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CONSEQUENCES OF PATRIARCHY AND OPPRESSION IN AUTHORITARIAN REGIMES: THE COLLAPSE OF AFGHAN WOMEN'S RIGHTS

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Madelyn Jablonski is a fourth year student studying International Relations and Spanish at Suffolk University's Madrid Campus. After her graduation in May 2023, Madelyn plans to continue her studies by pursuing a Master's Degree in Strategic Marketing and Communication. Madelyn's political interests lie in the areas of advocacy and public outreach.

She plans to combine what she has learned in her undergraduate and graduate studies in order to bring attention to problems certain groups of people face around the world that the general public may be unaware of. She also hopes to give a platform to those who do not have the chance to have their voices be heard. She is also passionate about LGBTQ+ rights, body image, access to education, environmental issues, US student loan debt, and the misperceptions of young people in today's society.



ABOUT POLITICS4HER:

Politics4Her is an intersectional feminist platform & youth-led movement advocating for the inclusive participation of young women and girls in politics. Politics4Her works to broaden dialogue and to bring international human rights into practice through advising policymakers and states by bringing international best ideas. Politics4Her strives to contribute to a more equitably governed world by democratizing national laws and legislation.

ABOUT THE PROGRAM:

The Young Feminist Scholars Programme is meant for any student who is extremely passionate about feminism and gender issues. The goal will be for each scholar to deliver a report specializing on a region in the world covering issues related to gender-based violence and/or women's political participation. Our two criteria for our scholars are to identify as international feminists (regardless of their gender) and most importantly to be able to showcase leadership. Scholars get to work in research, writing, policy as well as communications advocacy. Our main goal is for them to explore these different fields and see what they are most interested in while offering them guidance and mentorship so that it potentially helps them launch their early career.

TRIGGER WARNING:

Please note that since this policy brief includes words and phrases that should be avoided, you may come across some that you consider discriminatory or that have been used historically to oppress certain people or groups. These may cause distress to people who have experienced discrimination on the basis of their identity. Given the nature of this policy brief, we understand that many of the issues it discusses are personal and emotive for many people. While naming oppressions is necessary to deconstruct them, we recognize that this can take a toll on those directly affected. Please take care in the reading of the policy brief and prioritize your wellbeing.



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Taliban is a religious extremist and nationalistic militant group that regained control in Afghanistan in 2021. As a result of this, many human rights violations have been occurring in the country, more specifically women's rights. The Taliban is taking extreme measures to suppress women in order to create a patriarchal society so that they may maintain their power in the country. Women from young girls to the elderly all face their rights being taken away, which has had major consequences on all aspects of their lives. This policy brief is going to focus on the consequences of an authoritarian regime, such as the Taliban. It will draw attention to how women's rights are not only being taken away today but are at risk of affecting Afghan women's lives for generations to come. The brief will also include a breakdown of the current events of the country and highlight why it is a pressing issue that needs attention. The main focus of this policy brief is not an attempt to abolish the role of Islam and Sharia Law in the Southwest Asian and North African region, also referred to as the SWANA region, but will mention how it is a tool used by the Taliban in an extreme and harmful way.

INTRODUCTION

Afghanistan is a country that has resurfaced as a very prevalent focus of debate in recent news reports and media for women's rights violations yet again. It is currently a place where violence and oppression of women have occurred, which has caught the attention of many people all over the world, sparking international movements and resistance from Afghan women and beyond. But why is this happening and why should those not living in Afghanistan pay attention? The Taliban seized power in Afghanistan once again in 2021 and since then women have been drastically stripped of their rights. Some scholars, researchers, and journalists are even beginning to refer to this occurrence as gender apartheid, which will later be defined (Ochab).



Afghanistan | lex.dk – Den Store Danske



The Fuller Project

Areas of their lives in which their rights have been taken include but are not limited to, the rights to education, work, and self-expression. They have also faced an increase in violence and maltreatment, while simultaneously losing their rights to legal systems as well as participation in government. Even though the level of women's rights wasn't strong before the Taliban took power, today their remaining rights have been taken from them and now face even more harsh rules and policies than ever before. Oppressive regimes, such as the Taliban use extremist beliefs to assert complete power at the expense of negatively impacting women by suppressing them to support men; creating a toxic, patriarchal society.

What is apartheid?

How is it relevant to this topic?



Apartheid is a term already categorized as an international crime and crime against humanity by the Rome Statute, which is the international treaty in which the International Criminal Court, referred to as the ICC, is built. Apartheid was defined as the systematic segregation in places such as South Africa in the 20th century as systematic institutionalized segregation by race (Ochab). Gender apartheid differs slightly from this as it refers to the segregation of gender rather than race.

When it comes to the concept of apartheid, emphasis is placed on how a government implements certain policies to favor one group over the other. This can include reducing or completely stripping a certain group of their rights, drastically affecting their everyday lives. Though gender apartheid, is not yet formally recognized as something such as an international crime due to the interpretation of apartheid pertaining only to gender, it is starting to gain traction, especially in the case of the oppression of Afghan women and girls (Ochab).

A formal campaign supporting this idea was launched on International Women's Day in March 2023. The basis of the campaign focuses on the lack of current laws properly protecting against the systematic discrimination of women in places such as Afghanistan or Iran, as previously mentioned ("Campaign Calls for Gender Apartheid").

METHODOLOGY

First, the brief as a whole will have the information broken down into different categories. The subheadings of these categories are education, work, participation in government, abuse and maltreatment, self-expression and bodily autonomy, and negative consequences. Second, the brief will include academic and non-academic research, primary sources, as well as information from sources such as residents from the country, international bodies, and humanitarian organizations. It will also include the aforementioned topic of gender apartheid and argue how this term should be more widely used in order to properly convey the violations occurring in Afghanistan.



Lastly, it will then analyze the situation at hand using quantitative and qualitative data. Data will be used to reflect aspects such as how many women have suffered injuries from violence, for example. This will help to emphasize why this issue is important and set the reader up to hear solutions that will be proposed closing out the brief.

MAIN POINTS

HISTORICAL CONTEXT:

Since the Taliban took back power in Afghanistan in 2021, women's rights in the country are facing a crisis. Even though there was gender-based discrimination present in Afghanistan before the takeover of the Taliban, women's rights have completely disappeared as a result of the regime. The Taliban deemed that most jobs and education should be reserved just for men showing how the Taliban has created an oppressive and patriarchal regime. The most present areas in which women's rights are the most impacted by the Taliban rule include the right to education, work, and participation in government ("Violence and Discrimination Against Women"). They also face a higher number of abuse and maltreatment, decrease access to organizations and institutions, and an increase in restrictions on self-expression. Afghan women and girls are the largest group negatively impacted by the authoritative rule and have endured drastic changes in their lives, only one year following the start of Taliban rule. This also shows the intensity and level of power the regime has forced onto its people in such a short amount of time.



(Ebrahim Noroozi/AP)

EDUCATION

Soon after gaining power in the country, the Taliban banned any girls in secondary school and above the right to education in all provinces but Kunduz, Balkh, and Sar-e Pul. Even in these areas in which access to education remained, female students and teachers faced intimidation and harassment, which has caused attendance rates to drop to an all-time low as well. Therefore, even in the few areas where Afghan women and girls have the right to education in theory, in practice, this is not the case since they are still being deterred from attending school in other manners.

"My daughters are at home because schools are closed for them. My dreams for their future are all shattered. My life becomes bitter when I see my daughters with a disappointed look on their face. I do not have a good feeling at all." says Khatol, a former government employee who also lost her job due to the Taliban's policies.

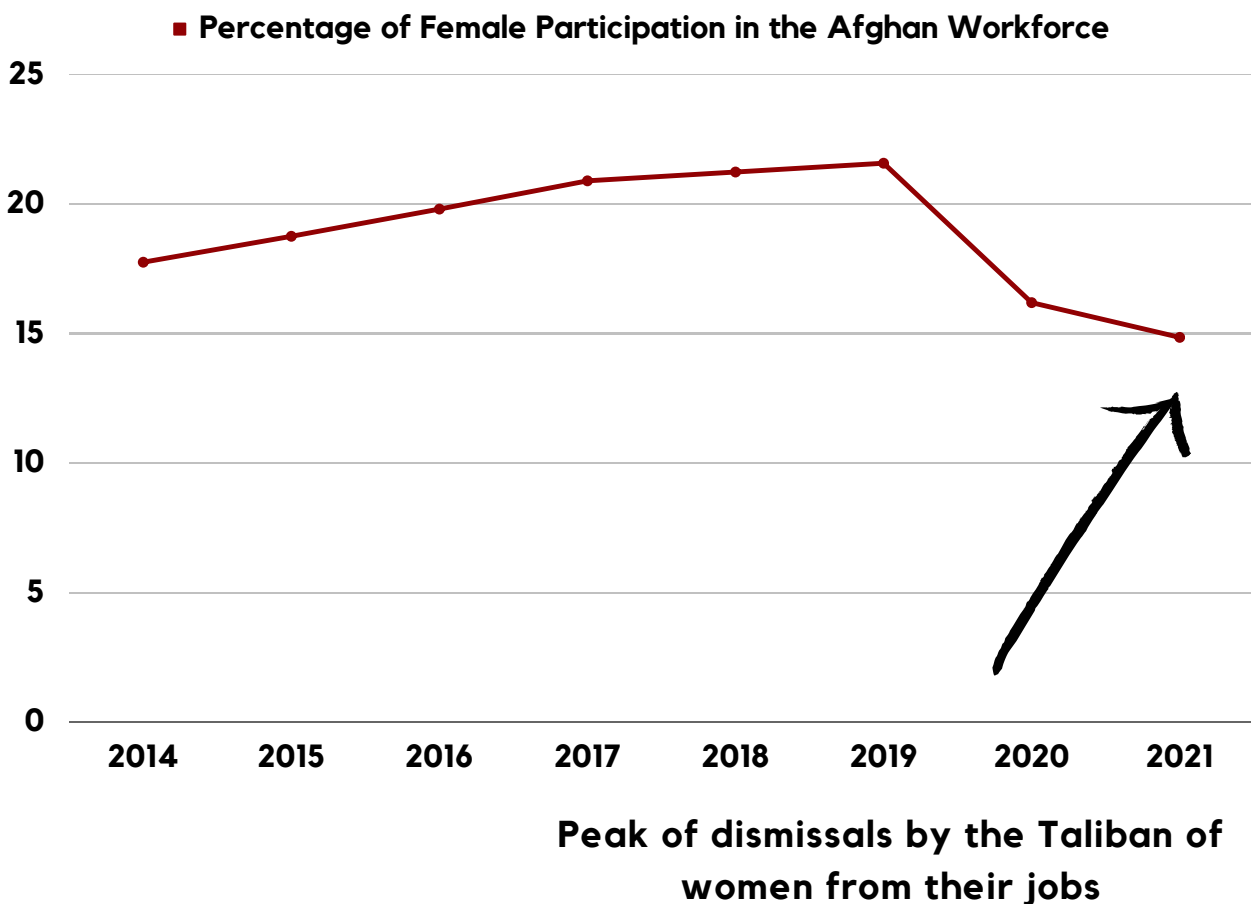
The effect of young women and girls no longer having the right to education goes beyond simply missing out on course curriculum, it can drastically change the course of a young woman's life. Education is a valuable resource that not only helps to provide the tools for growing adults to step into the role of active members of society but can help to provide better access to certain job opportunities in the future. Better jobs and a chance at greater personal financial prosperity can only be achieved through access to education past the childhood years. A lack of a good education is one of the ways in which the Taliban is diminishing women's rights as well as asserting power over them.

Afghan women's futures have already been decided for them, and that 'future' is a life of oppression and discrimination. No woman in any country should have their future dictated this way from such a young age. The lack of a good education will put women behind for the years to come, making it even harder for them to pursue equal rights with men. This shows how the discrimination against women is systematically created through governmental policies by the Taliban regime controlling the government and proves that gender apartheid reflects the case of Afghanistan today as per the definition previously given.

WORK

Even though women were told that they would still have the right to work after the Taliban gained control in the city of Kabul, many women across the country were told they could no longer go to work. First, the ban from work immediately commenced with all women working in government positions and continued until all jobs that could be worked by men were taken from women ("Afghanistan: Further Impoverished"). In 2019, the proportion of women in the labor force in Afghanistan peaked at 22%, which showed a slight recovery from the first round of Taliban rule in 1996-2001.

But since they have regained power, female employment has dropped from 22% to 15% in 2021 and is predicted to be even lower today (The World Bank). This is one of the lowest rates of female unemployment in the world. Taking away young women and girls rights to education could also have a great effect on this proportion as well. With women having the right to education being taken away from them at such a young age the chances of increasing the percentage of employed females are slim to none. This demonstrates one of the main impacts that can affect the country altogether.





© Education Cannot Wait

There are many women across the country that are earning a wage to keep their families afloat. Many of them being single mothers or the breadwinners of the house, now are facing poverty and struggling to put food on the table or keep the lights on ("In Focus: Women in Afghanistan" 2). "I cannot travel without a mahram [male chaperone]" says activist and Afghan woman Shiwa, "I do not have anyone at home to accompany me- neither a brother nor father. Who can accompany me? I am the one supporting my family." ("In Focus: Women in Afghanistan" 2).

This also shows how the policies imposed by the Taliban oppress women and put obstacles up to prevent them from living their lives the way they want and taking care of their families. Women such as Shiwa now face more struggles than facing discrimination, but now are left wondering how they will be able to provide for their family. A patriarchal society is harmful to everyone, no matter their gender. Women face the brunt of the impact that will be made on every Afghan person's life as a result of these extremely restricting measures against women

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PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS

As previously mentioned, government jobs were some of the first positions where women were told they could no longer come into work shortly after the reinstatement of the Taliban regime in 2021. "Before August, I had a normal life. I would work in an office together with my other colleagues including men." says Khatol, a former government employee in her firsthand account of how her life changed in August 2021 ("In Focus: Women in Afghanistan" 2). Khatol and her fellow female coworkers were let go from their job while her male counterparts were still permitted to continue work as usual.

It was no coincidence female government workers were the first workers to be barred from their jobs. Not soon after female government workers lost their jobs, all female participation in government was banned and were replaced by males. This includes not only women holding jobs in holding governmental or political positions but governmental institutions being taken away as well. For example, the Ministry of Women's Affairs, referred to as MoWA, and its provincial offices were all disbanded by the Taliban ("Violence and Discrimination Against Women").



(UN Women/ Amanda Voisard)



Women in the legal system were also greatly affected as female judges, lawyers, and prosecutors were dismissed from their jobs and were put in danger by the men that were imprisoned or convicted for domestic or gender-based violence. These men were freed following the dismissal of female legal professionals, and some reports even tell about the Taliban freeing these prisoners and ransacking the homes of female judges. It is evident that the banning of women from working and participating in the government or legal systems of Afghanistan not only affects how they provide for themselves and their families but also puts their safety at risk since men are being given the opportunity to act upon their anger towards the women who did their jobs and put criminals behind bars. So, not only are women banned from working and participating in government, some have the added concern of facing potential danger.

UN Women



ABUSE AND MISTREATMENT

Even before the Taliban regained control of Afghanistan in 2021, women have been facing assault, beatings, harassment, forced prostitution or marriage, and a myriad of other forms of maltreatment against Afghan women ("Violence and Discrimination Against Women"). It is even estimated by the World Health Organization that 90% of all Afghan women have experienced at least one form of domestic violence. This is an alarming number. But now, the Taliban have stripped women of their access to resources available to them if they endure such violence against them. It can also be assumed that the increase in the oppression of women allows these cases of violence to be on the rise, while the possibility of proper legal action against attackers or abusers has been taken away. For example, during the first few months of Taliban rule in 2021, "...35% of Afghan girls married before reaching the age of 18, and an outrageous 80% of women were victims of domestic abuse." ("Surviving Under the Taliban").

Also, as previously mentioned, female judges and lawyers were all banned from working in Afghanistan, and in many cases, those convicted of crimes of gender-based violence were then freed. Overall, this causes a block for these crimes being prevented and women have the chance to seek justice for the crimes committed against them. Therefore the right for women to be free from violence or torture has been taken away from them and is kept away through the systematic approach of also taking away the system and institutions that could be used to protect them



SELF-EXPRESSION AND BODILY AUTONOMY

The discrimination against women goes as far as their right to self-expression and bodily autonomy being taken away. A strict dress code based on their extreme interpretation of Islam and Sharia Law was immediately imposed once the Taliban gained power. This dress code unequally affects women, forcing them to cover their entire bodies, from the top of their heads to their feet. This also includes ankles and the face except for the eyes. Their clothing cannot be too brightly colored and women are still subjected to men's unwanted opinions when they leave the house.



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A sample of the experiences of a woman in Afghanistan can be understood through this quote from Jamila, a psychologist in Afghanistan, from a testimonial given to the UN Women's Organization: "Back then, I had no fear when I left home. I had no fear that someone would stop me on the street and ask me why my veil is white, red, or yellow. I had no fear that someone would stop me and snatch my phone out of my hand to see what I got on my phone. After August last year, life has become a complete nightmare for me." This shows the drastic change that women have endured since the implementation of such a strict dress code. It also shows how it has taken away power from women and given it to men, creating a completely patriarchal society while oppressing women. Seemingly no aspect of their lives has been left untouched by the discriminatory policies of the Taliban, therefore making this issue an issue of gender apartheid.

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Twitter/@RoxanaBahar1



Twitter/@WasHasNaz

The veil that is mentioned in the Quran and teachings has been replaced in Afghanistan by traditional Afghan clothing called a burkha, which is more covering than the veil as it includes covering the face and hands at all times ("Surviving Under the Taliban"). The women of Afghanistan should be able to choose whether or not they would prefer to wear a burkha when leaving their home, not have it be mandatory for them by those in power. Along with the requirement to wear a burka, a woman in Afghanistan is no longer allowed to wear make-up, high heels, or revealing clothing ("Surviving Under the Taliban"). The control over women down to their appearance emphasizes how the control and oppression of women are at such an extreme level. Not only do women no longer have the right to their jobs or an education, but they are also no longer allowed the freedom to express themselves through their appearance.

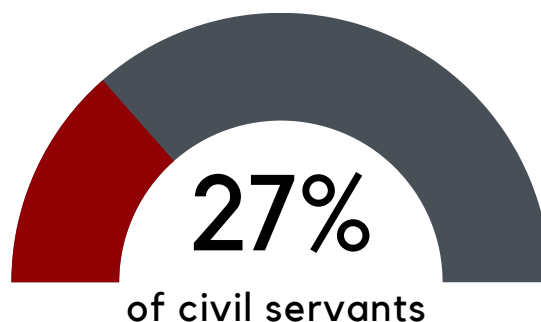
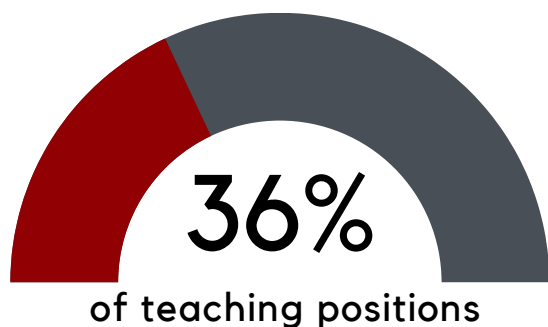
NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES

Without women working, many households are put in terrible financial positions. It also has an effect on the economy as a whole. One of the biggest consequences of this is being women fired from jobs and banned from schools, as well as their other rights diminishing, which has caused many sources of international funding to pull out of Afghanistan. Funding from other countries is a major part of Afghanistan's GDP. Taking away the right to work from almost all Afghan women has driven away skilled workers and a decent percentage of the labor force, which also contributes to a weakening economy (Iestork). Some labor fields in Afghanistan feel this impact more than others.

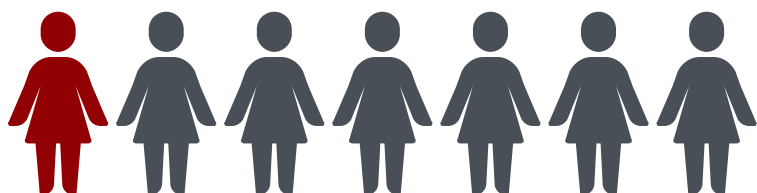
Female dominated jobs such as nurses and teachers are affected the most from the loss of the right to work. For example, 36% of teaching and 27% of civil servants were women, positions in the country were made up by women. It was also estimated that only 100 of the 700 female journalists in Kabul were still working by the end of 2021 ("Afghanistan: Further Impoverished").

Healthcare and women-owned small businesses are other fields in which the loss of women's jobs are felt. So, not only are women and their families now facing poverty due to losing their jobs, but any Afghan citizen will feel the effects of women's rights being taken away. Lastly, this shows how the Taliban does not care about any human rights and will do anything to hold onto power in the country, even if that means resorting to something as drastic as completely destroying the economy to do so.

Before August 2021 Afghan women made up....



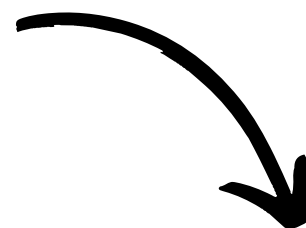
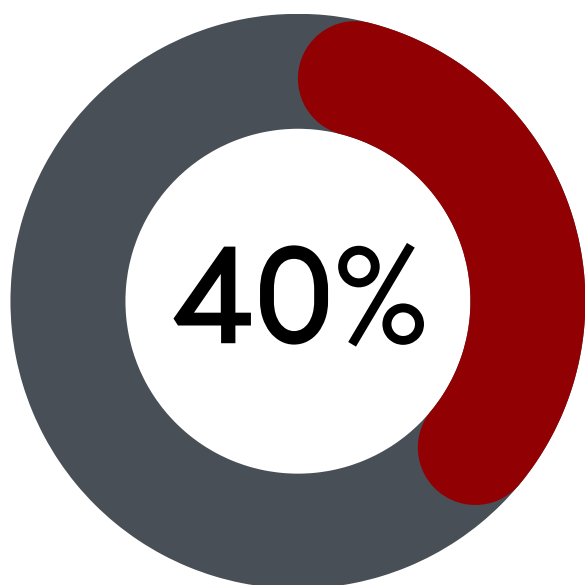
...today these percentages are dropping to almost 0%



Only 1 in ever 7 female journalists in Kabul, Afghanistan still had their job at the end of 2021



80% of all midwives across the country in 2018 were female. This position is now the most at risk of completely vanishing due to banning women from working and education.



40% of all healthcare facilities were already operating without female staff in 2016

CONCLUSION



Making policy recommendations to the Taliban itself is not an option. They are an extremist group that has committed serious human rights violations against women. The Taliban gets its power based on suppressing one group, women, to raise another, men. Suggesting that the Taliban should make changes in how they rule will not create change for women's rights. It will enable them and legitimize their power if it is recognized in this way. Yes, the Taliban could say that they are making changes that are suggested to them to help grant more women's rights, but there would be a hard limit to the rights that would be reinstated for them. It has also been proven that there is a severe disconnect when it comes to theory versus practice. In theory, the Taliban could say they're giving women their right to work back, for example, but once they do they facilitate intimidation and harassment that deters women from going to work. This shows that making policy recommendations cannot start from inside the current regime, they need to come from outside Afghanistan's borders and work their way in.

Taking away the right for women's rights is the main strategy used by the Taliban to silence women's voices and try to prevent resistance against discrimination against them. It also enables the creation of a government-run by men for men. There is no longer space for opposition and opinions other than the ones that support the male-dominated regime, but the resistance still prevails elsewhere. International organizations such as the UN, smaller nonprofits, journalists, activists, and other people fighting the oppression and discrimination against Afghan women are making their voices heard in other ways. Mobilizing people and encouraging the movement for women's rights in Afghanistan could give way to real progress and change being made. Holding those accountable for their actions on an international level weakens the power of the regime while simultaneously giving some power back to women. If this were to occur, who knows what could happen? Reinstating Afghan women's rights has the potential to diminish the power of Taliban rule and create a more democratic or fair way of governance in the future.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1

RESOURCES FOR FEMALE REFUGEES

2

DEFINING GENDER APARTHEID

3

ICC INVESTIGATIONS THROUGH TRIBUNALS

RESOURCES FOR FEMALE REFUGEES

In February 2023, Denmark followed the lead of Sweden's decision in December 2022 in granting the right to asylum and residency permits to women refugees fleeing Afghanistan ("Denmark, Sweden Offer Protection"). This gesture not only provides a potential resource for Afghan women but legitimizes the issue of gender discrimination and oppression that is occurring in the country. It also draws attention to the severity and urgency of the situation at hand. Other countries offering similar options to women fleeing Afghanistan as a result of the authoritative regime in power, could help to give women better chances at life and the enjoyment of the rights they are entitled to.

All in all, foreign countries need to step up and provide any kind of assistance they can to help facilitate the migration of women out of Afghanistan. Other countries can provide safe passage routes for migrant women, donate to neighboring countries in order to create the facilities needed to properly and safely receive refugees, and create medical or mental health resources. Female migrants are more at risk than their male counterparts for facing dangers such as assault, violence, or rape against them. It is vital that there are resources for women that could help them with the trauma of fleeing the country and help to ease them through the transition to life in a new country.



SAEED ALI ACHAKZAI | Credit: REUTERS

نه به آپارتايد جنسيتي
جنسيتي اپارتايد ختم كړئ

GENDER APARTHEID

<https://endgenderapartheid.today/>

FORMAL DEFINITION AND ADOPTION OF GENDER APARTHEID

The second policy recommendation is for the International Criminal Court, or the ICC, to take action to investigate discrimination in Afghanistan. As previously mentioned, the ICC recognizes apartheid as an actual crime against humanity, but only when it pertains to the issue of segregation and discrimination on the basis of race. This has caused the systematic discrimination and oppression of other minority groups in a country to not be acknowledged or deemed as such. This has created a lack of real action in cases such as the Taliban woman in Afghanistan.



Women continue to face their rights being taken from them and no real progress is being made toward reinstating them. Gender apartheid is a term that is only beginning to gain traction in certain aspects, but real change occurs when it can be officially recognized by an influential international body.

What would happen if the ICC investigates the women's rights violations in Afghanistan?

If the ICC were to first investigate the human rights violations that have occurred in Afghanistan through tribunals set up specifically for this case, they would then recognize that women are facing serious, systematic discrimination and oppression as a result of the Taliban regime's policies. This would give way to the ICC to take the results of these trials and finally adopt their own definition of gender apartheid. The ICC recognizing and defining gender apartheid could give way to guidelines on how to recognize it, in Afghanistan and other countries, as well as provide a route in which such crimes against humanity can be put through a legal trial. International legal involvement that shows results against what is happening in Afghanistan could help to bring about real progress working towards the proper rights that the women in Afghanistan deserve.

ICC INVESTIGATIONS THROUGH TRIBUNALS



The third and final recommendation is to form an official definition of gender apartheid that can be used not only by the ICC, but organizations, the media, and even individuals around the world. The current definition of apartheid by the ICC is as follows: "... inhumane acts of a character... committed in the context of an institutionalized regime of systematic oppression and domination by one racial group over any other racial group or groups and committed with the intention of maintaining that regime;". But why should apartheid be limited to just race? The definition of gender apartheid can be created by simply changing 2 words in the ICC's definition: "... inhumane acts of a character... committed in the context of an institutionalized regime of systematic oppression and domination by one [gender] group over any other [gender] group or groups and committed with the intention of maintaining that regime;".

Different minority groups face this same type of oppression by another group with more privilege and power in a certain country or area. Limiting the concept of apartheid to just race enables the systematic oppression of many groups around the world in different ways. In the case of Afghanistan specifically, the limitation of the official definition of apartheid is one of the reasons why no real action has been taken against the Taliban regime and the atrocities they have committed against Afghan women. Those in power who have committed these crimes go unpunished and the regime continues to dominate the country with extremist, patriarchal policies.

Apartheid:

"... inhumane acts of a character... committed in the context of an institutionalized regime of systematic oppression and domination by one racial group over any other racial group or groups and committed with the intention of maintaining that regime;"

Gender Apartheid:

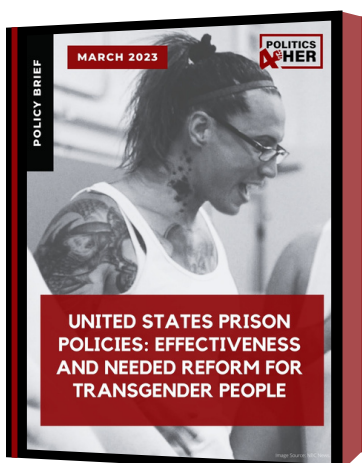
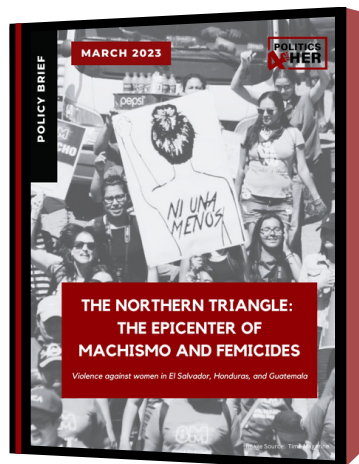
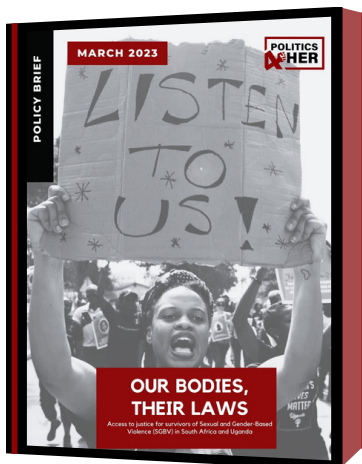
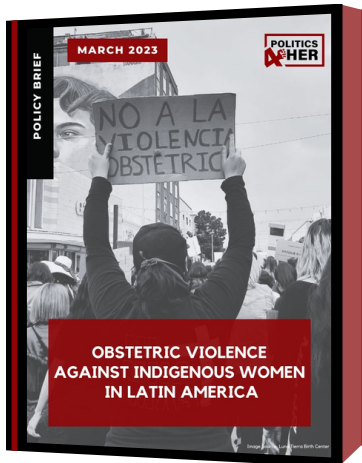
"... inhumane acts of a character... committed in the context of an institutionalized regime of systematic oppression and domination by one [gender] group over any other [gender] group or groups and committed with the intention of maintaining that regime;"

Adopting an official definition of gender apartheid as a result of investigations that could be made could in turn start to bring about justice for the women of Afghanistan, while simultaneously weakening the regime in place, which could be the start to implementing women's rights back into the country. Furthermore, it could give way to more awareness of the issue of gender apartheid and spark movements fighting for women's rights in Afghanistan and beyond.

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OUR OTHER POLICY BRIEFS





We are committed to assisting and providing resources for young women to become active participants of politics, international affairs and diplomacy. **Ideas matter, they shape the world we live in.** So, we strive to build a community to allow us to raise our voices, promote our ideas and share our vision, empowering women to be part of the change.



politics4her@gmail.com



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