

# The Taliban in Afghanistan (1996–2001)

By: Fishtank Staff

## About Afghanistan

- 1 Afghanistan is a country located in Central Asia, situated between Iran and Pakistan. About 35 million people live in the country, from many different groups. Afghanistan is home to many ethnic groups. Nearly half of the population is Pashtun, but Tajiks, Hazaras, Uzbeks, and other groups also live in the country. Islam is the state religion of Afghanistan, as 99.9% of the Afghan population is Muslim.



Source: By OCHA, CC BY 3.0,  
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=29589570>

## Understanding Islam

- 2 Since so many people in Afghanistan are Muslim, to understand events in Afghanistan's history, it is important to understand Islam. Islam is one of the world's major religions. People who follow Islam are called Muslims. The religion began more than 1,400 years ago in the Middle East.
- 3 Muslims believe in one God, called Allah, and follow the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad. These teachings are written down in a holy book called the Quran.

- 4 Many Muslims follow important practices in their daily lives, such as:
  - Praying five times a day
  - Giving to people in need
  - Fasting (not eating during daylight hours) during the month of Ramadan
  - Making a pilgrimage, or religious journey, to the city of Mecca if they are able
- 5 Today, Islam is practiced by more than a billion people around the world in many different countries and cultures.

## **A History of Conflict**

- 6 By the early 1990s, Afghanistan had already experienced many years of war and conflict. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, Afghanistan fought three wars against Britain and gained full independence in 1919. In 1978, a new government took power, leading to civil war and instability. The Soviet Union invaded in 1979 to support that government, and fighting continued even after Soviet forces left in 1989, lasting until 1992. After that, different groups fought each other for control of the country. Many cities were damaged, many people were forced to leave their homes, and life became very dangerous in many areas.
- 7 During this period of war and instability, a new group called the Taliban gained support and began to grow in power.

## **The Taliban's Rise to Power**

- 8 The word *Taliban* means "students" in Pashto, a language spoken in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Many members of the group had studied in religious schools called *madrasas* in Afghanistan and nearby Pakistan. Many early members were influenced by religious teachings and by the ongoing conflict after the Soviet withdrawal.
- 9 The Taliban claim to follow Islam, but they represent only one interpretation of the religion. Many Muslims have criticized the Taliban's rules or actions. Many Muslim scholars and leaders around the world have criticized the Taliban's ideas and government.
- 10 The Taliban first became strong in southern Afghanistan in the mid-1990s. They quickly captured towns and cities as they moved across the country.
- 11 In 1996, the Taliban took control of Kabul, the capital city of Afghanistan. After taking Kabul, they created a new government called the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. By 2000, the Taliban controlled most of Afghanistan.

## **Life Under Taliban Rule**

- 12 The Taliban governed Afghanistan using a very strict interpretation of Islamic law, which is sometimes called Sharia law. Their leaders believed society should follow very strict religious rules.
- 13 Under Taliban rule:
- Music, movies, and television were banned.
  - Many sports and forms of entertainment were not allowed.
  - Men were required to grow beards and attend daily prayers.
  - Women had to cover their bodies in public, often wearing a garment called a *burqa*.
  - Girls were usually not allowed to attend school, and women were usually not allowed to work outside the home.
- 14 The Taliban also created religious police to enforce these rules. People who did not follow them could face punishment.

## How People Responded to Taliban Rule

- 15 At first, some Afghans supported the Taliban because they hoped the group would bring stability after years of war. Although some people reported that in certain areas there was less crime and travel could be safer, others continued to experience fear and violence.
- 16 However, many Afghans disagreed with the Taliban's rules. Women and girls were especially affected because they lost many opportunities for education, work, and participation in public life.
- 17 Many people in other countries also criticized the Taliban government because they believed the rules were too strict and unfair.
- 18 Even though the Taliban enforced strict rules, many people in Afghanistan and Pakistan continued to practice aspects of daily life in private. These actions were often carried out quietly to avoid punishment.
- 19 Here are some ways people responded to restrictions:
- 20 **Continuing to Learn at Home**  
Some families kept books hidden so children could continue learning even when schools were closed to them.
- 21 **Keeping Culture Alive**  
Even though music and entertainment were banned in public, some families still shared songs, stories, and traditions at home.

22 **Telling the World What Was Happening**

Some Afghan writers and activists reported on conditions in the country to audiences outside Afghanistan.

23 Despite potential consequences, many people found ways to continue important aspects of daily life.



*Protest Rally against Taliban in 1998*

Source: "[File:RAWA protest rally against Taliban in Peshawar April28-1998.jpg](#)" by RAWA is licensed under [CC BY 3.0](#).

## References

Gendler, A., & Noorzai, R. (2023, August 16). *Life under the Taliban: A tale of two eras*. VOA News. <https://projects.voanews.com/life-under-the-taliban-tale-of-two-eras/>

Maizland, L. (2026, February 27). *The Taliban in Afghanistan*. Council on Foreign Relations. <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounders/taliban-afghanistan>

*Who are the Taliban?* BBC News. (2022, August 12). <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-south-asia-11451718>