



Human Rights Research League  
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# Those We Left Behind

**Revenge Killings and Other Serious Human Rights Violations in Afghanistan in the Aftermath of the Taliban's Seizure of Power**





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Those We Left Behind: Revenge Killings and Other Serious Human Rights Violations in Afghanistan in the Aftermath of the Taliban's Seizure of Power

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## **Executive Summary:**

Over the past year and a half, Human Rights Research League (HRRL) has been conducting a research project documenting Revenge Killings and Other Serious Human Rights Violations in Afghanistan in the Aftermath of the Taliban's Seizure of Power, covering all of Afghanistan's 34 provinces. The main part of the research has been carried out on the ground, by our team of Afghan researchers, conducting face-to-face interviews with witnesses and victims throughout the country, in all provinces, gathering information and documenting revenge killings, acts of torture, enforced disappearances, kidnappings, expulsions, and other serious abuses (e.g., extortion, sexual violence, forced marriages etc.) committed in Afghanistan since 15 August 2021.

This report is based on 433 face-to-face interviews conducted on the ground in Afghanistan across all the country's provinces. In addition, information received via other first-hand contacts, background interviews with Afghan experts, and reports by other international and human rights organizations informed our analysis. However, for matters of consistency and comparability, the statistics and numbers presented in this report are exclusively based on our own data, collected in person by our researchers.

Based on these 433 interviews, we identified 578 individual victims, across the country, who were exposed to a total of 770 serious violations of their human rights, including, in more than 400 cases, having their ultimate human right taken from them, the right to life.

The *de facto* authorities have repeatedly objected to limited reports depicting them as perpetrators of serious crimes, claiming instead these casualties were related to the armed conflict during the take-over, or committed by others, or by rogue groups, or based on personal feuds. But this is not what we have seen.

Our data suggests that a broad pattern of revenge killings and other serious human rights abuses emerges, not just in a few provinces, but throughout the entire country, not just during the immediate power transition period, but more than two years after the *de facto* authorities' seizure of power, and not just against people directly connected to the former government, but against all people, including women and children targeted by association.

Underlining the research findings, this report details victim profiles, categories, frequencies, and patterns of crime, and exemplifies the complexity of the situation with the help of actual cases, drawn from the data collected in personal interviews from across all of Afghanistan's 34 provinces.

## خلاصه

در طی یک سال و نیم گذشته، سازمان تحقیقات حقوق بشر (HRRL) یک پروژه تحقیقاتی را در زمینه مستندسازی قتل‌های انتقام‌جویانه و سایر موارد نقض جدی حقوق بشر در افغانستان، پس از به قدرت رسیدن طالبان، انجام داده است که تمام ۳۴ ولایت‌های افغانستان را تحت پوشش قرار میدهد. بخش عمده این تحقیقات در خاک افغانستان توسط تیم تحقیقات ما صورت گرفته است که طی آن با شاهدان و قربانیان در تمام ولایت‌های کشور مصاحبه حضوری انجام داده است. آنها اطلاعات در راستای مستندسازی قتل‌های انتقام‌جویانه، اعمال شکنجه، ناپدید شدن اجباری، آدم‌ربایی، اخراج، و سایر آزارهای جدی (مانند اخاذی، خشونت جنسی، ازدواج‌های اجباری و غیره) که از تاریخ ۱۵ اوت ۲۰۲۱ در افغانستان مرتکب شده است را جمع‌آوری کرده‌اند.

این گزارش بر اساس ۴۳۳ مصاحبه حضوری در افغانستان در تمام ولایت‌های کشور صورت گرفته است. علاوه بر این، اطلاعات دریافت شده از منابع دست اول، مصاحبه با کارشناسان افغانستان، و گزارش‌های دیگر سازمان‌های بین‌المللی و حقوق بشری، مبنای تحلیل ما بوده است. البته برای انطباق و مقایسه صحیح، آمار و ارقام ارائه شده در این گزارش منحصراً بر اساس داده‌های خود ما است که شخصاً توسط محققان ما جمع‌آوری شده است.

بر اساس این ۴۳۳ مصاحبه، ما ۵۷۸ قربانی را در سراسر کشور شناسایی کرده ایم که در مجموع در معرض ۷۷۰ مورد نقض جدی حقوق بشری قرار گرفته‌اند، از جمله در بیش از ۴۰۰ مورد، پایه‌ای ترین حق هر انسان که همانا حق زیستن میباشد از آنها گرفته شد است.

مقامات بالفعل مکرراً به گزارش‌های محدودی که آنها را مرتکبان جنایات جدی نشان میدهند اعتراض کرده‌اند، در عوض ادعا میکنند که این تلفات مربوط به درگیریهای مسلحانه در حین تسلط بوده، یا توسط دیگران، یا توسط گروه‌های سرکش، یا بر اساس دشمنی‌های شخصی انجام شده است. اما، این آن چیزی نیست که ما مشاهده کرده ایم.

داده‌های ما نشان میدهد که پدیده گسترده‌ای از قتل‌های انتقام‌جویانه و سایر نقض‌های جدی حقوق بشر، نه فقط در چند استان، بلکه در سراسر کشور، نه فقط در دوره انتقال قدرت، بلکه بیش از دو سال پس از بدست گرفتن قدرت، و نه فقط علیه افرادی که مستقیماً با دولت سابق مرتبط بوده‌اند، بلکه علیه همه مردم، از جمله زنان و کودکانی به دلیل وابستگی به فرد مربوطه، مورد هدف انتقام قرار میگیرند.

این گزارش، بر اساس تحقیقات صورت گرفته، مشخصات قربانیان، نوع جرم و تعداد دفعاتی که این گونه جرم‌ها رخ داده است، روال جرم و جنایت را شرح میدهد و پیچیدگی وضعیت را با کمک موارد واقعی که از داده‌های جمع‌آوری شده در مصاحبه‌های شخصی از تمام ۳۴ ولایت افغانستان به دست آمده است را نشان میدهد.

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<sup>i</sup> Map basis courtesy of the University of Texas Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin.

<sup>ii</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>iii</sup> *Ibid.*

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# Those We Left Behind

## Revenge Killings and Other Serious Human Rights Violations in Afghanistan in the Aftermath of the Taliban's Seizure of Power

*To all those brave Afghan women and men who contributed to this report with their testimony, insights, and efforts to make their and their fellow citizens' voices heard.*

### I. Introduction and Background

In April 2021, following three years of negotiations with the Taliban, the United States announced a withdrawal of troops to be completed by 11 September 2021. The withdrawal of NATO and allied troops was effectively concluded in August 2021. From the announcement of the withdrawal on, the Taliban began to rapidly advance on government-held territory, while the Afghan army and security forces for various reasons proved incapable to mount an effective defense, ostensibly taking the allies by surprise. On 15 August 2021, the Taliban took over control of Kabul and thus finalized their grip on power and re-established the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan.

The hasty and largely uncoordinated withdrawal and evacuation left “an estimated 150-170000 Afghans who worked with the international community over the past two decades”<sup>1</sup> behind, in addition to large groups of unconnected, ordinary people, who were left in peril. Soon after the seizure of power, the Taliban issued a countrywide ban on protests and “started a crackdown on the free media, including the detention of and assaults on journalists”, and the vulnerable population targeted for serious Human Rights abuses now covers most segments of society, including women, girls, the LGBTI+ community, ethnic and religious minorities notably Shia Hazaras, members of civil society, academics, journalists, lawyers, judges”<sup>2</sup>. Despite promises to the contrary, including the announcement of an inclusive government and amnesties for former Afghan security forces who had laid down their weapons, expulsion from homes, kidnappings, arbitrary detentions, revenge killings and other acts contrary to International Human Rights Law and International Humanitarian Law are the order of the day – amidst an unfolding humanitarian catastrophe: For 2022, Afghanistan’s population was estimated to pass 43 million, with more than half of the population (24.4 million people) in need of life-saving humanitarian support, and almost half of the population is under 15 years old, rendering it one of the largest youth populations in the world<sup>3</sup>. In 2023, with recurring droughts, continuing economic decline, and the added negative economic and humanitarian impact of policies severely restricting women’s rights,

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. European Parliament Resolution of 16 September 2021 on the Situation in Afghanistan, para. F. Available at: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2021-0393\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2021-0393_EN.html).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, paras. I-J.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Humanitarian Response Plan Afghanistan, UNOCHA (March 2023), p. 6-7, 13. Available at: <https://www.unocha.org/attachments/86fcc7cc-1fc7-490b-bdeb-75ea760281bc/Afghanistan-Humanitarian-Response-Plan-2023.pdf>

mobility and access to work, “a staggering 28.3 million people (two thirds of Afghanistan’s population) will need urgent humanitarian assistance to survive”<sup>4</sup>.

## **1. Those We Left Behind**

To be sure, such a high number of people in need did not start with the takeover by the Taliban. Rather, the numbers have progressively increased “from 9.4 million people in January 2020 to 14 million people in June 2020, 18.4 million people in January 2021, 24.4 million people in 2022, and now to 28.3 million people”, reflecting “the progressive shocks of COVID-19, the increase in conflict leading up to the takeover by the DFA [*de facto* authorities], the resulting economic shock, recurrent drought and the impact of policies, particularly restrictions on women’s rights and mobility, since August 2021”<sup>5</sup>. But at the time (prior to August 2021), the international presence was still relatively solid, access to those in need did not face the same hindrances, women’s right to work, including for international NGOs and UN agencies and thus their ability to follow up other women, was not nearly as restricted, and those working for and with the international community and forces were still protected by the presence of the latter.

All of that changed with the hasty withdrawal of allied troops and by 15 August 2021, as far as Afghanistan is concerned, the international community had effectively failed on the broadest spectrum and on every level its most central pledge inherent to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the UN Sustainable Development Goals: Leave No One Behind<sup>6</sup>. Instead, many of the most vulnerable were left in peril, others were exposed and left without protection against the wrath of those they opposed before.

To all those, this report is dedicated: Those We Left Behind.

## **2. Discrepancy between (Good) Intentions and Capabilities**

In a “Joint Statement on Reports of Summary Killings and Enforced Disappearances in Afghanistan” on 4 December 2021, the United States and Western partners expressed their worries in view of the current situation:

“We are deeply concerned by reports of summary killings and enforced disappearances of former members of the Afghan security forces [...].

We underline that the alleged actions constitute serious human rights abuses and contradict the Taliban’s announced amnesty [...].

Reported cases must be investigated promptly and in a transparent manner, those responsible must be held accountable, and these steps must be clearly publicized as an immediate deterrent to further killings and disappearances.

*We will continue to measure the Taliban by their actions.”<sup>7</sup>*

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>6</sup> United Nations Sustainable Development Group: Leave No One Behind. Available at: <https://unsdg.un.org/2030-agenda/universal-values/leave-no-one-behind> .

<sup>7</sup> U.S. State Department, Joint Statement on Reports of Summary Killings and Enforced Disappearances in Afghanistan, Media Note, Office of the Spokesman, (Dec. 4, 2021), (emphasis added). Available at: <https://www.state.gov/joint-statement-on-reports-of-summary-killings-and-enforced-disappearances-in-afghanistan/> .

But especially this last phrase embodies the whole scope of the dilemma: “We will continue to measure the Taliban by their actions.” Now that there are no longer any allied ‘boots on the ground’ and barely any ‘eyes on the ground’, how can we expect to keep such a promise? Without an appropriate ‘measure’, a broad and independent overview of Human Rights abuses across the country (data basis), efforts at trying to ‘measure the Taliban by their actions’ will largely be in vain.

For obvious reasons, the Taliban *de facto* government has few intentions or incentives to contribute to documenting and reporting their own crimes, and the international community largely lacks the tools and (independent) access to do so.

Prior to the allied forces’ withdrawal, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) regularly kept a record of civilian casualties, in accordance with its UN Security Council mandate. However, now, without powerful allied presence on the ground, UNAMA’s options are quite limited, and UNAMA’s capabilities for independent information gathering and critical reporting on abuses attributable to the *de facto* authorities naturally (more) restricted.

The UN Secretary-General’s Special Representative for Afghanistan, Deborah Lyons, acknowledged as much when she, in her briefing to the UN Security Council on 17 November 2021, praised the “formal interactions” as having “been generally useful and constructive” and stated that “the Taliban continue to provide security to the United Nations presence throughout the country”. Of course, having the host country provide security to a mission is not unusual, but having as the sole security provider forces of a country whose government is not politically recognized and includes “persons responsible for acts of terrorism, including former detainees, individuals under UN sanctions and a person on an FBI most wanted list”<sup>8</sup>, evidently does not set the stage for broad, independent information gathering – and especially so when it comes to abuses committed by or under the reign of the very persons that now are charged with assisting in investigating those crimes.

Within these ramifications, UNAMA tries to continue documenting casualties, but these efforts are largely focused on civilian casualties from indiscriminately used improvised explosive devices (IED) and explosive remnants of war, as opposed to revenge killings and other serious Human Rights abuses.<sup>9</sup> For the latter, UNAMA mostly has to rely on information provided by others, instead of first-hand, independent information gathering. And arguably, already long before an allied withdrawal from Afghanistan was even envisioned, UNAMA’s access to information was limited by security challenges, both in the country and within the mission:

“The conflict itself, and UN safety restrictions on what staff can do as a result, mean that in some areas staff find it much harder to maintain local networks and have to conduct all

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<sup>8</sup> European Parliament Resolution of 16 September 2021 on the Situation in Afghanistan, para. G. Cf. *supra*, fn. 1.

<sup>9</sup> In that vein, from 15 August 2021 to 30 May 2023, UNAMA recorded a total of 3,774 civilian casualties, including 1,095 civilians killed. About three quarters of these casualties were caused by indiscriminate attacks using improvised explosive devices (IED) or by unexploded explosive ordnances (UXO) and other remnants of war, resulting in random victims. Cf. Human Rights Situation in Afghanistan: May-June 2023 Update, UNAMA (2023), p. 3. Available at: [https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/human\\_rights\\_situation\\_in\\_afghanistan\\_may\\_-\\_june\\_2023\\_0.pdf](https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/human_rights_situation_in_afghanistan_may_-_june_2023_0.pdf).

interviews by phone. Staff noted that this affects the quality of information, verification from onsite investigation being preferable”<sup>10</sup>.

In the current predicament, the same restrictions and limitations on information gathering will of course apply to any international, official mandate or mission, which, correspondingly, will depend even more on other actors to provide vital information regarding serious Human Rights abuses committed on the ground and thus to hold the *de facto* government accountable.

Acknowledging this fact, the Human Rights Council resolution establishing the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Afghanistan in 2021 defined his tasks, similar to the ones of comparable UN Special Rapporteur mandate holders, as “[t]o seek, receive, examine and act on information from all relevant stakeholders pertaining to the situation of human rights in Afghanistan”<sup>11</sup>, thus largely having to rely on the collection and provision of information by others. When renewing and updating the mandate the following year, “the responsibility to *document and preserve* information relating to human rights violations and abuses”<sup>12</sup> was included, thereby preparing the ground for future accountability mechanisms.

This report aims to contribute to these efforts.

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. The UN and Casualty Recording: Good Practices and the Need for Action, Oxford Research Group (April 2014), p. 26. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/ORG-UN-and-CR.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Human Rights Council, Resolution on the Situation of Human Rights in Afghanistan, 13 October 2021, para. 12. UN GA Res. 48/1. Available at: <https://undocs.org/Home/Mobile?FinalSymbol=A%2FHRC%2FRES%2F48%2F1&Language=E&DeviceType=Desktop&LangRequested=False>.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Human Rights Council, Resolution on the Situation of Human Rights in Afghanistan, 11 October 2022, para. 20. UN GA Res. 51/20. Available at: <https://undocs.org/Home/Mobile?FinalSymbol=A%2FHRC%2FRES%2F51%2F20&Language=E&DeviceType=Desktop&LangRequested=False> (emphasis added).

## **II. Methodology**

Over the past year and a half, Human Rights Research League (HRRL) has been conducting this research project documenting revenge killings and other serious violations of Human Rights since the Taliban's seizure of power in Afghanistan, covering all of Afghanistan's 34 provinces. The primary part of the research was conducted on the ground, by our group of (Afghan) researchers, conducting face-to-face interviews with witnesses and victims throughout the country, in all provinces, gathering information and documenting revenge killings, acts of torture, forced disappearances, kidnappings, expulsions, and other serious violations of Human Rights (e.g., rape, sexual violence, forced marriages).

To that end, HRRL developed and conducted a course and training program for selected team members adjusted for project specific circumstances, covering research methods, research ethics, interview techniques and awareness of the risk of re-traumatization of victims (and, for that matter, of researchers themselves), encryption methods, security, and other issues of concern. A questionnaire (as a basis for collecting information) with specific questions for interviewers, data categories, and coding was developed and translated into the relevant languages (Pashto and Dari), a database for data entry established, and specific work plans and areas (provinces) per field researcher assigned.

The main part of the data collection took place from October 2022 to June 2023, in the course of which a total of 433 separate face-to-face interviews were conducted throughout all 34 provinces, in addition to information received via other, direct contacts in separate cases and physical background interviews conducted with doctors and forensic experts at hospitals and morgues in Afghanistan. The last case was received while this report was already in the process of being drafted, in September 2023. However, for reasons of consistency and comparability, the statistics presented in the ensuing chapters are exclusively based on our in-country, face-to-face interviews, with all extra information collected being used to inform and contextualize the interpretation of the results.

All interviewees were informed of the nature and purpose of the research, including how the information would be used, should they agree to contribute with their testimony. No monetary compensation or any other incentives were offered for their statements. Their only motivation was to have their voices heard and get their truth out. Nor were any team members rewarded according to the number of interviews they conducted. Researchers were particularly alert to avoiding the risk of re-traumatization. From all interviewees, informed, oral consent was obtained. Interviewees were also offered the option not to have their names stated. While not all of them requested anonymity, given the serious nature of the crimes for which testimony has been given and the significant, imminent risk of negative repercussions for any person identified as a witness in that context, we chose not to include real names in this public report or otherwise reveal any identities of people (incl. of victims) that might put them or their identifiable relations at risk<sup>13</sup>, in line with the overriding humanitarian principle: Do No Harm.

Where feasible, information from several witnesses and other sources was obtained on the same case, with the ideal of triangulation.

Interviews were conducted in Dari and/or Pashto. Afghan team members included male and female researchers, hailing from various parts of Afghanistan. The original data collected (in Dari and Pashto) was continuously transferred in a predefined, encrypted way and securely

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<sup>13</sup> For the same reason, we chose not to employ the term 'witness' in the references, but rather operate with the more generic description of 'persons with (direct) knowledge of the incident', even where they were first-hand eyewitnesses.

stored in real time outside the target country. Translations were checked and potential inconsistencies or peculiarities discussed with Afghan team members.

Due to the challenging security situation in Afghanistan and the sensitive nature of this project, data collectors could not remain for long working in certain areas, and often crisscrossed from district to district, with a view to avoid attracting attention. At other times, they had to stay put for a while. Their respective travel itineraries took these challenges into account.

Upon completion of the data collection process, the data and findings were cross-checked with other available information, including news articles and reports in other media, reporting by various UN agencies, mandates and missions, other international bodies, and NGOs, and academic and other literature was consulted.

### III. The Research Project

The main part of the data for our research project on ‘Those We Left Behind: Revenge Killings and Other Serious Human Rights Violations in Afghanistan in the Aftermath of the Taliban's Seizure of Power’ was collected between October 2022 and June 2023, with extra cases and background information received up until September 2023. The project covers *inter alia* revenge killings and (other) extrajudicial killings, torture, kidnappings, expulsions, enforced disappearances, sexual violence, and cases of extortion. It aims at documenting crimes committed from the Taliban's seizure of power on, i.e., from 15 August 2021 on, until, in principle, today. However, as the majority of the data was collected prior to June 2023 and interviews often also cover incidents that happened a while ago, this is naturally reflected in the distribution of the number of cases.

While all the crimes depicted here took place after the *de facto* authorities' take-over, we do not thereby assume that all of them have been committed by the Taliban or are attributable to the Taliban (and where there are indications to the contrary, this will be reflected in the ensuing chapters). After all, crimes take place in any country, and for various reasons. Looking at a 2018 snapshot of homicide rates per country, Norway e.g., recorded 25 homicides (or a homicide rate per 100.000 inhabitants of 0.47), Sweden 108 (or 1.08 per 100.000), the United States 16,214 (4.96), and Afghanistan 2,474 (6.66)<sup>14</sup>. From that point of view, even long before the Taliban's seizure of power and hence while the allied forces were still in the country and the previous government was still in charge<sup>15</sup>, Afghanistan's homicide rate was quite high (and indeed higher than the current estimates). On the other hand, it was not much higher than the homicide rate in the United States and in 2021, the US homicide rate actually surpassed the one of Afghanistan. However, it is important to notice that battle-related deaths, which in Afghanistan's case accounted for the by far largest number of deaths (35,786 in 2021), are not included in these homicide rates<sup>16</sup>.

Furthermore, there still are other armed groups operating in Afghanistan (including e.g., the regional Islamic State group ISIS-K – Islamic State Khorasan, that claimed responsibility for an airport bombing on 26 August 2021 killing about 170 people<sup>17</sup>). Also, there may be cases (and in media statements the Taliban leadership seems eager to convey this message) where an individual or a group only claims to be affiliated with the Taliban, or where crimes may have been condoned by one branch of the Taliban but condemned by another. But in any case, all the violations documented in this project have taken place under the Taliban's

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<sup>14</sup> World Population Review, Murder Rate by Country 2023 (despite the title, the newest underlying data included in this review refers to 2018), available at:

<https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/murder-rate-by-country>. The US homicide rate has since risen to 7 (in 2021), whereas the one for Afghanistan has been estimated to have fallen to around 4. Cf. The World Bank, Intentional Homicides (per 100,000 people), available at: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/VC.IHR.PSRC.P5>.

<sup>15</sup> Although, ‘in charge’ of course is a relative term. As the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) reported at that time: “As of July 2018, the Afghan government's control or influence of Afghanistan's districts fell to the lowest level (55.5%) since SIGAR began receiving the data in November 2015. The Afghan government controls or influences districts in which about 65% of the population lives, unchanged since October 2017”. See Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), Reconstruction Update, (Oct. 30, 2018), p. 45. Available at: <https://www.sigar.mil/pdf/quarterlyreports/2018-10-30qr.pdf>.

<sup>16</sup> The World Bank, Battle-related Deaths (number of people) – Afghanistan, available at: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/VC.BTL.DETH?locations=AF>.

<sup>17</sup> See e.g., European Parliament resolution of 16 September 2021 on the situation in Afghanistan, para. R. Cf. *supra*, fn. 1.

government and, at least in this sense, the Taliban would have to be held accountable for them (be it for their (active) commission, or lack of prevention).

Another critical takeaway is that crimes and (armed) conflicts do not exist in a vacuum. Evidently, serious crimes have taken place before, in Afghanistan, as well as elsewhere. But Afghanistan in particular has had a several decades long history of grave abuses of human rights and humanitarian law, which did neither start with the current *de facto* government, nor with the previous Taliban reign. Some crimes have been committed by competing armed groups, others also by allied and Afghan armed, security, and special forces under the previous administration(s). Some of the abuses committed back then and *modi operandi* that guided those actions unfortunately now sound all too familiar, including extrajudicial executions, arbitrary detentions and other willful violations of the law, targeting innocent people ascribing to them guilt by association, and the failure (or unwillingness) to investigate<sup>18</sup>.

More recently, some of these past abuses by previous government forces have also been acknowledged in criminal proceedings abroad. One case in point concerned a judgment by the German Federal Court of Justice [‘Bundesgerichtshof’]<sup>19</sup> where the acts of coercion, mistreatment of captured Taliban fighters, and desecration of a Taliban commander committed in Afghanistan in 2013 and 2014 by an Afghan army officer were qualified as the war crime of torture.<sup>20</sup>

This of course represents in no way any excuse or exoneration of the current, *de facto* authorities. The level and extensive nature of atrocities committed today speak for themselves, all the more so since most of these crimes now are perpetrated in a situation neither qualifying as an international, nor domestic (non-international) armed conflict, but against civilians, in (by the Taliban's own account) pacified, non-disputed territory.

But what the direct and indirect connections between atrocities, past and present, and the insight that no armed conflict exists in a vacuum should remind us of is that any future (international) accountability process would require a broad mandate to investigate abuses on all sides, and committed also prior to 15 August 2021, should there be any hope for a real, future reconciliation process that Afghanistan will be in need of.

Preliminary findings of this research project have been presented at the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva<sup>21</sup>, as well as in a series of conferences and seminars held at the University of Bergen's Chr. Michelsen Institute (CMI) and its Centre on Law & Social

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. e.g. 'They've Shot Many Like This', Abusive Night Raids by CIA-Backed Afghani Strike Forces, Human Rights Watch (2019), available at:

[https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report\\_pdf/afghanistan1019\\_web.pdf](https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/afghanistan1019_web.pdf).

<sup>19</sup> See German Federal Court of Justice [‘Bundesgerichtshof – BGH’], (Jan. 28, 2021), 3 StR 654/19, ECLI:DE:BGH:2021:280121U3STR564.19.0, <https://juris.bundesgerichtshof.de/cgi-bin/rechtsprechung/document.py?Gericht=bgh&Art=en&sid=8c98a8601d12df344bddd113b06a7b3&nr=116372&pos=0&anz=2> (available in German only).

<sup>20</sup> For a discussion of the case and an English translation of key excerpts of the judgment and underlying laws, see Tom Syring, Judgment on Foreign Soldiers' Immunity for War Crimes Committed Abroad (BGH), 61 International Legal Materials, 483-489 (2022). Available at: <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/international-legal-materials/article/judgment-on-foreign-soldiers-immunity-for-war-crimes-committed-abroad-bgh/FB44Do14EA83AD565A68C4564718B6CE/share/f98b76cf30f222e7afe3a84bd33ca716914ae7c913c9548adc640b2747dd5293>.

<sup>21</sup> Revenge Killings and Women's Rights Abuses in Afghanistan after the Taliban's Seizure of Power, UN Human Rights Council Side Event, Geneva, 13 September 2023, program available at:

[https://www.hrrleague.org/gallery/HRRL-HRC54%20Side%20Event%20on%20AFG%20\(FINAL\).pdf](https://www.hrrleague.org/gallery/HRRL-HRC54%20Side%20Event%20on%20AFG%20(FINAL).pdf).

Transformation<sup>22</sup>, at the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI)<sup>23</sup>, and at Oslo New University College (ONH)<sup>24</sup>. These events also provided opportunities to discuss current and future challenges in Afghanistan, including how states should deal with the Taliban on the world stage, and to what extent and at what cost engagement with or disengagement from the *de facto* authorities may be justified.

## 1. Challenges and Stipulations

The project aims to document revenge killings and other serious violations of human rights crimes committed throughout Afghanistan since the Taliban's seizure of power on 15 August 2021. To that end, our team of Afghan researchers traveled through each of the country's 34 provinces, interviewing witnesses and (surviving) victims. However, due to the challenging security situation in Afghanistan and the particularly sensitive nature of this project, often data collectors could not remain and work for long in one area and at other times, they had to stay put and inside for a couple of days, to avoid suspicion. In some cases, this may have contributed to a certain degree of underreporting.

Furthermore, given the lack of accessibility, travel times, and the fact that not all potential interviewees would be willing to come forward and share their account, we do not claim to have covered all of the crimes committed within the specified categories. In fact, considering the nature of this research and the serious challenges any endeavor to document crimes of this kind encounters, there is every reason to believe that the total numbers of crimes and victims unfortunately is significantly higher throughout the country.

About 20% of the provinces were covered by female data collectors. Ideally, we would have had an equal distribution of male and female researchers, but the increasingly harsh restrictions imposed by the *de facto* authorities during the reporting period particularly on women, affecting their right to work or even move freely, put serious constraints on these efforts. A certain difference in the provinces covered by a female as opposed to a male data collector may thus be expected (e.g., cases of sexual violence only reported to a female researcher). However, in the main, we have not noted any significant deviation, and the crimes reported back are relatively equally distributed across the provinces, irrespective of the gender of the data collector, though the details of the description of the crime, especially for certain categories, may vary.

In a country with a multitude of languages, having matching competencies on both sides of the interview is crucial. While all data collectors spoke Dari and Pashto, the two most widely spoken languages in Afghanistan, the interviewee's first and preferred language was not necessarily one of these, especially in rural areas. Where e.g., an interviewee could communicate in Pashto during the interview, but would have preferred to speak Pashai, correct recording of the meaning of a statement always takes extra efforts and

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<sup>22</sup> Those We Left Behind. Norwegian Afghanistan Policy after Taliban's Seizure of Power, Conference, Bergen, 10 October 2023, program available at: <https://www.lawtransform.no/event/those-we-left-behind-norwegian-afghanistan-policy-after-talibans-seizure-of-power/>.

<sup>23</sup> Human Rights Violations in the Taliban's Afghanistan, Conference, Oslo, 11 October 2023, program available at: <https://www.nupi.no/en/events/2023/human-rights-violations-in-the-taliban-s-afghanistan>.

<sup>24</sup> Dealing with the Taliban? Two Years of Atrocities after Regime Breakdown in Afghanistan, Seminar, Oslo, 18 October 2023, program available at: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CyS9DErQmxR/>.

misunderstandings may more easily occur. Hence, where the interviewee's preferred language differed from the language of the interview, this has been noted in the records.

The level of education of the interviewees and the question to what extent interviewee and interviewer had a common frame of reference naturally also had an impact on the statements given, content conveyed, and information registered and received.

In certain, especially rural regions (less than 25% of Afghanistan's population is defined as living in urban areas<sup>25</sup>), literacy rates are particularly low<sup>26</sup>, and the concepts of time and dates differ from what would be considered standard in another setting. In such a context, calendar days and months or times of day may sometimes have to be 'reconstructed', along with the witness, in order to find the equivalent date or time of an event (e.g., did the incident happen before or after Friday prayer, after nightfall, prior or after the harvest etc.?). Naturally (and that goes for any witness, irrespective of background), the further in the past a certain event happened, the more difficult it would be to remember all the details correctly. Some of the latest interviews were conducted in early and mid-2023 and could pertain to events that happened as early as August 2021, which could have had a certain impact on the memory of some witnesses. On the other hand, most of the events conveyed pertained to dramatic or in any case significant events in a person's life, which a witness in general is more prone to remember the outlines of than common, repetitive happenings of everyday life.

Even where an event has been delimited and connected to a particular day, e.g., the day of a crime, converting the Solar Hijri calendar (or Jalali calendar) used in Afghanistan (which is the same as the one used in Iran, but with different names for the months) to the Gregorian standard, entails another element of potential pitfalls.

Then there is the question of Afghan name traditions and identity. Most Afghans do not have family names. Some have given names that consist of one word, sometimes that given name is prefixed to a subordinating common name, e.g., '-Ullah').<sup>27</sup> Also, "[u]nlike Arabic names, the subordinating name and proper name are not related to the individual's parents or grandparents" and "religious, royal, occupational, and military honorific titles preceding a name can be confused as part of a given name."<sup>28</sup>

Furthermore, transcribing and translating Afghan names from Pashto or Dari to English varies frequently, as there usually are several possible options, and, strictly speaking, often none of these are really correct as any attempt at transcribing a Persian-Arabic script (both Pashto and Dari adopted the Arabic script in the 7<sup>th</sup> century – with certain modifications) to English necessarily represents but an approximation. Hence, even where the full name of a person has been recorded, this is not necessarily sufficient or even helpful to properly identify a person. Therefore, as a general rule, in addition to their respective proper names,

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. OCHA Services, Humanitarian Data Exchange, Afghanistan – Population Estimates (Urban/Rural), (Nov. 24, 2022), available at: <https://data.humdata.org/dataset/afghanistan-district-level-population-estimates-urban-rural>.

<sup>26</sup> In 2018 e.g., it was estimated that 63% of men and 90% of women in rural areas "cannot read, write or compute". Cf. VHS, DVV International, Afghanistan: Literacy Day 2018: Illiteracy is Synonymous With Exclusion and Poverty, (Sept. 2018), available at: <https://www.dvv-international.de/en/our-work/news/detail/afghanistan-literacy-day-2018-illiteracy-is-synonymous-with-exclusion-and-poverty>.

<sup>27</sup> See Babel Street, Understanding Pashto and Dari Names: A Challenge to Intelligence Gathering in Afghanistan, available at: <https://www.babelstreet.com/blog/understanding-dari-and-pashto-names-a-challenge-to-intelligence-gathering-in-afghanistan>.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

the victim's and witnesses' name of the father (and, where feasible, the perpetrator's name of the father) was recorded.

When it comes to perpetrators identified in certain cases, it is also important to bear in mind that they “may have changed their names as this is common practice among the Taliban fighters and commanders. This was their method when they were fighting against our ex-government. In one area they had one name, and in another area, they had another name to protect themselves from government agents and the practice is still there.”<sup>29</sup>

As with persons' names, the challenge of correctly transcribing and translating naturally also applies to Afghan province or district names, places etc. They equally come in many variations. In an attempt at keeping a unified record, as far as e.g., the more than 400 district names in our database are concerned, we followed the spelling as employed in a population estimate report by Afghanistan's Central Statistics Organization (CSO)<sup>30</sup>, all the while being aware of the fact that several times other transliterations could have been chosen as well.

Especially with a project like this, involving numerous people, languages, translations, transliterations, and highly sensitive information and large distances in a particularly challenging security situations, some details may always be lost in transition and some data may never have been collected, as the above challenges and stipulations indicate – claiming otherwise would be dishonest. But we believe that the numbers and statements speak for themselves, balance out individual inconsistencies that may occur, and provide an unambiguous picture of the current situation in Afghanistan.

## **2. Three Levels of Accountability**

The *de facto* authorities have repeatedly objected to reports depicting them as perpetrators of serious crimes, pointing instead to their orally announced ‘general amnesty’<sup>31</sup> and claiming that crimes were largely committed by others, by rogue or splinter groups and not by the proper Taliban themselves. Alternatively, they routinely dismissed reports of their crimes as having been committed based on personal enmity or revenge, feuds, or other personal motives<sup>32</sup>. Outside a properly constituted court of law, where evidence may be presented and shall be weighed by impartial judges, such claims are easy to make. In the current security situation and absence of a rule of law, forensic evidence will almost never be obtainable, and it is also true that perpetrators of killings and other atrocities only very rarely have been identified by name, even where there had been witnesses. But this admission actually cuts both ways.

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<sup>29</sup> Communication received by an informant on the ground with knowledge of the situation, 19 May 2023.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Central Statistics Organization (2018), Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2018-19, <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1Sn7qdZOPrvaC9jo4ILlLkVHPLtewpc1UFPOZxySnQo>.

<sup>31</sup> To this day, the *de facto* authorities have not publicly issued any written statement defining and circumscribing the contours of their asserted general amnesty, though they have broadcast various interviews and tweets claiming e.g., in general terms they would not take revenge on anyone who had worked for the previous government. Cf. UNAMA (2023), A barrier to Securing Peace: Human Rights Violations against Former Government Officials and Former Armed Force Members in Afghanistan: 15 August 2021 – 30 June 2023, p. 1. Available at: <https://unama.unmissions.org/barrier-securing-peace-hr-violations-against-former-government-officials-former-armed-force-members>.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. e.g., the various statements made by Zabihullah Mujahid and Inamullah Samangani, spokespersons for the *de facto* authorities, reproduced in translation in UNAMA (2023). *Supra*, p. 3. See also the Response by the *de facto* Ministry of Foreign Affairs to UNAMA's report. *Ibid.*, p. 13-14.

What we have seen in the overwhelming majority of cases is that the *de facto* authorities did not care to investigate at all, and that perpetrators that had been referred to as Taliban, could not be identified (by name) as they were not known in the area they operated in. A statement we have persistently been confronted with was: 'They were Taliban, but I don't know their names. They were not from here'. And often soon thereafter the same perpetrators were transferred to other areas or provinces. Refusal of investigations, blatant denial, and (re-)circulation of fighters appears to be a recurring *modus operandi* of the *de facto* regime, which exposes their attempts at putting the blame on mostly personally motivated individuals as disingenuous: Personal revenge and private feuds generally presuppose a personal relationship. In a large number of cases, the perpetrators were not from the area where they had committed the atrocities and therefore not known to the people living in that area and witnessing the crime. In all these cases, a personal motive appears to be rather unlikely, which undermines the Taliban's portrayed line of reasoning.

With these observations as a backdrop, this research project aims at contributing to three levels of accountability:

First of all, accountability of the *de facto* authorities. By presenting the project's findings and detailing the responsibility of the current regime for the crimes committed within the timeframe of the investigation, we intend to add to international efforts at holding the Taliban to account. Most of the atrocities documented below point to the Taliban as the perpetrators, and in any case, all of the crimes happened under their reign and at the very least therefore are their responsibility.

Secondly, by presenting detailed findings, we want to counter efforts by those states who far too quickly, uncritically and indulgently are tempted to resume business as usual with the current authorities. The more information on such atrocities is available, the harder it should be for states to willingly ignore them, and in any case, such 'intentional blindness'<sup>33</sup> would come at a greater cost, as such ignorance would be exposed as bad faith.

Finally, in a few select cases, our data may contribute to holding individual perpetrators to account in connection with (international) ongoing and future accountability mechanisms. Therefore, where the data we collected may add useful information and may be beneficial to certain case files and investigations before the International Criminal Court or other (future) international accountability mechanisms, we intend to contribute, where appropriate and possible in a suitable manner, more detailed information on individual cases.

### **3. Categories of Crime**

The crimes covered by this report are primarily revenge killings, torture, kidnappings, enforced disappearances, and instances of sexual violence, extortion, and expulsion. The main focus has been on individual cases where victim details could be established.

While we found cases of ***revenge killings*** in all 34 provinces (as will be detailed below), in several cases it was not possible to finally determine whether a victim had been killed in revenge for a specific affiliation, occupation, action, etc. (the core of what may be labeled

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<sup>33</sup> The Norwegian philosopher Harald Ofstad once used the term intentional blindness to describe the uncritical attitude of simply not thinking about what one does not want to think about, not seeing what one does not want to see, all along in bad faith. See Harald Ofstad, 'Vi kan ändra världen' ['We May Change the World'], Stockholm: Bokförlaget Prisma 1987, p. 137 f (referring here to Albert Speer's self-characterization when trying to explain and minimize the extent of his knowledge of the atrocities committed by the regime he served).

‘revenge killing’) or whether the killing in some cases was only a coincidence or motivated by other factors. In those instances, the killings were labeled as other, **extrajudicial killings**).

Where there was reason to believe that a reported killing referred to a **family feud** (incl. honor killings), this was labeled separately. Suicides were equally kept apart.

Mass killings based on improvised explosive devices (IED) or casualties of unexploded explosive ordnances (UXO) and other remnants of war (which children frequently fall victim to) have not been included. Likewise, the finding of unidentified bodies, mass graves, or otherwise reported incidents of mass victims are not included here, although several of them likely would fit the label of revenge (and hence would increase the total number of victims of such killings).

In those cases, the victims were often killed randomly or indiscriminately, or insufficient individual detail was known, which is not particularly conducive to creating victim profiles or establishing the perpetrator’s motivation in individual cases.

The only exception to this rule were cases where, while the name or exact identity of the victim remained unknown, several other markers were available, incl. e.g., gender, age group, profession/affiliation, and cause of death or manner/type of killing.

The category of **acts of torture** is based on Article 7, ICCPR<sup>34</sup>, and includes torture (as defined in Art. 1, CAT<sup>35</sup>), as well as cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. In some cases, victims were subjected to several underlying acts of maltreatment, each of which independently could have met the criteria of the offense of torture. According to a specialist in forensic medicine in Kandahar, many of the dead bodies he had to examine were killed through or following a series of torture, e.g., “hanging, cutting hands and then neck and finally through bullets”<sup>36</sup>.

In a number of cases the dead body of the person (tortured and) killed had also been (publicly) exposed, desecrated or otherwise humiliated *postmortem*, which, by itself, may represent torture. In the aforementioned recent case before the German Federal Court of Justice, based on universal jurisdiction, the Court qualified e.g., “the desecration of the dead body as a war crime, underlining that the protection offered by § 8(1) no. 9, VStGB [German Code of Crimes against International Law] against being treated ‘in a gravely humiliating or degrading manner’ *would also extend to a dead person*”<sup>37</sup>.

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<sup>34</sup> International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, adopted on 16 December 1966 by UN GA Res. 2200A (XXI).

<sup>35</sup> According to Article 1 (1) of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, adopted on 10 December 1984 by UN GA Res. 39/46, “the term ‘torture’ means any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession, punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed, or intimidating or coercing him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity”.

<sup>36</sup> HRRL interview in Kandahar province, April 2023.

<sup>37</sup> See Tom Syring, Judgment on Foreign Soldiers' Immunity for War Crimes Committed Abroad (BGH), 61 International Legal Materials, 483-489 (2022). Available at: <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/international-legal-materials/article/judgment-on-foreign-soldiers-immunity-for-war-crimes-committed-abroad-bgh/FB44D014EA83AD565A68C4564718B6CE/share/f98b76cf30f222e7afe3a84bd33ca716914ae7c913c9548adc640b2747dd5293#EN13> (emphasis added).

Even where several acts would separately and independently qualify as torture, they would be recorded as one single act in the statistics. However, where e.g., a killing was committed in conjunction with or preceded by torture, these acts would be recorded separately.

The same goes for **kidnapping**, which refers to the act of seizing, confining, abducting, or carrying away a person by force or fraud. Often, we saw that a combination of several categories of crime had been committed, where the same victim was e.g., kidnapped, tortured, and then killed.

Sometimes it would be difficult to distinguish when a person had been regularly arrested by representatives of the *de facto* authorities, or simply kidnapped, as the line between the two would not be evident, based on the approach, time of day (night), and the general lack of due process rules. At times, a kidnapping would be followed by a demand for ransom or in furtherance of another crime, often as a means to exert pressure on the person that had been kidnapped or their relatives. In those instances, the crime had been categorized as **extortion**.

Where a victim was pressured for money or other valuables at gunpoint, while certainly also entailing an element of cruel or degrading treatment, this was categorized as **armed robbery**. Since this crime usually was indistinguishable from other 'everyday' or 'private' crimes, it was kept apart and not focused on (in the same way as 'private feuds' were treated separately and disregarded, as opposed to 'revenge' and other 'extrajudicial killings').

Where the arrest, or kidnapping, abduction etc., whether with the involvement of agents of the *de facto* government or with their acquiescence, was followed by a refusal to acknowledge the deprivation of liberty or concealment of the fate or whereabouts of the person concerned, the crime was labeled as an **enforced disappearance**. In principle, these may still change status to killed or even released, though especially the latter is rather unlikely, given the nature of the crime (concealment of the fate) and the time that has passed.

Among other serious violations of human rights, we also recorded cases of **sexual violence**, including rape, which, for many reasons, are particularly difficult to find witnesses for and document, as those with direct knowledge usually are only the victim(s) and the perpetrator(s), the latter have no incentives, the former are afraid to talk, especially due to the heightened stigma attached to such a fate in a country like Afghanistan.

Also, some cases of **forced marriage** were recorded. Mostly, as in the sexual violence cases, the testimonies pointed towards the *de facto* authorities as the perpetrators and, as such, these atrocities left the realm of the strictly 'privately' committed crimes.

**Expulsion** points to the act of forcing someone to leave their land and constitutes in that sense a form of forced displacement. While we recorded several statements involving larger groups of people, only those cases where we had data on specific, individual victims could contribute to our victim profiles, which is why this category of crime could not receive the justice it deserves. Where a victim-witness e.g., described an incident concerning entire villages, we would only include one person in our count (akin to cases of mass graves, where identifiers on e.g., only one person existed). Therefore, these numbers are negligible and their qualitative record (the content of the cases) more meaningful, than their inclusion in quantitative analyses.

#### **4. A Note on International Prosecution**

Several of the above crimes may be prosecuted by domestic courts abroad (based on universal jurisdiction) and are reflected in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC). Indeed, preliminary examinations by the ICC into the situation in Afghanistan were made public already in 2007, focusing on crimes committed in the context of the armed conflict between pro-government and anti-government forces, including the war crimes of willful killing and of torture.

Eventually, on March 5, 2020, the Appeals Chamber of the ICC authorized the Prosecutor “to commence an investigation ‘in relation to alleged crimes committed on the territory of Afghanistan in the period since 1 May 2003, as well as other alleged crimes that have a nexus to the armed conflict in Afghanistan and are sufficiently linked to the situation and were committed on the territory of other States Parties in the period since 1 July 2002’.”<sup>38</sup> While the Government of Afghanistan initially had requested a deferral, on September 27, 2021, the Prosecution requested authorization to resume its investigations, which was granted on October 31, 2022, and further specified on April 4, 2023.<sup>39</sup>

From a prosecutorial point of view, the challenge for the ICC is that the current situation in Afghanistan does neither qualify as an international armed conflict, nor (apart perhaps from certain pockets of the country) as a non-international armed conflict as defined in international law. As far as many of the crimes committed after 15 August 2021 are concerned, due to the lack of nexus with war, they could not be prosecuted as war crimes.

For those crimes, the prosecutorial efforts would have to focus on crimes against humanity, which may be committed in times of war as well as peacetime. (Revenge) killings and many other serious violations depicted above (and to be detailed below) do have an equivalent in the enumeration of crimes against humanity in Article 7 of the Rome Statute of the ICC.

Killings could fall under ‘murder’<sup>40</sup>, expulsion may be reflected in ‘deportation or forcible transfer of a population’<sup>41</sup>, kidnapping and certain extortion cases are akin to ‘imprisonment and other severe deprivation of physical liberty in violation of fundamental rules of international law’<sup>42</sup>, and torture<sup>43</sup>, rape and other sexual violence<sup>44</sup>, and enforced disappearances<sup>45</sup> have verbatim the same counterparts in the Rome Statute and thus, in principle, could fill the elements of crimes as regards their equivalents in the list of crimes against humanity.

But there is one important caveat: In order to qualify as crimes against humanity in accordance with Article 7 (1) of the Rome Statute, any of the acts above must have been “committed as part of a *widespread or systematic* attack directed against any civilian population, with knowledge of the attack”<sup>46</sup>.

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<sup>38</sup> International Criminal Court, Situation in the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Appeals Chamber Judgment, No. ICC-02/17 OA4, 5 March 2020, para. 79.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. International Criminal Court, Situation in the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Appeals Chamber Judgment, No. ICC-02/17 OA5, 4 April 2023, paras. 57-62.

<sup>40</sup> Article 7 (1) (a), Rome Statute.

<sup>41</sup> Article 7 (1) (d).

<sup>42</sup> Article 7 (1) (e).

<sup>43</sup> Article 7 (1) (f).

<sup>44</sup> Article 7 (1) (g).

<sup>45</sup> Article 7 (1) (i).

<sup>46</sup> Emphasis added.

Successfully proving the widespread or systematic nature of such an attack requires as much documentation as possible. We hope that the data collected by our team as well as by all other individuals and organizations working on documenting the above crimes may contribute to those efforts.

Taking the above considerations, stipulations and aspirations into account, this is what we found.

## IV. Overall Findings

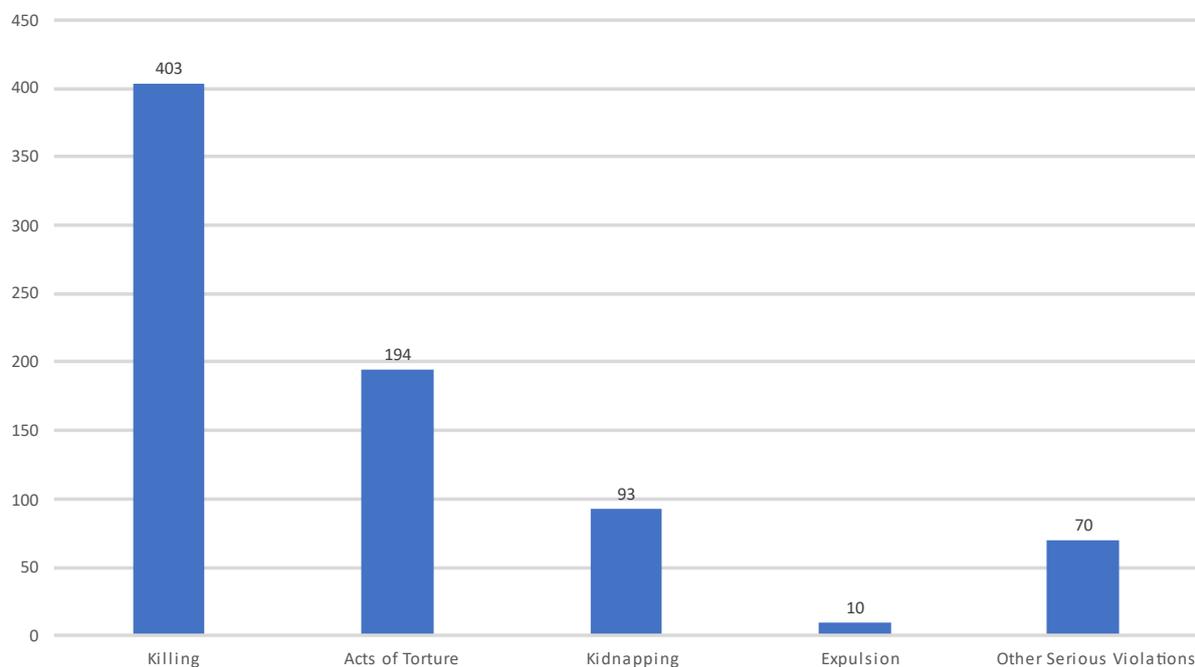
This report is based on 433 face-to-face interviews conducted on the ground in Afghanistan throughout all of the country’s 34 provinces. In addition, information received on separate cases via other first-hand contacts and physical background interviews with forensic and other experts, and reports by other international and human rights organizations informed our analysis.

However, for reasons of consistency and comparability, the statistics and numbers presented in the ensuing chapters are exclusively based on our own in-country, face-to-face interviews, with all extra information collected being used to inform and contextualize the interpretation of the results.

Based on these 433 interviews, 578 individual victims (of all categories of crime as depicted above) were identified, across the country, who were exposed to a total of 770 violations of their human rights, including having their ultimate human right taken from them, the right to life. The variance in these numbers is due to the fact that victims often were subjected to a series of violations, e.g., being kidnapped, tortured, and eventually killed, as in this case from Faryab province:

“The brother was local police and worked as a farmer after the fall of the government. One day, he went to the district town and bazar. He was kidnapped on the way. He was missing for a week. After a week, they threw his dead body in the crops. His head was broken into pieces by stones.”<sup>47</sup>

Figure 1 presents a general overview of the number of victims per category of crime.

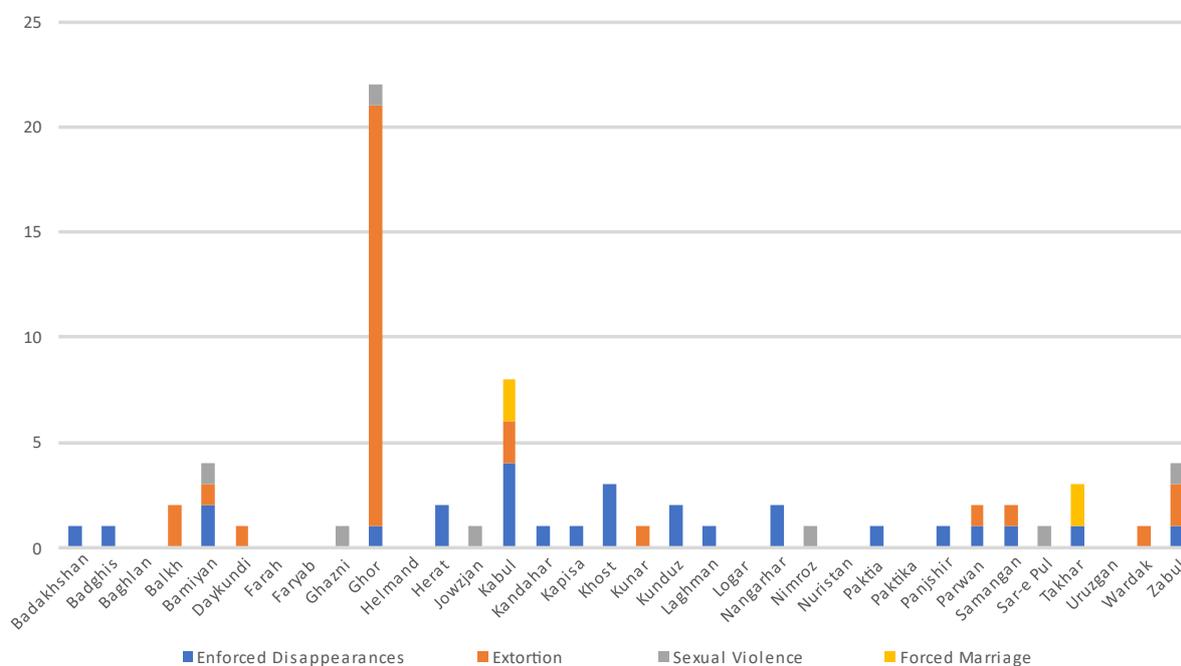


*Figure 1: Total number of victims per category of crime*

<sup>47</sup> HRRL interview with a person with direct knowledge of the incident, Faryab province, March 2023.

The general categories of crime presented in figure 1 pertain to the grouping of criminal acts, as they were initially categorized when collected in the field. ‘Other serious violations’ was intentionally kept as an open category, to account for important findings that otherwise might not have been discovered, as we neither could *ab initio* have too many categories, but nor did we want to discard important information on other serious violations just because we did not ask for it or have a label for it during data collection. While processing the data, we decided that the significant variation in the crimes included in ‘other serious violations’ rendered it beneficial to ascribe separate categories to them during the analysis, to better demonstrate their peculiar characteristics.

Extortion, e.g., was not an initial focus of our research, but transpired as a significant crime in our data in a certain area. When analyzing other serious violations of human rights per province, Ghor turned out to have the by far highest number of violations, mainly due to the particularly large number of extortion cases, that was much higher than in any province, even compared to the most populous one, the province of Kabul (cf. figure 2).



*Figure 2: Total number of victims of other serious violations per province*

While there will always be some variation due to a certain amount of randomness in terms of cases recorded versus cases that may not have been picked up on, given also the small total number of cases, Ghor nevertheless sticks out as an outlier. On the other hand, looking into historical data and comparing the security situation in that province prior to the Taliban’s seizure of power and now, demonstrates that Ghor has had a long history of a rather high level of general criminality, that appears to be in line with today’s data on other serious violations and may account for the high number of cases in that category also today. A 2019 province dashboard on Afghanistan by the World Bank<sup>48</sup>, based on data provided by the

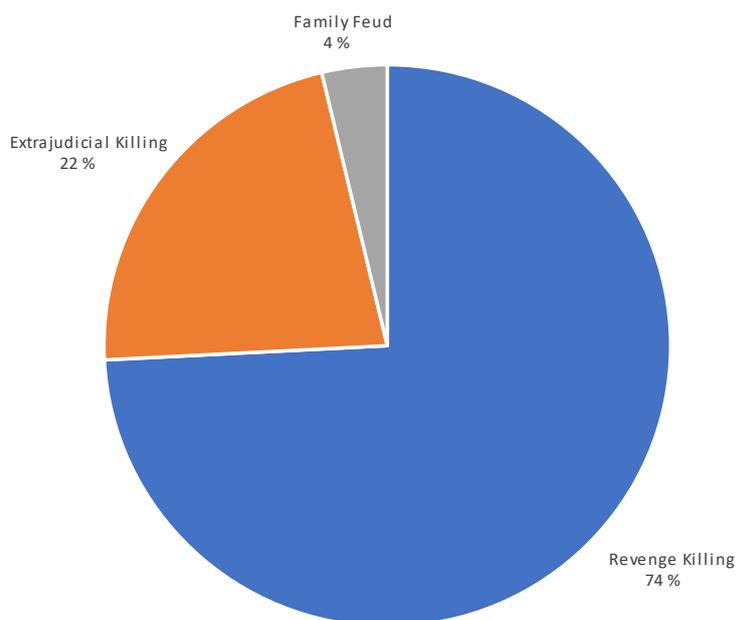
<sup>48</sup> World Bank, Afghanistan: Province Dashboard, (Aug. 1, 2019). Available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/data/interactive/2019/08/01/afghanistan-interactive-province-level-visualization>.

2016-2017 Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey<sup>49</sup> e.g., showed that Ghor was the province with the highest percentage of households in which male household heads reported that the respective district in which they were living was insecure: 59.1%<sup>50</sup>.

Expulsion on the other hand turned out to be less useful for statistical and victim profile purposes because, while witnesses and their fate may be representative of entire villages, we could only include those we had sufficiently identifiable information on in our profiles.

Our by far most significant category, the crime of killings, we chose to divide into three parts (cf. figure 3). In 4% of the 403 cases collected here, the main reason for the killing pointed to family feuds (incl. honor killings), which is why we labeled these separately and removed them from the further analysis. Sometimes, a family feud had significant underpinnings related to revenge on e.g., a former member of the security forces, or the demarcation between Taliban member or proponent and Taliban opponent crossed family lines. Therefore, especially these categorizations had to be decided on a case-by-case basis, e.g.:

“The son-in-law had two wives. He wanted to marry a third wife, but his two wives and his father-in-law opposed him. He then killed his father-in-law, his two wives and then his four children with bullets from a Kalashnikov. The perpetrator’s father was a Taliban commander. That’s why he is still free.”<sup>51</sup>



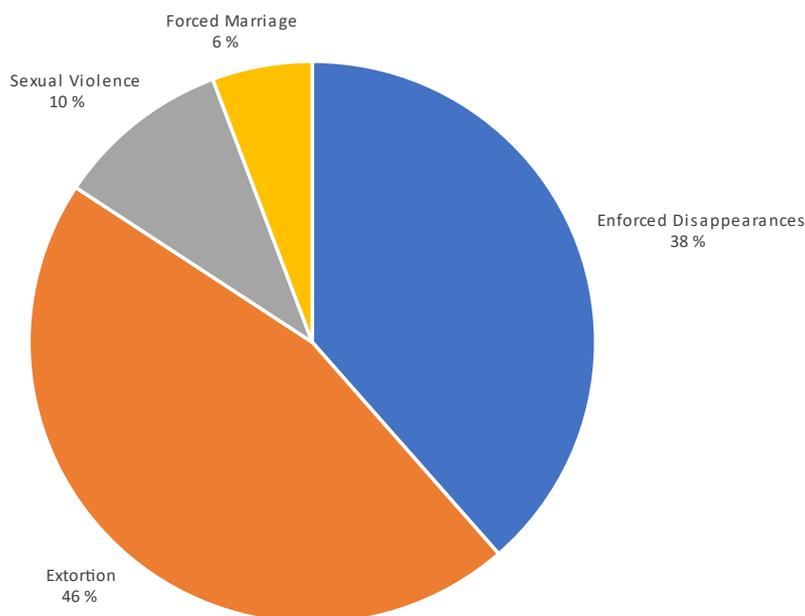
*Figure 3: Percentage of total number of victims killed, per subcategory*

<sup>49</sup> Central Statistics Organization (2018), Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-2017, available at: <https://washdata.org/sites/default/files/documents/reports/2018-07/Afghanistan%20ALCS%202016-17%20Analysis%20report.pdf>.

<sup>50</sup> The percentage for female household heads reporting that their districts were insecure was somewhat lower in Ghor, with 39,6% (though still significantly higher than the national average). However, as the majority of extortion cases targeted male victims, the male household heads’ reporting in this case would carry greater explanatory value.

<sup>51</sup> HRRL interview with a person with knowledge of the incident, Nimroz province, February 2023.

In 22% of the cases, it could not finally be determined whether the victim(s) had been killed in revenge for their affiliation, (previous) occupation, or a specific action, etc., especially where the witnesses could or would not point to a particular perpetrator or group of perpetrators. In those instances, the killings were labeled as other, extrajudicial killings. Often, those killings shared the same characteristics regarding the commission of the crime (apart from that last identifier) as those labeled revenge killings. Therefore, for the purpose of victim profiling, in a number of ensuing figures, those two categories of killings are presented both combined and separately. Family feuds etc. are however kept apart.



*Figure 4: Percentage of total number of victims of other serious violations, per subcategory*

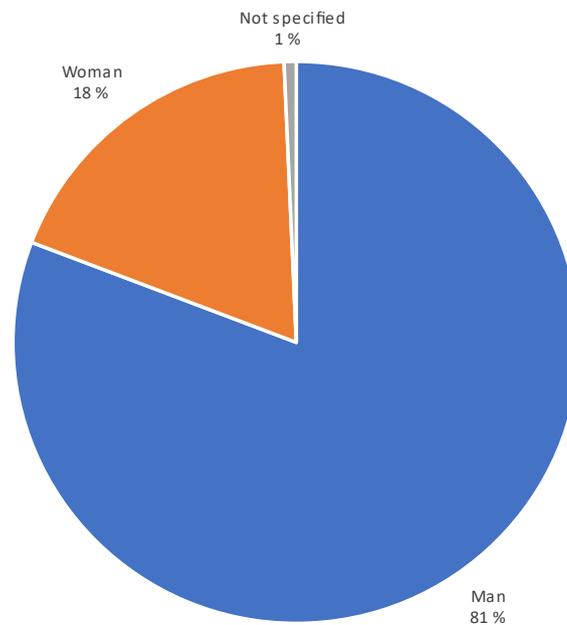
Figure 4 details the number of victims of other serious violations of human rights (in percentage), based on the 70 violations we recorded here in total. Extortion and cases of enforced disappearances are almost equally prominent here, with cases of forced marriage and especially sexual violence perhaps naturally (given the tabu attached to it) being the least frequently reported.

## **1. Gender Balance**

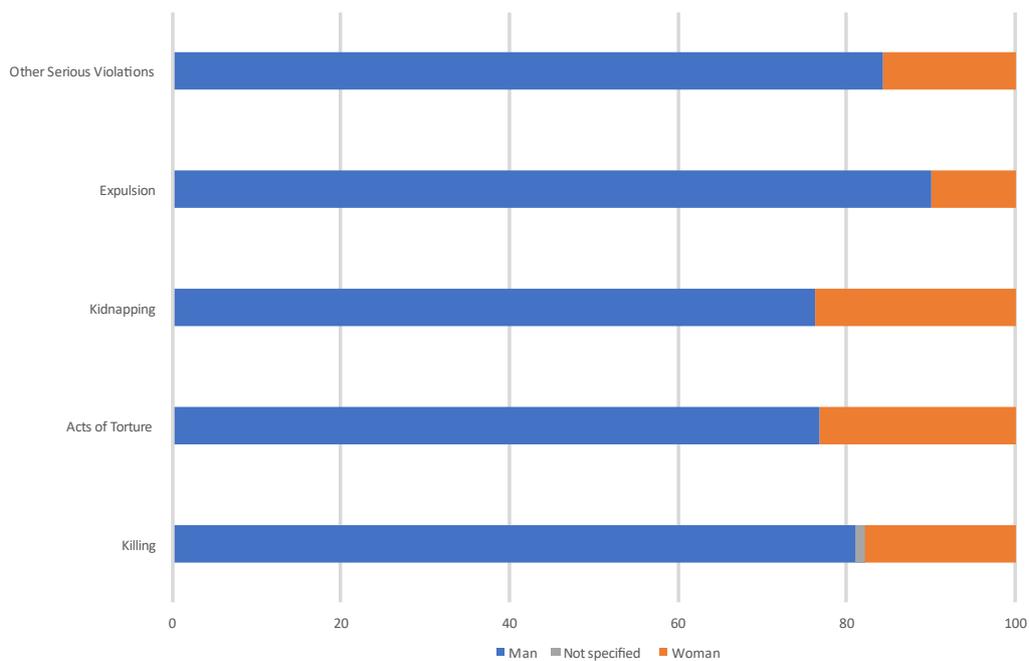
The overall balance of male versus female victims, across the country and for all categories of crime was roughly 4 to 1 in our data (81% male, 18% female, in 1% of the cases it could not be established or had not been record). The gender distribution in figure 5 is fairly consistently repeated for all main categories of crime (cf. figure 6), but with some notable exceptions when looking at certain subcategories.

Within the category of killings, female victims are clearly overrepresented among the victims killed in family feuds etc. (cf. figure 7). However, based on the rather low N (total number of victims in that subcategory), this by itself cannot be assigned importance.

Further delving into the subcategories of other serious violation shows that all of the extortion cases and almost all cases of enforced disappearances in our records pertain to men. That most cases of sexual violence and all cases of forced marriage involve female victims is unfortunately less of a surprise (cf. figure 8). However, also regarding these last two categories of crime, it has to be acknowledged that the results are merely indicative of a trend, as the number recorded for sexual violence and forced marriage are far too low for further interpretation.

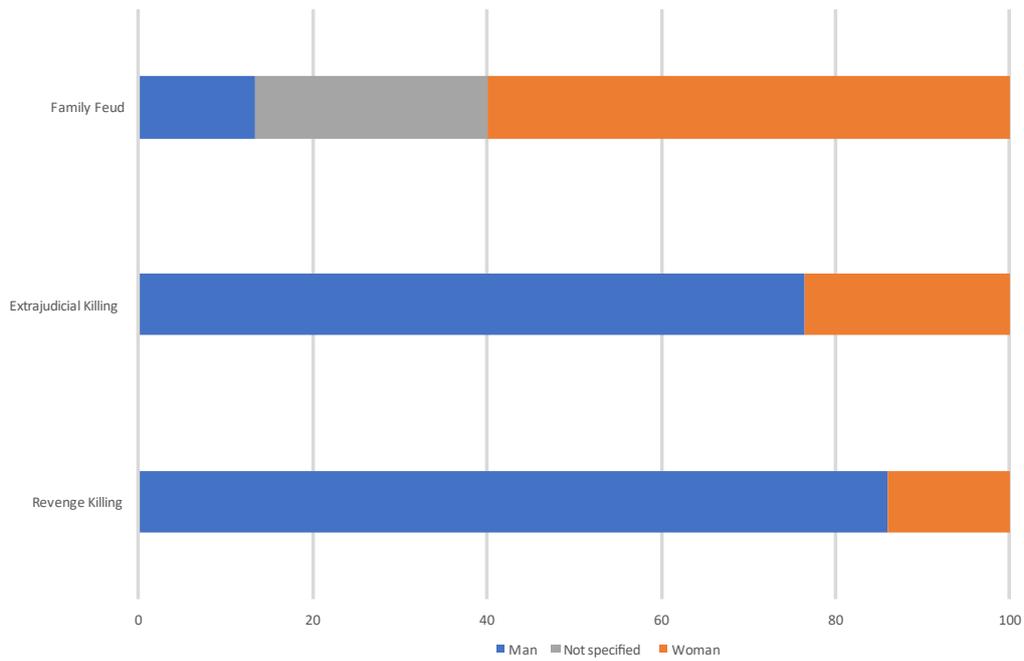


*Figure 5: Gender balance for victims of all crimes*

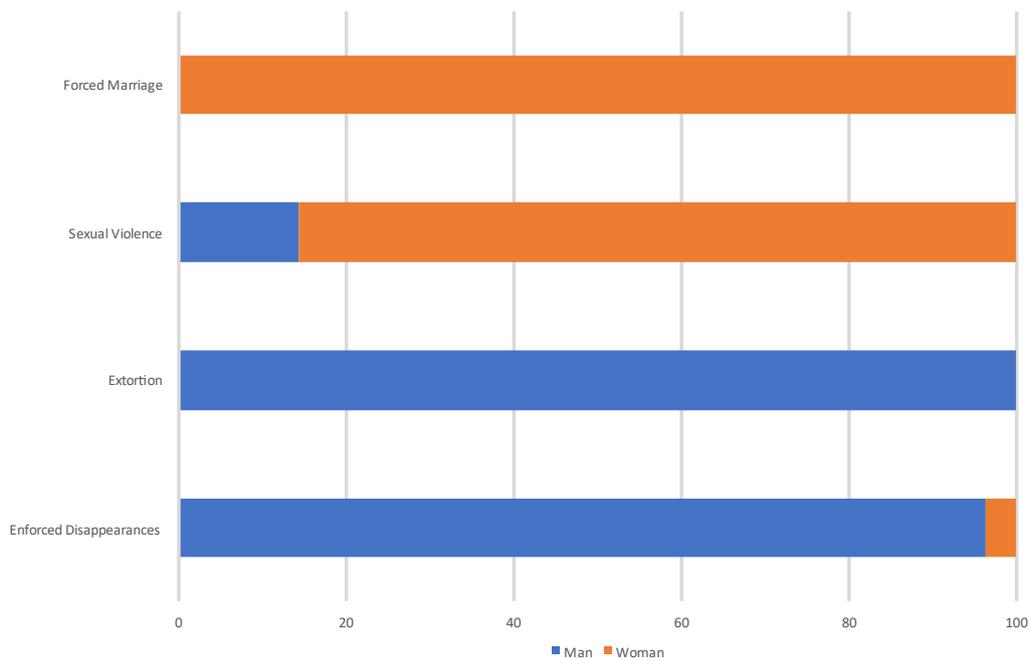


*Figure 6: Gender balance for victims, based on category of crime*

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*Figure 7: Gender balance for victims killed*



*Figure 8: Gender balance for victims of other serious violations*

## 2. Geographical distribution

Looking at the total number of victims per province, our records vary from less than 10 in Sar-e Pul to more than 60 in both Ghor and Kabul (cf. figure 9). For most provinces, the numbers are around 20.

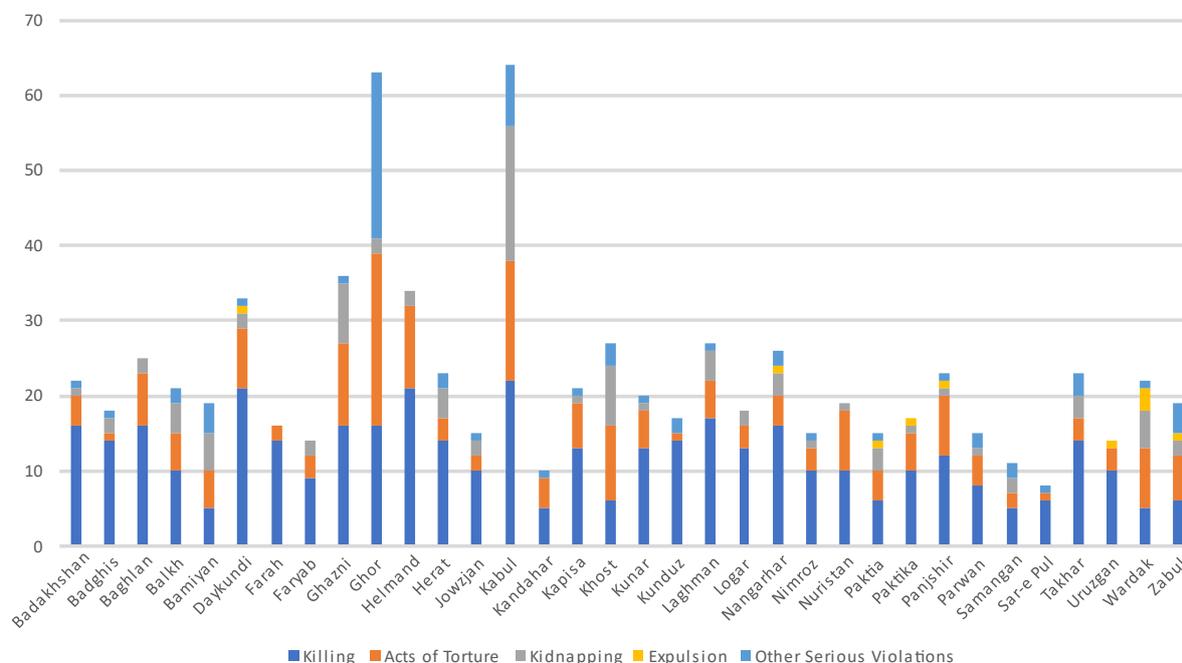


Figure 9: Total number of victims per category of crime per province

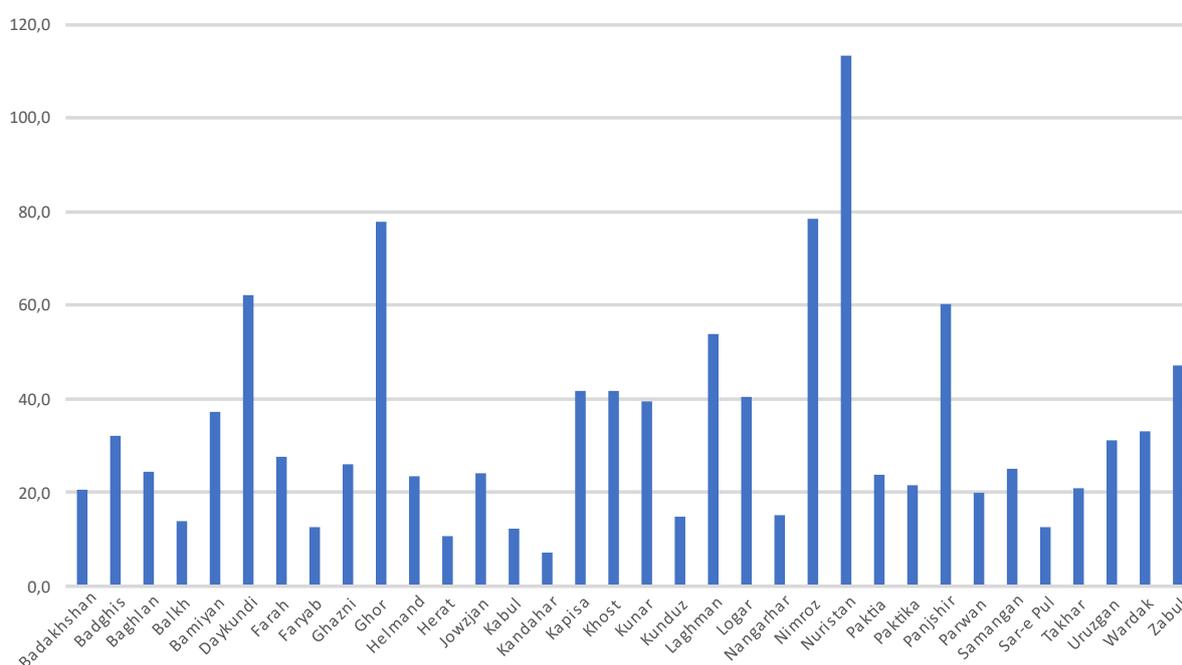
In all attempts at breaking down numbers, and especially when comparing total numbers per province, it is important to put them into perspective, as the provinces vary significantly, including when it comes to the size of their population. Therefore, with a view to having a better measure for comparison, apart from total numbers, we also represented them in relation to the actual size of their respective population by calculating the provinces’ crime rate per million inhabitants. While Ghor and Kabul e.g., were on top of the table in total numbers per province in the figure above, the crime rate per million inhabitants<sup>52</sup> displays quite a different scenario, with Kabul now having among the lowest numbers, while Nuristan would be the highest ranked province (cf. figure 10).

Kandahar on the other hand seems to rank consistently on the lower end. That, however, may also be explained by the particularly challenging security situation, not least for researchers collecting data on such sensitive issues in the fief province of the *de facto* authorities, and serves as a reminder that the actual total number of victims is likely to be significantly higher across the board. Especially provinces under particularly tight control by the Taliban, such as Kandahar, are presumable prone to a higher degree of underreporting. Information received via other, direct channels, but where we did not personally collect the

<sup>52</sup> The population numbers used for calculating the levels of crime committed per province were taken from the latest available population estimates provided by Afghanistan’s Central Statistics Organization (for 2022). Their website has since been down, the numbers however we have on file. For Kabul province we operated e.g., with the number of 5,211 million inhabitants, for Nuristan with 167,000.

data in face-to-face interviews (which is why this data was not included in our statistics here), seems to indicate as much.

Finally, it is important to keep in mind that a significant number of victims seems to have been kidnapped in one place, and then killed (or at least disposed of) in another, which may affect the numbers and, more importantly, the chances of resolving the cases and giving closure to their families. A hospital in Kandahar province e.g., reportedly had received scores of dead bodies from different parts of the Southern Region of Afghanistan since December 2021, all of them young people and 90% men, most of them killed through torture, the majority appeared to be soldiers. At least 70 of them were buried in the graveyard of unknown persons.<sup>53</sup>



*Figure 10: All crimes per million inhabitants per province*

<sup>53</sup> HRRL interviews with persons with knowledge of the respective hospital and morgue systems, and of the municipality units responsible for burying dead bodies whose relatives are not found after a while, Kandahar province, April 2023. For the record, and for obvious reasons, these victims are not included in our statistics.

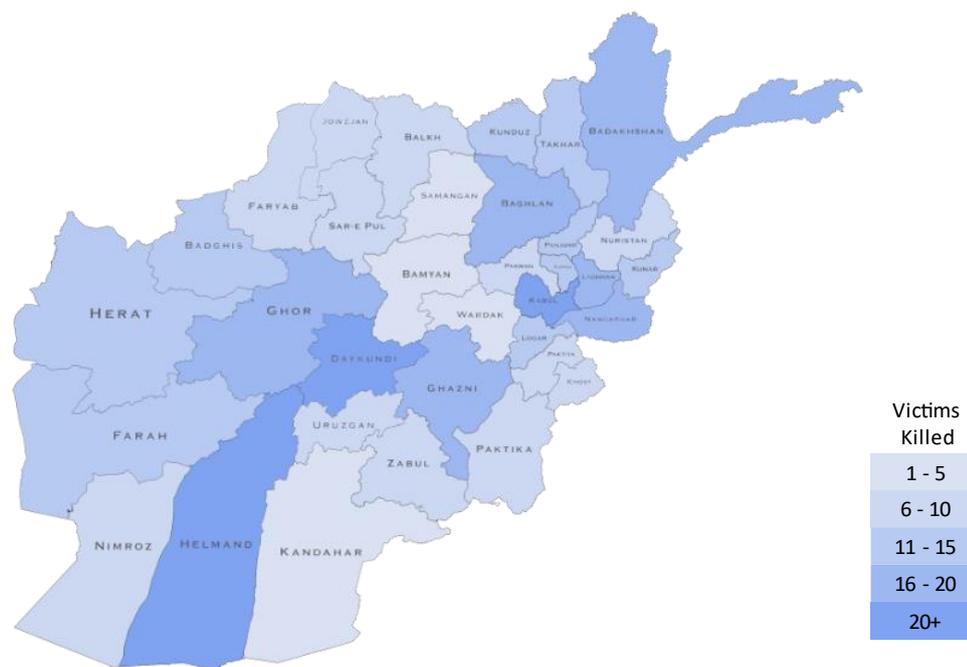


Figure 11: Total number of victims killed per province (map)

When focusing only on killings (all categories) per province, Daykundi, Helmand and Kabul are on top of the list, with more than 20 victims of killings each. In some provinces, including e.g., Kandahar (which also was among the lowest ranked in the list of the overall number of victims per province), we have – as also indicated above when it comes to all crimes – all reason to believe that the particularly challenging security situation contributed to a lower level of reporting on those crimes when it comes to physical interviews (cf. figures 11 and 12).

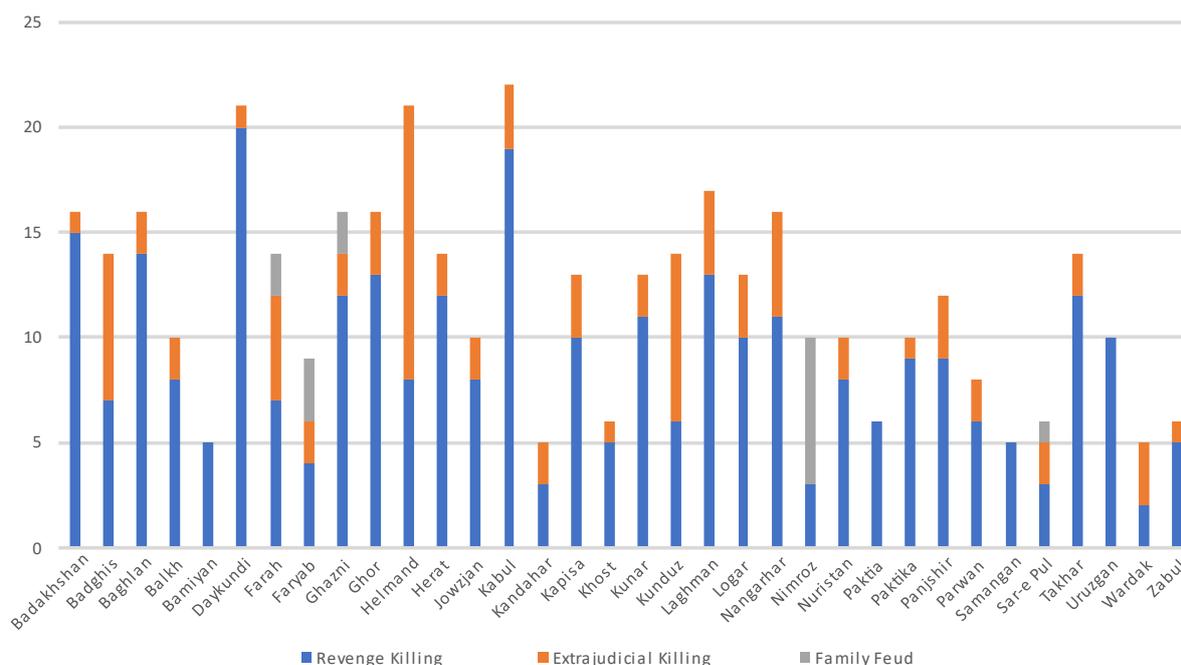


Figure 12: Total number of victims killed per subcategory per province

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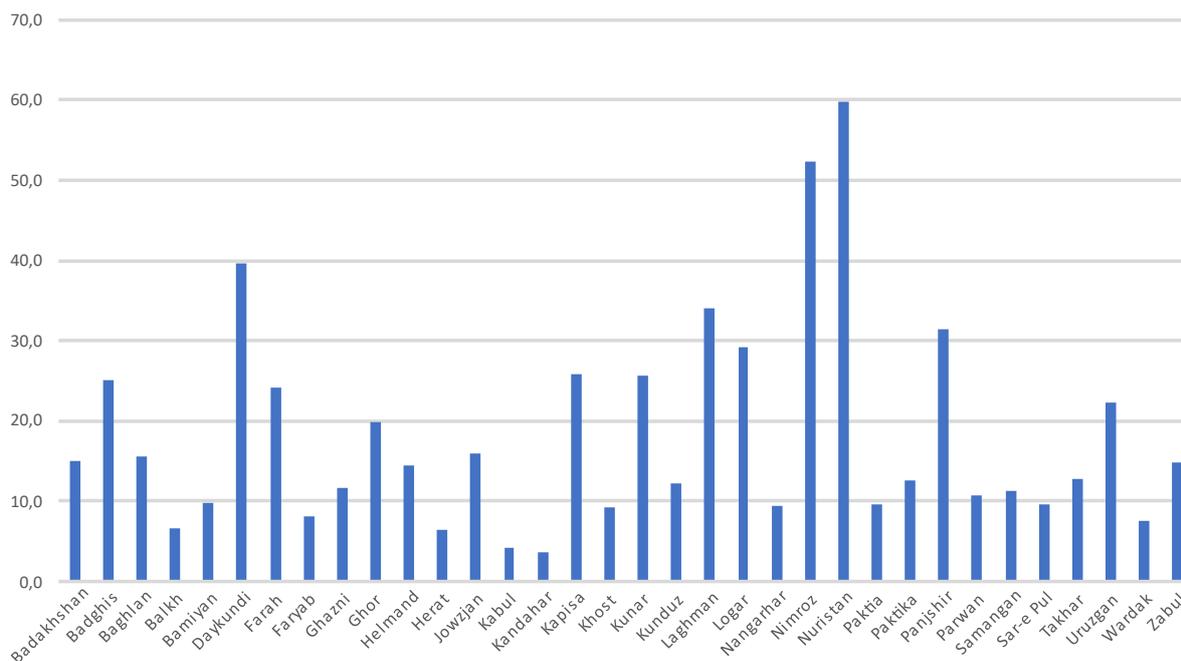


Figure 13: All killings per million inhabitants per province

When looking at the total number of killings, taking the population size of the respective province into account (cf. figure 13), a similar pattern as the one depicted above (cf. figure 10) for all categories of crime may be established, with some of the highest-ranking provinces in total numbers being leveled or switching places with others.

Looking at the total number of victims of torture (cf. figure 14) or kidnapping (cf. figure 15) per province, unsurprisingly, there is a certain correlation between provinces with a high number of killings and the respective other two crimes.



Figure 14: Total number of victims tortured per province (map)

As indicated above, these crimes are often committed successively, against the same victims, though variations in patterns and in frequency occur, also based on an element of randomness that increases the lower the total numbers are. Suffice it here to conclude that also the crime of torture appears to have been committed across all of Afghanistan, most frequently reported in our records (in total numbers) in Kabul, Ghor, Helmand and Ghazni, while kidnappings appear to also have been widely committed, especially in Kabul and Ghazni.



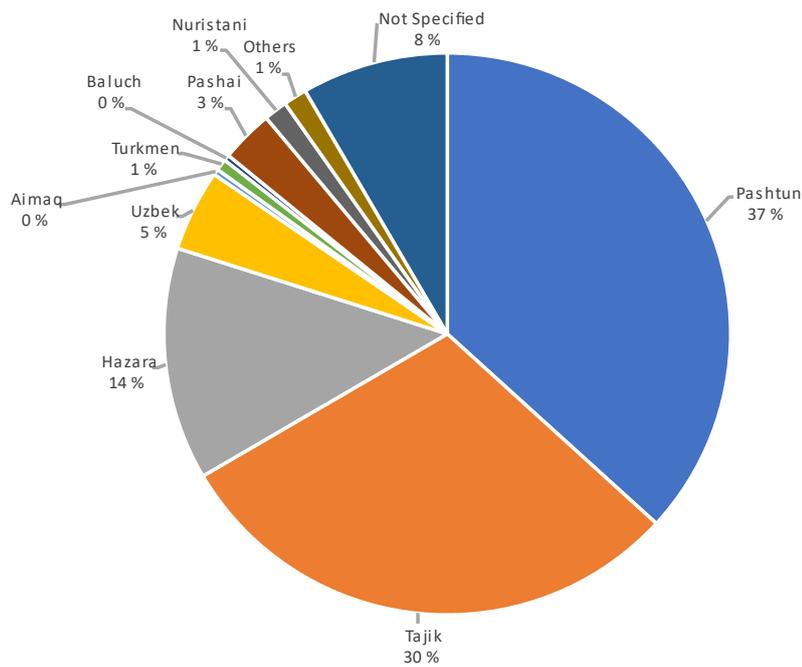
Figure 15: Total number of victims kidnapped per province (map)

### 3. Ethnicity

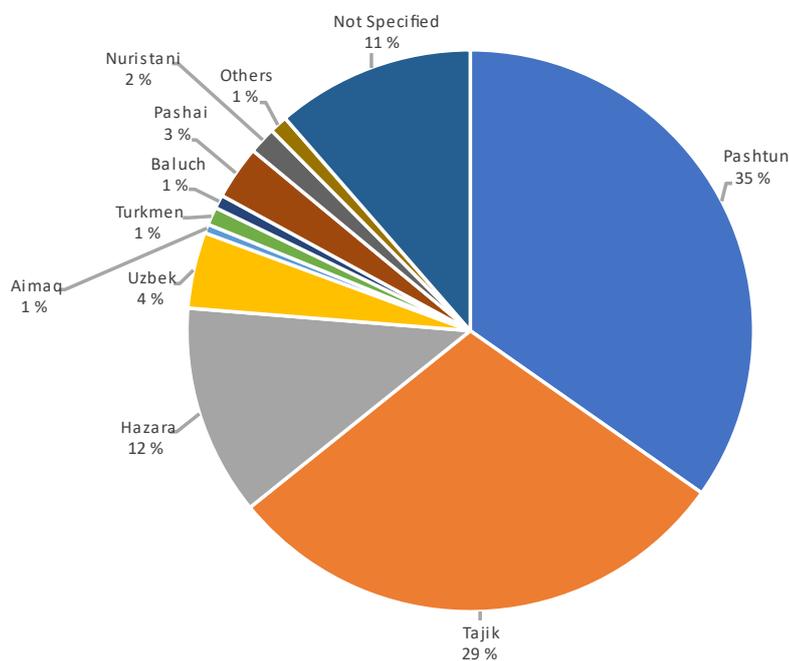
Wherever possible, we also recorded the ethnicity of the victims (along with other identifiers such as name, father's name, age, occupation/affiliation etc.), with a view to exploring whether certain groups are more exposed than others. Taking revenge killings as a point of departure, we found e.g., that while Pashtuns were underrepresented (37%, compared to their estimated share in the population of 42%), Tajiks were slightly overrepresented (30% versus 27%), Hazaras significantly overrepresented (14% compared to about 9%), and Uzbeks underrepresented (5% versus 9%)<sup>54</sup> (cf. figure 16). Some of the (other) smaller minority groups figured sometimes more prominently as victims (e.g., Pashai), sometimes less prominently (e.g., Baluch), or on a par with their actual share in the total population of Afghanistan. But since these numbers are more vulnerable to random variation, the smaller their point of departure, breaking down the numbers further would only be of limited value. Here, looking at actual cases and consulting and qualitatively analyzing the informative value of the data collected is much more rewarding – which will be the focus of part V. below.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. e.g. with the demographics for the entire population as presented by Statista, Breakdown of Afghan Population as of 2020, by Ethnic Group, available at: [Afghanistan: share population by ethnic group 2020 | Statista](https://www.statista.com/statistics/1111111/afghanistan-population-by-ethnicity/).

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*Figure 16: Revenge killings per ethnicity (in percent)*



*Figure 17: Revenge and extrajudicial killings per ethnicity (in percent)*

Where a victim had been killed in revenge for a specific affiliation, occupation, or action, we labeled the crime as a ‘revenge killing’, which often is related to the victim’s position in the previous government, army or security forces, or the person’s characteristics as a civil society

activist, etc. The killing may also coincide with or be motivated by other factors, but where the primary motivation pointed to the above factors, this label was chosen.

Where such a particular motivation for the killing could not be established, the crimes would be filed under (other) extrajudicial killings. The commission of both categories of killing share many similarities and often the sole difference was that the witnesses in their statements could not, or would not (for various reasons, including concerns for their own security), point to the perpetrator(s) responsible for the crime. Therefore, sometimes combining the two into one bigger group with a view to looking for similar traits in the larger pool of cases may be instructive.

In the case of the combined group of revenge killings and other extrajudicial killings (figure 17), the results largely conform with the findings for revenge killings only. The slight reduction in the percentages of Pashtun, Tajik, and Hazara victims is mainly due to the fact that the group of victims where ethnicity had not been specified was larger, which is not unexpected, as the lack of some information often was the (sole) reason for a killing being labeled as 'extrajudicial' as opposed to 'revenge'.

#### **4. Age**

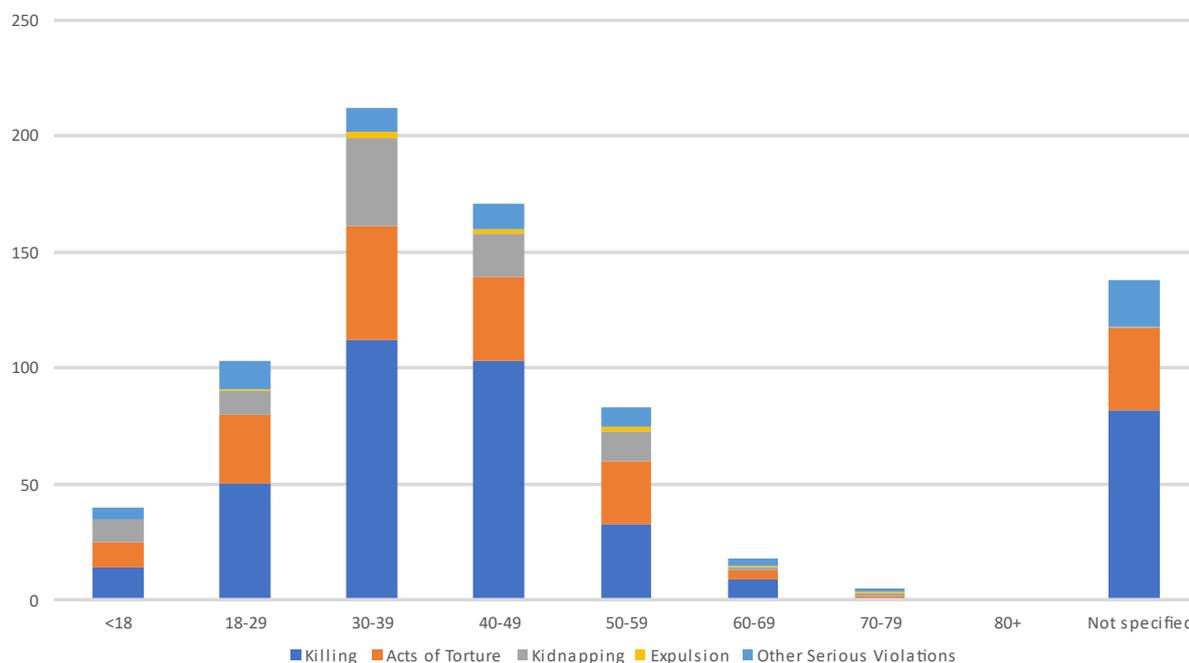
Looking at the age variable, the data collected appears to reflect what could be expected based on the distribution of victims within the various categories of crimes. The largest total number of victims was in the age group of 30-39 years (212 victims), followed by those 40-49 years old (171) (cf. figure 18). Considering that the largest category of crime within those age groups pertained to killings (see also figure 19), followed by torture, crimes that predominantly (ex-) army, police, intelligence officers and middle and more senior (as opposed to new recruits) were the victims of, these results may in part be explained by the victims' professional background or affiliation (for more on that, see also below).

The relatively large number of cases where the victims' age could not be specified could certainly have an impact on the total age distribution. However, as the size of the respective categories of crime within the group of victims without specified age is very much in line with the dominant groups of crime, even if the age of the victims within the 'unspecified age' group could have been established, a significant disturbance of the age group distribution would not have to be expected.

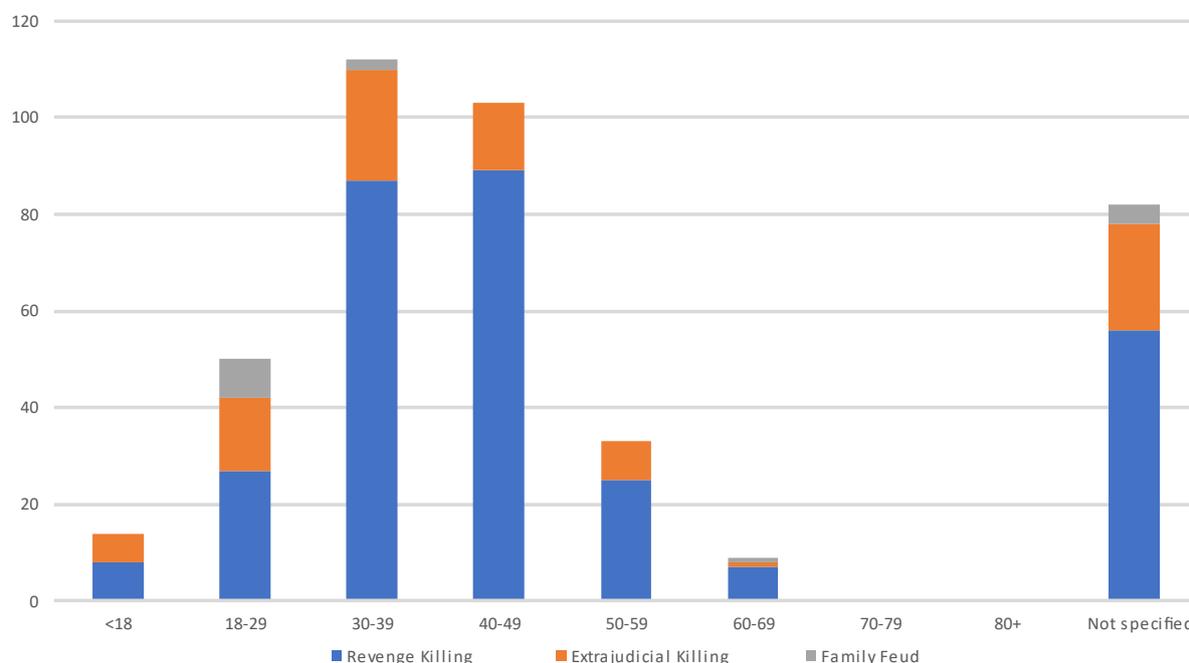
The main reason for the lack of age information in certain cases is twofold. Sometimes witnesses did not have detailed information about the victim, as they had no specific relation to the victim (they witnessed e.g., the crime, but were not otherwise close to the victim). Furthermore, exact information regarding age (akin to dates, times, calendars etc.) is not as commonly used in Afghanistan, especially in rural areas, as it may be in countries where almost everyone has an ID, birth certificate etc.

Since our data was collected in all parts of the country, not just urban centers, a sizeable group of victims of unspecified age was to be expected. In that connection it is also important to note that about 75% of Afghanistan's population is defined as living in rural areas, and in many provinces, that number is close to or equals 100% (cf. e.g., Ghor (99.0%), Daykundi (99.2%), Wardak (99.5%), Paktika (99.3%), Nuristan (100%), Panjshir (100%)), the only

significant outlier being Kabul province (15%), followed by Balkh (where the percentage of the rural population already jumps to 62.7%), Kandahar (64.2%), and Herat (70.9%)<sup>55</sup>.



*Figure 18: Total number of victims per category of crime per age group*



*Figure 19: Total number of victims killed per age group*

<sup>55</sup> World Bank, Afghanistan: Province Dashboard, (Aug. 1, 2019). Available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/data/interactive/2019/08/01/afghanistan-interactive-province-level-visualization>.

A final reason for the lack of age information in a number of cases is that sometimes, where that information was only provided as an approximation (e.g., 'above thirty'), then this information would only be used to conclude that the person concerned was an adult, but the age category would still read 'unspecified' in our statistics.

## **5. Occupation, Affiliation and Association**

Classifying victims according to their occupation or profession was not always straight forward. Often, a victim could have been targeted for more than one profession or activity (e.g., a doctor who also was a civil society activist), was falsely accused or targeted for a purported affiliation with a group (e.g., a doctor who simply abided by his or her oath and treated every patient, irrespective of the patient's background or political views), or had been attacked simply by association (e.g. an (ex-) soldier's wife or his children, solely because of her husband's or their father's (former) occupation).

When the victim checked several boxes, we attempted to identify the main reason for having been targeted. Where no independent, individual reason could be established, a victim would be classified according to the category of the targeted person one was associated with. Therefore, e.g., an (ex-) army officer's wife who had been killed merely due to her association with her husband, would also be classified as 'ex-army' for purposes of victim profiles, as e.g., in this case from Sar-e Pul:

"He had a job in the ex-government, but we didn't know what he was doing. People in the area were telling me that he works in intelligence. After the collapse of the government, he fled to Iran and his family stayed here. In October 2021, armed people entered the house and killed his wife with bullets. They didn't have any personal feud with anyone. Maybe she was killed for her husband's work."<sup>56</sup>

Hence, all the categorizations in the victim profiles in the ensuing graphics are to be read on an equal footing as occupation (profession), affiliation and/or association.

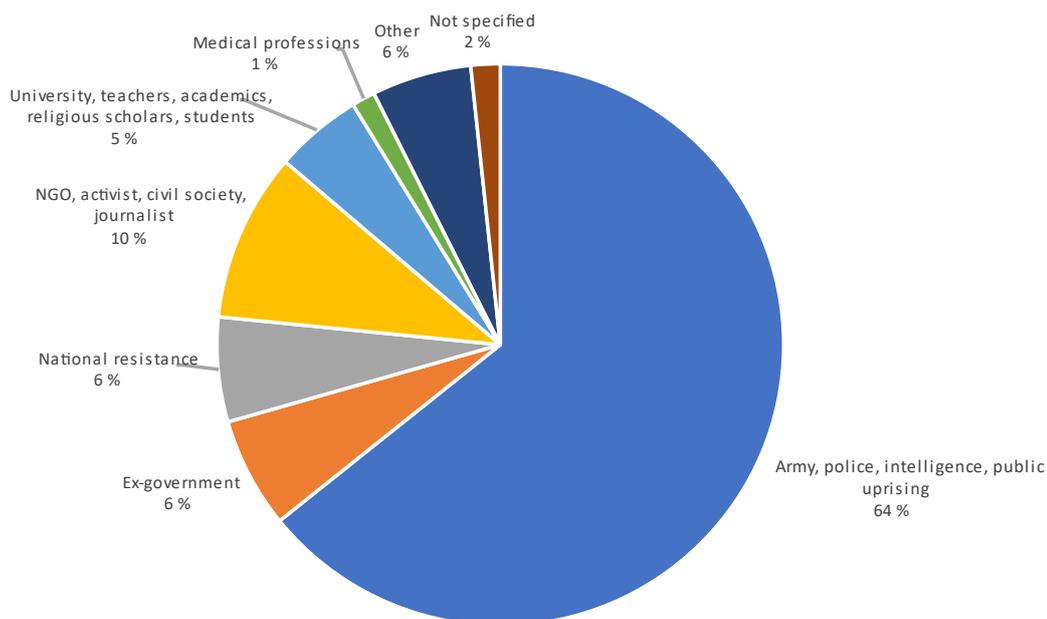
In some cases, that classification certainly contributed to increasing the percentage of victims targeted for their army etc. affiliation, but the main reason for the high percentage of victims with such a background (cf. e.g., the numbers for victims of revenge killings, figure 20) appears to be the large total number of people with a background from the military, police or security sector, and their visibility as (previous) opposing forces and agents of the state.

Only where the victim had neither one of the selected occupations (or professions) of his or her own, nor an affiliation or association with a person filling those criteria, that victim would be classified as 'other' (e.g., a farmer), or, where further details were unknown, as 'not specified'. On the other hand, a farmer accused and killed for his alleged affiliation with the national resistance, could be listed as 'national resistance'.

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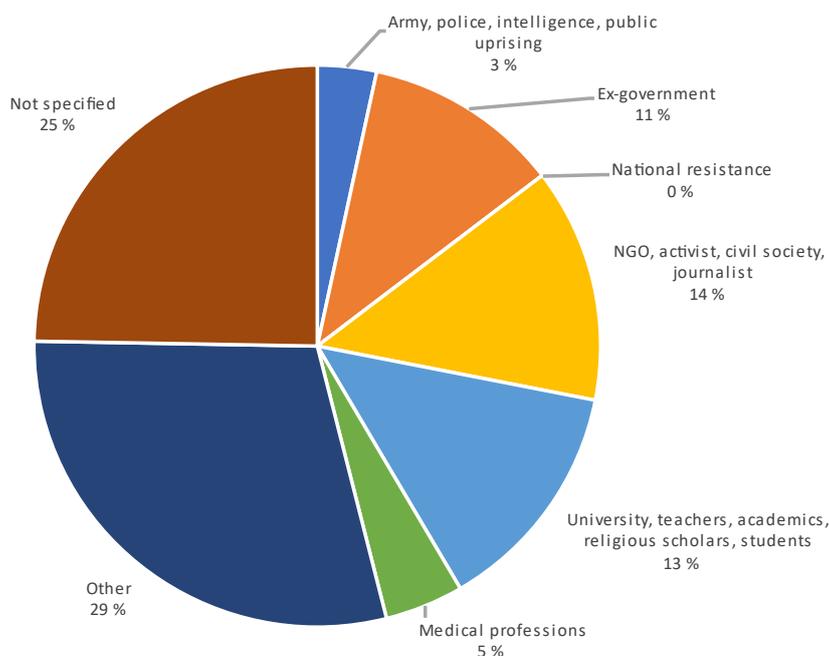
<sup>56</sup> HRRL interview with a person with knowledge of the incident, Sar-e Pul province, February 2023.

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*Figure 20: Revenge killings per profession, affiliation or association (in percent)*

For all their similarities regarding the pattern of the commission of the crime, juxtaposing revenge killings with (other) extrajudicial killings reveals quite stark contrasts when it comes to the occupation (profession) and affiliation of the victims. While (ex-) army, police, intelligence and public uprising (commanders) dominated among the group of victims of revenge killings (with 64%), for extrajudicial killings that variable is now down to 3%, whereas the previously small groups of ‘other’ (6%) or ‘not specified’ (2%), now dominate with 29% and 25%, respectively (cf. figure 21).

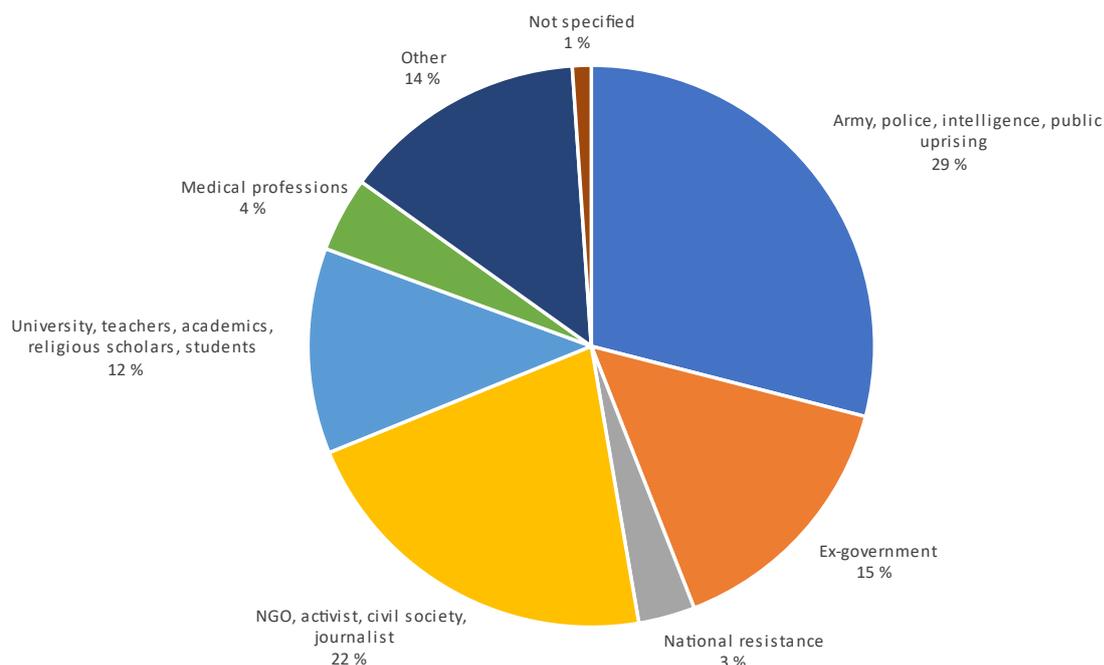


*Figure 21: Extrajudicial killings per profession, affiliation or association (in percent)*

As in the case of ethnicity (cf. above), the significantly larger group of 'not specified' in extrajudicial as opposed to revenge killings does not come unexpectedly, as the lack of some information often was the reason for categorizing a killing as 'extrajudicial' as opposed to 'revenge' in the first place. More interesting is that almost all killings of victims in the group of (ex-) army, police etc. were classified as revenge killings (only 3% of victims with that background received the 'extrajudicial killings' label), which may be explained by the fact that in almost all of those cases it was possible to establish the dominant motivation behind the killing. Furthermore, considering that the largest group of victims of extrajudicial killings refers to 'other' (29%), a more detailed subdivision of 'other' may have been desirable (and could still be created), but it also points to the challenge of finding the right level of division within victim groups versus splitting up groups at the expense of retaining a certain level cases per category, rendering the resulting N per division too small for drawing meaningful conclusions.

Even without further division, when it comes to revenge killings, the victim group of 'other' was already only 6%, further splitting up that group did not seem worthwhile. Here, focusing rather on the content of selected, individual cases appeared to be more beneficial (cf. below, part V.).

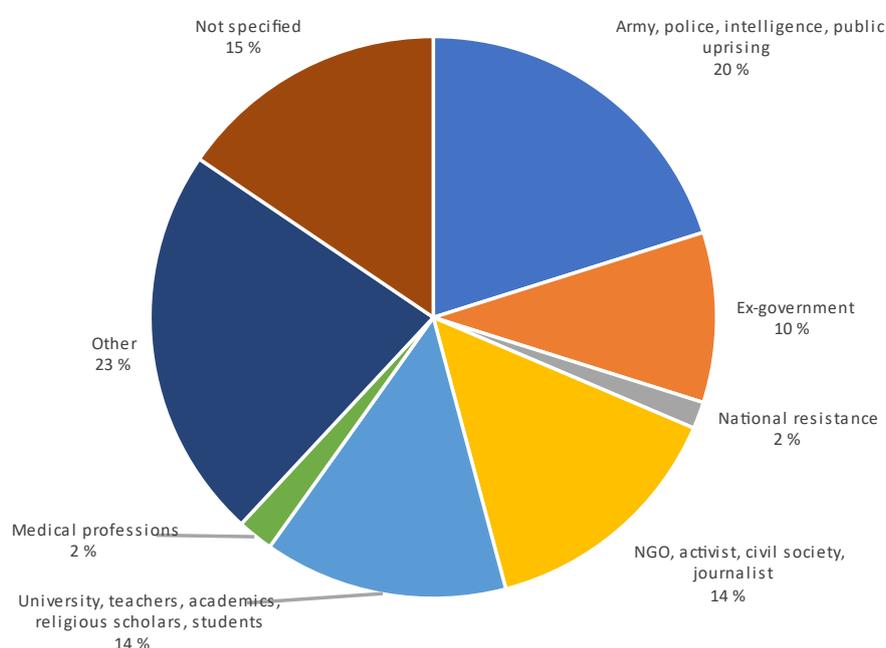
For victims of kidnappings (cf. figure 22), the distribution per occupation (profession), affiliation etc. is more balanced, with a significant number of victims within both the group of ex-police, army, etc. (29%), ex-government (15%), university, academics etc. (12%), and NGOs and civil society (22%), and other (14%), while merely 1% remained 'not specified'.



*Figure 22: Kidnappings per profession, affiliation or association (in percent)*

These numbers somehow contrast with the distribution per occupation (profession) for victims of torture. Similar to victims of kidnappings, also for torture, ex-army (20%), ex-government (10%), NGOs and civil society (14%), and academics (14%) represent significant victim groups, but here, the group of 'other' increases to 23% and, noticeable, the group of 'not specified' rises to 15% (cf. figure 23).

Considering that one and the same victim often experienced several, consecutive crimes, e.g., being kidnapped, then tortured (and perhaps eventually killed), having a stronger correlation among the distribution of professions and affiliations for victims of kidnappings and torture was to be expected, especially since torture usually did not occur by itself, but was, in the main, preceded by a kidnapping. On the other hand, the significantly higher number of ‘not specified’ occupations and affiliations among victims of torture (15%) compared to victims of kidnappings (1%), may at least in part be explained by the fact that the former also include victims of which fewer details are known (e.g., victims that had been tortured before having been extrajudicially killed). Also, a dead body of which perhaps not all details are known may have shown signs of torture. As with killing, the occurrence of torture may sometimes be judged and established by its results (a dead, or tortured body). In contrast, a kidnapping cannot be established in the same way without knowledge of the action itself. Therefore, a witness statement concerning a kidnapping is generally less likely to not have any information about the occupation or affiliation of the victim.



*Figure 23: Torture per profession, affiliation or association (in percent)*

## 6. Time Distribution

It has been stated that “[t]he majority of violations took place in the four months following the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan (15 August 2021 – 31 December 2021)”<sup>57</sup>. And one could argue that a certain peak in atrocities is to be expected in a power transition period and its immediate aftermath, where some fighting is still ongoing, tensions run high, retaliation is instant and the new, *de facto* authorities still strive to establish control over the country as well as within their own ranks.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. UNAMA (2023), *A Barrier to Securing Peace: Human Rights Violations against Former Government Officials and Former Armed Force Members in Afghanistan: 15 August 2021 – 30 June 2023*, p. 6, (pointing out that almost half of all extrajudicial killings they recorded pertained to that period of time). Available at: <https://unama.unmissions.org/barrier-securing-peace-hr-violations-against-former-government-officials-former-armed-force-members>.

But that is not the picture we have seen. Yes, there had been a peak in the first couple of months, but it was not the only one. Indeed, our data suggests that there have been several waves where crime rates, including for revenge and other extrajudicial killings have peaked, and that this pattern was ongoing, with a significant level of atrocities being committed continuously across the entire country. Looking at the total number of victims per category of crime per month within our reporting period, what we here call the time distribution of the atrocities committed, we see several distinct peaks, e.g., in August 2021, December 2021, February 2022, and July 2022, with the latter representing the most significant one (cf. figure 24). While some variation may be accidental or based on coincidences, we believe in numbers and at the very least, these numbers demonstrate that atrocities have not only, and not even primarily, been committed in the immediate aftermath of the Taliban's seizure of power, but long thereafter, and on a high level.<sup>58</sup>

The widespread nature and level of some of these crime concentrations during particular time periods and the similar pattern and targeted commission of the crimes seems to suggest a certain, underlying structure or policy. And, apart from the first peak, which coincided with the final stages of the Taliban's taking over of the country in August 2021, these subsequent waves may point to sensitive materials having been left behind by the hastily retreating Ghani government and its allies and been recovered by the Taliban. In fact, reports have indicated that the *de facto* authorities thus have received access to government employment records<sup>59</sup>, among them of the security forces and those that may have cooperated with them, including as informants<sup>60</sup>, as well as documents identifying Afghan staff members at foreign embassies and even job applicants for embassy jobs<sup>61</sup>. The various peaks may point to such records having been recovered at different instances and periods of time, resulting in the commission of numerous similar, individual crimes and at times perhaps even some coordinated purges.

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<sup>58</sup> The ostensibly steep drop in October 2022 is mainly due to the fact that on-the-ground data collection just started that month and a certain time lapse between the commission of the crime and the data collection is naturally needed for a crime to be picked up and registered, especially when it comes to physical, in-person interviews and data collection. Information received through other channels (which therefore, as stated, would not be included in our statistics) even long after our initial data collection period also seems to indicate that these atrocities continued far beyond the time frame of the graphical representation above. And, of course, these atrocities did not start on 15 August 2021, but were also already committed in the weeks prior to the Taliban's finalization of their seizure of the country. Thus, from that point of view also the starting point of the above graph represents to a certain extent an artificial construct, as it simply reflects the fact that only crimes committed from that day on were included in our statistics; it certainly does not mean that no crimes took place prior to that date.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. e.g., Human Rights Watch, 'No Forgiveness for People Like You', Executions and Enforced Disappearances in Afghanistan under the Taliban, (Nov. 2021), p. 2.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. e.g., Al Jazeera, Afghan Staff Details Left Behind at UK Kabul Embassy: Report, (Aug. 27, 2021), available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/8/27/afghan-staff-details-left-behind-at-uk-kabul-embassy-report>.

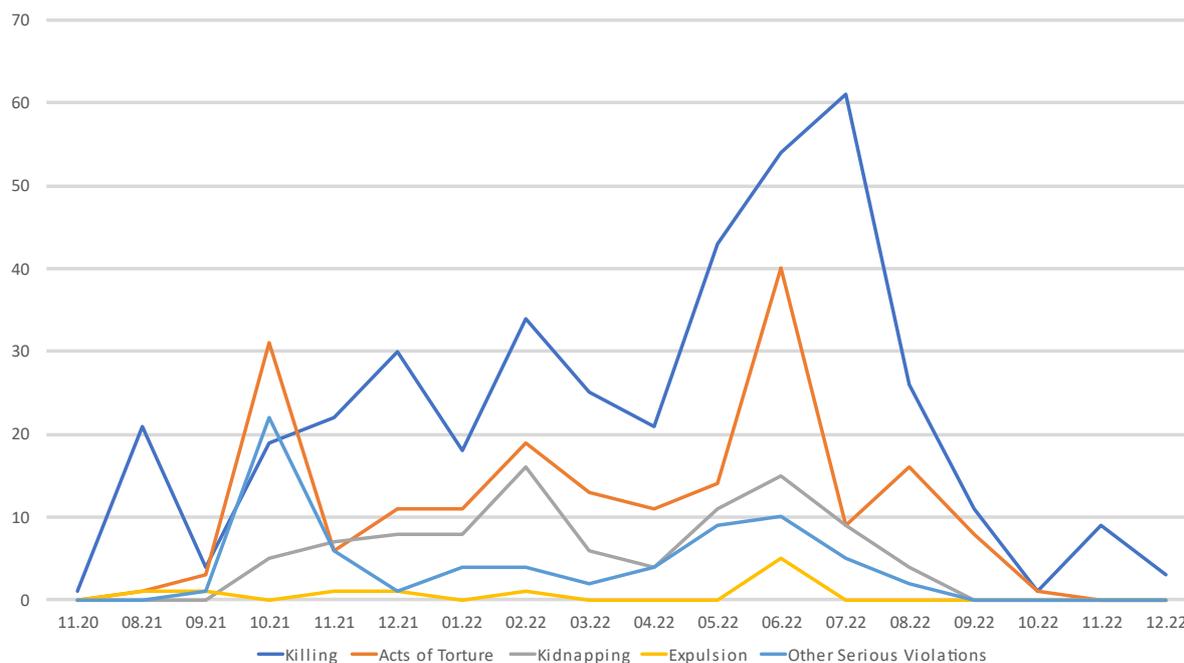


Figure 24: Total number of victims per category of crime per month

## 7. Conclusion on Overall Findings

Based on our data and supported by other materials informing our analysis, a broad pattern of revenge killings and other serious human rights abuses emerges, not just in a few provinces, but throughout the entire country, not just during the immediate power transition period, but more than two years after the *de facto* authorities’ seizure of power, and not just against people directly connected to the former government, but against all people, including women and children targeted by association.

While no conflict exists in a vacuum, and the number of casualties, including of indiscriminate violence, of IED and UXO and based on so-called ‘collateral damage’ has been high for the duration of the armed conflict between the Taliban and the previous government and its allies – this did not start with the Taliban’s seizure of power – the level of individual victim targeting since the take-over by the *de facto* authorities appears to have increased and experienced several waves of violence. Only now, as opposed to then, without an international presence, boots and eyes on the ground, establishing the facts and documenting such violence is all the more challenging. Some of the victims and awful secrets will remain hidden under the (in that sense) deceptive beauty of Afghanistan, exemplified here by a view on Surubi district in Kabul province. Others will be detailed below.



© Human Rights Research League, View of Surubi district, Kabul province.

## **V. Cases behind the Numbers**

While summary findings, statistics and numbers provide an overview and insights on an aggregate level, individual cases provide content, context, and texture. Hence, in the ensuing chapters, the atrocities largely described in an abstract fashion in the previous parts, will now be exemplified and detailed by actual cases from across all of Afghanistan, following, for convenience, the regional structure applied e.g., by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) in an alphabetical order, i.e., cases from provinces within the region of Central Highland will be followed by cases from the Central, Eastern, North Eastern, Northern, South Eastern, Southern, and Western Region. We invite the reader to have the general patterns, findings and analysis of the previous chapters in mind when exploring the ensuing short case examples from all 34 provinces.

While we have identifying details, including age, name, father's name, occupation, ethnicity, date of the interview, date of the alleged crime, province, district, location of the crime etc. for all cases that form part of our statistics on file, due to the serious security issues involved in collecting and documenting such sensitive information and in line with the Do No Harm principle, no information that might reveal the identity of witnesses and informants or could potentially harm family members and other persons close to them will be presented in this public report. That includes information regarding the relationship between a witness and a victim, or, for that matter, a perpetrator, or specific location or date of the (alleged) crime, if that information could expose the identity of the information provider and other persons concerned. That being said, all statements provided below are examples taken from HRRL's in-person interviews conducted in Afghanistan with persons with (direct) knowledge of the specific incident.

## **1. Central Highland Region**

The Central Highland Region (or the Central Highlands) includes two provinces, Bamiyan and Daykundi, known for their harsh weather conditions, frequent natural hazards, remoteness, physical access constraints, and level of conflict – not just in the past two years. The following examples, however, pertain to precisely that period of time.



© Jono Photography / Shutterstock, Bamiyan province.

### **Bamiyan:**

“The older son was police in our district. After the collapse of President Ghani, he fled to Iran. In May 2022, a group of Taliban came in cars to the house and asked about him. Since he was not at home, they arrested the younger son. They kept him until it got dark and then shot him. We buried his body.”<sup>62</sup>

“Their father worked in public administration for many years. After the collapse of the previous government, all employees fled and since their father was not a political or religious person, he stayed at home. They are three sisters, and they have no brothers. In the spring of 2022, the Taliban came to their house and arrested their father and shot him down in the crop fields.”<sup>63</sup>

“Her husband was working for the previous government, and she is illiterate, but people said he was in the national intelligence service and was involved in dangerous work. One day in June 2022, the Taliban came in a car and took him for investigation. There were six people

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<sup>62</sup> HRRL interview with a person with knowledge of the incident, Bamiyan province, October 2022.

<sup>63</sup> HRRL interview with a person with knowledge of the incident, Bamiyan province, October 2022.

with guns. After that day, the people in the village said that her husband had been killed, and his dead body was thrown in a floodway outside the village.”<sup>64</sup>

### **Daykundi:**

“We are Hazara people of three villages and we had a claim of land with Pashtuns. The land was in our hands. When the Taliban came to power, the local Pashtuns came along with the Taliban district governor. They ordered us to evacuate the area and take our families somewhere else. We submitted an application to the Taliban court in Daykundi and the court ordered to stop the evacuation, but the local Taliban didn't accept the court order and said that they only accepted the order of the supreme court in Kabul. We were expelled.”<sup>65</sup>

“She was young, and she studied. She worked in some NGO. When the Taliban came to power, she stayed at home but was searching for a job. One day in May 2022 she came out of the house and was walking on the road when someone fired at her and killed her with a Kalashnikov. They fled in a Corolla car.”<sup>66</sup>

“In August 2021, our whole district fell into the hands of the Taliban. All police forces handed over their arms to the Taliban and they were allowed to go back to their homes. But the Taliban arrested eight police. Most of them were Hazara, some of them were Pashtun. The Taliban tied their hands, took them to the mountain and killed them by shooting. They were Taliban from our district. *But they were new and from other areas. Therefore, I don't know their names. They were transferred by the governor after this incident.*”<sup>67</sup>

“In the autumn of 2022, the Taliban stormed their house. They falsely accused them of having relations with the National Resistance Front. They killed many of their family members, including a woman and three children. They were all Hazara. The Taliban fighters who killed them belonged to the governor of Daykundi province.”<sup>68</sup>

“He was an employee of the Afghan intelligence service. After the fall of the ex-government, he fled to Iran. His wife stayed alone in her house. One night in the spring of 2022, unknown people entered her house at night and strangled and hanged and killed her. I think she was killed in revenge of her husband.”<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> HRRL interview with a person with knowledge of the incident, Bamiyan province, October 2022.

<sup>65</sup> HRRL interview with a person with knowledge of the incident, Daykundi province, February 2023. These, and further examples in ensuing chapters, point to disagreement and conflict also within the Taliban ranks.

<sup>66</sup> HRRL interview with a person with direct knowledge of the incident, Daykundi province, January 2023.

<sup>67</sup> HRRL interview with direct knowledge of the incident, Daykundi province, January 2023. Emphasis added. The use of Taliban fighters outside their areas of origin and the transfer and circulation of Taliban fighters from one area to another appears to be a recurring feature in many of our cases.

<sup>68</sup> HRRL interview with a person with direct knowledge of the incident, Daykundi province, January 2023.

<sup>69</sup> HRRL interview with a person with direct knowledge of the incident, Daykundi province, January 2023.

## **2. Central Region**

The Central Region consists of the provinces of Kabul, Kapisa, Logar, Parwan, Panjshir, and Wardak. It therefore represents both the region with the largest number of provinces, and the by far most populous one, as it includes Kabul province, which, by itself, makes up about one sixth of Afghanistan's estimated population.



© Jono Photography / Shutterstock, Kabul River.

### **Kabul:**

“She was a female health professional. She was nice and beautiful. In January 2022, a senior employee of a ministry proposed to her, but she and her father declined. Later on, the same person threatened her and her family, and he married her by force. After the fall of the republic, there was a rise in cases to marry girls by force and it frightens many young women. We all live our lives in fear of such incidences happening to us as well.”<sup>70</sup>

“Two of the brothers served in the Afghan national army. In October 2021, four Ranger cars of the Taliban came and besieged the family's house and took the two brothers with them for investigation. After three days, we found their dead and tortured bodies in the industrial area behind our street. They were soldiers in the former government. That's why they were killed.”<sup>71</sup>

“His father worked for Afghan national intelligence, but fled Afghanistan after the collapse of the previous government. In May 2022, the Taliban came in police Ranger cars and arrested

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<sup>70</sup> HRRL interview with a person with direct knowledge of the incident, Kabul province, October 2022.

<sup>71</sup> HRRL interview with a person with direct knowledge of the incident, Kabul province, October 2022.

the son and tortured him. His dead body was thrown behind a school. He was only killed because his father used to work for Afghan intelligence.”<sup>72</sup>

“Their father was a public official in a ministry in the previous government, he remained at home after the collapse of the republic. One day in February 2022, he got a call from the ministry to come back and continue his job. He went back and was arrested, tortured, and then his dead body was handed to the family. He was killed for having been a public official in a ministry in the previous government.”<sup>73</sup>

### **Kapisa:**

“One day in August 2022, we received a call stating that someone had beaten her mother. We went there and saw her mother's head was covered in blood. She was dead before we reached the hospital. The Taliban had beaten her because she was a cook in the police headquarters. She was a brave Afghan woman who worked to provide for her family.”<sup>74</sup>

“He was a good man and a police officer in the previous government. After the collapse, he occupied himself with farming. One day in July 2022, when he was going to irrigate his land, he was shot and killed by the Taliban. I don't know the perpetrators. They were unknown people, but they were dressed as Taliban and looked like them. He was ex-police and killed in revenge.”<sup>75</sup>

“He was a farmer, and he was accused of having weapons and was arrested by the Taliban in June 2022. He was tortured and died. The villagers buried him. He had signs of torture on his body. I don't know the perpetrators' names, but they were Taliban, accusing him of having large quantities of weapons. He was a simple farmer. I don't know why he was killed.”<sup>76</sup>

### **Logar:**

“He was an ex-agent of the local Aghan intelligence. After the collapse, he worked as a taxi driver. One day in winter 2022, two passengers were with him in the car and when they were close to the village, they killed him by pistol and left the car and the dead body on the spot. He was a good man and had no problems with anybody. I don't know the killers, but they were not burglars, as they did not take his money, mobile phone or car. Maybe he was killed for his past work”.<sup>77</sup>

“There were three sons. Two of them worked in the police force and one worked in the bakery with their father. After the collapse, the two sons who had been police also came to work in the bakery, and work went well. One evening, in the winter of 2021, two people came on motorcycles and killed all three sons in the bakery.”<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> HRRL interview with a person with direct knowledge of the incident, Kabul province, October 2022.

<sup>73</sup> HRRL interview with a person with direct knowledge of the incident, Kabul province, October 2022.

<sup>74</sup> HRRL interview with a person with direct knowledge of the incident, Kapisa province, December 2022.

<sup>75</sup> HRRL interview with a person with direct knowledge of the incident, Kapisa province, December 2022.

<sup>76</sup> HRRL interview with a person with direct knowledge of the incident, Kapisa province, December 2022.

<sup>77</sup> HRRL interview with a person with direct knowledge of the incident, Logar province, January 2023.

<sup>78</sup> HRRL interview with a person with direct knowledge of the incident, Logar province, January 2023.

“He was in the border police. After the collapse, he started farming in the village. One night in August 2022, he was kidnapped from the village mosque. He went missing for a month. His dead body was thrown in the graveyard of the village. He was shot with one bullet in the head. I don’t know the perpetrators, but he never harmed anyone. Maybe he was killed for his past work.”<sup>79</sup>



© Alex Reynolds / Shutterstock, Kabul-Panjshir valley view.

## **Panjshir:**

“She had a few goats, and she was taking them daily to the nearby mountains. One day in July 2022, she was arrested and killed by the Taliban fighters. They accused her of spying for the fighters of the National Resistance Front hiding in the mountains and fighting the Taliban. This is brutality of the Taliban. She didn’t have any guilt, but they killed her. They were Taliban fighters, but they are from other areas, and I don’t know their names.”<sup>80</sup>

“He was a police officer in the ex-government. One day in July 2022, the Taliban arrested, tortured, and killed him by shooting, despite their general amnesty pledges. His only guilt was that he was a police officer in the previous government. I don’t know the names of the perpetrators, but they were Taliban. They are not from our area.”<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> HRRL interview with a person with direct knowledge of the incident, Logar province, January 2023.

<sup>80</sup> HRRL interview with a person with direct knowledge of the incident, Panjshir province, January 2023.

<sup>81</sup> HRRL interview with a person with direct knowledge of the incident, Panjshir province, January 2023.

“He was a farmer and had livestock. He was arrested and killed by the Taliban in July 2022. He was accused of spying for the National Resistance Front in the mountains. His family left the village. I don't know where they went. He had no personal guilt and had no relation to the previous government. He was just accused and killed by shooting. The perpetrators were Taliban fighters, but I don't know their names.”<sup>82</sup>

“They were three friends, all of them were ex-soldiers. One day in the fall of 2022, when they were walking together, they were arrested by the Taliban, accusing them of collaborating with the National Resistance Front. They were shot by a firing squad right away. They were innocent and killed for being soldiers in the previous government. I don't know the names of the perpetrators, but they were Taliban.”<sup>83</sup>

### **Parwan:**

“The father was an officer at in the local police. In September 2022, the Taliban invaded his house. The father was not at home, so they arrested his son and killed him. The names of the perpetrators are not known, but they came in security cars which belong to the Taliban government. The Taliban killed the son because his father had worked in the local police of the previous government.”<sup>84</sup>

“He was a local police officer. After the Taliban came to power, he was at home, working on his farm. One day in July 2022, he had been arrested by the Taliban and after a few days of torture he died. I don't know the identity of the perpetrators, but they were Taliban for sure. They arrested and killed him for being a local police officer.”<sup>85</sup>

“All of us girls are worried after the fall of the government, because in Taliban dominated areas, girls are married off against their will. One of my friends was threatened to marry a Taliban by force in January 2022. She was a student, 20 years old. They told her they would kill her if she refused to marry one of them. I don't know their names, but they were Taliban. My friend was innocent; she was just forced into marriage.”<sup>86</sup>

### **Wardak:**

“He was a police officer in the district office. He stayed at home after the collapse and wanted to go to Iran. In January 2022, his car was stopped by unknown people, and he was killed. I don't know who they were. Maybe he was killed for his past work in the police.”<sup>87</sup>

“He was a police officer and worked in another province and was never coming to our village. After the collapse, he came to the village and started a normal life. One day in February 2022, he was walking in the street when two motorcycle riders fired on him and killed him. I

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<sup>82</sup> HRRL interview with a person with knowledge of the incident, Panjshir province, January 2023.

<sup>83</sup> HRRL interview with a person with knowledge of the incident, Panjshir province, January 2023.

<sup>84</sup> HRRL interview with a person with direct knowledge of the incident, Parwan province, November 2022.

<sup>85</sup> HRRL interview with a person with knowledge of the incident, Parwan province, November 2022.

<sup>86</sup> HRRL interview with a person with direct knowledge of the incident, Parwan province, November 2022.

<sup>87</sup> HRRL interview with a person with knowledge of the incident, Wardak province, December 2022.

don't know who they were, but here only Taliban have weapons. They took revenge on an ex-police officer.”<sup>88</sup>

“He was a driver working for the American army. He worked there for many years. After the collapse, the Taliban came one day in February 2022 and arrested him in the street. He is still missing, dead or alive. His family went to the governor's office, but they denied his arrest. I don't know the perpetrators' names, but he was kidnapped by the Taliban. They are taking revenge on a driver who was working for the US forces.”<sup>89</sup>

### **3. Eastern Region**

The Eastern Region comprises the provinces of Kunar, Laghman, Nangarhar, and Nuristan. It thus includes one of the provinces with the highest per capita crime rate, including per capita killing rate in the country in the data that forms part of our statistics (Nuristan province, cf. also figures 10 and 13 above).

#### **Kunar:**

“One of the brothers had a high-ranking position in the previous government. He fled after the collapse. One day in March 2022, the Taliban arrested the other brother. He was tortured and killed, and the family buried him. I don't know the perpetrators by name, but they were Taliban from the district office. The victim was the brother of a high-ranking official in the ex-government, so he was killed in revenge.”<sup>90</sup>

“They were two friends who were border police in our district. After the collapse of the government, they remained at home. One day in February 2022, a Taliban commander came with two guards and killed both of them. I don't know all the perpetrators, but I know their commander and they were Taliban. They took revenge on ex-border police.”<sup>91</sup>

“He was an employee of the border police. He was arrested in a night raid against his house in August 2021 after the collapse of the government. He was taken away and then killed and his dead body was thrown. They were armed people and had M4 guns that were only with the [*de facto*] government. They took revenge on a border police officer, nothing else.”<sup>92</sup>

“He was a border police. He was arrested from his house in September 2021. He was taken, then tortured and shot. The family buried him. The perpetrators were Taliban. I don't know all of them by name, but I know their commander. They simply took revenge on a border policeman. He had no other guilt”.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> HRRL interview with a person with direct knowledge of the incident, Wardak province, December 2022.

<sup>89</sup> HRRL interview with a person with direct knowledge of the incident, Wardak province, December 2022.

<sup>90</sup> HRRL interview with a person with direct knowledge of the incident, Kunar province, December 2022.

<sup>91</sup> HRRL interview with a person with direct knowledge of the incident, Kunar province, December 2022.

<sup>92</sup> HRRL interview with a person with direct knowledge of the incident, Kunar province, December 2022.

<sup>93</sup> HRRL interview with a person with direct knowledge of the incident, Kunar province, December 2022.

## **Laghman:**

“He was a student and writing Facebook posts. He was kidnapped from the main road in July 2022, and he is still missing. Dead or alive is unknown. He was warned because of his Facebook posts three times from an unknown number. He was only critical in his Facebook posts, nothing else. The perpetrators were unknown people who had government Ranger cars with them.”<sup>94</sup>

“He was working in the intelligence services of the previous government. One day in June 2022, he was invited back to his old job. Instead, he was arrested, tortured, and killed by the Taliban. They were from the Taliban intelligence department, but I don't know their names. He was killed because he was intelligence in the previous government.”<sup>95</sup>

“She was an employee in the previous government working on women's affairs. In December 2021, she was arrested at midnight at home by unknown people. Two days later her dead body was thrown at night in the street. She was strangled. They came with their faces covered at night. They had M4 guns. I don't know them. She only worked on women's affairs. She had no other guilt.”<sup>96</sup>

“He was in the local police, and he was invited by the Taliban to resume his job. In June 2022, when he was with his two former colleagues, all of them were arrested and after five days, people found their dead bodies. These three were only local police, nothing else. The perpetrators were Taliban, but I don't know their names.”<sup>97</sup>

## **Nangarhar:**

“He was a teacher. In December 2021, he was arrested from his school and his strangled body was found dead three days later. He didn't do anything other than speaking out against the Taliban in public sometimes. The perpetrators were unknown people. He was simply a teacher at a school and killed by unknown people who hid their faces.”<sup>98</sup>

“He was an ex-army officer, and he was killed in July 2022 by unknown people. He was shot dead with ten bullets. They came on motorcycles. The perpetrators covered their faces and were unknown, but the area is close to the district headquarters, and no one came from there to ask about what happened. He was shot dead because he was an ex-army officer, nothing else.”<sup>99</sup>

“He was a religious scholar. In December 2021, the Taliban came to collect the zakat or the compulsory charity of crops from the village. He told them that people are poor, and you are not allowed to do it. The argument changed into a fight, and he was beaten and died after three days. They were Taliban and came from the district governor's office, but they are from

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<sup>94</sup> HRRL interview with a person with direct knowledge of the incident, Laghman province, November 2022.

<sup>95</sup> HRRL interview with a person with direct knowledge of the incident, Laghman province, November 2022.

<sup>96</sup> HRRL interview with a person with direct knowledge of the incident, Laghman province, November 2022.

<sup>97</sup> HRRL interview with a person with knowledge of the incident, Laghman province, November 2022.

<sup>98</sup> HRRL interview with a person with knowledge of the incident, Nangarhar province, October 2022.

<sup>99</sup> HRRL interview with a person with direct knowledge of the incident, Nangarhar province, October 2022.

other areas, so I don't know their names. He was beaten and killed because he didn't allow the Taliban to collect charity from people in the village by force."<sup>100</sup>

### **Nuristan:**

"One brother had worked as an adviser in the previous government. In November 2021, the other brother was arrested by unknown persons, tortured to make him give up the address of his older brother. He was killed. I think they were Taliban, but their names are not known."<sup>101</sup>

"She had worked at the police office as a cleaning lady. In February 2022, strangers came at night and arrested her. Her family found her dead body after two days. The perpetrators were Taliban, but their names are unknown."<sup>102</sup>

"He was a police officer in the previous government. He stayed at home after the collapse. One day in June 2022, he was asked by someone in the Taliban government to come and help the flood affected people in Laghman province. He went, he was tortured and killed. His dead body was thrown in the village at night. I think they were Taliban from Laghman province."<sup>103</sup>

"She worked as a nurse in the hospital for many years. One day in March 2022, the Taliban came and arrested her, and tortured her. They accused her of prostitution. I don't know their names, but they were Taliban."<sup>104</sup>

## **4. North Eastern Region**

The North Eastern Region comprises the provinces of Badakhshan, Baghlan, Kunduz, Takhar, and thus has borders, especially via Badakhshan, with Tajikistan, China, India, and Pakistan.

### **Badakhshan:**

"He worked in the police department of the ex-government in Badakhshan. After the Taliban came to power, he was without a job. One day in February 2022, while he was walking in the district bazar, someone fired at him from a Corolla car and killed him. The perpetrators remain unknown, but the Taliban's police are stationed close by the location where the incident took place, and they didn't do anything to catch the killer. Why?"<sup>105</sup>

"He was a police officer in Badakhshan in the ex-government. After the collapse, he stayed at home. In the spring of 2022, Taliban fighters besieged his house at night, arrested him, and took him with them, accusing him of collaborating with the National Resistance Front. He has been missing since, dead or alive is unknown. I don't know their names, but I believe

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<sup>100</sup> HRRL interview with a person with direct knowledge of the incident, Nangarhar province, October 2022.

<sup>101</sup> HRRL interview with a person with knowledge of the incident, Nuristan province, January 2023.

<sup>102</sup> HRRL interview with a person with knowledge of the incident, Nuristan province, January 2023.

<sup>103</sup> HRRL interview with a person with knowledge of the incident, Nuristan province, January 2023.

<sup>104</sup> HRRL interview with a person with knowledge of the incident, Nuristan province, January 2023.

<sup>105</sup> HRRL interview with a person with direct knowledge of the incident, Badakhshan province, February 2023.

they were people from the intelligence department of the Taliban. The accusations are baseless. They are just taking revenge on an ex-officer.”<sup>106</sup>

### **Baghlan:**

“There is a village on the main road to the district center. One day in the summer of 2022, a few cars of the Taliban came, and they were going to the district center office. A roadside mine exploded on their car and some of the Taliban were injured. The Taliban came and arrested many people from the village and killed four of them by shooting. They were surely Taliban, but they came from other areas, so their names are not known. They took revenge on innocent people for an act they had not committed.”<sup>107</sup>

“He was a civil society activist in Baghlan province and worked in the rights campaign for people in the area. He was arrested by the Taliban in July 2022 and after three days he was shot. They only gave his dead body to the family. The perpetrators were from the Taliban intelligence, but I don't know their names. He was killed for being a civil society activist and critic, nothing else.”<sup>108</sup>

“She was 20 years old and fond of music. She used to sing at the events of her school. One day in February 2022, when she went out of the Bazar, she was kidnapped by unknown people and was missing for a week. After one week, they threw her dead body in the village. She was shot one bullet in the head. I don't know who killed her. Her family didn't harm anyone.”<sup>109</sup>

### **Kunduz:**

“He was a soldier but had left the army several years ago due to injuries and remained at home. One day in July he went out for shopping and while walking, two Taliban fired at him from a Corolla car and killed him. He died on the way to the hospital. They just took revenge on him for his past work.”<sup>110</sup>

“He worked in intelligence for more than a decade. After the collapse, he handed over the weapons to the Taliban and stayed at home. In September 2021, the Taliban came, arrested him and shot and killed him on the street. They were Taliban, but they were not from here. Therefore, I do not know them by name. They only took revenge on an ex-officer.”<sup>111</sup>

“In January 2022, the charity (zakat) responsible of the Taliban in our district came to our area and asked us to give him the charity of crops. One of our representatives told him that our crops were not good and that we cannot give the charity. The Taliban responsible became angry and hit our representative with a Kalashnikov and his Taliban fighters joined in. Our

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<sup>106</sup> HRRL interview with a person with knowledge of the incident, Badakhshan province, March 2023.

<sup>107</sup> HRRL interview with a person with direct knowledge of the incident, Baghlan province, January 2023.

<sup>108</sup> HRRL interview with a person with knowledge of the incident, Baghlan province, January 2023.

<sup>109</sup> HRRL interview with a person with knowledge of the incident, Baghlan province, January 2023.

<sup>110</sup> HRRL interview with a person with knowledge of the incident, Kunduz province, November 2022.

<sup>111</sup> HRRL interview with a person with direct knowledge of the incident, Kunduz province, November 2022.

representative got severely sick. He had blood in his urine and saw the doctor twice but is still not well.”<sup>112</sup>

“She worked for an international NGO providing emergency relief and development assistance for many years. After the arrival of the Taliban, she stayed at home. One day in November 2021, she went out to the bazaar for shopping. When she returned back, two people fired at her with pistols and killed her in the middle of the street. I don't know who the perpetrators were. God knows. She didn't have any other guilt except working for this NGO.”<sup>113</sup>

## **Takhar:**

“He was working in the Afghan intelligence service of the previous government. In June 2022, the Taliban called him to go back to work and he went. He was arrested and killed. They gave the dead body to the family, and they buried him. The perpetrators were Taliban from the district. They killed him as an act of revenge for his past work. I don't know their names, but I know their leader.”<sup>114</sup>

“They were both ex-police. After the collapse, they were busy farming in the village. They didn't participate in any other activity. One night in June 2022, the Taliban arrested both of them at their home, and shot and killed them. They said they were accused of collaborating with the National Resistance Front. The perpetrators were Taliban, but I don't know their names. They only took revenge on two ex-police based on false accusations.”<sup>115</sup>

“She was just 19 years old and in 11<sup>th</sup> grade when the Taliban came to power and closed the school. Her father is a member of the Taliban and wanted her to marry his friend, but she denied. In July 2022, her father wanted to do it by force, so she committed suicide and killed herself with a pistol.”<sup>116</sup>

“Their father was killed in an explosion from a landmine, and their mother had to take care of four children. She was working in the houses of rich people who had higher government jobs. Two times the Taliban had called her and asked her to stop working in the houses of government related rich people, but she had told them that she worked to feed her children and that there is no indecency in it. In February 2022, armed men entered their home at night and killed their mother with Kalashnikovs.”<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> HRRL interview with a person with direct knowledge of the incident, Kunduz province, November 2022.

<sup>113</sup> HRRL interview with a person with direct knowledge of the incident, Kunduz province, November 2022.

<sup>114</sup> HRRL interview with a person with direct knowledge of the incident, Takhar province, December 2022.

<sup>115</sup> HRRL interview with a person with direct knowledge of the incident, Takhar province, December 2022.

<sup>116</sup> HRRL interview with a person with direct knowledge of the incident, Takhar province, December 2022.

<sup>117</sup> HRRL interview with a person with knowledge of the incident, Takhar province, December 2022.

## 5. Northern Region

The Northern Region consists of the provinces of Balkh, Faryab, Jowzjan, Samangan, and Sar-e Pul, bordering Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan.

### **Balkh:**

“They had a daughter in her early twenties who had gone to school till tenth grade. She and her female friend were both artists and sometimes they went to the cultural center and participated in theatre and singing. She knew many people and invited other women to freedom and equality. In 2019, someone put a night letter into their family's yard and advised them to prevent their daughter from ‘seducing’ other women. In the winter of 2021, she and her friend were kidnapped and after two days their shot dead bodies were thrown in the street. The names of the killers are unknown, but the work that their daughter did was against the hardliner Islam of the Taliban.”<sup>118</sup>

“She was an employee in the former government working on social affairs for many years. One day in the spring of 2022 she was alone at home and when her family returned, they found her slain in her room. She had lost a lot of blood. Her family buried her the next day.”<sup>119</sup>



© Jono Photography / Shutterstock, Balkh province.

<sup>118</sup> HRRL interview with a person with direct knowledge of the incident, Balkh province, October 2022.

<sup>119</sup> HRRL interview with a person with knowledge of the incident, Balkh province, October 2022.

### **Faryab:**

“She was a teacher but then left teaching and joined the police. After the fall of the government, she stayed at home. One night in March 2022, armed people with covered faces came to her house. They shot and killed her with a Kalashnikov. I don't know the perpetrators, but it is believed to be the work of Taliban intelligence. She was killed for her past work.”<sup>120</sup>

“She was 16 years old and was in 9<sup>th</sup> grade of school. One day in January 2022, she went to see whether the school was open or still closed. She went missing from that day on. After two weeks, they threw her dead body in the street at night. She was shot one bullet in the head.”<sup>121</sup>

“He was local police and after the collapse started farming in the village. One night in June 2022, the Taliban came in a Ranger car. They dragged him out of his house and shot him in the street. They said that anyone having relations with the National Resistance Front will have his fate. They were Taliban, but their identity is unknown. They accused an innocent man and killed him.”<sup>122</sup>

### **Jowzjan:**

“He graduated from 12<sup>th</sup> grade of school and studied English. Then he started working as an English teacher and had many male and female students. He got monthly fees from them, and work was good. In April 2022, unknown people entered his course and shot and killed him with bullets. I don't know the perpetrators, but his family had no personal animosity with anyone. Maybe some of his students later became translators with the international forces after learning English in his course, I don't know.”<sup>123</sup>

“She was a police officer during the previous administration. After the fall of the government, she stayed at home. One night in March 2022, some people stormed her house and killed her with a pistol. I don't know who the perpetrators are, but the new rulers kill many women who worked in the ex-government in different places. I think she was killed for her past work in the government.”<sup>124</sup>

“She was 17 years old and a good tailor. She was sewing clothes for women in the village. Once a woman owed her some money, so she went out to her house. There are long maize fields and crops on the way. She was kidnapped and taken inside the maize dense crops by unknown gunmen. They raped and killed her with pistol bullets.”<sup>125</sup>

### **Samangan:**

“He was an employee of the Afghan intelligence. After the collapse, he stayed at home. One day in September 2022 he was walking on the street, when someone fired at him from a

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<sup>120</sup> HRRL interview with a person with knowledge of the incident, Faryab province, March 2023.

<sup>121</sup> HRRL interview with a person with direct knowledge of the incident, Faryab province, March 2023.

<sup>122</sup> HRRL interview with a person with knowledge of the incident, Faryab province, March 2023.

<sup>123</sup> HRRL interview with a person with knowledge of the incident, Jowzjan province, February 2023.

<sup>124</sup> HRRL interview with a person with knowledge of the incident, Jowzjan province, February 2023.

<sup>125</sup> HRRL interview with a person with knowledge of the incident, Jowzjan province, February 2023.

Corolla car, and he was killed. I don't know the perpetrators, but his family had no problems with anyone. He was killed for his past work.”<sup>126</sup>

“He was a policeman in the ex-government. After the Taliban came, he lost his job and started driving taxi. One day in August 2022, when he was standing on a taxi stand, two people came on a motorcycle and fired on him and killed him. Then they fled. I don't know the perpetrators. I think he was killed for his past work.”<sup>127</sup>

“He was a trader. People were doing business with him both inside the country and abroad. In February 2022, the Taliban came to his shop and told him not to do business with people from the National Resistance Front. He told them ‘I will do my business and if you find someone suspicious you may sit outside my shop and arrest them. I don't stop my business for you’. In July 2022, unknown people came to his shop, killed him and took a large sum of money with them. I don't know the perpetrators, but I think they were Taliban intelligence people.”<sup>128</sup>



© Mark Time Author / Shutterstock, Samangan province.

### **Sar-e Pul:**

“Her husband had lost a limb in a landmine explosion. She had gone to school for 12 years and worked for some NGOs. After the collapse, she stayed at home, but was in search of a

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<sup>126</sup> HRRL interview with a person with direct knowledge of the incident, Samangan province, March 2023.

<sup>127</sup> HRRL interview with a person with direct knowledge of the incident, Samangan province, March 2023.

<sup>128</sup> HRRL interview with a person with knowledge of the incident, Samangan province, March 2023.

job. One day in June 2022, when she left the house and was walking on the road, someone fired on her from a car and killed her. She was killed for working in foreign NGOs.”<sup>129</sup>

“He was a local police officer for many years. After the collapse of the ex-government, he started farming. One day in July 2022, someone called him and told him to come out because he had found a job in a foreign NGO. He was shot and killed by pistol on his way. I don't know why he was killed; his family didn't have any personal problems with anyone. I think he was killed for his past work.”<sup>130</sup>

“She was a young woman in her early twenties. In May 2022, she was raped by a Taliban fighter and became pregnant. When her father found out about it, he strangled and killed his daughter, and the Taliban member left the area and fled.”<sup>131</sup>

## **6. South Eastern Region**

The South Eastern Region comprises the provinces of Ghazni, Khost, Paktia, and Paktika. The region, bordering Pakistan, had been conflict prone, with contested and insecure areas also long before the fall of the previous government.

### **Ghazni:**

“He was graduate of Pashto language and literature. He was a poet, and he was writing against the Taliban on Facebook. In June 2022, he was kidnapped from the village and after two days, his dead body was thrown in the village bazar. He was shot with two bullets in the head.”<sup>132</sup>

“They were three brothers, and the youngest brother had a high-ranking position in the previous government. The other two brothers were illiterate and had nothing to do with the government. After the collapse of the government, the educated brother left the country, while the other two stayed. In April 2022, the Taliban raided their home and arrested one of the brothers who had stayed behind, the second youngest. They kept him in a container for one week and then killed him. They were Taliban from the intelligence department, but I don't know their names.”<sup>133</sup>

“She was married and had four children. Her husband has been working abroad for the past few years, but before that, he worked for the Aghan intelligence. After the arrival of the Taliban, they didn't experience any problems, but in June 2022, unknown armed men entered her house and kidnapped her with the children. They went missing for a week and after a week, her family found their dead bodies in a dry well. They didn't have any personal or family problems with anyone. Maybe it was revenge for her husband's past work.”<sup>134</sup>

“She was a policewoman in the previous government. One day in June 2022, someone called her and said that the World Food Program distributes food items in the district and that she

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<sup>129</sup> HRRL interview with a person with knowledge of the incident, Sar-e Pul province, February 2023.

<sup>130</sup> HRRL interview with a person with knowledge of the incident, Sar-e Pul province, March 2023.

<sup>131</sup> HRRL interview with a person with direct knowledge of the incident, Sar-e Pul province, March 2023.

<sup>132</sup> HRRL interview with a person with direct knowledge of the incident, Ghazni province, November 2022.

<sup>133</sup> HRRL interview with a person with knowledge of the incident, Ghazni province, November 2022.

<sup>134</sup> HRRL interview with a person with direct knowledge of the incident, Ghazni province, November 2022.

should come. She went out and two motorcycle riders shot and killed her by pistol. She was not guilty of anything, except for having been a policewoman.”<sup>135</sup>

“She was only 16 years old. They were poor people. She often came to this place, begging for money and taking home food that was left by people, in order to feed her family. One night after a wedding, in January 2022, when most people had left, a Corolla car drove by and there were three, armed men. They grabbed and pushed her in the car and raped her.”<sup>136</sup>

### **Khost:**

“He was in the local police force. He stayed at home after the collapse. In June 2022, someone called him and told him to come out of his home, luring him under the pretext of having found him a job as a guard for an NGO that works with landmine removal. When he came out of the house, there were long maize fields. Two people with their faces covered fired at him and killed him. Then they fled. I don't know who the perpetrators are, but his family had no personal animosity with anyone. This is revenge against a local ex-police officer.”<sup>137</sup>

“He was a policeman in the previous government. After the collapse, he was searching for a job. One day in June 2022, someone called him and told him that the Taliban government is hiring back all previous police. He was very brave and went to the police headquarters, but never came back and is still missing. His family inquired, but the Taliban denied and said he never came to the police headquarters.”<sup>138</sup>

“He was a soldier in the army. After the collapse, his family asked him to leave but *he said that the Taliban had announced a general amnesty and there was no need to leave the area*<sup>139</sup>. In February 2022, the Taliban raided his house at night, dragged him out to the street and killed him by firing at him with Kalashnikovs. They were Taliban, but I don't know their names. They took revenge on an ex-soldier.”<sup>140</sup>

### **Paktia:**

“He was a professional police officer in the previous government. In October 2021, the Taliban came to his house at night, arrested him and took him to the police station. Five days later, they threw his dead body at the end of the street. He had been tortured and then shot.”<sup>141</sup>

“He was a poet and a writer. There was freedom of expression during the republic before the Taliban. After the Taliban's arrival, he continued his critical poetry and writings. Two times

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<sup>135</sup> HRRL interview with a person with direct knowledge of the incident, Ghazni province, November 2022.

<sup>136</sup> HRRL interview with a person with direct knowledge of the incident, Ghazni province, November 2022.

<sup>137</sup> HRRL interview with a person with knowledge of the incident, Khost province, December 2022.

<sup>138</sup> HRRL interview with a person with direct knowledge of the incident, Khost province, December 2022.

<sup>139</sup> Deception based on an unfulfilled promise of a general amnesty has been a recurring feature in several cases.

<sup>140</sup> HRRL interview with a person with direct knowledge of the incident, Khost province, December 2022.

<sup>141</sup> HRRL interview with a person with direct knowledge of the incident, Paktia province, October 2022.

the Taliban had called him and asked him to stop his work. In May 2022, he went to a poetry event, and he was kidnapped by unknown people. He has been missing since. I don't know who kidnapped him, but he had received warnings from the Taliban before."<sup>142</sup>

"He was an officer in the army in the previous government. After the collapse, he came back to the village and wanted to leave the country, but in January 2022, the Taliban came and arrested him and took him away. They killed him on the way and the villagers went with the family to collect the dead body."<sup>143</sup>

### **Paktika:**

"He was a police officer under the previous regime. After the fall of the government, he was unemployed and at home. In March 2022, he was arrested in the bazar by the Taliban. He was strangled and his dead body was thrown behind the shops in the bazar. He was tortured. They were Taliban and used a government car. I don't know their names. He was killed for being a police officer in the past."<sup>144</sup>

"He was a graduate of 12<sup>th</sup> grade and writing articles on Facebook criticizing the Taliban. One day in December 2021, he was dragged out of his car and shot without discussion. He was killed. The family went there and brought his dead body back. They buried him. The perpetrators were Taliban. The only thing he did was criticizing them in Facebook postings."<sup>145</sup>

"He was an employee of the Afghan intelligence in the previous government. After the collapse, he came to the village and started farming his land. In May 2022, when he was walking on the road in the village, two motorcycle riders shot him with Kalashnikovs and killed him. I think this was revenge for his previous work."<sup>146</sup>

## **7. Southern Region**

The Southern Region of Afghanistan consists of the provinces of Helmand, Kandahar, Nimroz, Urozgan, and Zabul. It borders both Pakistan and Iran and includes the Taliban's original fief and main center of power (Kandahar).

### **Helmand:**

"He was an agent of the Afghan intelligence agency in the previous government. In March 2022, he was arrested by the Taliban. He was missing for two days and then his dead body was found in the bazar. He had been shot and thrown there at night. They came in two Ranger cars, and they were Taliban, but I don't know their names. He was killed for his past work with the intelligence services."<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> HRRL interview with a person with knowledge of the incident, Paktia province, October 2022.

<sup>143</sup> HRRL interview with a person with direct knowledge of the incident, Paktia province, October 2022.

<sup>144</sup> HRRL interview with a person with direct knowledge of the incident, Paktika province, November 2022.

<sup>145</sup> HRRL interview with a person with knowledge of the incident, Paktika province, November 2022.

<sup>146</sup> HRRL interview with a person with knowledge of the incident, Paktika province, November 2022.

<sup>147</sup> HRRL interview with a person with knowledge of the incident, Helmand province, November 2022.

“He was an officer in the army of the previous government. In August 2022, he was kidnapped from his house and went missing. His family eventually found his dead body in another district. He was brutally tortured and killed. He was an officer in the ex-government. They took revenge on him.”<sup>148</sup>

“He worked for the Afghan intelligence in the former government. In December 2021, he was kidnapped and killed, because he believed their promise of a general amnesty. But they are kidnapping and killing people. He was killed because of his previous work.”<sup>149</sup>

### **Kandahar:**

“He was a police officer in the previous administration. When the Taliban captured the government, he handed over the weapons to the Taliban. In April 2022, he was kidnapped by the Taliban and a few days later, his family found his dead body out in the street. He didn't have any personal animosity with anyone. He was just killed because he was ex-police.”<sup>150</sup>

“He was an officer in a ministry of the previous government. When the Taliban came to power, he went into hiding and his son was arrested and killed. They were surely Taliban, but I don't know their names. His son didn't do anything, but the Taliban killed him as a revenge on his father.”<sup>151</sup>

“He was an officer in the Afghan army. When the Taliban came to power, he went into hiding. In August 2022, the Taliban were house searching. They entered his house and were looking for arms. His wife got into a quarrel with them. The Taliban fired on her, and she was killed on the spot. She was not guilty of anything except being the wife of an army officer.”<sup>152</sup>

### **Nimroz:**

“She had higher education and knew English and wanted to work for a foreign institution, but her husband opposed her. She didn't accept it and started working for an NGO. Her husband joined the Taliban a few years ago and when the Taliban came to power, he came back in July 2022 and shot and killed her.”<sup>153</sup>

“She was a ninth-grade student in high school. When the Taliban came to power, they closed the school. One day in February 2022, she wanted to check on the school, to see whether it would open again. When she entered the school yard, an armed man closed the gate behind her and raped her inside the school. The perpetrator was a Taliban fighter, but his name is unknown.”<sup>154</sup>

“He was an employee of the Afghan intelligence in the previous government. After the collapse, he opened a shop. In June 2022, when he was busy in the shop, a person came by

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<sup>148</sup> HRRL interview with a person with knowledge of the incident, Helmand province, November 2022.

<sup>149</sup> HRRL interview with a person with knowledge of the incident, Helmand province, November 2022.

<sup>150</sup> HRRL interview with a person with knowledge of the incident, Kandahar province, October 2022.

<sup>151</sup> HRRL interview with a person with knowledge of the incident, Kandahar province, October 2022.

<sup>152</sup> HRRL interview with a person with knowledge of the incident, Kandahar province, October 2022.

<sup>153</sup> HRRL interview with a person with direct knowledge of the incident, Nimroz province, February 2023.

<sup>154</sup> HRRL interview with a person with knowledge of the incident, Nimroz province, February 2023.

on a motorcycle, fired on him and killed him. I don't know who the perpetrator was. It was only revenge on an ex-employee of the Afghan intelligence.”<sup>155</sup>

### **Urozgan:**

“He was a police officer in the previous government. After the collapse, he worked in a tailor shop. One evening in March 2022, unknown people shot him dead. They looked like Taliban, but they are unknown. He was killed because he was ex-police.”<sup>156</sup>

“He was a police officer in the ex-government. He thought the Taliban would not kill him because they had declared an amnesty. But one evening in March 2022, unknown people killed him in front of his family. They were unknown, but they were Taliban. He was killed because he was ex-police.”<sup>157</sup>

“He was a civil servant in the previous government. He was a good and wise man. After the takeover of the Taliban, in November 2022, armed strangers came to his house and stabbed and shot him. He was killed by them. They killed him because he was a civil servant in the former government.”<sup>158</sup>

### **Zabul:**

“He was a police officer in the former government. He built a house with a lot of difficulties for his family on a piece of land allocated by the previous government. After the collapse, he received a promise of amnesty from the Taliban. But they came twice to his house, in the summer of 2022, tortured him, and asked him to leave the house. But where should he go? He didn't have anything to go to. He had no other guilt except having worked as police in the previous government. The perpetrators were Taliban, but they were not from here, so I don't know their names.”<sup>159</sup>

“He was a student of 9<sup>th</sup> grade in high school. In May 2022, he was kidnapped by armed people, sexually abused, and then tortured and killed. There were signs of torture on his dead body. He was innocent. He was handsome, so he was abused and brutally killed. The perpetrators were unknown people, though it seems like they had Taliban equipment.”<sup>160</sup>

“He was a police officer in the ex-government. He believed in the general amnesty of the Taliban and remained at home. But unfortunately, the Taliban raided his house one night in July 2022 and arrested him. His family later found his dead body in a park. I don't know the perpetrators, but they were Taliban. He was simply shot and killed for being an employee of the previous government.”<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> HRRL interview with a person with knowledge of the incident, Nimroz province, February 2023.

<sup>156</sup> HRRL interview with a person with knowledge of the incident, Urozgan province, January 2023.

<sup>157</sup> HRRL interview with a person with knowledge of the incident, Urozgan province, January 2023.

<sup>158</sup> HRRL interview with a person with knowledge of the incident, Urozgan province, January 2023.

<sup>159</sup> HRRL interview with a person with knowledge of the incident, Zabul province, December 2022.

<sup>160</sup> HRRL interview with a person with direct knowledge of the incident, Zabul province, December 2022.

<sup>161</sup> HRRL interview with a person with direct knowledge of the incident, Zabul province, December 2022.

## **8. Western Region**

The Western Region borders both Iran and Turkmenistan and comprises the provinces of Badghis, Farah, Ghor, and Herat. The Western Region is home to some of the most conflict prone areas, including e.g., Ghor which had the highest percentage of households in which male household heads also prior to the Taliban take-over reported that the respective district in which they were living was insecure (cf. also the discussion above and figure 2). The region also most recently experienced a series of devastating earthquakes<sup>162</sup>.

### **Badghis:**

“He worked in the police during the ex-government and was not working afterwards. One day in January 2022, he was kidnapped by unknown people and was missing for two days. He was killed. His arms were tied, and his dead body was thrown in the desert near the village. I don't know the perpetrators. I think he was killed for his ex-job. He was only working to provide for his family.”<sup>163</sup>

“She was an employee in the previous government, working on educational matters and serving for several years. One day in July 2022, she was shot and killed in front of her house by unknown gunmen. I don't know who the perpetrators were. She was only an employee of the previous government working in education and had no other guilt.”<sup>164</sup>

“She graduated from 12<sup>th</sup> grade of school and was active in women's rights. She also knew English. Sometimes she wrote things against the Taliban on the internet. One day in September 2022, when she went out of the house, two motorcycle riders killed her with a pistol and fled. The perpetrators are unknown, but her family didn't have any personal problems with anyone.”<sup>165</sup>

### **Farah:**

“He was a social worker in an NGO for several years. He was spreading public awareness to prevent underage and forced marriages of girls in the communities. One day in May 2022, when he was walking on the street, people in a jeep fired at him and killed him. I don't know the perpetrators, but he and his family had no animosity towards anyone and never harmed anyone. I don't know why they killed him, but the current government doesn't look kindly upon NGO workers.”<sup>166</sup>

“He was a police officer in the previous government. After the collapse, he started working in a mechanic shop. One evening in December 2021, when he was on his way home, unknown people opened fire and killed him in the street. I don't know the killers, but he had no personal problems. He had no other guilt except being ex-police.”<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Cf. e.g., OCHA Services, Afghanistan: Earthquakes – October 2023, available at: <https://reliefweb.int/disaster/eq-2023-000184-afg>.

<sup>163</sup> HRRL interview with a person with knowledge of the incident, Badghis province, January 2023.

<sup>164</sup> HRRL interview with a person with knowledge of the incident, Badghis province, January 2023.

<sup>165</sup> HRRL interview with a person with knowledge of the incident, Badghis province, January 2023.

<sup>166</sup> HRRL interview with a person with direct knowledge of the incident, Farah province, December 2022.

<sup>167</sup> HRRL interview with a person with knowledge of the incident, Farah province, December 2022.

“He was a policeman in the previous regime. After the collapse, he started working with his father in a shop. One day in December 2021, two people came on a motorcycle. They threw a hand bomb into the shop, thereby killing him and injuring his father. I don't know the perpetrators, but I think they were Taliban. The ex-policeman was killed as revenge for his past work.”<sup>168</sup>

### **Ghor:**

“She was 18 years old. After the arrival of the Taliban, she went to the new administration in 2021 to apply for a job. She was raped and gave birth. When the family filed an application against the perpetrator, the Taliban authorities didn't accept it and instead arrested the young woman and held her for one week with the baby.”<sup>169</sup>

“He worked in the judiciary during the previous regime. After the collapse, he stayed at home. In September 2021, four Taliban came from the district office and requested him to go with them and hand over some files. He went with them but went missing on the way. When his family inquired at the governor's office, they were told that they hadn't seen him. After ten days, his family found his dead body in the crop fields. They were Taliban from the district office, but since they come from other areas, their names are not known. It was revenge on a person who worked in the judiciary of the ex-government.”<sup>170</sup>

“The two villages are close, and Pashtuns and Tajiks live together without any problems. During the conflicts of the past decade, the Taliban were coming at night to the villages, and the villagers fought them. Two Taliban fighters were killed during one such attack, the rest fled. When they came back to power, they came to the villages one day in October 2021 and arrested people from both villages and tortured them until the villagers paid them 2 million Afghani and an amount of blood money for their killed friends.”<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> HRRL interview with a person with knowledge of the incident, Farah province, December 2022.

<sup>169</sup> HRRL interview with a person with knowledge of the incident, Ghor province, November 2022.

<sup>170</sup> HRRL interview with a person with knowledge of the incident, Ghor province, November 2022.

<sup>171</sup> HRRL interview with a person with direct knowledge of the incident, Ghor province, November 2022.



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## **Herat:**

“He graduated from high school and worked as a police officer in the border region. Twice he had been warned by the Taliban for his work. After August 2021, he believed in the general amnesty of the Taliban and opened a shop. In April 2022, the Taliban came in police cars, dragged him out of his house, and shot and killed him on the doorsteps.”<sup>172</sup>

“He was a local police officer. After the collapse of the previous government, he stayed at home. One day in May 2022, unknown Taliban fighters came from the police station and took him to investigate the issue of lost weapons. After that, he went missing. The Taliban deny the incident and claim they don't know.”<sup>173</sup>

“One day in October 2021, Taliban fighters came in two Ranger cars. They had four handcuffed soldiers with them. Two of the soldiers who looked like Hazaras were shot dead. The other two were Pashtuns and they were standing handcuffed. After a while, the Taliban commander arrived, and the fighters told him that the two Hazaras are shot dead and that these two are Pashtuns. The Taliban commander got angry and said that these are all pigs of infidels. There is no nationalism in Islam, kill them. So, they shot and killed those two Pashtun soldiers as well.”<sup>174</sup>



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<sup>172</sup> HRRL Interview with a person with direct knowledge of the incident, Herat province, October 2022.

<sup>173</sup> HRRL interview with a person with direct knowledge of the incident, Herat province, October 2022.

<sup>174</sup> HRRL interview with a person with direct knowledge of the incident, Herat province, October 2022.

## **VI. Concluding Remarks**

This research project has been conducted in the course of the past year and a half, documenting Revenge Killings and Other Serious Human Rights Violations in Afghanistan in the Aftermath of the Taliban's Seizure of Power, primarily with the help of face-to-face interviews conducted on the ground in Afghanistan across all the country's 34 provinces in addition to background expert interviews and other first-hand information.

Based on these 433 interviews, we identified 578 individual victims, across the country, who were exposed to a total of 770 serious violations of their human rights, including, in more than 400 cases, having their ultimate human right taken from them, the right to life.

The *de facto* authorities have repeatedly objected to limited reports depicting them as perpetrators of serious crimes, claiming instead these casualties were related to the armed conflict during the take-over, or committed by others, or by rogue groups, or based on personal feuds. But this is not what we have seen.

Our data suggests that a broad pattern of revenge killings and other serious human rights abuses emerges, not just in a few provinces, but throughout the entire country, not just during the immediate power transition period, but more than two years after the *de facto* authorities' seizure of power, and not just against people directly connected to the former government, but against all people, including women and children targeted by association.

Furthermore, we have seen that the announced (but never published) general amnesty for former police, army and security forces is not generally observed. Whether or not it is honored seems to depend on arrangements with local authorities. That, along with case examples of rivaling factions also points to a division among the Taliban's ranks and underlines the insight that the Taliban are not one unified group.

Utilizing and taking advantage of this fact has also been one of the key takeaways of the conference series we held in connection with the presentation of preliminary findings of this research. Here stakeholders argued that engagement, if at all envisaged or unavoidable, should be limited to engagement with local authorities, where feasible and promising, as this may provide some room for maneuver and for negotiating certain improvements at the local level – among Afghans. Considering the grim human rights situation and the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan coupled with – and exacerbated by – the unprecedented abuses of women's rights (to freedom, education, work etc.) amounting to gender persecution and indicative of gender apartheid, that is not only hampering, but directly preventing direly needed development of the country, such local civil society initiatives need to be supported.

At the same time, the International Criminal Court and other (future) international accountability mechanisms need to focus their attention on holding individual perpetrators of the most serious crimes to account. Alas, such justice is never quick and necessarily selective, but the outlook of being able to eventually see at least a few of those responsible for the atrocities committed put on trial, even in a distant future, may provide some sense of justice and hope to all those who now feel utterly forgotten by the international community:

Those We Left Behind.

# Human Rights Research League



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