, access to public spaces, education, healthcare and employment. Unlike many other institutions, it combines regulatory, monitoring and enforcement functions, allowing it to communicate restrictions, oversee their implementation and intervene across multiple sectors and administrative levels to ensure compliance.

Its extensive provincial presence gives it significant implementation capacity. As of early 2025, the ministry [reportedly](#) operated through more than 3,300 officials across Afghanistan, including around 540 in Kabul. Reports by [Afghan media](#) and

international [NGOs](#) also suggest that authorities rely on local monitoring mechanisms, including civilian informants, to identify perceived violations.

Enforcement methods have frequently been coercive. AW documented 130 publicly reported incidents involving MPVPV violations in the months following the August 2024 PVPV Law alone. Reported practices include [threats](#), [arbitrary detention](#), [physical violence](#), and [property destruction](#). Rukhshana Media has also reported visits to clinics, pharmacies and private homes to enforce compliance, including [pressure](#) on healthcare workers to stop providing contraceptives.

Overall, the evidence indicates that women are the primary targets of MPVPV monitoring and enforcement activities. The ministry's extensive provincial presence and cross-sector mandate make it one of the principal institutions shaping how restrictions concerning women and girls are implemented and enforced across Afghanistan.

6.4 IMPLEMENTATION PATTERNS AND ENFORCEMENT PRACTICES

AW documented over 350 alleged incidents related to the implementation of restrictions concerning women across 30 provinces between January 2022 and April 2026. The recorded incidents include reports and claims of [monitoring](#), [inspections](#), [threats](#), [violence](#), [detentions](#), prohibition of access to [public spaces](#) and [services](#), [dismissal from work](#), the closure of [public spaces](#), [women's businesses](#) and others.

AW's analysis suggests that implementation disproportionately centres on regulating women's visibility in public life. The largest concentration of incidents concerns dress requirements and public [appearance](#), followed by restrictions affecting access to [public spaces](#), employment, education, and freedom of movement. AW's assessment based on the collected evidence suggests that enforcement priorities extend beyond individual sectors and collectively regulate women's participation outside the home.

6.5 GEOGRAPHIC AND INSTITUTIONAL VARIATION

AW's analysis indicates that the implementation of restrictions on women and girls varies considerably across provinces. Kabul, Herat, Balkh, Takhar, Ghazni, and Badakhshan recorded comparatively high numbers of incidents during the reporting period. While no single factor explains these patterns, secondary-source analysis suggests that variation is likely shaped by a combination of governance structures, institutional presence, demographic factors, and local dynamics.

Incidents related to the enforcement of restrictions concerning women per province

Number of alleged incidents related to the enforcement of restrictions by the de facto authorities, between January 2022 - April 2026

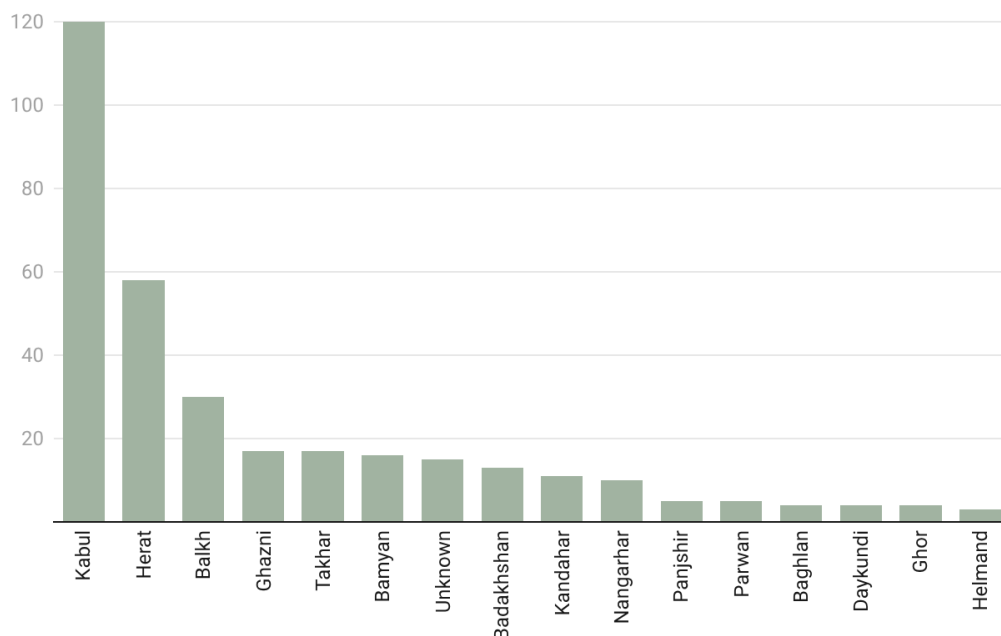


Chart: Afghan Witness • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 13: Graph showing the top provinces with the highest number of reported incidents related to the enforcement of women-related restrictions.

KABUL

Kabul records a high concentration of implementation and enforcement-related incidents, which may be linked to its role as Afghanistan's administrative and institutional centre. The province hosts central ministries, international organisations, universities, healthcare facilities, and a wide range of public and private workplaces where women's participation was previously more visible. This institutional density creates a setting in which there is a concentration of both enforcement actors and their targets, enabling more restrictions to be implemented and documented.

HERAT

Herat stands out as both a major urban centre and a key border province with Iran. Reporting indicates instances of locally intensified enforcement measures affecting women's access to healthcare facilities and public spaces. According to a [Médecins Sans Frontières](#) (MSF) report, published on 10 November 2025, additional local restrictions have had measurable impact on healthcare access, including reductions in urgent admissions following the introduction of stricter entry requirements for women

in healthcare settings. While the MSF case is one illustration, AW's wider analysis also identifies similar patterns across the women and media datasets. Together, these findings suggest that provincial implementation may, in some cases, extend beyond nationally issued directives, with local authorities exercising discretion in how restrictions are interpreted, communicated and applied.

BALKH

Balkh, centred on Mazar-e-Sharif, is another major urban and economic hub with significant educational and humanitarian presence. As in Kabul and Herat, the concentration of institutions such as universities, NGOs, and public services may increase both enforcement opportunities and the visibility of incidents. The province is led by Supreme Leader loyalist Mullah Mohammad Yusuf Wafa.

GHAZNI

Ghazni appears in the dataset in relation to early and localised implementation of restrictions affecting girls' education. This may reflect the role of provincial education authorities and local governance structures in operationalising centrally issued directives at an early stage of policy rollout. Reporting also indicates that Ghazni has been a site where restrictions on girls' schooling were enforced through provincial-level administrative instructions.

BADAKHSHAN AND TAKHAR

Badakhshan and Takhar also record relatively high levels of enforcement incidents but do not follow the same urban-centre pattern observed in Kabul, Herat and Balkh. In these provinces, variation may be linked to local governance dynamics, demographic composition and the role of provincial intermediaries in implementing national directives.

6.6 KEY INCIDENTS ILLUSTRATING ENFORCEMENT

As mentioned earlier in the Chapter, AW has recorded over 350 alleged enforcement-related incidents across various categories. One of the key restrictions tracked by AW is the nationwide ban on women's beauty salons.

In early July 2023, the de facto authorities [reportedly](#) issued a notice, granting women's beauty salons across the country a one-month deadline to close. The restriction was based on a verbal order from the Supreme Leader and delivered by an official letter from the MPVPV to beauty salons across the country. In late July, the MPVPV [stated](#) that all beauty salons must close as the deadline had ended. The announcement led to [protests](#) in Kabul, which were suppressed by the authorities.

AW recorded [several incidents](#) in Kabul and Balkh, indicating the authorities' enforcement of the ban, with beauty salons going [underground](#) and operating from homes. The incidents involved the MPVPV ombudsmen reportedly [raiding](#) home-based salons, [detaining](#) the beauticians and [confiscating](#) their tools.

Other key incidents include the enforcement of covering and hijab related rules. AW has recorded more than 114 alleged incidents of hijab enforcement between January 2022 and April 2026. These include incidents that fall under more than one category, including the freedom of movement, access to public spaces and services, and the right to education and work.

6.7 KEY FACTORS SHAPING VARIATION

CENTRAL VERSUS PROVINCIAL GOVERNANCE DYNAMICS

As discussed in Chapter 1, one of the key drivers of variation in the implementation of restrictions is decentralised. Local authorities play a key role in implementing and enforcing restrictions, leading to variation across different provinces. The dynamic between ministries and governors shapes the enforcement environment. Furthermore, local community elders and tribal leaders also play a significant role in decision-making, dispute resolution and mediation between the authorities and local communities.

INSTITUTIONAL OVERLAP

Another factor contributing to the variation is the involvement of various entities as both issuing, implementing, and enforcing bodies. Although the MPVPV serves as the key and cross-cutting authority, several other government ministries also act as issuing bodies and enforcers to varying degrees. For instance, the MoE, the MoHE, and the MPVPV have enforced restrictions on women across the education sector. Each entity may have different priorities, capacities, and interpretations of policies, possibly leading to various degrees of implementation across regions, as actors may have different priorities, capacities, and interpretations of the policies issued.

LEADERSHIP ALLEGIANCES

AW's analysis suggests an association between leadership alignment and implementation intensity. This aspect is more evident in the variation of enforcement across provinces. For instance, Herat and Balkh, two of the provinces with a higher number of enforcement-related incidents concerning women, are led by two hardliners and individuals close to the Supreme Leader.

URBAN VERSUS RURAL CONTEXTS

Urban areas are more likely to report tighter enforcement than rural areas due to the concentrations of key enforcement bodies, greater likelihood of reporting and documentations, wider participation of women in public spaces, and higher rate of

literacy and education. For instance, key provinces with large urban centres Kabul, Herat and Balkh have been mostly impacted than others.

ETHNIC AND LOCAL SOCIAL DYNAMICS

AW's analysis shows that ethnic and social dynamics are important factors contributing to the variation in implementation and enforcement of restrictions on women across provinces. As the data demonstrates, apart from Kandahar, the remaining affected areas such as Kabul, Balkh, Herat, Ghazni, Takhar, and Badakhshan are central and northern provinces, with ethnically diverse populations, such as Tajiks and Hazaras. Research published by the [Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit](#) (AREU) in January 2015, the [International Centre for Counter Terrorism](#) (ICCT) in April 2014, and [George Washington University's Programme on Extremism](#) in March 2022 suggests that ethnic groups hold relatively less conservative views on gender norms. AW observed a similar pattern at the further local level. For instance, in Kabul, the enforcement of restrictions concerning hijab and covering has been more concentrated in Western Kabul, where predominantly Shia and Hazara populations reside. The [Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights](#) (OHCHR) reported similar findings in a press release published on 2 February 2024. The higher number of incidents in Hazara and Shia populated areas could also be due to better reporting and focus by organisations, as the populations have historically faced [discrimination](#) and [threats](#) from various actors.

BORDER AND STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE

Herat, Balkh, and Badakhshan are strategically important border provinces. Herat borders Iran, Balkh borders Uzbekistan, and Badakhshan borders Tajikistan, Pakistan, and China via the Wakhan Corridor. Their economic significance, cross-border interactions and international exposure may increase administrative attention and shape local implementation priorities. For instance, on 22 December 2025, [Amu TV](#), a US-based Afghan media outlet, reported that the Taliban did not allow women without a mahram to visit the joint Afghanistan-Uzbekistan Bazar in Termez, Uzbekistan, bordering Hairatan in Balkh province of Afghanistan.

6.8 CASE STUDY: RESTRICTIONS ON FEMALE NGO WORKERS

This case illustrates how implementation evolved from a nationally issued directive into a highly negotiated and geographically uneven restriction.

On 24 December 2022, [Tolo News](#) reported that the de facto authorities' Ministry of Economy (MoEc) had issued a statement ordering all national and international non-governmental organisations to suspend female employees until further notice due to the staff not adhering to Islamic hijab and other rules applicable by the de facto authorities. In the statement, the Ministry warned that it would revoke the licenses of organisations that violate the order.

The ban led to immediate [backlash](#) and changes in NGO operations, as a survey published by [UN Women Afghanistan](#) on 31 December 2022 found that 86% of the 151 women-led/focused organisations surveyed had halted operations fully or partially. Key INGOs such as the International Rescue Committee (IRC), Christian Aid, ActionAid, Norwegian Refugee Council, Save the Children, Care, World Vision, and Islamic Relief [reportedly](#) announced full or partial cessation of their operations.

Meanwhile, UNAMA reported consecutive meetings with key de facto authorities to call for the ban's reversal. Shortly after, [reports emerged](#) that the de facto authorities had granted exemptions to female healthcare workers and education staff up to grade six, prompting several organisations, including the IRC and Save the Children, to resume healthcare and education programmes.

Despite the flexibility granted to NGOs following the ban, the de facto authorities [extended](#) the restriction to the female staff of UN agencies in Afghanistan in April 2023.

However, according to a report by the [New Humanitarian](#), published on 2 March 2023, the enforcement of the restriction has been inconsistent, varied, and driven by local realities, including leadership and NGOs' relations and negotiations with local actors. For instance, on 25 June 2023, the head of the Norwegian Refugee Council, Jan Eglund, [announced](#) on X that the organisation had resumed operations in Kandahar and several other provinces with its female staff.

On 29 December 2024, the MoEc [shared](#) another official letter on its X account, reaffirming the ban and reiterating that they would rescind licenses of violators.

On 23 August 2025, [Afghanistan International](#) reported that the de facto authorities had barred female staff from accessing UN premises in Kabul and several other provinces. On 11 September, the [UN](#) reported that the de facto authorities had prevented female staff from accessing UN compounds in Kabul, Herat, and Kandahar and extended the ban to field offices across the country. As a result, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) [closed](#) its eight sites where returnees from neighbouring countries received services upon return.

Despite that, monitoring by the [Humanitarian Access Working Group](#) (HAWG) from [January 2023](#) to [April 2026](#) shows that NGOs, including the UN, have been able to circumvent the restriction and continue working on the ground with their female staff. The recent HAWG tracker, [published](#) in April 2026, shows that 14 percent of female staff across NGOs, INGOs, and UN agencies continue to work from home, while 36 percent are able to do fieldwork, mainly through successful negotiations with local authorities.

The report also highlights geographic variation in the implementation of the ban, with some provinces being impacted more than others. According to the March 2026 HAWG tracker, based on a February 2026 survey, **Herat, Kabul, Nangarhar, Kandahar, Bamyan, and Kunar** were more impacted.

The situation, however, remains increasingly challenging, as organisations work around the authorities' tightening enforcement and respond to demands, such as gender segregation, the requirement of a mahram, increased monitoring, the authorities' involvement in procurement, and their access to staff lists and payroll information.

The case study suggests that both the implementation and enforcement of the restriction are shaped by ongoing interactions between nationally issued directives, provincial authorities, and local operational realities. While the restriction was introduced through a centrally issued directive, its implementation has depended on negotiations with local authorities, resulting in differing levels of implementation and compliance across provinces.

7. CHAPTER 4: COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS: WOMEN VS MEDIA RESTRICTIONS

7.1 KEY DIFFERENCES IN IMPLEMENTATION AND ENFORCEMENT

Although restrictions concerning women and the media are issued, implemented and enforced through many of the same governance structures, AW's analysis indicates important differences in their scope, implementation, and enforcement.

The most significant difference concerns the breadth of the restrictions. Measures affecting women extend across education, employment, healthcare, freedom of movement, and participation in public life, involving a wide range of government institutions. By comparison, restrictions concerning the media are more narrowly focused on regulating the information environment by controlling reporting, limiting criticism of the de facto authorities, and shaping public narratives.

The institutional arrangements also differ. Restrictions concerning women are issued by a broad range of ministries and authorities, while their implementation relies on provincial departments, public institutions, and other administrative actors. Enforcement is led primarily by the MPVPV, alongside other ministries and local authorities responsible for ensuring compliance within their respective sectors.

Restrictions concerning the media are issued primarily by the MoIC, the MPVPV and, in some cases, the Supreme Leader through decrees and other directives. Their implementation relies on provincial departments, media organisations, and other administrative actors responsible for communicating and applying restrictions. Enforcement is primarily associated with the GGDI, provincial authorities and, increasingly, the MPVPV following the adoption of the PVPV Law.

The way restrictions are communicated also differs. Measures concerning women are frequently introduced through formal legislation, official decrees, written directives and public statements. Media restrictions, however, are often communicated verbally

during meetings with journalists and media organisations before being reinforced through regulatory or security measures. This contributes to greater flexibility in how media restrictions are implemented at the provincial level.

The geographic distribution of reported implementation- and enforcement-related incidents also differs across the two domains. While Kabul, Kandahar, and Herat consistently record comparatively high numbers of reported incidents concerning both women and the media, Balkh, Takhar and Badakhshan feature more prominently in relation to restrictions concerning women, whereas Nangarhar, Khost, and Daykundi record comparatively higher numbers of reported incidents concerning the media. These differences suggest that implementation is shaped not only by the nature of the restriction but also by the institutions responsible for implementing and enforcing it, alongside local governance dynamics and reporting environments.

7.2 KEY SIMILARITIES IN IMPLEMENTATION AND ENFORCEMENT

Despite these differences, the implementation of restrictions concerning women and the media displays several common characteristics.

First, implementation in both domains relies on multiple institutions rather than a single authority. Responsibilities frequently overlap between ministries, provincial authorities, intelligence bodies and other administrative actors. In practice, the distinction between institutions responsible for issuing, implementing, and enforcing restrictions is often unclear, with several institutions involved in communicating, interpreting and implementing restrictions.

Second, implementation varies across provinces. Although restrictions are generally introduced through nationally issued laws, decrees, and directives, their implementation differs across Afghanistan. AW's analysis suggests that provincial authorities retain varying degrees of influence in how restrictions are communicated, implemented, prioritised and enforced contributing to differing implementation patterns between provinces.

Third, the MPVPV has assumed an increasingly important role across both domains since the adoption of the PVPV Law in August 2024. While the ministry has consistently been central to issuing, implementing and enforcing restrictions on women, its involvement in media restrictions has become more prominent through the implementation of the ban on images of living beings, and wider oversight of media activity.

Overall, the comparison indicates that, despite differences in their objectives and scope, restrictions concerning women and the media are implemented through similar governance arrangements characterised by overlapping institutional responsibilities and varying provincial implementation.

7.3 FACTORS DRIVING VARIATION ACROSS BOTH DOMAINS

The analysis suggests that no single factor explains variation in implementation across either domain. Instead, implementation appears to be shaped by the interaction of several governance, institutional, and local factors.

One factor is institutional concentration. Kabul, Herat, and Kandahar have a high concentration of government institutions, media organisations, educational facilities, and humanitarian actors, creating more opportunities for both implementation and the documentation of incidents.

Provincial leadership also appears to be one of several factors influencing implementation. As discussed throughout the report, the influence and allegiances of provincial leaders may shape how nationally issued directives are interpreted and prioritised. However, leadership should be viewed alongside other factors rather than as a single explanation for variation.

Local demographic and social dynamics may also contribute to implementation patterns in particular contexts. While these factors cannot be treated as causal based on the available data, they may influence how restrictions are implemented and reported in different provinces.

Finally, variation is also likely to reflect differences in reporting environments. Provinces with a stronger media, humanitarian, and civil society presence are more likely to generate publicly available reporting than areas with more limited access to information.

Taken together, these findings suggest that implementation reflects the interaction of governance structures, institutional arrangements, and local context rather than any single explanatory variable.

7.4 ROLE OF GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES, INSTITUTIONS, AND LOCAL DYNAMICS

The comparison of restrictions concerning women and the media demonstrates that implementation is shaped by the interaction between nationally issued policies and provincial implementation.

While major restrictions are introduced by the Supreme Leader and central Taliban de facto authorities' institutions, their implementation and enforcement depend on ministries, provincial authorities, intelligence bodies, and local administrative actors. These institutions are responsible for communicating, implementing, and enforcing restrictions, resulting in variation across provinces and sectors.

The case studies presented in this report illustrate that local dynamics also influence implementation. Negotiations between authorities and institutions, the role of

provincial leaders, institutional relationships, and local administrative practices all appear to affect how restrictions are applied.

Overall, the findings suggest that variation should not necessarily be interpreted as inconsistent Taliban policy. Rather, implementation reflects a governance system in which nationally issued policies are translated into practice by multiple institutions operating within different provincial contexts. Examining implementation therefore provides a more complete understanding of how the de facto authorities' governance functions in practice.

8. CONCLUSION

The findings of this report suggest that the implementation of the de facto authorities' restrictions is more complex than the policies themselves suggest. AW documented more than 350 reported incidents relating to the implementation of restrictions on women across 30 provinces, and 151 reported implementation-related incidents concerning the media across 26 provinces. While restrictions affecting women were broader in scope and implemented across multiple sectors, media restrictions relied more heavily on regulatory oversight, verbal instructions, and selective enforcement. Across both domains, the findings suggest considerable geographic and institutional variation in how nationally issued restrictions are translated into practice.

The analysis shows that this variation is shaped by several interacting factors rather than a single explanatory variable. Governance structures, overlapping institutional responsibilities, provincial leadership, local dynamics, and reporting environments all appear to influence how restrictions are communicated, implemented, and enforced. While Kabul, Kandahar, and Herat consistently record comparatively high numbers of reported implementation and enforcement-related incidents across both domains, other provinces emerge as hotspots depending on the type of restriction, illustrating that implementation varies with both local context and the nature of the restriction.

The report also finds that implementation is shaped by the governance arrangements of the de facto authorities. Responsibilities among ministries, provincial authorities, and security bodies frequently overlap, making it difficult to clearly distinguish among the institutions responsible for issuing, implementing, and enforcing restrictions. The case study on the implementation of the ban on images of living beings further suggests that leadership allegiances may be one of several factors influencing implementation. Ministries and provinces led by figures closely allied with the Supreme Leader generally showed greater compliance with the ban, whereas implementation was more inconsistent in other areas. This indicated that internal governance dynamics can affect the implementation of national directives.

Overall, the findings imply that this unevenness should not simply be read as inconsistent enforcement. Rather, it reflects a system of governance in which

directives issued in Kabul pass through multiple institutions operating at both national and provincial levels. Examining how restrictions are put into practice, therefore, offers a clearer picture of how Taliban authority actually functions and why its reach varies so markedly from one province to the next.

Your feedback is vital to helping us understand our work's impact. We would be grateful if you could complete [this short survey](#) to support our efforts to assess impact and continuously improve the quality of our investigations. All feedback will be 100% anonymous.

ANNEX 1: AFGHAN WITNESS' METHODOLOGY

Collect, preserve, verify: how AW monitors human rights and current events in Afghanistan

DATA COLLECTION

AW monitors social media and digital platforms to collect data on human rights issues and current events in Afghanistan. This data, commonly referred to as user-generated content (UGC), mainly images and videos, is collected from open-source social media channels such as Twitter, Facebook, and Telegram. Analysts also closely monitor accounts known to generate high volumes of relevant content, such as Afghan news outlets or journalists.

Before an image or video enters the AW database or a claim undergoes further investigation, analysts first verify if the content is recent or old. This initial check assesses its accuracy; content that appears new or has not been previously recorded will be reviewed and examined more thoroughly later in the process. Although sharing old footage is not always malicious, false claims can spread rapidly. Debunking this content is essential for verification and supports AW's wider effort to monitor Afghanistan's information environment.

DATA PRESERVATION

AW archives all collected data. This procedure ensures that data is securely stored and preserved in its original state should it ever be used to hold perpetrators to account. Preserving data is also important because vital information or evidence may be removed if social media platforms believe it violates their terms of use. Any data entering the AW database is archived upon entry by an auto-archiver. This collects the related media (photos, videos, audio), source code, and a screenshot of the original source and stores them on a secure server. Any tampering with the data would be detectable through alterations in the original unique value string assigned to it.

ANALYSIS AND VERIFICATION

Once the initial steps to collect and preserve the data have been taken, analysts will examine the content for additional clues that can shed light on what is happening, why, and who is involved. Analysts use open-source techniques to verify as many details as possible. When AW describes a piece of content as "verified", it means that investigators have confirmed, with a high degree of confidence, the location and date of a piece of footage or a photograph. Occasionally, analysts can verify other details, such as perpetrators or victims, but this is not always possible.

During the verification process, analysts will triangulate their findings with other sources, including news reports. AW treats all content equally, whether it is from an established news outlet or a social media account with few followers.

Verifying a claim also relies on having photographic or visual evidence. Sometimes, multiple footage clips from different angles can be combined to reconstruct an incident. This approach was used by AW during an [investigation](#) into summary executions in the Panjshir Valley in October 2022, where AW conclusively linked one group of Taliban fighters to the execution of ten men in the Dara District area. However, in other cases, visual evidence may be limited, allowing analysts to identify some details, but not all.

REVIEW

After content has been analysed, it is reviewed by a senior investigator to ensure the information is as accurate and reliable as possible. Data is also reviewed for privacy and safety to mitigate the risk of sharing footage that reveals identifying details of individuals, such as personal details or location. A privacy tagging system is used to identify any footage that might compromise the privacy, security, or safety of individuals, and footage flagged with a privacy tag will be redacted in the online map and any subsequent publications.

While viewing graphic footage or images is a necessary part of the verification process, CIR is focused on ensuring that several measures are in place to manage the risks associated with viewing traumatic content. When content is entered into the database, it is given a graphic content level category on a scale of one to five. This allows reviewers, investigators, and those viewing the footage to prepare themselves for graphic imagery.

A NOTE ON UNVERIFIED CONTENT

AW comes across a high volume of claims daily. Many claims are not verifiable. This does not necessarily mean they are false, but rather that the evidence is limited. There are several reasons for this: self-censorship and fear of reprisal are [widespread](#), local journalists [report](#) limited access to the scenes of security incidents, and in many rural areas of Afghanistan, especially, access to the [internet](#) – or a stable connection – is scarce, limiting the amount of visual evidence that surfaces on social media or via news outlets.

AW still archives unverified claims and takes them into consideration when analysing the broader human rights situation in Afghanistan. AW records two types of unverified claims: footage of incidents that cannot be verified, and text-based claims collected from social media. Some of the unverified data is mentioned in reporting or shared across AW and CIR's social channels but is always labelled by AW as unverified. As mentioned previously, verified data alone is likely only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to human rights abuses in Afghanistan. Where possible, verified, open-source data should be used in conjunction with the work of journalists and organisations on the ground to increase accessibility to reliable information and strengthen accountability mechanisms.