



AFGHAN WITNESS

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Land clearance in Kabul

The impact on marginalised communities

Land clearance in Kabul: The impact on marginalised communities

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1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Between 15 August 2021 and 15 August 2024, since the Taliban assumed control of Afghanistan, the Kabul Municipality has cleared 1,569,483 square metres of land located in 15 out of 22 of the city's Police Districts (PDs).

AW verified and mapped the demolitions, showing that almost half (44 percent (%)) of the destroyed properties were residential, and over a third (34%) were Kabul Informal Settlements (KIS) housing Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and displaced Afghans returning to the country from neighbouring states (returnees). Commercial properties accounted for just 15% of destroyed properties, and farmland accounted for 6% of the cleared areas.

Kabul West accounted for the majority of destruction, with 605,327 square metres of land cleared. Kabul North and East followed with 517,291 and 352,366 square metres of demolished properties, respectively. South Kabul contained the smallest amount of demolished area, with 94,499 square metres of land cleared.

In the Kabul North and East regions, the primary focus appeared to have been clearing KIS, comprising 42% of the cleared land in the North, and 79% in the East. By contrast, clearances of the Kabul South and West regions focused predominantly on the clearance of residential properties, with 81% in the South, and 61% in the West falling under this category.

Ostensibly, the clearances of residential properties are part of a land design and planning framework intended to improve the city's road infrastructure. However, AW notes that, out of the six PDs where over 50,000 square metres of verified residential property clearance was documented, three were located in Hazara communities, and two in Tajik communities, leading to a perception among residents and campaigners - echoed in media - that the clearances are targeted at ethnic minorities in Kabul.

While the Taliban claim to offer compensation in exchange for legal proof of ownership of residential properties, the authorities simultaneously claim that 80% of land ownership deeds in the country are legally invalid, in effect displacing large numbers of residents under the guise of conformity with the law.

The demolitions of KIS, however, were found to be widespread, with demolitions of multiple camps recorded across the North, East and West, leaving thousands of families homeless. The predominant reason Taliban officials give for the demolition of these camps is that the land belongs to the de facto authorities and those living there are "usurpers and opportunists." AW notes that the KIS land clearance was unrelated to road construction projects.

Many of these evictions in KIS were reportedly violent. Residents who attempted to film the demolitions were reportedly beaten, and in one case, a resident claimed that his niece died of exposure due to a lack of shelter following the demolition of their homes, which took place during the heat of summer. Unlike responses to residential property demolitions, the Taliban authorities have made no pretence of offering compensation or alternative accommodation for displaced camp residents.

In July 2023, the Taliban's Land Grabbing Prevention and Restitution Commission reportedly announced that, out of eight million acres of land surveyed in the country, 7.5 million had been "misappropriated." The Commission determined that this land belonged to the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, not private individuals. Reports from September 2022 in Baghlan and, more recently, in August and September 2024 of land clearance projects taking place in Kandahar City and Jowzjan Province, reveal that demolitions are not localised to Kabul. When combined with the commission's figures, this suggests a wider trend that is likely to continue.

Further clearances and displacement will create even greater competition for a dwindling amount of land and housing, exacerbating the already dire humanitarian situation in the country, and putting increased stress and demands on the organisations seeking to support vulnerable and marginalised communities.

2 INTRODUCTION

Within the first three years following Taliban's assumption of power in Kabul, the de facto authorities embarked upon a campaign of land clearance and demolition of properties in the capital. Although this was a continuation of infrastructure improvement projects carried out under the Republican government, there have been claims of a concerted effort to target and displace some of the most vulnerable individuals in the city.

While much needed infrastructure projects are indeed ongoing, accusations of bias against specific groups, diversion of roads to maximise property demolition, and allegations of non-payment of compensation undercut the narrative of a benevolent project of civic improvement.

Alongside ongoing infrastructure development, the Kabul Municipality has also embarked on a large-scale land clearance of informal settlements, which mainly [house](#) internally displaced peoples (IDPs) and displaced Afghans returning from neighbouring countries (returnees). Over the past three [years](#), humanitarian organisations, including the [Norwegian Refugee Council](#) (NRC), have reported that Kabul authorities have been forcefully [evicting](#) thousands of IDPs and [demolishing](#) their shelters. According to [USAID](#), the Taliban have cited the end of the conflict in Afghanistan as the reason for the demolition of the camps and the relocation of their residents.

Afghan Witness (AW) identified and investigated areas of Kabul targeted with clearances during the first three years of Taliban rule from 15 August 2021 until 15 August 2024. While the majority of Police Districts (PDs) were affected by the ongoing works, there was a clear focus on areas populated by religious and ethnic minorities, and vulnerable groups.

This report follows a joint collaboration on the topic with [Lighthouse Reports](#), [Etilaatroz](#) and [Zan Times](#). As part of the collaboration, the three teams conducted interviews with Kabul residents which further shed light on the impacts of the displacement and land clearance.

3 METHODOLOGY

AW collected and analysed publicly available data related to demolitions and forced displacements in Kabul between 15 August 2021 and 15 August 2024. This time frame coincides with the Taliban's first three years as de facto authorities in Afghanistan. While some demolition work began under the former government, the current analysis and mapping focused exclusively on demolitions and displacements that took place within the defined time frame.

3.1 DATA COLLECTION AND MAPPING

Data was collected and analysed in various stages to ensure rigour and accuracy. Initially AW compiled a variety of keyword combinations to identify visual evidence of demolitions and land clearance in the Afghan capital. This data came from digital media channels, including the Kabul Municipality's YouTube page.

Over 50 photos and videos showing demolitions were geolocated. The locations were further verified using satellite imagery to confirm the land as cleared and identify borders of the affected areas for more precise mapping.

Using each identified area as a starting point on [Planet](#), a satellite imagery provider, nearby areas were scanned for any visible land clearance as of 15 August 2024. Newly identified zones were screened to ensure they fit the criteria of the investigation, and then those identified with the requisite characteristics were added to the list of demolitions and clearances.

In order to mitigate against limited reporting and acknowledgement by the Kabul Municipality of demolitions and land clearance in areas housing vulnerable populations, AW manually identified locations of numerous Kabul Informal Settlements (KIS). In 2015, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) published a [map](#) of Kabul, showing the location of all KIS as of 17 February 2015. AW visually verified each location to identify which camps still existed as of 15 August 2021, and assessed whether the land had been cleared within the first three years of Taliban rule. In addition to the KIS identified by OCHA, AW visually identified further locations near established camps and throughout Kabul consistent with having been used for the same purpose. These new areas exhibited similar irregular layouts, makeshift structures, and, according to satellite data, had been developed after February 2015, explaining their absence from the OCHA map.

The figure below showcases the difference between a residential area in Kabul (left), and a KIS, prior to its demolition by the Kabul Municipality, in October 2021 (right).



Figure 1: Comparison between a Kabul residential area (left), and an Informal Settlement (right) using satellite data from October 2021 [34.522659, 69.098131].

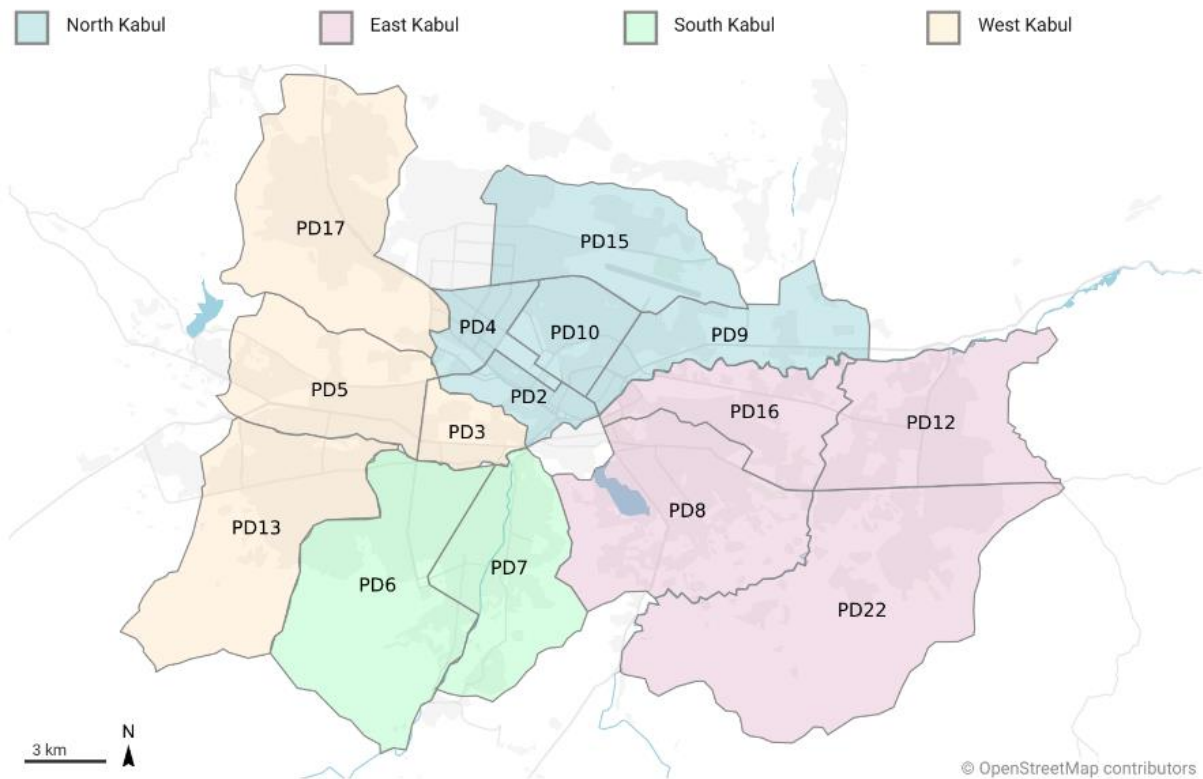
Once AW identified the locations of the demolitions, the extent of land clearance was mapped using the polygon function in Google Earth Pro, which provided the total affected area in square metres.

3.2 CATEGORISATION AND DATA ANALYSIS

Demolitions and land clearance were identified in 15 out of 22 of Kabul's PDs. For the purpose of this investigation, AW divided the capital into four regions based on their geographical position. The figure below shows which of the affected PDs were assigned to which area.

Kabul Regions

Division of Kabul into four regions based on the geographical locations of affected Police Districts



Only the Police Districts with land clearance between 15 August 2021 and 15 August 2024 were highlighted in the map.
Map: Afghan Witness · Created with Datawrapper

Figure 2: Division of Kabul into four regions based on the geographical location of PDs with verified land clearance between 15 August 2021 and 15 August 2024.

In a few cases, certain neighbourhoods were also identified and named where appropriate.

After locations were mapped, they were analysed and divided into five categories, based on the type of area affected: residential, informal settlements, commercial, farmland, and undefined. In cases where categories overlapped slightly, priority was given to the category that AW could visually confirm. For instance, it is possible that demolished commercial properties housed residents living on higher floors of the buildings. In these cases, the area was labelled as commercial, as that was the most visually identifiable use of the land at the time of the demolitions.

Lastly, AW analysed the percentage of each type of area cleared per PD, to determine whether regions with minorities were more likely to have been affected by Kabul Municipality works.

These findings were complemented by interviews with Kabul residents affected by the land clearances, undertaken by Lighthouse Reports, Zan Times and Etilaatroz, as part of a collaborative investigation.

4 DATA ANALYSIS OF LAND CLEARANCE AND DEMOLITION

AW identified a total of 1,569,483 square metres of area cleared by the Kabul administration between 15 August 2021 and 15 August 2024. Almost half (44%) of the destroyed properties were residential, and over a third (34%) were KIS. Commercial properties accounted for just 15%, and farmland accounted for 6% of cleared area.

Type of area in Kabul cleared between 2021 and 2024

Percentage of each type of area cleared by the Kabul administration between 15 August 2021 and 15 August 2024.

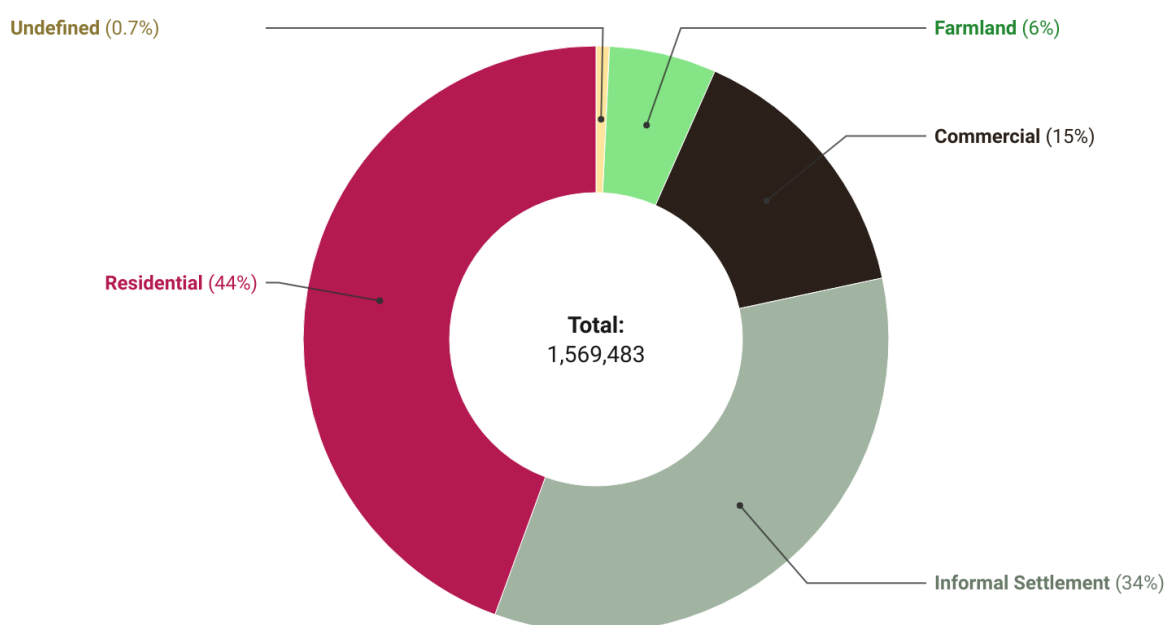


Chart: Afghan Witness • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 3: Percentage of each type of area cleared by the Kabul administration between 15 August 2021 and 15 August 2024.

The type of area cleared across the regions revealed a notable difference in focus between Kabul North, East, South and West. In Kabul North and East, the primary focus appeared to have been clearing KIS, comprising 42% of the cleared land in the North, and 79% in the East. This suggests a concerted effort to address informal settlements in these regions. In contrast, Kabul South and West focused predominantly on the clearance of residential properties, with 81% in the South, and 61% in the West falling under this category.

Type of area cleared in Kabul per region

Percentage of each type of area cleared by the Kabul administration in each region, between 15 August 2021 and 15 August 2024.

Informal Settlement Residential Commercial Farmland Undefined

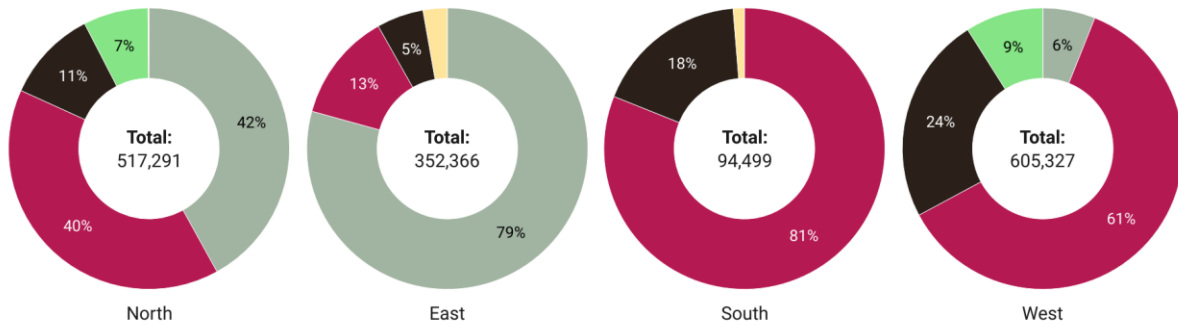


Chart: Afghan Witness - Created with Datawrapper

Figure 4: Percentage of each type of area cleared by the Kabul administration between 15 August 2021 and 15 August 2024, by region.

4.1 THE APPARENT TARGETING OF ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS MINORITIES

The breakdown of land cleared by PDs further shows the distinct focus of each region. In Kabul North and East, there is a clear focus on land clearance containing KIS, particularly within PD 4 and PD 10 in the North, and PD 8 and PD 22 in the East. On the other hand, in Kabul South and West clearances appear to be concentrated in residential areas, particularly in the West where PD 13 shows the largest amount of residential area clearance, and the highest of any PD in Kabul, followed closely by PD 17 and PD 5.

Type of land cleared in Kabul per Police District

Type and amount of land cleared per Police District in Kabul, in square meters, between 15 August 2021 and 15 August 2024.

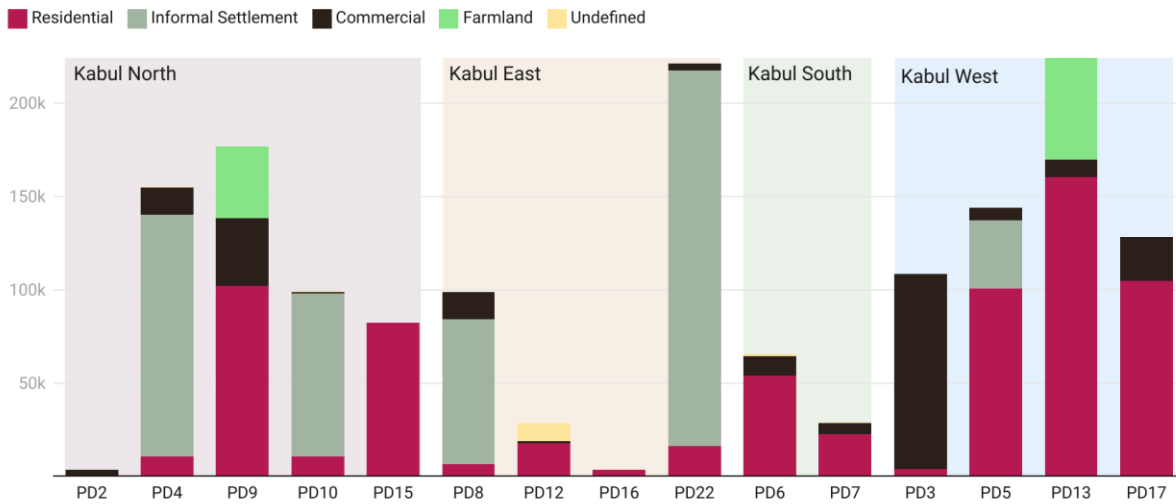


Chart: Afghan Witness • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 5: Type and amount of land cleared in Kabul, in square metres, between 15 August 2021 and 15 August 2024, per PD.

4.2 AREAS AFFECTED AND ETHNICITY MAP

By considering the distribution of ethnic groups in Kabul by concentrated area, AW observed a correlation between the presence of ethnic minorities and an increase of residential properties demolished within the area, compared with areas that were not home to similar higher densities of minority communities.

The [map](#) below, from a 2023 paper examining urban ethnic segmentation in Kabul, illustrates how Kabul is largely divided along ethnic lines into three areas, based on their proximity to their respective ethnic majority provinces: Tajiks in the North, towards Parwan province; Pashtuns in the East/South East, towards Paktika, Khost and Logar provinces; and Hazaras in the West/South West, towards Bamiyan province. Although the data used to map distribution of ethnic groups in the city is dated from 2015, AW assesses that locations of certain populations are unlikely to have significantly changed prior to the data reporting period. Dr Fabrizio Foschini, a political [analyst](#) at the Afghanistan Analysts Network, published a [report](#) in January 2019, containing information on the ethnic distribution of Kabul neighbourhoods, largely aligned with the findings from the map below.

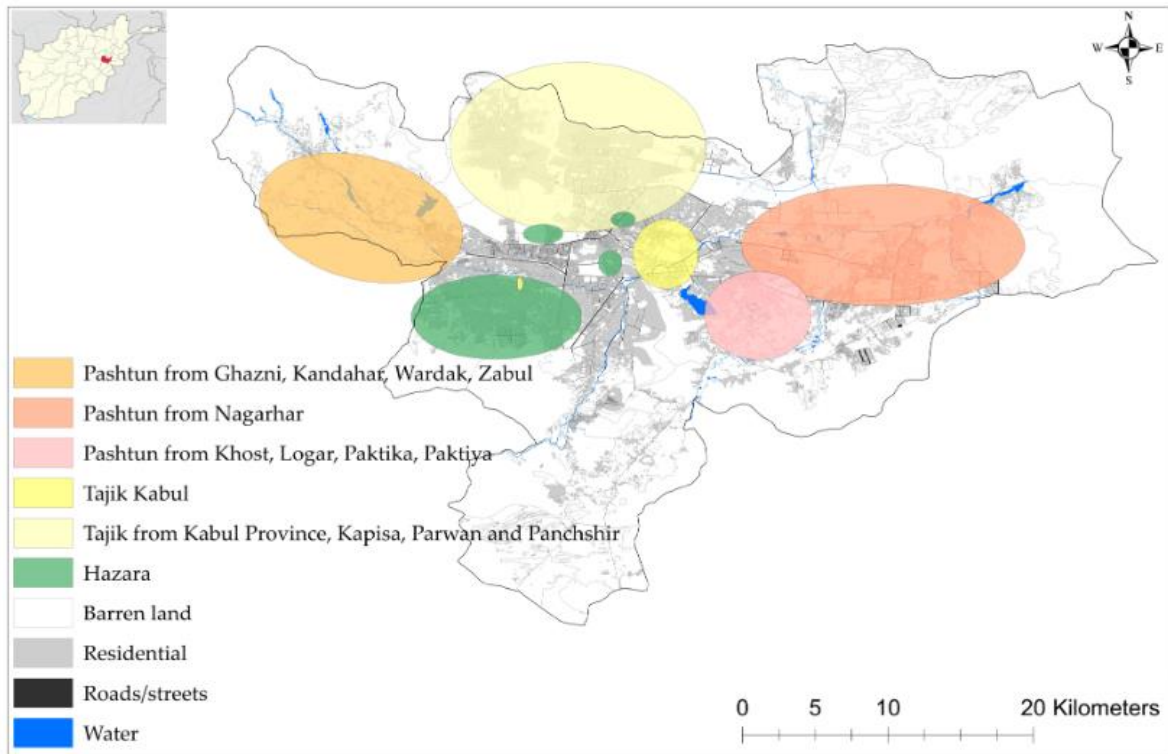


Figure 6: Map of Kabul city ethnic distribution as of 2015. Source: [A Study on Urban Ethnic Segmentation in Kabul City, Afghanistan.](#)

The Tajik ethnic group, seen highlighted above in yellow, in the Northwest and centre of Kabul, is mostly located within PDs 4, 10, 15, and 17. While the majority of the land clearance in PDs 4 and 10 was focused on KIS, PDs 15 and 17 showed some of the highest volume of area demolished containing residential properties. A similar pattern was observed in Hazara majority areas which take up a large section of PDs 6 and 13, and smaller pockets of PDs 3 and 5, seen in green.

Looking at all the PDs with over 50,000 square metres of verified demolition of residential property in Kabul, between August 2021 and August 2024, AW assesses it is possible to observe a clear pattern. The vast majority of large-scale clearance of land containing residential properties was located in communities containing a large Hazara and Tajik population, as seen in the graph below.

Clearance of residential properties with ethnic minorities in Kabul

Ethnic distribution per Police District (PD) with over 50,000 square metres of demolished residential properties in Kabul, between 15 August 2021 and 15 August 2024.

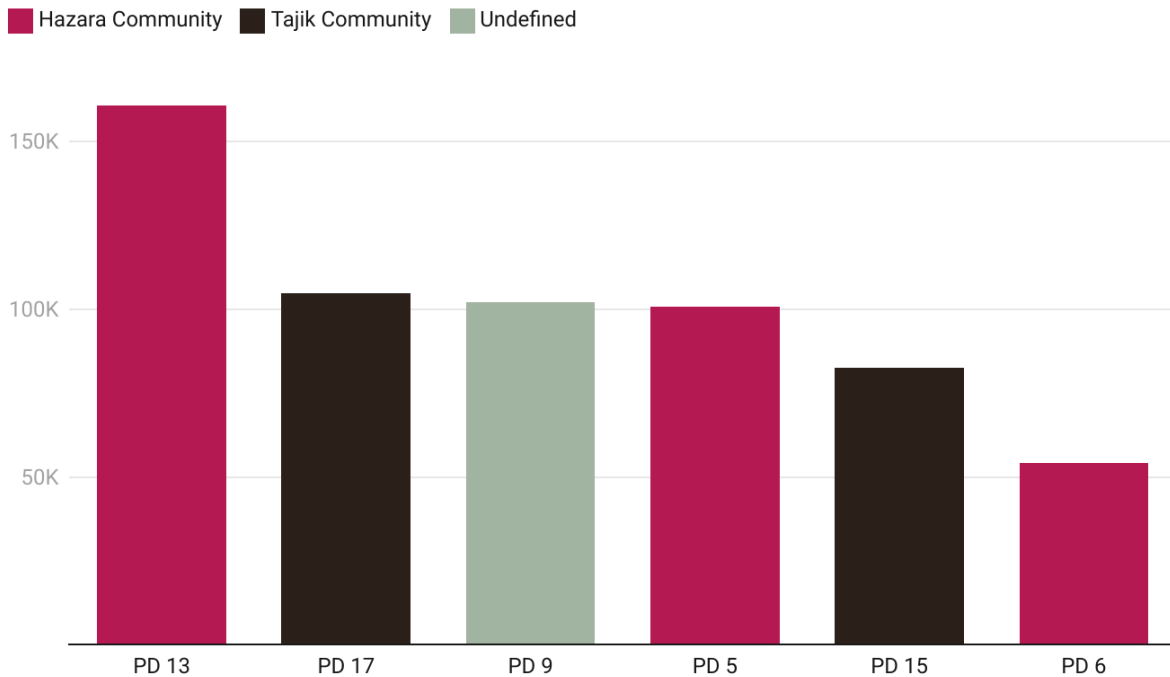


Chart: Afghan Witness · Created with Datawrapper

Figure 7: Ethnic distribution per PD with over 50,000 square metres of demolished residential properties in Kabul, between 15 August 2021 and 15 August 2024.

5 OSTENSIBLE REASONS FOR DEMOLITION OF PROPERTIES

The Kabul Municipality provided two main reasons for the eviction of residents and demolition of their properties. The first, which accounts for the vast majority of land cleared, is that the properties needed to be demolished to make way for infrastructure projects, predominantly the [widening](#) of an existing road, or the [construction of a new](#) one. In March 2024, [ToloNews](#) reported that 165 infrastructure projects were set to be implemented by the municipality in the solar year of 1403¹, following 85 road construction projects that were [reported](#) to have been implemented in 1402². In such cases, standard [announcements](#) by the Kabul Municipality often [state](#) the number of properties to be acquired, and claim that compensation “will be paid to their owners, according to the law.”

¹ The solar year of 1403, from March 2024 to March 2025.

² The solar year of 1402, from March 2023 to March 2024.

The projects are [allegedly](#) part of the ‘Kabul City Master Plan,’ a land design and planning framework that has progressed through [five iterations](#) since 1964, with the most recent being the 2018 [Kabul Urban Design Framework](#). The purpose of the plan, throughout its iterations, has been to design an appropriate infrastructure layout to accommodate the exponential population growth the city has experienced in the last 60 years, including through [road construction projects](#) to alleviate high levels of traffic.

The second reason the Kabul Municipality provided for the eviction of residents, and subsequent demolition of their properties, is that the land is deemed to be illegally occupied, and in fact belongs to the Taliban de facto authorities. In these cases, the [Kabul Municipality](#) refers to the people living on the land as “usurpers and opportunists.” AW notes that this language was also [used](#) by the previous government to refer to the residents residing in certain settlements marked for the construction of roads. While road construction is the primary reason for the demolition of formal residential settlements in Kabul, alleged land usurpation appears to be the primary reason for the destruction of KIS, several of which were [reportedly occupied](#) by IDPs. While ‘usurpation’ is the justification provided by Taliban authorities regarding specific evictions, AW notes that in July 2022, according to [USAID](#), the de facto authorities claimed that the justification for the widespread evictions in Kabul was the end of the conflict in Afghanistan, suggesting that people who had been internally displaced could now return to their provinces and cities of origin.

To deal with allegations of land usurpation, in October 2022, Hibatullah Akhunzada, the Taliban’s Supreme Leader, [established](#) The Land Grabbing Prevention and Restitution Commission (LGPRC). Illustrating the scale of the issue in a country where the vast majority of the land is [reportedly](#) untitled and unregistered,³ the Taliban’s Minister for Housing and Urban Development [announced](#) on 18 April 2023 that 80% of land deeds in Afghanistan were legally invalid. On this basis, AW assesses that allegations of land usurpation are likely to continue.

It is worth noting that the clearance of KIS did not appear to have a significant impact on the widening of existing roads or the construction of new roads in the capital. Although some of the camps were near roads, their destruction did not appear to be part of a larger project and rather centred on the Taliban’s decision to evict “usurpers and opportunists” and destroy their settlements in Kabul.

³ According to a 2015 [Special Report](#) by the United States Institute of Peace (USIP), no more than 20% of land in Afghanistan is accurately titled.

6 ALLEGATIONS OF NON-PAYMENT OF COMPENSATION TO DISPLACED RESIDENTS

To some extent, the previous Afghan administration respected a process of compulsory land acquisition that involved assessing the value of property slated to be demolished, payment of appropriate compensation to land owners, and the granting of time to enable would-be displaced individuals to secure alternative living arrangements prior to the start of demolition. For example, in 2018 the [Kabul Municipality](#) reported that several projects were delayed due to residents' refusal to relinquish their homes for demolition. Similarly, in May 2016, [Etilaatroz](#) reported that the Shaheed Mazari-Company Road Link Road Project was being held up by residents along the proposed route who refused to sell their properties to Kabul Municipality. AW assesses that the fact that the government allowed these objections to delay road construction projects shows some degree of respect for the rule of law.

Several [reports](#) by [Tolo News](#) and [Afghanistan International](#) indicate that since the Taliban returned to power, such adherence to due process has no longer been the case in Kabul. For example, on 9 June 2024 the [Kabul Municipality](#) announced the beginning of demolition of properties in Dasht-e-Barchi, a Hazara community area in PD 13, stating that "compensation will be paid" to displaced residents. Yet on 27 June 2024, [Tolo News](#) published an interview with several local residents, who claimed that no such compensation was forthcoming, despite the fact that verified [footage](#) showed demolition as beginning on 9 June 2024. In the interview, Noor Mohammad Sarwari, Head of the PD 13 District Council, said:

"People were not given enough time and no compensation was paid. The law states that first, people's houses should be compensated, the costs should be paid, and then they can start the demolition. The compensation form has not yet arrived, and when I went to the District Office, they said they have not yet signed the compensation form."

However, in the same report, Nematullah Barakzai, a representative of Kabul Municipality, claimed:

"The compensation work has started, and according to the law, in the first step, they will receive the payment for their buildings, and after confirming the ownership, they will receive compensation for their buildings."

AW notes that the inherent difficulty appears to be the need to provide proof of ownership to obtain compensation. As mentioned previously, in 2023 the Taliban's Minister for Housing and Urban Development [claimed](#) that 80% of land ownership deeds were legally invalid. Moreover, estimates from the World Bank, as cited in a [2017 USIP report](#), suggest that as of 2004, informal settlements (in the USIP report described as housing on land deemed not legally owned by those residing on it) covered 70% of Kabul and accounted for 80% of the city's population, figures that are presumed to have grown in the two decades following. The USIP report also noted that most of the land developed informally in Kabul was "state land either occupied by squatters or allocated – with varying degrees of legal façade – to land developers and construction companies belonging to powerful individuals with political support." Taken together, it is highly unlikely that many Kabul residents whose properties are slated for demolition, whether residing in KIS or more formal settlements, have legally valid proof of ownership, and will receive compensation.

This issue is particularly acute in the Hazara-majority PD 13, where according to a 2011 [survey](#) conducted by the Japan International Cooperation Agency as part of its preparations for drafting the Kabul City Master Plan, constructions of most residential areas in the district were unplanned, and therefore likely lacking legal ownership documentation. PD 13 was the Kabul police district that experienced the highest volume of residential land clearance by the Taliban administration between August 2021 and August 2024: AW verified and mapped 160,549 square metres of demolished houses in the PD.

In other cases, Taliban authorities appear to employ various excuses to avoid paying compensation, even when directly approached by claimants. A former resident of a [KIS](#) in PD 4 interviewed by Lighthouse Reports claimed that Taliban had initially promised they could cover the cost of a car rental, so their family could return to their original province of Kunduz, but no assistance ever materialised. Given Taliban laws restricting women's movements and public presence, it is likely that female heads of households face even greater restrictions in obtaining compensation. In an interview by ZAN Times, a Tajik female resident of [PD 15](#), whose house was demolished in 2024, claims to have visited the Municipal Office seeking compensation, but was denied entry without a male guardian. She further claimed that when she and other residents returned with their husbands, they were still denied entry and only ceased going to the Municipal Office when they no longer had the funds to make the journey.

7 ACCUSATIONS OF BIAS AND VIOLENCE

According to a December 2022 [report](#) by Etilaatroz, quoting a source who worked “in important government positions in the past”, the ethnic identity of residents has always been a factor in the implementation of construction and development programmes. The source said:

“The fact is that in constructions and development, the issue of ethnic identity of the beneficiaries of development programs has always been raised. Therefore, we see that the central and even western areas of the capital did not develop due to the ethnic affiliation of the majority of its residents.”

According to the source, this bias against the Hazara population of West Kabul has continued under the Taliban administration. The [article](#) also quoted a resident of PD 13, who claimed that the Taliban destroyed the houses of residents already struggling with food poverty, during the cold season, and only provided two days’ eviction notice.

In July 2024, [8AM media](#) interviewed a resident of Dasht-e-Barchi, in PD 13, who claimed that the route of the road project in the area was intentionally diverted to increase the amount of houses that would need to be demolished. Another resident, interviewed by [Ariana Television](#) in June 2024 also said:

“One can see that an unused warehouse on the other side has been left untouched while the road has been unnecessarily redirected to the area with residential houses.”

In December 2022, a resident of the Sherpur neighbourhood in PD 10, a Tajik community area, also [claimed](#) that the road project in that area was redirected, in this case to deliberately destroy the houses of Panjshiris (members of a minority ethnic group related to Tajiks), while sparing the houses of Pashtuns. [Etilaatroz](#) interviewed a resident who made the same claim, adding that the Taliban had said that their houses were “resistance houses” that should be destroyed.

8 REPORTED TREATMENT OF KIS OCCUPANTS

Unlike when displacing residents from more formalised areas for road projects, AW has not observed the Taliban providing or proposing to provide compensation or alternative housing for those living in KIS.

In the case of a camp in PD 22, East Kabul, [demolished by the Kabul Municipality](#) in July 2023, [Salam Watadar](#), [Tolo News](#), and the [NRC](#) reported that demolition began while occupants were still inside their properties, resulting in the alleged death of two children aged four and 15. Tolo News quoted a resident saying: “I was having breakfast when they knocked down our house. And a child of our relative was killed at the same moment.” Lighthouse Reports interviewed one of the evicted occupants, anonymous for security purposes, who claimed that his niece died of exposure due to a lack of shelter following the demolition of their homes, which took place during the heat of summer. He reported that, although some NGO personnel arrived to help them with the situation, they were denied entry by Taliban members.

On 2 June 2024, the NRC [reported](#) that Taliban de-facto authorities began the demolition of several KIS, rendering more than 800 families homeless. AW geolocated photos of the 2 June demolition, shared by the organisation, as well as footage [posted](#) online from 24 June 2024 showing the demolition of the Nasaji camp in PD 8. According to [Tolo News](#), no alternative land was provided for residents of the camp. The NRC noted that this was the third such mass demolition of KIS since 2022, with previous demolitions reported in [June](#) 2022 and [July](#) 2023.

[Reports](#) from 2024 [indicate](#) that once IDP settlements have been destroyed, the IDPs are returned to their original provinces. Abdul Rahman Rashid, the Taliban’s Deputy Minister of Refugees and Repatriation, was quoted by [Tolo News](#) saying: “The Islamic Emirate has decided to voluntarily repatriate them [IDPs] to their original provinces, and their needs and problems will be addressed. We intend to provide them with accommodation.” Accounts from those who were displaced, however, contradict this narrative. As one internally displaced person told [Tolo News](#): “No one can afford a single piece of bread for their night, and no place has been given to us.” Another individual, who was relocated to their original province, [noted](#) that their home province had been destroyed, and that he was left with neither money nor a place to live.

Notably, IDPs in Kabul [interviewed](#) between December 2023 and January 2024 by Researching Internal Displacement (RID), a global platform dedicated to the analysis of internal displacement, expressed a willingness to return to their places

of origin if employment opportunities and safe housing were provided. However, RID observed that no appropriate large-scale employment or housing development projects were underway. Additionally, the IDPs interviewed sought to emphasise that they were not seeking legal claims on the land on which they were currently living, and were willing to relocate as soon as the Taliban could find them a suitable alternative, which AW assesses as undermining the Taliban narrative that those living in KIS are “usurpers.” The IDPs also emphasised that their presence on the land on which they reside deterred land grabbers from claiming the land as their own, and had an expectation that the authorities would reward them with alternative land in Kabul or more economically secure provinces.

In an interview with Lighthouse Reports, a resident of a former KIS in PD 4, which was [demolished](#) in August 2024, claimed that he tried to record videos of the destruction of his property, but was stopped by Taliban members. The unnamed individual added that residents who were trying to document the destruction were beaten. Moreover, a separate source said the Taliban had forced community leaders in the camp, through threat of imprisonment, to sign documents stating they agreed to leave the camp.

9 NORTH KABUL

The land clearance in North Kabul has mainly focused on residential properties and KIS, as seen in the table below. AW verified and mapped 205,953 square metres of demolished residential properties, 217,061 square metres of area previously occupied by KIS, 55,108 square metres of commercial properties, and 38,589 of farmland. Out of the five PDs identified as part of North Kabul, four – PDs 2, 4, 10, and 15 – contained Tajik-majority communities.

Area cleared in North Kabul

Area in square meters cleared by the Taliban administration between 15 August 2021 and 15 August 2024, within the North Kabul region, per Police District (PD), and type of land usage.

Police District	Residential	Informal Settlement	Commercial	Farmland	Undefined
PD 2	0	0	3,362	0	0
PD 4	10,537	129,755	14,466	0	425
PD 9	102,183	0	36,380	38,589	0
PD 10	10,712	87,306	900	0	155
PD 15	82,521	0	0	0	0
Total	205,953	217,061	55,108	38,589	580

Table: Afghan Witness • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 8: Table showing the area in square metres cleared by the Taliban administration between 15 August 2021 and 15 August 2024, within the North Kabul region, per PD, and type of land usage.

The development of new roads and the demolition of KIS settlements accounted for a significant proportion of land cleared in North Kabul, with two of the single largest areas of demolition marked for the construction of new roads through dense residential neighbourhoods in [PD 9](#) and [15](#). According to [announcements](#) by the [Kabul Municipality](#), in September 2023 and March 2024, 901 houses and properties were acquired in preparation for this project. The figure below compares satellite imagery of the area in August 2022 and June 2024 following the clearance of residential properties and farmland for the construction of a new road in PD 9.



Figure 9: Satellite images from Planet showing the before and after demolitions of residential properties and farmland in PD 9 [34.553325, 69.212214]. Image © 2022 & 2024 Planet Labs Inc. All Rights Reserved. Reprinted with permission.

The Municipality also carried out six smaller road projects in the region. AW mapped and [verified footage](#) from three of these projects to [PD 4](#), one in [PD 9](#), and [two](#) in [PD 10](#). A small market was also [demolished](#) in PD 2, which was the only incident recorded

in the PD.

AW also geolocated 217,061 square metres of cleared land containing KIS in North Kabul, located within [PD 4](#) and [PD 10](#), which signified the third and fourth single largest areas of demolition in the North. When referring to the KIS cleared in PD 10, the Deputy Head of PD 10, Qari Abdul Hai Shahidzai, [claimed](#) that the land had been recovered from “usurpers and opportunists,” and added that the area was now “ready for the implementation of the development plan in the future.” No further details were provided regarding plans for this land.

The figure below shows satellite imagery of an informal settlement in PD 10 on two dates: before the land was cleared, in April 2024 (left), and following the [reported](#) forceful displacement of its occupants, in August 2024, after the Kabul Municipality [demolished](#) the structures.



Figure 10: Satellite images from Planet showing the before and after demolitions and land clearance of a KIS in PD 10 [34.562558, 69.187456]. Image © 2024 Planet Labs Inc. All Rights Reserved. Reprinted with permission.

10 EAST KABUL

The vast majority of land clearance in East Kabul was focused on several [informal settlements](#) located within [PD 8](#) and [PD 22](#). While demolished residential properties were identified and mapped in [PD 8](#), [PD 12](#), [PD 16](#), and [PD 22](#), their total cleared area of 44,181 square metres was still very small when compared with the 279,360 square metres of land previously containing KIS. Out of the four PDs identified as part of East Kabul, three (PD 8, 12, and 16) contained Pashtun-dominant communities.

Area cleared in East Kabul

Area in square meters cleared by the Taliban administration between 15 August 2021 and 15 August 2024, within the East Kabul region, per Police District (PD), and type of land usage.

Police District	Residential	Informal Settlement	Commercial	Farmland	Undefined
PD 8	6,477	77,761	14,452	0	0
PD 12	17,809	0	1,088	0	9,792
PD 16	3,602	0	0	0	0
PD 22	16,293	201,599	3,493	0	0
Total	44,181	279,360	19,033	0	9,792

Table: Afghan Witness • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 11: Table showing the area in square metres cleared by the Taliban administration between 15 August 2021 and 15 August 2024, within the East Kabul region, per PD, and type of land usage.

According to various reports published by the Kabul Municipality between October 2023 and August 2024, at least 280 properties were acquired within [PD 8](#), [PD 12](#) and [PD 22](#), with the intent to [clear houses](#) for the [development](#) of five [road construction](#) projects. The Municipality reassured displaced individuals that compensation would be paid, according to the law.

Despite large scale construction plans in East Kabul, the vast majority of land cleared was not part of announced projects. 78% of the area identified and mapped by AW in this region was housing vulnerable populations in various KIS, across PD 8 and PD 22. According to data published by [OCHA](#) in 2015, the Kodakistane Bagrami camp, and the two Nasaji Bagrami camps, all located in PD 8, housed 3,465 individuals. The figure below shows satellite images comparing these camps before (left) and after (right) the land was cleared by Taliban authorities.



Figure 12: Satellite images from Planet showing the before and after demolitions and land clearance of the Kodakistane Bagrami and Nasaji Bagrami camps in PD 8 [34.503577, 69.245080]. Image © 2024 Planet Labs Inc. All Rights Reserved. Reprinted with permission.

A separate KIS, located in PD 8, and [identified](#) by OCHA as “In Front of Hewadwall Blocks,” reportedly housed 1,855 individuals in 2015. Verified footage, uploaded by the Kabul Municipality on 17 April 2022, showed its [demolition](#) taking place. The video contained images of a group of individuals protesting against the works, throwing rocks at the demolition crews, seen in the figure below.



Figure 13: Local population throwing rocks at demolition crew during land clearance of KIS in PD 8 in April 2022 [34.491640, 69.224800].

AW also verified the [demolition](#) of 200,096 square metres of the only KIS located in PD 22. The camp was the same in which, according to a [report](#) by the NRC in July 2023, two children lost their lives during forceful evacuation. The incident was also covered by Afghan news outlets [Salam Watadar](#) and [Tolo News](#). People interviewed by the outlets claimed that the Taliban used violence to remove them from their homes, and added that some people were still inside their dwellings when demolitions started. According to [OCHA](#), as of 2015 this settlement housed 10,549 individuals.

In a [statement](#) published by the Kabul Municipality in July 2023, the administration claimed that efforts were underway to reclaim what they alleged was government land grabbed by “usurpers and opportunists” in the KIS in PD22.

11 SOUTH KABUL

AW identified and mapped land clearance in two PDs in the South Kabul region. The majority of demolitions targeted [residential](#) properties, with a total of 76,587 square metres, and [commercial properties](#), with 16,696 square metres, in PD 6 and PD 7. AW notes that part of PD 6 contains a large Hazara community.

Area cleared in South Kabul

Area in square meters cleared by the Taliban administration between 15 August 2021 and 15 August 2024, within the South Kabul region, per Police District (PD), and type of land usage.

Police District	Residential	Informal Settlement	Commercial	Farmland	Undefined
PD 6	54,109	0	10,424	0	1,006
PD 7	22,478	0	6,272	0	210
Total	76,587	0	16,696	0	1,216

Table: Afghan Witness • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 14: Table showing the area in square metres cleared by the Taliban administration between 15 August 2021 and 15 August 2024, within the South Kabul region, per PD, and type of land usage.

According to statements published in [August](#) and [October 2023](#) by the Kabul Municipality, the demolitions in PD 6 were exclusively part of road construction projects. The Taliban reportedly acquired 74 properties for the land clearance necessary to progress with the works on [Afshar Road](#) and 80 properties for the road project in [Pul-e-Sokhta](#). However, the de facto authorities have not released any [details](#) on the number of properties acquired for the 2024 [Gul Bagh road](#) project.

AW geolocated and verified demolitions of numerous commercial properties in the [Dar-ul-Aman](#) and [Chehelseton](#) areas, located in PD 6 and PD 7, respectively, as seen below. In March 2024, [Tolo News](#) spoke with shopkeepers affected by the demolitions who demanded alternative land from which to conduct their businesses. The following month, in April 2024, [Nematullah Barakzai](#), a representative of the Kabul Municipality, spoke with the outlet and reassured those affected by the demolitions that the Municipality would compensate them for the land and shops. AW has been unable to verify whether such promises have been fulfilled.



Figure 15: Satellite images from Planet showing the before and after demolitions of commercial properties in PD 6 and 7 [34.457928, 69.133544]. Image © 2023 & 2024 Planet Labs Inc. All Rights Reserved. Reprinted with permission.

AW verified and geolocated [footage](#) showing [demolition](#) of [residential](#) properties in both PDs in South Kabul. According to a [statement](#) published by the Kabul Municipality in April 2024, the land clearance was part of a project to develop a road connecting the West and South Kabul. The road construction work goes through the [Sar Aysab / Qala-e-Najara](#) neighbourhoods, an area consisting of dense, modest housing; according to the [Afghanistan Analysts Network](#), this area is known to be impoverished. AW was unable to source a press release by Kabul Municipality providing the number of properties demolished for this project, but given the size of the land cleared, the number is likely to be in the hundreds.

The figure below shows the comparison between the two sides of the road containing residential properties, before and after their complete or partial [demolition](#) by the Kabul Municipality.



Figure 16: Satellite images from Planet showing the before and after demolitions of residential properties in PD 6 and 7 [34.445322, 69.132197]. Image © 2024 Planet Labs Inc. All Rights Reserved. Reprinted with permission.

12 WEST KABUL

The land clearance in West Kabul spans four districts: [PD 3](#), [PD 5](#), [PD 13](#), and [PD 17](#). This region recorded the highest overall amount of cleared land, at 605,327 square metres. The volume of destruction of [residential](#) properties (369,983 square metres), [commercial](#) properties (144,460 square metres), and [farmland](#) (54,321 square metres) surpassed any other region in the capital. Out of the four PDs identified as part of West Kabul, two (PDs 3 and 13) contained Hazara-dominant communities, PD 17 contained a Tajik majority community, and PD 5 was comprised of both Hazara and Tajik communities.

Area cleared in West Kabul

Area in square meters cleared by the Taliban administration between 15 August 2021 and 15 August 2024, within the West Kabul region, per Police District (PD), and type of land usage.

Police District	Residential	Informal Settlement	Commercial	Farmland	Undefined
PD 3	3,797	0	104,649	0	0
PD 5	100,825	36,563	6,850	0	0
PD 13	160,549	0	9,412	54,321	0
PD 17	104,812	0	23,549	0	0
Total	369,983	36,563	144,460	54,321	0

Table: Afghan Witness • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 17: Table showing the area in square metres cleared by the Taliban administration between 15 August 2021 and 15 August 2024, within the West Kabul region, per PD, and type of land usage.

In November 2022, the Kabul Municipality [announced](#) the demolition of houses and land for the construction of a large road project in PD 13. In June 2024, the Municipality's YouTube page [announced](#) the beginning of a second large road construction project in the area, with footage showing the [demolition](#) of numerous properties in PD 13. AW verified and geolocated the land clearance of a total of 224,282 square metres in the district.

Both projects cut through dense residential areas, with the Kabul Municipality [claiming](#) that 587 properties had been acquired for demolition as part of the road project. Residents were reportedly given little time to vacate their houses before demolition, and according to sources cited by [Tolo News](#), were denied compensation for their properties by the Kabul Municipality.

Despite complaints from residents, both [Barakzai](#) and the [Kabul Municipality](#) claimed that compensation would be paid for around 580 properties. However, AW has been unable to verify whether any compensation payments have been made to date.

The figure below shows the satellite image comparison of before and after the clearance of land containing residential properties and farmland in PD 13.



Figure 18: Satellite images from Planet showing the before and after demolitions of residential properties and farmland in PD 13 [34.52041, 69.081194]. Image © 2022 & 2023 Planet Labs Inc. All Rights Reserved. Reprinted with permission.

Road construction was also the basis for all land cleared in PD17, totalling 128,431 square metres. The [majority of the land](#) cleared was residential, with some [commercial properties](#) also [demolished](#). Between April 2023 and April 2024, the Kabul Municipality [announced three projects](#) constructing large roads within PD 17, with reports of 560 properties slated to be demolished.

The figure below shows the comparison between before and after the road works involving the partial or complete [demolition](#) of residential properties in PD 17.



Figure 19: Satellite images from Planet showing the before and after demolitions of residential properties in PD 17 [34.574711, 69.079603]. Image © 2023 & 2024 Planet Labs Inc. All Rights Reserved. Reprinted with permission.

Road development in PD 17 also appeared to show a predisposition by the Kabul Municipality to cut across areas with dense residential properties. The figure below shows how the administration [demolished 90 houses](#) to create a winding road when the possibility of widening the already existing path seemed possible.



Figure 20: Satellite images from Planet showing the before and after land clearance cutting across a dense residential area in PD 17 [34.541458, 69.122808]. Image © 2022 & 2024 Planet Labs Inc. All Rights Reserved. Reprinted with permission.

According to the [Kabul Municipality](#), the objective of the project was to connect two roads. As the below figure shows, the Badam Bagh road (pink) and the Bagh-

e-Bala road (yellow) were already connected a few metres to the east. Given that the eastern connecting road bordered parkland (blue), it is conceivable that road widening could have taken place there, with no demolition of properties necessary to achieve this objective.



Figure 21: Google Earth Pro imaging showing (red) the route of road requiring the demolition of properties [34.541458, 69.122808], and (blue) an alternative eastern connecting road [34.538462, 69.130790], as well as (yellow) the Bagh-e-Bala road [34.533824, 69.127300] and (pink) the Badam Bagh road [34.541237, 69.130929].

By contrast, several verified [demolitions](#) in PD 5 were geolocated to various [KIS](#), totalling 36,563 square metres of [cleared](#) land. While most of them were fully

cleared, the Charahi Qambar camp, the largest informal settlement in Kabul according to [OCHA](#), was only partially demolished. According to the UN organisation’s data, as of 2015 the Charahi Qambar camp housed 12,047 individuals. The camp was also featured in an April 2022 [article](#), published by Undark, a non-profit digital magazine, which noted the dire living conditions of around 1,200 families within the camp.

Despite the Kabul Municipality’s May 2022 [announcement](#) of its [intention](#) to evict “usurpers and opportunists” from the capital, giving occupants of the camp less than a week to vacate, as well as subsequent [announcements](#) regarding the imminent clearance of the area, as of August 2024, the majority of the Charahi Qambar camp remains standing.

The fate of other informal settlements within PD 5 was quite different, with full land clearances during the first three years of Taliban rule. The figure below shows satellite imagery comparison before and after the demolition of an informal settlement covering 22,403 square metres.



Figure 22: Satellite images from Planet showing the before and after demolitions and land clearance of a KIS in PD 5 [34.521787, 69.098236]. Image © 2022 & 2023 Planet Labs Inc. All Rights Reserved. Reprinted with permission.

Between [May](#) and [November](#) 2022 the Kabul Municipality also announced the [demolition](#) of residential properties for the construction of three road [projects](#) in West Kabul. The plan was to connect four separate roads, linking PD 5 with PD 13, and PD 17. Verified satellite imagery of the area showed how the new roads were built across dense [residential](#) areas.



Figure 23: Satellite images from Planet showing the before and after land clearance cutting across a residential area in PD 5 [34.526369, 69.083156]. Image © 2022 & 2023 Planet Labs Inc. All Rights Reserved. Reprinted with permission.

13 THE PAST AND FUTURE OF LAND CLEARANCE

Afghanistan has a long and complex history of land disputes, in both urban and rural areas. In a report published in June 2015, [USIP](#) reported that this history was a “primary driver of conflict in Afghanistan”. Senior members of previous administrations have allegedly been engaged in land usurpation: for example, the 2003 demolition of homes in the Sherpur area of North Kabul’s PD 10. This was [reportedly](#) carried out on the orders of the then Minister of Defence, Marshall Muhammad Fahim, who [allegedly](#) allocated plots to several well connected individuals, including Cabinet Ministers, who reportedly used the land to build mansions. According to a 2023 report by the [Afghan Analysts Network](#), high ranking Taliban members were now the occupants of these mansions.

However, the current pattern and scope of demolitions, as analysed in this report, demonstrates its disproportionate impact on minorities and vulnerable individuals. Out of over 1.5 million square metres of land clearance within the first three years of Taliban rule, 78% of the total demolished area comprised either residential properties or KIS across 15 PDs. AW notes that within the six PDs with the highest volume of residential property clearance, totalling over 50,000 square metres of demolished land, five contained large Hazara and Tajik communities.

AW also identified and mapped a high volume of KIS cleared, amounting to over a third of the total area of land demolished by the Kabul Municipality within the first three years of Taliban rule. Despite promises by the de facto authorities to compensate the population evicted out of residential properties, the Taliban appeared to have made no attempt at either providing financial assistance or alternative housing to IDPs and returnees living in KIS. At a time of worsening economic and humanitarian conditions, this measure will have an unprecedented impact on a large group of vulnerable populations in Kabul as those displaced will no longer have the benefit of access to the well-established support from international aid organisations operating in the settlements. Furthermore, the inability of the international community to exert any significant influence over the de facto authorities’ behaviour means that they are free to continue this program of demolition, often targeting specific groups and ethnic groups, with impunity.

Looking to the future, in July 2024, the Taliban [announced](#) the confiscation of 2,248,336 square metres of land in the Bagh Dawood neighbourhood in PD 14, West Kabul, on the grounds that the owner’s land ownership documents were “fake”. Whether or not the land is eventually cleared, this is a significant residential area, although AW was unable to determine the number of residents who call this area home. As of 15 August 2024, however, the area still remained untouched.

In October 2024, the [Kabul Municipality](#) began demolishing the Sherpur houses as part of another road project, despite the LGPRC having reportedly [stated](#) on 9 February 2023 that they would look into the Sherpur usurpation. In addition, on 17 March 2023 the Taliban’s Supreme Leader [issued](#) a decree reiterating the prohibition of sale or transfer of state land by officials to individuals or corporations, except where explicitly permitted by the leader himself. As of October 2024, no investigation [has been reported](#), meaning the underlying issues remain unaddressed.

The current trend of clearances and displacement is likely to continue, and extend far beyond Kabul and other major cities. In July 2023, the LGPRC [reportedly](#) announced that out of eight million acres of land surveyed in the country, 7.5 million were “misappropriated”. Additionally, reports from September 2022 in [Baghlan](#) and, more recently, in August and September 2024, claim ongoing land clearance projects taking place in [Kandahar](#) City and [Jowzjan](#) Province. Further clearances and displacement will create even greater competition for a dwindling amount of land and housing, exacerbating the already dire humanitarian situation in the country, and putting increased stress and demands on the organisations seeking to support vulnerable and marginalised communities.