
AN INTRODUCTORY LETTER

Dear Readers,

Too often, young people want to understand the world but don't know where to start. The news can feel overwhelming, complicated, or even unrelatable. That's why our newspaper, The Citizen is written by teenagers, for teenagers—to break down important topics in a way that makes sense to us. Our goal is to make complex political and social issues accessible while encouraging curiosity and critical thinking.

In an age of information overload, it's easy to feel lost in the noise. Our goal is to cut through that clutter, presenting facts and opinions that challenge, inspire, and engage. We believe that an informed citizen is an empowered one, and through The Citizen, we hope to contribute to meaningful discussions that matter.

For this issue, we have focused on gender-based issues in recognition of Women's Day earlier this month, featuring articles on women's rights, political representation, and gender-based policies.

We are also excited to announce the launch of The Citizen's website, allowing us to reach a broader audience.

This newspaper is as much yours as it is ours. We invite you to read, reflect, and contribute—because every voice matters.

Best,
Ariana
Editor, The Citizen

MEET THE TEAM

Senior Writers: Sanaya Chopra, Sneha Gautam, Hriday Rajani, Ariana Singhi

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Special thanks to Miss Kim, and Miss Supriya for their guidance and support!

WOMEN'S RIGHTS OR WESTERN WRONGS?

TRADITION OR TYRANNY: THE TALIBAN RULE

BY SANAYA CHOPRA AND ARIANA SINGHI

[Four Afghan girl guitarists escaped the Taliban. Will they be forced back?](#)

Teenage musicians Yasemin, Zakia and Shukriya and Uzra, just 7, fled the repression of women in Afghanistan. Will a Trump order and Pakistan...

1 day ago

[Banned from speaking in public, Afghan women tell us their stories](#)

Dozens of Afghan women studying abroad are terrified of being sent back to Afghanistan if the State Department cancels their U.S.-funded...

1 day ago

Ever since the Taliban regained control of Afghanistan in 2021, their actions have dominated global headlines—particularly their systematic oppression of women. At the Newsroom, and in the Citizen — we believe it is essential to always examine both sides of the issue to reach the most wholistic analysis. This debate written by Sanaya Chopra and Ariana Singhi aims to explore whether the Taliban’s policies are a genuine reflection of tradition and religious values or a means of enforcing absolute control.

Culture Vs Control

Cultural relativism is the idea that ethical and social standards are derived from their cultural context, suggesting that cultures and moral frameworks can never be completely universal. This theory can be applied to Taliban restrictions imposed on Afghani women. Moreover, leaders and relativists have widely cited Pashtunwali, the traditional Pashtun code of conduct, to justify gender based segregation in Afghanistan. This framework places great emphasis on the honour or ‘Nang’ of the head of the family, which is heavily dependent on the perceived purity of the women in the household, and their adherence to traditional gender roles. Most notably, Pakistan’s Permanent Representative in the United Nations argued that “[T]he restrictions that have been put by the Afghan interim government flow not so much from a religious perspective as from a peculiar cultural perspective of the Pashtun culture, which requires women to be kept at home.” However, it is important to understand that Pashtun culture is not inherently oppressive and it is quite likely that frameworks such as ‘nang’ and ‘purdah’ are being exploited by the Taliban to justify gender apartheid. This raises the dilemma: to what extent can (Pashtunwali) cultural frameworks justify violations of women’s rights?

Education – A Privilege Solely For Western Women

In 2022, Taliban Minister of Higher Education, Nida Mohammad Nadim, justified the exclusion of girls from the fundamental education system, claiming that, “education for women clashes[es] with Islam and Afghan values.” For decades, the Taliban has propagated the idea that Islam only mandates fundamental religious briefing, and not formal education for women to ensure that they are not diverted from their domestic and household duties. Citing the Pashtunwali framework, leaders have frequently voiced concerns of girls being exposed to immoral influences, and the opposite sex (outside of the home) through education. This would irrevocably dishonour these girls and their families. Moreover, they have argued that the education of women is a western notion, and by extension have suggested that CEDAW – a human’s rights convention that protects the same right – caters solely to Western women.

Education as a Weapon: The Taliban’s Systematic Denial of Learning

The United Nations declared the ‘future of an entire generation of Afghan girls’, as a future ‘in jeopardy’. Afghanistan’s Taliban government has “deliberately deprived” at least 1.4 million girls of their right to an education during its three years in power, according to the United Nations. The Taliban argue that sending girls to school ‘doesn’t comply with its interpretation of Islam’. However, given that Afghanistan is the only country that bans girls from education, is the Taliban’s interpretation an extreme outlier... or just a lie? In reality, Muslim scholars and leaders, including women, have played key roles in intellectual and religious advancements, historically. The right to education, a fundamental human right — dictated by the UDHR, ICESCR, CRC, CEDAW — being systematically denied to Afghan girls will only lead to the collapse of Afghanistan. Education is the foundation of economic growth, social progress, and political stability. Without it, women remain trapped in cycles of poverty and dependence, unable to contribute meaningfully to society. Does the Taliban’s need for control—disguised as ‘preserving tradition’—matter more than securing Afghanistan’s future?

Gender Apartheid and the Legal System

With the Taliban Rule, not only do women have minimal rights, but they also have no representation. They cannot hold government positions, cannot serve as judges, and have no legal recourse in cases of domestic abuse or violence. The Taliban have abolished laws that once protected women from forced marriages and gender-based violence, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation. As a result, they have created a system of Gender Apartheid, where women are treated as second-class citizens with minimal rights and no representation — ensuring no change and continual absolute power for the Taliban. Traditionally, women in Afghanistan were involved in politics, law and public life and made further progress in the years up to their return.

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However, it is important to note, that while this argument is a common one amongst Islamic states, a ban on girl's education is exclusive to Afghanistan. The Taliban's perception of Sharia law is an outlier.

Mahram: Oppression with a Purpose

A woman must not travel except with a mahram, and no man may enter upon her except in the presence of a mahram." – Sahih al-Bukhari, 1862

Citing this saying by Prophet Muhammad, the Taliban have imposed stringent restrictions on a woman's freedom of travel. Similar to the male guardianship system of Saudi Arabia, Mahram can be viewed as an unquestionable violation of an individual's freedom of movement protected by both the UDHR and the ICCPR – Two of the United Nation's most notable human rights frameworks. However, from a cultural relativist perspective, the system is meant to safeguard the security and safety of women. Considering the Islamic culture's emphasis on honour and female modesty, an unsupervised encounter with a member of the opposite sex could severely erode the perceived honour of a woman in Afghani society, which, more often than not would lead to families disowning her. There is a fine line between safeguarding a woman's modesty and violating her fundamental rights.

Habiba Sarābi became the first female governor of an Afghan province (Bamiyan) in 2005. Additionally, Zarifa Ghafari, the youngest female mayor in Afghanistan became a symbol of resilience, surviving three assassination attempts. These advancements were immediately undermined when the Taliban returned to power. With tradition no longer supporting their gender apartheid, what justification is left for the Taliban?

Mahram: Oppression in a disguise

The concept of mahram (a male relative whom a woman cannot marry, such as a father, brother, or son) exists in Islamic jurisprudence primarily concerning modesty and travel safety, but the Taliban have weaponized it to exert absolute control over women. Travelling without a mahram can result in arrest, with rigorous inspections, particularly at checkpoints in towns and rural areas. The role of the mahram is rooted in the past: women were often accompanied by their mahram to ensure they were not left vulnerable during long journeys; this was particularly relevant in the past when roads were unsafe, and travel was slow and dangerous. However, the greatest threat to women's "safety" now comes from the very lawmakers who claim to protect them.

It cannot be denied that the Taliban violates a number of fundamental human rights protected by the UDHR. In fact - many of the Taliban's measures are unquestionably gender apartheid. History has proven time and time again that oppression breeds resistance. Regimes that thrive on segregation and coercion are extremely fragile and more often than not collapse within a decade. The question is: how much longer will the Taliban be able to retain control in a rapidly modernising world?

On the whole, there is a fine line between upholding cultural traditions and violating fundamental human rights. While it can be argued that no ethical or social structures can be absolutely universal, there are certain rights that every individual deserves simply due to the fact that they are human. So the most pertinent question this debate raises is: To what extent can cultural relativism be applied? How far is too far?

KEY TERMS:

The UDHR: The United Nations Declaration of Human Rights is the most important human rights document in the world. It is a long list of rights that everyone is entitled to: Including you!

MADAM PRESIDENT?

BY HRIDAY RAJANI AND SNEHA GAUTAM



For the first time in history, Mexico has broken generational barriers with its newly elected female president, Claudia Sheinbaum Pardo. Her victory highlights not only her significant personal accomplishments but also a shift in a country where gender inequality remains deeply rooted in politics and society. As expected, her journey wasn't easy. Like many women in leadership, she's faced sexism, political resistance, and constant scrutiny. But Sheinbaum didn't back down. From scientist to mayor to president, she's worked her way up, proving that women can and do have the ability to effectively lead in politics. This Women's History Month, it's more important than ever to recognise her contributions and acknowledge the obstacles she overcame in order to earn her position.

Policies and Politics

Sheinbaum's political career has been shaped by her dedication to social justice, sustainability, and gender equality. A key figure in Mexico's left-wing Morena party, she has long advocated for policies that uplift marginalized communities, particularly women. During her term as mayor of Mexico City, she launched multiple initiatives to combat gender-based violence, including the "Viajemos Seguras" (Let's Travel Safely) program, which provided women-only transportation to reduce harassment. She also pushed for stronger legal protections for domestic abuse survivors, making support services more accessible. Her presidency is an extension of this commitment. She has pledged to strengthen laws protecting women's rights, increase funding for women-led businesses, and increase educational opportunities for girls in underprivileged areas.

Current Term and Obstacles Faced

Sheinbaum's first year as president has come with its fair share of challenges. Even before she took office, critics questioned whether she could lead on her own or if she would simply follow the path set by her predecessor, Andrés Manuel López Obrador. Others doubted whether Mexico—a country where politics has long been dominated by men—was ready for a female president. Throughout her campaign and into her presidency, she has had to combat deeply ingrained sexism in politics, with critics scrutinizing her leadership in ways male politicians rarely face.

But Sheinbaum has faced skepticism before, and she hasn't let it stop her. Despite resistance from conservative groups, she has pushed forward stronger protections for women, ensuring that gender equality remains central to her administration. She has also had to navigate political opposition, economic struggles, and ongoing security challenges—issues that require long-term solutions. While the road ahead is far from easy, Sheinbaum's leadership so far has shown that she is not just making history—she is working to redefine it.

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CLAUDIA SHEINBAUM PARDO

BY HRIDAY RAJANI AND SNEHA GAUTAM



Sheinbaum's vision for Mexico's Future

Since taking office, President Sheinbaum has focused on social justice and equality. She recently presented her vision for the future in "Plan Mexico". This vision aims to develop the country by reducing poverty and inequality. She plans to create jobs, increase tourism, and improve the economy. She also aims to advance gender equality laws, and is working on mandating that political parties run an equal number of female and male candidates, creating more opportunities for women in politics. With a focus on liberalism and progressive ideals, President Sheinbaum shows that a government focused on social welfare, human rights, and equality for all can lead the future to a more just Mexico.

Notable Accomplishments

Besides being President of Mexico, Claudia Sheinbaum Pardo is also a scientist and environmental engineer. She was part of the IPCC(Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) in 2007 which received the Nobel Peace Prize for "their efforts to build up and disseminate greater knowledge about man-made climate change, and to lay the foundations for the measures that are needed to counteract such change." Prior to being elected president, Sheinbaum was the mayor of Mexico City. In this role, she improved public transport, promoted renewable energy and supported women owned businesses. President Sheinbaum's background in science and government has shaped her approach to the role of President, focusing on science driven policies and progressive change in the country.

The Road Ahead

While Claudia Sheinbaum's presidency makes history in Mexico as she is their first ever female president, real change requires more than just representation: it requires action. And president Shainbaum has risen to the occasion, and put action behind her words, creating policies to benefit Mexicans and improve Mexico's place in the world. Despite challenges and gender discrimination she faced, she now holds the top position in Mexico, making historic progress in human rights. The fight for equality is ongoing, and women's rights in Mexico will not be won by just one individual. It will require a collective effort so this historic presidency leads to lasting change.

The Echo Of Equality: The Uniform Civil Code

BY ANARV GUPTA

"Laws should be the same for everyone, whether they are rich or poor, whether they are of high or low birth."
— Napoleon Bonaparte

With the reelection of the Bhartiya Janata party in the Lok Sabha election, we can only wonder when they will deliver on their promises in their rather ambitious **manifesto**. That statement is relevant in the context of this article, as a UCC (Uniform Civil Code) has been promised to the people of India since the BJP's second term and yet, it hasn't been delivered.

The Uniform Civil Code is a proposed legal framework in India that seeks to replace religion-based personal laws with a uniform set of laws covering marriage, divorce, inheritance, and adoption for all citizens of India regardless of their religion. The current legal framework for laws that cover topics like inheritance, divorce, and marriage is rather complex, with a plethora of religious personal laws that are often discriminatory and derogatory. An example of the same is in the Muslim personal law, which states that a husband can divorce his wife through **talaq**, a practice that has long been criticised for its **unilateral** nature as women do not have the right to do the same; other aspects of Muslim personal law, such as polygamy, inheritance, and alimony, are questionable as well. This phenomenon isn't Islam-specific as there are examples in the Hindu, Christian and Parsi personal laws which even the communities themselves would think are outdated.

This is not our argument for why religion is discriminatory; it is our argument for why personal law is discriminatory. This type of socio-legal reform has also happened in the past. For example, the abolishment of untouchability in Hindu society was based on legislation and social reform and wasn't halted for the sentiments of *Manuvadis*. These social reforms are necessary in society, and the first step is to outlaw them before eradicating them from the mindset itself.

However, the idea of a UCC isn't **Bhartiya**, as uniformity of any form, whether religious or cultural, was never the norm in **Bharat**. The idea of a UCC comes from the Indian nation-state approach, where it is a Western myth that a state must have homogeneity in its laws. However, one must understand that having separate laws for all religions is complicated and ineffective for legislators. On the other hand, while the idea of a UCC seems like the correct choice for the 20th **Bharat** it remains on the harder side to implement. Frail Religious sentiment in a country like India where social unrest pops more than popcorn is a dangerous element. We belong to a generation with a long history; hence, we should remember what changing even a single place of worship does to the country's social stability. One couldn't even imagine what catastrophe would occur if a UCC draft contained radical changes to the current personal laws of certain communities.

Even though a UCC would be hard to implement in its right framework, a UCC would still put forth the **Bhartiya ethos** and hence is still favourable; it shouldn't infringe on the rights of a particular community but should prioritise legal equality. This debate of UCC isn't about religions but about removing laws from society that were created without any logic or law and are discriminatory and derogatory. Some critics of the UCC claim that it interferes with religious freedom; however, it is imperative to understand that religious laws need to be subject to the principles of the Indian constitution and societal values rather than religious **orthodoxy**. A BMMA survey revealed that 84% of respondents believe polygamy should be made illegal, showing that the community itself is rejecting the Islamic religious customs that shaped these personal laws and demanding they be updated to reflect the Muslim community's changing social values. The argument of cultural relativism falls short when the culture itself doesn't find a certain practice relative any longer

A Uniform Civil Code is not an attack on any religion but rather a step toward to legal equality. For a truly progressive India, it is imperative to prioritize gender justice over religious **orthodoxy**; the only question remaining is how long we will ignore the echo of equality.

UPDATES

Tesla shares have plunged by over 15%, the largest drop since 2020, signaling investor's discontent with Elon Musk's diminishing popularity, and interference with politics.

Moreover, Tesla's sales in Europe have dropped by over 45% following Musk's affiliation with the far right in Germany.

In the United States, demonstrators vandalised Tesla showrooms, and vehicles, protesting against DOGE's controversial actions.



Elon Musk: America's Rising Oligarch

BY SUMER KOTHARI

The Tesla, Twitter Owner, SpaceX CEO, and billionaire Elon Musk has an undeniable influence on American Politics, and the Trump Administration; donating millions to the campaign, heading an agency for government efficiency, and clashing with several conservatives to restrict freedom of speech on X.

Despite being a loyal Democrat and voting for their respective presidential candidates in 2008, 2016, and 2020, Elon Musk turned to the Republican Party in 2021 as a result of a rift with Biden regarding the absence of an invitation to an EV summit. After supporting Florida Governor Ron DeSantis' ill-fated campaign, Musk endorsed Donald Trump shortly after the assassination attempt on Trump's life on July 13th, 2024, in Butler, Pennsylvania. Having endorsed Trump, it was reported by the Wall Street Journal that Musk committed to donating over 45 million dollars to the campaign. On October 5th, Musk attended his first rally with Trump in the same location as the assassination attempt, and Musk announced that he would give one million dollars away to voters in swing states who supported his petition for free speech and the right to bear arms.

Following Trump's decisive win on November 6th, Elon Musk shared Trump's Stage during his victory speech and was credited with helping the Republican Party win. After the election cycle, CBS reported that Musk had donated over 277 million dollars to the campaign.

In mid-August, while hosting Trump for a conversation on X, Elon Musk suggested that Trump should form a commission focused on 'government efficiency,' and a few days after Trump's victory, on November 12th, Trump announced that Elon Musk and Vivek Ramaswamy [who would later leave], would lead a new cabinet named 'DOGE,' or the 'Department of Government Efficiency,' which will be responsible in cutting billions in US government spending. Musk's appointment to this role suggests that his donations, and support to Trump during the campaign cycle resulted in Trump rewarding him with power, and support despite being unelected; similar to an oligarch, who is a rich business leader with a lot of political influence. This also indicates that America is on a path to an oligarchy, with tech leaders other than Musk also attempting to appease Trump; notably being Mark Zuckerberg.

After the start of the presidential term, DOGE, led by Musk, has taken many controversial decisions, including cutting billions in contract savings in USAID, which provides foreign aid to external countries that are struggling and facing certain crises; cutting millions from the Department of Education; and cutting health programs benefiting 9/11 responders and survivors. DOGE has also laid off over 200,000 federal workers from multiple departments, notably the Internal Revenue Service [IRS]. In total, it is estimated that DOGE has cut 55 billion dollars from government spending.

While Elon Musk & Trump seem to be on good terms until now, that hasn't stopped Musk from maintaining his views, which, in some cases, are the opposite of Trump's. One of the notable potential conflicts between the pair remains their stances on China, where Trump is keen to increase the tariffs he placed on it during his first term, whereas Musk is firmly against tariffs, as they would be detrimental to Tesla's business and sales in the nation—its second biggest market.

Another possible contention point between the two could be looking at Musk's previous conflicts among prominent members of the Republican Members over the H-1B visa, which is a non-immigrant visa that allows U.S. companies to employ foreign workers for jobs that require technical expertise. The dispute arose when Laura Loomer, a conservative influencer, criticised the selection of an Indian-American as the adviser on artificial intelligence, which she declared not to be 'America first', and that the tech executives who aligned themselves with Trump were doing so to enrich themselves—thus taking a dig at Musk. In response, Musk removed the blue ticks and subscribers of Loomer and those who publicly shared her stance on Twitter, which contradicts his stance on free speech and should be a point of concern regarding his and Trump's control over social media. The debate was brought up again after Vivek Ramaswamy criticised American culture for promoting 'mediocrity' instead of academic excellence, which resulted in his clash with Musk and resignation from DOGE, therefore leaving Musk as the sole dominant leader of the powerful agency.

In conclusion, Musk is an unreliable, unpopular, and yet extremely powerful individual in the United States today. A clash with Trump is inevitable. However, until then his alarming decisions and actions will continue, all at the cost of his focus on his own companies: Tesla, SpaceX, X, and more.

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Beyond the Boundary: The Politics Shaping Cricket

BY RAGHAV JATIA

Cricket is a sport widely played worldwide and has brought great pride to India. It has transitioned from just a game to an emotion that binds and unites us all. Whenever there is a match in which India's playing, everyone makes sure to keep themselves free and they wholeheartedly cheer on team India. In fact, even political parties have taken note of this and now want to participate in it to gain popularity.

Cricket has practically become a religion in India with fans gathering in stadiums, the way people would gather in temples or mosques. They even follow customs and traditions such as always wearing matching jerseys or painting their entire face and sometimes even their body in the colour of their favourite team. Additionally, they sometimes choose to look away from the screen or not change their sitting spot in hope to bring luck. Several cricket legends are worshipped and looked up to as gods such as MS Dhoni and Sachin Tendulkar.

The main governing body of cricket in India is the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) which is in charge of all cricket in India. As the popularity of cricket increased, its engagement in politics did too. For example, the BJP party led by Modi has tried to gain followers by getting involved in cricket, they renamed the enormous cricket stadium in Ahmedabad, Gujrat and called it the 'Narendra Modi Stadium'. It is actually the world's largest international cricket stadium! Did you know that Narendra Modi actually went to watch the 2023 World Cup final? This significantly helped him boost his public relations (PR) and showed that his interests aligned with the Indians..

This brings the way political parties use cricket to gain influence by trying to stay relevant in the media into focus. Furthermore, when India plays against Pakistan - 2 rival countries with a long political history, it turns into a political battle for glory, where both countries' pride are put at stake. It is often used as government propaganda to fuel an anti-Pakistan rhetoric, which essentially fuels nationalism among the Indians and benefits the government.

In conclusion, cricket remains a sport to remember forever in India, and has certainly gotten involved in politics. All cricket matches feel like celebrating festivals with their chants and grand ceremonies. It even helps bridge the disparity between the richest and the poor as they all are on one team - supporting their nation.

THE BRIGHTSIDE!

Australia is taking a bold step toward gender equality. The recently proposed 2025 budget isn't just a bright spot in an uncertain world—it's a decisive move toward progress. With a strong focus on women's health and safety, it signals a future where women are supported and free from inequality. It's more than a light at the end of the tunnel—it's proof that we're on the path to reaching it.

Women's Health: \$793 billion over five years—the largest investment in 30 years.

- **Menopause & Endometriosis: Increased support, including new clinics for 1 in 9 women affected by endometriosis.**
- **Wage Increases: Pay rises for female-dominated sectors like aged care and early childhood care (starting January 2026).**
- **Childcare Support: Replacing the activity test with three days of subsidized childcare, helping more women return to work.**