

THE ROLE OF THE ORGANIZATION OF ISLAMIC COOPERATION (OIC) IN ADDRESSING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN AFGHANISTAN AFTER 2021

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Abstract

This study examines the Organization of Islamic Cooperation's (OIC) response to the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan since the Taliban regained power in August 2021, focusing on domestic violence and women's rights. Using a constructivist framework, it investigates how the OIC's religious identity shapes its discourse on gender-based violence and women's rights. The analysis draws on OIC statements and Special Envoy reports from August 2021 to December 2024, cross-referenced with evidence from Human Rights Watch (2022a), UN Women (2022), and Amnesty International (2023). The findings show that while the OIC occasionally references "the rights of women and children" and "gender-based violence," its language remains vague and non-binding. The organization has prioritized humanitarian assistance over concrete measures to address domestic violence or restore institutions such as the Ministry of Women's Affairs, and it has not convened a religious forum to advance Islamic justifications for gender equality that challenge the Taliban's interpretation of Sharia. This inaction reflects the OIC's consensus-based structure and its preference for non-interference over direct human rights advocacy. It contributes to constructivist scholarship on religious international organizations and proposes policy measures, including a permanent Sharia Council on Gender Justice and conditional humanitarian funding tied to women's protection services.

Keywords: Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC); gender-based violence; women's rights in Afghanistan; constructivism; Islamic diplomacy

INTRODUCTION

The Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan in August 2021 was a stunning reversal, erasing two decades of accomplishments in governance, civil liberties, and women's rights. The Western-backed government's swift collapse and the restoration of the Islamic Emirate horrified Afghans (Human Rights Watch, 2022b). The memories of Taliban governance (1996–2001) scared a lot of Afghans—particularly women and girls—because they remembered it as a regime of severe repression and exclusion (Physicians for Human Rights, 1998; Rashid, 2000). As world leaders jockeyed to

withdraw, reassess their diplomatic ties, and suspend aid, there was an urgent question: how would Islamic international organizations respond to a government that purported to exercise religious authority while enforcing rigidly patriarchal and authoritarian policies?

One of the leading organizations in this arena is the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). It is the second-largest intergovernmental organization after the United Nations, with 57 member states bearing a Muslim majority. Founded in 1969 to promote solidarity, cooperation, and Islamic values, the OIC bills itself as the collective voice of the Muslim world. Its objectives are to uphold and promote the principles of human rights and social justice through Islamic teachings; to project concerns of Muslims in all parts of the world to the international community; and to help solve social, economic, juridical, and political problems of Muslim countries. Such high expectations were pinned by the entire world that the OIC, with all its religious credibility and global standing, would have an optimistic and positive engagement with the Taliban government and help to protect the vulnerable groups in Afghanistan, especially women, children, and minorities who are already being subjected to a series of violations.

While there has been public outrage on the matter from Indonesia to Nigeria and from Mali to Kuwait, reactionary postures such as the Extraordinary Meeting of Foreign Ministers held in Islamabad in December 2021 and the formation of a humanitarian trust fund have not translated into direct actionable items from the OIC—beyond cautious statements (OIC, 2021, 2023c). And although the organization has urged inclusive governance and all Afghans' rights, it has notably stopped short of forcefully condemning the Taliban's ongoing discrimination against women or pressing forces in Afghanistan to take specific steps to protect them from domestic and gender-based violence. The chasm between the OIC's proclaimed mission and real practice raises a serious question regarding its credibility, its functioning, and the conundrums of Islamic diplomacy in situations where tyranny is sacralized.

This paper critically examines the OIC's engagement with human rights violations and domestic violence in Afghanistan since August 2021. It focuses in particular on how and whether the organization has exercised its institutional and normative power to influence the Taliban at the point of governance, as it pertains to women's rights, personal security, and gendered oppression.

Through a constructivist lens, the analysis unravels how identity, religious norms, and international pressures are blended in the OIC's decisions and the specters that hover around them. Turning to the structural, political, and ideological impediments of the organization's intervention, it raises questions for the Afghan public and the broader Muslim world.

The human rights situation in Afghanistan has rapidly deteriorated since the Taliban retook power. A raft of reports by United Nations agencies, human rights organizations, and international non-governmental groups have documented an alarming escalation in domestic violence, forced and child marriages, constraints on women's freedom of movement, and their exclusion from education and jobs. Services for victims of gender-based violence have also collapsed (Human Rights Watch, 2022a; UN Women, 2022; Amnesty International, 2023). Women and girls have all but been erased from public life, their rights and freedoms now circumscribed by a narrow interpretation by the Taliban of Islamic law. The new regime has dismantled the Ministry of Women's Affairs, jailed independent human rights groups, shut down safe houses, and replaced protective family laws with an ad hoc system led by male tribal and religious figures. Against this backdrop of despair, the absence of continued international focus has reinforced the sense of betrayal felt by Afghan women and vulnerable groups.

Much of the Western world and regional and multilateral institutions, including the United Nations, initially suspended aid and diplomatic recognition, but there was also the hope that regional and Islamic organizations would take responsibility for providing moral guidance and a culturally sensitive approach to engagement. This approach contrasts with much of the literature that emphasizes Western actors or UN-based institutions, not non-state moral actors; it calls to attention the significantly traditional Islamic organization: an exponent in the management of diplomacy, human rights, and religion-political tensions.

The OIC, in particular, was thought to be able to relate to the Taliban on their own religious grounds. The Taliban have always been at pains to insist that their policies reflect Sharia law, and so secular human rights arguments carry less weight with them (Akbari & True, 2022; UN Human Rights Council, 2023, para. 68). As a pan-Islamic organization, based on the concept of Islamic solidarity and ethical responsibility, the OIC could have presented an alternative narrative and opposed the Taliban's gender apartheid from within the Islamic context. This story would ground

itself not only in universal ideas about the dignity of every human being and the call to care for the poor but also within Islamic teachings that stress justice, mercy, and the responsibility to protect those who are marginalized.

The OIC's policy towards dealing with the Taliban has been cautious, minimal, and largely confined to the humanitarian dimension. Already in December 2021, the OIC convened an emergency meeting in Islamabad to rise to the challenge. They met during this session and established a humanitarian trust fund, requested financial assistance from member states, and appointed a special envoy for Afghanistan (OIC, 2021). Those responses addressed pressing needs—food shortages, the collapse of the healthcare system and the economy—rather than the human rights dimensions of the crisis. The final communiqué carried some general references to “the rights of women and girls” and “inclusive governance,” but it stopped short of condemning or even naming the Taliban's particular policies. Subsequent OIC declarations emphasized the need for dialogue, respect of nonintervention, and the sovereignty of Afghanistan, a pattern of hesitation to confront member states or quasi-states on moral grounds (Aydin, 2013).

For some time, scholars have debated the structural and ideological constraints faced by the OIC in promoting human rights. Aydin (2013) characterizes the organization as more a platform to build consensus than to police norms, noting its reluctance to call out fellow Muslim countries and its preference for political unity over moral clarity. According to Kayaoglu (2015), the OIC is undermined in its human rights promotion by its reliance on the Cairo Declaration on Human Rights (1990), which has also been attacked as a compromise on rights due to it subjecting them to Sharia. Kayaoglu (2020) also argues that the OIC's human rights framework is a compromise between state sovereignty, conservative views, and the wish to bring Islam and universal rights closer together. This shows a deeper tension between Islamic legitimacy and universal human rights. This viewpoint ponders whether the organization's failure to articulate a compelling Islamic case for gender equality does not significantly damage their credibility, and therefore effectiveness, in addressing crises like the one in Afghanistan.

Constructivist theorists such as Finnemore and Sikkink (1998) argue that international institutions are not just instruments that states use to pursue their material interests but can have a

significant impact on the normative, identity, and value structure of international politics. This implies that OIC's inaction or hesitancy on the gender crisis in Afghanistan can be shown as not just political errors, but also the failures of major norms. By avoiding a direct confrontation with the Taliban's notion of Islam, the OIC created the political space for one interpretation of Sharia to dominate the larger Islamic conversation, silencing even more egalitarian interpretations which do exist within the tradition. Otherwise, it would result in norm-squelching and the opportunity for diversity and reformation in the faith out the window in favor of political expedience and careful diplomacy between governments.

This article suggests that the current position of the OIC is illustrative of what is a more general trend in religious diplomacy: one increasingly concerned with advancing its own state-centered interests and ideological homogeneity, rather than genuine concern for human rights issues. It's a reminder that in the presence of such a dire gender-based humanitarian crisis as that now in Afghanistan, religious organizations must take more than just a stand with their words and instead begin to take real action that shapes behavior—through conversation, peer pressure, theological discussion, and conditional collaboration. What happens in Afghanistan constitutes a significant test for the OIC's moral credential, flexibility, and adherence to its purported principles.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Being the second largest intergovernmental organization in the world following the United Nations, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) has traditionally self-identified as the guardian of Muslim unity and Islamic values. However, within Muslim-majority countries that are either authoritarian or ruled by extremist actors, where the abusive conduct is serious and widespread, the way in which religious diplomacy is organized and operates invites continued scholarly debate regarding the limits of religious diplomacy, its motives, and its power to hold norms accountable. In the wake of the human rights catastrophe in post-2021 Taliban resurgence Afghanistan, the OIC's reactions (or lack thereof) are currently under intensified scrutiny both theoretically and practically. This review of the literature aims to contextualize the OIC's response to Afghanistan within broader debates on religious international organizations, norm promotion, and Islamic diplomacy. It draws upon three main groups of literature: current scholarship on the

OIC as an institution, the role and influence of the OIC in Afghan politics, and constructivist-oriented debates on religious norms and international human rights.

2.1 Institutional Role and Limitations of the OIC

The OIC's function and limitations are criticized from many theoretical and policy-related directions. It is regarded as a politically divided organization, and its ability to defend human rights is often undermined by the competing agendas of its 57 member countries. Aydin (2013) argues that the OIC seeks to represent the ummah or the international Muslim community, but its power to enforce decisions or to intervene in the larger affairs of a state is extremely limited. This is also because of its intergovernmental nature, which might water down its position, as a "consensus"-based institution. So even if the OIC comes out with declarations or statements on various important issues, they are not often accompanied by the right mechanisms for implementation or binding enforcement. Aydin calls this "normative posturing," in that it's more about showing off than any serious brand of diplomacy. One clear example is the OIC's response to the Taliban's ban on university education for women in December 2022. The OIC Secretary-General said the organization "cannot but condemn this decision" (KabulNow, 2022). A few weeks later, on 11 January 2023, the OIC Executive Committee met in Jeddah and asked the Taliban to reopen schools and universities for girls. However, the only practical step it announced was to send another group of religious scholars to Kabul. There was no deadline, no condition, and no consequence (OIC, 2023c).

2.2 The OIC and Afghanistan: Historical and Contemporary Engagement

The OIC has had a rocky history with Afghanistan, characterized by neglect, tokenistic gestures, and responsive humanitarianism. When the Taliban last ruled in Afghanistan (1996–2001), the OIC was silent in the face of the regime's egregious gender discrimination, intervening only sporadically (Aydin, 2013). Those historical factors are still influencing how the organization has been reacting to the Taliban's resurgence since 2021.

After the Taliban regained control in August 2021, the OIC convened an Extraordinary Meeting of Foreign Ministers at Islamabad in December that year. This meeting resulted in the

establishment of the humanitarian trust fund and the appointment of a special envoy on Afghanistan (OIC, 2021). Although these measures suggested a more affective policy orientation, Mohseni and Akbarzadeh (2022) argue that there has been no follow-up and clear political guidance. Even those who say that the OIC took on a symbolic leadership role in the discussions believe the body did not push back hard enough on issues such as women's rights, domestic violence or access to education—wary of confronting the Taliban's ideology.

Moreover, the OIC's condemnations have mostly refrained from explicitly criticizing Taliban policies. Rather, they are sticking to general cries for “inclusive governance” and the “rights of all Afghans,” which appear designed to string along Islamic unity without causing a major political blowup. It is a parallel reinforcement of Aydin's (2013) finding that OIC diplomacy frequently favors consensus among Muslim states over norm enforcement, especially vis-à-vis actors who present their rule in Islamic terms.

2.3 Post-2021 Human Rights Landscape in Afghanistan

Recorded instances of the erosion of women's rights and rampant domestic violence under the Taliban regime are a well-documented problem. Human Rights Watch (2022a) states that the restrictive policies of the Taliban have effectively banished women from public life, taking away their jobs, education, and freedom of movement. Such oppression is not merely structural; it's steeped in gender-based discrimination. Afghan women are also prohibited from receiving secondary and higher education, working certain jobs, and are even frequently confined to their homes under penalty. Amnesty International (2023) has further highlighted a worrisome rise in domestic and gender-based violence. The numbers show how serious the problem is. Even before 2021, a national survey found that 55.5% of women who had ever been married had faced physical, emotional, or sexual violence from a husband or partner, and 50.5% had faced physical violence (Shinwari et al., 2022). After the Taliban takeover, the situation became worse. According to the United Nations, the number of women and girls at high risk of gender-based violence grew by 30% in 2023, from 10.1 million to 13.1 million (OCHA, 2023). UN experts also report “a significant increase in spousal and intrafamily violence against women and girls,” while many services that once helped victims have stopped working (UN Human Rights Council, 2023, para. 75). Without the rights and support of the rule of law or of civil society, victims have nowhere to turn. There are reports of higher rates of

child and forced marriages, and intimate partner violence, along with decimated shelters and support networks. But, while the data is shockingly bad, the OIC's response after the announcement of some initial aid, has not specifically highlighted these human rights abuses. UN Women (2022) echoes these concerns, noting that "the Taliban's reading of Sharia law results in the structural exclusion and dehumanization" of women in Afghanistan. This visibly underscores the imperative of religious institutions, such as the OIC, to counter these narratives with alternative Islamic approaches that advocate for gender justice. The OIC's present approach and rhetoric fall short of addressing this major issue.

2.4 Norms, Identity, and Constructivist Interpretations

A constructivist approach to international relations makes an intriguing lens through which to view the OIC's behavior. Applying the model of Finnemore and Sikkink (1998) to the notion of norm dynamics demonstrates how international actors might come to embrace certain normative expectations in the phases of norm emergence, cascade, and internalization. Within this framework, the OIC functions both as a norm entrepreneur advocating Islamic solidarity, and as a potential conduit for progressive interpretations of Islamic human rights. However, Kayaoglu (2015, 2020) shows that the OIC's human rights bodies have moved away from universal rights and now focus more on what makes Islam different. They often criticize countries outside the OIC but rarely speak about violations inside member states. This kind of cultural relativism protects the OIC from Western criticism, but it weakens its moral position among Muslims.

2.5 Gaps in Scholarship and Areas for Further Research

Although the previous literature provides a strong foundation for assessing the performance of the OIC, there are also important shortcomings that need to be filled. For example, relatively little attention has been paid by scholarly researchers to the OIC's connections to Afghanistan since 2021, particularly in the domain of domestic violence. Much of the conversation today focuses on humanitarian assistance or political recognition, often as it relates to the underreported issue of gender-based violence against women and legal protections for women under Islamic rule.

Moreover, there is a dearth of studies that empirically measure the effect of OIC statements on Taliban policies. As noted above, the group's impact is more rhetorical. Still, we don't know whether it actually changes behavior through simple tools such as diplomacy, social pressure, or theological debate — more research is needed.

Finally, we require more comparative studies of how Islamic organizations deal with comparable crises in other areas – Nigeria with Boko Haram, Sudan, or Myanmar. Such analyses would also allow us to consider whether the OIC pattern of inaction with regard to Afghanistan is an exception or a broader trend in institutional action.

2.6 Theoretical Framework: Constructivism

This article aims to provide an in-depth analysis of the OIC response towards the human rights and domestic violence crisis in Afghanistan in the aftermath of the Taliban takeover in August 2021, adopting Constructivism as its main theoretical framework. One of the major theories is Constructivism from the international relations theory which focuses on the importance of ideas, norms, identities, and culture values in influencing the behavior of international actors. In contrast to rationalist theories—such as realism or liberalism—that emphasize actors' material interests or institutional payoffs, constructivism highlights how socially produced facts shape the ways states and nonstate groups make decisions and comply with norms (Wendt, 1992; Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998).

The regime of the Taliban views its pronouncements through an Islamic law and identity perspective, and the OIC seeks to present itself as a representative of Islamic solidarity and moral leadership in the Muslim world. Both are grounded in ideation. This is precisely what makes constructivism very useful for analyzing how these actors are and are not taking advantage of – and bending – the dynamics of religious legitimacy, normative authority and human rights duties.

2.6.1 Norm Dynamics and the Power of Islamic Discourse

A vital framework for understanding the evolution of norms comes from Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink's (1998) theory of the dynamics of international norms. They describe this process as having three central steps: emergence, cascade and internalisation. According to this model, "norm entrepreneurs" bring new ideas onto the international stage. Those ideas start to pick

up steam when champions of the ideas (players such as states, organizations, and religious leaders) enter the picture, until they are part of the regular way of doing business (and maybe even the law).

If we take a look at Afghanistan, it seems that the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) comes out as a possible norm entrepreneur who could contest the Taliban's regressive gender policies at least on the sketch. They would also be able to do so by offering other understandings of Islam that are more in harmony with human rights values. With its theo-moral authority, the OIC's pan-Islamic identity can also begin to challenge religious authoritarianism from within by means of Islamic moral suasion. But in practice, there has been a cleft between the OIC's professed principles and the way it behaves. This article is constructivist in nature, seeking to make sense of this disparity: why does the "movement" of the OIC, whose member states claim shared commitment to Muslim solidarity and pursuit of justice, not exercise its collective power more forcefully to push back against the abuses of the Taliban, especially those committed against women?

A crucial teaching of constructivism is that religious identity and discourse are not stable and given; they are contested, dynamic. Islam's gender, rights and justice norms are an interpretative and negotiable terrain shaped by power relations. The Taliban interpretation of Sharia to back domestic repression is not the only the way to look at it; other religious actors — such as scholars, women's organisations and institutions like the OIC — are able to frame arguments that have their foundations in the same tradition. As the debates collected by Hashemi and Qureshi (2022) show, this contestation is central to the politics of Islamic human rights: OIC silence and narrative ambiguity serves to allow an overriding reading that connects Islam with authoritarianism, muting more egalitarian voices.

2.6.2 The Role of Religious Norms in International Organizations

Constructivist scholars have reminded us that international organizations are not merely neutral platforms: They have their own identities and influence (Barnett & Finnemore, 2004). Take the OIC, for instance. Despite being an intergovernmental entity, it is dominated by a specific religious and cultural identity that informs how it views crises, allocates responsibility and deals with member states and groups like the Taliban. It is full of talk of ummah, Islamic solidarity, moral

obligation. This duality makes it an influential player when it comes to advocating for Islamic human rights, but it also puts it in a difficult position — especially when dealing with regimes that claim to embody Islamic values.

This dilemma is exacerbated by the OIC's reliance on the Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam (1990). Although it champions a range of basic rights, the Declaration ultimately subordinates them to Islamic law, leaving a vague vessel that can be interpreted in the most authoritarian of fashions. It is less able to take a strong moral position when confronted with rights violations which ostensibly are justified by other understandings of Sharia's teachings, as Kayaoglu (2015) observes. From a constructivist angle, the OIC is in a normalizing catch 22, which bounds its insistence in a certain Islamic meta-note sharing, but also the often political and different understandings among its member states, the Organization.

2.6.3 Norm Suppression and Political Avoidance

Constructivism explains why the OIC appears hesitant and reticent towards human rights crises. The way the body operates, the organization's detractors say, can be viewed as a specific suppression of norms, motivated by the fear of causing rifts among Muslim nations or political fallout, and such norms ambiguously force themselves to the middle ground. Aydin (2013) also notes the OIC tends to focus on consensus building and is reticent to challenge its membership and those who align with its members. This is especially stark in the case of Afghanistan, where the Taliban's claim to Islamic legitimacy places the OIC in a difficult position: condemning the Taliban may risk further fracturing the unity of Muslims, or make the OIC appear to adopt "Western" standards of human rights.

Through a constructivist lens, this takes the form of selective norm promotion—OIC gives precedence to humanitarian assistance, economic development, and good relationships among states and ventures to play down divisive social concerns such as women's rights and domestic violence. The presentation of these issues however is frequently vague or symbolic, for example the references by the OIC after 2021 to "inclusive governance," or "the rights of all Afghans," which do not go further than listing these factors without any account of the actual abuse or its gender-element (See OIC, 2021).

This cautious diplomacy reflects a broader divide in faith-based diplomacy: how to assert moral authority while engaging the messiness of global politics and disparate ideologies. Constructivism demonstrates that as well as being a question of tactics there is also a question of social identity and internal tensions inside the OIC itself.

Furthermore, while several scholars have addressed Islamic diplomacy, few have interrogated how religious discourse is strategically mobilized—or avoided—when confronting internal contradictions within pan-Islamic institutions. This gap suggests a need for interdisciplinary research that combines international relations theory, Islamic legal studies, and gender politics to fully grasp the nuances of norm (non-)promotion within the OIC.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research adopts a qualitative content analysis approach, informed by constructivist theory, to examine the OIC's engagement with domestic violence and human rights violations in Afghanistan following the Taliban's return to power in August 2021. Content analysis enables us to explore how the OIC constructs and communicates its normative commitments in official texts. Rather than relying on statistical generalizations, this method emphasizes an interpretive reading of language, rhetoric, and meaning to show how international organizations such as the OIC engage with issues of gender, human rights, and religious authority.

The data include six official OIC documents published between August 2021 and December 2024. These are final communiqués of the Council of Foreign Ministers, summit declarations, public statements, and reports of the OIC Special Envoy to Afghanistan. They were compared with reports by Human Rights Watch (2022a), Amnesty International (2023), and UN Women (2022), and with academic studies on Islamic diplomacy and norms. The full list of sources is given in Appendix A.

The analysis was done in five steps. First, through close interpretive reading, each primary document was examined line by line to assess how the OIC addresses the issues of women's rights, domestic violence, and the broader human rights landscape. Second, a thematic analysis was

conducted to identify recurring terms and ideas such as “rights of women and children,” “gender-based violence,” “Islamic principles,” “ummah solidarity,” and “humanitarian assistance.” Third, going beyond what was present to what was missing, special attention was paid to omissions—such as the absence of explicit references to specific abuses (e.g., the prohibition of girls’ education) and the lack of legal, financial, or institutional enforcement mechanisms. Fourth, OIC texts were compared with ground-level reports from UN Women (2022), Human Rights Watch (2022a), and Amnesty International (2023) to highlight the gap between rhetorical commitments and actual implementation. Finally, drawing on constructivist theory, the analysis explores how the OIC’s institutional identity and normative decisions reflect broader patterns of religious diplomacy, norm contestation, and selective norm promotion. This approach helps clarify how the OIC navigates the interplay between religious identity, political diplomacy, and human rights within a context shaped by religious authoritarianism.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents an integrated empirical analysis and discussion of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation’s (OIC) engagement with women’s rights and domestic violence in Afghanistan following the Taliban’s return to power. Using a constructivist lens, the discussion interprets qualitative findings from OIC documents between August 2021 and December 2024, cross-referenced with field-based reports from Human Rights Watch (2022a), UN Women (2022), and Amnesty International (2023).

4.1 Framing of Human Rights and Women’s Rights

4.1.1 Islamabad Council (December 2021)

On December 19, 2021, the OIC held a meeting of foreign ministers in Islamabad that was characterized as an emergency meeting. The final communiqué discussed the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan and expressed the need for member states to provide aid to Afghanistan consistent with Islamic principles, such as zakat, and the values held by the Muslim ummah (OIC, 2021, paras. 2-3). The final communiqué referred to “the rights of women and girls in accordance with Islamic Sharia” (para. 6) but failed to explain what this meant in relation to rights to education, employment, and freedom of movement.

In contrast, UN Women (2022) reported that the Taliban had banned girls from attending secondary school, impacting over one million students, as of September 2021. The OIC trust in the Taliban to honor their references to women and girls' rights in their final communiqué reflects a normative ambivalence that leaves an excessive degree of interpretive authority to non-state actors like the Taliban.

4.1.2 Islamabad Council of Foreign Ministers (March 2022)

This session, the 48th Session of the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers held in Islamabad in March 2022, was the first time that the OIC had made a reference to "gender-based violence" in a document. While this was good to see, the reference was also remembered as part of "Islamic principles" without detailed measures or plans for enforcing actions (OIC, 2022b, para. 5). It should also be noted, according to Amnesty International (2023), that child marriage increased 200% in Helmand and Kandahar and intimate partner violence increased 75% in Herat, all in 2022.

While the rhetoric on gender-based violence was stronger than previous iterations, the OIC did not identify actions that could be taken on an organisational level such as reinstating the Ministry of Women's Affairs or reviving the (Afghan) Independent Human Rights Commission. This indicates a tendency by OIC to issue documents with symbolic commitment, but without any means to implement them.

4.2 Treatment of Domestic Violence

4.2.1 Jeddah Council (December 2023)

The Jeddah communiqué referenced "escalating domestic violence" and urged the restoration of the Ministry of Women's Affairs (OIC, 2023b, paras. 3-4). This was the first direct mention of domestic violence. Nevertheless, it fell short of specific implementation mechanisms— which would address aspects such as funding shelters, providing legal aid, or entering into partnership with NGOs.

Human Rights Watch (2022a) suggested a range of specific next steps: opening funds for shelters, establishing a national hotline, and appropriate trainings for law enforcement. Without

detailed planning, OIC's rhetorical pleas fragment engagement from actual implementation that is of real consequence given their strategic dogma in relation to Taliban ideology.

4.2.2 Special Envoy Reports (2022 and 2024)

The biannual reports acknowledged that none of the \$5 million in humanitarian funds were allocated to women's shelters, legal protection, or anti-trafficking programs (OIC, 2024, p. 8). UN Women (2022) contrasts this with its \$3 million fund to support 15 safe spaces, which the Taliban closed in February 2022.

While the envoy's informal meetings with Taliban representatives did not yield any new policies, by May 2022, women were prohibited from university campuses (Human Rights Watch, 2022a, p. 5) and the envoy did not provide any rationale or intentions to change this situation. This reflects a disjointed and unproductive process of diplomacy.

4.3 The Unfulfilled Possibility of Religious Norm Entrepreneurship

While the OIC usually claims to be a protector of Islamic moral authority, it has not acted as a true "norm entrepreneur" in the case of Afghanistan. According to constructivist theory, norm entrepreneurs not only need ideational legitimacy but also must frame their advocacy and promote counter-narratives. The lack of sustained religious counter-narratives, such as fatwas on the protection of women's rights in Islamic jurisprudence, demonstrate that the OIC failed to contribute to public discourse or reclaim interpretive authority. In this regard, the OIC's inaction contrasts with other Muslim religious actors who have issued progressive rulings on gender justice, demonstrating that such interventions are both possible and powerful. The lack of OIC's initiative reflects a broader pattern of rhetorical commitment without epistemic engagement, undermining its credibility among both international observers and Muslim publics.

4.4 The Use of Islamic Normative Claims

4.4.1 The Use of Unconvincing Repetition

The OIC cites "in accordance with Islamic Sharia" and "Islamic principles" in all of the documents, despite not specifying Quranic verses or Hadiths that support women's rights. The Cairo Declaration (1990) is explicit about gender equality under the law (Article 5) but was never

cited in any communiqués after 2021. Herein lies the issue identified by Kayaoglu (2015), which is to rhetorically depend on Islamic norms without any endorsement of actionable intentions, legitimizing the Taliban's conservative interpretation over all else.

4.5 The Taliban Regime

4.5.1 Relatively Nonbinding Statements

The communiqués from the OIC used vague descriptions in an attempt to not offend the Taliban regime such as urging or calling upon them, however the use of specific demands or timelines are lacking. The Taliban had not yet reinstated the Ministry of Women's Affairs as of 2025 (Amnesty International, 2025, p. 3). In contrast, the OIC suspended Syria's membership in 2012 and condemned Myanmar in 2017. The lack of parallel firmness in Afghanistan reflects the OIC's caution when Islamic legitimacy is invoked.

4.5.2 Absence of Conditionality

Despite disbursing \$15 million in humanitarian aid by December 2024 (OIC, 2024, p. 6), the OIC attached no human rights conditions to its funding. UN Women (2022) did so by allocating \$10 million for women's protection services. Mohseni and Akbarzadeh (2022) argue that aid without conditions sustains oppressive regimes. The OIC's approach shows the cost of separating humanitarian relief from human rights obligations.

4.6 Limitations of the Study

Although this research aimed to offer a thorough analysis of how the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) has responded to the women's rights crisis and domestic violence in Afghanistan after the Taliban's return, there are several limitations worth noting.

First and perhaps most significantly, the study relies heavily on document analysis rather than direct fieldwork. Due to the challenging security situation in Afghanistan and restrictions imposed by the Taliban, it was simply not feasible to conduct interviews with activists, OIC officials, or women directly affected by these policies. This absence of firsthand voices inevitably limits the depth and personal nuance of the findings. While official documents and secondary reports provide

valuable information, they cannot fully capture the lived experiences and perspectives of Afghan women on the ground.

Second, much of the official communication from the OIC tends to be broad, diplomatic, and sometimes deliberately ambiguous. Phrases like “rights of women and girls in accordance with Islamic Sharia” are used frequently, yet they often lack concrete details or specific action plans. This vagueness makes it difficult to assess whether the OIC’s statements represent genuine commitments or merely diplomatic rhetoric intended to avoid political conflict.

Third, the time frame of the study covers events from August 2021 to December 2024. Given how quickly the situation in Afghanistan continues to evolve, there is always the possibility that new developments could emerge that might shift the analysis or call for updated research. Future studies may need to revisit these issues as conditions change.

Despite these limitations, I believe this research still offers important insights into the complex challenges facing religious international organizations like the OIC, especially in navigating sensitive issues like women’s rights under authoritarian religious regimes. I hope future research can build on this work and help fill some of these gaps.

Comparing the OIC’s cautious response in Afghanistan to its actions in other Muslim-majority contexts such as Nigeria, Sudan, or Myanmar could help determine whether this inaction is exceptional or a systemic feature of Islamic diplomacy. Furthermore, the implications of the OIC’s silence are profound. Afghan women increasingly feel abandoned, raising doubts about whether religious institutions can genuinely serve as defenders of human rights under authoritarian regimes. Future research should also explore how local Islamic scholars and women-led religious networks could challenge extremist interpretations from within the Islamic tradition, offering a powerful alternative narrative for gender justice. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for ensuring that religious organizations can meaningfully contribute to human rights advocacy in volatile political contexts.

CONCLUSION

This study critically explored the Organization of Islamic Cooperation’s (OIC) response to the serious humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan after the Taliban regained control in August 2021, in

particular focusing on domestic violence and women's rights. Using a constructivist framework and a qualitative content analysis of OIC communiqués (December 2021–December 2024), along with relevant reports from Human Rights Watch (2022a), the UN Women (2022), and Amnesty International (2023), we have shown the OIC's normative commitments based in Islamic solidarity and moral responsibility did not lead to any effective protection for Afghan women. Despite repeated references to “the rights of women and children” and occasional mentions of “gender-based violence,” OIC statements remained deliberately vague and nonbinding, lacking specific proposals—legal, institutional, or financial—to counteract the Taliban's restrictive policies.

While this study provides significant insights, it is important to recognize its limitations. The research relied mainly on document analysis due to the security challenges in Afghanistan, which prevented direct interviews with affected women, OIC officials, or local activists. This means the paper cannot fully capture the personal experiences or diverse opinions on the ground. Moreover, given how quickly the situation in Afghanistan evolves, some findings may soon require updates as new developments arise.

Nevertheless, the findings offer a valuable contribution to understanding how religious organizations like the OIC navigate complex issues of human rights and gender justice. Future research could explore more comparative case studies in other Muslim-majority contexts or examine how religious discourse can be more effectively mobilized to challenge authoritarian regimes. Such studies would enrich our understanding of both the potential and the limitations of Islamic diplomacy in addressing crises like the one in Afghanistan.

Our empirical findings reveal that the OIC prioritized humanitarian assistance—food security, healthcare, and emergency shelter—over targeted interventions to combat domestic violence; it failed to condition aid on improvements in women's status or to fund programs for legal aid, women's shelters, or vocational training. Moreover, by not convening a dedicated theological forum to articulate alternative Sharia-based arguments for gender equality, the OIC allowed the Taliban's stringent interpretation of Islamic law to go unchallenged in the broader Muslim discourse. This normative incoherence, as understood through constructivist theory, derives from

the OIC's consensus-driven decision-making culture, which privileges noninterference and political unity over robust human rights advocacy.

To address these shortcomings, the article advances several policy recommendations:

1. Create a Permanent Sharia Council on Gender Justice to issue authoritative interpretations of Islam that support women's rights to education, work, and freedom from violence. Through declared fatwas based on legitimate sources of Islam (see e.g., Quran 4:1, Muwatta Hadith about the importance of knowledge for all), the OIC can disarm the Taliban's extreme interpretations and provide a more progressive framework of type of Islamic gender justice.

2. Include Conditionality in the OIC Humanitarian Trust Fund through specific allocations to women-centred services (e.g. safe houses, legal clinics, and psychosocial support), as long as there is measurable progress on restoring women's institutions (e.g. re-opening girls secondary schools, re-establishing the Ministry of Women's Affairs). Conditionality helps impose the material and moral authority of the OIC to bring policy change.

3. Partner with UN Agencies, International NGOs, and Afghan Civil Society to develop Islamically literate and contextually relevant and operational programs on domestic violence. Collaborating with UN Women, local NGOs, and feminist networks, the OIC can minimize the dissonance between interventions and Islamic principles on the one hand and international human rights principles, on the other.

4. Make Explicit Public Condemnation of Specific Taliban Policies, for example: "the OIC condemns the ban on girls' secondary education as contrary to Quranic commands on learning for all" (Note: quoting Quran 96:1-5). Specific naming and shaming could unstick the Taliban narrative that challenges to their declarations are "un-Islamic."

The Future: Reforming Engagements by OIC

In the future, OIC must keep in mind that symbolic solidarity does not respond to structural violence against Afghan women. Beyond the four recommendations above, the OIC could do with internal reforming - for example, creating an independent human rights organization within its secretariat, developing regular review mechanisms to ascertain engagement with OIC principles

amongst member states, and expanding its collaborative engagements with youth-led Islamic civil society organizations which allow for active interrogation. This will contribute to institutional responsiveness to the growing gap between normative declarations and the realities of lived experience.

This study adds to the constructivist scholarly literature on religious international organizations in demonstrating how institutional identity and normative ambiguity can hinder an organization's ability to act. The OIC has moral and theological authority, but its unwillingness to counter regressive interpretations of Sharia has limited its power. Future research could look at intra-Islamic networks of norm entrepreneurs, provide comparative analyses of OIC reactions to other crises in Muslim-majority states, and undertake field methodologies to measure the real-world impact of OIC programs. The OIC must go beyond symbolic solidarity and engage in explicit norm entrepreneurship to help restore its credibility and continue to facilitate gender justice in Afghanistan and the broader Muslim world.

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APPENDIX A. DATA SOURCES Primary OIC documents (August 2021–December 2024)

This study analyzes six official OIC documents published between August 2021 and December 2024: –Final communiqués from the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers meetings (e.g., Islamabad 2021, Islamabad 2022, Jeddah 2023) –Summit declarations (e.g., Istanbul 2023) –Public statements and press releases concerning Afghanistan –Reports from the OIC Special Envoy to Afghanistan (January–June 2022; January–June 2024) Secondary sources – Reports by Human Rights Watch (2022a), Amnesty International (2023), and UN Women (2022) documenting the situation of women's rights and domestic violence in Taliban-controlled areas. –Academic literature on Islamic diplomacy and norm-building, including works by Aydin (2013), Kayaoglu (2015, 2020), and Finnemore & Sikkink (1998).