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IN PURSUIT OF VIRTUE: Men's views on the Islamic Emirate's restrictions on Afghan women

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Since taking power in August 2021, the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) has introduced increasingly severe restrictions on the rights and freedoms of Afghan women and girls that have reverberated across families and communities. The new rules have bolstered traditional male roles as women's 'gatekeepers', determining what they can and cannot do. At the same time, these laws have also undermined men's roles as supporters and facilitators of the ambitions of their female family members – in particular their daughters, but also wives and sisters. Overall, they have taken choices away from families, putting more power over Afghans' personal lives into the hands of the state and its officials.

Between June and September 2024, Martine van Bijlert and the AAN team set out to hear from men across Afghanistan about how the new rules and restrictions had affected their families, their own lives, and their relationships with the people around them. In a series of in-depth and surprisingly candid conversations, seventeen men from diverse backgrounds and locations shared their perspectives on these changes. Some of the men agreed with traditions surrounding women's mobility and appearance, such as hijab and the need to travel with a mahram. Many, although certainly not all, came from families where women traditionally did not work outside the home. Not all their daughters had gone to school. But all of them, in varying degrees and for their own reasons, were distressed by the most invasive restrictions, in particular the ban on girls' education. The emotional intensity of their responses, as will be seen from the interviews, was arresting.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In this report, we explore the effects of the restrictions on women *as seen through the eyes of men*, probing how the Emirate's rules affect family dynamics and the lives of both men and women. In a series of in-depth interviews, we spoke to seventeen men across Afghanistan and asked them:

- What impact the rules and restrictions on women's lives have had on their families.
- How the rules have affected their own lives.
- How they viewed these changes in the context of the various regimes they have lived under in their own lifetime.
- Which kinds of men and women they thought had been most affected by the changes.
- What their own views were on the restrictions, the reasons behind them, and who they thought should be in charge of such matters.

We asked the men, not to privilege their opinions or because harm is more pronounced or important when also felt by men, but because the exclusion of women from public life affects everyone. It can disrupt families, fray communities and undermine both men and women. This report complements a large body of work from AAN addressing women's lives.

The most invasive of the Emirate's decrees and directives have aimed at pushing women and girls out of the public sphere and confining them to their homes. Girls were banned from secondary schools, a decision that has been upheld every year since its implementation. Universities were initially reopened to women, under strict conditions, including gender-segregated classrooms and dress codes. This, however, was short-lived and female students were once again barred from universities, in December 2022. The few fields of study still available to women, such as nursing and midwifery, were suddenly suspended in early December 2024, without explanation. Most female government employees were told to stay at home and, in December 2022, NGOs, the United Nations and foreign embassies were told they could no longer employ women (with some exemptions for health and

education). Curbs on women's mobility have also increased, including the closure of beauty salons and prohibitions on women visiting parks, gyms and historic places, participating in sports and travelling without a male relative.

These restrictions, coupled with anxieties over the risk of being harassed by enforcers from the Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice, have taken their toll on Afghan women. They have eroded their independence, diminished their well-being and sense of self and upended their lives. Yet, their struggles do not exist in isolation from the rest of society. The new rules have implications for men's lives as well and their views on them are critical to the lives of their female relatives – whether they disagree with the restrictions or support them. An overview of the main preoccupations the men raised when we spoke to them about the Emirate's restrictions on women, is presented below.

Key findings

The impact of the rules and restrictions on their families

The most pressing concern, by far, was the ban on education for girls above grade six. Regardless of their other views, all the men expressed dismay about it – including those whose daughters had not gone to school, those who did not have school-aged daughters and those who did not have daughters at all. The men described, at length and repeatedly, how it had affected them emotionally as they watched the distress of their daughters and other girls, agonised about their future and reflected on what it meant for Afghanistan. Many of their daughters had tried to secure some kind of alternative education, even though it was mostly unsatisfactory, either by changing their field of study to subjects that, when the interviews were conducted, were still open to women, or enrolling in private courses, or going to madrasas. One man had encouraged his daughters, who had never had a school to go to and were now of marriageable age, to learn to read and write from a radio programme. Several of the men said they had considered leaving the country in search of education for their daughters, but most had been forced to conclude it would probably not be possible.

The restrictions on women's employment had affected far fewer families directly, as many of the men came from families where women did not traditionally work outside the home. Even so, there was a shared sense of

dismay and concern, particularly because it meant a looming lack of skilled female professionals, such as doctors and midwives. The men who had been directly affected by their wife's loss of employment had, in most cases, also lost their own source of income and struggled to provide for the family. Interviewees worried about the consequences for families without male breadwinners or legal guardians. Not all interviewees were in favour of women working in every sector. Regardless of their other views on women working outside the home, however, all believed that educated women were needed in some professions, if only to make sure their wives and daughters would not need to be treated by male doctors or seen by male officials.

One of the main impacts of the rules on hijab and mahram, regardless of whether families had adhered to them in the past or not, was an increased sense of vulnerability felt by both men and women when female family members left the home. Several men described how the women in the family had become much more reluctant to leave the house, even if it was permissible, as they feared being bothered by enforcers. They described the emotional and psychological toll the rules were taking on their wives and daughters who had to spend far more time at home than they used to and with almost no opportunity to go out to parks or on picnics. Many of the men were unsettled by the possibility that officials might harass their daughters and female relatives because of how they dressed, and even in families where women had already keenly observed hijab, they were more careful than ever. Several described the possibility of themselves and their female relatives being questioned by officials as to whether their relationship allowed them to be outside together as a deep dishonour and unwarranted interference in their family lives. A few of the men condemned what they considered lapses in hijab and other conservative norms under the Islamic Republic, while adding that this did not mean that women should not be allowed to study or work.

Several men pointed to the Supreme Leader's decree on women's rights as an example of a positive development. The decree, among other things, banned the practice of *baad* (giving girls in marriage to another family to resolve a blood feud), enshrined a woman's right to inheritance and affirmed that marriage requires a woman's consent. They considered this a positive, although some were doubtful about its actual implementation.

How the rules affected their own lives and relationships

When speaking about the effect of the restrictions on their own lives, many of the men veered into other post-takeover changes, such as economic hardship or the end of the armed conflict. Although most said women had been hit much harder by the Emirate's various restrictions than men, several kept returning to how difficult life had become for them, and for men in general, because of their responsibility to provide for the family. They described feelings of powerlessness when they compared what their family wanted or needed with what they could deliver and spoke extensively about their own economic anxieties.

Security was the second recurring theme, with several men commenting on how its improvement had been the most positive change brought about by the return of the Emirate. As with the economy, several men seemed to think that improvements to security mainly affected men, although others thought the war's end had benefited everyone. But while security and the economy were clearly at the front of many interviewees' minds, they also kept returning to the harm done by school closures on girls and the restrictions on women to their families, their country and its future.

In terms of the direct effects of the rules on their lives, interviewees focused on the practical changes they have had to make, the added strain of possibly being questioned or punished, and the emotional anguish of seeing how downcast their daughters, sisters and wives had become. Several interviewees described how their lives had become more complicated now that women needed a mahram when they went out. More than that, they described the strain of being monitored and possibly called out or punished for perceived violations when leaving the house with their families or female relatives, as well as the feelings of vulnerability and anger it brought. It was not just the men whose wives and daughters had been used to going out unaccompanied who said they felt the change. In general, the anxiety about female family members being harassed or questioned, and the potential punishment of men, led to an increased policing of women's behaviour from within the family.

Relationships within families had become more strained, with the rules on hijab and mahrams and the threat of random questions by Amr bil Maruf enforcers keeping many women at home, while many men were also spending more time in the house due to unemployment. Families have been forced to

spend much more time together, often in cramped quarters. Many of the men spoke about how the stresses caused by the restrictions and economic hardship had led not only to depression but also to frustration, frayed tempers and arguments.

The men described how events where women meet and that are important for the social fabric of communities and connections between families had also decreased – weddings, funeral and mourning ceremonies, as well as visits to relatives and religious places. Some men spoke about how relations within communities had suffered and worried about its possible effect on society – brothers falling out, couples breaking up, an increase in underage marriages or children running away from home and turning to drugs.

Opinions on the restrictions: context, causes and consequences

When asked to consider how things had changed for men and women throughout their own lifetime and under the various regimes, the men reflected on how every period had offered different trade-offs, with a different mix of freedom, security, opportunity and economic strengths or weaknesses. There was, in particular, a strong streak of nostalgia over what had been lost when the men discussed the Republic. Several described those years as among the best, despite the problems of corruption and conflict, because of the opportunities provided for a whole generation.

Many of the men focused on education levels and the rural-urban divide when asked whether they thought all men and women had been affected by the recent changes in the same way. Some said they thought educated women had the most difficult lives since they had been hit hardest by the restrictions, while others focused more generally on the hardships of rural life and the lack of access to healthcare and other services. Many of the men equated higher levels of education and skills with less poverty, more opportunities and a better life. Others, however, believed this was no longer the case, now that educated men, they said, were no longer valued or recruited into the government in the same way.

When asked their opinions on the IEA's restrictions, many interviewees stressed that they supported Islamic values, laws and traditions, but disagreed with the fervour and force with which some rules were enforced. Others distinguished between rules they agreed with but that were not new (for example, compulsory hijab), those that were new and that they did not agree with (like the

education ban) and those that were good but would probably not be implemented (such as women's inheritance rights under Islam). Several interviewees questioned whether the rules, as implemented by the Emirate, were the only possible or correct interpretation of how Islam meant people to live. They pointed to differences of opinion within the Emirate's ranks, among Islamic scholars and within the wider Islamic world. Others thought the basis of some of the rules were cultural or tribal rather than religious and pointed, for example, to the fact that many of the Taleban had simply not come from areas where they would have seen girls go to school.

Opinions were divided regarding the possibility or likelihood of the Emirate easing its restrictions. Some thought the Taleban might change their minds and relax their views once they had been exposed to people living in the cities and realised the reality was more nuanced than they had been led to believe. Others thought the Emirate did not intend to relax the restrictions on women at all.

It was striking how many of the men described a far more egalitarian vision than was likely the case in their own families and communities, **when discussing the different roles of men and women in society and who should decide on such matters.** There were also mentions of open disagreement within families over the restrictions, in particular between daughters and fathers, but possibly less than one would expect. Throughout the interviews, there were indications of how opinions around education and women had changed over time or had allowed for different ways of acting, particularly during the last generation.

The interviews reveal that restrictions imposed on women by the Emirate have profoundly affected family life for our interviewees. At the same time, there appeared to be a desire among many of the men to be able to either welcome or at least tolerate the Emirate's rule. It is the prevailing regime and provides a degree of stability, with no real alternative in sight, and our interviewees were generally deeply in favour of an Islamic government. However, they remained deeply troubled by the continued refusal to allow their daughters to study, the indifference to what a dearth of professional women would mean for society and the way those outside the Emirate's direct circle were treated with suspicion.

While the conversations in this report were held with men who would be open to discussing family matters with someone from outside their primary circle, which may possibly have excluded the most conservative viewpoints, the range of backgrounds is wide enough for us to be confident that the convergence of opinions

we found is highly significant. A desire for education has taken root in large parts of Afghan society, not just in the cities but also in the villages. The interviews also raise questions about the acceptability of the state policing the private lives of Afghan families. The rift caused by these issues may be unsustainable in the long term.

INTRODUCTION

Over the last three years, AAN has published a large number of reports on the Emirate's increasingly severe restrictions on women's lives.[1] In these reports, we explored how women and girls have sought to navigate these rules and how the shrinking of the space allowed to them outside the home has eroded their independence, well-being and sense of self. However, the restrictions on women do not affect women alone, nor are women and girls the only ones who hold opinions about them.

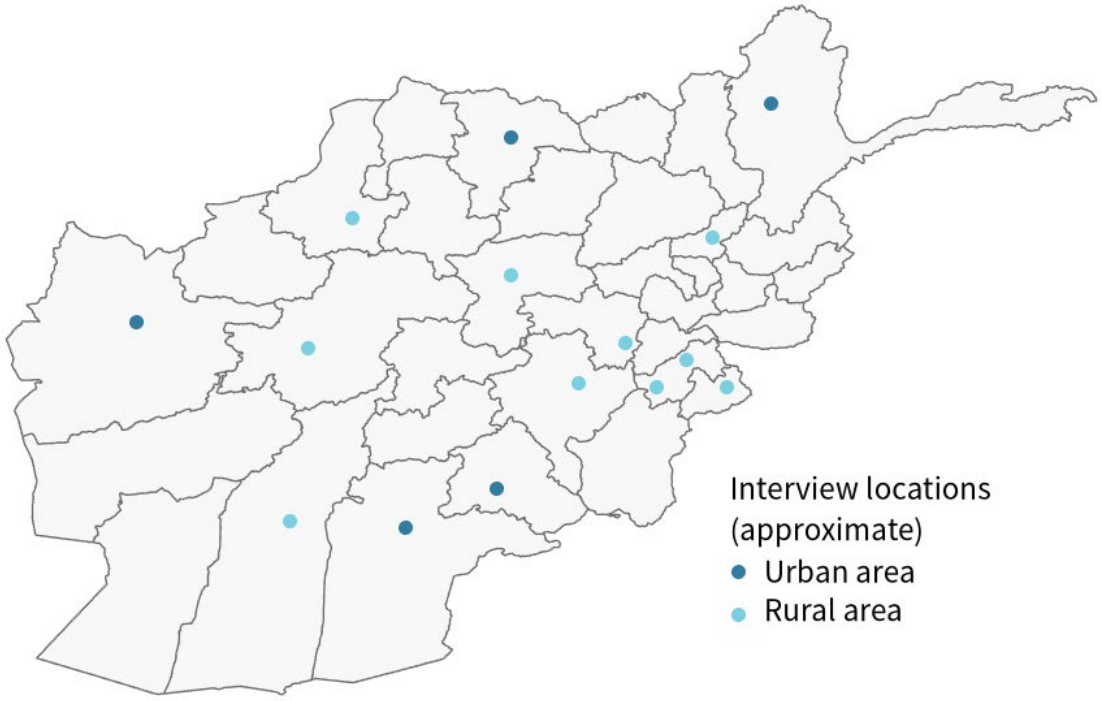
Since the Emirate came to power, it has enforced increasingly sweeping restrictions on the lives of women and girls, including: barring them from high school, universities, education centres and most recently, medical institutes; banning women from most work in NGOs, the United Nations and embassies; banning beauty salons; banning most female civil servants, police and military personnel from going to work and sacking judges and prosecutors; curbs on women's independent travel and what they can wear; and denying them access to parks, gyms and public bath houses. There is no complete ban on women working outside the home as there was during the first Emirate and the private sector is in principle still open to businesswomen and female workers, subject to restrictions on segregation, movement and mahrams. However, the pressure on female-owned enterprises is greater than on those owned by men, with many more closing or downsizing. For more on this, see the World Bank's Afghanistan Private Sector Rapid Survey: An Assessment of the Business Environment – Round 3. For more details on the Emirate's decrees and directives, see this USIP overview.

For this reason, in this report, we delve into the effects the restrictions have had on men, families and the wider community *as seen through the eyes of men* – not

[1] See for instance, AAN's 2022 reports: 'Strangers in Our Own Country: How Afghan women cope with life under the Islamic Emirate and How Can a Bird Fly On Only One Wing: Afghan Women Speak about life under the Islamic Emirate' on how women experienced the increasing restrictions early on. AAN is planning to publish a dossier of all reports on women and girls since August 2021, in early 2025. For an earlier dossier on women (2015-July 2021), see 'Dossier XXX: Afghan Women's Rights and the New Phase of the Conflict'.

because harm is more pronounced or important when also felt by men, but because the exclusion of women from public life affects everyone. It can disrupt families, fray communities and undermine both men and women.

Spread of the interviewees across Afghanistan



Source: AAN

Men in Afghanistan have traditionally functioned as women's 'gatekeepers' and legal guardians, determining what they can and cannot do. This has only increased with the establishment of the Emirate, which has made men legally and, in some cases, criminally responsible for infractions by their female relatives. However, many men have also traditionally functioned as supporters and facilitators for the ambitions of, in particular their daughters, but also wives and sisters, encouraging them and shielding them from outside criticism.

This report explores men's views and experiences of how the Emirate's rules on women interact with family dynamics and the lives of both men and women.

The data for this report was gathered in seventeen in-depth, semi-structured interviews with men from all walks of life, between June and September 2024. Care was taken to ensure a good mix of education levels, geographic location (including rural and urban settings), ethnic background and age. The interviewees were selected through extended networks of acquaintances, since they had to be open

to discussing family matters, however obliquely, with someone from outside their primary circle.

Our interviewees included educated and uneducated men, from cities and from rural areas. The backgrounds and experiences of these men, however, illustrate how blurred these distinctions have become as individuals and families move between the city and the village in search of work, education, security or a different lifestyle.

Three of our seventeen interviewees lived in a major city (two in Kandahar, one in Mazar-e Sharif), one in its outskirts (Herat) and two in provincial centres that are more like towns (Faizabad and Qalat). The rest lived in rural districts. However, two of the men who lived in villages, from Khost and Maidan Wardak, also owned houses in Kabul and moved between city and village as needed. One interviewee, from Bamyan, used to live and work in Kabul but recently moved back to his village for economic reasons; the interviewee from Paktia also, for economic reasons, now works in the Gulf. These men may no longer consider themselves rural, particularly if they have gone to university, but they or their families do live in the countryside. Similarly, in terms of the educational divide, several of the men with very little education had sons and daughters who had gone to high school or university or had been on their way to going.

At the time of the Emirate's takeover, Afghanistan had achieved the highest literacy rate in its history. School education, not only for boys but also for girls, had become a norm and, where lacking, a major demand from parents (insecurity did keep many children in some parts of the country at home, while corruption in the education sector meant some schools and teachers only existed on paper). Still, by 2020, according to the World Bank, women accounted for 19 per cent of the country's total paid workforce and the number of girls in secondary education had increased from seven per cent in 2004 to 40 per cent in 2020.

During the interviews, the conversations revolved around five main topics. First, we asked the interviewees what impact the rules and restrictions on women's lives had had on their families. The men's strongest responses revolved around the ban on education for older girls and how seeing their daughters in despair made them feel about the future, the government and their own sense of self. Even the men who said the rules had not affected their families much – their own wives and daughters

had little education, did not work outside the home and had always abided by the rules on hijab and mahrams – were deeply worried about how the restrictions would result in a society with no female doctors or other necessary professions.

A Kabul shopfront with faces of women obscured. According to a local shopkeeper, virtue and vice enforcers had instructed them to conceal women's faces.
Photo: Wakil Kohsar/AFP, 21 July 2024

Secondly, we asked the men how the rules had affected their own lives. They spoke about the inconveniences of needing to be a mahram and the loss of family income if their wives had previously worked. What came through most strongly, though, was a sense of deep vulnerability to possible harassment by enforcers employed by the Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice to police public morality.[2] Many of the men also expressed a sense of failure in their role as providers for the family in the face of economic hardship and described the strain

[2] The full name of the ministry, which the Emirate set up in September 2021, immediately after the takeover, is the Ministry of Propagation of Virtue, Prevention of Vice and Hearing of Complaints (*wazarat-e amr bil-maruf wa nahi an il-munkar wa sam-e shekayat*). It is commonly referred to as Amr bil-Maruf, or vice and virtue. See the ministry's website here and our basic translation of its most recent law 'The Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice Law, translated into English'.

of living in a house full of people who were all emotionally affected and almost always home. Some spoke of the improved security since the takeover as a positive that benefited everyone, even if men more than women. Still, for most, the benefits were not enough to weigh positively in the balance against the new stresses they were under.

Thirdly, we asked them to view these changes in the wider historical context of the various regimes they had seen in their lifetime. Their replies circled around themes of security, education, economy and the trade-off between freedom and control. Although many of the men condemned some of the problems of life under the Islamic Republic, including war and corruption, there was an overall strong sense of nostalgia for what had been lost – opportunities provided by education for all, a better economy and a sense of progress.

In 2020, women made up 29 per cent of the students in private and public higher education institutions (123,635 out of a total of 429,790 students), according to the National Statistics and Information Authority (NSIA). In 2022-23, while women were still allowed to go to university under the Emirate, the total number of students had significantly decreased, but slightly less so for women (89,456 out of a total of 280,895 students were women, or 32 per cent). In 2023-24, the total number of students had dropped to 192,389 "due to the exclusion of female students," with NSIA reporting just 673 female students in higher education (see NSIA's statistical yearbooks from 1399 to 1402 (2020-21 to 2023-24).

For background on the Emirate's abrupt decision in March 2022 to keep girls' secondary schools closed, despite having announced their reopening, see AAN's The Ban on Older Girls' Education. For a timeline of the closing of universities to women and a discussion of the Emirate's efforts to reshape Afghanistan's higher education system, see AAN's 2023 report The Emergent Taleban Defined University.

Fourthly, we asked what they thought about which men and women had been most affected by the changes. Their replies explored whether educated men and women were better off than their uneducated counterparts and whether life was now harder or easier for men and women in the villages than it was in the cities. Although they all seemed to agree that these were relevant distinctions, their own backgrounds and experiences show how blurred the lines between these categories have become.

Finally, we asked for their own views on the restrictions, what they thought was the thinking behind them and who they believed should be in charge of such matters. They had a lot to say about this, but one of the overarching themes, here and in the rest of the conversations, was just how important Islam and being a Muslim was for these men and how they felt they did not need a government to tell them what was required of them, their families and their children.

Given the need to carefully select interviewees who would be prepared to speak on these subjects, as well as the size of our sample, we do not claim that the report represents the full spectrum of opinions among men in Afghanistan. We are, however, confident that the opinions and experiences expressed here represent a wide variety of men and their families.

Quotes in this report have been lightly edited for clarity and flow and sometimes condensed to minimise repetition. To the extent possible, great care has been taken to convey the conversations as they took place and preserve the meaning of what was said.

CHAPTER I.
THE RESTRICTIONS ON WOMEN AND GIRLS THAT THE MEN MENTIONED THE MOST

When asked about the direct impact the Emirate's rules on women had had on their families, the restriction mentioned most frequently by the interviewees – by far – was the ban on girls' education above grade 6 (roughly age 12). This was discussed, with varying degrees of intensity, by every single interviewee, including those who did not have school-aged daughters or even daughters at all. Some of the men also described the loss of family income after female relatives lost their jobs because of Emirate policies, as well as changes to their own responsibilities due to the restrictions on women's mobility. Several discussed the rules on women's hijab, the need for women to be accompanied by a mahram, and the increased stresses and responsibilities this posed for both women and men.

There was considerable variation in whether the families of these men had already observed strict dress codes for women or whether the women of the family had been used to going out unaccompanied, or not. But whether they agreed with some of the IEA rules on women or not, the men, without exception, had significant concerns about their wider effect and were, without fail, dismayed by the education ban for girls above grade 6.

Many men described how the ban had affected them emotionally as they watched the distress of their daughters and other girls, considered their future and worried about what it meant for the country. None of the men were entirely comfortable with the regime's interference in decisions they thought should be in the realm of the family, although the extent to which this bothered them varied.

1.1 How the men framed the changes

There was a considerable difference in how the men responded to the opening question of the interview: "How have the IEA rules with regard to women affected your family?" A large portion immediately replied that their family had been

harmed, some of them extremely so, or more generally, that all families in the country had been badly affected by the restrictions. These included men living in both rural and more urban areas, educated and uneducated and from across ethnic groups and geographical locations, for example these men:

> *The rules have deeply affected my family. My two daughters are now deprived of education. One was studying at Kabul University and the other was in grade seven. I have houses in Kabul. I used to move my family from Maidan Wardak to Kabul every spring, and then in winter, when the school and university closed, we'd come back to our village.*
> - Landowner from Maidan Wardak

> *The biggest effect of the Emirate's rules is on my daughters, who are banned from going to school. One was in grade eight, the other in grade seven. They're waiting for the schools to reopen, just counting the days. My other two daughters graduated from midwifery school in the first year after the change of government, but they can't get jobs.*
> - Former NGO employee from Zabul

A boy walks past a beauty salon in the Shahr-e Naw area of Kabul on the day the Emirate had ordered beauty parlours to shut within a month.
Photo: Wakil Kohsar/AFP, 4 July 2023

> *We've been affected very grievously. The women in our family are almost completely restricted to the four walls of the house.*
> - Former government employee from Khost

> *These rules have affected almost every family in Afghanistan, particularly the ban on education for girls and on women working..*
> - Former restaurant owner from Herat

A smaller number, five of the seventeen men, started by saying that not much had changed for their families:

> *We live in the countryside. Our family was affected, but not as much as the urban people.*
> - Tailor from Helmand

> *Our family hasn't undergone many changes because we were already familiar with these rules. The culture and traditions of our region are almost the same as the rules.*
> - Farmer from Paktia

> *The one change from the previous times is the end of the war. We'd been badly affected by it, living in the middle of the crossfire. … There was no school for women in the past in our area, and there is none now.*
> - Farmer from Khost

Even those who said little had changed in their lives suggested that this was not the end of the conversation:

> *We've experienced no substantial changes in our lives. Honestly, things have changed in both directions, positively and negatively.*
> - Businessman from Kandahar

> *At the moment, my family's living in the village and we're happy with whatever is according to sharia. Except for some of the policies, but they've promised to resolve them soon.*
> - Pharmacist from Faryab

One of the men gave a succinct rundown of the main restrictions on women and girls:

> *Based on what the officials of the Emirate have said, people hoped the school gates would be opened for girls, and women would be allowed to go to work.*

However, after three years, I see the Emirate imposing new laws and restrictions on women, and people in general. After the schools, they closed the universities. After that, the women who worked in NGOs were banned from working. Women were banned from going to parks. Women were prohibited from working in business.[3] For example, hair salons that employed thousands of people, were closed. Women who used to work in foreign and domestic NGOs were banned from working. Based on the new restrictions on women, we can say they want to make women prisoners.
- Former government employee from Panjshir

1.2 The education ban, a most pressing concern

When asked about the effect of the Emirate's rules on women, most interviewees launched into what had upset them the most – the ban on education for girls above grade 6. They spoke about it in highly emotional terms:

Everyone knows that after the takeover, all girls' schools above grade six were closed, and this has affected everyone across the country. Everyone's sad about it. They ask why their children can't go to school. Girls should also benefit from knowledge, the same as boys. Of course, when girls can't reach their goals, it also saddens the men. My three daughters were university graduates. Now they're jobless. Why should it be this way?
- Engineer from Badakhshan

I want my children to be educated. I don't want them to be illiterate like me and work as farm workers on other people's land. Back in my day, schools were closed and the mujahedin told people not to study. Now they [the Emirate] are doing the exact same thing. … I have three sons and three daughters. During the Republic, two of my girls lived with my brother in Gardez so they could go to school. I wanted them to become doctors, but unfortunately the Emirate came and their dreams haven't come true. If they'd allowed it, my daughters would have finished their first year at university by now. I know what's going on in the hearts of the girls in this country. A wave of despair has swept over their lives.
- Farmer from Paktia

[3] There has been no blanket ban on women working or running businesses but there have been multiple restrictions and, as the interviewee indicated, the virtue and vice ministry did order the closure of hair and beauty salons from July 2023 based on a verbal decree of the Supreme Leader.

Most of the negative things our society has been going through over the last forty years are because of a lack of education, first for men and then for women. I'm very concerned and even depressed when I see my girls watch their brothers go to school and university. Most of the time, they cry quietly to themselves. I'm a very emotional man and I can't bear this. The one thing that troubles our family these days isn't the loss of my job, but the fact that my girls can't continue their education.

- Former government employee from Khost

Girls arrive at their high school in Kabul to find it shuttered, just hours after high schools were supposed to reopen for girls for the first time since the Emirate's takeover.
Photo: Ahmad Sahel Arman/AFP, 23 March 2022

Several of the men pointed to the wider consequences of the education ban:

While the world has progressed, we're still debating whether going to school is legal or illegal. … There's no female doctor in our village. When someone is sick, we have to walk three hours to the provincial centre. By the time we get there, the patient has either died or their condition has worsened. This is because of a lack of education.

- Farmer from Paktia

Some of the men began by saying the restrictions had changed little for their families, but then had plenty to say about older girls' schooling:

> *Our family was somewhat affected [by the new rules], although not as much as people in the cities. We live in a rural area and because there's no city nearby, our women didn't used to go shopping in the past either. Whatever the rules now say, they were already being observed in our family and our area. Even so, those rules still made the women of our family sad. Our daughters were studying in community-based schools where they were learning many things. When the Emirate stopped the classes, their mothers were inconsolable. At first, the girls weren't that upset, but they're getting sadder by the day as they begin to understand that they're being deprived of an education.*
> - Tailor from Helmand

> *In the countryside, people live ordinary lives and the rules haven't affected their families. Women wore hijab in the past, as they do now. They used to go out with a mahram, the same as now. Only the rule preventing girls from going to school has affected the families who want their daughters to get an education. Closing the doors of schools and universities was disastrous for us. It's a real tragedy.*
> - Farmer from Paktia

The interviewee who probably came closest to outright support for the IEA's policies was a university graduate from Faryab who did not have children of his own yet:

> *In my family, women weren't working; all of them were housewives and were always at home. My nieces were in grades six and eight. They can't go to school now, but they're not too old. They'll still have time to study when the schools reopen. … There aren't as many restrictions on women as some people say. They can go shopping and to relatives' houses without a mahram. They only need one when they're going from one province to another.[4] And they shouldn't be alone in a car with a man. I think the bans on women are where they're needed; I also don't allow [my] women to travel without a mahram.*
> - Pharmacist from Faryab

[4] The reality is more complex than this and appears to vary from place to place, as explained in section 1.4 below.

Although he downplayed the effects of the restrictions and professed support for most of them, he also opposed the education ban and described how he too had been moved by its effect on the women and girls he knew:

> *Of course, the ban on women's education affects us all. Instead of progressing, we're going backwards. This will lead to challenges because they need women to work in some places. I'm not in favour of banning girls' education. If the schools reopen, we'll all be delighted. We're waiting for it. … The girls are so sad because they're thirsty for education. I know some who were in the last semester of medicine and other fields, and they're devastated. We don't have any solutions and can't do anything to make them happy since both the government and private educational institutions are closed. Only the midwifery and nursing fields are still available for girls.[5] Before the schools closed, my nieces wanted to become engineers and doctors. Now, whenever I go home, they ask me when the school will reopen. I try to encourage them and make them hopeful.*
>
> - Pharmacist from Faryab

One or two interviewees were optimistic, or at least somewhat hopeful, that the issue would be resolved in time:

> *The Emirate [officials] may have seen these restrictions as right because they're ulema [Islamic scholars] and know the religion and traditions. It's true that most of their rules are grounded in the Quran and Hadith. I hope we'll at least get a madrasa for women in our village so they can at least learn the religious instructions and perform their religious duties correctly. But don't worry! I'm sure things will change for the good; the Emirate says they're working on a solution [for the schools] and that they'll then be allowed.*
>
> - Farmer from Khost

A scramble for alternatives

Many of the men described ways in which they were still trying to secure some kind of education for their daughters, even though mostly it was unsatisfactory. Some girls had changed their field of study to subjects that, when the interviews were conducted, were still open to women, like nursing and midwifery. The IEA, however,

[5] On 5 December 2024, the Emirate introduced new rules preventing women and girls from attending private medical institutions, effectively closing the last avenue for Afghan women to access higher education (see the United Nation's statement).

has since banned those subjects and closed private universities and even medical institutes to female students.

> *My oldest daughter was studying computer science at a private university. She'd hoped to become an international-level expert, but those hopes are gone. She then started midwifery in a private institute – it was something she didn't like, but she'd been depressed doing nothing, so she told me it was better to enrol even if she didn't like it. My two other girls would have graduated by now. Instead, they're at home from morning to afternoon and only go to an English course for an hour [a day].*
> - Former government employee from Khost

Two months after the Emirate came to power, officials ordered schools to reopen – except for girls' secondary schools. Amena, who could no longer attend school, gazes out of her house in Kabul.
Photo: Bulent Kilic/AFP, 14 October 2021

> *My sister couldn't continue her studies at the state university because of the rules. She had to switch to a private university and choose one of the subjects open to women. Even at the private university, the Taleban sometimes bother them. For example, last winter they took a few girls from the university because they didn't observe hijab properly. Now, girls can only study to become teachers, doctors, nurses or midwives, but they can't study at public universities because*

> *the Emirate won't let them participate in the entrance exam. So, they have to go to private universities. … Many girls can't pay the fees for medical faculties, so they can only study to be midwives.*
> - Farm worker from Ghazni

Other men said their daughters had switched from school to madrasa:

> *One of my daughters was in grade seven and the other in grade eight, but when the Emirate came, they were stopped from going to school. They now go to a private madrasa in our area, where a woman gives them lessons in religion. They'd already learned to read the Quran, so they didn't need to study it, but they study other religious topics. However, it's not enough to have religious lessons. They need to study modern sciences too, but they can't because of the restrictions.*
> - Former restaurant owner from Herat

> *There are madrasas for both girls and boys. Girls are allowed to go and they're going. My nieces, who were in grade seven, are now studying in madrasas and in private courses. But I hope the schools will reopen so they can continue their education.*
> - Pharmacist from Faryab

Several men said they had considered moving elsewhere to secure an education for their daughters – to a larger city or another country. Some, however, have had to tell their daughters this will probably not be possible:

> *The girls in our family are feeling very low and don't want to do anything. They've lost all hope of getting an education and becoming well-educated people in the community. As a father, the impact on me is very hard. But we've made some changes – my daughters are taking courses now. And we've decided to leave the country. This has given my daughters hope. They'd definitely have more [psychological] problems than they have now without that hope.*
> - Landowner from Maidan Wardak

> *For me, the future looks dark. It takes ages for people to change their attitudes. I've tried multiple times to leave the country only because of my daughters' future, but so far, I haven't succeeded. If I get the chance, I won't spend another night here. It's not easy, but I'll do it for my girls.*
> - Former government employee from Khost

My daughters had dreams that I don't think they can achieve under the Emirate. I feel so sorry for them. Sometimes, I can see them thinking deeply and worrying. Unfortunately, I can't do anything. We can't leave either. If we go to Iran, we'll need a lot of money to get visas and rent a house and who knows if the government of Iran will allow my daughters to study there either.
- Former restaurant owner from Herat

Female students stand in line to take the entrance exam at Kabul University. They were likely the final cohort; on 21 January 2023, the Emirate excluded women from these exams.
Photo: Wakil Kohsar/AFP, 13 October 2022

I'm worried about how to educate my girls. If this situation continues, where should I go? I don't have the means to go to another country so my children could study there and I could work. Emigration conditions have become very difficult. Let's see what God wants. I hope these days will change and not carry on as they are.
- Former government employee from Panjshir

For some girls, not being able to go to school predates the re-establishment of the Emirate. One man told us that in his community, many people were not in favour

of education in general. Still, he had recently bought books and notebooks so his daughters could learn the basics from a radio programme:

> *There were no schools for girls in our area in the past and there are none now. Two of my daughters are married. The other two are of marrying age and I want them to have some education so they can at least read a billboard and perform their prayers correctly. … Many people in our village don't want schools and are against them, so most of them are illiterate. My two daughters have now started learning from educational radio programmes. I bought them notebooks and books. They follow it closely and have almost learned to read and write.*
> - Farmer from Khost

1.3 Restrictions on women working; loss of jobs, loss of income

Several of interviewees mentioned, often in the same sentence as the ban on higher education for girls, the restrictions on women working, in particular for the government and with NGOs, as evidence of how the Emirate wants to confine women and girls to the home. This was the case for the former government employee from Panjshir, whose own female family members did not work, nor had they done so in the past:

> *The Islamic Emirate has imposed restrictions on women, including limits on work, education, and social activities. Girls have been banned from education. Women who worked for the government have been banned since the beginning. Girls have been banned from schools, which has harmed many families. Women are confined to their homes like prisoners. They're deprived of all their social rights. Most women are depressed now.*
> - Former government employee from Panjshir

Other men had been directly affected by the restrictions on women working and their families were struggling economically after their wives or other women in the family had lost their jobs. In most cases, this has been accompanied by other losses of income:

> *My wife was a teacher in one of the local schools sponsored by the Swedish Committee [SCA]. When the Emirate made SCA stop its activities, those schools closed and our family lost a source of income. That job was good for my wife since she's educated. Now, she's not happy having to stay at home all day. I don't have a job any more either. After the Emirate came [back] to power, the number*

> *of students and classes [at the university] decreased and so did my income; it wasn't even enough for our personal expenses. Now I work in the village on the land with my brothers.*
> - Former university lecturer from Bamyan

> *Apart from the Emirate's rules concerning women, the biggest change for our family has been economic. My wife was a teacher at a secondary school, which is now closed due to the restrictions. She's still receiving her salary, but you know they recently reduced the salaries of teachers who are staying at home.[6] It's been a blow to our [household] economy. I also lost my restaurant in a legal dispute. Fortunately, I have a brother in Europe. Because our mother's here with me, he sometimes sends us some money. We survive on that.*
> - Former restaurant owner from Herat

For one man the situation had become so dire that he decided to leave the country in search of work, leaving behind his family:

> *I was working in a government office when the Republic fell. When I returned to work, there was a letter on my desk saying I'd been fired and someone else had been employed in my place. My wife worked in an office that was for women only, there were no men, but she also lost her job and their office was abolished. … The economic situation of our family became very weak and I decided I had to go abroad. It's been a year and a half since I came to the UAE. I work here now and send money home.*
> - Former government employee from Paktia

Several of the men who came from families and areas where women generally do not work said they worried that families without menfolk would be hit particularly hard, as they had no breadwinner or legal guardian:

> *Around us, there are families who don't have any men because they've been killed or have emigrated. Those families don't have a mahram and face problems. Some families have women who are the breadwinners, but they face economic problems because they lack a mahram. If they want to go to Kabul, they must have a mahram to go with them. … The life and economic status of women who have someone to support them or have family members abroad who send them money is better. But the lives of women who bear the [financial]*

[6] For details and background on the pay cut for women still on the government's payroll, which came into effect in summer 2024, see AAN's 'A Pay Cut for Afghan Women Working in the Public Sector'.

> *responsibility for their family and have no supporter or no man, such as widows with orphans, they're ruined.*
> - Former government employee from Panjshir

> *I've heard that women's [civil service] salaries have decreased to 5,000 Afs [USD 65 per month]. What can they do with 5,000 Afs? Many women are breadwinners because they don't have a male guardian, or they're widows. This cut in the salaries means women might as well not work at all. These are negative policies. Everybody needs to work and likes to have an income so their lives can get better.*
> - Pharmacist from Faryab

Others described the restrictions on women working (often understood to be total, or spoken about as if they were total) as something that would upset both the country's economic balance and individual households:

> *By removing half of the society's workforce, the Emirate is also harming the country's economy. The elimination and disregard for them upsets the social balance of labour. In addition to this harm, the income and quality of life of many families has declined and women have become a consuming force only.*
> - Farmer from Paktia

However, it was not just the economic fall-out that concerned the interviewees. As with the ban on education, interviewees reported that the limitations on women working also affected how they felt about life in general:

> *My three daughters are university graduates. Two of them had jobs, but they've lost them. Why should it be this way? It's caused irreparable damage and an economic and social shock. It's so difficult when someone studies hard and gets a job, only to lose it. All families are suffering because their women have lost their jobs and can't study any more. It doesn't have to be like this, but it is and we have to bear all these problems and burdens.*
> - Engineer from Badakhshan

Several men wondered what the lack of education and work opportunities for women would mean in terms of services: in the absence of female doctors and civil servants, would women be seen by men, or not at all?

> *If we say women should be dealt with only by women, whether in health, government or at checkpoints, then we need female education and work to be allowed. Now, a woman's age is determined by a male employee [when getting*

an ID card]. Female patients go to male doctors for problems that only a female doctor should treat. Why? Because we don't have enough female professionals and medical staff. They [the IEA] say they ban education and work so women can be safe from immorality. Then they force them to go to non-mahram doctors who treat them and to male government employees who determine their age [by seeing their faces].
- Former government employee from Khost

Midwifery students in a classroom at the Community Midwifery Education School in Maidan Shahr, Wardak province. The Emirate banned women from attending private medical institutions on 3 December 2024. Photo: Bulent Kilic/AFP, 13 October 2021

Allowing women to have an education is a necessity these days. Things have changed. In the past, people would go to the 'dam' [village barber] if they had a toothache, instead of a doctor.[7] *Nowadays, people go to the doctor and they don't just get their teeth pulled; instead, they fill their teeth and perform many cures to fix them. But I can't take my wife to a male doctor. So, they should at*

[7] A *dam*, or village barber, is also responsible for cooking in communal ceremonies such as weddings and, traditionally, functioned as a local doctor. Dentists in Afghanistan first train as medical doctors.

> *least allow education [for women] in the health sector. … In our area, women don't work. I think it's better for women to be at home, rather than sit with men in offices. But I'm in favour of women working as doctors, separately [from men].*
> - Farmer from Khost

> *This is already a huge problem and it will only get worse. It'd be a great shame if a woman had to visit a male doctor while giving birth, but this is imminent if women aren't allowed to get an education.*
> - Businessman from Kandahar

Not all the interviewees were in favour of women working in every sector or having any kind of job they chose, but all of them, regardless of their other views on women working outside the home, believed there were occupations that needed educated women, even if only to make sure that their own wives and daughters would not need to be treated by male doctors or seen by male officials.

1.4 Leaving the house: mahrams and recreation

Most of the men mentioned the IEA's restrictions and orders on clothing and the obligation for women to be accompanied by a close male relative, or mahram, when venturing from the home. Whether an unaccompanied woman should leave the house at all or can travel a certain distance without a mahram is not clear from either Emirate rules, or the practice of the enforcers of the Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and the Preventing of Vice (often shortened to virtue and vice or Amr bil Maruf). It appears to vary from place to place, but even where there is a more relaxed attitude from society and the enforcers, there is always the danger for women of being challenged.[8]

As for the hijab, in much of the Arab and wider Muslim world, this term refers to a woman covering her head, that is, wearing a headscarf. In Afghanistan, however,

[8] The recently released law of the virtue and vice ministry is silent on the matter. The ministry has, however, on various occasions clarified that, according to them, women need to at least be accompanied by a mahram for long-distance travel of more than 45 miles or 72 kilometres. This was first stated in December 2021 (see here) and recently reiterated by acting deputy minister Mawlawi Muhammad Faqir Muhammadi, in an interview with BBC Pashto on 3 October 2024. He explained that a woman needed to be accompanied by a mahram since "accidents might occur or a woman might become ill or face other problems." It is clear from reports on the ground, however, that enforcers often demand that women be accompanied by a mahram on even short trips.

'hijab' refers to clothing that covers the head and body more fully and often also the face. Thus, wearing a long Iranian-style *manteau* (tunic) and headscarf, or shalwar kameez *(piran wa tomban* or *punjabi)* and headscarf would be considered by more conservative Afghans, including the Taleban, as *bi-hijab*, meaning without hijab. Moreover, this is a country where headscarves were already worn, so a point of contention is whether women need also to cover their faces, either entirely or with only their eyes showing (see also our reporting here).

Among our interviewees, there was an obvious difference between men from families for whom strict rules on hijab and mahrams had already been the daily practice, either out of conviction or because of where they lived, and those for whom it is new. As seen above, some interviewees from more conservative areas commented on how these rules on clothing and restrictions on woman being outside by herself had, in practice, already been in effect:

> *Our people have our own [type of] hijab and wear it regardless of what the Emirate says. Our women generally don't go outside the village without a man [mahram], regardless of the Emirate. Not wearing proper clothes or going to the bazaar alone isn't something that happens in our area. This has been the practice for centuries. To be honest, we only hear on the radio that they're restricting women; we've not faced these restrictions and we hardly see Amr bil Maruf, only when some young men have done something wrong.*
> - Farmer from Khost

Another interviewee also started by saying that nothing had changed because women never used to go out without a mahram anyway. But then he noted that some things that used to be possible were no longer permissible, for instance, a group of women going to the city or the hospital without a man:

> *We haven't organised anything special to accommodate the bans. Paktia is a traditional society where women wore hijab and didn't go out without a mahram even before the Emirate. Women in Paktia aren't as free as women in the cities, but at least they could go [in a group] to the city or to clinics without men. Now that's not allowed. When a woman from the family gets sick and has to go to the hospital, a mahram must go with them. They're not allowed to enter without one.*
> - Former government employee from Paktia

Others described how the new rules meant that the women in the family had become reluctant to leave the house, even if it was permissible, because they could now be bothered for doing something wrong:

> *The women don't go to the market, for example, even though they know the Emirate officials aren't very serious [in enforcing the rules]. ... They say going to the market isn't worth the risk that one of the officials might say something to them. So, when they need something for themselves or the family, I have to go and bring it for them. Whether or not the Taleban allow them to go out, they prefer to stay home now.*
> - Former NGO employee from Zabul

In families where women and girls had been used to going out, the change has been profound. Not only have many of them lost their main reasons for leaving the home – with schools and universities closed and often, jobs lost – there were now restrictions on where they could go, how they should behave and dress, and that they should be accompanied by a man. As a result, many now spend most of their time at home. Several men described the emotional and psychological toll this was taking on their wives and daughters:

> *People behave differently towards each other now. Women and girls who used to work and study, didn't use to spend so much time at home. Now they're anxious and sometimes argue with their brothers, mothers and fathers.*
> - Former university lecturer from Bamyan

A recurring theme in the interviews was that women are no longer allowed to exercise, go to parks and visit other recreational places and this had exacerbated the impact of other restrictions, including by making it difficult to go out as a family and have a good time:[9]

> *My daughters spend their day watching TV and using their mobile phones. The restrictions on visiting picnic places have made it worse. In the past, we could go to places like Qargha Lake and Zazai Park [an amusement park, near Kabul] every two weeks, but now, you can't go anywhere. A few months ago, I had an argument with Amr bil Maruf at the entrance gate of Qargha because they*

[9] For more details on the tensions and obstacles surrounding going on a picnic with the family, see 'The Daily Hustle: Going on a picnic with your family, if you're a girl'. See also AAN's 2023 report 'What Do Young Women Do: A glimpse into everyday life after the bans'.

wouldn't allow me in with my family. We were turned back. Women have become prisoners in their own homes. I feel so sorry for them.
- Former government employee from Khost

My daughters wanted to visit Qargha Lake and Paghman [near Kabul] as well as parks in other provinces, but now they can't. I haven't taken them to these places because we've heard about the restrictions for women through the media and I don't think it's necessary to stress myself and the women in my family by taking them places only to find out we're not allowed to visit them.
- Engineer from Badakhshan

Families ride on paddle boats at Band-e Amir, Bamyan province. The Emirate announced a ban on women going to the lakes on 26 August 2023.
Photo: Bulent Kilic/AFP, 4 October 2021

Women can no longer go to parks or other recreational places. They don't have the same interest and eagerness to do things as they used to. They can't do any of the things they could before. They have to just spend their time at home. … Women are in despair and want to leave the country whenever possible.
- Civil society activist from Kandahar

> *In the past, when my family was still here [his wife and children are now in Iran], I could take them to parks and other places with my sisters' families. Now my sisters can't go alone to parks or the mountains to enjoy nature. I could take them, but it's difficult. We don't have the peace of mind we used to have.*
> - Lawyer from Balkh

> *One of my brothers has a small shop near Band-e Amir [in Bamyan province], which is a national park. Many people, including women, used to travel there from other provinces such as Herat and Kabul, but now Amr bil Maruf doesn't let them and tells men they shouldn't bring their families.[10] These rules and restrictions make not only women but also men very sad.*
> - Former university lecturer from Bamyan

In some areas of the country, however, it appeared that families were still allowed to go out together:

> *Generally, a mahram always accompanies women in this province wherever they go. In the past, when families went to a recreation area, they went together. In Paktia, women can still go to recreation areas with their families and to the city. No one has stopped them yet.*
> - Former government employee from Paktia

1.5 Rules on hijab

The rules on the hijab were, again, described by some of the men as something their family had always abided by:

> *Hijab and mahram aren't just something the Emirate says, people already know about them because of what Islam says. Of course, hijab is something that people also used to observe during the Republic when they went to work, school, or university. Very few people were so liberal that they wore clothes that weren't according to our culture, and over time, even these people have changed and reformed themselves.*
> - Former government employee from Panjshir

[10] Many consider the waters of Band-e Amir to have *barakat* (blessings) for those immersing themselves, especially women who are having trouble getting pregnant or carrying a baby. It was therefore a place where women could legitimately go, which contributed to it being a family-friendly tourist destination, compared to many other attractions which have always been largely men-only. In August 2023, the Emirate banned women from visiting the lakes (see BBC reporting).

However, many of the men were troubled by the fact that their daughters and female relatives could now be harassed for how they dressed:

> *One issue is hijab. Those who don't observe it are disturbed by Amr bil Maruf. We have to tell our women to observe [strict] hijab when they go out, so they won't be harassed and insulted by Amr bil Maruf. We're compromising; all the people in Afghanistan are compromising.*
> - Engineer from Badakhshan

A man and his sons ride a motorbike past a billboard instructing women to wear the Emirate's decreed style of hijab, in Kandahar.
Photo: Javed Tanveer/AFP, 16 June 2022

There were indications that because of this, even in families where women already keenly observed hijab, they were more careful than ever – although the men did not provide much detail about what that looked like exactly:

> *Most families changed their lifestyle and appearance, which is what the Emirate wanted. For example, I also told my [female] family members not to leave the house unnecessarily, and if they do, then someone must go with them. I also told them to change how they dressed, even though our family already knew*

about these issues, but I emphasised it even more so that, God forbid, they wouldn't face any problems.
- Former government employee from Panjshir

Of course, the type of hijab is related to the family. Some families use veils and others use burqas. Recently, many girls have been using Arabic hijab [black gowns and headscarves, which may be worn with niqab or a full-face veil].
- Farmer from Paktia

Some of the interviewees disapproved of what they thought were lapses in hijab and other conservative norms under the Republic. At the same time, they made it clear it was not all-or-nothing and that stricter rules on what women wear should not close off the possibility of them working or getting an education:

The Republic was the only regime that did better in providing women with education and work opportunities. As a Muslim, I don't deny there were problems with things such as hijab, but to be fair, the Republic did a lot of good things too and helped give women a place and value in society.
- Former government employee from Khost

The Emirate isn't the only Islamic government. There are some 70 Islamic countries that have prosperous and free societies. But the Taleban are making the rules up themselves. It's true that there's such a thing as hijab, but hijab doesn't mean sitting at home.
- Engineer from Badakhshan

One of the men thought that women had brought the restrictions on themselves by not observing proper hijab and that if they complied, the restrictions would be relaxed:

I think most of these restrictions are because of the women themselves. They don't wear proper clothes and have many other problems. I'm not saying that all of them are doing it, but a number of them are, and it's because of them that the rest of the women are prevented from going to school and work. If women kept the hijab and stayed away from immoral actions, I'm sure they'd not be banned [from work and school].
- Businessman from Kandahar

Other men, also from families who were already observing strict hijab in the past, disagreed with this stance, and implied that the Emirate's stated reasons for closing

the schools and universities – that suitable conditions had not yet been met or that women had not observed the hijab and non-mixing rules properly – were not the real reasons:

> *The Emirate's officials always say that [girls'] schools have been closed 'until further notice', but for how long? Why is there no end to this further notice? Everything was already prepared, especially in the cities: girls' schools were separate from boys' schools and most teachers were women. One [remaining] issue is the hijab, but they [the government] can choose it [the style] in a very short time and just tell people: Send your daughters to school with this type of hijab. It's very simple and every family will be ready to do it.*
> - Farmer from Paktia

> *Regarding hijab, it's true that it's God's command and most Afghans are Muslim and observe it. This isn't something to discuss much. They [the Emirate] can just make a short statement and tell the people about hijab and its type. But unfortunately, they aren't ready to allow women to leave the house to work, study, or for recreation.*
> - Former government employee from Panjshir

Finally, one man expressed concern about the 'bundling up' of all rules on women and girls: just because he might be comfortable with some restrictions did not mean he didn't oppose those that were most disruptive:

> *It's not that we are against the hijab or that we want the improper environment seen in foreign countries or males and females mixing, but we want some of the basic human rights for women. When you prevent education for the women who become the mothers of tomorrow, the next generation will grow up in darkness.*
> - Former government employee from Khost

1.6 Rules on inheritance

Government officials often assert that, rather than restricting women's rights, the Emirate is actually protecting and promoting them.[11] They point to the Supreme Leader's 2021 decree that, among other things, banned the practice of *baad* (giving

[11] For more on how the Emirate in general, and the Virtue and Vice Ministry in particular, sees itself as a protector of women's rights, see AAN's report earlier this year '[How the Emirate Wants to be Perceived: A closer look at the accountability programme]', pp 48-60.

girls in marriage to another family to resolve a blood feud), enshrined a woman's right to inheritance and decreed that marriage required a woman's consent.[12] Several men referred to these rights positively, although some were doubtful about their actual implementation:

> *Some of their rules are good, and society benefits from them, such as the law on inheritance for women. Unfortunately, in Afghanistan, more than 50 per cent of the people don't give their sisters and daughters their inheritance rights, particularly in the southern provinces. They don't consider the inheritance rights of their daughters and sisters at all, while Islam has given this right to women.*
> - Farmer from Paktia

> *The women in my family and I both see all these things as negative for women, except the right of inheritance for women, that's good. But this right is just words. People who didn't give this right [to women in their own families] in the past aren't complying with the rule now.*
> - Former NGO employee from Zabul

> *I don't see anything positive about the Emirate's rules. All women's rights have been taken away. They have one rule that's good for women, the one that says women's inheritance rights should be given to them. Unfortunately, in our society, most people consider inheritance only for men. I'm a witness to this. In our region, I've never seen a father or brother give his sister or daughter the right to inherit. Most mullahs don't give the girls their inheritance rights either. This law of the Emirate is positive and good, but if they don't follow it, the public won't either.*
> - Former government employee from Paktia

[12] Decree 83, dated 2 December 2021. See AAN's translation of 'Decrees, orders and Instructions of Taleban supreme leader Mullah Hibatullah Akhundzada' (as published in the Official Gazette up to 22 May 2023).

CHAPTER II.
HOW THE RESTRICTIONS AFFECTED MEN, WOMEN AND FAMILIES

When the interviewees explored how the restrictions on women had affected families and family relations, as well as the interviewees' own lives, several key themes emerged. These included practical changes in the lives of the men due to the rules, the way the restrictions and their consequences made the men feel and the impact the restrictions on women had on wider relations. Many of the men also referred to the interplay between the restrictions and other major changes and disruptions in their life that had taken place since August 2021, in particular, the collapse of the economy which had had catastrophic consequences for some interviewees, and improvements in security with the end of the conflict.

2.1 How the men themselves were affected: practical changes and emotional strain

In this section, men responded to questions about how the new rules concerning women and girls had affected their own lives. They spoke about the practical consequences and emotional strain the rules had brought about within families, but also about other post-takeover changes – economic hardship or the end of the conflict. Sometimes, the impact of these changes was compared to the impact of the rules. In other instances, however, interviewees answered questions about how the restrictions on women's lives had affected them by speaking instead about their household economy or family's security. A similar pattern will be seen in chapter 4 when we asked men to compare life for men and women under different regimes and historical periods; the topic was often eclipsed by other concerns.

Beginning with the practical consequences for men because of the new rules, several interviewees described how their lives had become more complicated now women needed a mahram when they go out. Others described the stress of worrying about the safety and well-being of female family members:

> *My wife lost her job as a teacher, which has really upset her. And we lost a source of income, which is really bad. Life has become harder because women must stay in the house and if they need to go far from home, we have to go with them. One of the men in our family must always be available for such a situation.*
> - Former university lecturer from Bamyan

> *One of the changes we've made [in our household] is that we now accompany our women when they leave the house. The Emirate's rules require women to have a mahram with them when they go out. This means our women can't leave the house unaccompanied because they're afraid that the soldiers may bother them. The rules are very strict and give the Emirate more authority over women than their own families have.*
> - Civil society activist from Kandahar

Here too, many men spoke about the stress and emotional turmoil they feel when seeing the effect of the restrictions on their families, particularly their daughters:

> *My life has become harder. The main difficulty in my life is that I can't educate my daughters. Seeing them not going to school, or the older ones not being allowed to work, makes the whole family unhappy.*
> - Former NGO employee from Zabul

> *The laws haven't had much effect on men because, so far, every type of law the Taleban imposed has been against women. But fathers who wanted their girls to be educated and dreamed of seeing their children in higher positions one day have also been hurt. The restriction that keeps girls from going to school has had the greatest impact on my life.*
> - Former government employee from Paktia

The pressure of being monitored

Several men described the strain of being monitored and possibly called out or punished for perceived violations when going out with their families or female relatives, and the feelings of vulnerability and anger that brings. It was not just the men whose wives and daughters had been used to going out unaccompanied who said they felt the change. The men whose female relatives had already rarely left the home and who had always accompanied them when they did were also bothered by the threat of confrontation and questioning:

> *When you go somewhere with your family, for example to another province or the bazaar, the Taleban watch you obsessively, as if you're committing a major sin. When you pass through checkpoints with a female family member in the car, they ask who she is and where you're taking her. They won't let you have family picnics, which is crucial for families living in the city where there's no open place to take a clean breath. Sometimes they comment on the hijab of your family, which is really disturbing. This is how our lives have become with these people.*
> - Former government employee from Khost

> *One thing that bothers me a lot is their unnecessary suspicions. It's good, but not always. For example, when you're driving with a woman, the people at the checkpoint will ask you to prove who she is. If she's your sister, you can show your ID cards [proving you have the same father], except many women in Kandahar don't have an ID card. But if she's your wife, how should you prove that? No one has their nikah khat [marriage certificate] with them all the time. … They separate you and ask questions, which in itself is a problem because how can a non-mahram speak to a woman? This has not happened to me yet, but some of my friends have faced it and it's made them angry.*
> - Businessman from Kandahar

The anxiety about women family members being harassed or questioned, and the potential punishment of men, has led to an increased policing of women's behaviour:

> *The announcement that male relatives would be held accountable for any violation of these restrictions by the women and girls in their family caused many men to curb the women for fear of being punished. I also told the girls and women in my family to observe hijab [more strictly]. I send my son with my daughter to the gate of the madrasa where she goes for religious education, even though it's near our home, to make sure no one says anything [to her].*
> - Former government employee from Panjshir

The concern was made worse by instances of women actually getting into trouble and a sense of randomness over who is targeted:

> *Women don't feel safe now. I saw with my own eyes how the Taleban took a few girls away in a police car in an area near Ghazni city, even though they were wearing proper hijab.*
> - Farm worker from Ghazni

Virtue and vice enforcers inspect vehicles at a checkpoint on the outskirts of Herat.
Photo by Mohsen Karimi/AFP, 4 October 2024

The rules on men and women not being able to travel together also made working more complicated, according to the lawyer from Balkh. Other than that, he had also observed how some families had become more conservative to forestall any trouble (he himself had moved his family to Iran):

> *Some government people interfere in my business as a lawyer. For example, we can't drive with our female colleagues in a car anywhere, even to drop them off at home [after work]. There are women who can't even go out with their husbands to parks because they might be stopped and questioned until it's clear they're married. From what I've seen, Mazar-e Sharif is better than Kabul, but even here, some people like us are more careful now and think it's better to keep women at home rather than being asked everywhere about their relationship. They don't take women out for recreation so the Taleban won't object to them or insult them and use bad words [when speaking to them]. This is the situation now.*
> - Lawyer from Balkh

He appeared to link women's sense of confinement and men's fear of violence from officials as two sides of the same coin:

> *Women feel like they're in chains and have been imprisoned in their own homes. They're hopeless and think they've lost all their freedoms. They feel like society and the government don't value them. But men are also afraid of violence by the Emirate and of the ignorance of [its officials of] human rights. Men don't feel like this government belongs to them and is taking care of them either. The Emirate has done some good things as well, but not so much that people can trust them. It claims to behave well with people, but generally, both men and women aren't happy about things.*
> - Lawyer from Balkh

One interviewee, when speaking about the fear of being questioned, brought up rules that mainly affected men – possibly because he comes from a village where women already abided by conservative social customs (he had managed to secure an education for his daughters, up until the Emirate came to power, by sending them to stay with his brother in the city):

> *For example, the rules on the prevention of vice, such as trimming the beard or listening to music at wedding parties, have had harmful effects. People live in fear. They're afraid of being insulted and humiliated by Emirate officials, who react without asking questions first and really intimidate people. They do what they want and no one can ask them why they interfere in people's personal lives.*
> - Farmer from Paktia

2.2 Affected by a worsened economic situation

A strong theme in many of the interviews was the worry men felt because of their precarious economic situation. In some cases, this was directly related to, or exacerbated by the fact that women in their families had lost their jobs or could no longer contribute to the household's income. But whether this was the case or not, several men made the point that, although they suffered because of various IEA restrictions on women, this just added to their main problem: the fact that they struggled to provide for their families. Several men described feelings of powerlessness when they compared what their family wanted or needed and what they were able to provide:

The biggest changes in my own life are the ban on women's education and my economic situation, which has gotten much weaker than it was under the Republic. … I used to provide for my daughters so they could study. Now the schools are closed and they can't go. One hasn't been to school for almost two years, the other just finished sixth grade and was told not to come back. They feel really bad and are asking me to send them to Herat city so they can study at a [private] educational centre, but I don't have the financial means. … I tell them I can't rent a house there and pay for their education. They know this too. They know that we, the men in the family, can do nothing for them.
- Schoolteacher from Ghor

I don't have the financial means to send my daughters to Pakistan or Iran to continue their education and achieve their dreams. It's every father's dream for his children to have higher education. Now these dreams have been ruined.
- Former government employee from Paktia

Some, when asked about restrictions on women's lives, responded by speaking mainly about their own economic worries:

The fact that women have lost their jobs has damaged the family's economy. Teachers [including his wife] are still receiving their salaries but we've heard the amount will decrease. Men are also weary because there's no work. The country's facing an economic recession, which affects the men of the family most. I'm tired of this situation too.
- Civil society activist from Kandahar

Girls and women have been affected more than anybody else, but men have been affected too. Now they [the men] are the only ones [in the family] working and earning a living and they can't manage all the expenses because things are expensive and there's not enough work. When I sit and talk with the men in our area, they all seem unhappy.
- Farm worker from Ghazni

The women in my family didn't work during the Republic either. It was our responsibility to provide nafaqa [household expenses] for them. My brother and I supported our family, but now we're both jobless. … Men suffer a lot because there's no work and they have to cover the family's expenses in any way possible, either by borrowing money or travelling to Iran or elsewhere to find

> *work. There's a high mental pressure on men. They face a lot of anxiety now.*
> - Former government employee from Panjshir

Later in the interview, he made it even more personal:

> *My life changed because I lost my job, not because of the rules. Not only me, but many people, particularly military people, lost their jobs and their lives have been disrupted. Men and women are struggling with psychological problems. … I feel like a beggar because I had to sell my car, laptop and things from my house to provide for my family. All our problems are because of the poor economy. Maybe it's different in other families, but in our family our trouble is because of the poor economy.*
> - Former government employee from Panjshir

Others described the pressures of heavy rain, floods, the Emirate's collection of *ushr* and *zakat*,[13] and the ban on poppy cultivation as depressing their income and – sometimes disastrously – adding to the strain of life:

> *People are facing mental problems, not [just] because of the laws of the Emirate but because of the bad economic situation, especially in the countryside. It was good under the Republic, many people had jobs, but now there's nothing. And this year, the floods and untimely rain have really devastated the people who depend on income from their land. … The market isn't suitable for farm products and the Emirate forcefully demands ushr and zakat. The government should help people when they've been harmed, but instead they collect [money] from them.*
> - Farmer from Paktia

> *Before the bans [were introduced] on many things, there were jobs available for men. They were working either in their own fields or other people's fields, but now the men of our household can't find any work, especially since poppy cultivation was banned.*
> - Tailor from Helmand

For others, the economic situation has meant living apart from their families:

[13] In most Muslim countries, ushr, a tithe on the harvest, and zakat – in Afghanistan, its equivalent on increases in livestock – are considered to be alms. They are an obligation on believers who can afford them, with money or goods in kind given to the poor and other particular groups. The Emirate introduced them as new taxes. For more on this, see AAN's 2022 report, 'Taxing the Afghan Nation: What the Taleban's pursuit of domestic revenues means for citizens, the economy and the state'.

I sent my wife and daughters to Iran. … I know the situation for Afghans in Iran is not that good, but if we think it's bad in Iran, it's worse here in Afghanistan, particularly for women and girls. … It makes life difficult for me. I feel lonely, but I can't join them. I've gone through a lot of trouble studying to become a lawyer. If I go to Iran to live with my family, I'd have to take on menial labour, which is beyond my [physical] ability.
- Lawyer from Balkh

When I lost my job, I tried to find a new job but couldn't. Finally, I decided to go abroad. Before coming to the UAE, I moved my family from Gardez to my ancestral village because I couldn't pay the rent after I lost my job. In rural areas, the cost of living isn't as high as in the cities. … I used to be in my own country with my family and working for my homeland with a passion. Now, I work as a labourer in a foreign land.
- Former government employee from Paktia

2.3 Impact on relations within the immediate family

When discussing their relations within the immediate family, many of the men spoke about how the stresses stemming from the restrictions, again, coupled with economic hardship, had led to short tempers and strained relations. With the rules on hijab and mahrams and the threat of random questioning by Amr bil Maruf enforcers keeping many women at home, and many men spending more time in the house due to unemployment, families have been forced to spend much more time together, often in cramped quarters. That can lead to frustration, frayed tempers and arguments.

Frayed tempers and arguments

My mother feels bad for my sister. She says, 'We've supported her in achieving her dreams and ambitions since she was a child, but the new rules ban them.' My sister says she feels hopeless and doesn't have any motivation. I feel sad for her. … Obviously, people's behaviour has changed because of these rules, not only my sister, but also other girls who wanted to go to university. They easily get angry and irritated. Sometimes, they shout. They say they can't stay at home and only do housework. They need to do other things too, but under this government, they can't.
- Farm worker from Ghazni

A family reads in their home in Kabul. The eldest daughter, Marwa, was just a few months away from becoming the first woman in her family to attend university when the doors were closed to girls.
Photo: Ahmad Sahel Arman/AFP, 23 December 2022

The rules have also affected how we treat each other. We've been forced to put all our plans on hold, they're all impossible now. Our feelings have changed. We're easily irritated. We're sensitive. Everyone is always crowded in at home and that causes bad behaviour. We've had to lock our plans away. They're now impossible to pursue.
- Landowner from Maidan Wardak

My relationship with my family is still good, but of course there's a change. Now that I'm in the village, working on the farm, my behaviour isn't as good as it used to be. I'm not living among educated people and the behaviour of local people isn't that good. My wife's behaviour has also changed since she's had to stay at home all day. She worries and thinks a lot about her future and that of our children. Sometimes, she loses patience. She gets angry quickly.
- Former university lecturer from Bamyan

For us, it wasn't the rules, but my long joblessness, that was the problem. Being at home 24 hours a day devalues the relationship between family members,

> *especially between husband and wife. If you're home all day long, you have to engage in every family issue, and that sometimes damages relations.*
> - Former NGO employee from Zabul

> *Unemployment and poverty have increased tensions and even [caused] violence in the family, as well as mental problems, even for myself and my wife. Sometimes my wife or children want something from me, when I don't have the money and can't fulfil their desire. Then I certainly get agitated. For example, my wife asked me two or three times for something that was beyond my ability to provide and we quarrelled. Even though my wife is educated too, sometimes there's fighting between us.*
> - Former government employee from Panjshir

It was unclear whether that last interviewee was referring to actual physical violence or heated arguments. None of the interviewees spoke about domestic violence outright, but instances of it are likely to have gone up. This businessman from Kandahar did, however, briefly acknowledge that it exists:

> *People's lives are different everywhere. Some people have calmer lives and have no inter-family arguments or disrespect. Others just see women as their nokar [servant] and beat them.*
> - Businessman from Kandahar

Struggling with depression

Several of the men we interviewed described how all the women in the family, from the old to the young, were affected by depression:

> *The women in my family are very downcast. They feel like the Emirate is their enemy and is just trying to separate women from any kind of activity that's related to life itself. One of my daughters is very close to suffering a psychological illness. The other women in our family are also not feeling well.*
> - Former NGO employee from Zabul

> *Women are frustrated and sad that they can't move freely. Their families and their children are worried about them for this reason. The Emirate's rules have certainly caused depression in women. Our family members and the families around us are no exception. Even old women have been psychologically affected. They're worried about the girls and the [younger] women in their family.*
> - Lawyer from Balkh

Sometimes, my daughters fight with their brothers because they're jealous that the boys can go to school. My sons are young. They don't know how deep and disturbing this problem is, so they don't care much and sometimes make fun of their sisters.
- Former government employee from Khost

The art of keeping your composure

A few men said their relationships with the family and wider community had not changed and were still good. But it was clear from the way they phrased their replies that this was despite their families and they themselves feeling the strain acutely:

There's been no change in my relationship with my family. I don't behave badly with the women in my family just because they can't study. In the past, my daughters were busy with school and studying, now they're at home. But their behaviour hasn't changed towards me either. They respect me as they did before.
- Schoolteacher from Ghor

I used to go to work at 6 in the morning and return home at 5 in the afternoon, but now I don't go to work. I used to sometimes go away for two or three days. Now I'm at home 24 hours a day. There's been no change in my relationship with my family, but we will all be affected. They'll remain illiterate now and won't have the rights and privileges they had in the past or that people have in other societies. But we love our children and whatever I do, I do for them.
- Engineer from Badakhshan

My relationship with my family and other people hasn't changed. I'm a very patient person and I have a high level of tolerance. But I hope to God that he helps us get through these days, and soon.
- Former restaurant owner from Herat

2.4 Impact on the social fabric of community and extended family

In Afghanistan, social visits and events where women meet, such as weddings, funeral and mourning ceremonies, as well as visits to relatives and religious places, are important for the social fabric of communities and connections between families. Without elaborating in detail, several of the interviewees indicated that

social relations within the wider family and community had suffered because of the new rules, particularly those that restrict women from leaving the house. They pointed to the reluctance many women now feel about going out even when it is permissible under the new rules:

> *The rules regarding women have affected our family badly. The women are downcast and worried about their future. They've also restricted our social relations: women can't socialise as they used to.*
> - Civil society activist from Kandahar

Virtue and vice enforcers walk to the Purple Flower Poetry Festival in Tap-e Gul Ghundi Park in Charikar district, Parwan Province.
Photo: Wakil Kohsar/AFP, 17 April 2024

> *During the Republic, women could go to wedding parties and there were some traditional and cultural events, like the atan [dance], but those aren't available now. The women are afraid to do it, since in some places, the Taleban have stopped women from having such celebrations.*
> - Former NGO employee from Zabul

The interviewee whose family is currently in Iran mentioned that not only the new rules, but also economic pressures meant there were fewer family gatherings. Overall, there was a sense that men, as well as women were feeling a greater sense of social isolation:

> *The relationships with my relatives have changed due to these rules, and visits with relatives have been reduced. In the past, we used to visit them often. Now we only meet during Eid or sometimes when there's a wedding or a funeral. When a society is economically affected, it impacts everyone. One such impact is fewer visits.*
> - Lawyer from Balkh

One interviewee mentioned the discontinuation of a woman's shura that had provided them with benefits, including education and a place to gather:

> *The women had a shura in our village. They'd gather at a house and sometimes receive some public awareness education and sometimes even some aid from an NGO, such as cash or nutrition for their children. Now, they don't get this kind of training and information any more, for example, about hygiene, child births or violence against women.*
> - Tailor from Helmand

Break-ups and early marriages

Some interviewees spoke about complete breakdowns in relations – brothers falling out, couples breaking up (even though this is against tradition) and people no longer helping each other out financially:

> *Although Paktia is a traditional province where divorce cases are few, there are people who have family problems because of the new situation and the spouses have separated, including some of my friends. There are also cases of brothers who'd lived together for several years, but after they became unemployed, their economic situation deteriorated and they started living separately.*
> - Former government employee from Paktia

> *Society's behaviour has changed. People now adjust their relationships and interactions according to the laws of the Islamic Emirate. For instance, very few women participate in community activities or go to the market these days. Because of economic problems and unemployment, no one lends each other*

> *money any more or helps others out financially. They're afraid that if a person has no job, they won't be able to pay back the loan.*
> - Former government employee from Panjshir

One man mentioned an increase in underage marriages as another change in the social fabric, now that girls could no longer continue their education, while another thought the bad atmosphere within families would result in more children running away from home and turning to drugs:

> *Another important issue is that under the previous government, girls were trying to get an education and then work, but since the Emirate came [back] to power and imposed these restrictions, they have to get married. It might be against their will, but they have no other option. Their parents just think about them getting married. This leads to an increase in underage marriages.*
> - Former university lecturer from Bamyan

> *There's more depression, especially among women, which is at the root of a lot of family problems. Such unstable environments affect kids badly, like causing them to run away from home and become drug addicts.*
> - Farmer from Paktia

2.5 The role of improved security

A second recurring main theme discussed by the men, alongside the economy, was security. Like the economy, several brought it into the conversation when asked how the restrictions on women had affected them. Several remarked that its improvement was the most positive change brought about by the return of the Emirate. Some said, though, that it had mainly benefitted men:

> *The Emirate's rules haven't affected me because men have the right to study and work. And security has got better. In the past, there was war and we couldn't travel. It was difficult to go outside. Now it's better.*
> - Pharmacist from Faryab

> *The new rules have definitely changed everything, especially in terms of women's education and work, but there are also some things that we men believe are good for the community, security for example, and the fact that we feel safer now and don't fear that someone will rob or kill us. Women don't consider this because they were safe even before. For example, thieves never*

wanted to rob women since it would be seen as a kind of cowardice or loss of honour.
- Former NGO employee from Zabul

A few interviewees thought women's security had worsened, while others thought the end of the war had benefited everyone – although they still, in the same breath, mentioned the problems of today:

The most important change has been the end of the war. We were living in the middle of the crossfire and I was wounded twice. It was a good change for my family as well. During the last years of the Ashraf Ghani government, our women would keep watch while we slept so we'd have time to escape if there was a [night] raid. They'd stay awake for entire nights because they feared that if we were caught, they'd kill us immediately. We weren't with the Taleban, but the KPF [Khost Protection Force] and the [CIA-supported, NDS] 01 units didn't care whether you were a Taleb or not. They beat men and women and, if your house was chosen as a target, they opened fire. We've been through very tough times. In Pushtunwali [Pashtun tribal code], women embody the honour of men, and that honour was not well-kept during the war. During raids, in the middle of night, soldiers would enter the house and search both men and women. Now, praise be to God, all those problems and indignities are gone and we're safe. That's the positive change. But there are economic problems.
- Farmer from Khost

There have been positive and negative changes. For instance, we're less worried now when a woman from the family goes out, because she's safe. Unlike during the previous government, no one in town is harassing them. In the past, when a woman visited the bazaar or a doctor, wicked people would say bad things to them and chase and harass them. With the Emirate, this problem is completely gone. No one can harass a woman. The negative aspect is that women can no longer go to school and university.
- Businessman from Kandahar

It's true there are no bombings and explosions and that now the Emirate is in power, the war is over, but that's because they were the ones who were fighting and carrying out the explosions. If they hadn't done it before coming to power, we could have had security during the Republic as well. But now, women don't feel safe when they want to go anywhere. We [men] need to accompany them.
- Farm worker from Ghazni

While security and the economy were clearly at the front of many interviewees' mind, they kept returning to the impact of the school closures on girls and the restrictions on women.

This was also apparent in the second half of the interview, when the topic was further explored by placing Emirate restrictions in the context of the various regimes they had seen during their lifetime; speculating over which men and women had better or worse lives; and asking their opinions on the roles of men and women and the reasons for the Emirate's restrictions. These different strands are explored in the following three chapters.

CHAPTER III.
CHANGES SEEN DURING THEIR LIFETIMES

In the interviews, the men were next asked to consider how things had changed throughout their own lifetime, during the various regimes and historical periods, for men and women. This was a different way to tease out what changes they considered most important and impactful as they looked back. As became clear, in interview after interview, every period offered different trade-offs with a different mix of freedom, security, opportunity and economic strengths, or weaknesses. There was, in particular, a strong streak of nostalgia over what had been lost, when the men discussed the Republic, even as they also continued to circle the problems of the period between the two emirates.

3.1 Qualified nostalgia for the Republic

Although all the interviewees conceded that the time of the Republic had had significant problems, several described how those years had been among the best, particularly because of the opportunities they had provided for a whole generation:

> *There's been war in our country for 40 years and we've killed each other in the name of jihad, which was of no benefit. But in my opinion, the best time for our people was the last 20 years, especially for the youth, who made significant progress. They became acquainted with new technologies, got an education, and gained awareness of what life means and of the rights of men and women. In the past, people really lived in darkness, but they became aware and stopped giving their sisters and daughters in baad marriage. Although our area was always a battlefield, people still progressed, and we can't ignore that. In the past, there was one high school in our region and people came from near and far [to attend it], but a few years ago, schools were built for boys in every village. Although it wasn't as good as it should have been, it was better than nothing.*
> - Farmer from Paktia

> *During the Republic, there were positive changes for the men and women of our family. Although my parents were uneducated, I could go to university and I*

> *made a lot of progress. My sisters had already married, but their children, both boys and girls, could study and progress as well.*
> - Former university lecturer from Bamyan

Others reflected on the downsides of the Republic:

> *We should remember that it's not only the Emirate but also the impact of the former corrupt government that led our country into crisis. The leaders of the former government escaped suddenly and let the current regime, that had no background [in governing], come in to lead 40 million Afghans.*
> - Lawyer from Balkh

> *We don't remember a lot of good things from the Republic either – the government was under the control of tribal mafia. But at least, people weren't living under the poverty line.[14] Women and men had jobs, and girls went to school and university. Now, those things have become a dream.*
> - Former restaurant owner from Herat

3.2 The trade-offs between security, education, economy, freedom and control

Many of the replies to the question of what had changed for men and women under the various regimes continued to circle around a combination of factors – security, education and the economy – and the trade-off between freedom and control, often moving from one to another as if trying to determine which was most important:

> *After the Emirate took over, security got much better. In fact, apart from the time of Zahir Shah when, according to our elders, there was security, Afghanistan has never experienced such good security as now. However, this is physical security, which isn't everything. We also need jobs and social, political and cultural security. We need to be able to express our ideas freely, whether political, social or cultural. If we look at human rights treaties, they're mostly about the freedom of human beings. Also, under the Emirate, most people live under the poverty line. I see many families around us who don't have enough to eat. If they*

[14] A significant portion of the population was living under the poverty line during the Republic as well, especially during its latter years, but following the banking crisis and decrease in international aid and economic activity after the Emirate takeover, poverty levels rose sharply and also started affecting what used to be the middle class. See for instance '[Living in a Collapsed Economy (1): A cook, a labourer, a migrant worker, a small trader and a factory owner tell us what their lives look like now]'.

have something for their lunch, they don't have anything for dinner. If they have something for dinner, they don't have anything for the following day. Our people are very disheartened because of these changes.
- Former restaurant owner from Herat

A man in Kandahar replaces the Department for Women's Affairs' sign with that of the Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice.
Photo: Javed Tanveer/AFP, 20 October, 2021

Under the Republic, security wasn't good. Security's good under the Emirate, but in terms of education, things are now less than zero. Under the Republic, there were work opportunities even for uneducated people, but work opportunities are very scarce now. Except for security, nothing's good under this regime.
- Schoolteacher from Ghor

I was a child during the Republic and was going to school, which we hadn't had before. I had to leave because of some problems, but many other boys and girls got an education. So, I think the best life was during the Republic because there was freedom to learn and do whatever you wanted, as long as it was allowed

> *because, thank God, we're Muslims. It was the most prosperous time in my life, but some things were indeed very unpleasant, like the fighting. Children couldn't go to school because of it. Women were always concerned about their children and the men of their families, and the men were always either fighting or trying to keep themselves safe. Whenever the fighting stopped, we knew it would start again, so we were always waiting for it. When God considers my life, I'll ask him to only look at the last three years when there was no fighting and we could travel everywhere and work without fear. But the bad thing is that there are no jobs. People are leaving the country. Women are banned from work and girls are banned from education. This is the worst thing.*
> - Tailor from Helmand

For several of the interviewees, the extent to which the regimes followed Islamic rules and values was part of the mix forming their overall opinion:

> *The main change now is that people pray regularly [they're namaz khwan] and do so in congregation, there's security, a ban on poppy cultivation and the Islamic Emirate collects usher and zakat from the people. Women must wear Islamic hijab when they go out. In the past, shops were closed before 6 in the evening and people were afraid because the fighting could start at any time. Now, there's security and people can go anywhere with full confidence. People are happy now. We can't foresee the future, but it would be good if security was provided and the Emirate had good interactions with the people because if there's no security, there'll be nothing.*
> - Pharmacist from Faryab

The interviewee from Balkh, who had not been as badly affected by the fighting under the Republic as some of the other interviewees, credited the current government with greater control over its own forces and described changes in the position of other ethnic groups, including his own, the Hazaras:

> *There were good things during the Republic. People were comfortable and had peace of mind when going out. No one would threaten them with death or kill them arbitrarily. Businessmen were doing business and there were major companies in the country that no longer exist. It was a period of transition from monopolisation and totalitarianism to a period of diplomacy between the parliament, the executive and the judiciary. There were disagreements, but at least people were trying to see themselves in the government's mirror and*

> *wanted to be part of it. Now, unfortunately, the other [non-Pashtun] ethnic groups don't see themselves in the government and don't have anyone in the security forces.*
>
> *But there are good things now too. There's a government and the words of its leaders are heard in the far and remote areas of the country. The members are loyal to their leaders. There's little corruption, at least not at the level of the previous administration when corruption reached its peak. During the Republic, there were forces from over 40 countries here and the government leaders were their servants. Now the leaders aren't slaves or servants of other countries. And there's security all over the country. We had religious freedom under the previous government, which we don't have now, but our people were systematically killed and assassinated, which doesn't happen [in the same way] under the current government. Of course, in the first year of this government, there was a lot of uncertainty, but now the police have an internal affairs unit that carefully follows the police to see if they're doing something wrong or oppressing people. We don't see drug addicts in public places any more. Everywhere looks clean. The situation has improved, although not for women and children.*
> - Lawyer from Balkh

Elsewhere in the interview he added that during the Republic: "It was impossible to file a complaint against a soldier, but under the Emirate I filed a complaint against some Taleban men and it was addressed."

One of the interviewees focused on how education had been a problem in his area during the Republic due to Taleban pressures, even though there had been some leeway. He questioned why the Taleban did not allow education now they were in charge:

> *My area was a battlefield for two decades. The people made sacrifices. All of them had to leave. Now that the war is over and there's security, the people are still not calm and comfortable. … During the Republic, some local classes were established by NGOs. At first, they weren't allowed to teach, even though the teachers were women or very old men. The Taleban used to say that the schools were from infidels and would make girls brazen. But when the NGOs gave them money, there was no problem and they allowed it. Several local classes were established in our village up to sixth grade, and it was very good.*

Many people educated their daughters in this way and it was very useful. But it was a temporary programme. And many organisations stopped their activities because the Taleban demanded money.

Now that the war is over, there's security and the government belongs to the Taleban. They should build girls' schools in areas where there aren't any and allow people to educate their children. In this way, we can get rid of our dependence on foreign countries and have educated people and doctors in every region.
- Farmer from Paktia

3.3 Looking back beyond the Republic

Several of the interviewees did not look back much further than the Republic. This may partly be because they did not have strong memories; those in their thirties would have been barely born when the communist government fell in the early 1990s, while those in their forties would have been teenagers. For others, the main two contrasting regimes may have been the Republic and the current Emirate. Some, however, did discuss memories that went further back, as they discussed the changes across several governments:

My wife and I are part of the generation of the [communist] revolution. Our whole life was spent in an era of fighting, which was never good for us, not in any era. I don't know much about the Soviet invasion because I was a child then, but the Republic was the best time for us. Me and my children and the whole nation were provided with education and we were given a vision of the world. There was hope for development and a better life. I became the owner of a good house here, and even houses in Kabul city. Everyone in my family enjoyed a good life during the Republic. But the most important thing, for me and everyone, was that we were all given dignity and value. Now we're hopeless. We've buried our country and our children will grow up illiterate.
- Landowner from Maidan Wardak

The first Emirate [1995-2001] was the worst period for Afghan women. There were public stonings and beatings and traditional courts, without observation of either sharia or the law. The fall of the first Emirate and the formation of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan was a turning point in the history of the country because women in the big cities, in the north, west, south and east of

the country, were able to participate in education and training, employment, freedom of expression and even the political system, official institutions, universities and the security services like the army and police. People could somehow achieve their relative rights within Afghanistan's traditional and rigid society.
- Former government employee from Paktia

I remember when I was a child, my late father was listening to the radio about the factional fighting between the mujahedin parties. It was a very bad time. Everyone was suffering because of the war. When the first Islamic Emirate was established, the situation in our area worsened. I can still feel the suffering and pain of that time. The Taleban killed many people and we had to leave. We were in Pakistan for five years. The good thing in the refugee camps was that the UN provided education services. We returned during the transitional administration under Karzai. Although there were a lot of problems in the past twenty years, there were also opportunities. I finished high school and graduated from university. There was corruption and insecurity, but our province, Bamyan, was really safe. … All governments throughout Afghanistan's history have been puppet governments, but every government that thinks about its people and works to provide education and jobs, including the puppet ones, will be good. But in this government, we haven't experienced any good things yet.
- Former university lecturer from Bamyan

Whether the current situation allowed for some optimism or hope, or not, seemed to largely depend on the interviewee's personal situation:

During the jihad [against the Soviets], we did hijrat [took refuge in Pakistan] and had a very difficult life there. When they were gone, we returned and continued our life in the district. The war was over, but the war between the mujahedin [factions] was again costing people's lives and wealth. During the [first] Emirate, security was like it is now, but there was drought and unemployment. The Karzai government was good. There was work, education and security. We moved to Kandahar city and started a small business. The security in the city was better, but in the countryside, there was fighting everywhere and many people were killed. In the city, things were calm for people who had no connection with politics or the Taleban. And the economic situation was much better than during the first Emirate. … Some people are very unhappy with the current situation because their women and girls were going to school and

university and worked in NGOs and are no longer allowed [to do these things]. So, it's normal that they're unhappy. Where do I think we're headed? I think all these problems are temporary; God will correct all things.
- Businessman from Kandahar

People have grown a lot in the past 20 years in every way. If we compare the current situation with 30 years ago, there have been many positive changes. In the past, the majority of our people were uneducated. The people's economic situation was very weak and they lived in darkness. The worst thing was the civil wars that really destroyed people's lives and so many innocent people were killed. … The recent decisions of the Emirate have destroyed any freedom and rights that women had. But it's still a thousand times better than the years of the civil war. At least people can live freely. People aren't killed under different pretexts. And we hope that one day this current situation will improve. Still, I don't feel very good when I see the situation with its increasing restrictions. I'm happy there's no war and there isn't the same darkness as 30 years ago, but I'm worried about my children's future. When the gates of education are closed, society goes towards darkness.
- Former government employee from Paktia

The world's always changing, our country especially. There were many changes in the past, but we've never had such restrictions. Now, there are changes to every aspect of life, including jobs and schools. We're in an impasse now and it's irreparable. There are no work or education opportunities and this has really affected us.
- Engineer from Badakhshan

CHAPTER IV.
HOW DIFFERENT PEOPLE ARE AFFECTED DIFFERENTLY

After discussing the different regimes and eras, the interviewees were asked whether they thought all men and women had been affected by the recent changes in the same way, or whether they thought important differences existed between people. In their replies, the men distinguished between the educated and uneducated, people from the rural areas and those from the cities, people who had benefited from the previous regime and those who had benefitted less, or not at all, the poor and those who were well off, and of course, men and women.

4.1 Who has a better life?

Many of the men started out explaining how women had been affected more than men, before they probed different categories:

> *The recent changes have affected women the most. Men were also affected, but if they find a job, they can still work and the boys can still go to high school and university. … The lives of educated women are [relatively] good. They're able to deal with family matters and handle expenses well. They can also maintain good relations and kinship within the household and neighbourhood. The lives of urban women are also better than those of rural women. But all our lives, especially women's, have changed for the worse.*
> - Former NGO employee from Zabul

> *The recent changes affected everybody, but honestly, women have been affected more than others. They have been confined to their homes. … The women who didn't work during the Republic and stayed at home have the best lives because nothing has changed for them. Their life has remained the same. … Women who've lost their jobs and income and now must stay at home have the worst lives.*
> - Former restaurant owner from Herat

Preventing girls from education, not allowing women to work and the unemployment of men – all these things have affected families. Men with higher education who are now jobless are suffering; their future's unknown and it's disheartening. Most of the young men have psychological problems now due to these issues. I mentioned it earlier and I'll say it again: the lives of women in rural areas haven't changed because people already knew about these laws. But they have greatly affected the lives of city women.
- Farmer from Paktia

Female students arrive at Kabul University to take the *konkur*, the university entrance exams. Soon after, on 21 January 2023, the Emirate banned girls from sitting for these exams.
Photo: Wakil Kohsar/AFP, 13 October 2022

4.2 Educated versus uneducated

Educated women have better lives

Several men said they believed those who were educated, had specific skills or owned assets, whether men or women, were better off than those without since they had more opportunities to still have an income. Education and skills in this view were often equated with less poverty:

Women who have skills and who can make things have better lives, but those who are illiterate and were born into poor families and who haven't been taught anything don't have good lives. For example, my sister is a tailor and my cousin teaches at a madrasa. They're earning money. … Men who are doctors, have businesses, or cars or machinery like tractors, as well as those who are landowners or shepherds, have better lives [than other men].
- Pharmacist from Faryab

There's a difference between the lives of women in our village. Educated women have a good life and have access to what they need in terms of services, medicine, food, clothes and being valued by the community. They still have very good lives because they have a better economic situation compared to the women who are uneducated and don't have good food, good clothes or access to medical treatment.
- Landowner from Maidan Wardak

I think all women have been affected in the same way. Some, very few, families who are better off financially have sent their daughters to the cities to study in private educational centres. Some women who are doctors, vaccinators or teachers still have jobs and their situation's good. The women who don't have anyone to provide for them don't have good lives. The men who are educated have the best lives. Some have jobs, and those who don't can do business or work as shopkeepers. But actually, no one has a very good life.
- Schoolteacher from Ghor

Educated women have harder lives

Others thought life was actually harder for women who were educated or who used to work, since they felt the changes the hardest:

The recent changes have affected women more than men. Men can still get an education, although not of the quality they used to receive. They can work and be active socially. Women don't even have the few opportunities that men still have. … If we ignore the economic status of the families, which is mostly the responsibility of men, all women have the same kind of lives, but educated women have been affected more. All women have boring and monotonous lives, but educated women have the worst lives because they can't continue to study or work.
- Former university lecturer from Bamyan

> *The women who worked as doctors, teachers and government employees had good lives in the past. They were working and getting paid, which gave them satisfaction. Now they're restricted. The women who were knowledgeable and didn't accept this situation, and those who could, went abroad and escaped. Other people who are poor have to stay here and it's really difficult for them.*
> - Engineer from Badakhshan

Some men thought educated women also worried more than uneducated women:

> *Women who are teachers or midwives and still have jobs have the best lives. In addition, women who are uneducated and who are housewives don't worry that much. Their lives are also good, to some extent. The girls and women who have lost their chance to study and work have the worst lives.*
> - Farm worker from Ghazni

> *In our area, most women stayed at home anyway. Only women who worked for the government or NGOs are unemployed now. Their life is different compared to other women because they now have more problems. … In the villages, illiterate women are more comfortable than those who are more educated. They worry about the future and regret that they're educated but can't work. Also, the girls who are deprived of education are suffering from depression because they have nothing to do and those who had goals can't reach them.*
> - Former government employee from Panjshir

Educated men have harder lives

One interviewee who thought educated women had better lives than uneducated women thought the opposite was true for men. Several others agreed with him and commented on how the change in government had led to an inversion in who could find jobs and who could not:

> *[Educated women have a good life and have access to what they need…] Among the men, I think the educated men were most badly affected. They lost their jobs and are devalued in the country.*
> - Landowner from Maidan Wardak

> *Previously, the educated class could work, but now they're unemployed. There are no jobs and the NGOs have collapsed. All government jobs have been given*

to their own [Emirate] members, we can't work in government. This is one of the changes and transformations we're witnessing.
- Engineer from Badakhshan

Usually, those who are educated and have businesses have better lifestyles than those who are uneducated because they always have with their work, under any regime, while the uneducated are always forced to work for others or become farm workers who are dependent on others. But in our country, the situation's different; educated people are performing the tasks of the uneducated and illiterate people are doing the jobs of the educated. Education isn't worth anything here.
- Farmer from Paktia

Men have also been affected, but not in the same way [as women]. Educated men who have lost their jobs have been affected more [than those without education]. For example, I used to teach at a private university, but now I work on the land. There's no difference between me and an ordinary farm worker who has no education. In fact, a farm worker's life is better than mine because at least he's a professional in what he does. Educated men have also been under more pressure.
- Former university lecturer from Bamyan

Unemployment has made men weaker. There's no work for them in government offices. If you want to work for the government, you must have fought and have jihad experience. Otherwise, you're unemployed – like my two brothers who are both highly educated. It's very hard for them. Currently, educated and illiterate people are equal under the Emirate.
- Former government employee from Paktia

Interviewees noted that even though schools and universities were still available to boys, they too had been affected by the current situation:

Of course, this situation affects my children too, with a ban on education [for girls] and schools operating so weakly [for boys] and the government not paying any attention. The madrasas are doing well, as they're strengthening religious subjects. I sent my sons to both religious madrasa and school because, even if they get higher education, they might not find jobs. So, it's good if they go to both. The government madrasa in my area's only for boys; that's why I only sent my sons.
- Schoolteacher from Ghor

The boys are also discouraged. They look at the educated people who are wandering around unemployed. They think that, even if they study, they'll still be unable to find a job. Some people are so disillusioned they tell their children not to go to school. They give their own example, saying they studied but all their efforts were wasted.
- Former NGO employee from Zabul

4.3 Rural versus urban areas

When discussing the difference between rural and urban areas, several men discussed life in general for women, regardless of the regime (harder in the rural areas), while others looked at where the change had been greatest (in the cities).

The hardships of rural life

Those who focused on the hardships of rural life mentioned the hard work, the absence of rights and the lack of schools and health services:

The recent changes have affected everyone because the economic situation of our people, whether in the cities or rural areas, is bad. Most people just think about finding food for their families. … But life in the village is more difficult than in the city. A woman in the village works from early morning till late at night, taking care of the children and elderly, providing food, washing clothes, cleaning the house and taking care of the sheep, goats and cows. They have no right to the land, even though they work alongside men. They aren't taken seriously for cultural reasons. … They don't demand their rights and the men, both within the family and in the economic system, consider them incapable of independent economic activity. In contrast, urban women have access to resources and take care of themselves. They have their role in the family and a more peaceful and comfortable life than rural women.
- Former government employee from Paktia

Life in rural areas is harder because there's less access to education and healthcare. I have no idea which women have the best lives. Maybe just one per cent of Afghan women might have better lives. In fact, women in Afghanistan have never had good lives and now the situation's worsened. All women have been affected. Even women who were teachers but now have to stay home and are receiving a reduced salary have a hard life.
- Lawyer from Balkh

Women carry bundles of twigs on their heads in Kabul province.
Photo: Daniel Leal/AFP, 4 August 2022

Some men pointed out the obvious – that rural families who have wealth, added income or access to remittances have a better life than others:

> *Women from families whose economic status is better than others have a better life. Those whose husbands work abroad and send money or who have a business here have better lives than those in families that rely on agriculture and have no other income.*
> - Former government employee from Paktia

The effect of the changes in the cities

Those who focused on the changes in the big cities considered the loss of jobs and imposition of unfamiliar restrictions:

> *During the past 20 years, NGO jobs were mainly concentrated in the big cities and some provincial centres. These jobs gave women and men stable incomes. But they lost their jobs. … Although economic problems have affected everyone,*

women have suffered more than men because they've lost all their freedoms and have been imprisoned.
- Former government employee from Paktia

There have been no positive changes in the lives of the women living here [in the province], but there have been detrimental changes in the lives of those who live in the big cities, since the women in some families had jobs. For instance, my [married] daughter had two jobs, but now she doesn't have even one.
- Engineer from Badakhshan

Not much has changed in the villages because people had a traditional life before and still have it now. But there have been many changes in the lives of women in the big cities, since most of the restrictions are imposed on them. The new laws have had a severe impact on urban women.
- Farmer from Paktia

4.4 Connections to the previous or current government

A few of the men noted how those who are linked to the current government have better lives, mainly due to their access to jobs, often taken from those linked to the previous government:

Before the Emirate came, the lives of many people in our region were good. They didn't lack money. People were working in the government or for foreign organisations and companies. But most of our people, men and women, lost their jobs after the Emirate came. They have no supporters and are unemployed and their economic situation is not good at all.
- Former government employee from Panjshir

Men and women who are literate and have critical office skills are now excluded from employment and those with no expertise or knowledge are employed instead.
- Farmer from Paktia

The people who were working for the previous government don't now have good lives. Those who work for the Islamic Emirate have better lives.
- Pharmacist from Faryab

One of the interviewees noted how the change of regime had resulted in a new kind of elite and that the women in these families were best off:

The women in the families of the Emirate authorities have better lives because their men receive high salaries, even though most of them are uneducated and don't have any work experience. Their men are the ruling khans in the country now. Others are struggling due to unemployment and the economic recession. … I think uneducated women have better lives because they don't suffer from the ban on women's education and work. They don't understand gender discrimination either. On the other hand, educated women don't live good lives and are frustrated.

- Civil society activist from Kandahar

CHAPTER V.
VIEWS ON THE EMIRATE'S RULES ON WOMEN

At the end of the interviews, we asked the interviewees their opinions on the IEA's rules concerning women and what they thought were the reasons it had imposed the restrictions. We also asked what roles they thought men and women should play and who they thought should decide such matters. Finally, we asked whether there were many differences of opinion about these matters within their families and communities. The interviewees had a lot to say on the subject.

5.1 How the men viewed the Emirate's restrictions on women

Agreeing with some rules, but disagreeing with the fervour and force of the restrictions

Several interviewees couched their opinions on the Emirate's restrictions by expressing support for at least some of its rules. In most cases, they stressed that they supported Islamic values, laws and traditions, but said they disagreed with the fervour and force with which some rules were enforced, and with their obligatory nature:

> *Some of the rules are commendable, as they're implementing what God and the Messenger have said. But some rules that they've made obligatory and are implementing by force aren't good. For instance, Amr bil Maruf's advice to grow beards and offer namaz [prayer] is good, but when they force people or beat them and take them away, those aren't good actions. We're Muslims, thank God, and we can understand what we should do after being advised by them. But some of them use violence. … There are also restrictions that are unnecessary. For instance, how can women express themselves without using their voices?*[15] *If the rules are positive, everyone will accept them, but restrictions also have a limit.*
> - Pharmacist from Faryab

[15] This probably refers to article 13.3 in the new Amr bil Maruf law under the injunctions related to women covering themselves, which says "Women's voices (in a song, hymn or recital out loud in a gathering) are also something that should be concealed." See AAN's translation of the law.

> *In my personal opinion, some of the laws of the Emirate are based on sharia, but when they implement them, they overdo it [efrat mekonand]. And some of their laws interfere with people's personal lives, both women's and men's. They shouldn't do that. Islam is a great religion and people should be encouraged, not forced to adhere to it. Nothing can be done by force; they should proceed gently and gradually.*
> - Farmer from Paktia

> *Islam doesn't prevent women from studying and working. The Emirate should let women and girls work and study, considering Islam obliges women and men [to learn]. I think there are two categories of people who damage the image of Islam. Those who overdo it and those who do too little [efrat wa tafreet]. We've witnessed both, during the Republic and [now under] the Emirate.*
> - Former university lecturer from Bamyan

Others distinguished between rules they agreed with but that were not new (eg hijab), those that were new and that they did not agree with (eg the education ban) and those that were good but would probably not be implemented (eg freedom of choice in marriage), creating a layered picture of the role of new rules and old traditions:

> *The rule that women should wear hijab's good – we want our women to be in hijab … but some rules are very harsh, like banning women from education and work. If it's allowed in all Islamic countries, why should we ban it? Are we the only Muslims? … In our communities, girls don't have the right to make decisions about their most important destiny: 98 per cent, or more, cannot get married according to their own choice; their parents just tell them what they've decided. This is done by the community, not by the Emirate. The Emirate rule that girls should choose whoever they want to marry is very good, but who will obey this? I know many mullahs in our area who don't give this right to their own daughters, let alone to the common people.*
> - Tailor from Helmand

Pointing to cultural differences

Several interviewees disputed that the rules as implemented by the Emirate were the only possible or correct interpretation of how Islam meant people to live. Others thought the basis of some of the rules were cultural or tribal, rather than religious.

Islamic Emirate spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid announces a decree specifying a strict dress code for Afghan women.
Photo: Ahmad Sahel Arman/AFP, 7 May 2022

The Emirate says these restrictions on women are according to the Quran and the Hadiths and that women must stay at home and do the housework. They're saying this, even though the country needs teachers, doctors and women in other sectors, but they don't consider this. I don't think all the things they claim as Quranic law are actually the Quran's law. We don't have any verse in the Quran that says women shouldn't study or work. It's true that in Islam, women shouldn't go out without a mahram, so I think that's why they don't allow them to work.

- Schoolteacher from Ghor

Women in Panjshir were already observing the rules and treated them as a religious obligation. But some of the rules aren't laws, they aren't sharia, nor are they the customs of our country. … If the laws of Islam are implemented correctly, the people would have no problems. They should give the rights of men and women: labour rights, education rights, inheritance rights and all the other freedoms that Islam has given to Muslims.

- Former government employee from Panjshir

I don't think they have valid reasons for imposing these restrictions, since Islam doesn't oppose women's education and work. Women and men should both have their rights and no one should impose restrictions on them. I know there are issues in Islam regarding women and men's work, but women can work and study and serve their country as well.
- Civil society activist from Kandahar

I believe these rules, particularly the ones preventing women and girls from working and education, come from traditional beliefs. Islam doesn't prevent them; it actually puts a lot of emphasis on education. I've heard from the ulema who were quoting the Messenger of God, saying: "Seeking education is obligatory [farz] both for men and women."[16]
- Former restaurant owner from Herat

Some of the interviewees pointed to the fact that many of the Taleban had simply not come from areas where they would see girls going to school, for cultural reasons but also, in some cases, because girls' schools had simply not existed:

I think they've merged Islam with the traditions of our country. In the last fifty years, not everyone could see their daughters or sisters go to school. Under the Republic, schools for girls were available only in the cities. In Helmand, there were no schools even for boys in the remote areas.
- Tailor from Helmand

The authorities who made these rules come from remote areas and the countryside. Their opinions are different from the people in the cities. ... They enforce their own thoughts even though the people who are living in cities are also Muslims.
- Engineer from Badakhshan

Their rules reflect parts of Afghan society where people still hold the same views as centuries ago, which is because of illiteracy and negative traditions. It's not the Taleban's fault. Even in my family, many of my cousins who live in the village are against [female] education and work. … For me, what's more surprising is that the same people who are against [female] education and work come [from Khost to Kabul] with their families and ask me to find them a good female

[16] When this same point was raised during his interview with BBC Pashto, acting deputy minister of virtue and vice Mawlawi Muhammadi said that the obligation to learn related to sharia education *(sharia ulom)* – issues such as prayer, zakat and fasting – not modern education.

> *doctor. How can one find a female doctor when you don't let your daughters get an education?*
> - Former government employee from Khost

Some of the interviewees thought the Taleban might change their minds and relax their views once they had been exposed to people living in the cities and realised the reality was more nuanced than they had been led to believe:

> *The Emirate has imposed these rules because they think if women are free to get an education or go to work, they'll be involved in bad deeds. But it's not like they say. Unfortunately, they're unfamiliar with urban life. I believe the majority of them will change with time.*
> - Former NGO employee from Zabul

Some interviewees pointed to differences of opinion within the Emirate's ranks,[17] among Islamic scholars and within the wider Islamic world as indications that the Emirate's rules did not represent the only possible or correct interpretations of sharia:

> *The views among Muslims are different. For example, Iqbal Lahori was a Muslim philosopher, but he shaved his beard, or there was Sayed Qutb, who also shaved his beard. And all of them were in favour of schools. In their time, people, men and women, travelled to other places for education because their worldview was so open. … In the madrasas where the Taleban have studied, the [wider] Muslim world hasn't been introduced to them. … I don't think all the Taleban are in favour of these restrictions. Some high-ranking Taleban officials are against these rules, so let's wait and see what will happen in the future.*
> - Engineer from Badakhshan

> *In other countries with an Islamic system, there are no such restrictions. In other Muslim countries, women can study and work in any field they want to.*
> - Former university lecturer from Bamyan

[17] See also AAN's 2022 report on the changing or differing opinions on girls' education within the Emirate's ranks, 'Who Gets to Go to School; Are Taleban attitudes starting to change from within?'.

Speculating about the reasons for the Emirate's strictness

Some interviewees thought Emirate officials themselves may be aware that the rules were too strict, but felt they could not change them, or not too soon, since most of the followers supported them:

> *[In my city] I see some women and girls dress like they used to during the Republic. But the rules on women's education and work are still strict. I believe the Emirate's interpretation of Islamic rules is mostly based on tribal traditions and customs. Most of the Taleban grew up with tribal beliefs and customs and they can't change these very suddenly.*
> - Lawyer from Balkh

Other interviewees thought the Emirate wanted to use the restrictions as a bargaining chip in negotiations with the rest of the world:

> *I don't know much about politics, but I always watch and listen to the news. The Emirate says they've only temporarily barred women from employment, education and social interactions and that they did it to uphold women's dignity and the integrity of the whole country, but I think they're doing it for their political goals. I think they want to use the issue of girls' education to negotiate with the international community for recognition. This means keeping girls' schools and universities closed and making their reopening conditional on receiving legitimacy from the international community.*
> - Farmer from Paktia

> *I believe if they allow women's education and work, the world will recognise them and money [development aid] will pour in once again. This will help both their government and the people. Now, as we hear on the radio, the only issue hindering their recognition is the ban on women's education and work.*
> - Farmer from Khost

Some thought the Emirate did not intend to relax the restrictions on women at all:

> *I think the Emirate doesn't want to open the schools. Maybe there aren't enough teachers in rural areas, but in cities there are a lot of them, so why don't they allow them to work and let girls study? I think what they really want is to purge the modern education people received during the past 20 years. They want to keep people in the dark. … They say the ground hasn't been prepared yet, but*

why not? Who should pave the way? I think they're just making excuses and are basically against education.
- Farmer from Paktia

A group of men picnic at the Qargha Reservoir on the outskirts of Kabul. On 6 April 2022, the Emirate designated different days for men and women to visit parks and finally banned women from parks altogether on 10 November 2022.
Photo: Bulent Kilic/AFP, 26 October 2021

5.2 Different roles of men and women

As part of mapping their opinions on the Emirate's restrictions on women, the men were asked what they thought about the different roles of men and women in society. In answering the question, many of the interviewees seemed to contrast the reality as they witnessed it in their own families and that of others with a more abstract vision of what they wished for, or maybe thought the 'correct' answer might be:

There are many things women can do that men can't, and vice versa. Each has their own role and specific duties. One role that women play is that they teach

children. But everyone can play a role based on their ability, so we can't say a woman's role is 100 per cent to be a teacher or to only train children. Women can have senior positions too. For instance, Singapore is ruled by a woman and she has made the country prosperous. Both men and women have talents and should be allowed to use them. It's not right that women shouldn't have certain jobs or can't get a certain rank. We should allow them to be beneficial and to progress in our society.
- Engineer from Badakhshan

From all points of view – human, religious, philosophical, social, democratic, legal – men and women have common duties and responsibilities. We can't just put fifteen million people in the corner of the house in the name of religion and tradition and not use their talents and energy. Unfortunately, Afghan men often see women as inferior and don't treat them humanely. They use this to justify violence and restrictions on women's lives. In [many] Afghan families, only men can make decisions. Afghan families are a hierarchy and women are at the lowest level.
- Former government employee from Paktia

Others spoke about the practical division of labour and roles they saw in their surroundings, while adding that women should also be able to transcend that:

In our society, men are often expected to care for the family and provide for the family's living expenses [nafaqa]. This isn't a woman's responsibility. Islam also says this. In our society, women often play the main role in housekeeping and raising children. But women's right to education and social activities is also very important because they're an active part of society and their education and progress improve society.
- Former government employee from Panjshir

Men cannot do some of the work that women can. Women should be allowed to work in any sector where they're needed. For instance, they're not needed in the military, even though most countries have women in their military. In Afghanistan, it's not allowed now, but under the Republic, some women were working in the military. There might be a need for women in the military in Afghanistan too, but only when the country is at peace and has the resources.
- Schoolteacher from Ghor

5.3 Who should decide how families live?

Asked who should decide on such matters, several of the interviewees described a preferred situation that probably did not exist in their own families and communities, but that they did appear to aspire to:

> *Women and men should have equal and fair rights. Women should be free to choose their education and profession. They should have cultural and social freedoms, and men should support them. All members of society, men and women, should be able to decide their own fate.*
> - Lawyer from Balkh

> *I think all men and women should decide about their issues. The government doesn't have to have anything to do with it. Women should decide about where to work and what to study. Men in their families can simply give them advice, but shouldn't interfere in their affairs. The government should provide services for them, but not put up hurdles.*
> - Former university lecturer from Bamyan

> *I think everyone who's an adult in a family should have their own views when it comes to decision-making. Views of others shouldn't be imposed on them.*
> - Landowner from Maidan Wardak

Others described a much more hierarchical decision-making process, in the first place within the family, but also under the influence of ulema and elders:

> *Men should have their own roles and women their own. Every family has a head and he's the decision maker, but decisions that concern women should be made by women. In general, whatever Islam has given women should be provided to them. No one, including the government or parents, has the right to ban or disallow rights that have been given by God to women. They're already allowed by God.*
> - Tailor from Helmand

> *The roles of men and women are already known in our community. The men are the decision-makers about everything in the family.*
> - Former NGO employee from Zabul

> *In our region, the elders make the big decisions. Unfortunately, women aren't involved in any decisions. But I myself believe that men and women should be*

partners in every decision about the family and all their opinions should be taken into account. The roles of men and women in the family should be equal because a woman is a mother and it's mothers who make society.
- Farmer from Paktia

In Afghan society, religious leaders often make decisions in the light of sharia laws. But in most families, it's the parents who make decisions, especially the fathers or older brothers. Women don't have much of a role in decision-making. I think it's better if all family members, men and women, decide. Opinions of both men and women are important. If they're husband and wife, they should consult each other about decisions regarding their children or anything else. And after that, they can consult the elders of the family. In general, it's important to consult and decide based on the opinions of all family members. Even the opinion of a single family member should be considered.
- Former government employee from Panjshir

Men and women should be equals in decision-making, but family affairs are usually managed according to the wishes of the grandfather, father and elder brother. Elders, mullahs, local commanders, maliks and khans also make decisions. When men make decisions, they consider consulting and talking to their wives dishonourable [bi ghairati]. Only in exceptional cases would they discuss issues with women. Men always have the authority to make decisions in collective and individual affairs. According to the customs and traditions of the country, men are the only ones who work and have a salary and are valued, while women's work is neither paid nor valued. But I think all family members should be consulted when making family decisions. If they want their daughters to get married or their sons or for any other issue, they should consult with all family members, including women, because there's benefit in consultation.
- Former government employee from Paktia

Some of the men said they believed both the government and the ulema should stay out of decisions that concerned the private lives and futures of the family:

Men and women should decide about their future and the government should not interfere in it because making decisions about your own life has nothing to do with politics and government policies.
- Former restaurant owner from Herat

> *Each family can discuss these issues among themselves and make decisions that will benefit all family members. The ulema can talk to people and advise them, but they can't decide for them. The government's duty is to serve the nation and provide services such as healthcare, education and employment. The government shouldn't decide on the personal issues of men and women, including their education and work.*
> - Civil society activist from Kandahar

Others wondered whether it might be possible to change the minds of those in power, but on the whole were not optimistic:

> *The Amir is making decisions about these things and I don't know whether he has advisors or gets advice. The government is in their hands and they decide now. The people can't decide, can they?*
> - Schoolteacher from Ghor

> *I think restrictions on women's rights are exaggerated. We should neither be as restrictive as the Taleban nor as free as Europe. … But the people's demands won't be heard because the government is influenced by mullahs and ulema who don't want to accept such things. I think, if the international community doesn't pressure them, change is impossible.*
> - Engineer from Badakhshan

5.3 Differences of opinion within families

Finally, the interviewees were asked whether everyone in their family held the same views on the Emirate's rules or whether there were differences of opinion. Most interviewees didn't answer in much detail, other than saying that there were different points of view in their family on many things, but not on the impact of the restrictions on women.

Differences of opinion, but not on the Emirate's restrictions on women

> *The men and women in our family have different ideas, but we've learned from our elders that we should have mutual respect, even if we disagree. However, regarding the rules on women, we all have the same views, that they're not for the benefit of our nation and are cruel.*
> - Former restaurant owner from Herat

> *Everyone in the family has the same views regarding the Emirate's rules on women; they don't agree with them. They want the government to allow women and girls to work and study. But they have different views on other cultural, social, economic and political issues.*
> - Former university lecturer from Bamyan

> *Not all my family members have the same views on these matters, but regarding education and work for women, they have the same views. On some other issues related to the Emirate, they have different views. I like some of the things the Emirate has done, but they don't. And there are some issues they might like that I oppose.*
> - Lawyer from Balkh

Differences of opinion and changing views

One man from Kandahar, whose daughters currently go to a madrasa but will not be able to go to university after that, spoke openly about the disagreements within his family, while the man from Zabul only alluded to it:

> *My wife has no idea and, honestly, I've not heard anything from her because nothing has changed for her. She's illiterate and wears hijab regardless of the rules. But my daughters dislike the Emirate … not because they're affected but because they're concerned about others. From my perspective, that's the effect of what they hear in the media and from other girls who can't continue their schooling. Whenever I say the Emirate did this or that good thing, my daughters tell me they don't care about any improvements when they're not allowed an education. … Sometimes, I get angry with them for not appreciating the security the Emirate has established and for always talking negatively about them. And they get angry with me when I speak well of the Emirate.*
> - Businessman from Kandahar

> *The women in the family and I both see that all the things are bad for women, except the right of inheritance. But the views of the women are more negative about the Emirate's rules than those of the men in our family.*
> - Former NGO employee from Zabul

There were also indications that opinions around education and women had changed over time or had allowed for different ways of acting. The farmer in Khost who told us there were no schools or madrasas nearby because "many people in

the village don't want schools and are against it" also said he had chosen a different path for his youngest daughters. This had come at the insistence of his sons:

> *In our village, most people lead similar lives, although some are against women's education while others support it. Those who work abroad [in the Gulf as migrants] usually support education for girls. In fact, it was at the insistence of my eldest son [who works in the UAE] that I bought a radio and books for my younger daughters so they could follow lessons on the radio. My sons are very pro-education. They often tell me to move to the city so the boys and girls can get an education, but I haven't agreed yet.*
> - Farmer from Khost

> *Views [on women's rights] were different in the past, but since the new generation grew up, they were able to change the old ideas in the family and now, to a large extent, all views are the same.*
> - Tailor from Helmand

> *In the 20 years of the Republic, schools were slowly improving and educational opportunities were provided for men and women. Private schools and universities were established across the country. The generation older than 40 was [largely] uneducated, while the younger generation, the under-35s, are [more] educated. They thought education creates a good future, so the current situation dismays the young. But the elders have also realised that it's better for their children to be educated and open-minded, even if they belong to poor families.*
> - Engineer from Badakhshan

Some hoped the Taleban might also be able to change:

> *Previously, they thought the people living in urban areas were all adulterers, but when they came to the cities, they saw that the urban people are also Muslims. And that they go to the mosque too and offer prayers. Some of the Taleban have already changed. Now, they have different thoughts about people living in cities. I believe the majority of them will change with the passage of time.*
> - Former NGO employee from Zabul

5.4 Limitations on expressing misgivings

One theme threaded between the lines throughout some of the interviews was the limitations on openly expressing their opinions and misgivings. In fact, some men were initially hesitant to participate in the interview. One of the interviewees alluded, twice, to not being able to fully speak his mind – whether in the interview or in society – although he did not provide further details:

> *I think all women have the same problem, as all people now know the value of education and the value of achievement, and this was taken away from them. But conditions don't allow us to clearly express ourselves. … In the past few days, there have been increasing voices speaking about the ongoing closure of the schools; it's the people's voice, but I cannot speak up in our society because of some problems.*

Another interviewee, who was relatively favourable towards the Emirate, expressed a sense of resignation towards how the Emirate governed:

> *Currently, the people can't do anything about these things. We're under the control of the authorities and they should decide – because if we work outside the law, we'll be suppressed. The better way is to have leaders create laws, while the people make a government. And the government should provide what the people demand.*

He conceded that the reason he had no problems was because he was careful:

> *Thank God, there's been no change in my relationships with others. For me, there's no change because I fully comply with the Emirate's rules and don't do anything against them. But for others, it might be different.*

Another interviewee expressed a sense of vulnerability in his area of origin:

> *The relationships within our family haven't changed, but our relationships with others in the area have. Some people now adhere to the Emirate's approach, while others are more freethinkers. Those who have a conservative outlook look down on those who think freely; they see them as their enemy and as the enemy of the government. They can even cause security issues. The Emirate has arrested and beaten people for having open minds.*

One man described how he had been detained by the Emirate more than once, including for advocating for the rights of girls to study and go to school. He was released after mediation by local elders:

> *When I was released, they made me commit not to engage in such activities anymore. It was very discouraging that I would no longer be free to express my ideas.*

Another man simply said:

> *One of the practical changes we've made is to never criticise the Emirate. We know that if we criticise them, we'll be in trouble.*

And although many of the men spoke of a dark future if the rules remained like this, some also expressed a sense of hope that something irreversible had changed:

> *Despite all these difficulties and restrictions, the historical background of Afghan women is somewhat bright and irreversible. They've had an active and acceptable presence in so many fields. Even though the laws of the Taleban have struck heavy blows against them and they've been the victims of all kinds of oppression within their families, the achievements of the last two decades show that the new generation of women and girls will never go back.*

CHAPTER VI. CONCLUSION

The interviews reveal that restrictions imposed on women by the Emirate have profoundly affected family life for our interviewees. These restrictions have upset relationships and influenced how the interviewees perceive themselves, their country and their future. Afghanistan's precarious economic situation had already taken a toll on many of the men as primary providers for their families. This situation is made worse by the loss of income of women family members, the men's inability to provide an education for their daughters and their struggle to support and comfort their daughters and other family members who now sit at home with little to do. The government's apparent assumption that they cannot be trusted to know how to live as proper Muslims and decent people is deeply troubling to them, as is the way that choices have been taken away from families, putting more power over Afghans' personal lives into the hands of the state and its officials.

A girl sells tea to a group of men chatting and enjoying the sunset on a hilltop in Kabul.
Photo: Bulent Kilic/AFP, 14 September 2021

At the same time, one of the underlying themes in the interviews was the desire among many of the men to be able to either welcome or at least tolerate Emirate rule. After all, it is the prevailing regime and provides a degree of stability, with no real alternative in sight. Our interviewees were generally deeply in favour of an Islamic government. However, they found crucial parts of the Emirate's interpretation of what that should entail to be problematic and insupportable.

In particular, they were profoundly troubled by the continued refusal to allow their daughters to study, the indifference to what a dearth of professional women would mean for society and the way those outside the Emirate's direct circle were treated with suspicion. A possible compromise seemed to emerge from these conversations: a system where the rules on hijab, mahrams and separation of the sexes were clear and enforced respectfully. This, many of them felt, could allow women to return to the classroom and government jobs, move around without being harassed and enjoy the rights afforded to all human beings.

For some reason, however, this remains a bridge too far for the current Emirate leadership. Although the potential for open revolt is slim, the rift caused by these issues may be unsustainable in the long term. A strong desire for education has taken root in large parts of Afghan society, not just in the cities but also in the villages. The interviews also raise questions about the acceptability of the state policing the lives of Afghan families. While suppressing open criticism may obscure how deeply alienated many Afghans feel, it will not make it go away.

ANNEX 1.
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The data for this report was gathered in seventeen in-depth, semi-structured interviews with men from fourteen provinces:

- Four men from the central provinces of Afghanistan: one from Bamyan, one from Wardak, one from Ghazni and one from Panjshir
- Four from the southeast: two from Khost and two from Paktia
- Four from the south: two from Kandahar, one from Helmand and one from Zabul
- Three from the north: one from Faryab, one from Badakhshan and one from Balkh
- Two from the West: one from Herat and one from Ghor

Among the seventeen men, there were eight Pashtuns, three Tajiks, two Hazaras, two Sadats and two Uzbeks. In terms of age, the focus was on men with families and as a result, most of the interviewees were between 35 and 55 years old with two outliers: an unmarried man, the only one in the sample, who was 27 years old, and an older man, with family, who was 63 years old.

Three of our seventeen interviewees lived in a major city (two in Kandahar, one in Mazar-e Sharif), one in its outskirts (Herat) and two in provincial centres that are more like towns (Faizabad and Qalat). The rest lived in rural districts. Two of the men, from Khost and Maidan Wardak, lived in villages but owned houses in Kabul and moved between the city and their area of origin as needed. One interviewee, from Bamyan, used to live and work in Kabul and had recently moved back for economic reasons. The research sample thus illustrates the often-blurred lines between urban and rural, as individuals and families move between the city and the village in search of work, education, security or a different lifestyle.

Two of the men lived apart from their families at the time of the interview: one from Paktia had recently relocated to the UAE in search of work (he was interviewed by phone), while another, living in Balkh, had taken his parents, wife and young daughters to Iran, hoping they would have a better future there.

The sample also represented a mix of socio-economic backgrounds and levels of education. It included farmers and farm workers; small businessmen; former government and NGO employees; a pharmacist; tailor; schoolteacher; former university lecturer and a lawyer. We chose the descriptions that seemed most relevant, with the understanding that many of these men have varied backgrounds, worked in different sectors and often play multiple roles in their communities. The levels of education ranged from uneducated or having had only basic education, those who had been at high school (7th to 12th grade), up to university degrees. None of the men indicated that they were linked to the current government.

The interviews were conducted by five AAN researchers in Dari or Pashto between 26 June and 14 September 2024, either in person or by phone, depending on the circumstances. The conversations followed a five-part questionnaire that can be found in Annex 2.

The interviewees were selected from or through the researchers' extended networks of acquaintances, since they had to be open to discussing family matters with someone from outside their primary circle, however obliquely. The interviewers were briefed to use the questionnaire as a loose guide to allow for a natural flow of the conversation. This included skipping questions they felt were repetitive or would be uncomfortable to ask and rephrasing those they felt would otherwise be inappropriate.

In several conversations, the men were not directly asked about their relationships with their wives or other women in the family, instead referring to the more general "relationships in the family." On this particular sensitivity, see some of the comments of the interviewers:

> *I changed some of the prepared questions, at least the way of asking them, for example, using simpler words. And some questions, if you ask them of someone you don't know, he might not like it, or he might not answer. For example, most Afghans don't like it when you ask questions about their personal life or their relationship with their family.*
>
> *There are some questions [in this questionnaire] you shouldn't ask of someone you don't know. That's why each time I tried to find someone I knew or who I was introduced to, so the person I was interviewing would trust me and share correct information.*

> *If I had to ask a stranger these same questions, maybe I wouldn't ask the personal questions related to husband and wife, because most men don't like it.*
>
> *Not all questions can be asked from just anyone. Personally, I can't find other people of whom I dare to ask: Has your relationship with the women in your family changed?*

The researchers took notes during the interviews and in some cases audio recordings, which were later transcribed and translated into English. Quotes in this report have been lightly edited for clarity and flow and sometimes condensed to minimise repetition. Great care has been taken to, as much as possible, convey the conversations as they took place and preserve the meaning of what was said.

ANNEX 2. QUESTIONNAIRE: MEN'S VIEWS ON THE RESTRICTIONS ON WOMEN

Explanatory Note: The questions in bold are the main questions that are meant to guide the conversation. The questions in italic are possible follow-up questions and topics, depending on how the conversation goes and whether they have already been organically touched upon (that is, they can be skipped, if they seem inappropriate or no longer necessary, or added as needed).

Interviewer:
Date:
Interviewee:
Age:
Province, district, village/city:

Relevant information: ethnic background, occupation, household/family size (who is in it, sons, daughters), position within the family, social background, education:

Questions:

1. How have the IEA rules with regard to women affected your family?

- *What practical changes did your family make in how you organise your lives?*
- *How have these rules changed the lives of the women of your family?*
- *How have the rules affected how the women in your family feel?*
- *What about the men?*
- *Do people behave differently towards each other now? If so, how?*
- *Apart from the IEA rules about women, what have been the biggest changes for the men and women of your family over the last years?*

2. How have these rules affected you? (may have been answered already)

- *Has your own life changed because of the rules around women?*
- *What does this look like practically?*
- *Has your life become easier or harder as a result of the rules?*
- *Has your relationship with your family, or with other people, changed because of the rules?*

3. If you look at your whole life, how have things changed for the men and women in your family (village/neighbourhood) throughout the different regimes and periods?

- *What do you remember about what was good and what was bad in each period?*
- *How did it affect men and women differently?*
- *Where do you think your lives are headed? How might this affect your children?*

4. Did the recent changes affect all men and women in the same way, or are there important differences?

- *Do all the women in your family/village/neighbourhood have the same kind of lives, or are there differences?*
- *Which women in your family/village/neighbourhood have the best lives do you think? Why are their lives better? Which have the worst lives?*
- *What about the men, are they all affected in the same way?*

5. What do you think about the IEA's rules on women?

- *What do you think are the reasons for the IEA's restrictions on women?*
- *What do you think should be the role of men and women?*
- *Who should be allowed to decide about these things?*
- *Does everyone in your family have the same views on these matters, or are there different views?*
- *Is there anything else you would like to say about this?*

Interviewer notes:

1. How did you introduce the research? Where did you start the conversation?
2. How did you conduct the interview (by phone/zoom/in person/etc; notes while talking/recorded/ notes from memory, etc.)?
3. How did the conversation go?
4. Did you add or skip any questions? Which ones and why?
5. Were there questions you asked that you wish you hadn't? Or questions you didn't ask that you wish you had?
6. How did you select this person? (Had you interviewed them before? How did you find them? Are you related somehow?)
7. What are your thoughts about what he told you?

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Cover: A tailor shows a burqa to a customer at his shop in Herat.
Photo: Mohsen Karimi/AFP, 1 October 2023