



4.8.3. Blood feuds

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In August 2025, AAN expert Sharif Akram described blood feuds or revenge killings as closely connected to notions of honour, pride and shame ‘as seen through tribal customs and centuries-old traditions in Afghan society’. Although blood feuds exist to some extent among all ethnic groups in Afghanistan, they ‘have been historically widespread’ among Pashtun tribes, especially in the south, east and southeast, representing a ‘defining feature’ of Pashtun tribal tradition’. Blood revenge is enshrined in *Pashtunwali* (traditional social, cultural, and quasi-legal code regulating the Pashtun way of life) and is called *badal*.¹⁷¹⁴ Blood feuds sometimes can start with minor incidents or disagreements escalating into long-lasting enmities.¹⁷¹⁵ These feuds do not have a specific time limit to end¹⁷¹⁶ and may last for generations.¹⁷¹⁷ Blood feuds that are not resolved, often gradually involve more family members, while they can expand from family to clan and tribe level.¹⁷¹⁸ They are frequently initiated by disputes linked to honour-related issues, often involving women or girls, the killing of a relative, land disputes,¹⁷¹⁹ inheritance,¹⁷²⁰ water rights, and family conflicts.¹⁷²¹

Akram, based on research carried out in Khost province, suggested that, in the past decades, there had been ‘shifts in cultural norms’ in Afghan society which had led to a noticeable decline in blood feuds. The same source however highlighted that, due to lack of data and documentation information, ‘as well as the complex and deeply personal nature of these conflicts’, estimating this decline is challenging. Moreover, the nature of blood feuds has reportedly changed, with their frequency and length decreasing and becoming more ‘contained’ in terms of persons involved. Increased ‘access to education, exposure to other cultures and values and inter-tribal connectivity’ were identified as some of the main factors of this change.¹⁷²² However, since the Taliban takeover in 2021, blood feud cases had been re-emerging,¹⁷²³ while confidential sources interviewed by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2023 indicated that cases previously processed by the former government were being reconsidered under the de facto authorities.¹⁷²⁴

Blood feuds and retaliation killings are mainly resolved through informal *jirga* resolution, and in some cases through judicial proceedings.¹⁷²⁵ Residents of Khost Province interviewed for the 2025 AAN report noted that, although new blood feuds were rare, many such conflicts remained from previous generations. However, these unresolved feuds had become less violent as tribal elders, youth and *jirgas* were ‘playing a more active role in mediation and conflict resolution’.¹⁷²⁶ In February 2024, the de facto Ministry of Borders and Tribal Affairs (MoBTA), as cited by local media, claimed to have resolved 1 271 disputes with the help of religious scholars and elders across the country since the Taliban takeover in 2021.¹⁷²⁷ In certain cases blood feuds

can be resolved or averted through the practice of ‘blood price’, which refers to a form of compensation paid by a person or a member of a family whose rights have been violated,¹⁷²⁸ or through compensation in form of property or land.¹⁷²⁹ They may also be resolved through the practice of *baad*, which refers to the exchange of girls and women between families or clans.¹⁷³⁰ For instance, the family of the person accused of murder or manslaughter gives a bride to a male member of the victim’s family in order to end the feud.¹⁷³¹ In 2022, AAN expert Ali Mohammad Sabawoon noted that *baad* marriages were relatively rare and had become rarer in recent years.¹⁷³² However, the Austrian Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum in a 2024 report, indicated that forced marriage of girls to settle feuds was ‘still common among Pashtuns’, who ‘believe that this principle can keep families safe and imposes a heavy penalty on the violator’.¹⁷³³ In December 2021, the de facto authorities issued a decree on Women’s Rights,¹⁷³⁴ outlawing some traditional practices, including *baad*,¹⁷³⁵ as un-Islamic.¹⁷³⁶

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