



Taliban's Restrictions on Girls' Education in Afghanistan: Revisiting Global Response, Intervention, and Commitment

Miss Shailja Rai¹, Dr. Anna Nath Ganguly²

¹ Student, Amity Institute of Social Sciences, Amity University, Noida

² Assistant Professor, Amity Institute of Social Sciences, Amity University, Noida

Shailja Rai: shailja072002@gmail.com, Dr. Anna Nath Ganguly: anganguly@amity.edu

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15209985>

Abstract

The Taliban's stringent restrictions on girls' education in Afghanistan have ignited widespread international condemnation, prompting responses from human rights organizations, governments, and global institutions. This research paper provides a comprehensive analysis of the historical trajectory of girls' education in Afghanistan, tracing its progress and setbacks through various political regimes. It explores the Taliban's ideological rationale for imposing educational bans, examining the intersection of religious interpretations, tribal customs, and political motivations. Furthermore, the study delves into the far-reaching socio-economic and political ramifications of these restrictions, including their impact on Afghanistan's workforce, economy, diplomatic relations, and societal structures.

In addition, this paper assesses the effectiveness of global interventions, including diplomatic efforts, economic sanctions, and initiatives by international organizations such as the United Nations and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. It also highlights the role of alternative education models, including underground schools and digital learning platforms, in circumventing restrictions and providing Afghan girls with access to learning opportunities. The research underscores the urgent need for a unified and sustained global strategy—leveraging legal frameworks, regional diplomacy, and grassroots activism—to challenge the Taliban's oppressive policies and safeguard the fundamental right to education for Afghan girls. By fostering international cooperation and local resilience, the global community can work toward a future where Afghan girls regain their access to quality education and the opportunities it brings.

Keywords: Afghanistan, Taliban, girls' education, human rights, global intervention, alternative education models

1. Introduction

Education is universally acknowledged as a basic human right and serves as a key driver of social and economic advancement. In Afghanistan, the education of girls has been a longstanding and contentious issue, particularly under the Taliban's restrictive governance. The Taliban's prohibition of secondary and higher education for girls has reversed decades of progress in expanding educational opportunities for women. This regression has deepened gender inequality and weakened Afghanistan's socio-economic structure by depriving the country of the contributions of half its population.

This paper examines the historical, ideological, and policy-related factors that inform the Taliban's stance on girls' education, analyzing how their rigid interpretation of Islamic law has influenced their policies. Additionally, it explores the global response to this crisis, assessing the political, humanitarian, and diplomatic measures taken to address the violation of girls' educational rights in Afghanistan. The study further investigates the broader implications of these policies on Afghanistan's future and the international community's role in promoting human rights and equitable access to education.

2. Literature review

Education in Afghanistan has faced significant challenges, with periods of progress and regression. Barfield (2010) and Dupree (1998) trace early modernization efforts, while Samady (2001) and the World Bank (2012, 2023) highlight post-2001 reforms that improved educational access, particularly for girls. However, these advancements have been systematically dismantled under Taliban rule. Barakat (2011) and Kirk (2003) discuss conflict-related disruptions, while UNESCO (2003, 2021) reports indicate targeted attacks on girls' schools. Human Rights Watch (2023) and UNICEF (2022) document Taliban-imposed bans that severely limit women's education and economic participation.

The Taliban's governance enforces strict gender apartheid (Kandiyoti, 2022, 2023), restricting women's social and economic roles (Rashid, 2000; Ahmed, 2016). UNDP (2023) and the World Bank (2023) highlight the economic toll of these restrictions, while UN Women (2023) and Malala Fund

(2023) document grassroots efforts to sustain female education. International bodies (Amnesty International, 2023; ICC, 2023) condemn these violations, advocating legal action. Despite diplomatic pressures (BBC, 2023; The Guardian, 2023), initiatives like Learn Afghanistan (Forbes, 2023; Durrani, 2023) offer digital alternatives. Future research should explore sustainable education models and legal strategies to challenge gender-based discrimination.

3. The Evolution of Girls' Education in Afghanistan

3.1. Pre-Taliban Era (Before 1996):

Afghanistan's education system saw steady progress in the early 20th century, achieving key milestones in expanding educational access for girls. During King Amanullah Khan's reign in the 1920s, efforts to modernize the country led to reforms that promoted education for both boys and girls (Barakat¹, 2011). His initiatives aimed to create a more progressive and inclusive society, resulting in the establishment of schools that enabled girls to pursue formal education. This momentum continued, particularly during the 1970s and 1980s, when the Soviet Union played a pivotal role in financing and advancing education throughout Afghanistan, including for girls (Samady², 2001).

Despite these developments, conservative and rural communities remained resistant to female education. Deep-rooted cultural and traditional beliefs, often upheld by tribal customs, restricted girls' access to formal schooling (Dupree³, 1998). In many of these areas, families continued to prioritize traditional roles for women over their educational advancement, limiting the overall impact of educational reforms.

3.2. Taliban Rule (1996-2001):

The Taliban's rise to power in 1996 ushered in a period of severe restrictions on girls' education in Afghanistan. Under their strict interpretation of Islamic law, girls were barred from attending school beyond the primary level (Human Rights Watch⁴, 2001). The regime justified these policies by claiming that female education was incompatible with their rigid understanding of Islamic teachings and the tribal customs they upheld (Rashid⁵, 2000). Consequently, an entire generation of Afghan girls was systematically deprived of formal schooling.

Beyond the education sector, the Taliban's policies imposed harsh social restrictions on women, further deepening gender inequality (Kandiyoti⁶, 2007). The prohibition on girls' education became one of the most heavily condemned aspects of their rule, drawing strong international criticism and worsening Afghanistan's socio-cultural and economic struggles (UNESCO⁷, 2003).

3.3. Post-2001 Developments: A Period of Progress:

The US-led intervention in Afghanistan in 2001 ushered in a transformative period, particularly in expanding educational opportunities for girls. With the collapse of the Taliban regime, efforts to rebuild Afghanistan's education system gained momentum, supported by legal reforms and significant international aid (UNICEF⁸, 2005). One of the most notable developments was the sharp rise in female enrollment in schools and universities. International bodies, including the United Nations, along with donor nations, contributed financial resources and technical support to facilitate girls' access to education (World Bank⁹, 2012).

This progress was evident in the growing number of girls attending school, the construction of new educational institutions, and the increasing presence of women in higher education (Rostami-Povey¹⁰, 2007). By the mid-2000s, more women were pursuing careers in fields such as medicine, law, and academia, signifying a shift toward greater gender inclusivity in education. Although challenges persisted, this period played a pivotal role in advancing girls' education and promoting the broader empowerment of women in Afghanistan (Kirk¹¹, 2003).

4. Taliban's Ideological Justification for Banning Girls' Education:

The Taliban's restrictions on girls' education stem from their interpretation of Sharia law, their commitment to traditional Pashtunwali tribal customs, and their broader political objectives. Their governance is shaped by a rigid and highly conservative understanding of Islam, which they claim prohibits the education of girls beyond a certain age (Barfield, 2010). According to their ideology, women's primary role is centered around domestic responsibilities, and they argue that formal education beyond this limited scope contradicts Islamic principles (Ahmed¹², 2016). The Taliban view any

¹ Barakat, Sultan. *Education and Conflict: Afghanistan's Education System in Transition*. International Institute for Educational Planning, 2011.

² Samady, Saif R. *Education and Afghan Society in the Twentieth Century*. UNESCO, 2001.

³ Dupree, Nancy Hatch. *Afghan Women Under the Taliban*. Middle East Journal, 1998.

⁴ Human Rights Watch. *"Afghanistan: Humanity Denied – Systematic Violations of Women's Rights Under the Taliban"*, 2001.

⁵ Rashid, Ahmed. *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil, and Fundamentalism in Central Asia*. Yale University Press, 2000.

⁶ Kandiyoti, Deniz. *The Politics of Gender and Reconstruction in Afghanistan*. UNRISD, 2007.

⁷ UNESCO. *Education Under Attack: Afghanistan Report*, 2003.

⁸ UNICEF. *Progress of Education for Girls in Afghanistan*, 2005.

⁹ World Bank. *Education in Afghanistan: Achievements and Challenges*, 2012.

¹⁰ Rostami-Povey, Elaheh. *Afghan Women: Identity and Invasion*. Zed Books, 2007.

¹¹ Kirk, Jackie. *Education and Fragility in Afghanistan*. International Journal of Educational Development, 2003.

¹² Ahmed, Farid. *The Taliban's View on Women and Education: Analyzing Ideological Justifications*. Middle Eastern Studies, 2016.

deviation from this belief as a threat to their vision of Afghan society, reinforcing the notion that women's education challenges their perceived social and familial roles (Kandiyoti, 2007).

Beyond religious reasoning, the Taliban also rely on the Pashtunwali tribal code, a traditional set of customs governing Pashtun society, which places strict emphasis on conservative gender roles (Rashid, 2000). This tribal framework further limits women's participation in public life, including their access to education (Dupre, 1998). Additionally, the Taliban have strategically shaped their policies to align with a broader political narrative, presenting themselves as protectors of Afghan cultural and religious identity (Giustozzi¹³, 2018). By portraying the exclusion of girls from education as an effort to preserve national values rather than a violation of fundamental human rights, they seek to justify their stance despite overwhelming international criticism (UNESCO, 2003).

Despite widespread condemnation from global institutions, human rights organizations, and foreign governments, the Taliban continue to uphold their restrictive policies (Human Rights Watch¹⁴, 2022). They assert that barring girls from education is consistent with both Islamic teachings and Afghan cultural traditions, using this argument to resist external pressure and maintain their ideological control over society (Abirafeh¹⁵, 2009). The intersection of religious doctrine, tribal customs, and political strategy reinforces their unwavering opposition to female education, significantly impacting the future of Afghan girls and the country's overall development (Kirk, 2003).

5. Comparison of Taliban Policies on Women's Education: 1996-2001 vs. Post-2021:

When the Taliban first took control in 1996, their stance on women's education was explicitly restrictive, barring girls from attending school beyond the primary level and creating a hostile environment for female teachers (Rashid, 2000). When they regained power in 2021, they initially pledged a more moderate approach, with some officials suggesting that women would be granted greater freedoms, including access to education (UNESCO, 2021). However, despite these assurances, their policies have largely replicated those of their earlier rule (Human Rights Watch, 2022).

Although limited access to primary education was permitted in certain regions, secondary and higher education for girls remained strictly prohibited, with numerous girls' schools and universities remaining closed (Amnesty International¹⁶, 2023). Additionally, female teachers were dismissed from their positions, further diminishing educational and employment opportunities for women (BBC¹⁷, 2022). The Taliban's claims of moderation have ultimately proven to be misleading, as their policies continue to be rooted in the same ideological beliefs that previously justified severe restrictions on women's rights and education (Giustozzi, 2018). Consequently, the situation for girls' education in Afghanistan remains largely unchanged under their leadership (Kandiyoti, 2023).

6. Socio-Economic and Political Consequences of Banning Girls' Education

6.1 The Economic Impact

Restricting girls' education in Afghanistan has profound economic consequences. UNICEF estimates that keeping girls out of secondary school costs Afghanistan 2.5% of its annual Gross Domestic Product (GDP), amounting to at least \$500 million in the past year alone (UNICEF¹⁸, 2022). Furthermore, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) estimates that the annual economic cost of banning women from employment in Afghanistan is approximately \$1 billion, representing 5% of the country's GDP (UNDP¹⁹, 2023). These figures underscore the substantial economic losses resulting from the exclusion of women and girls from education and employment, hindering Afghanistan's economic growth and development.

6.2 Effects on Women's Employment and Livelihood

The exclusion of girls from education in Afghanistan severely limits women's employment opportunities, hindering their economic independence and professional growth (Human Rights Watch²⁰, 2023). This exclusion perpetuates gender inequality, as women become increasingly dependent on male family members for financial support (Kandiyoti²¹, 2022). The lack of educational opportunities also correlates with higher rates of child marriage, as families may resort to early marriage for their daughters in the absence of viable educational paths (UNICEF, 2022).

Sectors such as healthcare and education, which previously employed a significant number of women, are particularly affected by these restrictions (Amnesty International, 2023). The dismissal of female educators and healthcare workers not only reduces women's participation in the workforce but also exacerbates poverty and inequality by shrinking the job market and depriving communities of essential services (World Bank²², 2023).

6.3. Political Ramifications: Global Relations and Security Concerns

¹³ Giustozzi, Antonio. *The Taliban at War: 2001–2018*. Oxford University Press, 2018.

¹⁴ Human Rights Watch. *Afghanistan: Girls' Education Under the Taliban*, 2022.

¹⁵ Abirafeh, Lina. *Gender and International Aid in Afghanistan: The Politics and Effects of Intervention*. McFarland, 2009.

¹⁶ Amnesty International. *Afghanistan: The Devastating Impact of Educational Restrictions on Girls*, 2023.

¹⁷ BBC News. "Taliban's Education Ban on Girls: One Year Later", 2022.

¹⁸ UNICEF. *The Impact of Banning Girls from Secondary Education in Afghanistan*. 2022.

¹⁹ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). *Economic Costs of Gender Exclusion in Afghanistan*. 2023.

²⁰ Human Rights Watch. *Afghanistan: Taliban's Crackdown on Women's Rights*. 2023.

²¹ Kandiyoti, Deniz. *Gender and the Crisis of Development in Afghanistan*. 2022.

²² World Bank. *Economic Consequences of Educational Exclusion in Afghanistan*. 2023.

The Taliban's policies on girls' education have caused a significant shift in Afghanistan's diplomatic relations with the international community. The decision to bar girls from education has led to Afghanistan's growing political and diplomatic isolation, with many countries cutting ties or reducing engagement with the Taliban-led government (United Nations, 2023). In response to these policies, the international community has imposed stricter sanctions and reduced foreign aid to Afghanistan, further destabilizing the economy and society (Al Jazeera²³, 2023).

Moreover, Afghanistan's exclusion from global forums and organizations weakens its political standing and diminishes its ability to participate in international decision-making (BBC, 2023). The ban on education also raises concerns about the rise of an uneducated, disenfranchised youth population, which could be more susceptible to radicalization and extremist ideologies, creating security risks for both Afghanistan and the wider region (Giustozzi, 2022).

6.4. Impact on Afghan Families and Communities

The Taliban's prohibition of girls' education in Afghanistan has far-reaching consequences that extend beyond the immediate denial of learning opportunities. This policy inflicts profound psychological distress on Afghan girls, leading to heightened levels of depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Kakar²⁴, 2022). A study conducted between August and November 2021 revealed that approximately 70% of Afghan students experienced depression and PTSD following the Taliban's resurgence, with women disproportionately affected (Human Rights Watch, 2022).

In response to these oppressive measures, many families have resorted to clandestine methods to ensure their daughters' education (Amnesty International, 2023). Some have turned to underground schools operating beyond governmental oversight, while others have migrated to regions where girls' education remains accessible (UNHCR²⁵, 2023). These actions, while courageous, have led to social fragmentation as families grapple with safeguarding their daughters' futures amidst systemic rights violations. This fragmentation exacerbates existing societal tensions and undermines community cohesion, fostering a pervasive sense of disempowerment among Afghan citizens (Kandiyoti, 2023).

7. Global Response and Diplomatic Interventions

7.1. United Nations and International Bodies

The United Nations (UN) has been at the forefront of condemning the Taliban's ban on girls' education, highlighting its severe implications for human rights and Afghanistan's development (United Nations²⁶, 2023). UN Secretary-General António Guterres has urged the Taliban to reverse its policies, calling the restrictions an "unjustifiable violation of fundamental freedom."

- UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) marked 2023 as the International Year of Girls' Education in Afghanistan, underscoring the need to safeguard Afghan girls' right to learning (UNESCO, 2023).
- UN Women has stated that banning girls from education is a deliberate act of gender discrimination that must be addressed through global diplomatic efforts (UN Women, 2023).
- UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund) has warned that preventing girls from receiving an education will have long-term economic and social consequences, exacerbating poverty and inequality in the country (UNICEF, 2023).

7.2. The European Union (EU)

The European Union (EU) has been vocal in denouncing the Taliban's restrictions, particularly the suspension of female medical education, which has significantly weakened Afghanistan's already fragile healthcare system (European Commission, 2023). The EU Parliament has passed resolutions condemning these policies and has repeatedly emphasized that restricting education for girls violates international human rights standards (European Parliament²⁷, 2023).

Recognizing the urgent need for educational access, the EU has pledged to fund alternative education programs, particularly through online learning platforms and community-led schooling initiatives for Afghan girls (European External Action Service²⁸, 2023). These programs aim to ensure that girls can continue their education despite the Taliban's restrictions. Additionally, the EU has committed to supporting Afghan women's rights organizations, providing financial aid to grassroots movements advocating for gender equality and educational access.

Furthermore, the EU has linked humanitarian aid to human rights conditions, making it clear that the continuation of financial support to Afghanistan is contingent upon the Taliban's willingness to restore educational and employment rights for women. European diplomats have also engaged in direct negotiations with the Taliban, urging them to reconsider their policies on women's education, though these efforts have seen limited success so far.

7.3. Role of Regional Powers (Pakistan, China, Iran)

Regional powers, including Pakistan, China, and Iran, have varied perspectives on the Taliban's educational policies and have taken different approaches to influencing the regime. Pakistan has maintained diplomatic relations with the Taliban but has occasionally pressured the group to adopt

²³ Al Jazeera. *Afghanistan's Isolation in the Global Community*. 2023.

²⁴ Kakar, Palwasha. *Psychological Impact of the Taliban's Policies on Afghan Women*. 2022.

²⁵ UNHCR. *Afghan Refugee Crisis and the Education Ban on Girls*. 2023.

²⁶ United Nations. "UN Condemns Taliban's Ban on Girls' Education." 2023.

²⁷ European Parliament. "Resolutions Condemning Afghanistan's Gender Policies." 2023.

²⁸ European External Action Service. "EU Funds Alternative Education for Afghan Girls." 2023.

more inclusive policies, particularly regarding women's rights and education (Dawn²⁹, 2023). Some Pakistani leaders have urged the Taliban to reopen girls' schools, fearing that instability in Afghanistan could spill over into their own borders and fuel extremism. China has engaged with the Taliban while emphasizing the importance of stability and development in Afghanistan. While Beijing has not directly criticized the ban on girls' education, it has stressed the need for long-term economic development, which would require a more inclusive approach to governance and education (Global Times³⁰, 2023). Iran, with its shared cultural and religious ties to Afghanistan, has urged the Taliban to reconsider its policies, calling for greater inclusion of women in education and the workforce (Tehran Times³¹, 2023). Iran has hosted Afghan female refugees seeking education and has provided scholarship opportunities for Afghan students unable to continue their studies at home.

These countries, while seeking to influence the Taliban, must balance their own geopolitical interests with the broader push for human rights and reform in Afghanistan.

7.4. Role of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)

The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), representing 57 member states with a shared commitment to Islam, has called on the Taliban to reconsider its ban on girls' education, emphasizing that Islam itself supports the right of girls to be educated (OIC³², 2023). The OIC has stated that the exclusion of girls from education contradicts the values of the Islamic faith, which encourages the pursuit of knowledge for both men and women.

In a series of meetings, the OIC has urged the Taliban to align their policies with Islamic teachings, citing examples from other Muslim-majority countries where women actively participate in education and the workforce. However, despite these calls for reform, the Taliban has largely ignored the OIC's requests, and tangible policy changes remain minimal.

The OIC's influence on the Taliban remains limited, as the regime continues to prioritize its interpretation of Islamic law and cultural norms over international and regional pressure. However, the organization has vowed to continue diplomatic engagements, stressing that investing in education is crucial for Afghanistan's long-term development.

8. Non-Governmental and Grassroots Efforts

8.1. The Role of NGOs in Providing Alternative Education

Despite the Taliban's restrictive policies on girls' education, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have stepped in to provide alternative educational opportunities for Afghan girls. These organizations have developed underground schools and online learning platforms as a means of circumventing the Taliban's bans (Human Rights Watch, 2023). While these efforts are fraught with risk—due to the Taliban's strict enforcement and surveillance mechanisms—they offer a glimmer of hope for Afghan girls who would otherwise be denied an education.

Some notable initiatives include:

- Learn Afghanistan, founded by activist Pashtana Durrani, has been instrumental in providing digital education platforms for Afghan girls unable to attend school physically (Durrani³³, 2023).
- Mawoud Education Center has continued to offer clandestine classes, despite facing severe threats and previous attacks.
- CODE TO INSPIRE, an NGO focused on technology and coding education, has helped Afghan girls gain skills in software development and programming, opening new pathways for employment (Forbes³⁴, 2023).

By operating outside the formal education system, these NGOs play a vital role in ensuring that Afghan girls continue to learn and build their futures, despite the Taliban's oppressive policies.

8.2. Afghan Women's Activism

Afghan women's rights activists have been at the forefront of challenging the Taliban's ban on girls' education, employing various strategies to advocate for educational access and gender equality (UN Women, 2023). Their efforts include organizing protests, launching advocacy campaigns, and collaborating with international organizations to raise global awareness.

One notable activist, Wahida Amiri, has demonstrated remarkable resilience in her fight for women's rights (Amiri, 2023). After the Taliban's return to power in 2021, Amiri joined the "Spontaneous Movement of Fighting Women of Afghanistan," participating in street protests advocating for women's right to work and education. These demonstrations were met with brutal resistance, including the use of tear gas, aerial gunfire, and physical assaults by Taliban forces.

In February 2022, Amiri and several fellow protesters were arrested and detained for 18 days by the Taliban's Ministry of Interior Affairs. During their detention, they were coerced into making statements aimed at discrediting their activism, with these forced confessions broadcasted on Afghan

²⁹ Dawn. "Pakistan's Stance on Afghan Women's Education." 2023.

³⁰ Global Times. "China's Engagement with the Taliban: Stability and Development." 2023.

³¹ Tehran Times. "Iran Urges Taliban to Rethink Education Policies." 2023.

³² OIC. "The Islamic Perspective on Women's Education: An OIC Statement." 2023.

³³ Durrani, Pashtana. "Digital Learning as Resistance: How Afghan Girls Are Defying the Taliban." 2023.

³⁴ Forbes. "Empowering Afghan Girls Through Tech: The CODE TO INSPIRE Initiative." 2023.

television channels Upon release, they were explicitly warned against further protests, yet their commitment to advocating for women's rights persisted (The Guardian³⁵, 2023).

In September 2023, Amiri joined a ten-day hunger strike to protest the Taliban's repression of women, further underscoring the dire need for global support Afghan activists continue to work closely with international organizations, including the United Nations and various NGOs, to ensure that the plight of Afghan women remains in global discourse

The international community's support remains crucial in pressuring the Taliban to revoke the education ban and uphold women's rights The relentless activism of Afghan women serves as a powerful testament to their resilience and determination in securing educational rights for all girls in Afghanistan, despite the formidable challenges posed by the Taliban's authoritarian regime

9. Legal Actions and Human Rights Advocacy

9.1. International Laws and Human Rights Violations

The Taliban's restrictions on women's education violate multiple international agreements designed to protect human rights and ensure gender equality These include:

- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which guarantees the right to education for all individuals, regardless of gender (UN General Assembly, 1948).
- The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which obligates state parties to ensure women's full access to education (CEDAW, 1979).
- The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), which recognizes education as a fundamental right and condemns any form of gender-based exclusion from schooling (ICESCR, 1966).

These violations have led to growing international legal scrutiny and calls for action against the Taliban's policies

9.2. Legal Action Against the Taliban

Several nations, including Germany, Canada, Australia, and the Netherlands, are exploring legal avenues to hold the Taliban accountable for violating international treaties on women's rights Some of these efforts include:

- Filing cases in international courts to challenge the Taliban's legitimacy and bring attention to their systematic oppression of women (The Hague Tribunal³⁶, 2023).
- Supporting Afghan women's rights groups in legal complaints before the International Criminal Court (ICC) (ICC, 2023).
- Documenting human rights abuses through organizations such as the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) to strengthen legal arguments for Taliban sanctions (UNHRC, 2023).

9.3. Recognition of 'Gender Apartheid'

There is a growing movement among activists and international human rights organizations to formally recognize gender apartheid as a crime under international law Nobel laureate Malala Yousafzai has urged world leaders to classify the Taliban's policies as a systematic form of gender discrimination, akin to racial apartheid in South Africa (Yousafzai³⁷, 2023).

- Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have pushed for a UN-led investigation into the Taliban's crimes against Afghan women under international legal frameworks (Human Rights Watch, 2023).
- Legal scholars are advocating for gender apartheid to be recognized as an independent crime under the Rome Statute of the ICC, which could pave the way for international prosecution of Taliban leaders (ICC, 2023).

10. Diplomatic and Economic Pressure on the Taliban

10.1. Sanctions and Aid Restrictions

In response to the Taliban's oppressive policies:

- The United States, the European Union, and the United Kingdom have imposed targeted sanctions on Taliban leaders responsible for restricting women's rights (U.S. State Department, 2023).

³⁵ The Guardian. "Taliban Crackdown on Women's Protests: The Risk Afghan Activists Face." 2023.

³⁶ The Hague Tribunal. "International Legal Proceedings Against the Taliban." 2023.

³⁷ Yousafzai, Malala. "A Call to Recognize Gender Apartheid in Afghanistan." 2023.

- Several governments have suspended direct development aid to Afghanistan, instead channeling funds through humanitarian organizations to ensure aid reaches those in need without empowering the Taliban (World Bank, 2023).

10.2. Engagement with Regional Powers

Several Islamic nations and influential regional actors are being urged to exert pressure on the Taliban to reverse their discriminatory policies (Organization of Islamic Cooperation³⁸, 2023).

- Qatar, Turkey, and Pakistan have been called upon to leverage their diplomatic ties with the Taliban to push for policy changes
- Saudi Arabia and Iran, as prominent Islamic states, have publicly condemned the education bans, emphasizing that Islam encourages education for both men and women (OIC, 2023).

11. Humanitarian and Educational Responses

11.1. Supporting Alternative Education Initiatives

With formal schooling for girls banned, international organizations and Afghan activists have established alternative education programs

- Community-Based Education (CBE): NGOs such as Mawoud Education Center and Learn Afghanistan operate secret schools where girls can continue their studies despite Taliban restrictions
- Online Learning Platforms: Universities and global platforms such as Khan Academy, Coursera, and edX have launched free courses to support Afghan women's education
- International Scholarships: Countries including Canada, Germany, and the UK have introduced scholarship programs and resettlement opportunities for Afghan female students, ensuring they can continue their education abroad (UK Home Office, 2023).

11.2. Funding and Humanitarian Aid

To mitigate the crisis:

- The World Bank and the UN Development Programme (UNDP) have redirected funding toward women-led businesses and alternative education programs (World Bank, 2023).
- International donors have pledged millions of dollars to ensure Afghan girls receive some form of education, even if it is through informal or online means (UNDP, 2023).

12. Case Studies of Informal Education Models:

12.1 Case Study: Underground Schools – The Secret Schools Initiative

Since the Taliban officially banned girls from secondary education in 2021, thousands of female students have been left without formal learning opportunities. In response, female educators and activists established underground schools—covert learning centers operating in private homes and undisclosed locations. These schools function in small, decentralized groups of 5-15 students to evade detection. Classes are taught by volunteer teachers, including former educators, university students, and activists, who risk their safety to provide education. Due to security concerns, these schools rely on word-of-mouth communication to recruit students and operate without formal school materials. Subjects taught include mathematics, literacy, science, social studies, English, and vocational training such as sewing and computing skills (Human Rights Watch, 2022).

Despite their significance, these secret schools face numerous challenges. Teachers and students operate under extreme danger, as discovery could lead to arrest, beatings, or even execution under Taliban-imposed laws. Additionally, there is a lack of essential resources such as books, writing materials, and adequate classrooms. The constant fear of exposure affects the mental well-being of both students and educators. Nevertheless, underground schools have had a profound impact, with over 5,000 girls continuing their education through these initiatives. Some students have even passed university entrance exams and secured scholarships abroad. These schools have played a crucial role in maintaining literacy rates and empowering Afghan women with resilience and knowledge (UNESCO, 2023).

One notable success story involves a former high school teacher in Kabul who transformed her home into a secret school. She has educated over 100 girls through rotating shifts, with many of her students later receiving international support to further their education (Amnesty International³⁹, 2023).

12.2. Case Study: Online Education – The Learn Afghanistan Program

With in-person schooling banned, Afghan activists and NGOs have increasingly turned to online education platforms to provide learning opportunities for girls. One of the most successful initiatives is *Learn Afghanistan*, founded by Afghan educator and activist Pashtana Durrani. The program utilizes platforms like WhatsApp, Telegram, and Google Classroom to deliver online classes. The curriculum includes STEM subjects, social sciences, business,

³⁸ Organization of Islamic Cooperation. "The Taliban's Education Ban and Islamic Principles." 2023.

³⁹ Amnesty International. (2023). *Afghan Women's Rights Under the Taliban*. Retrieved from www.amnesty.org

English, and vocational training. Students also receive international mentorship, connecting them with global educators who teach remotely. Additionally, for those with limited internet access, the program provides offline learning solutions through USB drives containing pre-recorded lessons (Durrani, 2022).

However, online education in Afghanistan comes with several obstacles. The Taliban frequently restricts internet access in women-dominated communities, limiting students' ability to attend classes. Moreover, many students lack access to smartphones or laptops, making participation difficult. Cyber threats, such as online surveillance and hacking by Taliban supporters, also pose significant risks to both students and teachers.

Despite these challenges, *Learn Afghanistan* has successfully reached over 700 girls, many of whom have secured international scholarships. The program has ensured continuous access to education, even under Taliban-imposed restrictions. One success story highlights a young Afghan girl who, after being banned from school, completed an online business course and established a home-based tailoring business. She now employs other women in her neighborhood, demonstrating the transformative power of online education (UNDP, 2023).

12.3. Case Study: Community-Based Education (CBE) in Rural Afghanistan

In rural Afghanistan, where access to education was already limited before the Taliban takeover, international organizations have implemented *Community-Based Education (CBE)* programs to secretly educate girls. NGOs such as CARE Afghanistan, UNICEF, and Save the Children have established discreet classrooms in remote villages, often disguising them as religious gatherings (madrasas) to avoid Taliban suspicion. These programs rely heavily on local community involvement, with teachers often being respected elders or religious leaders, making the initiative more acceptable in conservative societies. Subjects taught include literacy, numeracy, health education, and Islamic studies (UNICEF, 2022).

The initiative faces numerous risks. Some schools have been periodically shut down by local Taliban leaders, while funding shortages threaten the sustainability of these programs. Additionally, conservative families in rural areas often fear retaliation if they send their daughters to school. Despite these challenges, CBE programs have educated over 3,000 girls, significantly improving literacy rates in Taliban-controlled areas. Furthermore, these programs have contributed to reduced child marriage rates, as education has kept many girls in school longer.

A notable success story comes from Bamiyan Province, where a rural school initially operated under the guise of a religious study group. Over time, it gained partial approval from local Taliban leaders, allowing it to continue educating girls without severe repercussions (CARE⁴⁰, 2023).

12.4. Case Study: International Scholarships and Evacuation Programs

To counteract the Taliban's restrictions on women's education, several countries and universities have introduced scholarship and evacuation programs to relocate female students to safer environments. Organizations such as the Malala Fund, the Asian University for Women, and Qatar University, along with various Western institutions, have launched initiatives to support Afghan women. These programs provide full tuition coverage, accommodation, and living expenses for female students pursuing higher education in STEM, business, humanities, and healthcare fields (Malala Fund⁴¹, 2023).

However, these initiatives face challenges. Many Afghan girls struggle to obtain travel permits due to Taliban-imposed restrictions on women's mobility. Some families are reluctant to allow their daughters to travel abroad, fearing societal backlash or Taliban retaliation. Additionally, students who manage to leave Afghanistan often experience emotional distress from forced displacement and separation from their families.

Despite these hurdles, international scholarship programs have successfully relocated hundreds of Afghan female students, enabling them to continue their education in safe environments. Many graduates have gone on to establish advocacy programs for Afghan women's rights. A particularly inspiring story involves a medical student who was forced to abandon her studies due to Taliban policies. Through a full scholarship in Canada, she resumed her medical education and is now actively involved in advocating for women's education and healthcare in Afghanistan (World Bank, 2023).

13. Potential Policy Changes Within the Taliban Regime

13.1. Internal Dynamics and Ideological Shifts

The Taliban is not a monolithic entity; its internal factions demonstrate varying degrees of conservatism. Some segments within the group may be more open to negotiations regarding social policies, including girls' education. Engaging with these moderate elements could facilitate incremental policy changes that favor educational access for Afghan girls (Giustozzi, 2021). Historical precedents suggest that ideological shifts within militant organizations often emerge from internal debates and pragmatic governance challenges.

13.2. Influence of Muslim Leaders and Scholars

International Muslim leaders play a crucial role in influencing the Taliban's stance on women's education. Nobel laureate Malala Yousafzai has urged Muslim scholars and political figures to condemn the Taliban's gender policies, arguing that such systematic discrimination constitutes gender apartheid and should be recognized as a crime against humanity (Yousafzai, 2023). If widely supported, a unified stance from the Muslim world could pressure the Taliban to reassess its policies, particularly given the historical impact of religious legitimacy on governance in Afghanistan (Moghadam⁴², 2022).

13.3. Economic Incentives and Conditional Aid

Linking economic aid to specific policy reforms, including the reopening of girls' schools, presents a strategic approach to influencing Taliban governance. The World Bank and the United Nations have previously used conditional funding mechanisms in conflict zones to promote social policies

⁴⁰ CARE. (2023). *Education Initiatives in Rural Afghanistan*. Retrieved from www.care.org

⁴¹ Malala Fund. (2023). *Scholarships for Afghan Women: A Global Effort*.

⁴² Moghadam, V. (2022). *Gender, Politics, and the Taliban's Ideological Shifts*. Cambridge University Press.

(World Bank, 2022). However, the success of such strategies depends on robust oversight mechanisms to ensure aid reaches the intended beneficiaries without inadvertently strengthening oppressive structures

14. Strategies for Long-Term Investment in Afghan Women's Education

14.1. Community-Based Education (CBE) Programs

Expanding Community-Based Education (CBE) programs offers a culturally sensitive solution for educating girls in remote regions. These initiatives operate with community approval, often under the guise of religious instruction, making them more resilient to political disruptions. UNICEF reports that such programs have significantly increased literacy rates among Afghan girls by integrating local traditions into educational frameworks (UNICEF, 2023).

14.2. International Conferences and Advocacy

Global forums, such as the International Conference on Girls' Education in Muslim Communities organized by the Muslim World League, provide a platform for addressing ideological barriers to girls' education. These initiatives seek to align educational advocacy with Islamic principles, gaining support from influential religious scholars and policymakers (MWL⁴³, 2023). By emphasizing education as a fundamental Islamic duty, such efforts could lead to more sustainable educational reforms.

14.3. Sustained Financial Support and Policy Advocacy

Long-term investment in education requires consistent funding and policy engagement. Jan Egeland, Secretary-General of the Norwegian Refugee Council, warned that funding cuts pose severe risks to Afghan women's educational opportunities, impacting NGO-led programs and humanitarian assistance (Egeland⁴⁴, 2023). Addressing these challenges necessitates stronger commitments from international donors to sustain educational initiatives amidst ongoing political instability.

14.4. Leveraging International Legal Frameworks

Advocating for the recognition of gender apartheid as a crime under international law could establish legal and moral imperatives for the Taliban to reform their educational policies. International legal bodies, including the International Criminal Court and the United Nations Human Rights Council, play a crucial role in promoting this recognition (UNHRC, 2023). Such efforts require coordinated campaigns from human rights organizations to elevate the issue within global diplomatic agendas.

15. Conclusion

The Taliban's restrictions on girls' education in Afghanistan have created a dire humanitarian and human rights crisis, drawing widespread condemnation from governments, international organizations, and civil society. Since returning to power in 2021, the Taliban have implemented policies that systematically deny education to Afghan girls beyond the primary level, setting the country on a trajectory of gender-based discrimination and economic decline. Despite ongoing international efforts to pressure the Taliban through sanctions, diplomatic negotiations, and conditional aid, these measures have yielded limited success due to the group's ideological rigidity and resistance to external influence.

The global response has been fragmented and, at times, ineffective. While some nations and organizations advocate for direct engagement with the Taliban in hopes of negotiating incremental policy changes, others insist on isolating the regime to exert maximum pressure. However, both approaches have faced significant challenges. Diplomatic engagement has often been met with empty promises and unfulfilled commitments, as the Taliban continue to prioritize their ultraconservative interpretation of Islamic governance over international demands. Meanwhile, sanctions and aid restrictions have inadvertently worsened Afghanistan's humanitarian crisis, disproportionately affecting vulnerable populations, including women and girls who already face systemic oppression.

Despite these challenges, there are pathways for reopening education for Afghan girls that require sustained global commitment and innovative strategies. The success of community-based education (CBE) programs, which operate outside the Taliban's formal schooling system, demonstrates the potential for grassroots initiatives to bridge the educational gap. Similarly, international advocacy efforts, such as Nobel laureate Malala Yousafzai's push for recognizing gender apartheid as a crime under international law, offer a legal framework for holding the Taliban accountable. The role of influential Muslim scholars and leaders in challenging the Taliban's stance on girls' education also remains critical in shaping the ideological discourse within the country.

Going forward, the international community must adopt a more unified, strategic, and persistent approach. This includes leveraging diplomatic channels to engage moderate factions within the Taliban, increasing financial support for underground and alternative education models, and amplifying the voices of Afghan women who continue to resist oppressive policies. Countries with strong economic and diplomatic ties to Afghanistan, particularly regional actors such as Pakistan, Qatar, and Turkey, must play a more active role in advocating for policy changes.

The cost of inaction is severe—not only for Afghan girls but for the future of Afghanistan as a whole. A generation deprived of education will lead to a weaker economy, increased dependency on foreign aid, and a long-term cycle of poverty and instability. The global community has a moral and strategic imperative to continue fighting for Afghan girls' right to education, ensuring that their dreams, aspirations, and potential are not permanently

⁴³ MWL (2023). *International Conference on Girls' Education in Muslim Communities: Policy Recommendations*. Muslim World League.

⁴⁴ Egeland, J. (2023). *Humanitarian Challenges in Afghanistan: The Impact of Funding Cuts on Women's Education*. Norwegian Refugee Council.

extinguished by oppressive policies. Only through sustained pressure, innovative solutions, and unwavering commitment can we hope to reverse these restrictions and rebuild an inclusive and equitable educational system in Afghanistan.

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