Repeating the Past or Following Precedent? Contextualising the Taliban 2.0's Governance of Women

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ICCT International Centre for Counter-Terrorism

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Contents

Abstract

More than one year since the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan we must ask, "what should we expect from Taliban governance?" Governance necessitates a group's navigation of numerous factors, including gender. One way to contextualise the Taliban's recent re-entrance into governance (Taliban 2.0) is to examine its own past and the precedent set by fellow governing violent Islamists, such as Islamic State (IS) and Hamas. While three distinct groups, all have adopted an explicitly "traditionalist" stance. Through these transitions, all three groups have faced a dilemma stuck between their ideology and the practical issues that arise from governing. This article first explores three case studies - IS, Hamas, and the Taliban - to provide a brief but nuanced understanding of how each of the groups' gendered ideologies has manifested in their local contexts. Second, using primary and secondary sources, it compares these groups across three critical areas of their governance praxis: implementation of gendered policies; the utility of women to the group's strategic objectives; and bids for local and external legitimacy. In doing so, this exploratory paper examines the similarities and differences across the case studies, addressing important implications for scholars and practitioners in understanding the future direction of the Taliban 2.0, and consequences for other governing violent Islamist groups.

Keywords: Taliban, Afghanistan, Hamas, Islamic State, gender, governance, women, counter-terrorism

Introduction

It has now been more than one year since the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan and its re-entrance into governance; the so-called 'Taliban 2.0' iteration.[1] Its rapid rise to power ushered in a new phase of violent Islamist governance, sparking concerns about how the non-state actor's rule will impact the daily lives of local Afghans, particularly women (and girls).[2] Governance necessitates a group's navigation of numerous factors, including gender. In contexts of contested power or transition, women frequently become the points of definition and demarcation of, and between, different groupings and actors.[3] Representations of women – particularly their bodies – assume political significance and reflect a group's broader goals, values, and identity. Determining a group's stance on gender is what Valentine Moghadam coined the "woman question".[4] At times of perceived socio-economic uncertainty and confrontations with the West, the image of the "traditional" woman holds the promise of a return to an "authentic" and idyllic past[5] – one that the Taliban has strived to replicate.

In this exploratory research we ask, "What can be expected from the Taliban's latest phase of governance, in particular, its navigation of gender?" There are two places to look for answers: firstly, its past - the Taliban 1.0 era (1994-2001), and secondly, the predecessors to the Taliban's 2.0 governance beginning in August 2021 - namely fellow governing violent Islamists, such as Islamic State (IS) in Iraq and Syria (2014-2017) and Hamas in the Gaza Strip (2006-today).

From the start, it is important to note that these three groups are not, and do not claim or seek to be, carbon copies of each other. Indeed, they diverge in traditional and tribal influences on their Islamist ideologies; demographics and representability of their constituencies; timeline and duration of governance; and the means of initial transition into power. Nevertheless, there is value in their comparison. The divergence in their ideals and policies concerning women have direct consequences, as evidenced by the groups' varied levels of support and legitimacy. As the Taliban 2.0 strives to appeal to diverse constituents – its hard-line supporter base, civilian subjects, and international partners – the question remains as to how it will choose to implement its 'traditionalist' ideals, and at what cost?

What these groups do have in common is their explicitly "traditionalist" stance; their transition into governance; and their use of violence to achieve their ends. Through these transitions, all three groups have faced a dilemma: "a constant balancing act between the ideology that drives the group in question and the pragmatic issues that govern the actual application of ideology".[6]

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1 In this paper 'Taliban 2.0' refers to the Taliban's rule since August 2021. We do not argue that the Taliban 2.0 is a different organisation from the Taliban 1.0. Rather, we contend that the Taliban 2.0 framing emerged mainly from the US-Taliban diplomatic engagement in Doha to refer to a supposedly reformed Taliban. As such, we examine the Taliban 2.0 both in terms of the group's re-entrance into governance and its supposed change and reform. Moreover, the analytical distinction of the newly re-emerged Taliban 2.0 to its previous 1.0 iteration has been made by numerous scholars and analysts. For example, see: William Maley, "The Public Relations of the Taliban: Then and Now," *International Centre for Counter-Terrorism*, 2021, https://icct.nl/publication/the-public-relations-of-the-taliban-then-and-now/ ; Farkhondeh Akbari & Jacqui True, "One year on from the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan: re-instituting gender apartheid," *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 2022, https://doi.org/10.1080/10357718.2022.2107172 ; Joshua Snider, "Taliban 2.0 and US National Security Policy in Afghanistan", *Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs* 9, no. 3 (2022), pp. 402–423.

2 John R. Allen and Vanda Felbab-Brown, "The fate of women's rights in Afghanistan," *Brookings,* September 2020.

3 Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender & Nation, Politics and Culture* (Sage, 1997).

4 Valentine M. Moghadam, "Revolution, Islamist Reaction, and Women in Afghanistan," in *Women and Revolution in Africa, Asia and the New World*, ed. Mary Ann Tétreault (The University of South Carolina Press, 1994), p. 212.

5 Valentine M. Moghadam, *Modernizing Women: Gender and Social Change in the Middle East,* 2nd ed. (Lynne Rienner, 2003), p. 106.

6 Devorah Margolin and Charlie Winter, "Women in the Islamic State: Victimization, Support, Collaboration, and Acquiescence," *The ISIS Files, The George Washington University* (2021).

It is at this point that the most salient divergences under the "traditionalist" umbrella are most visible and impactful. In some cases, as these groups have evolved, their utilisation and treatment of women (and girls) have adapted to facilitate functional governance, bolster gendered ideals, and even foster legitimacy. However, in other cases, these groups stumble on Moghadam's woman question, taking actions that play to their conservative bases but undermine possible successful administration of territory.

This article is exploratory in nature. Still relatively early in the Taliban 2.0 era, and with few official statements released by the group, the purpose of this analysis is to weigh the possible strategies that the Taliban may adopt in its governance of women. Drawing on both primary source statements and publications issued by the groups, as well as secondary source reporting, the article proceeds in two parts. First, it introduces the three case studies, IS, Hamas, and the Taliban, to provide a brief but nuanced understanding of how each of the groups' gendered ideologies has manifested in their local contexts. Second, it compares these groups across three critical areas of governance praxis: implementation of gendered policies; the utility of women to each group's strategic objectives; and bids for local and external legitimacy. In doing so, the similarities, differences, and past lessons of these case studies are examined in order to address important implications for scholars and practitioners in understanding the future direction of the Taliban 2.0 and consequences for other governing violent Islamists.

Group Ideology

Despite different interpretations, violent Islamist ideology drives IS, Hamas, and the Taliban.[7] This ideology affects how these groups engage in rebel governance matters, the practices groups implement, and how they frame their policies. This, in turn, influences engagement with governed populations, including women.

Islamic State

Islamic State's (IS) Salafi-Jihadist ideology has been central to its *modus operandi*, informing its rules of engagement as a military force and governing actor. At the heart of Salafi thought is the project to "bring Muslims back to what is regarded as the 'authentic' and 'pure' Islam of its early generations".[8] An example of a traditionalist revolutionary force, IS views the restoration of "correct" gender roles - in particular through the regulation of women's status and bodies - as critical to affirming ideological integrity and authenticity.[9]

In its vision of society, IS stipulated binarised and gender-essentialised roles for men and women. Far from encouraging women to adopt the same responsibilities as men, IS promoted its idea of a (supposedly) equally-valued women's "jihad without fighting".[10] Whereas men were lauded for their military prowess and public roles as state-builders, women were expected to embrace their hyperfeminine "sedentariness, stillness, and stability" in the private sphere.[11] Rather than a demotion, IS frames women's duties of marriage and motherhood as divinely ordained and key to the group's expansion and survival. Not simply a matter of populating its proto-state, IS documentation - including the parenting pamphlet "A Sister's Role in Jihad"[12] - attests to the importance of women's education of their children in the group's ideological tenets. As such,

7 Assaf Moghadam and Brian Fishman, *eds. Fault Lines in Global Jihad*. (Routledge, 2011).
8 Shiraz Maher, *Salafi-Jihadism: The History of an Idea* (Hurst & Co, 2016), p. 7, https://doi.org/10.1093/jis/ety008.
9 Moghadam, *Modernizing Women*, p. 106.
10 Islamic State, "To Our Sisters: A Jihād Without Fighting," *Dabiq* 11 (9 September 2015): pp. 40-45.
11 Charlie Winter, *Women of the Islamic State: A Manifesto on Women by the Al-Khanssaa Brigade* (Quilliam Foundation, 2015), p.19.
12 Islamic State, "A Sister's Role in Jihad," 2014.

IS-affiliated women were positioned to inspire the group's next generation, contributing to its ambitions for inter-generational endurance. The appeal of this rhetoric and vision of womanhood has been reflected in the praise of IS-supportive women on social media,[13] and the large-scale recruitment and migration to its caliphate in Iraq and Syria.[14] The Islamic State is examined in Syria and Iraq from its 2014 declaration of a caliphate to its territorial collapse in 2017.

Hamas

The second case study, *Harakat al-Muqawwama al-Islamiyya*, more commonly known as Hamas, emerged in the late 1980s. While it began as a social and religious wing of the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas is a uniquely Palestinian organisation, promoting an Islamist solution to cure what the group determined to be the ills of modern society.[15] Specifically, its *modus operandi* has focused on revolution-from-below, participating in aspects of the modern political systems, including the 2006 Palestinian elections, in order to create a government one day ruled by shari'a. In doing so, Hamas seeks to frame its Islamisation of society as a "choice", driven by those that live under it.[16] Despite this framing, the group does not discount acts of violence and pressure to achieve its goals of a "traditional" Islamic society.

Compared with IS and the Taliban, Hamas boasts a seemingly more "inclusive" relationship with women.[17] Its "Islamisation" of society endeavours to have "liberated women [...] by emphasising social equality".[18] With the caveats of conformity to Hamas's version of "proper" Islamic behaviour and fulfilment of the group's interests, women have been allowed a limited entrance into public life. Hamas's 1988 charter laid out two key roles for women: wife/mother on the one hand, and political activist on the other.[19] Unique among governing violent Islamists, Hamas has brought in women as public-facing partners in the group's political ambitions alongside raising children in accordance with its ideology.[20] As such, women who adhere to Hamas's ideology often walk a precarious line. While their public-facing roles may rally support from female populations, they also often challenge more traditionalist ideals. Hamas is examined in the Gaza Strip from its election to power in 2006 to the present day.

The Taliban

Manifested in its establishment of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, the Taliban – through both its 1.0 and 2.0 eras – adheres to Deobandi Islam, a predominantly Pashtun and Sunni revivalist movement that insists upon a "pure" adherence to, and implementation of, shari'a law.[21] Through this ideology, the Taliban seeks to "restore the Islamic balance that was upset by incursions

13 For example, see Erin Marie Saltman and Melanie Smith, *Till Martyrdom Do Us Part: Gender and the ISIS Phenomenon*, (Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2015).
14 Joana Cook and Gina Vale, "From Daesh to 'Diaspora'" II: The Challenges Posed by Women and Minors after the Fall of the Caliphate," *CTC Sentinel* 12, no. 6 (2019): pp.30-45.
15 Marc Lynch, "Islam Divided between Salafi-jihad and the Ikhwan," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 33, no. 6 (2010): pp. 467-487, https://doi.org/10.1080/10576101003752622.
16 See, Hamas,. "A Document of General Principles and Policies," *Al-Qassam Website,* 2017.
17 Sara Ababneh, "The Palestinian women's movement versus Hamas: attempting to understand women's empowerment outside a feminist framework," *Journal of International Women's Studies* 15, no. 1 (2014): pp. 35-53, https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol15/iss1/3 ; Islah Jad, "Islamist Women of Hamas: Between Feminism and Nationalism," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 12, no. 2 (2011): pp. 176-201, https://doi.org/10.1080/14649373.2011.554647.
18 "Hamas and Women: Clearing Misconceptions," *Hamas Website*, January 12, 2011, accessed July 14, 2018.
19 Jad, "Islamist Women", p. 180; See, Articles 12, 17, and 18, "Hamas Charter", 1988.
20 "How to Win and Lose Elections in Palestine," *Al-Qassam Website*, December 3, 2006, accessed November 15, 2018; "A Salute to the Palestinian Woman," *Al-Qassam Website*, March 10, 2014, accessed January 13, 2019; "Hamas and Women: Clearing Misconceptions," *Hamas Website*, January 12, 2011, accessed July 14, 2018.
21 Thomas H. Johnson and M. Chris Mason, "Understanding the Taliban and Insurgency in Afghanistan," *Orbis* 51, no. 1 (2007): pp. 71-89, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.orbis.2006.10.006

from the West" and its rivals.[22] This, then, shapes the group's traditionalist stance on gender and women. The Taliban 1.0 first came to power in 1994 at a time of social and political uncertainty; it framed its formation as a response to rival mujahideen faction's brutality,[23] and used the plight of Afghan women as a rallying cry.[24] The discourse of saving Afghan women from violations perpetrated by their predecessors served to shore up local support and intended to legitimise the reputation of the Taliban 1.0 as guardians of Afghan security and (women's) honour.[25]

However, from its outset, the Taliban's approach to preserving societal honour has overwhelmingly focused on the assumed threats posed by women's bodies, faces, and freedoms. A 1997 statement from its Attorney General's Office encapsulates the group's position: "The face of a woman is a source of corruption for men who are not related to them".[26] In 1994, the United Nations Special Rapporteur documented 21 ordinances issued from the Taliban's Committee of the High Court regulating Afghan women's bodies and behaviour.[27] Despite its initial framing of saving women, the group's rhetoric quickly turned to position female Afghans as a threat that required securitisation.

This rhetoric appears to be a mainstay of the Taliban 2.0. The group's newly published manifesto has compared women and girls' public education as a "source of evil", and instead encourages home-schooling.[28] One of the only documents to shed light on the group's mindset and policy direction, this manifesto is only available in Arabic and is thus largely inaccessible to locals. So far, the group's statements confirm suspicions of a gendered societal vision that is almost entirely unaltered from the 1990s. Rolling back almost all the modest gains made for women's emancipation in the last two decades, the Taliban's vision to "restore the Islamic balance" of Afghan society amounts to an informal state policy of "gender apartheid".[29]

As traditionalists, all three case studies – Taliban 2.0, Hamas, and IS – share policies that are vital to the establishment and maintenance of their version of an authentic Islamic society. However, they diverge in their navigation of gender therein. Hamas stands alone in its offer of a type of "social equality" that seeks to promote female activism within governance. Conversely, IS presents a top-down approach that purports to offer a "separate but equal" mentality, which, in practice, is anything but. Finally, while the Taliban lobbied for power on the premise of women's protection, its security policies largely target, rather than safeguard, women. Questions remain regarding how its "gender apartheid" will affect the group's aims for successful governance in practice, which it continues to frame as a choice driven by the Afghan people while a devastating record number of people escape Afghanistan from the Taliban rule.[30]

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22 Anastasia Telesetsky, "In the Shadows and Behind the Veil: Women in Afghanistan Under Taliban Rule," *Berkeley Women's Law* Journal 13, no. 1 (1998): p. 296, https://lawcat.berkeley.edu/record/1116273.
23 Moghadam, *Modernizing Women,* p. 264.
24 Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 25.
25 Jennifer L. Fluri, "'Rallying Public Opinion' and Other Misuses of Feminism," in *Feminism and War: Confronting US Imperialism* eds. Robin L. Riley, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, and Minnie Bruce Pratt (London: Zed Books, 2008), pp. 143-157.
26 "Women in Afghanistan: The Violations Continue," *Amnesty International*, June 1997, p. 2.
27 Taliban ordinances specified, for example, that a "[…] woman's veil must cover her whole body, that perfumed women are regarded as adulteresses, that a woman must not leave her house without her husband's permission, and that a woman must not look at strangers." See, Shannon A. Middleton, "Women's Rights Unveiled: Taliban's Treatment of Women in Afghanistan," *Indiana International & Comparative Law Review* 11, no. 2 (2001): p. 442.
28 Jawad Borhani, "The Islamic Emirate and Systems: An Overview of the Taliban's Manifesto of Statehood," *Reporterly,* https://reporterly.net/latest-stories/the-islamic-emirate-and-systems-an-overview-of-the-talibans-manifesto-of-statehood1/ , accessed 7 June, 2022.
29 Telesetsky, "In the Shadows and Behind the Veil," pp. 296-298; Farkhondeh Akbari & Jacqui True, "One year on from the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan: re-instituting gender apartheid."
30 Ashraf Haidari, "The World Should Protect Afghan Refugees Fleeing the Taliban's Oppression," *Just Security,* 30 August 2022, https://www.justsecurity.org/82888/the-world-should-protect-afghan-refugees-fleeing-the-talibans-oppression/

As noted above, it is important to highlight that these three groups are not identical. The value of their comparison comes from examining their transitions into governance, and how they have found a balance between their ideology and their implementation of that ideology. By comprehending that the divergence in their ideals and policies concerning women have direct consequences, we can better understand the future direction of the Taliban 2.0 and consequences for other governing violent Islamist groups.

Group Praxis

After introducing the groups' ideological underpinnings, the following sections explore how Taliban 2.0, Hamas, and IS address three overarching issues of governance in practice: the implementation of gendered policies, the utility of women to the group's strategic objectives, and bids for local and foreign legitimacy.

Implementation

During its caliphate era and since the takeover of Gaza, IS's and Hamas's unilateral control of their respective territories allowed them to create (patriarchal) governance structures to implement their ideals in practice. The same applies for both the Taliban 1.0 era and its new seemingly uncontested 2.0 iteration. Consequently, women's everyday spaces, voices, bodies, and movements became increasingly politicised and controlled.

The educational system was one of the first sites of gendered applications of Islamist governance, with differing levels of restriction across the three cases. First, under IS, girls' primary education was a necessity (provided there were female teachers available).[31] Thereafter, inconsistencies arose. While women attended university (for example, in Mosul[32]), many degrees were limited only to male students.[33] IS understood that girls' education was critical to its state-building project; to pursue sanctioned professions such as education and healthcare,[34] women could not be "illiterate or ignorant".[35] Nevertheless, protecting girls' modesty was a driving force for educational restrictions. All institutions were sex-segregated, and girls' admission depended on conformity with the group's ultra-conservative dress code.[36] Strictures also applied to teaching and administrative staff, who were only permitted to teach students of the same sex.[37] By February 2015, the Ministry for Education in al-Dijla Province announced the closure of girls' schools on account of insufficient staff.[38] Overall, IS provided an education system to serve its gender-binarised society. Girls were taught to be good wives, mothers, educators, and carers. Although plagued with restrictions, the group ostensibly provided them with the education to do so.

31 See, Sara Zeiger et al. "Planting the Seeds of the Poisonous Tree: Establishing a System of Meaning Through ISIS Education," *The ISIS Files, The George Washington University* (2021).
32 Al-Tamimi, Aymenn Jawad. "Archive of Islamic State Administrative Documents - Specimen 9G: Admission statistics for Mosul University: 2015-2016," (2015).
33 Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi. "Archive of Islamic State Administrative Documents - Specimen 8X: Structure of Islamic State-controlled Mosul University," (2015).; Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi. "Archive of Islamic State Administrative Documents - Specimen 9M: Timetable of classes, Mosul Medical College," (2015).
34 Margolin and Winter, "Women in the Islamic State."
35 Charlie Winter, *Women of the Islamic State*, p.18.
36 "Untitled [Educational Regulations Notice To School Directors]," Islamic State, Deputy Head, Department for Education [Distributed in Aleppo Province], September 2014.
37 "To: The Administrations of All Schools. Subject: Instructions," Islamic State, Abu Abdullah al-Qahṭānī, Department for Education, Centre of Euphrates Province, December 24, 2014.
38 "To: Offices of the Department for Education in Dijla Province. Subject: Statement for Distribution - The Emir, Shariʿī Committee," Islamic State, Department for Education, Dijla Province Centre, February 19, 2015.

By contrast, Hamas has highlighted its high numbers of female university students who feed into its women's movement.[39] Nevertheless, women and girls still face strict gender segregation policies in its educational system (and beyond). In 2013, six years after it took control of Gaza, Hamas codified into law what it was already encouraging in practice: excluding male teachers from girls' schools and segregating classes after age nine.[40] This was framed as a decision driven by conservative Gazan society, and like IS, as a way of protecting the "modesty" of women and girls.[41]

The Taliban has adopted a more extreme approach to girls' education than either IS or Hamas. Between 1994 and 1996, upon seizing new territory, the Taliban 1.0 systematically closed all girls' schools. Justifications were offered, including the poor security situation and lack of funds,[42] and that girls' education was classified as a "low priority".[43] From 1996, once the group was firmly in power, schools were segregated, female teachers were dismissed, and male teachers were prohibited from teaching girls.[44] In its latest phase of governance, the Taliban 2.0's prohibitions on girls' education quickly returned. In September 2021, the Taliban Education Ministry resumed classes for boys in grades seven to twelve.[45] Three months later, the Deputy Education Minister confirmed that girls would still not be allowed to attend secondary school until an unspecified "new policy" was approved in the new year.[46] Meanwhile, secondary schoolgirls have reported threats by militants to cover their hair.[47] The result is widespread fear and hesitance to return to school, should they ever be reopened. A policy supposedly driven by concerns for Afghan girls' privacy and security has led to their increased vulnerability.

The three groups' strategic controls of women and girls certainly did not end in the classroom. Both the Taliban and IS progressively instituted measures to visually and physically conceal women, limiting their freedom of movement and access to public spaces. Even during IS's early stage of using a "softer" approach to religious outreach, advisory billboards focused on women's modesty and chastity.[48] This progressed to increasingly strict dress codes and constraints on all public outings, reaching a climax in 2016 with men's authorisation to forbid their wives from leaving their homes altogether.[49]

Similarly, throughout the 1990s in Taliban-ruled Afghanistan, women were severely limited in their ability to work, as they could not leave the house without a male chaperone.[50] Even in the first month of its return to governance in 2021, attention immediately turned to restricting women's access to public spaces.[51] A daily tracker produced by Human Rights Watch has documented the Taliban 2.0's closure of shelters for victims of domestic violence; prohibition on women's

39 Jad, "Islamist Women".
40 Fares Akram, "Hamas Adds Restrictions on Schools and Israelis," *New York Times,* April 1, 2013.
41 Reuters Staff, "Hamas law promotes gender segregation in Gaza schools," *Reuters,* April 1, 2013.
42 Thomas Ruttig, "Have the Taliban Changed?" *CTC Sentinel* 14, no. 3 (2021): p. 8.
43 Barry Bearak, "Afghanistan's Girls Fight to Read and Write," *New York Times,* March 9, 2000.
44 This ruling also negatively impacted boys' education, as prior to Taliban rule, around 70 percent of public school teachers in Afghanistan were women. See, Ruttig, "Have the Taliban Changed?" p. 7.
45 Emma Graham-Harrison, "Taliban ban girls from secondary education in Afghanistan," *The Guardian,* 17 September, 2021.
46 Hugo Williams and Ali Hamedani, "Afghanistan: Girls' despair as Taliban confirm secondary school ban", *BBC News*, 8 December, 2021.
47 Ibid.
48 Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "The Islamic State Billboards of Raqqa (Part 2)," November 13, 2014.
49 "Abide in Your Homes," Al Naba 50, October 13, 2016.
50 Middleton, "Women's Rights Unveiled," pp. 442-443.
51 As soon as the news of the Taliban soldiers entering Kabul broke in the early hours of Sunday 15 August, 2021, the first images emerged showing panicked shopkeepers wiping portraits of female models and tearing posters. See, Ruby Lott-Lavigna, "Photos of Women are Being Erased in Kabul," *Vice*, August 16, 2021.

employment and sports; and the requirement of a male chaperone for even basic public outings.[52] While early rhetoric may have briefly sought to signal a softening in the Taliban 2.0 approach, recent events suggest that the group has returned to reinstitute its 1.0-era "gender apartheid".[53]

The most significant difference across these three cases is their methods of rule enforcement. The Taliban and IS both created new offices dedicated to policing moral infractions. First instituted by the Rabbani government in 1992, in 1996 the Taliban 1.0 adopted the "Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice", which has been reinstated since its takeover in 2021.[54] As early as 2014, IS announced the establishment of its new "Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice".[55] The similarity in name and function between the two apparatuses is striking. Both bodies were responsible for the regulation and punishment of "deviant" behaviours. For example, in 1990s Afghanistan, women who revealed even a small area of bare skin or wore a burqa of insufficiently thick material were violently beaten, in some cases by Taliban militants wielding chains.[56] Their punishment was made a public spectacle and served as a warning to others. Similarly, IS's morality police were empowered to stop and punish those who violated the group's sex-segregation policy.[57] Demonstrations of justice at the hands of (predominantly male) militants served to establish a new societal and gendered hierarchy within these groups' areas of operation.

Interestingly, Hamas adopted a notably different approach, in line with its "population-driven" transformation of Gaza. For example, Hamas has argued that while wearing the hijab is a religious obligation, it remains a woman's choice to do so, and not something that can be forced upon her.[58] The group's actions, however, did not always reflect this framing. To assist in the internalisation of its ideals, Hamas exerted pressure mainly through "virtue" campaigns that sought to discourage "Western" behaviours.[59] In 2010, the group enforced the removal of "immodest" mannequins, which it argued was a policy derived from the complaints of ordinary Gazans.[60] While Hamas has not codified all of its behavioural strictures into law, in 2016, its police officers began to penalise driving instructors who did not have a chaperone for female students,[61] and in 2021 a judge sought to require a male guardian's permission for women to travel outside of Gaza.[62]

Restrictions on women's dress and movement have heavy consequences. Those who could not afford to purchase a burqa that conformed to the Taliban's or IS's rules were forced to share or become imprisoned in their own homes.[63] This, and further regulations, resulted in significantly restricted access to healthcare. At first, the Taliban 1.0 stipulated that women could receive treatment only from female doctors. However, women's severely limited access to education and

52 Heather Barr, "List of Taliban Policies Violating Women's Rights in Afghanistan," *Human Rights Watch*, September 29, 2021.
53 Akbari and True, "One year on from the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan". It is important to acknowledge here that a policy and practice of 'gender apartheid' is not limited to the Taliban, but also applies to other sovereign states in the region. However, the focus of this article is on non-state actors, whose internal and external legitimacy cannot be guaranteed through alliances or natural resources.
54 Alasdair Pal, "Taliban replaces women's ministry with ministry of virtue and vice," *Reuters,* September 18, 2021.
55 Suadad al-Salhy, "Islamist militants strengthen grip on Iraq's Falluja," *Reuters*, January 18, 2014.
56 Moghadam, *Modernizing Women,* p. 266.
57 Hamoon Khelghat-Doost, "Women of the Caliphate: The Mechanism for Women's Incorporation into the Islamic State (IS)," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 11, no. 1 (2017): pp. 17-25, https://www.jstor.org/stable/26297734.
58 "Hamas and Women: Clearing Misconceptions," *Hamas Website*, January 12, 2011, accessed July 14, 2018.
59 Dina Kraft, "Hamas launches 'virtue campaign' in Gaza," *Telegraph*, July 28, 2009.
60 Reuters Staff, "Hamas targets women's underwear in modesty drive," *Reuters*, July 28, 2010.
61 Emily Harris, "Hamas: Gaza Women Learning To Drive Must Have A Chaperone," *NPR*, June 1, 2016.
62 "Women need male guardian to travel, says Hamas court in Gaza Strip," *Guardian*, February 15, 2021.
63 Telesetsky, "In the Shadows and Behind the Veil", p. 296; Rukmini Callimachi, "For Women Under ISIS, a Tyranny of Dress Code and Punishment," *The New York Times*, 12 December, 2016.

the workforce resulted in a dire shortage of female medical professionals.[64] IS imposed similar restrictions on women's healthcare. In theory, its gender-segregated parallel institutions could have provided opportunities for tailored services for women and girls.[65] However, in practice, the prohibition on male doctors' treatment of female patients demonstrated an unwavering commitment to morality at the expense of women's welfare.[66] Moreover, although women under Hamas do not face such strict restrictions in their service as doctors and healthcare workers, Gaza still suffers from relatively high maternal mortality rates.[67] In all cases, the reality of service provision does not match the groups' rhetoric of saving or protecting women. In practice, gender segregation becomes gender subordination.

Utility

The three groups' differing approaches to governing female civilians are reflected in the varying degrees to which women have been incorporated into their organisational structures. While Hamas and IS appear to have created some openings for women's operationalisation in recognition of their strategic utility, the Taliban 2.0 has thus far failed to follow suit.

The composition of a group's leadership is significant, acting as a signal - to supporters and enemies alike - of the movement's aims and whom it seeks to represent. Both IS and the Taliban have broadly excluded women from their highest decision-making bodies. IS's cabinet, religious council, executive committees, and provincial governors have been exclusively male. Similarly, from their first iteration in the 1990s, the Taliban's cabinet has consistently lacked female representation. Even in its most recent "peace agreement" with the United States, there were no references to women, girls, or gender, and there were no women on the Taliban negotiation team.[68] Repeated appeals from the international community for the Taliban 2.0 to meaningfully include and engage with women have been met with ambivalence. The only exception has been a demonstration in Kabul in September 2021 by 300 female Taliban 2.0 "supporters", which seemed to be an attempt to answer the calls of the international community on inclusion of women.[69] Yet, there has to date been no notable effort to incorporate women into its structure in any meaningful or even symbolic ways.

Hamas's all-female branch stands in stark comparison. Since its inception, Hamas has organised events on women's issues, attended by the highest echelons of the organisation.[70] The group even established the "Islamic Women's Movement in Palestine" in 2003, highlighting the strategic incorporation of women even prior to governance.[71] Since its transition to power in 2006, women have been integral to the group's governance efforts; for example, through its appointment of female MPs (even in the 2006 election),[72] the promotion of its Ministry of Women's Affairs,[73] the

64 Middleton, "Women's Rights Unveiled," p. 446.
65 Islamic State's official propaganda and online supporters explicitly lauded its all-female childbirth and neonatal facilities. For example, see, Islamic State, The Fertile Nation 2, Media Office of Raqqa Province, 3 July, 2017.
66 Vale, "Piety is in the Eye of the Bureaucrat," p. 37.
67 World Health Organisation. "Trends in Maternal Mortality: 2000 to 2017," (WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA, World Bank Group, and the United Nations Population Division, 2019).
68 "Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan between the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognized by the United States as a state and is known as the Taliban and the United States of America," *U.S. Department of State*, February 29, 2020; Allen and Felbab-Brown, "The fate of women's rights in Afghanistan".
69 "Veiled protest: Afghan women rally in support of the Taliban," *France24,* September 11, 2021.
70 Jad, "Islamist Women."
71 Ibid.
72 "How to Win and Lose Elections in Palestine," *Al-Qassam Website*, December 3, 2006, accessed November 15, 2018.
73 "Zahar: The Palestinian Fundamentals Do Not Change," *Al-Qassam Website,* June 6, 2012, accessed January 8, 2019.

facilitation of women-led support rallies,[74] and women's events.[75] Indeed, in March 2021, Jamila al-Shanti was elected to the Political Bureau, the highest decision-making body of Hamas.[76] This incorporation of women results in a very different cabinet to that recently formed by the Taliban 2.0. While Hamas may echo the Taliban's narrative of having "freed women politically, economically, and socially",[77] in practice, the group delivers more than rhetoric. That said, women in positions of power are largely seen as representing women and women's interests,[78] and embody Hamas's idealised vision of womanhood: educated, modest, mothers.[79] Their credibility rests on conformity to this ideal and often their relationships as wives or mothers of influential Hamas men.[80]

Beyond politics, all three of these groups converge on their policies of sex segregation. As a result, women have faced the most severe restrictions to employment. For example, Taliban 2.0 spokes*men* declared that women may work "in accordance with the principles of Islam".[81] However, with no steps taken to define what that means in practice, women across the country have been sent home from their jobs as city employees,[82] government workers,[83] judges,[84] and bankers,[85] to name a few. Under the guise of protecting women's modesty, the Taliban 2.0 has reduced illicit intermixing between the sexes in the workplace.[86] Importantly, it is only women who must forfeit their jobs and careers for this "shared ideal".

To be clear, even violent Islamist groups that do promote women's participation and activism are driven by instrumental, not altruistic, intent. Despite a seemingly inclusive workforce and political agenda, in all their roles, women have been incorporated into Hamas in order to serve female constituents. Even through service in the police force, while wearing uniforms that adhere to Hamas's dress code, women have primarily worked cases involving other women.[87] IS has taken this model of female policing to the extreme through its all-female *hisba* (morality police) units that facilitated brutal corporal punishment of other women.[88] In both cases, women served a strategic purpose, as space within the groups' bureaucracies were opened in line with, and in fulfilment of, conservative interests.

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74 "The Female Branch Rallied in Support of Palestinian Prisoners," *Hamas Website,* April 8, 2017, accessed July 9, 2018; "Hamas Women Movement Protests against UN Move on Jerusalem," *Hamas Website*, March 10, 2018, accessed July 9, 2018.
75 "Hamas Holds a Conference on the International Woman Day," *Hamas Website*, March 5, 2017, accessed July 9, 2018; "Hamas Holds Women's Day Conference on International Women's Day," *Hamas Website*, March 9, 2017, accessed July 9, 2018.
76 "Hamas elects first woman to political bureau," *Times of Israel*, March 14, 2021.
77 "Hamas and Women: Clearing Misconceptions," *Hamas Website*, January 12, 2011, accessed July 14, 2018.
78 "Women's Participation in the Palestinian Struggle for Freedom," *Al-Qassam Website,* December 3, 2006, accessed November 15, 2018.; "International Woman's Day Is Different in Palestine," *Al-Qassam Website*, March 7, 2007, accessed January 8, 2019.
79 "Um Nidal Farhat: Sacrifice without Limits," *Al-Qassam Website*, December 3, 2006, accessed January 8, 2019.
80 See for example: Mariam Farhat, Muna Mansour, and Fadia Al-Qawasmi. "Um Nidal Farhat: Sacrifice without Limits," Al-Qassam Website; "Interview: Member of Legislative Council Muna Mansour," *Al-Qassam Website*, July 6, 2011, accessed January 10, 2019.
81 "Veiled protest: Afghan women rally in support of the Taliban," *France24.*
82 Jonathan Franklin, "Female Government Workers In Kabul Told To Stay Home In Latest Taliban Rule," *NPR*, September 19, 2021.
83 Hira Humayun and Helen Regan, "About the only job women can do for the Kabul government is clean female bathrooms, acting mayor says," *CNN,* September 19, 2021.
84 Claire Press, "Female Afghan judges hunted by the murderers they convicted," *BBC,* September 28, 2021.
85 Rupam Jain, "Afghan women forced from banking jobs as Taliban take control," *Reuters*, August 15, 2021.
86 Rob Picheta and Zahid Mahmood, "Taliban tell Afghan women to stay home from work because soldiers are 'not trained' to respect them," *CNN,* August 25, 2021.
87 Taghreed El-Khodary, "Hamas Police Force Recruits Women in Gaza," *New York Times,* January 18, 2008.
88 Gina Vale, "Women in Islamic State: From Caliphate to Camps," *International Centre for Counter-Terrorism* (October 17, 2019) pp. 4, 6, https://icct.nl/publication/women-in-islamic-state-from-caliphate-to-camps/.

The incorporation and utility of women within the three groups analysed here can be viewed on a spectrum. On one end, Hamas has presented itself as a platform for women's public participation and empowerment, appealing to individual supporters and serving the group's strategic ends. In the middle, IS has shown to make strategic concessions with regard to women's employment; within the parameters of all-female parallel institutions, the activism of female members boosted public outreach and provided operational benefits. On the other end, the Taliban 2.0 has yet to even acknowledge opportunities for women's civic participation. In this regard, the group has so far deviated from the examples of its "traditionalist" predecessors.

Legitimacy

Through governance, non-state actors have sought to legitimise their state-building exercise. These groups first and foremost seek support from local populations, and secondly, in some cases, appeal to external stakeholders. In all governance contexts, physical force alone is rarely sufficient to maintain control.[89] In the battle to win the "hearts and minds" of local populations, the presence of women has been shown to positively influence attitudes toward a rebel group, lending legitimacy to its actions.[90] Moreover, a group's localised engagement with women often affects how it is perceived by the international community.

Some groups have sought to engrain themselves into local populations by force. After its takeover of large swaths of Syria and Iraq, IS used its governance to control food, resources, and people.[91] Clear in-groups and out-groups were created, with perceived "infidel" communities (specifically women) facing brutal treatment.[92] However, IS also imposed harsh restrictions on Sunni female populations, which it viewed as a core supporter base.[93] In response, local women voiced and performed resistance through public protests, covert organising, verbal retaliation, and politicised acts of survival or "resilient resistance".[94] Though on a smaller scale than recent demonstrations in Afghanistan, protests were relatively commonplace at the early stages of IS's rule. While these acts of public defiance resulted in some minor concessions from the group,[95] they were not able to physically overturn or challenge its control.

89 Research on rebel governance often focuses on the balance of means used to achieve legitimacy. For example, see, Victor Asal et al. "Carrots, Sticks, and Insurgent Targeting of Civilians," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 63 no. 7 (2019): 1710–35, https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002718789748 ; Zachariah Cherian Mampilly, *Rebel Rulers: Insurgent Governance and Civilian Life During War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592712002642.

90 Devorah Manekin and Reed M. Wood, "Framing the narrative: Female fighters, external audience attitudes, and transnational support for armed rebellions," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 64, No. 9 (2020): 1638-1665, https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002720912823 ; Meredith Loken, "'Both needed and threatened': Armed mothers in militant visuals," *Security Dialogue* 52, no. 1 (2021): 21-44, https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010620903237.

91 Devorah Margolin et al. "You Reap What You Sow: The Importance of Agriculture to the Islamic State's Governance Strategy." The ISIS Files, *The George Washington University* (2021).

92 Gina Vale, "Liberated, Not Free: Yazidi Women After Islamic State Captivity," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 31, no. 3 (2020): pp. 518-523, https://doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2020.1726572 ; Margolin and Winter, "Women in the Islamic State."

93 Margolin and Winter, "Women in the Islamic State."; Gina Vale, "Piety Is in the Eye of the Bureaucrat: The Islamic State's Strategy of Civilian Control," *CTC Sentinel* 13, No. 1 (2020): 34-40.

94 Gina Vale, "Defying Rules. Defying Gender?: Women's Resistance to Islamic State," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (September 11, 2020), https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2020.1816680.

95 Ibid., p. 11.

How a governing non-state actor engages with its local (female) populations can affect its perceived legitimacy at the international level. For Hamas, efforts to win local support can have a significant pay-off in its bid for international legitimacy.[96] The framing of its gendered behavioural codes as policies born from the choices of supportive women is paradigmatic of Hamas's bottom-up approach to governance.[97] Despite this community-driven framing, Hamas has also faced a degree of resistance to its "encouragement" of women to adopt "traditionalist" behaviours. In 2009, a Hamas-appointed judge's ruling enforced a new uniform (including the hijab and jilbab) for female lawyers, who fought back, challenging the ruling as having no basis in law.[98] In response, Hamas rescinded the decision, under the pretence of a misunderstanding.[99] As mentioned above, in February 2021, a Hamas-appointed Higher Shari'a Council judge ruled that women required the permission of a male guardian to travel outside Gaza.[100] Public protests forced the court to compromise in a re-written law that allows men to petition the court to prevent a woman from travelling.[101]

For groups focused on localised governance, international support is not always sought or desired. Throughout its lifespan, IS craved the ire of its enemies, whose recognition and aid held little value, and thus failed to apply pressure or exact concessions. By contrast, the Taliban 2.0 has ostensibly sought international legitimacy,[102] and as such must recognise that its local policies, specifically regarding women, will have ramifications on these ambitions. As the Taliban 2.0 strives to appeal to diverse constituents – its hard-line supporter base, civilian subjects, and international partners – questions remain as to how it will choose to implement its 'traditionalist' ideals. The remainder of this section delves into the complexities of the Taliban's appeals for legitimacy in the eyes of diverse and competing constituents, and potential fissure points that can be targeted.

Both times that the Taliban came to power, it has struggled for primacy in a crowded political landscape. To distinguish itself from rival factions and occupying forces - past and present - the Taliban has sought to project an image of legitimacy as the "choice" of the Afghan people. For example, in a recently released Taliban 2.0 anthem in English, the orator proclaims: "Talib is selected by Afghan nation; Talib is elected by Afghan nation; Talib is accepted by Afghan nation".[103] Central to its appeals for civilian "acceptance" is the movement's raison d'être of fighting for Islamic ideals and "honour", particularly in the backdrop of foreign invasions.[104] Gender norms have been consistently used to construct and reflect the group's core values. However,

96 Devorah Margolin, "#Hamas: A Thematic Exploration of Hamas's English-Language Twitter," *Terrorism and Political Violence* (2020), https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2020.1761343 ; Sagi Polka, "Hamas as a Wasati (Literally: Centrist) Movement: Pragmatism within the Boundaries of the Sharia," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 42, no. 7 (2019): pp. 683-713, https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2017.1402432.

97 "Interview with Khaled Meshal: Why Should We Be Punished for the Sins of Others?" *Al-Qassam Website,* December 1, 2009, accessed July 20, 2018.

98 Rory McCarthy, "Hamas patrols beaches in Gaza to enforce conservative dress code," *Guardian,* October 18, 2009.

99 "German Mediator Is Serious," *Al-Qassam Website,* September 3, 2009, accessed July 19, 2018.

100 "Women need male guardian to travel, says Hamas court in Gaza Strip," *Guardian*, February 15, 2021.

101 Nidal al-Mughrabi, "Gaza law barring women from travel without male consent to be revised, judge says," *Reuters*, February 16, 2021; Fares Akram, "Hamas 'guardian' law keeps Gaza woman from studying abroad," *Associated Press*, November 5, 2021.

102 Aaron Y. Zelin, "Looking for Legitimacy: Taliban Diplomacy Since the Fall of Kabul," *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, August 15, 2022.

103 The choice of English as the language of the anthem is telling, signalling its intended audience is likely the international community, rather than local populations. Abdulhaq Omeri, "English anthem of the Taliban . #Afghanistan," @AbdulhaqOmeri, Twitter, 19 July 2022, https://twitter.com/AbdulhaqOmeri/status/1549346066415423489 ; For discussion on the Taliban's use of propagandistic anasheed, see, Thomas H. Johnson, *Taliban Narratives: The Use and Power of Stories in the Afghanistan Conflict* (Hurst & co., 2018).

104 Ruttig, "Have the Taliban Changed?" p.4

its distinct regional and ideological influences created a unique, localised brand for the Taliban to impose its rule across diverse communities in Afghanistan.[105] This universalised approach constitutes a direct barrier to the group's legitimacy as the sole representative of the ethnically, culturally, and even linguistically diverse population in Afghanistan.

Throughout its phases of governance, the Taliban has faced a delicate balancing act in its appeals to (diverse) local populations, its hard-line conservative supporter base, and foreign (particularly donor) states. It has been consistent in its ideologically-defined values. However, there are notable instances of pragmatic concession. Indeed, the late 1990s saw restrictions lifted on women's education and employment in the medical sector.[106] After rising maternal mortality rates and the deterioration of the country's healthcare system[107] - likely also affecting militants and families - these policy reforms tempered and, in some cases, directly responded to the concerns of local populations and international audiences. Interestingly, in late August 2021, the group again "encouraged" female healthcare professionals to return to work,[108] seemingly demonstrating a miniscule of institutional learning from past policy failures, at least concerning the medical field.

The debates and balancing act concerning girls' education continue to this day. Hostage to its ideology, the Taliban 2.0 has failed to convince its influential hardliners to allow girls' education beyond secondary school. However, in the past, internal criticism from some Taliban officials helped to drive important concessions.[109] For example, in 1997, the head of the Taliban's religious police acknowledged: "We will be blamed by our people if we don't educate women and we will provide education for them eventually."[110] "Eventually" arrived the following year, albeit with restrictions, including not teaching girls over eight years old.[111] Since its 2021 return to power, the Taliban Ministry of Education initially announced the re-opening of girls' secondary schools. However, hardliners in Kandahar forced the group to renege on the policy.[112] These contradictions highlight the fraught divide between provincial hardliners and Taliban 2.0 officials in Kabul, who might be willing to engage with the international community. This example also reveals which audience holds ultimate decision-making power over the Taliban 2.0's policies: its hard-line backers.

While the legitimacy aspirations of IS and Hamas are slightly more clear-cut, the Taliban 2.0 continues to balance competing interests in its struggle for power and control. The movement's stand on women's rights is at the heart of its battles for legitimacy at both the internal and international levels. While concessions on women's rights are equated to succumbing to "Western values" and betraying the group's ideals, their own extremely restrictive gendered policies have made it difficult to gain international support, even from so-called Taliban-sympathetic states

105 Yoshinobu Nagamine, *The Legitmization Strategy of the Taliban's Code of Conduct: Through the One- Way Mirror* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 45.
106 "Humanity Denied: Systematic Violations of Women's Rights in Afghanistan," *Human Rights Watch,* 13, no. 5 (2001): p. 16.
107 "Maternal Mortality in 2000-2017: Afghanistan," *World Health Organisation*, 30 July, 2019.; Telesetskyt, "In the Shadows and Behind the Veil," p. 447.
108 James Mackenzie and Hugh Lawson, "Taliban say Afghan women health service staff should go back to work," *Reuters*, August 27, 2021.
109 Ruttig, "Have the Taliban Changed?" p. 3.
110 Larry P. Goodson, "Perverting Islam: Taliban social policy toward women," *Central Asian Survey* 20, no. 4 (2000): p. 421, https://doi.org/10.1080/02634930120104618.
111 This is in line with the group's prohibition of the intermixing of the sexes after age nine. See, Middleton, "Women's Rights Unveiled," p. 451.
112 Safiullah Padshah and Christina Goldbaum, "Taliban Renege on Promise to Open Afghan Girls' Schools," *New York Times,* 23 March, 2022; For further analysis on the Taliban's internal struggles to reach consensus on its policies regarding girls' education, see, Andrew Watkins, "The Taliban One Year On," *CTC Sentinel* 15, no. 8 (August 2022), 1-15, https://ctc.westpoint.edu/the-taliban-one-year-on/.

such as Pakistan.[113] The group's narrative for "change" should be understood in the context of US-Taliban negotiations that painted the Taliban 2.0 as if the movement will be reconcilable, which has been proven to be otherwise.

Conclusion: Lessons Learned?

Following its takeover of Afghanistan more than one year ago, the Taliban 2.0 initially sought a more "moderate" framing. Yet, in practice, the organisation that (re)emerges today closely aligns with its earlier iteration. Cases such as the IS and Hamas highlight two very different paths that governing violent Islamists can take - each with its own advantages and pitfalls. In different ways, these groups have been forced to balance their underpinning ideology and "traditionalist" answer to the "woman question" in theory, and the reality of implementation in practice. With this precedent come warning signs for the Taliban 2.0 as it seeks to cement its long-term control of Afghanistan, and lessons for those that seek to counter them.

Implementation

The framing of the Taliban's policies as representative or reflective of its citizens' desires for government is similar to that of Hamas's transformation of Gaza as a "choice" of its people. However, the comparison ends here. Beneath its rhetorical veneer lie harsh restrictions and violent enforcement. Of the three cases, the Taliban has consistently adopted the most extreme approach to female education and employment. Most girls' secondary schools remain closed; and women are largely barred from civic engagement. Instead, the Taliban's engagement with female civilians has centred on policing "moral" infractions, resulting in women's progressive visual and physical concealment and subjugation.

For all three cases, the reality of women's everyday lives does not match the rhetoric spouted by these groups regarding their "protection". Specifically, in the case of the Taliban-ruled Afghanistan, these *everyday* acts of violence rarely make international headlines. However, when they do, their source is unsurprisingly not the group's media apparatus. Rather, it is the voices of defiant (female) Afghan activists who refuse to be silenced, nor to allow the group's gendered violence to go unnoticed.[114] Robust and effective monitoring is key to disrupting its rhetorical veneer. Daily trackers such as that established by Human Rights Watch are a good start, but care must be taken not to exclude - or endanger - local populations. A holistic, locally-driven monitor of the Taliban's governance – as was Mosul Eye under IS in Iraq[115] - would not only serve as a historical myth-busting record of the group's policies, but also provide contextualisation and diverse perspectives from across Afghan provinces.[116] Scholars, policymakers, practitioners, and journalists seeking to support such efforts should empower female activists within Afghanistan, or at least seek connections through diaspora networks. With effective data collection, the reality of the Taliban 2.0's governance say-do gap can be exposed to its constituents, populations, and the international community.

113 'Pakistan's Hard Policy Choices in Afghanistan', Asia Report N°320, *International Crisis Group*, 4 February, 2022.
114 Quentin Sommerville, "Five Afghan women who refuse to be silenced," *BBC News*, 18 February, 2022.
115 Omar Mohammed, "Mosul Eye: To Put Mosul on the Global Map," https://mosul-eye.org/.
116 This recommendation builds on the work of Untold Narratives, whose project 'Write Afghanistan' has been supporting Afghan women fiction writers since 2019 to improve their writing and simultaneously share their accounts and stories of conflict in their communities. Since the Taliban 2.0 takeover in 2021, the organisation's 'Untold's Diary' project has ensured that Afghan women writers stay connected via a secure messaging app to share their thoughts, fears, and dreams. For media coverage of the initiative, see: Lyse Doucet and Zarghuna Kargar, "The secrets shared by Afghan women," *BBC News*, 11 December 2022, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-63638876

Utility

With the acknowledgement that these groups are hostage to the societal context from which they emerge, Hamas, IS, and the Taliban have adopted vastly different approaches to incorporating women within their bureaucracies. Their divergence is, at least in part, reflective of each group's willingness to concede ideological tenets for pragmatic advantage. Beyond the valorisation of women as wives and mothers, instrumental and not altruistic motivations drive governing violent Islamists to facilitate women's participation. Hamas's all-female branch and female parliamentarians lend credence to the group's state-building and provide an outlet for activism for female adherents. For IS, women's employment was permitted on the basis of operational necessity and within the parameters of its sex-segregation policy. The incorporation of women has facilitated the functioning of both groups' administrative, educational, and healthcare departments, to name a few. Arguably, this also creates openings for unaffiliated women to interact with the movements.

The Taliban 2.0, however, is not likely to (quickly) follow suit. While there have been small concessions in women's employment in healthcare, the group's ideological foundations stand firm. Even when faced with pragmatic challenges, the Taliban continues to uphold binarised roles that exclude women from public life. The failure thus far to appoint women to its cabinet is a testament to the group's vision for society and governance that remains largely unchanged from its 1990s 1.0 iteration. A possible explanation can be found in the group's internal dynamics. Still in the early phase of its 2.0 era, deviation from its core ideals would risk possible division and alienation of its hard-line supporter base. As such, the unwillingness to change its policies toward women constitute an important signal to the prioritisation of the Taliban's internal and external stakeholders.

Exposure of the Taliban 2.0's rhetorical veneer of "moderation" hinges, again, on the disconnect between the group's promised policies and practice, as well as the *déjà vu* of its 1990s 1.0 governance. Refusal to recognise the strategic advantage of women to its cause remains a stumbling block for the group, hampering its aims to deliver equal access to welfare, for example through education or healthcare. There have not been sufficient changes to support its claims to weigh women's rights in its new mandate. These are weaknesses that can be targeted. Building on the above recommendation to forge a locally-curated tracker of Taliban 2.0 governance, such data and united pressure from external stakeholders is critical to holding the group to account and to push for Afghan women's continued emancipation.

Legitimacy

Legitimacy is the lifeblood of a governing actor. However, appeals to constituents are not cost-free. What ensues is a balancing act between a group's loyalty to its ideological underpinnings and its desire or willingness to concede policies for the benefit of legitimacy. For example, IS's disregard for external legitimacy resulted in women's incorporation for its own gain, whilst ignoring aspects of gendered policy that might irk external audiences. Conversely, Hamas's governance practice demonstrates thoughtful consideration of its local decisions that can have global consequences.

Despite the Taliban's claims to "represent" and respond to the desires of its citizenry, the group has so far failed to convincingly curry favour with local Afghans. In particular, the movement has refused to account for, or respond to, the voices and needs of half of its population. Recent reports reveal instances of gang-rape and forced disappearance of Afghan women who dare to protest against the new regime.[117] While IS perpetrated mass sexual and gender-based violence against women within its territories, it was careful with its targeting and publicity.[118] Global attention has largely focused on its genocide against the Yazidi community, rather than the group's own Sunni Muslim constituents. By contrast, defiant demonstrations by and subsequent reprisals against Afghan women do not support the Taliban 2.0's desired image of "acceptance" by its people.[119] It is essential to repeatedly expose the Taliban's say-do gap. Far from a choice of the Afghan people, the violent imposition of governance continues to falter with regard to basic service provision in areas such as healthcare and education. Moreover, local policies - and the legacy of the past - have international consequences. Indeed, the widespread refusal to forge trade deals with Taliban-controlled Afghanistan in its 2.0 era highlights the flashpoints and fragility of earning legitimacy, if, however, this is the group's aim. Recently, the killing of al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri in Kabul has also prompted accusations of the Taliban's "clear violation of international principles and Doha Agreement".[120]

Studying governing violent Islamist groups' successes and failures provides vital insights into non-state transitions into administration and control. All three groups have suffered challenges to governance in practice—whether internal disagreements, rival factions, localised resistance, or global condemnation. The way in which they weather the storm provides a forecast for the terms of their relationships with local populations and the international community. All three groups have needed to balance driving ideology, strategic and practical necessity, and ambitions for legitimacy. All of these aspects of governance require navigation of gender. The ink is not yet dry on the policies of the Taliban 2.0, but the evidence to date suggests the group will more closely follow its past than its fellow governing violent Islamist groups. Should the desire for external legitimacy prove to be genuine, this is a point of entry to press for reform and eventually transformation of the movement - to reflect the Afghan society. An unaltered twenty-first century return of the Taliban 1.0 "gender apartheid" poses a serious threat to Afghan women's rights, survival of vulnerable ethnic groups such as the Hazaras, and the country's broader security and prosperity. Exposure of the group's rhetorical veneer of "moderation" requires the international community to be the elephant that never forgets, and instead pushes for real change.

117 Ayesha Jehangir, "The media spotlight on Afghanistan is fading fast – but the agony of its people is far from over," *The Guardian*, 18 March, 2022.; Charlie Faulkner, "Afghanistan's 'disappeared' women: an arrest by the Taliban, then a bullet-riddled body," *The Times*, 27 January, 2022.

118 Mara Redlich Revkin and Elizabeth Jean Wood, "The Islamic State's Pattern of Sexual Violence: Ideology and Institutions, Policies and Practices," *Journal of Global Security Studies* 6, no. 2 (2021): 1-20, https://doi.org/10.1093/jogss/ogaa038.

119 Yogita Limaye and Merlyn Thomas, "Taliban break up rare protest by Afghan women in Kabul," *BBC News*, 12 August, 2020.

120 Shweta Sharma, "Taliban 'grossly violated' agreement by sheltering al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri, US says," *The Independent,* 4 August, 2022.

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