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نهاد پژوهش و توسعه

Policy Brief

The Taliban's Morality Law: Controlling Afghan Women and Girls and the Global Obligation to Respond





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Executive Summary

Since the return of the Taliban rule in August 2021, Afghanistan has been experiencing the worst women's rights crisis in the world. International policymakers must recognize the regional and global implications of this crisis, including the potential spillover effects on gender rights, migration, and radicalization in countries bordering Afghanistan and beyond. It is imperative that the situation of women and girls remains at the forefront of all international efforts to advance gender equality and protect human rights, and that those efforts provide the required political support to Afghans as they try to (re)build an inclusive, pluralist and peaceful society. This urgency is now further intensified due to the Taliban's promulgation of their Morality Law, formally known as the Law on the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (PVPV Law).

The PVPV Law (hereinafter also referred to as the 'Morality Law') has codified systemic gender oppression and subordination, stripped both men and women of their fundamental rights, and made it legal for the Taliban to act without any impunity. This Law has now made women's mobility, education, employment, and public presence punishable by law, fostering a climate of immense fear, deprivation, and oppression—all of which is fuelling forced migration.

The international response to the Taliban's gender apartheid has been grossly inadequate, with key diplomatic forums excluding Afghan women and civil society representatives. International political leaders and policymakers must balance existing levels of political engagement, emerging geopolitical narratives of transactionalism, and international commitments to human rights and gender equality.

The Taliban's Morality Law has turned Afghanistan into an open air prison for women, stripping them of access to (non-)formal education pathways,

employment (even in those sectors the Taliban initially permitted for women), mobility, and personal freedoms as basic as speaking in public or carrying a smartphone.¹ The Taliban's enforcement methods—threats, violence, and social pressure—have left women in a state of fear, depression, and isolation.

Without immediate and coordinated international action, the erosion of women's rights and unchecked punishment of citizens will further destabilize Afghanistan, turning it into a more entrenched breeding ground for the Islamic State 'Khorasan Province' (ISKP) and other extremist groups.² This instability does not just threaten Afghanistan and the region but also stands to set a dangerous global precedent of normalizing gender-based discrimination and extremist ideologies.

Given this situation, this policy brief—developed using qualitative and quantitative research (including surveys and focus group discussions involving 7223 female respondents across 32 provinces)—contextualizes the challenges that women in Afghanistan are facing as a direct consequence of the Taliban regime's PVPV Law (Morality Law) and proposes a 5-point action plan for international policymakers to advocate for and support Afghan women and girls.

A. Methodology & Key Findings

The findings presented in this policy brief are based on the quantitative and qualitative data gathered during the BISHNAW³ research study conducted by the Organization for Policy Research and Development Studies (DROPS) between December 2024 and February 2025. A structured questionnaire was used to collect quantitative data, and qualitative data was generated from focus group discussions (FGD). In total, 7,223 female respondents in 32 provinces and 514 female participants from 25 provinces were part of BISHNAW's survey.

with outreach extending to 25 provinces. The project combines a community-based approach with digital survey tools to capture the experiences and opinions of women at the sub-national level in Afghanistan in real-time. The methodology was developed to accommodate the Afghan context and aims to enable a more diverse range of women to participate in the research compared to traditional methods used in Afghanistan.

¹ BISHNAW Focus Group Discussions, January-February 2025.

² Mir, A. (2023). *Two Years Under the Taliban: Is Afghanistan a Terrorist Safe Haven Once Again?* [online] United States Institute of Peace. Available at: <https://www.usip.org/publications/2023/08/two-years-under-taliban-afghanistan-terrorist-safe-haven-once-again>.

³ Launched in 2020, BISHNAW-WAWRA is DROPS's flagship digital initiative operating in 34 provinces across Afghanistan,

Research Tool	Respondents	Sample Size	Details
Telephonic survey (4 multiple choice questions)	Women>18	2791	32 provinces (snowball sampling)
In-person survey (4 multiple choice questions)	Women>18	4432	25 provinces ⁴ (purposive sampling)
Online FGDs	10-20 women per FGD, ages 18-49	514	1 FGD x 11 provinces. Participants were members of BISHNAW's existing Women's Peace Circles

The **key findings** of this survey are:

- Nearly half (**49%**) of the respondents reported wearing the full hijab, including the niqab, (face veil) to avoid interaction with the Taliban's PVPV police (morality police) while **20%** stated that they no longer leave their homes without a *mahram* (an 'eligible' male relative chaperone/guardian).
- Only **5%** of the respondents reported avoiding using a phone in public, and another **5%** reported refraining from speaking in public. This suggests that these behaviors are less commonly altered, likely because restrictions on clothing and mobility have already significantly shaped their actions.
- 56%** of the respondents said the introduction of the PVPV law (Morality Law) has led to considerable negative behavioral changes among community members. This sentiment is reflected across all provinces, indicating widespread dissatisfaction and adverse impacts of the Morality Law, particularly in urban areas, where gender norms are being rapidly transformed by extreme religious ideologies.
- The enforcement of the PVPV Law (Morality Law) has further deepened social, economic, and legal inequalities, disproportionately impacting women. The most affected areas include employment (**33%**), access to (non-)formal education (**25%**), and freedom of movement (**18%**).
- On enforcement of the PVPV Law (Morality

Law), **34%** of the respondents said local mosques are being used to give instructions to male community members on how to implement the law, making religious institutions an important implementing tool, highlighting the Taliban's focus on community-based enforcement. Public humiliation (**20%**) and giving advice or counseling on the law (**20%**) were second most commonly reported as being the strategy used by the Taliban.

- 19%** of the respondents mentioned enforcement through physical punishment for non-compliance, indicating the use of punitive measures, while **7%** of respondents said house searches were being conducted to check compliance.

B. The PVPV Law: Background & Context

In January 2024, BISHNAW's survey found that out of 3,640 respondents, 67% described Taliban restrictions as a form of systemic oppression and domination of women and girls.⁵ 64% said elements of gender apartheid were either fully or partially embedded in the current status quo.⁶ This is evidence that the erosion of women's rights in Afghanistan is now apparent in every aspect of women's public and private lives.

"Historically, Taliban ideologies have marginalized women, often viewing them as insignificant contributors to society. While there was a slight shift in mentality towards women's

⁴ In-person surveys and FGDs were conducted in the provinces of Balkh, Bamiyan, Daykundi, Farah, Faryab, Jawzjan, Herat, Kandahar, Nangarhar, Baghlan, Paktia, Badghis, Kabul, Badakhshan, Takhar, Kunar, Samangan, Helmand, Nuristan, Nimroz, Sar-e-Pol, Ghazni, Kunduz, Parwan.

⁵ The Organization for Policy Research and Development Studies (2024). Gender Apartheid in Afghanistan. [online] BISHNAW-WAWRA. Available at: <https://bishnaw.com/gender-apartheid-in-afghanistan/>.

⁶ (Gender Apartheid in Afghanistan, 2024)

education and work in the past, recent years under Taliban rule have revived old prejudices. Now, a majority of women find themselves confined to their homes, with only a small fraction employed in the health and education sectors.”

– **BISHNAW Focus Group participant, Nimroz Province, January 2024**

Shortly after seizing power on 15 August 2021, the Taliban claimed they would not ban women and girls from schools, universities, or (the pursuit of) employment. However, merely weeks later, they began introducing a series of restrictions on women's education, employment, and mobility. At the time, the Taliban justified their actions by suggesting that the restrictions were intended to protect women and girls till they (i.e., the Taliban) were in a better position to improve security, form a government, and review the curriculum.⁷ Four years on, and with a morality law now in place, it is abundantly clear that the Taliban's objective has always been to completely dismantle women's rights, reverse gender equality norms, and establish a fundamentalist theocracy under authoritarian rule.

The PVPV Law (Morality Law) codifies the Taliban de facto authorities' (DFA) policies of gender control that the group thus far issued through edicts that were either announced in a document format or verbally. Unlike these edicts that the group had thus far been announcing over the past three years in an ad hoc and arbitrary manner, now, these edicts have been published in the country's official gazette, making them enforceable and punishable by law.

First announced by Taliban leader Haibatullah Akhundzada in July 2024, the PVPV Law (Morality Law) entered Afghanistan's official gazette in August 2024, and includes one section, i.e., Article 13, which focuses solely on the morality of women.⁸ While the immediate effects—including but not limited to the loss of autonomy, loss of

economic independence, increase in forced early (and child) marriages, and rising mental health issues—are widely recognized, the long-term societal impact of this Law is less understood. These laws are reshaping Afghan society and allowing for the Taliban DFA to (re-)create a state in their own image—one that regulates and polices its citizen's behavior, is oppressive to women and girls, and is ideologically extreme.

Seven months into its implementation, the PVPV Law (Morality Law) is being enforced both consistently and systematically across all provinces. The Taliban DFA have also created a dedicated complaints department and have recruited enforcement personnel called 'Muhtasib'⁹ (morality police) tasked with enforcing the systematic implementation of the law.

The Morality Law has not only codified existing Taliban edicts but has also introduced new restrictions on women and girls, such as women having to veil their entire body (including their faces) when in public, and from men who are not close relatives. Richard Bennett, the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Afghanistan, warned in his 2025 report on the PVPV Law that the “law forms part of a systematic Taliban plan to impose a vision of Afghanistan that is at odds with fundamental principles of dignity and equality – as it did the first period of its rule.”¹⁰ He also added that “[i]t confirms that the group has not moderated its behaviour but instead remains committed to pursuing its deeply discriminatory and misogynistic agenda.”¹¹

Such draconian laws were not enforced even during the Taliban's first stint in power (1996 to 2001). The Taliban's new Morality Law has also—for the first time in Afghanistan's history—equated a woman's voice with her 'private parts' (the Arabic word 'awrat' is used synonymously with nakedness and genitalia). This denotes, under the PVPV Law (Morality Law), that women's voices should not be heard loudly in public or heard singing or reciting

⁷ Afghanistan: Taliban announce new rules for female students. (2021). *BBC*. [online] 12 Sep. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-58537081>.

⁸ The Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice Law [Unofficial AAN Translation]. (2024). [online] Afghanistan Analysts Network. Available at: <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/en/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2024/08/Law-on-Virtue-and-Vice-Basic.pdf>.

⁹ A 'Muhtasib' is an enforcer, i.e., the person who has been delegated by the *Amir al-Mu'minin* ('Commander of the

Faithful', who in this case, is the Taliban Chief), or by a person authorised by the 'Commander of the Faithful', to carry out the task of enforcement.

¹⁰ Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan, Richard Bennett (2025). *Study on the so-called 'Law on the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice'*. [online] UN Human Rights Council. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2025-02/a-hrc-58-74-pvpv-study.pdf>.

¹¹ (Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan, Richard Bennett, 2025)

hymns.¹² Furthermore, among other things, women are also prohibited from: using their phones in public; befriending non-Muslims; and revealing their faces to non-believers or women deemed 'morally improper'.

C. Key Trends: Impact, Community Attitudes, & Enforcement of the PVPV Law

“The enforcement of these laws [PVPV/Morality Law] has brought drastic changes to women's lives. Schools have been closed, restrictions on movement have increased, and wearing the hijab has become mandatory. If we need to go outside, we make sure to have a Mahram with us at all times to avoid problems. Additionally, we are no longer allowed to wear hijabs of different colors—only black hijabs are permitted.”

– **BISHNAW Focus Group participant, Nuristan Province, February 2025**

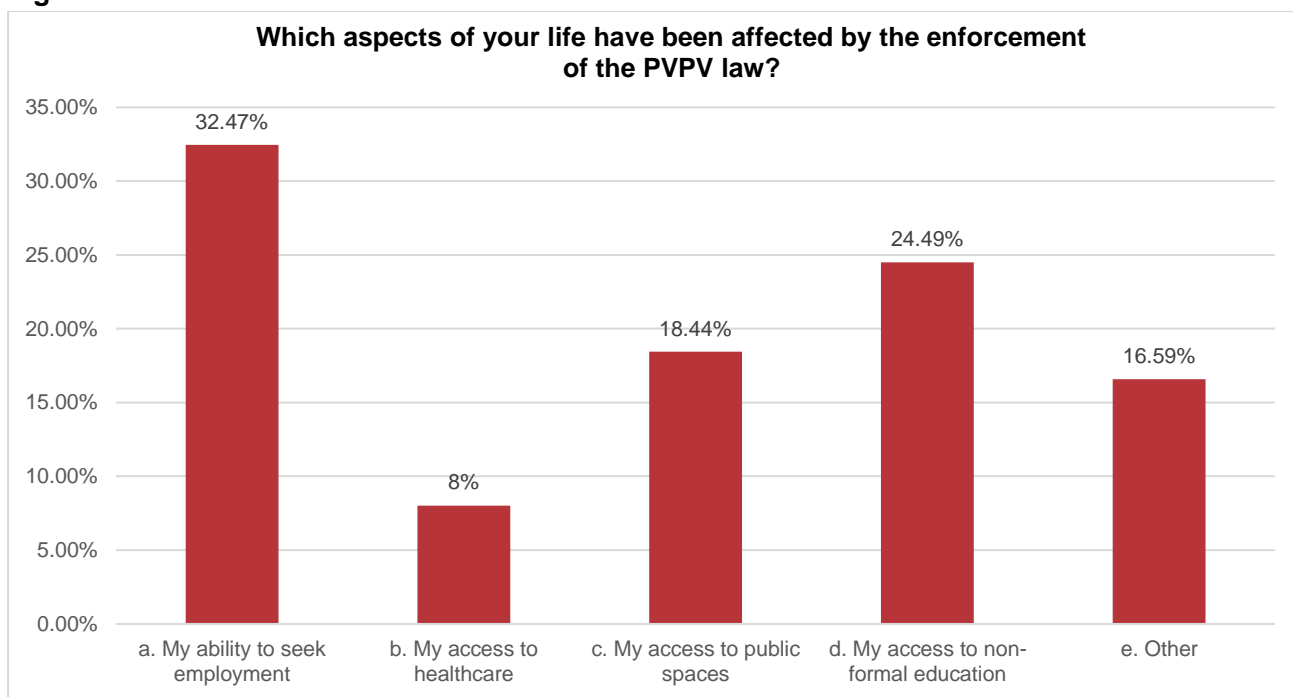
Impact of the PVPV Law (Morality Law) on Women's Daily Lives

Between December 2024 and January 2025, DROPS conducted a survey on “The PVPV Law and its Impact on Women and their Communities”¹³ and found that the enforcement of the Morality Law has intensified existing restrictions on women and girls, making them stricter, more dangerous, and increasingly radical. UN Special Rapporteur Richard Bennett’s 2025 report supports these findings, adding that it confirms his “earlier warning – that Afghanistan is now the epicenter of an institutionalized system of gender-based discrimination, oppression, and domination which amounts to crimes against humanity, including the crime of gender persecution.”¹⁴

According to the respondents of DROPS’ survey (see Fig.1),¹⁵ the top three aspects of their lives that have been affected the most by the Taliban’s Morality Law are:

- a. their ability to seek employment (33%)
- b. their access to non-formal education (25%)
- c. their access to public spaces (18%)

Fig.1



¹² Safi, M. and Khan, A. (2024). New morality law in Afghanistan is not just silencing women’s voices: it’s gender apartheid. *ODI Global*. [online] 11 Oct. Available at: <https://odi.org/en/insights/new-morality-law-in-afghanistan-is-not-just-silencing-womens-voices-its-gender-apartheid/>.

¹³ The Organization for Policy Research and Development Studies (2024). *The PVPV Law and its Impact on Women and their Communities*. [online] BISHNAW-WAWRA. Available at:

<https://bishnaw.com/the-pvpv-law-and-its-impact-on-women-and-their-communities/>.

¹⁴ (Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan, Richard Bennett, 2025)

¹⁵ (The PVPV Law and its Impact on Women and their Communities, 2024)

The impact of the Taliban's Morality Law on women's ability to seek employment, underscores significant economic and professional restrictions exacerbating Afghanistan's economic crisis. Women faced barriers to economic participation before the Taliban's takeover as well, but they are now experiencing severe marginalization and worsening poverty. Women-headed households and women from poor and marginalized communities are disproportionately impacted.¹⁶

Additionally, access to non-formal education, the only remaining alternative for girls to receive any form of schooling, has also been significantly disrupted. This situation is set to deteriorate further as girls are now also barred from non-formal means of education in addition to existing restrictions banning them from formal education beyond Grade 6, thus severely limiting their future employment opportunities and prospects, causing and amplifying rising economic insecurity, and deepening the feminization of poverty. In the long run, these policies will weaken Afghanistan's labor force, leading to lasting negative economic consequences for the country.¹⁷

Behavioral Changes in Community Members Induced by the PVPV Law (Morality Law)

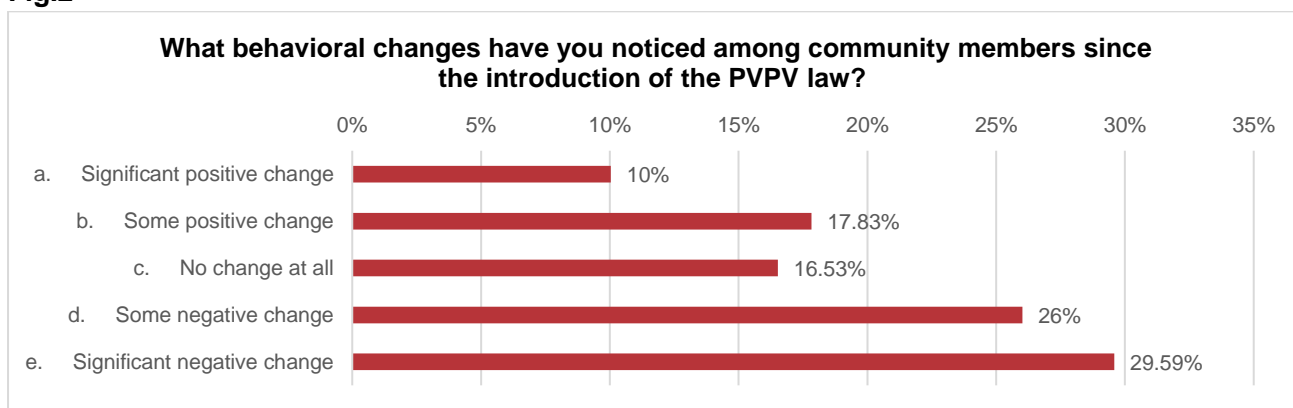
More than half (55.59%)¹⁸ the respondents collectively noted negative behavioral changes (see Fig.2) among members of their communities

(both men and women) since the introduction of the Taliban's Morality Law. This reflects a continuing trend observed in previous DROPS surveys and studies, which had found that community attitudes toward gender equality norms have been reversing at a rapid pace, particularly in urban areas rather than rural ones.¹⁹ Similar trends were noted by UN Women in its consultations in Afghanistan, where it found that there was indeed a decline in community attitudes towards both primary and secondary education for girls.²⁰

According to DROPS focus group participants, communities may also be complying with these laws because men are "constantly exposed to the Taliban's religious messaging,"²¹ be it at the mosque or in public spaces. Others explain that by framing the PVPV Law (Morality Law) as a religious obligation, the Taliban make it difficult for men to oppose them without risking accusations of apostasy or heresy or blasphemy.

Additionally, by targeting 'male guardians' and making them ultimately accountable for the behaviour of women in their families, the Taliban have instilled fear at the community level, such that if women violate the rules, their male relatives—husbands, fathers, or brothers—would face punishment, public shaming, imprisonment or physical violence, thereby creating intense community and family pressure to comply.

Fig.2



¹⁶ (Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan, Richard Bennett, 2025)

¹⁷ (Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan, Richard Bennett, 2025)

¹⁸ (The PVPV Law and its Impact on Women and their Communities, 2024)

¹⁹ Safi, M., Browne, E., Kamninga, T. and Khan, A. (2024). [Executive Summary] *Changing social norms around age of marriage in Afghanistan: Data on repression and resistance*

under the Taliban. [online] London: ODI. Available at: <https://bishnaw.com/changing-social-norms-around-age-of-marriage-in-afghanistan-executive-summary/>.

²⁰ Summary of Countrywide Consultations with Afghan Women. (2024). [online] UN Women. Available at: https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-10/af-c1242-final-consultation-report_july-2024-en-r02.pdf.

²¹ BISHNAW FGD Participant from Kapisa Province, 8 Feb 2025.

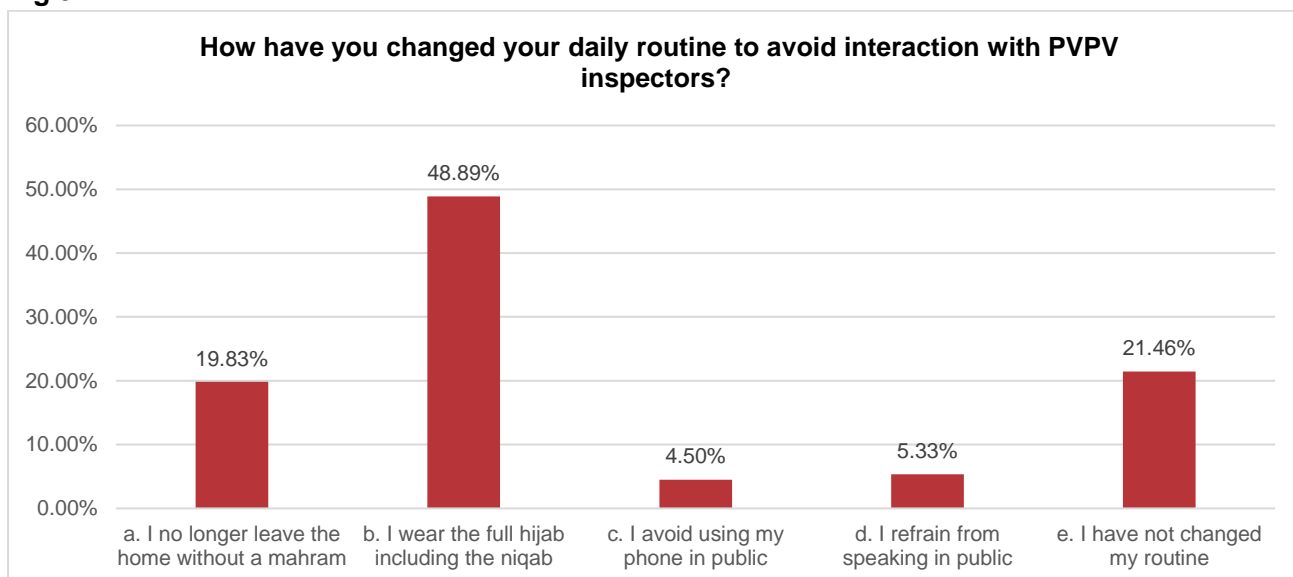
According to Bennett, the PVPV Law (Morality Law) has affected every aspect of daily life in Afghanistan, instilling a growing fear of being reported on by neighbors, colleagues, or even family members for infractions. As a result, communities are increasingly resorting to self-regulation and self-censorship. Over time, this fear and mistrust has the potential to erode the social fabric of Afghan society, fragmenting communities under the weight of collective suspicion.²²

Measures Taken by Women to Avoid Interaction with the PVPV Police (Morality Police)

Nearly half (48.89%)²³ the respondents reported wearing the full hijab, including the niqab (face

veil), to avoid interaction with PVPV police (morality police). This was by far the most common adjustment made by respondents (see Fig.3) to avoid drawing the attention of the Taliban's morality police. According to the Taliban, women and girls must wear the "Sharia hijab" when in public spaces, requiring their faces to be covered entirely, except for the eyes. The Taliban are even enforcing this on girls in Grades 4-6 when traveling to and from school.²⁴ Nearly one-fifths of the respondents said they have restricted their movements because they are always required to be accompanied by a mahram (an 'eligible' male relative chaperone/guardian) to leave their homes, suggesting an enforced dependency on male guardianship.

Fig.3



Additionally, 5.33%²⁵ of respondents reported refraining from speaking in public. This lower response rate does not indicate that the issue is unimportant or uncommon. Rather, it reflects the reality that women and girls—already forced to cover their faces and only able leave their homes with a male chaperone in tow—rarely have the opportunity to raise their voices in public. The Taliban's morality police are specifically tasked with ensuring that women's voices remain unheard outside their homes or private gatherings, putting

them at risk of sanctions even in personal spaces.²⁶

Mechanisms Used by the Taliban to Enforce the PVPV Law (Morality Law)

The most concerning finding of DROPS' survey and focus group discussions pertain to how the Taliban have been enforcing the PVPV law (Morality Law) in the country. The PVPV Law gives the morality police "broad and arbitrary"²⁷ powers to punish anyone they believe is violating the Law's provisions. In many ways, such powers make the

²² (Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan, Richard Bennett, 2025)

²³ (The PVPV Law and its Impact on Women and their Communities, 2024)

²⁴ (Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan, Richard Bennett, 2025)

²⁵ (The PVPV Law and its Impact on Women and their Communities, 2024)

²⁶ (Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan, Richard Bennett, 2025)

²⁷ (Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan, Richard Bennett, 2025)

morality police the enforcer, judge, and prison warden with almost no limitations or checks on their power.²⁸

“The Ministry of Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice uses sacred places for its personal enforcement of laws. They do not directly deal with women but rather try to enforce all their laws on women through the men of each family. They frame their instructions as religious obligations, making it difficult for men to challenge them without being accused of being against Islam.”

– **BISHNAW Focus Group participant, Kapisa Province, February 2025**

Religious institutions (local mosques) seem to play a significant role in implementing the law at the community level, highlighting a focus on community-based enforcement. 33.81% of respondents reported that local mosques were giving instructions (during their sermons) to male community members on how to implement the law (see Fig.4). This finding was also echoed by Bennett, who described it as a “worrying trend”²⁹ in his report as it makes community leaders, religious

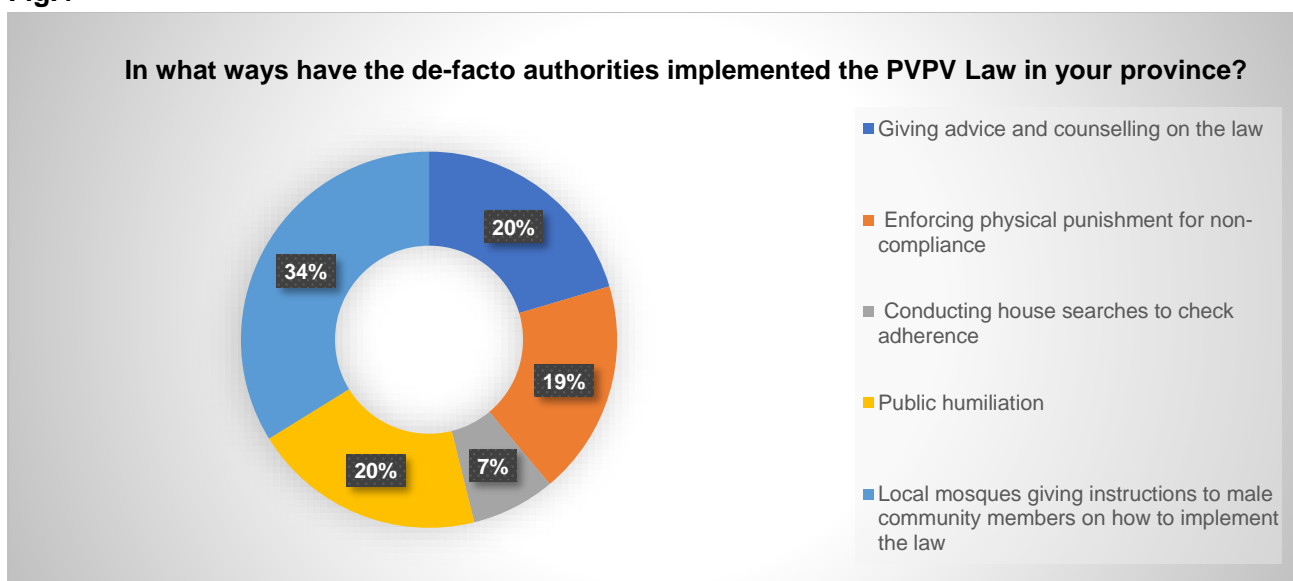
leaders, and even family members enforcers of the law.

“Men are being warned that if their female relatives violate these laws and are taken to prison, they will be held responsible. This has led men to enforce these laws on the women in their families, further increasing restrictions.”

– **BISHNAW Focus Group participant, Kandahar Province, February 2025**

While the level of community enforcement differs across regions, there is a growing trend toward the normalization of restrictions, where the distinction between Taliban-imposed control and societal pressure is becoming increasingly blurred. During focus group discussions, participants told DROPS that not all men were complying with these instructions by choice but for the sake of self and family preservation. For instance, protecting the ‘honor’ of the women in their families, fear of physical abuse or imprisonment for either themselves or their family members were all cited as reasons for why men were following the guidance given to them.

Fig.4



Public humiliation (20.06%),³⁰ followed by giving advice or counseling on the law (20.42%)³¹ were second most commonly reported as being the strategies used by the Taliban to implement the

PVPV Law (Morality Law). In his 2025 report, Bennett also noted that “[v]erbal reprimands, public humiliation, and fines”³² were being used as means to enforce the law. For instance, in some areas, the

²⁸ (Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan, Richard Bennett, 2025)

²⁹ (Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan, Richard Bennett, 2025)

³⁰ (The PVPV Law and its Impact on Women and their

Communities, 2024)

³¹ (The PVPV Law and its Impact on Women and their Communities, 2024)

³² (Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan, Richard Bennett, 2025)

morality police have been using loudspeakers to humiliate women who were not accompanied by a mahram (an 'eligible' close male relative chaperone/guardian) or if they were not wearing the "correct" hijab.³³ Additionally, 18.50% of respondents mentioned that the PVPV Law (Morality Law) was also being enforced through physical punishment inflicted on those who do not comply with the law.³⁴ This aspect of the law is particularly problematic.

The seven-step process outlined for the morality police in Article 24 of the PVPV Law (Morality Law) states that as the seventh step, the morality police may mete out '[a]ny punishment that an enforcer considers appropriate, and which is not the exclusive prerogative of a court of law.'³⁵ However, there is no clear definition of what does or does not fall under the court's jurisdiction. As a result, the morality police wield significant power in determining what constitutes an 'appropriate' punishment. Moreover, although the law states that the morality police are to "not pry into people's private sins,"³⁶ 7.21% of respondents cited house searches being conducted to check for compliance with the Morality Law.³⁷

Conclusion & Big Picture Considerations

This policy brief emerges at a critical juncture, as development aid for Afghanistan—and the Global South more broadly—faces severe cuts under the new U.S. administration and reductions in foreign aid spending by European countries.³⁸ With security and migration dominating the policy agenda in the West, more and more funding is being redirected and spent at home to address domestic needs. But what is less understood—or

is understood but not given serious recognition—are the consequences this redirection would have on a world that is already witnessing a rise in conflict zones and growing authoritarian regimes that threaten not only the security of their citizens but also beyond.

First, migration will not only continue but has the potential to worsen with these aid and funding cuts. In 2024, data from Frontex revealed a drop of 38% in irregular border crossings into Europe. However it noted that detections rose by 14% and those were from migrants predominantly coming from three countries, with Afghanistan being one of them. Frontex's data also showed that of the 62% of women who arrived in the EU in 2024, the majority were Syrian and Afghan women.

Second, exports of illicit drugs from Afghanistan are likely to continue. According to the European Union Drugs Agency (EUDA), almost all heroin consumed in Europe comes from Afghanistan.³⁹ It is important to highlight that while for 2023, the UNODC noted a 95% decline in both cultivation and production of opium in Afghanistan following the Taliban's ban on opium poppy cultivation and production, the EUDA has stated it has thus far not seen any signs of heroin shortages in Europe. The key reason for this is the Taliban's large stockpiles of opium and its derivatives that have soared in prices after the Taliban's ban.⁴⁰

Third, as US and European aid funding depletes and dries up, access to critical services will continue to shrink in Afghanistan, further exacerbating the humanitarian crisis. Recent aid cuts by the incumbent U.S. administration have already had devastating consequences for the estimated 40 million Afghans who are still reliant on humanitarian assistance.⁴¹ This will be further

³³ (Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan, Richard Bennett, 2025)

³⁴ (The PVPV Law and its Impact on Women and their Communities, 2024)

³⁵ (Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan, Richard Bennett, 2025)

³⁶ The Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice Law [Unofficial AAN Translation]. (2024). [online] Afghanistan Analysts Network. Available at: <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/en/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2024/08/Law-on-Virtue-and-Vice-Basic.pdf>.

³⁷ (The PVPV Law and its Impact on Women and their Communities, 2024)

³⁸ Gulrajani, N. and Pudussery, J. (2025). With the knives out on development spending, have we reached 'peak aid'?. *The Guardian*. [online] 23 Jan. Available at:

<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2025/jan/23/global-development-economics-donor-spending-refugee-oecd-world-bank-peak-aid>.

³⁹ New report — Heroin and other opioids pose substantial threat to health and security in Europe. (2024). [online] European Union Drug Agency. Available at: https://www.euda.europa.eu/news/2024/1/new-report-heroin-and-other-opioids-pose-substantial-threat-health-and-security-europe_en.

⁴⁰ Trouble In Afghanistan's Opium Fields: The Taliban War On Drugs. (2024). [online] International Crisis Group. Available at: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-asia/afghanistan/340-trouble-afghanistans-opium-fields-taliban-war-drugs>.

⁴¹ Saikal, A. (2025). In Afghanistan, families are forced to sell children to survive. Trump's USAID cuts will be devastating. *The Conversation*. [online] 16 Feb. Available at: <https://theconversation.com/in-afghanistan-families-are>

exacerbated by cuts from the EU, which has proposed cutting approximately 2 billion Euros in all of its foreign aid spending in the next two years, which will also impact Afghanistan. These reductions will severely impact the much-needed, critically important work that local civil society organizations are carrying out under difficult conditions to provide non-formal education, healthcare, and essential services—lifelines for women and girls in urgent need.

In this shifting landscape, the international community must take urgent and strategic action to prevent the further empowerment of extremist, authoritarian, and radical fundamentalist regimes like the Taliban DFA that thrive on the dismantling of civil society, discrimination against and dehumanization of women, suppression of free speech, and the erasure of advocacy for justice and equality. These repercussions will extend far beyond Afghanistan's borders, with lasting global consequences.

The Taliban's extremist policies, particularly their systematic oppression and dehumanization of women and girls risk fostering a dangerous ideological shift among Afghan men and boys, creating security threats both regionally and globally. As the Taliban tightens its grip through worsening discrimination and repression, these risks will continue to escalate. The combination of

rising poverty, lack of opportunities, restricted education, and the erosion of individual and collective freedoms will further fuel mass legal and illegal migration and radicalization, exacerbating regional instability and global security threats.

Against this backdrop, without immediate and coordinated international action, the erosion of women's rights and unchecked punishment of citizens will further destabilize Afghanistan, turning it into a more entrenched breeding ground for the ISKP and other extremist groups.⁴² This instability does not just threaten Afghanistan and the region but also stands to set a dangerous global precedent of normalizing gender-based discrimination and extremist ideologies worldwide.

The international community must therefore act urgently and strategically to prevent the further empowerment of extremist and authoritarian regimes like that of the Taliban's, halt the erosion of Afghan women's rights through coordinated diplomatic and funding efforts, and ensure long-term support for Afghan civil society and women-led initiatives. Failure to take decisive action will not only exacerbate Afghanistan's crisis but also pose significant security risks at the regional and global levels. The policy, legal, and operational actions outlined in the 5-point action plan below are indispensable in this regard.

[forced-to-sell-children-to-survive-trumps-usaid-cuts-will-be-devastating-249713](#).

⁴² Mir, A. (2023). *Two Years Under the Taliban: Is Afghanistan*

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Policy Options & Recommendations: A 5-Point Action Plan

1. Diplomatic Pressure & Advocacy

- Prioritize Afghan women's rights in all international negotiations, including future UN-convened Doha Talks and engagements with regional stakeholders.
- Ensure that Afghan women and civil society representatives are included in all global policy discussions and decision-making processes.
- Reject engagement with the Taliban that is not principled and does not include clear conditions on human rights, particularly women's rights.

2. Strengthening Afghan Civil Society

- Increase direct funding for women-led organizations working on legal aid, shelters, research, advocacy, capacity building, and mental health support.
- Provide an enabling environment for women-led civil society organizations and women's rights activists to continue their work in Afghanistan and in exile without fear of Taliban retaliation.
- Support independent Afghan media and digital platforms to amplify the voices of women and to document human rights violations.

3. Gender-Responsive Humanitarian Assistance

- Ensure that EU and other international aid prioritizes Afghan women and girls, particularly in:
 - Non-formal education opportunities for girls.
 - Employment pathways to counteract economic exclusion.
 - Mental health services for Afghan women affected by Taliban oppression.
 - Focusing on gender-sensitive programming in EU and other internationally funded humanitarian aid projects.
 - Ensuring access to safe shelters, legal assistance, and psychosocial support for women and girls.
- Establish verifiable guarantees that ensure humanitarian aid reaches marginalized communities without Taliban interference or control.

4. Targeted Sanctions & Accountability Measures

- Expand and enforce targeted sanctions on Taliban leaders and enforcers of the PVPV Law (Morality Law) while ensuring humanitarian aid is not affected.
- Use international legal mechanisms (e.g., the UN Security Council, ICC, ICJ, and the UN Human Rights Council) to hold the Taliban accountable for gender-based crimes.
- Increase documentation and reporting of the Taliban's gender-based crimes and human rights violations to build future legal cases against the Taliban for gender apartheid and crimes against humanity.

5. Addressing Migration & Security Risks

- Expand and expedite asylum programs for Afghan women activists, journalists, and professionals at risk.
- Strengthen refugee protections in countries neighboring Afghanistan, ensuring women and girls fleeing Afghanistan have access to legal statuses and services.
- Recognize the link between violations of women's rights and security threats, to prevent Afghanistan from becoming a breeding ground for extremism and transnational crime.