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TALIBAN MADRASAS

Ideological Consolidation, Gender Persecution and Afghanistan's Future Stability

HAMRAH Network Report | June 2026

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Executive Summary

Since retaking power in August 2021, the Taliban have pursued a rapid and systematic transformation of Afghanistan's education system. In under five years, they have established unprecedented enforcement and control over Afghanistan's institutions of religious education (i.e., madrasas, Dar-ul-Ulooms, Dar-ul-Huffaz), achieving a degree of centralisation and regulation unmatched by any previous Afghan government. As this report finds, madrasas increasingly serve as the primary vehicle through which the Taliban seek to institutionalise their authority, reshape Afghan society, enforce gender discrimination and the persecution of religious minorities, suppress secular thought, and extend politicised ideological control across the country.

The Taliban are constructing an alternative parallel state education infrastructure, that is well-resourced and well-administered, complete with its own curriculum, examinations, credentials, and staffing apparatus, and dormitories; designed to subordinate modern public education to a politicised religious framework. The findings are based on sensitive fieldwork and documentary evidence collected discreetly in Afghanistan between March and May 2026. The speed and scale of this effort are unprecedented in Afghanistan's modern history. Before August 2021, approximately 5,000 madrasas were officially registered nationwide. In under four years, by September 2025, the de facto Ministry of Education reported over 23,000 registered madrasas, with more than 3.65 million students enrolled. This expansion has been achieved by building new madrasas, and perhaps more consequentially, by absorbing, registering, and regulating formerly private and informal madrasas under a centralised ideological framework. What were once locally rooted, often small, and independently operated religious schools have been brought within the Taliban's administrative and doctrinal control.

The findings of this report also indicate that official figures, themselves striking, significantly understate the true scale of expansion. Field research in Kandahar province mapped and verified most of the 1,500 officially registered madrasas and documented 23 Dar-ul-Ulooms and jihadi madrasas in the city and its four surrounding districts alone, against an official Taliban claim to just one jihadi madrasa per province. In Bamiyan, a predominantly Hazara and Shia province with historically high rates of girls' education, the total number of students enrolled in religious institutions has roughly doubled to 12,800 since 2023, while annual public school graduates have fallen from more than 4,000 to around 1,800.

The expansion of the madrasa system carries wide-ranging implications for society, security and future economic development in Afghanistan; however, this report focuses primarily on two of the most significant long-term consequences. First, the madrasa system

has become the primary infrastructure through which the Taliban's gender persecution is being replicated and institutionalised. Girls banned from secondary education have been channelled into female madrasas as their only remaining option. Boys and girls are being educated within a framework that naturalises and enforces gender hierarchy. A generation formed within this system will inherit and enforce a social order in which the subordination of women and girls is not mere policy, but accepted doctrine. Second, the madrasa network carries a growing potential for politicised ideological radicalisation with significant regional stability, and international security implications. The Taliban's harbouring of the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and other armed groups, enabled by shared Deobandi ideology and cross-border madrasa ecosystems, is already fuelling instability across the wider region. Whether this reflects strategic sequencing as the Taliban consolidate power, or a longer-term commitment to enabling regional militancy as part of their policy toolkits, the institutional infrastructure for that escalation is now firmly in place.

No single point of external pressure is likely to alter a system this deliberately constructed to last. The speed, scale, and growing institutional coherence of the Taliban's madrasa expansion serve as a warning to international actors who continue to approach the Taliban on pragmatic grounds, assuming that governance responsibilities would moderate their behaviour. The Taliban's ambition of structural transformation of Afghan society and polity cannot be meaningfully addressed through aid conditionality or diplomatic pressure alone. Engagement strategies so far have been ineffective and, in some instances, have inadvertently legitimised the group. The international community must be clear-eyed about what has been dismantled and what is being replaced and built by the De Facto Authorities (DFA), and determine how and on what terms it should engage. The stakes could not be higher for Afghanistan and its future generations.

I. Introduction

Madrasas are integral to the Taliban's power, legitimacy, and survival. Since retaking power in August 2021, the Taliban have pursued a systematic effort to regulate, consolidate, and expand Afghanistan's diverse and historically localised religious institutions. As this report finds, in under five years they have established an unprecedented level of enforcement and control over Afghanistan's madrasa networks, achieving a degree of regulation and centralisation unmatched by any previous Afghan government. [1]

Before the Taliban takeover in 2021, approximately 5,000 madrasas were formally registered nationwide, while the

1 See Rahimi and Watkins (2025), The Taliban's Dynamic Efforts to Integrate and Regulate Madrasas and the Motives for Doing

majority continued to function informally without state regulation.[2] By mid-2024, the Taliban had reportedly registered, repurposed, or newly established just over 21,000 religious institutions across Afghanistan, a figure revised upward to over 23,000 by September 2025.[3] This reflects an unprecedented scale of regulation, centralisation, and expansion. Critically, much of this growth has been achieved by bringing pre-existing private, informal and community-based madrasas under Taliban administrative control, as well as converting public education infrastructure, rather than by constructing new institutions.

This report examines the scale of that expansion, its institutional character, and its broader implications for Afghan society, regional stability, and international security. The findings suggest that the true scale of madrasa proliferation significantly exceeds what has been publicly acknowledged, that the sector is considerably better resourced than previously understood, and that the transformation of education has become a central vehicle for the Taliban's project of reshaping Afghan society and consolidating ideological control. Religious institutions now increasingly serve as the primary mechanism through which the Taliban seek to institutionalise their authority, reshape and penetrate Afghan society, enforce gender discrimination and the suppression of religious minorities, and extend politicised ideological control across the country.

Fieldwork for this study was conducted in Kandahar and Bamiyan provinces. Kandahar is the Taliban's religious and political heartland; Bamiyan, by contrast, is a predominantly Hazara and Shia province with a history of antiTaliban resistance and comparatively high levels of public and girls' education prior to 2021. [4] The report also draws on secondary sources and interviews with more than 34 individuals in Afghanistan with direct knowledge of, or involvement in, the education sector. [5] This study was commissioned by Hamrah Network, which managed the research process and oversaw data collection under conditions of restricted access and significant security constraints. Field research for this study was conducted between March and May 2026, drawing on rare, groundlevel work carried out covertly in a context where independent research is severely limited and providing empirical evidence not available through official channels.

So, Raoul Wallenberg Institute, May 2025, https://rwi.lu.se/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Rahimi-and-Watkins-2025.pdf.

2 See Afghan Witness, Centre for Information Resilience, Taliban Management of the Education System, 1 February 2024, https://www.info-res.org/afghan-witness/reports/taliban-management-of-the-education-sector/.

3 See Ministry of Education, Summary Report on the Implementation Progress of the Ministry of Education's Operational Plan Achievements, September 2025; and Ministry of Education, Annual Report of the Achievements of the Ministry of Education: Government's Accountability Programme to the Nation 1402, Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, 2023–2024.

4 See Human Rights Watch, Afghanistan: Massacres of Hazaras in Afghanistan, Vol. 13, No. 1(C), February 2001, https://www.hrw.org/reports/2001/afghanistan/.

5 A note on evidence: throughout this report, a clear distinction is maintained between verified data, findings derived from field research and submissions, and anecdotal accounts. Given funding constraints, this research limited fieldwork to two provinces, Kandahar and Bamiyan; further mapping across Afghanistan is needed to fully establish the national scale of the madrasa campaign.

Fieldwork involved direct observation, mapping of religious institutions, and interviews with madrasa students, instructors and individuals who have firsthand knowledge of the education sector. For security reasons, the identities of participants and specific fieldwork locations are withheld. The study also draws on publicly available data, official Taliban statements, and secondary sources. While access constraints limit the ability to verify some official figures, the consistency of findings across multiple sources strengthens the reliability of the analysis.

II. The Origins, Typology, Governance and Significance of Madrasas

The madrasa as an institution has been foundational to the Taliban's legitimacy, cohesion, and survival.[6] The movement's origins, organisational structure, and ideological worldview are deeply rooted in both the traditional hujra system of religious learning in Afghanistan (see glossary for definitions of key terms) and the Deobandi madrasa networks that expanded significantly during the anti-Soviet jihad (1979-1989) and civil wars (1992-2001), particularly in Pakistan and along the Afghanistan–Pakistan border.[7] Madrasas are found across the wider region and, in most cases, operate as conventional religious schools with no association with violence or militancy. The institution itself is not inherently political.

Historically, religious education in Afghanistan was relatively localised and informal, centred around local clerics and small study circles known as hujras, operating from village mosques or private homes with little formal regulation. Many senior Taliban figures, including founder Mullah Omar, began their education in these traditional settings before joining more formalised conservative Deobandi institutions in Pakistan, such as Dar-ul-Uloom Haqqania — widely regarded as a key ideological incubator for the Taliban movement.[8] These seminaries followed standardised curricula rooted in the Dars-i Nizami tradition, with strong emphasis on hadith studies, Hanafi jurisprudence, and religious orthodoxy.[9]

During the jihad against the Soviet occupation, some of these madrasa networks became increasingly linked to militant recruitment, ideological

6 See Ahmed Rashid, Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).

7 Established in 1866 during the colonial period, Dar-ul-Uloom Deoband developed a standardised madrasa model for religious seminaries across South Asia, combining modern organisational and educational structures with a predominantly traditional religious curriculum. Its influence went on to shape thousands of madrasas across the region, including in Afghanistan. Many of these madrasas received funding from international actors, including the CIA and Gulf countries, that supported the jihadi groups fighting the Soviet Union. See Muhammad Qasim Zaman (ed.), Schooling Islam: The Culture and Politics of Modern Muslim Education (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007); and Ebrahim Moosa, What Is a Madrasa? (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

8 See Ahmad Rashid (2000).

9 Developed in the eighteenth century and later institutionalised through the Deobandi movement during the colonial period, the

mobilisation, and armed struggle. Following the withdrawal of the Soviet Union and the fall of the Soviet-supported government, the madrasas became a point of consolidation for ideological groups battling each other, leading eventually to the establishment of Taliban control in 1996 by a movement that derived its core identity from the Kandahar madrasa network. After the 2001 fall of the Taliban and the ensuing insurgency targeting United States and Coalition forces, religious instruction became fused with narratives of jihad, martyrdom, and resistance, creating pathways from madrasa networks into the movement's political, administrative, and security structures.[10] Between 2001 and 2018, academic and security data recorded approximately 1,339 suicide attacks in Afghanistan alone. These attacks resulted in 9,197 deaths and wounded nearly 16,000 others.[11]

The concern in the current context arises specifically from the Taliban's systematic effort to bring madrasas under centralised ideological control and deploy them as instruments of social transformation and political consolidation. This worldview continues to inform the Islamic Emirate's[12] most restrictive and exclusionary policies today, particularly those targeting women, girls, and religious minorities.

Since returning to power in 2021, the Taliban have developed a layered religious education infrastructure comprising several distinct types of institutions. Together, these form an interlocking system of religious instruction, politicised ideological socialisation, leadership reproduction, and societal control. Understanding how they differ, and how they interact, is essential to understanding the links between Taliban's madrasa-building and state-building project.

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Dars-i-Nizami curriculum combines Islamic jurisprudence, hadith studies, Quranic exegesis, Arabic grammar, logic, and elements of classical philosophy. Over time, the curriculum became increasingly centred on religious orthodoxy, doctrinal conformity, and the preservation of Islamic identity. The core curriculum generally spans eight years and includes Quranic sciences, hadith, Hanafi jurisprudence, Arabic linguistics, theology, logic, and classical legal reasoning.

10 See Alex Strick van Linschoten and Felix Kuehn, An Enemy We Created: The Myth of the Taliban/Al-Qaeda Merger in Afghanistan, 1970–2010 (London: Hurst, 2012); Afghanistan Analysts Network, Decrees, Orders and Instructions of Taleban Supreme Leader Mullah Hibatullah Akhundzada, 15 July 2023, https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/en/resources/taleban-and-related-documents/decrees-orders-and-instructions-of-taleban-supreme-leader-mullah-hibatullah-akhundzada/; International Crisis Group (2024), Taliban Government at Three: A Fractious Movement Navigates Governance, Asia Report No. 340, August 2024; and Andrew Watkins (2022), The Taliban One Year On, CTC Sentinel 15:8, https://ctc.westpoint.edu/the-taliban-one-year-on/.

11 Abdul Basir Amin and M. Nurzhan (2020), Suicide Bombing in Afghanistan: A Multilevel Analysis, Journal of Strategic Security, 13(3): pp. 85–104.

12 Islamic Emirate refers to the Taliban's self-declared governing structure (the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan). The term is used descriptively and does not imply international recognition.

Table 1: Typology of Taliban Religious Education Institutions

Institution Type	Primary Function	Key Features
Standard madrasas	Mass religious education and ideological conditioning	Dars-i-Nizami curriculum: Quranic memorisation, Hanafi jurisprudence, Taliban-aligned political programming. Largest category by number. Feeds into higher institutions and Taliban administrative structures.
Dar-ul-Huffaz	Quranic memorisation; early-entry socialisation	Enrols children at young ages; emphasis on rote learning and discipline. Entry point into the broader madrasa system, particularly in rural areas.
Dar-ul-Ulooms	Advanced theological training; reproduction of clerical and governance class	Trains future clerics, judges, muftis, and administrators. Significant Taliban investment to raise quality and reduce dependence on Pakistani institutions.
Jihadi madrasas	Cadre formation, ideological screening, and elite recruitment	Established by the Spiritual Leader's decree and administered under his direct supervision from Kandahar. Best-resourced institution in the system. Functions as screening mechanism for government and security appointments. Officially one per province; but as this report finds the number is much higher.
Female madrasas	Containment of female education within religiously sanctioned limits	The main education option for girls above grade six in Afghanistan.

Source: Field research and secondary sources.

Standard madrasas constitute many institutions and are the primary vehicle for mass religious conditioning.[13] Their curricula are rooted in the Dars-i-Nizami tradition, with heavy emphasis on Quranic memorisation, hadith studies, and Hanafi jurisprudence. Fieldwork for this study found that standardisation on the ground remains uneven for now; the choice of books and subjects is still determined by individual instructors, whose training and resources vary considerably. However, the Ministry of Education now conducts regular monitoring visits to ensure madrasas adhere to the prescribed curriculum, suggesting that centralised oversight is gradually tightening.[14] Interviews consistently identified a layer of Taliban-aligned political programming alongside religious instruction (elaborated further below). Graduates can now feed into higher-level institutions and, increasingly, into Taliban administrative, religious, and security structures.

Dar-ul-Huffaz centres specialise in Quranic memorisation and represent the second-largest category by number. They typically enrol children at a very

13 This report employs the term "standard madrasa" as an analytical distinction, not a normative one.

14 See Ministry of Education, Summary Report on the Implementation Progress of the Ministry of Education's Operational Plan Achievements, September 2025; and Ministry of Education, Annual Report of the Achievements of the Ministry of Education: Government's Accountability Programme to the Nation 1402, Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, 2023–2024.

young age, emphasising discipline and rote learning. They function as the first point of entry into the broader madrasa system, immersing children in religious frameworks from an early age and, notably, have historically served as community-based institutions that even families prior to 2021 relied upon. What is significant now is the Taliban's systematic effort to bring these traditionally informal institutions under centralised ideological and administrative control with Taliban approved curricula.
Dar-ul-Ulooms provide multi-year advanced religious education broadly equivalent to graduate-level theological study, training the clerics, judges, muftis, and religious administrators who will staff Taliban governance structures for the next generation. Interviewees noted that the quality of instruction in Afghan Dar-ul-Ulooms does not yet match that of their Pakistani counterparts, a gap the Taliban leadership is actively working to close through significant investment in facilities, salaries, and instructor quality.

Jihadi madrasas are the most politically significant category in the Taliban's education architecture, and the most misunderstood. Established by decree of Supreme Leader Hibatullah Akhundzada and administered through a special Kandaharbased directorate that reports to him, these institutions sit outside the normal Ministry of Education chain of command. Research for this study, consistent with the Raoul Wallenberg Institute's 2025 research, indicates that the standardised curriculum in jihadi madrasas does not differ substantially from that used in other Taliban-run institutions — they do not, on current evidence, provide specialised military or weapons training.[15] However, interviews with some jihadi madrasa students revealed that in some institutions, a text entitled Lessons of Jihad forms part of the curriculum.[16] Taliban officials have, however, been explicit about their ideological purpose; the acting Minister of Higher Education, Neda Mohammad Nadim, and former Minister of Refugees Khalil al-Rahman Haqqani have both publicly called for madrasas to instil jihadi and military concepts.[17] Officially, the Taliban acknowledge one jihadi madrasa per province. This report's fieldwork in Kandahar alone documented 23 jihadi madrasas and Dar-ul-Ulooms, and a modest estimate of around 25,000 students. In January 2026, Mohammad Sadiq Akif, the Director of Cabinet Affairs Coordination, on his twitter claimed that 26,000 students are enrolled in Jihadi Madrasas.[18]

15 See Rahimi and Watkins (2025).

16 Field interview, Kandahar, April 2026.

17 Yasin Shayan, Taliban Minister Calls Jihadi Madrasas Guardians of 'Jihadist Mindset', Amu TV, 21 October 2024, https://amu.tv/132038/. Ali Kosha, Entrenching Extremism: The Taliban's Radicalisation Agenda in Afghanistan, Reset DOC, https://www.resetdoc.org/story/extremism-taliban-radicalization-agenda-afghanistan/.

18 Mohammad Sadiq Akif (@SadiqAkif), "Da Kandahar Jihadi madrasa ki de Zabiullah Mujahed Saheb da Wena Mohem Taki", X, January 12, 2026.

Beyond curriculum, jihadi madrasas offer proximity to power. They are the best-resourced institutions in the system, with direct links to Taliban leadership, preferential land allocations, and government salary support. Those interviewed were suggesting that the jihadi madrasas function, in effect, as screening and recruitment mechanisms, identifying loyal graduates for placement in government, security, and administrative roles, and that their graduates are actively favoured over other students in Taliban appointments.

The Taliban have built on the education governance structures inherited from the Islamic Republic but have centralised, streamlined, and expanded them to ensure that religious education operates under direct ideological control, and religious education supersedes modern education, with ultimate authority flowing from the Supreme Leader in Kandahar. This governance architecture has been extended rapidly through what might be described as a franchise model under which existing private and unregistered madrasas are brought into the system in exchange for government salaries, formal certification, and access to state resources. This approach has enabled the Taliban to extend ideological and institutional control across the sector rapidly and at relatively low cost.

Formal responsibility for the madrasa system is divided between two ministries. The Ministry of Education manages and funds standard madrasas, integrates Taliban doctrine into the broader education system through curriculum restructuring, and has overseen the conversion of public schools and other government facilities into religious institutions. The former Ministry of Hajj and Endowments (now renamed the Ministry of Guidance, Hajj and Endowments) oversees mosque-based education networks, Dar-ul-Huffaz centres, and jihadi madrasas. It has also established a General Directorate of Religious Universities and Specialties, allowing madrasas to apply for university status and degree-awarding powers - a recognition pathway that did not previously exist.

The division between the two ministries is, however, less significant than the echelon above them. Ultimate authority rests with the Supreme Leader's Office through a newly established General Directorate of Religious Affairs in Kandahar, which operates outside the normal ministerial chain of command. Through this directorate the Supreme Leader directly appoints senior administrators of jihadi madrasas, sets doctrinal parameters, and exercises final approval over curriculum content.

This governance architecture is designed for durability: the Supreme Leader holds doctrinal authority, the ministries manage operations, the ulama councils enforce local conformity, and the Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice monitors compliance.

III. The Scale of Madrasa Expansion

Today, religious education institutions outnumber Afghanistan's more than 18,000 public and private schools.[19] The Taliban are consolidating a parallel state education infrastructure, complete with its own examination architecture, credentialling system, and staffing apparatus.

In April 2022, just eight months after seizing power, the de facto Minister of Education announced plans to establish between three and ten new madrasas in each of Afghanistan's approximately 400 districts, each with capacity for 1,000 to 2,000 students.[20] The Taliban reconfirmed this ambition in their 2023-2024 annual report, publicly targeting over 4,000 new madrasas nationwide.[21] In the 2023-2024 Annual Ministry of Education report, they outlined plans to upgrade at least 70 madrasas to Dar-ul-Uloom level in 2025.[22] They further reported that in the first six months of 2025–2026, 85 new madrasas had been established.[23]

The Taliban's own reporting charts the scale of transformation. The de facto Ministry of Education's 2023-2024 Annual Report recorded 21,257 religious educational institutions with total enrolment of 3,687,200 talib-al-ilm (religious students). [24] It comprised of 19,669 madrasas, 1,277 Dar-ul-Huffaz, 115 Dar-ul-Ulooms, and 39 orphanages, including five institutions established for Afghan refugees in Pakistan and others.[25] By September 2025, the number of officially registered institutions had reached 22,972 and that boarding facilities provided to 27,379 talib-al-ilm across the country.[26] The Taliban claim to have established at least one

19 According to the Ministry of Education's 2023-2024 annual report, the total number of public and private general education schools stood at 18,337, fewer than the over 21,000 religious institutions the Taliban reported during the same year. See Ministry of Education Annual Report of the Achievements of the Ministry of Education, 2024; Ministry of Education Annual Report, 2025.

20 Homa Wahaj, Religious Education Surges under Taliban as Secular Schooling Languishes, Voice of America, 8 October 2024, https://www.voanews.com/a/religious-education-surges-under-taliban-as-secular-schooling-languishes/7815283.html; see also Afghan Witness (2024); and Amu TV, Rights Group: Taliban Rapidly Expanding Jihadi Madrasas across Afghanistan, 2025, https://amu.tv/153943/.

21 Ali Kosha (2024). Mirwais Balkhi, Factors Driving Taliban Madrasafication in Afghanistan and Their Implications, Wilson Centre, March 31, 2025, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/factors-driving-taliban-madrasafication-afghanistan-their-implications.

22 See Ministry of Education Annual Report of the Achievements of the Ministry of Education, 2024.

23 See Ministry of Education Annual Report, 2025.

24 See Ministry of Education Annual Report of the Achievements of the Ministry of Education, 2024.

25 A note on methodology is essential here. The Taliban's figures encompass a combination of newly built madrasas, formerly private or informal institutions brought under Taliban registration, and repurposed public facilities. The Persian term used in official communications translates broadly as "establishing," encompassing all three processes. Official data should therefore be understood as reflecting the extension of Taliban control over Afghanistan's religious education landscape, not exclusively the construction of new institutions. Disentangling these categories is not possible on the basis of currently available data.

26 See Ministry of Education, 2025 annual report. The scale of madrasa enrolment is further corroborated by examination data from the third quarter of the 2024–25 fiscal year. The de facto Ministry of Education recorded 37,520 completed internal examination forms at the secondary level and 21,688 at the post-secondary level, all entered into the ministry's database, with national-level examinations scheduled for the fourth quarter. See Ministry of Education, 3rd Quarter 1404 Progress Report: Summary of Progress, Actions and Achievements by Elements and Programmes, Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, 2025.

Table 2: National Scale of Madrasa Expansion (2023-2025)

Metric	2023-2024	Sept 2025
Standard madrasas	19,669 registered institutions	22,972 registered institutions (of which 27,379 students are provided with accommodation and food).
Dar-ul-Huffaz	1,277 (with accommodation capacity for 1,650 Talib al-Ilm approved in 2023)	Data on the total number of Darul Huffaz centres is unavailable; however, 1,800 talib al-ilm were reported enrolled, of whom 300 are girls.
Dar-ul-Ulooms	115	Data unavailable
Orphanages (religious teaching)	39	9,000 orphans receiving religious education in madrasas
Madrasas in Prison	Data unavailable	92
Total madrasa enrolment	3,687,200	Exact data unavailable. They reported to have enrolled 29,013 new students (grade 1-14) in 2025-2026.
Jihadi madrasa enrolment	21,000	26,000

Source: Taliban Ministry of Education official annual reports and statements. [27]

jihadi madrasa in every province, but field research shows the real number is far higher . In Kandahar province alone, researchers identified at least 23 jihadi madrasas and Dar-ul-Ulooms in operation. To put this into perspective, the total number of officially registered madrasas before 2021 stood at approximately 5,000.[28]

Against this backdrop of dramatic religious education expansion, the Taliban established only 276 new public schools during the same period, a disparity that underscores the extent to which religious education has been deliberately prioritised over the formal public school system and the latter is reduced to a residual function.[29] The expansion of Taliban control has also involved the systematic conversion of public education infrastructure. Public schools, universities, dormitories, teacher training institutes, government guest houses, and broadcasting facilities have all been repurposed.[30] Documented cases include Abdul Hai Habibi High School in Khost province, one of the most modern

27 Figures should be treated as minimum estimates; this report's provincial findings indicate significant undercounting. Official data do not distinguish between newly constructed madrasas, formerly private institutions brought under Taliban registration, and repurposed public facilities.

28 Afghan Witness (2024).

29 See Ministry of Education, 3rd Quarter Progress Report, September 2025. The existence of any new public school construction under the Taliban nonetheless warrants scrutiny. A significant portion of these projects were likely already under way before August 2021, carried over from contracts and donor commitments made under the Islamic Republic and completed under Taliban administration rather than initiated by it. Some may also reflect international aid conditions or donor-funded programmes that the Taliban accepted on pragmatic grounds without ideological investment in their success.

30 See Rahimi and Watkins (2025); Afghan Witness (2024); and 'War on Education': Taliban Converting Secular Schools into Religious Seminaries, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 25 June 2022, https://www.rferl.org/a/taliban-secular-schools-converted-madra-

secondary schools in southeastern Afghanistan, converted into a madrasa in 2022, displacing approximately 6,000 students and 130 teachers.[31] In May 2023, Panjshir University was requisitioned, forcing around 300 students to vacate. Across all 34 provinces, teacher training institutes (previously one per province) were shuttered and converted into jihadi madrasas, while the Ministry of Education simultaneously disbanded its Teacher Training Department entirely.[32]

The Taliban madrasa networks extend far beyond the classroom, targeting vulnerable populations, including people with disabilities. Taliban officials have claimed in speeches the existence of 92 prison-based madrasas, presenting them as rehabilitation centres. The Taliban officials have claimed up to 9,000 orphans are now receiving Islamic instruction and that 92 madrasas have been established inside prisons.[33] As one community leader in Kandahar put it, "turning orphanages into [additional] madrasas for children and setting up

sahs-education/31914672.html.

31 Radio Free Europe reported that the Taliban converted the Meetra TV station in Balkh province, northern Afghanistan, into a madrasa; the station was affiliated with the former warlord and governor of Balkh, Atta Mohammad Noor. See 'War on Education': Taliban Converting Secular Schools into Religious Seminaries, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 25 June 2022, https://www.rferl.org/a/taliban-secular-schools-converted-madrasahs-education/31914672.html.

32 Tolo News, Taliban Converts Panjshir University Dormitory into Jihadi Madrasa, 13 May 2023, https://tolonews.com/afghanistan/provincial-183341.

33 Mohammad Sadiq Akif (@SadiqAkif), "Da Kandahar Jihadi madrasa ki de Zabiullah Mujahed Saheb da Wena Mohem Taki", X, January 12, 2026. See also Illya, Citizens Raise Alarm as Orphanages Turn into Ideological Training Centres, Hasht-e Subh Daily, 25 April 2026,

madrasas in prison is the best recruitment mechanism for the Taliban. They have a history of brainwashing children in their madrasas and then using children as suicide bombers." [34]

The Taliban have introduced a formal examination and credentialling process for the madrasa sector. In 2023-2024, 21,300 of the 33,900 ulema sitting level-confirmation examinations passed across three tiers: khamsa (secondary), alia (advanced), and alimia (scholarly).[35] The Ministry of Education has advertised 87,592 religious education posts nationwide, with recruitment of 50,000 personnel underway in 2025.[36] Since September 2024, the Taliban have ceased publishing official education data, making independent verification increasingly difficult.

A. Bamiyan Province

Bamiyan presents one of the clearest illustrations of what Taliban madrasa expansion means in practice in a province where the Taliban had historically enjoyed almost no support. Bamiyan's ethnically distinct Hazara population, who are predominantly Shia and comprise approximately 80 per cent of the province's inhabitants, has been historically marginalised and were specifically targeted by the Taliban on religious grounds during their earlier period in power (1996-2001), with well-documented massacres of entire communities.[37] Before 2021, Bamiyan was regarded as one of Afghanistan's most progressive provinces educationally and culturally, with comparatively high levels of girls' enrolment. [38] What has emerged since is the gradual displacement of civic and public education by an increasingly ideological religious system imposed on a population that has historically been resistant to Taliban governance.

By 2023, official provincial education data from Bamiyan recorded 84 public madrasas, two private madrasas, one female madrasa, two Dar-ul-Ulooms, and 10 Dar-ul-Huffaz centres. By 2024-2025, the number of public madrasas had risen to 136, with a jihadi madrasa established with dormitory capacity for 1,000 students. Researchers also documented at least 16 unregistered institutions not reflected in official figures, concentrated mainly in Bamiyan city and two districts (Kahmard and Saighan) of the province with substantial Sunni population.

Total enrolment in Bamiyan's madrasas stood at approximately 6,972 students in 2023, of whom 3,401 were male and 3,571 female. By 2025, provincial

34 Field Interview, Kandahar, April 2026.

35 See Ministry of Education Annual Report, 2025. For further detail on staffing, see the Ministry of Education second and third quarter reports for 2024–2025 and its 2025 annual report.

36 See Ministry of Education, 3rd Quarter Progress Report, 2024.

37 See Human Rights Watch, 2001, February.

38 See Anna Larson, The Trajectory of Women's Rights in Afghanistan: A Province-by-Province Dynamics Analysis, Afghanistan Analysts Network, 2020; and UNICEF Afghanistan, Afghanistan Annual Country Report 2020, UNICEF, 2021, https://www.unicef.org/reports/afghanistan-annual-country-report-2020.

Table 3: Madrasa Expansion in Bamiyan Province

Indicator	2023	2024–2025
Public madrasas	84	136 (incl. 16 not yet registered)
Female madrasas	1 public	1 public, 1 private
Dar-ul-Ulooms	1 public, 1 private	1 public, 1 private
Dar-ul-Huffaz	10	Data unavailable
Jihadi madrasas	0	1 (capacity 1,000 students)
Total madrasa students	6,972 (3,401 male; 3,571 female)	~12,800 (est.)
Annual madrasa graduates	Not recorded	>2,500
Annual public school graduates	>4,000 (pre-2021)	~1,800

Sources: Bamiyan Provincial Directorate of Education (2023 and 2025 data); HAMRAH Network fieldwork.

officials and fieldwork sources estimated that figure had roughly doubled to approximately 12,800. [39] More than 2,500 students now graduate annually from these religious institutions, compared with fewer than 1,800 from public schools, down from more than 4,000 before 2021.[40]

These figures come with an important caveat: they do not include Shia madrasas in the province. Until recently, many Shia religious groups had resisted Taliban registration and oversight, maintaining a degree of independence. The data presented here therefore likely understate the full extent of religious education in Bamiyan. However, interviews conducted for this study suggest that the fragile accommodation that previously allowed Shia institutions to operate with limited Taliban oversight is now beginning to erode. The appointment of a new provincial governor has marked a turning point. Community elders and local interviewees described increased arrests of civil society figures, reduced consultation with Shia religious leaders, and a more assertive posture toward Shia institutions and civic life. In early 2026, students at Bamiyan University were informed that dormitory accommodation would only be available to Sunni Hanafi students - a move widely perceived as sectarian discrimination that generated significant tensions on campus. A December 2025 report by Rawadari documented the Taliban's use of a combination of coercion and financial incentives to convert Ismaili Shia communities in four districts of Badakhshan Province.[41] These are not isolated incidents but early indicators of a hardening posture toward non-Sunni communities, as their power and control consolidates over the Afghan society.

39 Field interview, February 15, 2026, Bamiyan Province.

40 Field interview, February 12, 2026, Bamiyan Province.

41 Rawadari, The Human Rights Situation of Ismaili Shias in Afghanistan, December 2025, https://rawadari.org/reports/the-human-rights-situation-of-ismaili-shias-in-afghanistan/; see also Amu TV, Rights Group Says Taliban Fine Ismaili Families in Badakhshan over Schooling, 24 December 2025, https://amu.tv/217674/.

Table 4: Madrasa Enrolment in Kandahar Province (2026)

Location	Madrasas	Students
Kandahar City	**340**	**136,000**
Daman District	73	29,200
Spin Boldak District	72	28,800
Zhari District	71	28,400
Panjwayi District	70	28,000
Maiwand (Upper) District	69	27,600
Arghandab District	68	27,200
Khakrez District	67	26,800
Nesh District	66	26,400
Shah Wali Kot (Upper) District	65	26,000
Shah Wali Kot (Lower) District	56	22,400
Maruf District	64	25,600
Arghistan District	63	25,200
Shorabak District	62	24,800
Registan District	61	24,400
Takhta Pul District	60	24,000
Dand District	59	23,600
Ghorak District	58	23,200
Mianshin District	57	22,800
Maiwand District	52	20,800
TOTAL	**1,522**	**608,800**

B. Kandahar Province

Data from Kandahar reveals the striking scale of madrasa expansion in the Taliban's ideological and administrative heartland. Figures obtained from the Provincial Directorate of Education record 1,522 madrasas operating across Kandahar province in 2026, with an estimated enrolment of approximately 608,800 students. Kandahar City alone accounts for 340 madrasas and approximately 136,000 enrolled students nearly one quarter of total provincial enrolment, suggesting a significant concentration of madrasa infrastructure within the city itself including Dar-ul-Ulooms and jihadi madrasas. This concentration underscores the city's position as the Taliban's spiritual, political, and administrative centre.

Researchers verified much of this data through field visits in Kandahar city and four surrounding districts, though not all districts were covered. Data on the exact number of jihadi madrasas, Dar-ul-Ulooms, and Dar-ul-Huffaz could not be obtained independently. Were these institutions included, the total figures would be considerably higher.

Field visits in Kandahar City and only four surrounding districts also identified at least 23 Dar-ul-Ulooms and jihadi madrasas, against an official acknowledgement of one jihadi madrasa per province. Given that this mapping covered only a small portion of the province, the actual number is likely to be higher. Elders and madrasa students interviewed in Kandahar suggested that female attendance in madrasas has doubled since 2021.

The evidence from Kandahar and Bamiyan points to a coordinated effort to rapidly expand the madrasa network, which has become a central instrument of the Taliban's project to reshape and penetrate Afghan society. Religious institutions now increasingly serve as the primary mechanism through which the Taliban seek to institutionalise their authority, reshape and penetrate Afghan society, enforce gender discrimination and the suppression of religious minorities, and extend politicised ideological control across the country. They are subordinating madrasas into their administrative framework, repurposing them, and establishing new ones as instruments of movement-building, state consolidation, enforcement of their decrees, and the cultivation of popular legitimacy and support.

The madrasa system is being used, albeit it not yet on a wide scale, as a mechanism of political surveillance and social control. Several parents interviewed for this study described withdrawing their sons from madrasas not only because of the radical content, including lessons on jihad, but because of well-founded fears that students were being encouraged to monitor and report on their families. Instructors had reportedly told students that their loyalty is to the Emirate, and it takes precedence over family bonds. The penetration of the surveillance function into the home through madrasa students is not anecdotal. One elder in Kandahar detailed an encounter with the provincial head of the General Directorate of Intelligence (GDI), who while making an arrest within hours of a reported crime, told community members plainly: "Be aware that we now have informants in each one of your households. " [42] The madrasa system, the elder observed, serves as the ideal training ground for conformity and obedience and, by extension, for the cultivation of informants.

In parallel, as the below section shows, the Taliban have progressively re-engineered the public education system, increasingly subordinating, and in many cases sidelining, modern public education in favour of religious instruction. They have banned girls from secondary and higher education, enforced gender segregation, removed modern and civic subjects from curricula, and prohibited

42 Kandahar fieldwork, April 2026.

a wide range of educational texts and materials.[43] The following section examines how the Taliban finance this network and pursue broader education re-engineering, leading to a gradual hollowing out Afghanistan's already fragile public education system.

IV. Financing the Madrasa Network

The full cost of the Taliban's madrasa expansion programme is difficult to establish; there has been no public disclosure of expenditures. Even conservative estimates, however, point to investment on an extraordinary scale. Using the Taliban's own plan to build 4,000 new madrasas as a baseline, and applying a modest construction cost of USD 250,000-300,000 to just onethird of those institutions, the capital outlay alone would fall between USD 1 and 1.2 billion, before accounting for equipment, staffing, administration, accommodation, food, or subsistence support for students. The World Bank reported in 2025 that education spending accounted for 18.8 per cent of the total Taliban budget (approximately USD 675 million), the second-largest sector after security.[44] A 2023 Afghanistan Analysts Network study found that 95 per cent of the education budget was spent on salaries alone.[45] Read alongside the Taliban's own data in which 87,592 religious education posts were advertised nationwide in 2024-2025, and with recruitment of 50,000 staff underway, the implication is clear: a substantial and growing share of the Ministry of Education's budget is directed to the salaries of religious teachers, madrasa instructors, and administrative personnel.[46]

Photo (C) 8am.media Photograph: AFP

43 See FEMENA, 134 Ways the Taliban Wage War on Women, 24 November 2025, https://femena.net/2025/11/24/134-ways-the-talibanwage-war-on-women/.

44 World Bank Group, Afghanistan Economic Monitor, January 2026, 22 January 2026, https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/57127c0d0fb6d08e482b51ddaee5489d-0310012026/original/Afghanistan-Economic-Monitor-January-2026.pdf.

45 Kate Clark and Roxanna Shapour, What Do the Taleban Spend Afghanistan's Money On? Government Expenditure under the Islamic Emirate, Afghanistan Analysts Network, March 2023, https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/en/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2023/04/Revised-Taleban-expenditure-202304-FINAL.pdf. The budget shows planned rather than actual expenditure. The 1400 Q4 mini-budget remains the most detailed source available from the Emirate on its spending priorities; the subsequent 1401 budget was disclosed only in a few sentences.

46 See Ministry of Education Annual Report, 2024; and Ministry of Education 3rd Quarter Report, 2024.

Beyond the state budget, the Taliban draw on several additional funding streams. Interviews with individuals familiar with the de facto Ministry of Finance revealed that the Taliban's Supreme Leader has access to a significant discretionary budget, used to finance the construction and management of madrasas outside normal appropriations processes.[47] Coercive fundraising targeting private individuals and businesses has become increasingly common, with portions reportedly directed toward the construction and maintenance of madrasas.[48] Several interviewees described implicit threats against business owners to pressure them into financing religious institutions.[49] As one businessman in Kandahar stated: "paying for a madrasa's salaries, food, and building costs is the price of getting things done under the Emirate. " [50] Financing or maintaining a personal madrasa has also become an informal means of securing contracts, licences, or favourable treatment from authorities.

It is therefore unsurprising that some senior Taliban leaders have established their own madrasas, indeed some of the largest madrasas in Kandahar documented by this study were linked to key Taliban figures.

For example, Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, the Deputy Chairman of the Administration for Economic Affairs, Taliban co-founder, and Popalzai tribal leader from Kandahar province, established al-Jamiah al-Islamiyyah Dar-ul Uloom Kandahar, following the Taliban's return to power.[51] Fieldwork revealed that approximately 1,000 students graduate from the madrasa each year. In late 2025, Baradar presided over its graduation ceremony, describing institutions of this kind as "important pillars of social reform, religious knowledge, and jihad. " [52] Sustaining and funding a madrasa confers religious legitimacy as well as political influence within the Taliban system. It serves both as a symbol of piety and a marker of status and authority.

47 See Rahimi and Watkins (2025); Afghanistan Analysts Network (2023); and Afghanistan International, Taliban Leader Allocates $9 Million for Pakistani Religious Seminaries, 11 April 2025, https://www.afintl.com/en/202504114551.

48 See Rawadari, Afghanistan Human Rights Situation Report 2024, April 2025, https://rawadari.org/reports/afghanistan-human-rights-situation-report-2024/; and Avizha Khorshid, From Gifts to Extortion: Inside the Taliban's Expanding Corruption Network, Hasht-e Subh Daily, 22 August 2025, https://8am.media/eng/from-gifts-to-extortion-inside-the-talibans-expanding-corruption-network/.

49 Field interviews, Kandahar and Bamiyan, April 2026; see also Avizha Khorshid, From Gifts to Extortion: Inside the Taliban's Expanding Corruption Network, Hasht-e Subh Daily, 22 August 2025.

50 Field Interviews in Kandahar and Bamiyan, April 2026. Also

51 Ahmed Rashid (2000); Abdul Ghani Baradar, Encyclopaedia Britannica, https://www.britannica.com/biography/Mullah-Abdul-Ghani-Baradar, which confirms that Baradar and Omar operated a madrasa together in Maywand district, Kandahar province, in the early 1990s before founding the Taliban; Shan A. Zain, From Hardcore Militant to Peace Envoy: A Profile of Afghan Taliban No. 2 Mullah Baradar, 20 December 2013, https://jamestown.org/from-hardcore-militant-to-peace-envoy-a-profile-of-afghan-taliban-no-2-mullah-baradar/; and Middle East Institute, Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar Akhund, Taliban Leadership Tracker, https://talibantracker.mei.edu/english/taliban/leadership-tracker/Mullah-Abdul-Ghani-Baradar-Akhund-aka-Haji-Mullah-Abdul-Ahmad-Turk.

52 Ahmad Sohaib Hasrat, Baradar Urges Clerics to Guide People with Wisdom, Kindness, Pajhwok Afghan News, 4 January 2026, https://pajhwok.com/2026/01/04/baradar-urges-clerics-to-guide-people-with-wisdom-kindness/; and Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs Office, Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar Akhund: A Secure Afghanistan Is Considered a Major Economic and Political Opportunity for All, https://dpmea.gov.af/index.php/1404-English-News-150.

Religious taxation known as ushr (a tithe of approximately 10 per cent levied on agricultural harvest, paid either in kind or cash) and zakat (mandatory charitable contribution required of all eligible Muslims), constitutes a further funding stream for the group.[53] The significant role of religious taxation in financing the Taliban during the insurgency is well documented.[54] Since 2021, they have further centralised and codified these obligation, with ushr formalised as a compulsory levy. In 2023, they reported collecting approximately one billion dollars through these taxes, funds that flow directly to the Supreme Leader's office for distribution at his discretion. [55] It would not be surprising if a significant portion of this revenue is directed towards the madrasa network, and Jihadi Madrasas in particular. Interviews in Kandahar and Bamiyan also revealed that madrasa students are sent on a daily basis to collect food from surrounding households and communities. In some cases, villagers have devised systems of communal food production for local madrasas.

These financing questions represent areas that warrant significantly greater international scrutiny. The scale of investment required to sustain a network of 23,000 madrasas cannot be explained by the Taliban's domestic revenue base alone. The sources, mechanisms, and governance of madrasa financing remain inadequately documented and deserve sustained analytical attention.

V. Education Re-Engineering and the Hollowing Out of Public Schooling

Since returning to power, the Taliban have pursued a far-reaching restructuring of Afghanistan's education system, combining the rapid expansion of religious education with major revisions to public school and university curricula. This transformation has increasingly shifted educational priorities toward their interpretation of Islam, while systematically weakening the public education and eroding the provision of secular subjects.

53 See Kate Clark and Roxanna Shapour, What Do the Taleban Spend Afghanistan's Money On? Government Expenditure under the Islamic Emirate, Afghanistan Analysts Network, March 2023.

54 Afghanistan Analysts Network, The Sun in the Sky: The Relationship between Pakistan's ISI and Afghan Insurgents, LSE Crisis States Research Centre Discussion Paper 18, https://www.lse.ac.uk/international-development/Assets/Documents/PDFs/csrc-discussion-papers/dp18-The-Sun-in-the-Sky.pdf; Scott S. Smith, Service Delivery in Taliban-Influenced Areas of Afghanistan, United States Institute of Peace, Special Report 465, April 2020; and Vanda Felbab-Brown, The Taliban's Drug Trade: Revenue and Taxation, Brookings Institution.

55 Pajhwok Afghan News, "1 Billion Afs Collected in Ushr, Zakat Last Year: Fazli," July 26, 2023, https://pajhwok.com/2023/07/26/1-billion-afs-collected-in-ushr-zakat-last-year-fazli/; See also Kate Clark, "Survival and Stagnation: The State of the Afghan Economy," Afghanistan Analysts Network, November 7, 2023, https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/en/reports/economy-development-environment/survival-and-stagnation-the-state-of-the-afghan-economy/.

In October 2022, the Taliban formally initiated a nationwide revision of school and university curricula. [56] The committee overseeing this process was composed largely of senior hardliners closely aligned with the movement's leadership. The new curricula approved in 2023 were grounded in Hanafi jurisprudence and shaped by a highly conservative Deobandi worldview. Subjects associated with civic education, critical thinking, cultural studies, and human rights were reportedly removed or significantly reduced after being characterised as "harmful" or "unnecessary" to the Islamic Emirate. [57] In their place, new material was introduced focusing on Emirate Studies, religious guidance, and themes linked to jihad and moral conduct. The new curriculum now includes topics such as the recommendations of the Supreme Leader, avoidance of fornication and gambling, and the importance of obedience to leaders within the Islamic system.[58] In January 2026, Hibatullah Akhundzada signed a new "Criminal Procedure Code for Courts" that, according to leaked copies and human rights analyses, formalises a highly hierarchical and punitive justice system rooted in the Taliban's interpretation of religious and social order. The code reportedly institutionalises unequal punishment based on social status, expands mechanisms of domestic and political repression, and further consolidates clerical authority and social control, prompting strong condemnation from Afghan and international human rights organisations.[59] The displacement of modern education has been reinforced through financial incentives that actively disadvantage the public school system. Madrasa teachers now receive state salaries while students gain state-recognised certification and pathways into public sector employment. In practice, madrasa graduates appear increasingly favoured for positions within Taliban administrative and religious institutions. The Ministry of Education in 2023-2024 issued teaching certificates to over 21,000 former madrasa students, allowing them to teach at secondary and undergraduate levels, replacing civil servants with years of specialised training

56 For more detail, see Rahimi and Watkins (2025); and 8am Media, Where Does the Taliban's Educational Ideology Come From?, 24 February 2024, https://8am.media/eng/where-does-the-talibans-educational-ideology-come-from/, which cites Abdul Hakim Haqqani's book The Islamic Emirate and Its System of Governance as the authoritative Taliban text underpinning curriculum reform under his oversight as Chief Justice.

57 UNICEF and UNESCO, Afghanistan Education Situation Report 2025, https://www.unicef.org/afghanistan/documents/afghanistan-education-situation-report-2025; UNESCO, Banned from Education: A Review of the Right to Education in Afghanistan, 26 March 2025, https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/banned-education-review-right-education-afghanistan; Human Rights Watch, 'Schools Are Failing Boys Too': The Taliban's Impact on Boys' Education in Afghanistan, 6 December 2023, https://www.hrw.org/report/2023/12/06/schools-are-failing-boys-too/talibans-impact-boys-education-afghanistan; Amu TV, Taliban Revises School Curriculum, Omitting Five Subjects, 5 April 2024, https://amu.tv/90580/; Hasht-e Subh Daily, Taliban Modify Education Curriculum to Propagate Violence and Bigotry, 17 December 2022, https://8am.media/eng/exclusive-taliban-modify-education-curriculum-to-propagate-violence-and-bigotry/; and Arif Sahar, Radicalisation through Education in Afghanistan: A Critical Inquiry and Implications, International Journal of Educational Development, Vol. 117, September 2025, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2025.103320.

58 See their 2025 Third Quarter Report.

59 Rawadari, Press Release Regarding the Implications of the Criminal Procedure Code for Courts, ecoi.net, 22 January 2026, https://www.ecoi.net/en/document/2137357.html.

with graduates holding only madrasa credentials.[60]

The drivers of madrasa enrolment extend beyond ideology. A survey involving 8,245 women across all 34 provinces found that 56 per cent of respondents identified the Taliban's ban on girls' secondary education as the primary reason families enrolled daughters in madrasas.[61] Religious motivation was the second most cited factor, followed by community pressure and the absence of alternatives. [62] In some areas, larger madrasas provide food, accommodation, and financial assistance, making them one of the few accessible options for economically vulnerable households. For many families, enrolment reflects not religious preference but economic hardship and the collapse of alternatives.[63] According to OCHA's data, acute poverty directly affects 65%of the general population, a figure that spikes drastically to 75% in rural areas.[64]

What is increasingly evident is that the Taliban have constructed a parallel education infrastructure designed to endure. The public school system, starved of teachers, investment, and students is progressively being hollowed out. Since 2021, the Taliban have established only a limited number of new public schools, in stark contrast to the rapid expansion of the madrasa network, showing where their priorities lie. Overall, the number of public high school graduates reportedly declined.[65] UNESCO reporting points to similarly severe deterioration in access to education across the country and warned that by 2030, the country will not have enough qualified teachers to replace the current workforce. [66]

The question of who will train the next generation of Afghan doctors, engineers, agriculturalists, and scientists is an existential one. The systematic replacement of modern education with a curriculum that explicitly rejects civic and scientific knowledge will produce citizens structurally ill-equipped to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century. Today's graduates will inherit a country with ever-greater needs and ever-fewer tools to address them. The following section examines the most significant political and security consequences of this process.

60 Ministry of Education Annual Report, 2025.

61 Organization for Policy Research and Development Studies (DROPS)/BISHNAW, Community Tracking Poll on Women's Experiences and the Shift toward Madrasa Enrolment in Afghanistan, 2024, https://dropsafghanistan.org/.

62 See also Hadis Habibyar and Sara Ibrahim, 'Send Your Daughters or You Get No Aid': The Taliban Are Making Religious Schools Girls' Only Option, The Guardian, 22 September 2025, https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2025/sep/22/taliban-afghanistan-women-girls-madrasa-religious-schools-only-option-education.

63 According to OCHA, 65 per cent of Afghanistan's population live in acute poverty. See OCHA, Afghanistan Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2026, December 2025.

64 See United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan: Afghanistan, 30 December 2025, https://humanitarianaction.info/.

65 See UNESCO and UNICEF, Afghanistan Education Situation Report 2025, 2025.

66 UNESCO and UNICEF, Afghanistan Education Situation Report 2025, 2025; and Samuel Hall, The Cost of the Suspension of Women's Higher Education in Afghanistan, commissioned by UNESCO, 2023.

VI. Implications

The implications of the Taliban's madrasa system are profound and far-reaching for Afghanistan and beyond. Below we highlight only two: 1) how the madrasa system has become the primary infrastructure through which the Taliban's gender discrimination is being replicated and institutionalised; and 2) how this carries a growing potential for politicised ideological radicalisation with significant implications for regional stability and international security.

A. Entrenching Gender Discrimination

The madrasa network has become a key infrastructure through which the subordination of women and girls, and the marginalisation of other vulnerable groups including children, people with disabilities, LGBTQI+ and others is being institutionalised and internalised. The Taliban's system of gender discrimination, characterised by leading human rights organisations and a growing number of governments as "gender apartheid", is being enforced and reproduced through the madrasa system. Interviews with key informants reveal that discrimination against women and girls, and against non-Sunni Hanafi communities, is increasingly being encoded in doctrine, enforced through surveillance, and deliberately designed to outlast the current political moment.[67]

Since retaking power, the Taliban have issued multiple edicts denying women and girls fundamental rights: the rights to education, work, freedom of movement, expression, and association.[68] Today, around 1.4 to 2.2 million girls are barred from attending school beyond primary level.[69] The exclusion of women from universities has reduced female tertiary enrolment to zero. With women barred from medical faculties, there is an impending crisis regarding the availability of female healthcare professionals, which fundamentally limits women's access to basic medical services. These have effectively removed women from public life and confined them to the domestic sphere, subject to the control of their husbands and fathers. The reform of the education sector, and the madrasa system in particular, is central to enforcing the legal framework that underpins this system of gender persecution.

For girls, banned from secondary and further education, female madrasas offer the possibility of a limited religious education, and beyond that little else.[70] Interviews with madrasa students

67 See, for example, Rawadari et al., Joint Statement on the Rollback of Women's Rights in Afghanistan under Taliban Rule, 10 December 2024; and the reports of the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan.

68 See, for example, the reports of the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan, https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-afghanistan; and FEMENA, 134 Ways the Taliban Wage War on Women in Afghanistan: Testimony-Based Evidence from Afghanistan, 4 November 2025.

69 See Samuel Hall, The Cost of the Suspension of Women's Higher Education in Afghanistan, commissioned by UNESCO, 2023.

70 See Organization for Policy Research and Development Studies (DROPS)/BISHNAW (2024).

revealed that girls and boys alike are explicitly taught their respective social roles, defined by religious obligation and domestic subordination. The curriculum prepares girls for a prescribed role within the Taliban's patriarchal religious order. The content of the Taliban madrasa instruction goes further than passive exclusion. Interviews for this study document that female madrasa students are consistently taught that men are permitted four wives, that women should accept and do not question their husbands' remarriage, and that early marriage, particularly to fighters and those involved in jihad is to be sought and celebrated.[71] One girl interviewed in a Kandahar madrasa noted that she would prefer marrying someone who had been involved in jihad against the Americans, adding that her teachers actively encouraged this view.[72] Several madrasa girls described how, since their brothers began attending a madrasa alongside them, they begun policing their clothing, movements, and social contact, and some noted how they are being pressured to marry early, despite their father's lack of objection.

One girl noted that three of her friends had already married at age sixteen. The personal and relational consequences of this indoctrination are tangible and immediate and consistent with other reporting and research.[73] Statistical modelling released by UN Women projects that the ongoing ban on girls' secondary education will trigger a 25% increase in the rate of child marriage, putting 37.5% of all Afghan girls at immediate risk of forced underage marriage.

Physical compliance with Taliban gender norms is enforced within madrasa settings with notable rigour. One madrasa boy in Kandahar described how girls are monitored not only for hijab observance but for the colour of their nail varnish, the shape of their eyebrows, and the colour of their clothing. This pervasive surveillance of female bodies normalises a culture of control that extends well beyond the madrasa walls.

The social consequences are immediate and visible. Interviews for this study document brothers pressuring their sisters to marry early and abandon education, armed with religious authority derived from their madrasa instruction. Children are being taught that their loyalty to the Emirate and to the madrasa takes precedence over family bonds and that monitoring and reporting the behaviour of parents and relatives is not a betrayal but an obligation. Field interviews documented parents withdrawing their sons from madrasas

71 Field Interviews in Bamiyan and Kandahar, April-May 2026.

72 Field Interviews in Kandahar, April-May 2026.

73 See UNICEF, The Cost of Inaction on Girls' Education and Women's Labour Force Participation in Afghanistan, UN News, 2026, https://news.un.org/en/story/2026/04/1167389; UN Women, Afghanistan Gender Country Profile, 2024, https://www.unwomen.org/; and Abdul Basir Amin et al., The Impact of Afghanistan's Policies on Early Child Marriage and Girls' Education: Current Trends and Future Consequences, Risk Management and Healthcare Policy, 18 (2025), pp. 3517–3520, https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/41195162/.

specifically out of fear that their children had become informants within their own households. As one elder in Kandahar recounted after speaking with the head of provincial intelligence: "We now have informants in each one of your households." The madrasa network, he observed, was the ideal training ground for this kind of conformity.

The psychological toll of systematic exclusion is also documented. One girl stated: "I am alive, but I feel that I do not live my life. I have depression and life has become meaningless." Such testimony reflects the wider findings of mental health research on the impact of the Taliban's education ban and underscores that the harm being inflicted is not only structural but deeply personal.

For boys, madrasa curricula, and jihadi madrasa curricula in particular, consistently frame masculinity in terms of militant piety, religious authority, and the policing of gender norms. An investigative report by Rukhshana Media documented how Taliban madrasas are fuelling deep divisions within Afghan families: boys and young men educated in these institutions are increasingly adopting views that lead them to regard female relatives' participation in modern education and professional work as "sinful." [74] The systemic nature of this indoctrination not only reinforces Taliban ideological control but also creates a climate of suspicion that erodes traditional family bonds and further isolates women from public life.

The long-term implications are profound. A generation educated exclusively within this framework will inherit and enforce a social order in which gender persecution is not policy but doctrine — normalised, naturalised, and sanctified by religious authority. This is, by design, self-perpetuating. The madrasa system produces the ideologically formed graduates who will staff Taliban governance structures, teach in Taliban madrasas, and enforce Taliban decrees on the next generation. The institutionalisation of gender apartheid through education seems central to the Taliban's project.

The international community has responded to the Taliban's gender persecution primarily through diplomatic pressure and conditional aid. The findings of this study suggest that this framing is insufficient. The madrasa system as currently constituted is not a policy that can be reversed through engagement or conditionality — it is a structural transformation of the conditions under which Afghan society reproduces itself. International actors must reckon with this reality in how they frame their engagement, their advocacy, and their support for Afghan civil society.

74 Ziba Balkhi, How a Proliferation of Religious Schools in Afghanistan Is Spreading Suspicion and Division, Rukhshana Media, 13 March 2026, https://rukhshana.com/en/how-a-proliferation-of-religious-schools-in-afghanistan-is-spreading-suspicion-and-division/.

B. Regional Stability and Global Security Risks

The expansion of the Taliban's madrasa network carries significant and growing implications for regional and global security. The primary concern is not that Jihadi Madrasas are systematically producing battlefield combatants - available evidence does not support that conclusion at this stage. The more consequential threat is ideological: the annual production of tens of thousands of graduates formed within a framework that treats religious authority, political loyalty, and militant identity as inseparable. It is the fusion of doctrinal, institutional, and generational that could pose the deeper and more durable security risk in the years ahead.

The Supreme Leader commands the personal loyalty of hundreds of thousands of madrasa students and graduates who regard his call to jihad as a religious obligation. The madrasa system is the institutional mobilising force available to the Supreme Leader. As one madrasa instructor in Panjwai district of Kandahar stated: "The Amir [Mullah Hibatullah] pays particular attention to these madrasas. He has brought the ulama council, the Emirate's Dar-ul-Fatwa,[75] and madrasa management under his supervision and control in Kandahar.[76]" In July 2022, following criticism from ulama regarding the ban on girls' education, Mullah Hibatullah warned that criticism of Taliban authorities was "not permissible" in Islam, framing dissent as fitna (a state of social disorder incompatible with Muslim duty, to be eradicated by all means necessary).[77] The Taliban's Minister of Higher Education went further, stating that those undermining Taliban order "by speech, pen, or in practice" are considered opponents of a just leader, and wajeb ul-qatl — permitted to be killed. [78] Meanwhile, non-Hanafi religious minorities are increasingly being characterised in madrasa teaching as guilty of bid'ah[79] and therefore legitimate candidates for conversion. A theological framework that legitimises the violent suppression of dissent, combined with a madrasa network producing

75 A Dar ul-Fatwa is the official Islamic institution or council responsible for issuing religious edicts (fatwas).

76 Independent Persian, Taliban Leader's Decree: Criticism of Officials Is Forbidden, July 2022, https://www.independentpersian.com/node/255261/ (Farsi-language source documenting Akhundzada's statement at the July 2022 ulema gathering framing criticism of Taliban authorities as fitna); and United States Institute of Peace, What's Next for the Taliban's Leadership amid Rising Dissent?, April 2023, https://www.usip.org/publications/2023/04/whats-next-talibans-leadership-amid-rising-dissent, documenting the suppression of internal dissent following ulema criticism of the girls' education ban.

77 Ibid. and United States Institute of Peace, What's Next for the Taliban's Leadership amid Rising Dissent?, April 2023, https://www.usip.org/publications/2023/04/whats-next-talibans-leadership-amid-rising-dissent.

78 Deutsche Welle (DW Dari), Taliban Minister of Higher Education: Those Who Undermine Taliban Order Are Wajeb ul-Qatl, 2023, https://www.dw.com/fa-af/a-64970389 (Dari-language source); see also Amu TV, Neda Mohammad Nadim: Taliban's Minister behind Education Ban, August 2024, https://amu.tv/119779/.

79 Some students interviewed for this report noted that they are taught that adherents of other Islamic schools of thought, such as Shia, Ismaili, and Sufi communities, are guilty of bid'ah. Bid'ah, an Arabic term meaning "innovation" or "innovation in religious matters," traditionally refers to practices or beliefs introduced into Islam that were not part of the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad and the early Muslim community. Conservative or literalist interpretations have used the term broadly to condemn alternative religious practices, rituals, or interpretations as illegitimate. In Taliban interpretations, Bid'ah is treated as a serious deviation from the faith and an unforgivable corruption of core religious principles.

tens of thousands of ideologically formed graduates annually, has every potential for future instability, whose full consequences for Afghanistan, the region, and the international order are only beginning to materialise.
The Taliban's continued maintenance of a dedicated "martyrdom" or suicide brigade reportedly drawn from graduates of jihadi madrasas is one of the clearest direct and disturbing linkages between the Taliban's madrasa system and its coercive apparatus. Taliban authorities have repeatedly showcased these units in military parades, presenting them as symbols of loyalty and revolutionary commitment. While their operational role since the Taliban's return to power remains limited and largely opaque, their continued training and public glorification suggest that the Taliban have deliberately preserved the institutional infrastructure for militant mobilisation. This blurs the line between religious education and militarisation in ways that have significant implications for regional stability and international security.

The most immediate regional manifestation of this threat is the Taliban's relationship with the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). The TTP and the Afghan Taliban share deep ideological roots in Deobandi doctrine, Pashtun identity, and decades of cross-border institutional ties, including shared madrasa networks.[80] In August 2021, TTP leader Noor Wali Mehsud renewed his oath of allegiance to the Islamic Emirate, describing the Taliban's victory as one for the "entire Muslim ummah. "[81] The Taliban have consistently refused to dismantle the TTP or sever its operational links to Afghan territory, despite sustained pressure from Islamabad.

Pakistan declared itself in a state of "open war" with Afghanistan in February 2026 following a sustained escalation of cross-border strikes.[82] In 2025, the Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies recorded at least 1,066 militant attacks, resulting in over 3,400 deaths. [83]The cross-border madrasa ecosystem, sustained by shared doctrine, identity, and institutional ties, provides the TTP and affiliated movements with a depth of ideological and logistical support

80 International Crisis Group, Pakistan: Responding to the Militant Surge on the Afghan Border, March 2026, https://www.crisisgroup.org/rpt/asia-pacific/pakistan-afghanistan/354-pakistan-responding-militant-surge-afghan-border; Rahimi and Watkins (2025), documenting how the cross-border Deobandi madrasa ecosystem connecting Afghanistan and Pakistan has shaped Taliban and TTP cadre formation; Ahmed Rashid, Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000); United Nations Security Council, Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team, Sixteenth Report, S/2025/796, December 2025, https://docs.un.org/en/S/2025/796; and Borderland Struggles: The Consequences of the Afghan Taliban's Takeover on Pakistan, Third World Quarterly, 2025, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00358533.2025.2466193.

81 Thomas Joscelyn, Pakistani Taliban's Emir Renews Allegiance to Afghan Taliban, FDD's Long War Journal, 19 August 2021.

82 Al Jazeera, Pakistan Bombs Kabul: Why Are Afghanistan and Pakistan Fighting?, 27 February 2026, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/2/27/pakistan-bombs-kabul-why-are-afghanistan-and-pakistan-fighting; and Munir Ahmed and Abdul Qahar Afghan, Pakistan Says It Is Now in 'Open War' with Afghanistan after Cross-Border Strikes, Associated Press, 27 February 2026.

83 See Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies, Pakistan's 2025 Counterterrorism Toll Surges 73% as Militancy Hits Multi-Year Highs, 2025, https://www.picss.net/press-release/pakistans-2025-counterterrorism-toll-surges-73-as-militancy-hits-multi-year-highs-picss/.

that state-level interventions have consistently failed to sever. Whether the Taliban's continued support for the TTP and other armed groups reflects deliberate strategic sequencing - using militant proxies as leverage while consolidating domestic power or a more fundamental ideological alignment - is a question that cannot be definitively resolved on current evidence. The Taliban have historically been willing to take extreme risks to maintain their commitment to foreign jihadis, even under severe international pressure. Their track record provides little basis for optimism that this calculus has fundamentally changed.

The threat is not confined to Pakistan. In 2025, cross-border skirmishes with Tajikistan, Iran, and Uzbekistan underscored the wider regional dimension, driven by escalating border incidents and cross-border militant activity. The Taliban have launched multiple armed incursions on the territory of Tajikistan from Afghanistan's Badakhshan province. The United Nations Security Council has documented that the Taliban continue to "create a permissive environment for terrorist groups." [84] The cross-border Deobandi madrasa ecosystem provides these groups with ideological grounding, recruitment pathways, and institutional continuity that will prove extremely difficult to disrupt from outside.

The full consequences of the centralised madrasa system for Afghanistan, the region, and the world could be profound in the years ahead.

VII. Conclusion

The evidence presented in this report points to a single, clear conclusion. The Taliban's madrasa system is now well-resourced, well-administered, and functioning as a parallel education framework; representing a project of societal transformation pursued with a speed and systematic coherence that has no precedent in Afghanistan's modern history. In under five years, the Taliban have constructed a parallel education infrastructure that now exceeds the reach of Afghanistan's formal public school system, extending ideological control into families, communities, prisons, and orphanages. The two long-term consequences examined in this report, the entrenchment of gender discrimination and the potential for ideological radicalisation with implications for regional stability and international security, are serious and already materialising.

84 United Nations Security Council, Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team, Sixteenth Report, S/2025/796, December 2025, https://docs.un.org/en/S/2025/796.

International actors' appeasement of the Taliban, and their hope that the responsibilities of governance will moderate the movement's repressive policies, has produced no evidence of change. The madrasa system is the clearest demonstration of the Taliban's actual vision. Engagement, formal or informal, has thus far served only to legitimise and enable the foundations of an oppressive, ideologically driven system. The parallel madrasa infrastructure the Taliban have constructed is designed to outlast political pressure, institutionalise gender persecution, and sustain the ideological ecosystem that feeds regional militancy.

The time to change course is now. Serious coordinated pressure on the Taliban is needed to halt their ideological consolidation. If the international community waits, it risks confronting a system so deeply entrenched that meaningful intervention becomes considerably harder.

VIII. Recommendations

To Governments Engaging with the Taliban

- Recalibrate engagement: Governments must establish clear public red lines and ensure that political or diplomatic contact does not inadvertently legitimise the Taliban, including by allowing them to open political offices in their capitals. The reopening of girls' secondary education should be made an explicit, public, and non-negotiable condition for any deepening of political or economic engagement.
- Expand funding for alternative education: Scholarship programmes, distance-learning platforms, community-based education initiatives and accreditation pathways for Afghan students, particularly girls, should be treated as long-term strategic investments. Special attention should be given to training future midwives, doctors, nurses and teachers to prevent severe shortages in essential services. Afghan civil society organisations, educators, and universities in exile are maintaining the institutional infrastructure that a future Afghanistan will need. Governments must allocate significantly greater, longer-term, and more flexible funding directly to Afghan-led organisations.
- Prioritise funding Afghan civil society: Afghan educators, researchers, journalists, and human rights defenders operating under severe constraints inside Afghanistan and in exile are the source of knowledge about what the Taliban are actually doing. Donors must urgently increase flexible, long-term funding for this work for Afghan CSOs. They have been filling the gap and a critical a bridge that preserves support.
- Strengthen accountability: Support and adequately resource the UN's Independent Investigative Mechanism for Afghanistan (IIIM-A). Use existing sanctions designations to pursue individuals and entities that are blocking girls' secondary education.

The systematic exclusion of girls from education and the forced indoctrination of children in madrasas should be explicitly incorporated into international accountability frameworks.

- Maintain and strengthen UNAMA's monitoring mandate: The UN Security Council should strengthen UNAMA's mandate to include explicit, regular, and publicly reported monitoring of madrasa expansion, its scale, governance, financing, and curriculum content as a core element of human rights and security reporting.

To Regional Governments

- Pakistan: Continued tolerance of TTP use of Afghan territory and of the cross-border Deobandi madrasa networks that sustain it is incompatible with domestic security. A strategic recalibration is required, including review of Pakistani madrasa financing that feeds cross-border networks. Bilateral pressure on Kabul has failed; engagement through multilateral frameworks addressing shared ideological infrastructure is overdue.
- Central Asian states: Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan should engage multilaterally through the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and the UN Security Council to address Taliban support for designated terrorist organisations operating from Afghan territory. Bilateral border management alone is insufficient given the ideological depth of the threat.
- Iran: Iran should reconsider the technical and political support it extends to the Taliban. As Pakistan's experience demonstrates, such support carries significant long-term risks and Iran is unlikely to be immune from the consequences. Mass deportation of Afghan refugees considering conditions inside Afghanistan andnvoluntary returns of women, girls, and civil society figures into a system of institutionalised gender persecution are incompatible with international humanitarian law. Iran should also monitor and restrict cross-border madrasa financing networks operating through its territory.

To International Organisations

- The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation: OIC should take a clear and unequivocal stand, publicly challenging the Taliban's claim to represent legitimate and authoritative Islamic education and making plain that the systematic exclusion of girls and women from education is incompatible with Islamic principles and values.
- Advocate for and support the IIIM-A: International organisations should support and publicly advocate for the immediate operationalisation of the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Afghanistan, provide technical support and expertise, and work closely with Afghan civil society organisations to ensure that evidence of Taliban violations is systematically documented and preserved.

- Condition development engagement: The World Bank and other international financial institutions should ensure that any development engagement in Afghanistan does not subsidise or provide cover for the Taliban's system of gender persecution. Education sector analysis including independent assessment of the Taliban madrasa system should be a prerequisite for any programme design.
- Invest in critical professional training: Prioritise support for alternative training pathways for Afghan women in midwifery, nursing, medicine and teaching. The continued exclusion of women and girls from education risks creating severe shortages of female healthcare workers and teachers, with potentially catastrophic consequences for maternal and child health, increased mortality during childbirth, and reduced access to essential services across the country.
- Document and amplify: UNESCO and UNICEF should publicly allocate resources to document the Taliban's systematic conversion of schools to madrasas, displacement of trained teachers, and destruction of public education infrastructure, and use this documentation to support accountability processes. The UN Special Rapporteur on Afghanistan and the Working Group on gender apartheid should treat the madrasa system as central to their analysis and reporting.

To Civil Society

- Centre Afghan expertise: International NGOs, think tanks, and universities should prioritise long-term partnerships with Afghan scholars in exile, conduct joint research programmes, and ensure that Afghan voices are centred rather than substituted for.
- Sustain investigative coverage: Media organisations should invest in sustained, in-depth coverage of the Taliban's madrasa education system, including through support for Afghan journalists working under severe restrictions inside the country. This is a matter of global public interest.
- Build evidence archives: International legal and human rights organisations should work with Afghan counterparts to preserve documentation, curriculum materials, student testimony, administrative records that can support future accountability processes. Evidence preserved now is a precondition for accountability later.
- Challenge Taliban claims to Islamic authority: Faith-based organisations and Muslim civil society networks internationally should challenge the Taliban's claim to represent Islamic education. Amplifying alternative Islamic scholarly voices and supporting Afghan ulema who have rejected Taliban doctrine is both morally significant and strategically important.

Appendix A: Glossary of Key Terms

Amir ul-Muminin. *Arabic for "Commander of the Faithful"; the title used by Supreme Leader Mullah Haibatullah Akhundzada, asserting both political and spiritual authority over the Islamic Emirate.*

Baghi. *A term for one who rebels against a legitimate ruler, applied by the Taliban to any person deemed to oppose the Emirate's authority — a designation carrying severe legal consequences under their interpretation of Islamic law.*

Dar-ul-Huffaz. *Arabic for "House of the Memorisers"; centres specialising in producing huffaz (those who have memorised the entire Quran), typically enrolling young children and operating as the earliest point of entry into the Taliban's education system.*

Dar-ul-Uloom*. Arabic for "House of Sciences"; an advanced seminary providing graduate-level theological training for future clerics, judges, muftis, and administrators who staff Taliban governance structures.*

Dars-i-Nizami. *A standardised classical Islamic curriculum developed in eighteenth-century South Asia, emphasising Hanafi jurisprudence, hadith studies, and Arabic grammar; it remains the backbone of instruction in Taliban-run madrasas and Dar-ul-Ulooms.*

Deobandi*. Relating to the Deobandi reform movement within Sunni Islam, originating at the Dar-ul- Uloom Deoband seminary in India in 1866 and emphasising strict Hanafi jurisprudence; the Afghan Taliban's ideology and institutional origins are deeply rooted in this tradition.*

Fitna*. the Quran uses the word to denote a spiritual test or crucible rather than an inherently negative event. In historical political usage, however, it came to signify sedition or the breakdown of Muslim social order. The Afghan Taliban deploy the concept in this latter sense in seeing any challenge to their authority or interpretation of Sharia as fitna: moral and political chaos that must be suppressed.*

Hadith. *The collected traditions of the Prophet Muhammad's sayings and actions, regarded as the second most authoritative source of Islamic law after the Quran, and a core component of madrasa curricula.*

Hanafi. *One of the four principal schools of Sunni Islamic jurisprudence, predominant across Afghanistan and Pakistan; the Taliban's legal and religious framework is rooted in Hanafi doctrine as interpreted through a conservative Deobandi lens.*

Hujra. *An informal site of religious learning either in local mosque or a guesthouse, which shaped the early education of many senior Taliban figures. Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA).*

The official name of the Taliban's governing authority since August 2021, characterised by highly centralised power flowing from the Supreme Leader in Kandahar.

Jihad. *An Arabic term meaning "striving" or "struggle" as in defence of Islam and treated as a religious duty incumbent on all believers. Taliban farmed their armed struggle against the American military intervention in Afghanistan as Jihad. Jihadi. A modern term used to describe individuals, groups or institutions that justify violent action through their own interpretation of jihad. It is a political and security label rather than a classical Islamic term and should be used carefully because it does not reflect mainstream Islamic understandings of jihad.*

Madrasa. *From the Arabic root meaning "place of study"; an institution of Islamic religious learning, ranging from small village-based circles to large seminaries offering multi-year programmes in theology, jurisprudence, and Quranic sciences.*

Ministry of Guidance, Hajj and Endowments (MoGHE). *The renamed Ministry of Hajj and Religious Affairs, which oversees mosque-based education, Dar-ul-Huffaz centres, and jihadi madrasas, and in practice wields greater authority over the most politically significant religious institutions than the Ministry of Education.*
Sharia. The body of Islamic law derived from the Quran, Hadith, and jurisprudential reasoning; under Taliban rule, it designates the supreme legal framework of the Emirate, interpreted through a conservative Hanafi-Deobandi lens.

Talib al-Ilm. *meaning "seeker of knowledge" or religious student.*
Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). A Pakistani Islamist militant organisation aligned with the Afghan Taliban through shared Deobandi doctrine and cross-border institutional ties; the Taliban have refused to sever TTP's operational links to Afghan territory despite sustained Pakistani pressure.

Ulama. *Scholars of Islamic religious law and theology, constituting the traditional clerical class; under the Taliban, ulama councils have been reorganised into a centralised hierarchy reporting directly to Kandahar and enforcing the Supreme Leader's decrees.*

Ushr. *A tithe of approximately 10 per cent levied on agricultural produce*
Zakat. Mandatory charitable contribution required of all eligible Muslims.

Appendix B. About HAMRAH Network

HAMRAH Network builds the resilience and capacity of Afghan civil society to resist repression and protect the most marginalised communities today, while putting in place the foundations of a rights-based, inclusive, democratic Afghanistan for tomorrow.

HAMRAH's Vision is of an Afghanistan in which all are included – where those who have been silenced or sidelined are at the centre of civic and political transformation and are empowered to shape a more just, democratic future.

HAMRAH serves as a trusted, connector, convener and catalyst to support our members to provide protection and other services to women and girls, people with disabilities, LGBTIQ+ people, ethnic and religious minorities and other marginalised groups in Afghanistan; to resist Taliban repression; and to put in place the building blocks for democratic transformation.

Ours is a shared journey (the word HAMRAH comes from the Persian Dari word for "sharing a path or journey"), in which HAMRAH's members lead and we facilitate.