



Global Coalition to **Protect**
Education from Attack

The Impact of Explosive Weapons on Education:

A Case Study of Afghanistan



September 2021

Students in their classroom in Zhari district, Khandahar province, Afghanistan. Many of the school's buildings were destroyed in airstrikes, leaving classrooms exposed. © 2019 Stefanie Glinski

Summary

Between January 2018 and June 2021, the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA) identified **over 200 reported attacks on schools, school students and personnel, and higher education in Afghanistan that involved explosive weapons**. These attacks injured or killed hundreds of students and educators and damaged or destroyed dozens of schools and universities.

In the first six months of 2021, more attacks on schools using explosive weapons were reported than in the first half of any of the previous three years. Explosive weapons were used in an increasing proportion of all attacks on education since 2018, with improvised explosive devices most prevalent among these attacks.

Attacks with explosive weapons also caused school closures, including when non-state armed groups used explosive weapons to target girls' education.

Recommendations

- Access to education should be a priority in Afghanistan, and schools and universities, as well as their students and educators, should be protected from attack.
- State armed forces and non-state armed groups should avoid using explosive weapons with wide-area effects in populated areas, including near schools or universities, and along routes to or from them.
- When possible, concerned parties should make every effort to collect and share disaggregated data on attacks on education involving explosive weapons, so that the impact of these attacks can be better understood, and prevention and response measures can be developed.
- GCPEA's [*Toolkit for Collecting and Analyzing Data on Attacks on Education*](#) offers guidance on how to strengthen data collection on attacks on education, including attacks with explosive weapons.

Introduction

Since 2001, the Government of Afghanistan made considerable progress in expanding and strengthening its education system, all while facing tremendous challenges posed by armed conflict.¹ However, as Taliban forces regained control of the country in recent months culminating in the taking of Kabul in August 2021, Afghanistan's advancements in providing and protecting education, especially for women and girls, are at risk of being overturned.² In the first half of 2021, insecurity forced the closure of over 920 schools, according to the Afghanistan Education in Emergencies Working Group.³ And conflict, along with a range of other socioeconomic factors, kept nearly 3.7 million children out of school, 60 percent of them girls, before the Covid-19 pandemic further impacted enrolments of around 10 million children.⁴

In Afghanistan, threatened and actual attacks on education and the military use of schools, among other barriers, have prevented teachers and students at all levels from working in or attending safe learning spaces. Non-state armed groups, including the Taliban and the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP), have bombed, burned, or threatened schools and universities, and abducted or killed students and personnel.⁵ These armed groups have opposed and systematically targeted women's and girls' education.⁶ Additionally, schools and universities have sustained severe damage during fighting between Afghan armed forces, international forces, and non-state armed groups.⁷ Concerns about safety remained one of the key reasons children, and particularly girls, did not attend school, or dropped out.⁸

GCPEA's *Education under Attack 2020* report classified Afghanistan among the countries most heavily affected by attacks on education between 2015 and 2019, identifying over 600 reported incidents of attack or military use of schools that harmed nearly 1,500 students and educators.⁹ In 2020 and the first half of 2021, GCPEA identified over 130 reported incidents of attacks on education and military use of schools, which injured or killed over 350 students and educators.¹⁰

GCPEA found that attacks on education involving explosive weapons gravely and unequivocally affected education in Afghanistan over the past 3.5 years. Over 200 reported attacks with explosive weapons on schools, school students and personnel, and higher education during this period injured or killed hundreds of students and educators and damaged or destroyed dozens of schools and universities. Such attacks commonly include airstrikes, artillery, mortars, car bombs, roadside bombs, other improvised explosive devices (IED), and explosive remnants of war (ERW). The use of explosive weapons is particularly dangerous for civilians in populated areas, such as near schools and universities, and on routes to and from them. Explosive weapons with wide-area effects produce a large blast, can spread fragments over a wide radius, and, since many cannot be effectively targeted, they risk indiscriminately harming civilians.

This case study uses GCPEA's new [*Toolkit for Collecting and Analyzing Data on Attacks on Education*](#) to explore the effects of explosive weapons on education in Afghanistan, highlighting both shorter- and longer-term impacts. The *Toolkit* provides suggested indicators and data disaggregation methods to analyze different types of weapons or attacks and their impacts on educational facilities and students and personnel.¹¹

The impact of explosive weapons on civilians in Afghanistan

Over the past decade, Afghanistan's conflict has consistently ranked among the world's deadliest. The use of explosive weapons in populated areas by state armed forces, international forces, and non-state armed groups has contributed to the high levels of civilian injury and death, and destruction of civilian objects and infrastructure.

In 2020, the non-governmental organization Action on Armed Violence (AOAV) found that Afghanistan experienced the highest number of reported civilian casualties resulting from the use of explosive weapons globally.¹² Of these casualties, AOAV found that 79 percent were due to the use of IEDs.¹³ Furthermore, vital civilian objects, including schools, were damaged by airstrikes, ground-launched strikes, ERWs, and other explosive weapons.¹⁴

Children have been disproportionately affected. In 2020, children were one-third of all civilian casualties, and more than 80 percent of civilian casualties from explosive remnants of war, according to the United Nations (UN).¹⁵ The number of children killed or maimed in conflict in Afghanistan is the highest in the world, according to recent reports. The UN secretary-general's Annual Report on Children and Armed Conflict found that, in 2020, Afghanistan had the highest number of children killed or maimed as a result of armed conflict: nearly two-thirds of all children killed and one-third of all maimed children globally. These casualties resulted from ground engagement (1,195),¹⁶ non-suicide improvised explosive devices (517), explosive remnants of war (315), and airstrikes (299).¹⁷

In addition to other violence, the use of explosive weapons has produced destructive and deadly impacts on education in Afghanistan that are both direct and wider ranging.¹⁸ Some direct impacts of blasts include damage to education facilities, and civilian casualties.¹⁹ However, explosions can also have indirect and reverberating impacts on education, such as school closures that cause students to miss weeks or months of education, and fear and trauma that prevent students from learning. Even the suspected presence of explosive weapons near a school can inhibit attendance, as revealed in an Afghanistan Protection Cluster survey, which found that 25 percent of children were unable to access schools due to the reported presence of mines or explosives in the first quarter of 2021.²⁰

Methodology

This case study analyzes data from GCPEA's Education under Attack dataset, specifically data on attacks on education in Afghanistan from January 1, 2018, to June 30, 2021. The data include verified incidents and unverified reports from international non-governmental organizations (NGO), local and international media, conflict monitors including the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data project (ACLED), Insecurity Insight, and the UN. GCPEA used both individual incidents and aggregate counts in the data analysis.²¹

Attacks on education are any threatened or actual use of force against students, education personnel, education facilities, or education resources. Attacks on education and military use of schools are intentionally or indiscriminately perpetrated by armed forces, other state security forces, or non-state armed groups for political, military, ideological, sectarian, ethnic, or religious motivations. For a full set of definitions, see GCPEA's [Education under Attack Dataset Codebook](#).

GCPEA included events or aggregate counts that involved the reported or verified use of explosive weapons in analyses while taking care to avoid double counting using standards developed in the abovementioned Codebook.

Explosive weapons “are conventional weapons that detonate explosives to affect an area with blast and fragmentation... including grenades, mortar bombs, artillery shells and aircraft bombs, as well as improvised explosive devices.”²² Under this broad classification, there are numerous subcategories. In line with commonly used classifications,²³ GCPEA employed the following categories in this case study when analyzing data:

- Air-launched strikes, including air-dropped bombs;
- Ground-launched strikes, including artillery, shelling, rockets, mortars, missiles, and grenades;
- Directly emplaced explosives, including improvised explosive devices and mines;
- Explosive remnants of war.

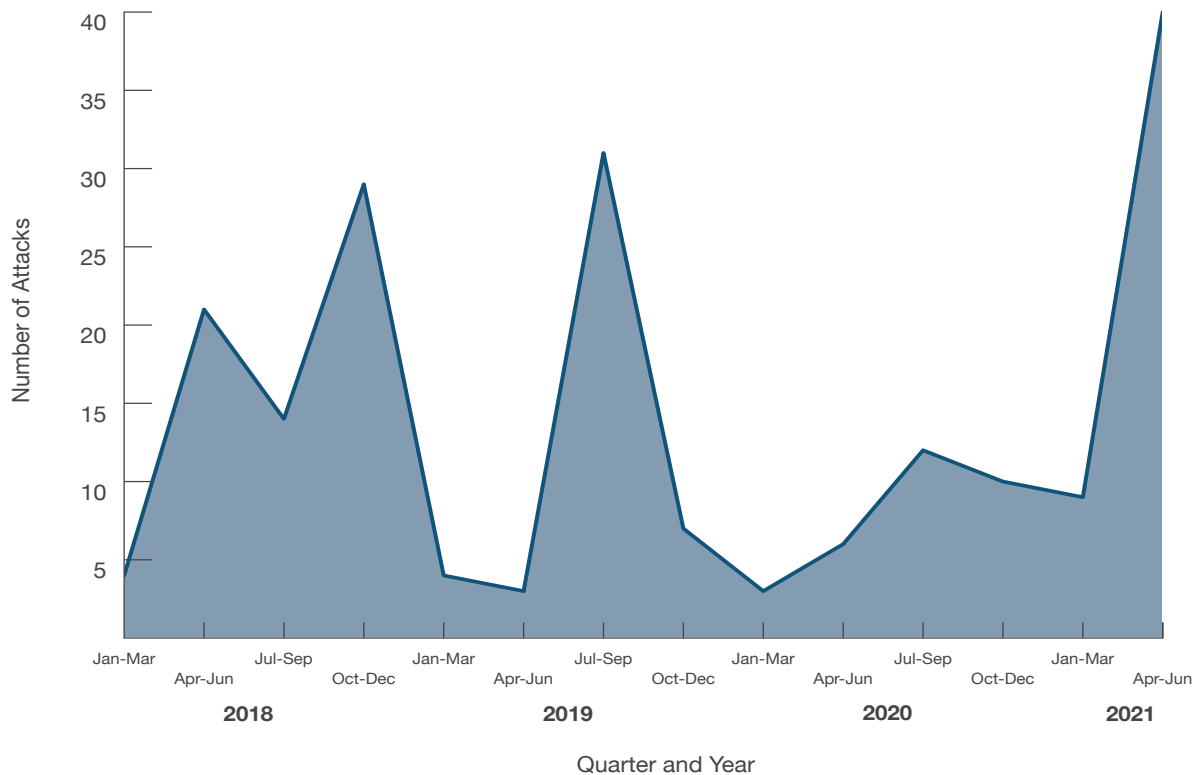
This categorization best suited the objectives of the study: to analyze the impacts of explosive weapons on education in Afghanistan. This categorization also corresponded to the level of detail in the available reporting. Many incident reports of explosive weapon use do not include the level of detail required to determine the exact type of weapon or method of delivery used in the attack. Also, some reports may incorrectly name or categorize types of weapons. Therefore, a limited number of incidents in the below analyses may be miscategorized.

Attacks on schools involving explosive weapons

Afghan armed forces, international military forces, and non-state armed groups used explosive weapons in at least 180 reported attacks on schools in Afghanistan between January 2018 and June 2021. Attacks on schools involving explosive weapons reportedly killed or injured more than 640 students and educators and damaged or destroyed over 70 schools during that period. These attacks ranged from air and ground-launched strikes to IEDs and incidents involving unexploded ordnances (UXO).

Violence impacting children’s access to education in Afghanistan gradually declined in 2019 and 2020.²⁴ This trend holds for attacks on schools involving the use of explosive weapons: after a peak of over 65 reported attacks in 2018, incidents steadily declined in 2019 and 2020 with around 45 and 30 reported attacks, respectively. However, attacks on schools using explosive weapons may be on the rise in 2021 compared with past years. **In the first six months of this year, more attacks on schools with explosive weapons were reported than in the first half of any of the past three years.** (See graph 1).

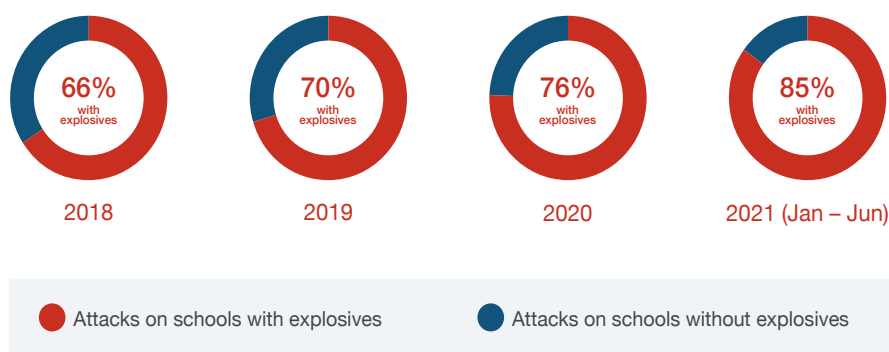
Graph 1: Attacks on schools in Afghanistan using explosive weapons, January 2018 - June 2021



The number of attacks on schools involving the use of explosive weapons in Afghanistan, by quarter, from January 1, 2018, to June 30, 2021.

Although the overall number of attacks on schools declined in 2019 and 2020, before rising again in 2021, **explosive weapons were used in an increasing proportion of all attacks on schools in each year.** About 65 percent of reported attacks on schools in 2018 involved explosive weapons. By 2021, explosive attacks had risen to 85 percent, as compared with other types of attacks on schools such as arson, looting, raids, threats, and armed assault.²⁵ (See graph 2). **Attacks on schools involving explosive weapons also reportedly killed or injured more students, teachers, and staff and damaged or destroyed more school buildings, when compared with non-explosive attacks.**

**Graph 2: Attacks on schools in Afghanistan:
Attacks with explosive weapons compared to attacks without,
January 2018 – June 2021**

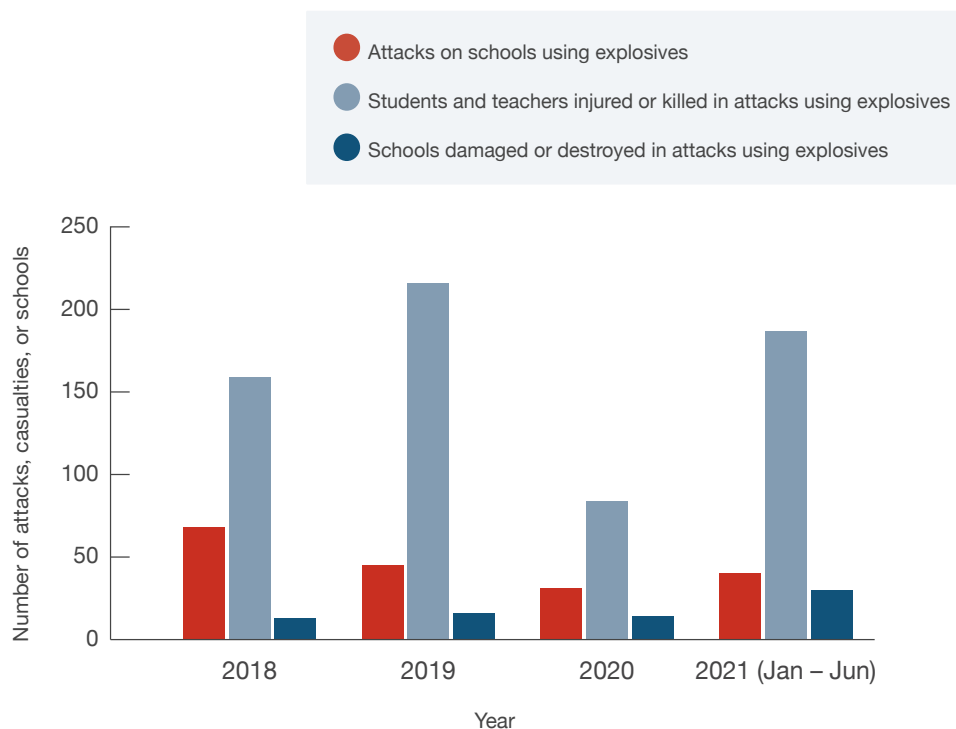


The proportion of attacks on schools in Afghanistan involving explosive weapons compared to the proportion of other attack types between January 1, 2018, and June 30, 2021. The reported total number of attacks (both explosive and non-explosive) was approximately 100 in 2018; approximately 60 in 2019; approximately 40 in 2020; and approximately 45 in the first half of 2021.

Attacks on schools involving explosive weapons injured and killed many dozens of students, teachers, and staff each year and damaged or destroyed several dozen schools between January 2018 and June 2021. For instance, in 2019, attacks on schools with explosives resulted in the reported injury and killing of at least 200 students and staff. In the first half of 2021, attacks on schools involving explosive weapons killed or injured at least 185 staff and students, nearly all of them girls. In addition, explosive weapons have reportedly damaged more than 70 schools over the past 3.5 years. About 30 incidents of reported damage occurred in 2021 alone. (See graph 3).

Among the types of explosive weapon attacks GCPEA tracked, directly emplaced devices (generally IEDs) were most commonly used in attacks on schools and killed or injured the most students and educators. Between January 2018 and June 2021, IEDs were reportedly deployed in more than 100 attacks on schools, injuring or killing approximately 550 students, teachers, and education staff and damaging or destroying about 20 schools. This follows a global trend in the use of IEDs in school attacks. AOAV found that IEDs were used in the majority of explosive weapon attacks on schools globally in recent years and posited that, due to the intentional placement of such devices at or near schools, such attacks were targeted.²⁶

Graph 3: Attacks on schools in Afghanistan using explosive weapons, January 2018 – June 2021



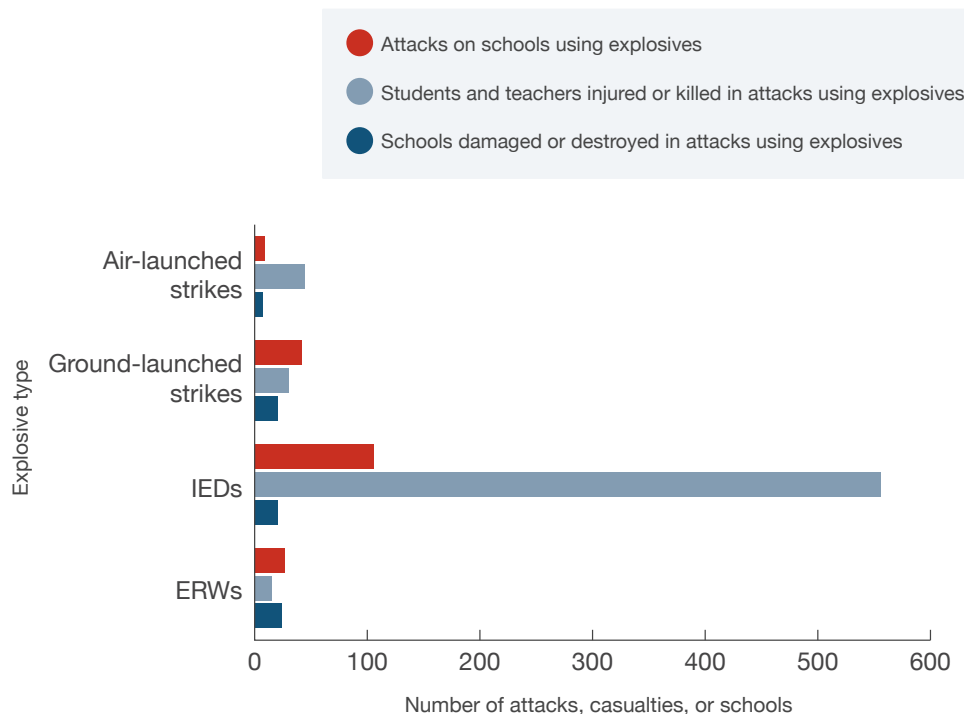
The number of reported attacks on schools using explosives in Afghanistan between January 1, 2018, and June 30, 2021, as well as the number of students and educators injured or killed and the number of schools damaged or destroyed in those attacks.

In contrast, fewer ground-launched strikes occurred (about 40) in Afghanistan during the same period, but they reportedly damaged or destroyed about the same number of schools (approximately 20), as compared to IED attacks. However, ground-launched explosive weapon strikes reportedly caused significantly fewer casualties, killing or injuring about 30 students, teachers, and education staff in attacks on schools in the past 3.5 years.

Furthermore, GCPEA identified relatively few air-launched strikes on schools (about 9), but these were comparatively deadly and destructive. Airstrikes on schools over the past 3.5 years reportedly injured or killed approximately 45 students and educators and damaged or destroyed about seven schools. Finally, about 25 attacks on schools involved ERWs, reportedly injuring or killing approximately 15 students or educators. (See graph 4).

Ground-launched strikes—such as artillery, shelling, rockets, mortars, and grenades—targeting or exploding near schools, as well as their remnants exploding later, appeared to affect education more frequently in recent months and years. On the other hand, the number of IEDs placed in or near schools—including car bombs—appear to have declined in frequency over the past 3.5 years.

Graph 4: Attacks on schools in Afghanistan by explosive type, January 2018 - June 2021



Number of attacks on schools in Afghanistan between January 1, 2018, and June 30, 2021, categorized by explosive type, as well as the number of students and educators injured or killed and the number of schools damaged or destroyed in those attacks.

Attacks on female students and teachers

Non-state armed groups used explosive weapons to target girls’ schools and education in Afghanistan at least twice a year in the past 3.5 years, reportedly killing or injuring at least 160 female students and education personnel and damaging or destroying at least five girls’ schools.

Of these incidents, the most devastating attack occurred on May 8, 2021, when an unidentified armed group detonated a carful of explosives and two other bombs outside Sayed Shuhada High School, a girls’ school near Kabul. At least 85 civilians were killed and over 240 were wounded, the majority of whom were reported to be schoolgirls ages 11 to 18.²⁷ The attack also damaged the school building and its supplies. In addition to affecting girls, the attack reportedly targeted the ethnic Hazara community.²⁸ The school remained closed for several days following the attack.²⁹

Military use of schools and attacks involving explosive weapons

GCPEA also recorded several incidents of schools being used for military purposes that were later attacked using explosive weapons over the past 3.5 years.³⁰ GCPEA does not count these as attacks on schools, but rather as the military use of schools, since their military use can compromise their protection as civilian objects under international humanitarian law. However, such incidents highlight the increased vulnerability of schools to further damage and destruction when armed forces or groups use them for military purposes.

For instance, on February 16, 2021, a non-state armed group used a school as a fighting position from which to attack a convoy of Afghan security forces in Balkh province, according to media outlets. Afghan security forces launched an airstrike in response, reportedly destroying the school. No casualties were reported.³¹

Attacks on school students and staff

School students and personnel in Afghanistan were also directly affected by attacks using explosive weapons between January 2018 and June 2021.

The use of explosive weapons in populated areas can occur along school routes, threatening the safety of students and educators on their way to or from school. For example, on November 2, 2019, a roadside bomb placed by the Taliban detonated, killing nine children who were on their way to school, and injuring one other, in Tahiraha village, Darqad district, Takhar province, as reported by media sources.³²

In other cases, non-state armed groups targeted education personnel. In one instance, *The New York Times* and local media reported that on August 19, 2020, an IED planted on a Ministry of Education vehicle exploded in Kabul, killing the head of the Scientific Council of the Ministry of Education and injuring another personnel member.³³

Attacks on school students and personnel were most likely underreported over the past 3.5 years. In addition, reporting sometimes omitted sufficient details to link violent incidents to education, such as whether children were on the way to or from school at the time of an attack or whether a person was targeted due to their status as an educator.

Higher Education

In addition to attacks on schools, higher education in Afghanistan also endured attacks involving explosive weapons over the last 3.5 years. Between January 2018 and June 2021, GCPEA identified approximately 18 reported attacks using explosives, affecting both university students and staff and higher education buildings and facilities.³⁴ Of the reported incidents,

roadside and car bomb attacks occurred most frequently, although GCPEA also identified reports of airstrikes and rockets affecting higher education. For instance, an explosive device attached to a motorcycle detonated outside the gates of Paktia University in March 2020, according to Scholars at Risk and *The New York Times*.³⁵ And in May 2021, an explosive device attached to a minibus carrying students and staff of Al-Beroni University exploded in Parwan province, killing at least three university staff and injuring several students, as reported by Scholars at Risk and media outlets.³⁶

In an attack that grabbed headlines, gunmen stormed Kabul University on November 2, 2020, where they detonated explosives, engaged in a gunfight with state security forces, and held dozens of students and staff hostage in classrooms. The attack, later claimed by the Islamic State, lasted over five hours; about 22 students (10 women³⁷) were killed and over 20 wounded (including many women).³⁸ The attack damaged classrooms and educational materials in the university³⁹ and affected the learning of more than 21,000 students (over 7,000 women), based on 2018 numbers.⁴⁰ Several students reported psychological distress from the attack and did not resume classes.⁴¹ (See diagram).

The impacts of the November 2020 explosive attack on Kabul University

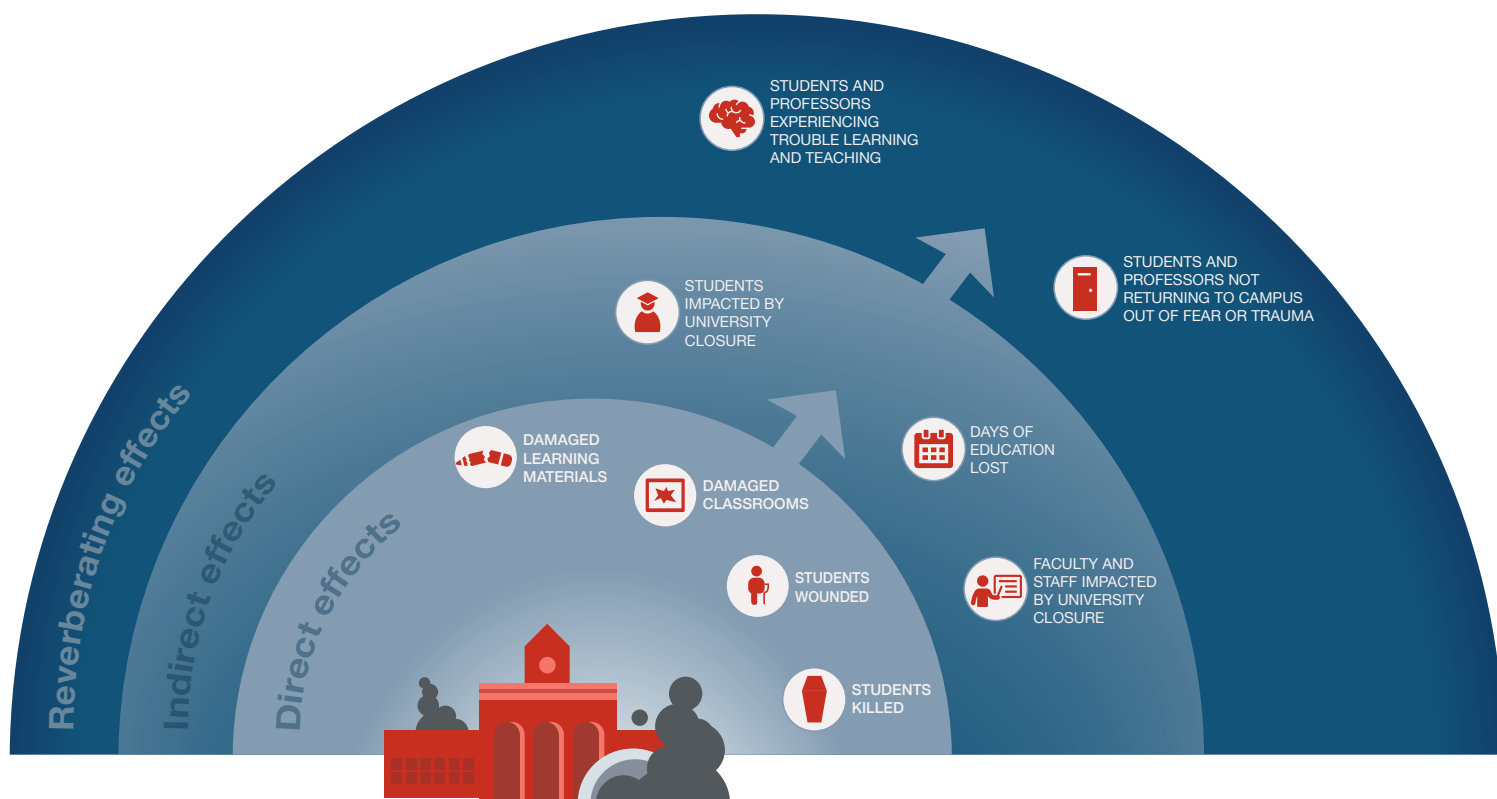


Diagram: The impacts of the November 2, 2020, attack on Kabul University in which armed gunmen used explosive weapons. Attacks on education involving explosive weapons have direct, indirect, and reverberating effects. In addition to killing and injuring students and educators and damaging educational infrastructure, attacks can limit access to education and negatively affect learning over the long term.

Recommendations

Two decades of progress on safe education for all are at risk in Afghanistan. Yet, prior to the Taliban regaining control of the country in August 2021, the Afghan government and its partners still had crucial work pending to protect students, teachers, schools, and universities from the worst effects of armed conflict.

Attacks using explosive weapons have increased in recent years and have had severe and lasting consequences for schools, universities, teachers, and students in Afghanistan. And since January 2020, attacks on education in at least 20 other countries have involved explosive weapons, according to GCPEA research. Urgent action is needed to limit the use of explosive weapons in Afghanistan and globally to protect civilians and support safe access to education during and after conflicts.

GCPEA calls on all states to endorse and implement the [Safe Schools Declaration](#) and for international agencies and civil society organizations to support these efforts. Afghanistan endorsed the Declaration in May 2015,⁴² but like many other states, still needs to take steps to fulfill its commitments. GCPEA recommends specific actions below to reduce and mitigate the impact of attacks on education involving explosive weapons, both in Afghanistan and globally.

Militaries, other state security forces, and non-state armed groups, and those with influence over these parties, should:

- Avoid the use of explosive weapons with wide-area effects in populated areas, including near schools or universities or along routes to or from them, and develop operational policy based on a presumption against such use.
- Take into account all foreseeable harm to civilians and the reverberating effects of explosive weapons before carrying out attacks.
- In endorsing states such as Afghanistan, strengthen and support the implementation of the Safe Schools Declaration to better protect the civilian character of schools and universities and cease attacks and threats of attacks against students, teachers, and educational facilities, including by implementing the *Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict*.

States and national and international justice institutions should:

- Provide, facilitate, and support nondiscriminatory assistance to survivors of attacks on education, including those injured, family members of people killed or injured, and affected communities.

- Systematically investigate attacks on education that involve the unlawful use of explosive weapons and share findings publicly when possible. States should then fairly prosecute those responsible.

Ministries of Education and other education providers should:

- Develop and implement gender-responsive risk assessments, education continuity plans, and comprehensive safety and security plans to prevent and mitigate the impact of attacks on education.
- In Afghanistan, authorities should ensure that existing frameworks and protocols, such as the Comprehensive Safe Schools Framework, continue to be implemented.

States and organizations collecting data on attacks on education should:

- Where possible, make every effort to collect and share disaggregated data on attacks on education so that the impacts of such attacks can be better understood, and prevention and response measures can be developed.
- In Afghanistan and other countries where attacks using explosive weapons are prevalent, include in data gathering the types, quantities, and locations of explosive weapons used, as well as details on schools and other educational facilities damaged or destroyed, and teachers, students and other education personnel injured or killed.
- Adopt guidance from GCPEA's *Toolkit for Collecting and Analyzing Data on Attacks on Education* in developing monitoring systems and humanitarian or sectoral needs assessments.

Donors and humanitarian and development actors should:

- Prioritize and fund measures to prevent, mitigate, and respond to attacks on education, such as by developing risk assessments, education continuity plans, and comprehensive safety and security plans, within humanitarian response and development programs.
- In endorsing states such as Afghanistan, strengthen and support efforts to implement the Safe Schools Declaration.

The Toolkit

To produce the analyses in this case study, GCPEA used data collection methods and calculations available in the [Toolkit for Collecting and Analyzing Data on Attacks on Education](#). The *Toolkit* offers indicators to analyze different attack types and their impacts on students, personnel, and educational infrastructure. Specifically, GCPEA relied on *Toolkit* indicators:

- 1.1.1 Number of reported attacks on schools
- 1.3.1 Number of students and education personnel reported injured or killed in attacks on schools
- 2.1.1 Number of reported attacks on students, teachers, and other education personnel
- 2.2.1 Number of students or education personnel reportedly injured, killed, or abducted in targeted violence
- 6.1.1 Number of reported attacks on higher education institutions
- 6.3.1 Number of students and education personnel reported injured or killed in attacks on higher education institutions
- 7.1.1 Number of reported attacks on higher education students, academics, and other personnel
- 7.2.1 Number of higher education students and personnel reportedly injured, killed, or abducted in attacks

Where possible, GCPEA disaggregated data as suggested in the *Toolkit* to provide richer analyses of the incidences and effects of attacks on education, including by weapon type, damage, injury, and death. GCPEA also analyzed event data by subcategories, such as gender of students or teachers, location of school, perpetrator of attack, and whether military use had occurred before or at the time of attack.

GCPEA recommends the *Toolkit* for improved understanding of the scope and impact of attacks on education and the military use of schools and universities. To address underreporting, data gaps, and limited impact analyses, the *Toolkit* provides guidance to governments, civil society organizations, the UN, and humanitarian and development agencies on data collection, analysis, and reporting.

Although this case study showed several of the impacts of explosive weapons on education, additional relevant impacts could have been analyzed with richer data. For instance, GCPEA could not assess the total number of days that schools or universities closed due to attacks involving explosive weapons, or the percentage of all schools in a region affected by such attacks, among other impacts. Where possible, GCPEA encourages concerned governments and organizations to implement guidance available in the *Toolkit* to collect and report richer, disaggregated data through monitoring systems, humanitarian or sectoral needs assessments, or other data collection efforts. With richer data, and the subsequent analyses that become possible, more effective response and prevention plans can be developed.



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To learn more about the scope and impact of attacks on education in Afghanistan and globally, explore [GCPEA's webpage](#) and the *Education under Attack 2020* [report](#) and [interactive website](#).

GCPEA is grateful for the support it receives from the Education Above All Foundation, Education Cannot Wait, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and an anonymous donor.

GCPEA is a coalition of organizations that includes: co-chairs Human Rights Watch and Save the Children, Education Above All Foundation, the Institute of International Education (IIE), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Plan International, UNESCO, and UNICEF.

This case study is the result of independent research conducted by GCPEA. It is independent of the individual member organizations of the Steering Committee of GCPEA and does not necessarily reflect the views of the Steering Committee member organizations.

Endnotes

¹ Parul Bakshi, “[Unpacking inclusion in education: lessons from Afghanistan for achieving SDG4](#),” Background paper for the 2020 Global Education Monitoring Report, 2020, (accessed July 8, 2021).

² “[SECRETARY-GENERAL’S REMARKS TO THE SECURITY COUNCIL ON AFGHANISTAN](#),” United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, August 16, 2021, (accessed August 19, 2021). Najim Rahim and David Zucchino, “[Attacks on Girls’ Schools on the Rise as Taliban Make Gains](#),” *The New York Times*, May 21, 2019, (accessed August 19, 2021).

³ Information received by a UN respondent on July 10, 2021.

⁴ “[Education](#),” UNICEF, January 2020, (accessed August 3, 2021), p. 2; “[Humanitarian Action for Children Afghanistan](#),” UNICEF, December 2020, (accessed March 19, 2021), p. 2.

⁵ GCPEA, [Education under Attack 2020](#), Afghanistan chapter.

⁶ GCPEA, “[It Is Very Painful To Talk About](#)”: *The Impact of Attacks on Education on Women and Girls*, (New York: GCPEA, 2019), (accessed July 12, 2021), pp. 9, 33-34, 36, 38.

⁷ GCPEA, [Education under Attack 2020](#), Afghanistan chapter.

⁸ Information received from a UN respondent on August 11, 2021.

⁹ GCPEA, [Education under Attack 2020](#), Afghanistan chapter.

¹⁰ GCPEA Dataset and UN CAAC report.

¹¹ Assessing impacts such as the total number of days that schools or universities were closed or the number of out-of-school students due to attacks was beyond the scope of this case study. However, such indicators are included in the *Toolkit*. Compared to other guidance documents on assessing the impacts of attacks involving explosive weapons such as the [Menu of Indicators](#) from the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, the *Toolkit* stops short of determining the number of students achieving minimum proficiency in reading or mathematics and other third level impacts. For more details, see: UNIDIR, *Menu of Indicators to Measure the Reverberating Effects on Civilians from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas* (Geneva: United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research and Insecurity Insight, 2021), pp. 62-77.

¹² AOV, “[Afghanistan country page](#),” 2021, (accessed July 8, 2021).

¹³ Attacks using IEDs are more often reported in the media due to large casualty numbers and other distinguishing features. Other types of explosive weapons violence may go underreported.

¹⁴ UNAMA, [Afghanistan: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2020](#), (Kabul: UNAMA and OHCHR, February 2021), (accessed August 3, 2021), p. 11.

¹⁵ UNAMA, [Afghanistan: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2020](#), p. 32.

¹⁶ As per the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, ground engagements include “kinetic ground operations, stand-off attacks, crossfire and armed clashes between parties to the conflict. Ground engagements include attacks or operations in which small arms, heavy weapons and/or area weapons systems, i.e. mortars and rockets are fired” (see the [Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2020](#)).

¹⁷ UN Security Council, “[Children and armed conflict: Report of the Secretary-General](#),” A/75/873-S/2021/437, May 6, 2021, (accessed June 21, 2021), para. 13.

¹⁸ GCPEA, [Education under Attack 2020](#), Afghanistan chapter and Global Overview.

¹⁹ See a discussion of direct, indirect, and reverberating effects here: Bonnie Doherty, “[Statement on the Preamble to the Consultations on Political Declaration on the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas](#),” Human Rights Watch statement, (accessed July 12, 2021).

²⁰ “[Protection Brief - Afghanistan \(Quarter 1\)](#),” Afghanistan Protection Cluster, March 2021, (accessed July 19, 2021), pp. 5.

²¹ For more on GCPEA’s research methodology, see [Education under Attack 2020](#) (pp. 88-96) and the [Toolkit for Collecting and Analyzing Data on Attacks on Education](#) (Codebook).

²² INEW, “[Explosive weapons in populated areas – key questions and answers](#),” International Network on Explosive Weapons background paper, September 2019, (accessed July 19, 2021), pp. 1.

²³ GCPEA relied on definitions from: [Explosive Violence Monitor 2020](#) (London: Action on Armed Violence, 2021), pp. 7-8; UNIDIR, [Menu of Indicators to Measure the Reverberating Effects on Civilians from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas](#) (Geneva: United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research and Insecurity Insight, 2021); and Article 36, [Explosive Weapons: Protecting Civilians from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas](#), pp. 12-14.

²⁴ UNAMA, [Afghanistan: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2020](#) (Kabul: UNAMA and OHCHR, February 2021), (accessed August 4, 2021), p. 38; UNAMA, [Afghanistan: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019](#) (Kabul: UNAMA and OHCHR, February 2020), (accessed August 4, 2021), p. 27.

²⁵ Reports of attacks on schools involving explosive weapons declined alongside non-explosive attack types over the past 3.5 years in Afghanistan, although explosive weapons attacks became a larger proportion of all attacks on schools during this period. Specifically, after a peak of over 65 reported attacks on schools involving the use of explosive weapons in 2018, incidents steadily declined in 2019 and 2020 with around 45 and 30 reported attacks, respectively; however, the first six months of 2021 saw an increase in reported explosive attacks compared to the same period in other years. Simultaneously, the number of reported non-explosive attacks on schools declined from around 35 in 2018 to around 10 in 2020 and around seven in the first half of 2021. The increasing proportion of explosive attacks (as part of all attacks on schools) is likely *not* an artifact of media coverage. First, although explosive attacks consistently receive more media coverage than other attack types, there is little reason to believe media reporting of such incidents would have proportionally increased year over year rather than remained constant. Second, GCPEA receives reports from sources other than media, such as NGOs and the UN. Taken together, GCPEA's analysis points to a likely real increase in the proportion of the use of explosive weapons in attacks on schools, rather than increased media coverage of the events.

²⁶ Verity Hubbard, "[The impact of explosive weapons on children's education](#)," AOA, March 10, 2021, (accessed July 12, 2021).

²⁷ Afghan Voice Agency; Afghan Islamic Press News Agency; GardaWorld; AP; Anadolu Agency; New York Times; Shamshad TV; Afghanistan Times; Xinhua; Kabul Now; AFP; TOLO News, as cited in Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED), Event ID AFG54302 (data downloaded June 8, 2021). Jennifer Deaton and Sheena McKenzie, "[Death toll rises to 85 in Afghanistan girls' school bomb attack](#)," *CNN*, May 10, 2020, (accessed June 11, 2021). "[Afghans hold funeral for victims of Kabul school bomb blasts](#)," *Al Jazeera*, May 9, 2021, (accessed June 11, 2021). Thomas Gibbons-Neff and Najim Rahim, "[Bombing Outside Afghan School Kills at Least 90, With Girls as Targets](#)," *The New York Times*, May 9, 2021, (accessed June 11, 2021). "[Urgent to Protect Girls & Education in Conflict Said UN Officials After Deadly Attack in Afghanistan](#)," Office of the SRSG CAAC, May 12, 2021, (accessed June 11, 2021). "[Car bombing at Afghan school in Kabul kills 55, injures over 150](#)," *Reuters*, May 8, 2021, (accessed June 11, 2021).

²⁸ Adam Nossiter, "['Why Do We Deserve to Die?' Kabul's Hazaras Bury Their Daughters](#)," *The New York Times*, May 9, 2021, (accessed July 12, 2021).

²⁹ "[Afghan girls torn between fears and ambitions after school attack](#)," *Reuters*, May 11, 2021, (accessed July 13, 2021).

³⁰ Information received from a confidential source not otherwise available; See also: "[Airstrike destroys school in Balkh's Charbulak district](#)," *Pajhwok Afghan News*, February 17, 2020 (accessed March 17, 2021). Pajhwok Afghan News, as cited in ACLED, Event ID AFG51664 (data downloaded March 16, 2021). Mujib Mashal, "[Homes Lost and Lives Trampled, Rural Afghans Urgently Want Peace](#)," *The New York Times*, March 5, 2019, (accessed April 10, 2019).

³¹ "[Airstrike destroys school in Balkh's Charbulak district](#)," *Pajhwok Afghan News*, February 17, 2020, (accessed March 17, 2021); Pajhwok Afghan News, as cited in ACLED, Event ID AFG51664 (data downloaded March 16, 2021).

³² "[9 school children killed in blast in Afghanistan's Darqad district](#)," *ANI News*, November 2, 2019, (accessed November 12, 2019). "[Nine children killed in Afghanistan landmine blast](#)," *Al Jazeera*, November 2, 2019, (accessed November 12, 2019). "[World Digest: Nov. 2, 2019](#)," *The Washington Post*, November 2, 2019, (accessed November 12, 2019).

³³ Fahim Ahmed, "[Afghan War Casualty Report: August 2020](#)," *The New York Times Magazine*, August 28, 2020, (accessed October 19, 2020). Bakhtar News Agency; Pajhwok Afghan News; Afghan Islamic Press News Agency, as cited in ACLED, Data ID AFG47118 (data downloaded October 19, 2020). Confidential source not otherwise available.

³⁴ Attacks on education include attacks on schools, school students and personnel, and higher education, as well as child recruitment and sexual violence at, or on the way to or from, school. Between January 2018 and June 2021, GCPEA identified slightly more than 200 attacks on education in Afghanistan involving the use of explosive weapons. Around 180 of these attacks were against schools; around 18 were against higher education; and several attacks were on students, teachers, or education personnel.

³⁵ "[Afghan War Casualty Report: March 2020](#)," *The New York Times*, March 5, 2020, (accessed April 21, 2020). Scholars at Risk Network, Academic Freedom Monitor, [Paktia University](#), March 23, 2020, (accessed October 22, 2020).

³⁶ Scholars at Risk, Academic Freedom Monitor, [Al-Beroni University](#), May 29, 2021, (accessed June 11, 2021). "[Several killed as roadside bomb targets minibus in Afghanistan](#)," *Al Jazeera*, May 29, 2021, (accessed June 11, 2021). "[Afghan officials: Roadside bomb kills 4, wounds 11 students](#)," *The New Arab*, May 29, 2021, (accessed June 11, 2021).

³⁷ UNAMA, [Afghanistan: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2020](#), (Kabul: UNAMA and OHCHR, February 2021), p. 28.

³⁸ Since the complex attack involved both gunfire and explosives, the number of students or educators killed or harmed by explosives rather than another form of violence remains unclear. Scholars at Risk, Academic Freedom Network, [Kabul University](#), November 2, 2020, (accessed March 19, 2021). "['Act of terror': At least 22 killed in Kabul University attack](#)," *Al Jazeera*, November 2, 2020, (accessed March 19, 2021). Thomas Gibbons-Neff and Fatima Faizi, "[Gunmen Storm Kabul University, Killing at Least 19](#)," *The New York Times*, November 2, 2020, (accessed March 19, 2021). "[Kabul University attack: Fears for mental health one month on](#)," *BBC News*, December 8, 2020, (accessed March 19, 2021). Michael Safi and Akhtar Mohammad Makoi, "[Attack on Kabul University by Isis gunmen leaves 22 dead](#)," *The Guardian*, November 2, 2020, (accessed March 19, 2021). "[Students Wounded in November's University Attack Seek Help](#)," *Afghan Voice Agency*, January 24, 2021, (accessed March 19, 2021).

³⁹ Thomas Gibbons-Neff and Fatima Faizi, "[Deadly School Assault Catapults Kabul into Even More Despair](#)," *The New York Times*, November 3, 2020, (accessed July 19, 2021).

⁴⁰ [Afghanistan Statistical Yearbook 2018-19](#) (Kabul: Islamic Republic of Afghanistan National Statistics and Information Authority, July 2019) (accessed July 19, 2021), pp. 56.

⁴¹ "[Kabul University attack: Fears for mental health one month on](#)," *BBC News*, December 8, 2020, (accessed March 19, 2021). "[Traumatized survivors of university attack recount the horrors they experienced](#)," *Ariana News*, November 5, 2020, (accessed August 19, 2021).

⁴² GCPEA, [Safe Schools Declaration Endorsements](#).