FAQs: Protection from Digital Identification Methods by the Taliban

Are you advising people in Afghanistan to delete their digital history?

No. That's an individual choice people must make for themselves. In our experience activists are the best placed to make their own risk assessment, but for those who decide they want to delete their digital footprint, we are providing guidance.

How many people are deleting their digital history?

We don't know. Our guides on how to protect oneself from digital identification - both through deleting digital footprints and evasion of biometric technology - have received thousands of engagements on our web page and social media accounts. We don't know the extent to which they are being shared beyond those platforms.

What biometric data and technology does the Taliban have?

We don't know for certain. But we believe they may have - or may soon have - access to various databases with biometric info as well as handheld technology that can be used to record, process and make positive identifications. There was a large-scale gathering of biometric data of voters across the country prior to the 2019 election. We also understand foreign military forces recorded mass amounts of biometric data which has been left behind. It is not clear how the Taliban is able to access these databases. However, we have no reason to believe these databases have been destroyed.

Are the Taliban using this data to identify people?

They may not have to in many cases, and are likely to use conventional methods of finding out who people are. But to identify those in hiding or who have fled to places where they are unknown, they could use biometric data to identify people.

What is the biometric data the Taliban may have access to?

Facial records, iris scans, and fingerprints are all in the databases in question.

What other data and information can be used to target people in this crisis?

Advertising technology data (including geolocations), any data that was collected by Afghan ministries that are now under the control of the Taliban, etc.

If people in danger want to minimize or delete their digital footprint, what can they do?

We have released two guides, in English, Farsi, Dari, and Pashto, on 1. how to delete digital history and 2. how to evade the use of biometric technologies. The guide on digital history was initially developed in partnership with activists in Hong Kong during 2020 and has been updated.

You can find [our resources on protecting one's online identity from the Taliban](#) here - with translations in English, Dari, and Pashto.