

2024 Annual Report on Media Freedom in Afghanistan

December 26, 2024



Table of Contents	Page
About this report	2
Background	3
Eexecutive Summary	5
Methodology	6
Legal framework	7
The duality of de facto authorities and ambiguities in the implementation of media Law ...	8
Media Inistitutions under the Defacto authorities	11
Media violations commission.....	11
Access to information department.....	13
Economic Problems of the Media	14
The media policy of the de facto authorities	15
Media directives.....	17
Pressure on Domestic Media and Prohibition of Collaboration with “Exiled” Media	21
The Situation of Women Working in the Media	22
Threats, arbitrary arrests and detentions of journalists and media workers	25
Media outlets temporarily closed.....	25
Media outlets closed with unknown reopening dates.....	25
Conclusion	27
Recommendations	28

About This Report

This report has been prepared by the Advocacy Department of the Afghanistan Journalists Center(AFJC) to provide an independent and professional assessment of the state of media freedom and the conditions faced by journalists in Afghanistan. It examines media freedom across 34 provinces of the country during 2024, offering a comprehensive summary, statistics on violations of media freedom, and details regarding targeted attacks on media outlets, as well as incidents of violence, threats, and arrests of journalists.

As an independent, non-governmental organization, the [Afghanistan Journalists Center](#) has been committed to preparing and publishing annual and special reports since 2014, and this vital work has continued uninterrupted to this day.



Afghan media prior to the Taliban's return to power. Photo: Captured from a video report by Tolo News, 18 June 2020.

Background

Before the Taliban regained power on August 15, 2021, Afghanistan boasted a vibrant and diverse media landscape that thrived despite pervasive war and insecurity. The 2004 [Afghan Constitution](#) enshrined freedom of expression as a protected right. Furthermore, the Mass Media Law, enacted in 2008, affirmed the government's commitment to promoting media freedom, stipulating that no individual or entity—including governmental bodies—could prohibit, censor, or restrict the activities of news and information media, except as outlined in this law. Nevertheless, journalists in Afghanistan encountered significant violence and threats during this period, largely due to ongoing conflicts and instability.

According to the Afghanistan Journalists Center, over the course of two decades, more than 120 journalists and media workers lost their lives in [targeted attacks](#), particularly those attributed to ISIS and the Taliban, as well as during various conflicts and crimes.

However, the collapse of the republic government led to a dramatic decline in support for free media, resulting in the closure of over half of the country's media outlets and the exodus of hundreds of journalists and media professionals. The de facto Ministry of Information and Culture [reported](#) that prior to the fall of the republic government, there were 405 registered media outlets—including radio and television stations, print publications, and online platforms.

A survey conducted and announced on May 19, 2022, revealed that only 182 of these media outlets remained active.

The most [recent statistics](#) from the de facto authorities, released on March 25, 2024, indicate that there are currently 283 media outlets operating in Afghanistan, with an additional 25 new audio, video, and print outlets launched in the past year, as noted by Khobaib Ghufuran, spokesperson for the de facto Ministry of Information and Culture.

Reporters Without Borders (RSF) [ranked](#) Afghanistan 122nd out of 180 countries in its global press freedom index published on April 20, 2021, prior to the Taliban's return to power. In its latest report, released on December 12, 2024, [RSF ranked](#) Afghanistan 178th and categorized it as one of the worst countries in the world for journalists. The report indicates that Afghanistan has fallen 56 places in media freedom during the three years of Taliban rule.

Executive Summary

Published on December 26, 2024, this report highlights the ongoing suppression of media freedom in Afghanistan, which has intensified significantly throughout 2024 amid the de facto authorities' ambiguous media policies. However, findings from the Afghanistan Journalists Center (AFJC) indicate a marked increase in divisions within the de facto authorities regarding media relations, a trend that has become more pronounced compared to the previous year.

In 2024, the de facto authorities of the Ministry of Information and Culture, which oversees media affairs, emphasized their commitment to supporting the media and enforcing the [media law](#) enacted during the republic. This law acknowledges media freedom within a defined framework and aims to promote a free press. The ministry announced that [draft amendments](#) to both the media law and the Access to Information Law have been submitted to de facto leader Hibatullah Akhonzada for review. These amendments are in their final stages and are expected to be approved soon, with only "slight changes" anticipated.

The report highlights that the status of media law enforcement over the past 12 months remains unclear. The de facto Ministry of Information and Culture, primarily responsible for overseeing media and journalist issues, has become increasingly marginalized. Despite assertions that the ministry has revitalized the Media Complaints and Violations Investigation Commission to prevent arbitrary actions against media and journalists, the reality reveals a continued crackdown. The report indicates that a hardline faction within the de facto authorities has imposed further restrictions on media and journalists through new [media directives](#). This faction is increasingly exerting control via the General Directorate of Intelligence (GDI) and the Ministry of Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice. They have leveraged recently enacted [law of the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice](#) to expand the powers of the morality police, allowing them to intervene with media outlets, issue threats, and detain media personnel.

The report reveals that at least [seven new media directives](#) were issued in 2024, up from four the previous year. These directives impose significant restrictions on local media, including bans on taking photos and publications of images of living beings in Kandahar, Takhar, Baghis, Helmand, and Nangarhar provinces; limitations on women contacting media outlets in Khost; prohibitions against live broadcasts of political programs; and mandates for media to adopt specific terminology when reporting on de facto authorities.

Since the Taliban regained control of Afghanistan on August 15, 2021, the de facto authorities have issued at least 15 directives governing media operations through the end of 2023. These

directives encompass a broad array of restrictions, including prohibiting women from appearing on state-owned media platforms such as national radio and television, banning coverage of demonstrations, and outlawing music.

Additionally, the authorities have imposed stipulations on how women should dress and present themselves in media, barred women from participating in plays and television entertainment programs, and prohibited interviews with opponents of the regime. International television broadcasts via Afghan media have also been banned, along with the release of films and series. Criticism of Taliban officials is forbidden, as is the representation of women's voices in media in Helmand province. Furthermore, cooperation with "exiled" media is not permitted.

Notably, apart from a directive that forbids the publication of images of living beings, as articulated in the new Vice and Virtue Law, the rest of these instructions do not specify penalties for journalists and media outlets that refuse to comply.

The AFJC's Afghanistan Press Freedom Tracker [documented](#) 181 incidents of media and journalist rights violations in 2024, including 131 threats and 50 arrests. At least five journalists received prison sentences ranging from two to five years. Notably, there were no reported targeted attacks or injuries to media workers this year, marking a significant improvement over 2023, which witnessed a targeted attack that resulted in the death of one journalist and injuries to at least 19 others.

Methodology

This report provides a comprehensive analysis of the status of media and journalist freedom in Afghanistan for the period from January to December 2024. The findings presented herein are derived from data collected by the Afghanistan Press Freedom Tracker, an initiative operating under the Advocacy Department of the Afghanistan Journalists Center (AFJC).

Established in 2014, the [Afghanistan Press Freedom Tracker](#) serves as the first online database dedicated to documenting violations of media freedom in the country. The data collected is made available in three languages: Persian/Dari, Pashto, and English, ensuring accessibility for a diverse audience. In compiling the data, careful consideration is given to the security and confidentiality of the media personnel, which may result in the exclusion of specific details regarding media outlets or individuals in certain cases.

The data for the Tracker is sourced from reports submitted by representatives of the AFJC across various provinces, focusing on incidents involving violations of journalists' rights and media operations. Additionally, the AFJC's Advocacy team conducts thorough monitoring of open sources, including news media and social media accounts of journalists. Information received from media professionals is verified against credible sources, including individuals and institutions knowledgeable about the reported events, prior to being recorded in the Tracker.

It is important to note that the Advocacy team at AFJC does not include events lacking verified credibility in this report. Furthermore, it is acknowledged that not all incidents of rights violations against journalists and media personnel may be reported to the AFJC. This can occur due to security concerns or due to the wishes of affected journalists to remain anonymous. To protect the privacy of individuals whose rights have been compromised, specific details of certain incidents may not be disclosed in this report.

This methodology underscores the commitment of the Afghanistan Journalists Center to uphold the principles of accuracy, reliability, and confidentiality in documenting the critical state of media freedom in Afghanistan.

Legal Framework

The right to freedom of expression is enshrined in Article 19 of the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) and the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) (ICCPR). As a State Party to the ICCPR, Afghanistan has a responsibility to promote, protect, and respect human rights, ensuring that all members of society, including journalists, can exercise their right to freedom of expression. This includes cultivating an environment that supports safe and independent media operations and holding accountable those who attack media workers.

The [Afghanistan Constitution](#) and the [Media Law](#) were drafted with consideration of Islamic principles and in compliance with the country's international obligations, including Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the ICCPR. The right to freedom of expression and media freedom was recognized in the Constitution ratified by the former republic in 2004. Article 34 states: “Freedom of expression shall be inviolable. Every Afghan shall have the right to express thoughts through speech, writing, illustrations as well as other means in accordance with provisions of this constitution. Every Afghan shall have the right, according to provisions of law, to print and publish on subjects without prior submission to state authorities. Directives related to the press, radio, and television as well as publications and other mass media shall be regulated by law.” However, the de facto Ministry of Justice announced in mid-August 2023 that this law had been repealed.

Additionally, the legal framework for free media and journalists in Afghanistan is articulated in the Media Law, enacted in 2009. In 2015, several articles of this law were amended and revised, resulting in a comprehensive document consisting of 11 chapters and 55 articles. The Media Law safeguards the rights to freedom of thought and expression, promotes free and independent media, and ensures access to information. Furthermore, there is a dedicated [Access to Information Law](#), which is internationally [recognized](#) as one of the best in the world. This law was passed in 2014 and subsequently amended twice, in [2018](#) and [2019](#).



Press conference by de facto authorities at the Government Media and Information Center (GMIC) in Kabul.
Photo: Captured from a video published by GMIC, August 22, 2023.

The Duality of the de facto and the ambiguity in the implementation of media law

In 2024, the dual and ambiguous approach of the de facto authorities toward media affairs and freedom of expression continued to manifest, highlighting inconsistencies in the implementation of media laws and the protection of journalists.

Encounters regarding media freedom revealed a division within the de facto authorities. A faction, including senior spokespersons and officials from the de facto Ministry of Information and Culture, as well as some so-called "moderate" figures, advocated against a harsh approach to media and journalists. In certain instances, they have publicly expressed these views.

For instance, during a seminar on December 18, 2024, titled "The Role of the Media in Strengthening the Islamic System," [Shir Mohammad Abbas Stanekzai](#), the de facto Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, addressed media restrictions, stating, "Criticism and excessive restrictions on them serve no purpose other than harm. Therefore, my request to the government and the Islamic Emirate[Taliban government] is to support our media, refrain from making their

work difficult over minor issues, and allow them to compete with global media. This will be achieved when the gap between the Islamic Emirate and the media is bridged."

Stanekzai further asserted, "If someone visits a media outlet to discuss an issue, participates in a roundtable, or offers criticism of the [Taliban] government, we should exercise patience. Expressing an opinion does not make someone a criminal; opinions differ, and Afghanistan is not monolithic in its views."

Similarly, [Hayatullah Mohajer Farahi](#), the Deputy Minister of Publications at the de facto Ministry of Information and Culture, stated at the same seminar, "We have never taken a confrontational stance toward the media. There is a specific address for the media, and the Ministry of Information and Culture is open to them."

From the perspective of this faction, the Media Law passed during the previous Republic government remains in effect—albeit with some exceptions—or the draft amendment to this law, which recognizes media freedom within a defined framework and supports free media, is nearing completion with only "slight changes" pending final approval by the de facto leadership.

On January 28, 2022, Zabihullah Mujahid, a spokesperson for the de facto, [stated](#) that the media should operate within the framework of the media law. He reiterated its enforceability at a meeting in Kabul on February 2, 2022. Despite more than three years having passed since the Taliban regained power, the fate of the amended media law remains uncertain as of 2024. However, [Mujahid expressed](#) optimism on January 6, 2024, saying, "The media law will be finalized soon, with contributions from the Ministry of Information and Culture and legal institutions such as the Ministry of Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, as well as the Ministry of Justice. It has been sent to the for final approval, and we hope for a swift conclusion." Additionally, [Khairullah Khairkhwa](#), the de facto acting Minister of Information and Culture, noted on June 24, 2024, during a press conference in Gardiz provincial capital of Paktia, that the previous mass media law is "in line with Sharia and the principles of the Islamic Emirate" and will be signed and made available to the media with "a few differences."

While journalists and experts have not yet been consulted regarding the amendments to these laws, and the specifics of the proposed changes remain undisclosed, Mohajer Farahi stated on December 20, 2024, that the [draft amendment of the Media law](#) emphasizes three key areas: respect for Islamic values, Afghan culture, and the national interests of the country. When asked by AFJC whether the public media law from the republican government remains enforceable until the Taliban leadership signs the draft amendment, he affirmed, "Yes, except for a few cases."

Conversely, the second faction, primarily composed of extremely conservative traditional and religious elements, aligns with the policy of Taliban leader [Mulla Haibatullah Akhundzada](#). He [stated](#) on October 13, 2022, that to establish a "pure Sharia system" in Afghanistan, all laws and bills enacted in the previous two decades would be reviewed, and any "illegal" or "un-Islamic"

provisions would not be tolerated. This faction is advancing the process of reforming media-related matters and holds significant influence over these decisions. Fazl Hadi Sahibzada, head of the legislative branch of the de facto Ministry of Justice, [stated](#) on April 12, 2024, that all laws from the previous government have been repealed.

This faction leverages the power of the de facto [General Directorate of Intelligence](#) (GDI) and the [Ministry of Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice](#) to enforce its agenda. The media community in the country has consistently expressed concerns over direct interference from these bodies. In response to these concerns, Zabihullah Mujahid, the spokesman for the de facto government, addressed these concerns on May 19, 2022—three months prior to the Media Complaints Commission resuming its operations. He [stated](#), “From now on, if any violations occur involving the media, rather than allowing intelligence or other organizations to intervene or insult, the Complaints Commission will be reinstated and will begin its work soon.”

On April 1, 2023, Khairullah Khairkhah, the de facto minister of the Ministry of Information and Culture, raised similar concerns following a meeting with representatives from the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, and the General Directorate of Intelligence (GDI). He announced plans for a [joint agreement](#) that would require all media-related decisions to be communicated to the Ministry of Information and Culture and the Commission for Handling Complaints and Media Violations, thereby preventing direct intervention from other departments. However, the extensive powers granted to the moral police under the Ministry of Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, after the publication of the Law of Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice on August 21, 2024, have undermined the authority of the commission and diminished its role in overseeing media operations.



Media institutions under the de facto authorities

Media Complaints and Violations Commission

The Media Complaints and Violations Commission, originally established during the previous republic under the [Media Law](#), was deactivated following the Taliban's return to power on August 15, 2021. However, on August 22, 2022, Abdul Haq Hammad, an official at the de facto Ministry of Information and Culture, [announced](#) that the commission would resume operations the following day, with its first meeting taking place on August 23, 2022.

The Media Law specifies that the commission should consist of 11 members, including women, and be chaired by the Minister of Information and Culture. However, the newly formed commission under the de facto authorities has been expanded to 17 members and [lacks female](#) representation. The current composition includes the de facto Minister of Information and Culture as chairman, five officials from the ministry, representatives from the ministries of

Justice, Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, and the General Directorate of Intelligence (GDI), as well as a representative from the Faculty of Journalism at Kabul University, four representatives from media support organizations, and three representatives from the media.

Details regarding the reformation of the commission have not been publicly disclosed, leading to discrepancies in the information provided by its members. One member stated to the Afghanistan Journalists Center, “The commission was formed in accordance with the Media Law of the former republic and operates under the same name as specified in the law, but with a different composition and more members.” He added, “Since the previous government has been abolished and a new political structure has been formed, the composition of the commission is also based on these considerations.” According to him, many aspects related to the media, such as the establishment of new media outlets, issuance of work licenses, and media ownership, are still governed by the Media Law.

Conversely, another commission member expressed uncertainty regarding the legal foundation for the commission's re-establishment, claiming, “The Media Complaints and Violations Commission was not established based on the Media Law, but at the request of the Ministry of Information and Culture and the decree of the [Taliban] Prime Minister. If it were based on the Media Law, there would be no need for a new decree.” He noted that official letters were sent to various departments and institutions to appoint their representatives to the commission, which will operate for a one-year term, although its working procedures remain unclear.

Despite these uncertainties, this commission member believes that its existence is necessary and can be effective “to some extent” in improving the current media landscape. While details of the commission's meetings have not been made public, it is said to have worked towards releasing several detained journalists and alleviating pressure from de facto entities, including security agencies, on the media, as well as addressing legal issues. However, there have been instances where the commission's actions have undermined its intended purpose, effectively becoming a tool for suppressing free media. For example, on April 17, 2024, the commission decided to suspend the licenses of private TV stations [Noor](#) and [Barya](#) in Kabul. A day later, the offices of both television stations were closed, with the official justification citing “failure to observe journalistic principles, ignoring national and Islamic values, and fueling ethnic, linguistic, and partisan prejudice” — accusations that were vehemently denied by the officials of both stations.



Access to Information Department

On December 30, 2018, the [Access to Information Commission](#) was established as an independent body under the former republic, operating in accordance with the Access to Information Law. However, following the fall of the republic and the return of the Taliban to power, the Independent Access to Information Commission was deactivated. After a significant delay, it was [restructured and merged](#) into the de facto Ministry of Information and Culture on December 15, 2022, and now functions as the Access to Information Department.

Details regarding the composition of this new department and its efforts to enhance access to information remain unclear. On November 7, 2024, Rahmatullah Nariwal, the head of the de facto Access to Information Department, [acknowledged](#) the existing challenges in facilitating access to information. He stated, “The Department of Access to Information is making every effort to remove any obstacles to access to information. There will definitely be obstacles, because the situation is like this. One system is different from another, and each system has its own principles, so there will be differences in access to information. However, our entire department is committed to guaranteeing the right to access information.”

On the same day, the [Anis daily](#), operating under the de facto Ministry of Information and Culture, reported that measures have been implemented by the de facto Cabinet Presidency to enhance access to information and strengthen media over the past three years. The publication noted that during this period, 123 press conferences were organized to inform the public about the activities of the de facto authorities. Furthermore, it reported that the de facto Cabinet Presidency held approximately 40 meetings to coordinate and address challenges related to access to information with media officials and journalists, in addition to 246 press conferences and 7 major conferences. The report also highlighted that in the past three years, 512 recorded news packages were produced by spokespeople from various departments of the de facto government and disseminated to the media, along with more than 50 exclusive interviews conducted with journalists.

Economic Problems of the Media

Since the fall of the republic government, about [half of media outlets](#) in Afghanistan have ceased operations due to a combination of factors, including the withdrawal of international aid and restrictions imposed by the de facto authorities on free media. Over the past three years, a significant number of experienced media professionals have also left the country, and this trend continues. The remaining media outlets face severe limitations, unable to broadcast entertainment programs or audience-friendly dramas due to the constraints imposed by the de facto authorities. As a result, they have lost a substantial portion of their advertising revenue, to the extent that many are unable to meet their financial obligations related to frequency licenses.

On April 9, 2022, the de facto Ministry of Communications and Information Technology [announced](#) that 133 media outlets had failed to renew their frequency licenses and collectively owed over 200 million Afghanis (approximately \$250,000 USD) to the ministry. The ministry has warned these indebted outlets that failure to renew their licenses will result in cancellation.

For instance, on August 5, 2024, the de facto Afghanistan Telecom Regulatory Authority (ATRA) suspended the frequency licenses of 17 [local media outlets in Nangarhar](#) province due to non-payment of debts. Local radio and television stations in this first-tier province are required to pay 108,000 Afghanis (about \$1,550 USD) along with an additional annual fee of \$25 to renew their frequency licenses. Although this amount is lower in smaller second-tier and third-tier provinces, sources indicate that most local media outlets are still struggling with debts ranging from one year to over ten years.

Although these media outlets continue to operate, the director of a local radio station in Takhar informed the Afghanistan Journalists Center that the rising costs from various taxes and electricity are burdensome. He also noted that commercial advertisements, which were primarily supported by international organizations in sectors such as health, drugs, and peace, have decreased significantly. These advertisements were the main source of income for independent media.

According to various sources, media officials have made multiple requests to the de facto authorities to reduce the [costs of frequency licenses](#) and allow media outlets to pay their debts in installments over three years. However, no positive outcomes have been reported thus far. Inayatullah Alokozai, spokesperson for the de facto Ministry of Communications and Information Technology, stated to the Afghanistan Journalists Center on December 22, 2024, that a committee has been formed to address these requests and is expected to make a decision following a comprehensive review and evaluation.



The Radio Television Afghanistan (RTA), operating under the de facto Ministry of Information and Culture, has undergone significant changes over the past three years. Photo: Captured from a national television broadcast, December 25, 2024

Media Policy of the De Facto Authorities

On page 8 of this report, under the title “The Duality of the De Facto Authorities and the Ambiguity in the Implementation of Media Law,” it is noted that a faction within the de facto authorities, characterized by its extremely conservative and traditional views, is responsible for the intensification of restrictions and suppression of media freedom in Afghanistan. This faction seeks to align all matters—including media practices—completely with their interpretation of Islam, disregarding domestic legal frameworks and the country’s international obligations. Their goal is to establish what they term a “purely Islamic system” in the country.

To advance this agenda, senior spokespersons and officials from the Ministry of Information and Culture publicly stress the enforceability of media laws. However, this faction is simultaneously working to amend the Media Law and the Right to Access to Information Law to suit their preferences. Additionally, they continue to issue media directives.

The findings from the [Afghanistan Press Freedom Tracker](#), indicate that the de facto authorities issued at least [seven new directives](#) to the media in 2024 alone. Since the Taliban's return to power on August 15, 2021, they have issued a total of at least 15 instructions regarding media operations, with four of those directives occurring in 2023. These directives address a broad spectrum of media-related issues, including the prohibition of women appearing in state-run media, the banning of coverage of demonstrations, restrictions on music, regulations on how women can present themselves and work in media, and the prevention of women from taking on roles in television dramas and entertainment programs. They also include bans on interviews

with opponents of the de facto authorities, restrictions on international television broadcasts through Afghan media, limitations on the release of films and series, prohibitions on criticizing Taliban officials, bans on the broadcast of women's voices in Helmand province, and restrictions on cooperation with "exiled" media outlets.



Media Directives

In 2024, the de facto authorities issued at least seven media directives:

1. Ban on Photography and Filming of Local Officials

Mullah Shirin Akhund, the de facto governor of Kandahar, announced a [ban on photography and filming](#) during meetings of local officials in a letter dated February 18, 2024. The order directed local authorities in Kandahar province: “Through this letter, you are instructed to refrain from taking photographs and videotaping in your official and unofficial gatherings in the future, as the harm outweighs the benefit. Publish your work reports in written and audio form.” Following this directive, local journalists reported that officials in Kandahar were refusing to grant interviews and denying requests for photographs. This ban was initially communicated to journalists in neighboring Helmand province on February 20, 2024, by then-governor Maulvi Abdul Ahad Talib, but its enforcement ceased after a month. However, following the implementation of this directive in Kandahar, similar bans were officially announced in [Takhar](#) province on September 25, [Badghis](#) province on October 23, [Helmand](#) province on October 25, and [Nangarhar](#) province on November 12. The ban gained legal standing after the publication of the Law on the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice on August 21, 2024, leading many provinces to adopt the new regulations, with some de facto offices ceasing to publish images on social media.

2. Prohibition on Girls Making Phone Calls to Media

Abdul Rashid Omari, the de facto police chief in Khost province, issued an official letter on February 24, 2024, [banning girls from making phone calls to radio and television](#) stations. He warned media officials that allowing girls to call would result in their summoning and prosecution. The letter expressed concerns that some private radio stations were promoting moral corruption, citing instances where girls participated in educational or social programs. Omari stated: “By abusing these educational and social programs, girls make illicit phone calls to program hosts, which leads society towards moral corruption and contradicts Islamic principles.” The letter emphasized that local radio and television stations lacked licenses from the Education Department to broadcast school curriculum programs. Following this directive, on April 21, 2024, representatives from three local radio stations—[Naz](#), [Iqra](#), and [Wolas Ghag](#)—were summoned and detained by the Department of Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice for broadcasting music and facilitating phone calls from female listeners. They were released after six days upon agreeing to adhere to the department's regulations.

3. Prohibition on Publishing Images of Living Beings

The de facto Ministry of Justice announced the [Law on the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice](#) on August 21, 2024. Prepared under the directive of Taliban leader Mullah Haibatullah Akhundzada, this law comprises four chapters and 35 articles and took effect upon publication in the ministry's official gazette. Article 17 assigns the morality police the responsibility of ensuring media officials refrain from publishing materials contrary to Sharia law and Islam, including images of living beings. Article 4 states that the law applies universally to all departments and individuals within Afghanistan, granting the morality police broad powers to monitor citizens' behavior, attire, and appearance, thereby imposing implicit and explicit restrictions on media operations, particularly affecting female journalists.

Additionally, Article 22 outlines the morality police's role in preventing the misuse of recording devices and the dissemination of images of living beings. It specifies that the voice of a woman or music in public spaces is considered private, and the police are tasked with preventing such occurrences. The law also deems ties as “non-Islamic signs” that the morality police must suppress. While the provisions are vaguely defined, the penalties for non-compliance are specified. Article 24 states that individuals who violate the law may face consequences based on the severity of the offense, which can include advice, intimidation, threats, property confiscation, detention from one hour to three days, and other penalties deemed appropriate by the morality police, with persistent offenders potentially referred to court.

Following the publication of the Law on the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, extensive efforts have been made to implement this legislation at the provincial level, resulting in severe consequences for media operations and journalists. By the end of 2024, a ban on broadcasting images of living beings was officially announced in the provinces of Kandahar,

Takhar, Badghis, and Helmand, leading to the closure of television stations within these areas. (For further details, see the section titled “Threats, arbitrary arrests and detentions of journalists and media workers on page 25 of this report.) In Nangarhar province, while a ban on video interviews with local officials has been enforced, no formal ban on the publication of images of living beings has been announced. Nevertheless, the [national television](#) station operating in this province, under the de facto Radio Television Afghanistan (RTA), has ceased operations, indicating underlying issues and pressures that local officials are reluctant to address.

Findings from the Afghanistan Journalists Center (AFJC) indicate that the de facto Ministry of Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice has intensified its monitoring of media outlets since the law's enactment, often collaborating directly with the General Directorate of Intelligence (GDI). For instance, on December 4, 2024, representatives from the Ministry, accompanied by GDI officers, conducted a sudden raid on the offices of [Arezo TV](#) in Kabul. During this incident, seven employees were arrested, and the Ministry representative sealed the television channel's office. Additionally, on November 3, 2024, in Khost, the department of Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice closed the offices of three local private radio stations—[Ghargasht](#), [Zhman](#), and [Lawang](#)—on charges of playing music in their programming. (For additional information, see the section titled " Threats, arbitrary arrests and detentions of journalists and media workers" on page 25 of this report.)

5. [Ban on the live broadcasting of political programs.](#)

6. [Prohibition of challenging and criticizing Taliban laws and policies.](#)

7. [Prohibition on inviting unapproved individuals to media programs.](#)

On Saturday, September 21, 2024, media representatives in Kabul were invited to the Ministry of Information and Culture for a meeting lasting approximately an hour, during which they were informed about eight articles outlined in [new directives](#). According to the AFJC, three of these articles (1, 2, and 5) impose new restrictions that media outlets must follow:

- (1) Programs (discussions) should be pre-recorded and not broadcast live;
- (2) Experts must be invited from an official list; inviting individuals not included on this list is prohibited;
- (3) To invite someone not on the list, prior permission must be obtained from the Directorate of Media Supervision [Ministry of Information and Culture];
- (4) Each morning, the list of programs and guests for political debates must be submitted to the Directorate of Media Supervision, with programming only proceeding after receiving approval;

- (5) Criticizing the laws, policies, and decisions of the [Taliban] government and challenging its officials without evidence is strictly forbidden;
- (6) The media manager, media outlet, program host, and editor of pre-recorded programs must remove weak points, sensitive topics, and criticisms of the “Islamic Emirate” [the Taliban government] and its officials;
- (7) In cases of violations of the aforementioned points, the media head, publication manager, program host, editor, and political expert [guest] will be held accountable and face consequences based on established principles;
- (8) Media errors must be rectified through the appropriate channels within the media itself.

AFJC has obtained the referenced list within these directives, which includes 68 individuals. Media representatives, who spoke on the condition of anonymity due to fears of retribution from the de facto authorities, informed the AFJC that the content of these directives was communicated verbally to the media in Kabul just one day prior to the meeting, with explicit instructions for compliance.

AFJC’s findings reveal that some television stations continue to broadcast live programs while adhering to the "red lines" set by the ruling administration. In response to increasing restrictions, media outlets have shifted towards religious content and educational programming; however, they lack the freedom to choose their religious scholars or experts. The director of a radio station in Nangarhar province reported being threatened for inviting religious scholars or experts who hold differing views on jurisprudential matters than those sanctioned by the de facto authorities. For example, he noted that de facto officials would say certain individuals were "Salafi" or "Wahhabi" and therefore ineligible to appear on programs.

[7. Mandates for media to adopt specific terminology when reporting on de facto authorities.](#)

In 2024, media outlets have faced increasing pressure to refer to deceased de facto authorities as "[martyr](#)." This pressure escalated following the killing of Khalilur Rehman Haqqani, the de facto Minister of Refugee Affairs in Kabul, on December 11, 2024. Representatives from various media organizations in Kabul reported to the AFJC that they were compelled by the de facto Ministry of Information and Culture and the GDI to adopt this terminology. Some outlets even [revised their published articles](#) about Haqqani to incorporate the term "martyr" and "martyrdom." Furthermore, media sources informed the AFJC that they have been urged to use religious or ceremonial titles for de facto authorities, including referring to their leader, Mullah Haibatullah Akhundzada, as "Amir al-Mu'minin."

Pressure on Domestic Media and Prohibition of Collaboration with “Exiled” Media

The term “exiled media” in Afghanistan emerged after the fall of the republic government on August 15, 2021, marking the return of the Taliban to power. In the aftermath, many Afghan journalists and media workers fled the country, seeking refuge primarily in Western nations. A significant number remain in limbo in neighboring countries, including Pakistan, Iran, and Turkey. Many of these individuals have aligned themselves with media outlets abroad, particularly those creating content for Afghan audiences. Over the past three years, as the environment for free media in Afghanistan has increasingly constricted, efforts to establish independent [media in exile](#) have intensified. Most of these outlets operate as online publications, with a growing number of television stations also joining this network, which is largely based in European countries, the United States, and Canada.

Due to restrictions imposed by the de facto authorities, these exiled media outlets are unable to obtain operating licenses from the de facto authorities in Afghanistan. However, some journalists within the country continue to collaborate with these outlets, albeit covertly, due to the associated risks and threats. Notably, several of these media organizations were active in Afghanistan prior to the regime change; after the departure of their management teams and some staff, they were legally registered and reorganized in exile to continue their operations.

Findings from the Afghanistan Journalists Center indicate that journalists across the country have been warned against cooperating with so-called exiled media outlets, including Afghanistan International Television, Etilaat-e-Roz daily, Hasht-e-Subh daily, and Amu Television. The de facto authorities assert that these organizations propagate against the regime. For instance, on May 9, 2024, the Media Complaints and Violations Commission issued order for journalists and experts to avoid collaborating with [Afghanistan International TV and Radio](#), threatening that doing so would be considered a criminal act. The commission accused the London-based media outlet of "lacking impartiality" and providing a platform for opponents of the Taliban government to criticize the “Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan.” Furthermore, the commission prohibited the media outlet from broadcasting in public spaces.

On September 5, 2024, Afghanistan International reported that the Taliban government had deployed [jamming signals](#) to disrupt the satellite broadcasts of the media outlet, preventing audiences from accessing its programming effectively. According to statistics compiled by the Afghanistan Press Freedom Tracker, at least 20 of the 50 journalists and media workers arrested in 2024 were interrogated on charges of collaborating with exiled media outlets.



The Situation of Women Working in the Media

As previously mentioned, the media policy of the de facto authorities is based on directives issued to media outlets. To date, a total of 22 [directives](#) have been implemented, five of which specifically target women. These directives include a ban on women working in state-owned media, such as the National Radio and Television, a prohibition on women's participation in television dramas, and restrictions on the presence, behavior, and attire of female media personnel. Additionally, there are bans on women's interviews with men, restrictions on broadcasting women's voices in Helmand province, and a prohibition on women's telephone calls to the media in Khost province. The impact of these restrictions has also been felt in other provinces.

In addition to the general instructions applicable to all media workers, women in media face additional limitations imposed on Afghan women, which further restrict their freedom of movement and expression and, consequently, their participation in the workplace. This includes adherence to the [hijab decree](#), which mandates that women wear a burqa (chadari) or a black hijab with a face covering. This dress code is also enforced for women appearing on television programs.

The new [Law on the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice](#) imposes specific restrictions on women, including the requirement for full hijab, which entails complete covering of the body,

head, and face, as well as the necessity of having a [Mahram](#) (male guardian) for long-distance travel. Since the law's enactment, drivers have been unable to offer services to women without a male guardian, making it increasingly difficult for women to travel independently. According to the hijab decree, women must wear a burqa or a black hijab with a face covering; this dress code also applies to those appearing on television.

Women are required to be accompanied by a Mahram for travel exceeding 78 km, effectively barring female journalists from engaging in fieldwork. For instance, a female journalist working for a private television station in Kabul reported to the Afghanistan Journalists Center (AFJC) that while she adheres to the hijab and wears a mask, she is permitted to travel within Kabul and its districts without a Mahram, but cannot travel to other provinces without one. However, she noted that overall treatment of journalists, particularly women, by de facto security officials in Kabul has improved compared to previous years. She mentioned that she and her colleagues have received a letter from the de facto police headquarters in Kabul, allowing them to prepare reports without significant issues. Additionally, the separation of male and female journalists at news conferences has reportedly decreased.

Despite these improvements, restrictions and discriminatory treatment of female journalists persist, even at major official events. For example, on March 19, 2024, the de facto Ministry of Education invited journalists to cover the opening ceremony of the new school year in Kabul. However, the invitation, published on the Ministry's website, stated that [female journalists](#) could not participate due to the lack of a suitable venue for women.

On July 23, 2023, the de facto Department of Information and Culture in Helmand province communicated a directive from the provincial governor warning local media outlets against broadcasting [women's voices](#) under any circumstances, including in business or health advertisements. The [Law on the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice](#) asserts that a woman's voice is considered private and should remain concealed outside her home. The implementation of this provision and its impact on women in the media sector remain uncertain. Although radio stations managed and staffed by women continue to operate in some provinces, findings from the AFJC indicate that implicit restrictions on women working in provincial media have increased. For example, the director of a local radio station in one of the northern provinces reported on July 16, 2024, that representatives from the de facto Department of Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice instructed him not to broadcast women's voices under any circumstances, including in commercials or health advertisements. He was compelled to close the radio station for a day but managed to resolve the issue through local consultations. Nonetheless, he expressed concerns that the problem persists, and similar incidents may occur in the future, given that women's voices are considered private under the law.

There are indications that women working in provincial media are facing increased restrictions on their access to information. For instance, on March 3, 2024, Habibullah Hanafi, head of the de facto Department of Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice in Takhar province, warned

local media officials that the presence and work of [women in the media](#) was unacceptable and should not be permitted. Currently, a small number of women work at various local radio stations in the provinces, complying with orders that prohibit men from being present in their workplaces. However, they are not allowed to perform or present programs live due to the fear of male communication with the audience.

A local radio reporter from one of the western provinces informed the AFJC that female journalists in the area are only permitted to participate in special women's programs. These restrictions have intensified the pressure on the few remaining women in the media within a very traditional society.

On December 15, 2024, the director of a local radio station in another province reported that an official from the de facto Department of Information and Culture opposed the continued employment of two female presenters at his station, resulting in their forced resignation.

Threats, arbitrary arrests and detentions of journalists and media workers

In 2024, the media directives communicated to journalists and media outlets—both in written and oral forms—continued to influence the de facto authorities' treatment of the media, reflecting trends from previous years. These directives, with the exception of a ban on publishing images of living beings as outlined in the Law on Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, lacked clarity regarding the repercussions for journalists and media outlets that failed to comply. Findings from the Afghanistan Journalists Center (AFJC) indicate that journalists who disregarded these instructions faced threats, imprisonment, or punitive actions against their media organizations, including temporary or permanent bans.

The AFJC's [Afghanistan Press Freedom Tracker](#) documented at least 181 incidents of media freedom violations in 2024, comprising 131 threats to journalists and media outlets and 50 arrests of journalists. This represents an approximate 8% increase in violations compared to 2023. Furthermore, the nature and intensity of repression in 2024 significantly escalated. At least 18 media outlets were temporarily closed or ceased operations indefinitely due to direct orders from the de facto authorities or indirect pressure stemming from restrictive directives, such as bans on music broadcasting, prohibitions on women contacting the media, and bans on taking images of living beings or conducting video interviews with local authorities.

Media outlets temporarily closed

1. [Lawang Radio](#), Khost, Khost province (November 3-22)
2. [Zhman Radio](#), Khost, Khost province (November 3-6)
3. [Ghargasht Radio](#), Khost, Khost province (November 3-6)
4. [Nariman Radio](#), Qala-e-Naw, Badghis Province (September 9-23)

The closures of Radio Lawang, Zhman, and Ghargasht were ordered by the Department of Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice in Khost province. Sources indicate that Lawang Radio was closed for allegedly women making phone calls to the station and having music in some programming, while Zhman Radio and Ghargasht Radio faced similar charges related to music use. All three outlets were permitted to resume operations after submitting written commitments to adhere to the department's "red lines."

Media outlets closed with unknown reopening dates

1. [Arezo TV](#), Kabul (since December 4)
2. [National TV-Nangarhar](#) province (since November 6)

3. [National TV-Helmand](#), Lashkargah, Helmand province (since October 25)
4. [Sabawoon TV](#), Lashkargah, Helmand province (since October 25)
5. [National TV-Badghis](#), Qala-e-Naw, Badghis province (since October 22)
6. [Oboor TV](#), Qala-e-Naw, Badghis province (since October 22)
7. [National TV-Takhar](#), Taliqan, Takhar province (since October 13)
8. [Mah-e-Naw TV](#), Taliqan, Takhar province (since October 13)
9. [Rayhan TV](#), Taliqan, Takhar province (since October 13)
10. [National TV-Kandahar](#), Kandahar, Khandahar province (since August 14)
11. [Kawoon Ghag Radio](#), Mehtarlam, Laghman province (since June 13)
12. [Noor TV](#), Kabul (since April 16)
13. [Barya TV](#), Kabul (since April 16)
14. A local private TV station (details withheld for security reasons)

[Arezo TV](#) was closed by the de facto General Directorate of Intelligence (GDI) and the Ministry of Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, accused of dubbing and airing foreign series and collaborating with exiled media outlets. [Noor TV](#) and [Barya TV](#) channels in Kabul were shut down for alleged violations of "media principles," a claim denied by officials from the respective outlets, who argued that the closures were politically motivated. [Kawoon Ghag Radio](#) was closed by the GDI, which claimed that it is "property of the government." The radio director has rejected this assertion. The matter is currently under investigation by the de facto Media Complaints and Violations Commission. Additionally, many media outlets established in the past two decades with international support reported increased pressure from the GDI, which has opposed the renewal of operating licenses for several of these organizations.

The aforementioned television stations, with the exception of National TV in Nangarhar, ceased operations primarily due to the ban on broadcasting images of living beings. This prohibition was officially imposed in at least four provinces—Kandahar, Takhar, Badghis, and Helmand—by the end of 2024. The [National TV branch in Nangarhar](#) ceased operation after local authorities imposed a ban on taking photographs and conducting video interviews with officials, and it now operates solely as a radio station. While broadcasting image of living beings has not been banned in Nangarhar, there are serious concerns that the complete implementation of the new Law on Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice could further affect state-owned media and the private sector nationwide.

In addition to the closures, the AFJC’s Afghanistan Press Freedom Tracker recorded at least 50 arrests of journalists and media workers in 2024, including five individuals who were tried and sentenced to two to five years in prison in Ghazni, Kabul, and Baghlan provinces, with their identities withheld for safety reasons. The latest arrests involved seven employees of Arezo TV in Kabul on December 4. They were released after providing written guarantees not to leave Kabul and to appear in court, with their trial scheduled for late December 2024 at the request of the de facto Ministry of Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice.

Conclusion

Freedom of expression is a fundamental human right and a cornerstone of democratic societies. It empowers individuals to articulate their opinions and facilitates the free exchange of information and ideas. A vibrant and independent media is essential to uphold this right, as it fosters robust public discourse.

Afghanistan has established legal frameworks that define and protect the right to freedom of expression and support a free media landscape. This right is further enshrined in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. As a state party to the International Covenant, Afghanistan is obligated to promote, protect, and respect the human rights of its citizens. This includes ensuring that all members of society, including journalists, can fully exercise their right to freedom of expression, create a safe and independent environment for media operations, and hold accountable those who perpetrate attacks against media workers.

Despite the de facto authorities reiterating their support for media freedom and journalists throughout 2024, the findings of this report reveal a stark discrepancy between their rhetoric and actions. Over the past year, additional restrictions on media operations have been imposed, and requests for reducing heavy taxes and electricity bills have gone unaddressed. Although the ruling administration has acknowledged the existing media laws and has consistently promised that these laws would soon be signed with minor amendments, the specifics of this process remain unclear. Moreover, media professionals and experts have not been consulted regarding these changes. Given the current circumstances and the ongoing issuance of directives that restrict media freedom, it is anticipated that the purported minor amendments to these laws will be far more extensive than previously indicated.

Additionally, the Afghanistan Journalists Center has documented widespread violations of the rights of media and journalists in 2024, which starkly contradict the claims made by the de facto authorities. This ongoing pattern of behavior underscores the urgent need for genuine commitment to media freedom and the protection of journalists' rights in Afghanistan.

Recommendations

To the De Facto Authorities:

1. **Repeal Restrictive Guidelines:** The media guidelines issued alongside the Media Law and the Access to Information Law, which have severely limited the freedom of the media and journalists, should be repealed.
2. **Eliminate Discriminatory Measures:** Restrictions and discriminatory practices against women in the media, which adversely affect their professional roles and hinder journalists' ability to accurately report on the views and situations of women and children, must be abolished.
3. **End Interference by Institutions:** The unauthorized interference of institutions, particularly the General Directorate of Intelligence (GDI) and the Ministry of Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, in media operations and journalists' activities should cease.
4. **Cease Threats and Arrests:** The ongoing threats against media personnel and the arrest of journalists must end. Imprisoned journalists should be released immediately and unconditionally.
5. **Ensure Journalist Safety:** Implement necessary and specific measures to guarantee the safety and security of journalists and media workers.
6. **Revise Media Laws Responsibly:** Any revisions to media laws, including the Media Law and the Access to Information Law, should adhere to international standards and involve consultations with independent media representatives and experts.
7. **Uphold Professional Standards in Complaints Commission:** The composition of the Commission for Handling Media Complaints and Violations should reflect professional and legal standards without discrimination.
8. **Restore Independent Access to Information Commission:** The independent structure of the Independent Access to Information Commission must be reinstated, ensuring that it can fulfill its professional and legal responsibilities effectively.
9. **Conduct Awareness Programs:** Organize specific awareness programs for officials and spokespeople within governing institutions regarding the importance of a free media and journalists' rights to access information.
10. **Address Media's Economic Challenges:** Given the severe economic difficulties faced by media outlets, tax debts should be forgiven, or at least provisions for long-term installment payments should be made.
11. **Adjust Licensing Costs:**** The fees associated with renewing various media licenses, particularly those related to frequencies and electricity rates, should be adjusted in line with the media's income.

12. Facilitate Media Establishment: Remove obstacles to the establishment of new media outlets and the renewal of licenses, ensuring that such requests are addressed in accordance with the law.

To the International Community and Relevant International Institutions:

1. Provide Support for Independent Media: Offer financial and technical assistance to free and independent media outlets that have become vulnerable due to escalating restrictions and economic challenges, ensuring that this support does not compromise their independence.

2. Enhance Capacity-Building Programs: Support capacity-building initiatives for journalists and media workers to strengthen their skills and resilience.

3. Empower Women in Media: Focus on supporting women working in the media in Afghanistan through targeted capacity-building programs.

4. Advocate for Media Rights: Intensify advocacy efforts to uphold the rights and freedoms of media and journalists with the Taliban authorities.

5. Support Threatened Journalists: Collaborate with journalists who face threats due to their work, providing them with the necessary backing and protection.

6. Aid Exiled Independent Media: Support independent and free media outlets operating abroad that focus on Afghanistan, facilitating their efforts to report on the situation in the country.

End