

A Comparative Analysis of Media Restrictions under the Taliban Regimes & democratic Regime in Afghanistan

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Abstract

This article aims to discuss the experience of Afghan media, focusing on the restrictions in the period of the Taliban rule from 1996 to 2001 and the period that followed after the regime fell in 2001. The complete censorship of the Taliban extended to newspapers, banning anything that included music, photography, or television limited cultural freedom and information sharing under Taliban rule, and that media turned into a propaganda tool. The 2003 Afghan Constitution and the Bonn Agreement paved way for a free operational media environment and, therefore instantly boosted up independent journalism and digital media until the Taliban's reintroduction in 2021. This recent rise of the Taliban to power has reintroduced censorship rather severely curbing the freedom of the press and threatening women journalists who suffer from not only professional danger but also legal discrimination at the workplace. By 2024 most of journalists especially women were laid off their jobs and many companies and media houses shut down. Using secondary sources of data, the article discusses those restrictions

through the lens of the framing theory & relating it to Afghan society, pointing out free speech, culture and society's regression towards authoritarianism as the outcomes. Finally, this study calls for increased international pressure towards rallying for the rights of individuals as well as media liberties in Afghanistan in order to develop a democratic sense of rights in the nation.

Keywords: Afghan media, Taliban censorship (1996-2001, 2021), cultural freedom, propaganda.

Introduction

Afghanistan has witnessed dramatic changes in media over the span of last few decades, linked with the political scenario & stability of the country. This evolution came with the periods of great oppression especially during the Taliban regime in 1996-2001, and periods of rejuvenation after the US led invasion in 2001 (Britannica, 2001). The emergence of the Taliban marked a daunting period for freedom of media and artistic freedom, the Taliban immediately put restrictive measures in place in order to bring conformity in cultural productions with their way of Islamic beliefs about politeness. On the other hand, the post-Bonn media context was defined by the politics of media liberalisation, growth of new media outlets, opening of the information field and growing professionalism in journalism. Although the Taliban's activities in Afghanistan have increased media freedom over the years promoting freedom of speech, the recent emanation of the Taliban in 2021 made it reverse the gait achieved in the last two decades.

The first rule of the Taliban was totalitarian and authoritarian which closely followed its aggressive policy of censorship in an attempt to remove any opinion or cultural product, which it deemed unfit or wrong. Entertainment in any form was prohibited; photography, music, television and others were all forbidden and the media had become totally an instrument for disinformation as it released only material which the Taliban believed was according to the shariah law. It not only suppressed artistic freedom but also primarily limited the Afghans' information, so the people could barely receive the news different from the Taliban's narrative. Hence, fulminating with journalists and media authorities, it

deleted a generation of creative heads, either forcing them into exile or making them go mum, and left what is referred to as a cultural disappearance. (VOA, Life under the Taliban: A tale of two eras, 2024)

After the Taliban's ouster in 2001 the country witnessed a media revival due to the constitutional right of freedom and the support which international community provided to Afghanistan. A vast number of television stations, radio channels and print media sources provided Afghans with different reporting and news information. Journalists have started to investigate and explain what's happening in their respective areas to the population thus creating informed people. The advancement of information technology to the next level was due the increase in the use of mobile phones and increased access to the Internet. A focal point that by 2016 89% of the Afghan used the mobile phones in connecting to the internet which was a major step towards the social media usage and ultimately broader connectivity. (Extremism, The evolution in Taliban media strategy, 2022)

During this period, the Afghan media depicted a lively media stage with discursive and dialogues debates especially on occasions that relate to political activities like polls. The role of the media included the persuading of the electorate to exercise their right to vote for the candidates of their choice, explaining the policies of the candidates to the people and informing the same that the government was a dictatorship and that the government was abusing the people's rights. However, political instability and armed conflict, many non-governmental and international organizations made efforts to train the journalists in the principles of the ethical norms and neutrality to upgrade the Afghan media more professional.

In fact, the Taliban came back into power in August 2021 and immediately continued the practices that had been protested against earlier. Restrictions on the freedom of press were instigated the moment the Taliban regained power, the same as in the earlier period of their rule. It soon banned entertainment programs, prohibited freedom of media on protest and obliged compliance to Islamic rules and regulations depriving free speech. It has been documented that some of the journalists have been arrested, threatened or even physically attacked for violating the

new media regulations and quite a number of the media houses were closed down. Afghan journalism became ever more dangerous as women were no longer safe and were persecuted systematically. (Seattle, 2023)

By the end of 2021, this has reduced the functional media outlets to 39 % of what was the standard, from a total of 11,857, the total number of journalists reduced significantly to 4,759 (Borders, Afghanistan has lost almost 60% of its journalists since the fall of Kabul., 2022). Education policies that were set and implemented affected women more than men; at that time women lost their jobs and access to any promotion. The reemergence of the Taliban meant not only reintegration of censorship but also significant erosion of rights and freedoms of women, who were flatly banned from exercising most of their civil liberties and, in particular, from working in media or as journalists. Restrictions placed on female journalists did not only affect employment; further they were restricted in their interaction with sources, interviews, and even public conversation.

The effects of such restrictions are thus largely extensive and very devastating on Afghan social, cultural, as well as political growth. The Taliban had restricted the freedom of media and press hence the media and journalism had adopted a culture of self censorship and some of the issues remained concealed for instance human rights violations and government. The Effectiveness of Taliban Controlled Media It thus fosters a climate of fear which otherwise hampers freedom of opinion and pluralism in the political public sphere, not to mention the pillars of a democratic state. The chilling effect on journalism compounds the info-shaping crisis in Afghan society still deeper, which obliterates the right of the Afghan citizens to the information they should have for their choices informed and have a rightful say in governance.

Furthermore, the arms being placed on media and freedoms of expression in Afghanistan have more extensive impacts for international relation and support. Due to restrictions on freedom of speech the journalists are prevented from providing a coherent and detailed view of human rights, governance as well as social justice in Afghanistan hence the global society also finds it hard to monitor the situation or even come up with the right response. The attempt by the Afghan government and Western

militaries to constantly silence opposition stifles the possibilities for a constructive change and healing of a divided Afghan society.

As this article delves into the historical context of media in Afghanistan, it aims to highlight the intricate relationship between media freedom, societal progress, and democratic governance. By examining the cycles of repression and resurgence through the secondary sources of data, analysis of media reports, research articles and documents by media organizations, the article underscores the critical importance of a vibrant media landscape in fostering an informed citizenry capable of holding power accountable. Ultimately, the future of media in Afghanistan hinges on the collective efforts of the international community to advocate for human rights, free expression, and the protection of journalists, particularly women, to ensure that Afghanistan can reclaim its place as a dynamic and pluralistic society.

Theoretical Framework: Framing Theory

Framing Theory is an idea derived from the domain of communication studies and it asserts that the frame through which information is contextualized or packaged offers a major cue to how audiences would engage that information. It is especially important in relation to Afghan media and media discourses that function closely intertwined with the processes of political and social transformation.

Originally, Framing Theory holds that it is possible to influence readers' perception of the real world by highlighting and thereby manipulating the provisions made available in the media. Such choice of presentation builds up certain perceptions that are well aligned to the receptionists' beliefs, their encounters and cultural backgrounds. In Afghanistan where conflicting stories are possible because of the multifaceted society it has, how topics related to governance and human rights, gender equality among other matters is perceived can go a long way in shaping Afghans' perception or risking the unity of the society.

This paper uses Framing Theory as a lens and the Taliban's revival in 2021 as an example of the media environment. As soon as they got the reins of the government again, the Taliban are eager to sell their rule as a return to order and Shariah, as well as to stifle criticism and/or

independent journalism. In presenting they are restoring order through the proper establishment of governance system that the Afghan people are used to, what the Taliban is essentially doing is to establish its own ideological pitch, dismiss other voices that may build the necessary protest its rule.

On the other hand, independent media outlets and foreign media reporting on Afghanistan set parameters for their journalism reporting issues like Human Rights violation, Gender inequality, Free Speech suppression, and any other human rights abuses going on in Afghanistan. By focusing on these narratives, they seek to help get the message out on the disposition of the people of Afghanistan and the need to support Afghan women and journalists. Disputes over framing do identify a continuing battle for control over the terms of public debate about Afghanistan.

Framing Theory, if appreciated in its wider sense, returns important consequences regarding media acting as both a facility for domination and an avenue of emancipation. In a context that many media outlets still heavily regulated in its work, framing of issues is the question of life and death for independent reporters and activists. They must play the game on the thin line between censorship and self-censorship while at the same time aiming at depicting genuine images about Afghan society. It is the capacity of telling those stories in ways that the citizens will understand and act on to regain their rights and counter the dominating narratives of such regimes.

All in all, it can be noted that the Framing Theory serve as the device for searching the dynamics of the media representation in Afghanistan. Its overemphasis how one constructs a narrative for change partakes in a society and reclaim agency when coerced into oppression. That is why the strategies for Media framing of Afghanistan will remain vital as the country struggles to deal with all the intertwined issues and to achieve positive change and shift towards the culture of democratic discussions.

Afghan Media restrictions during Taliban Rule 1996-2001.

The first rule of the Taliban from 1996 to 2001 was a black period for the media and entertainment industries in Afghanistan. The Taliban had strict control over the information in an attempt to regulate and limit the exposure to their version of Islamic values.

The Taliban prohibited such activities as photography, music, TV, and other forms of entertainment during this period, for instance. Cinemas were closed down completely, and merely possessing or using a television set was prohibited. They also burnt film reels and closed down photography studios, which made it impossible to create or perform any forms of art. The press, television, and other electronic media were banned; the only legal medium was radio, and that too only for broadcasting religious programs. (VOA, Life under the Taliban: A tale of two eras, 2024)

At the beginning of the year 2001, the Taliban prohibited the use of the internet, stating that it promoted immoral and anti-Islamic content. (RAWA, 2021) Their foreign minister said, “We want to establish a system in Afghanistan through which we can control all those things that are wrong, obscene, immoral, and against Islam.” (Extremism, Evolution in Taliban media strategy, 2022) This meant that it became very difficult for people to get any information that was not in accordance with the Taliban’s version of Islam. Therefore, many journalists and media specialists had to quit their jobs because of these harsh restrictions.

At that time they also put very strict rules on media and gained information that was not an interpretation of Islam by them. A large number of journalists faced a situation where they had to lose their jobs. This control was not only religious but also social and political to ensure that Afghan society did not revolt against the Taliban. They restricted media and entertainment, thus limiting cultural and intellectual development, employing media censorship as a means of social control.

Afghan Media During the democratic regime (2004-2021).

The Afghan media landscape flourished after the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001 and the opening up of media freedoms in the following two decades. The Afghan media landscape experienced remarkable development in the years between 2001 and 2021. According to the

Afghanistan's Constitution promulgated in 2003, Article 34 recognizes the right of freedom of expression. It vouches for free speech and any Afghani citizen is allowed to speak, write or illustrate whatever they want. The article also protects freedom of speech and all matters to do with press censorship are against the law. The Bonn Agreement of 2001 established the legal framework for the free media in Afghanistan and paved the way for the formation of numerous media organizations. (wikipedia, n.d.) In 2016, it was estimated that 89% of Afghans used their mobile phones to access the Internet. (Extremism, The evolution in Taliban media strategy, 2022) RSF, in its survey until August 15, 2021, reported that 547 media outlets were existent and functioning. (Borders, Afghanistan has lost almost 60% of its journalists since the fall of Kabul, 2022) According to the rating of RSF media Index Rating in 2018-19 Afghanistan stands at 121 among the countries 180 list. (Borders, World Press Freedom Index 2019., 2019)

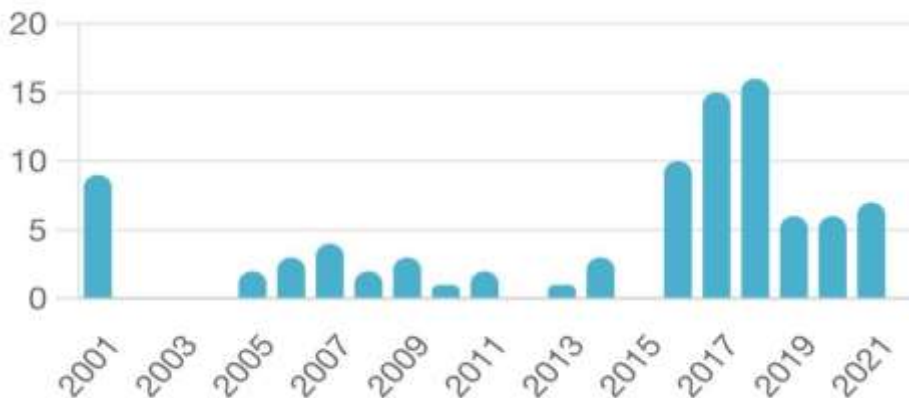
During Afghan elections held in 2009, the media allows more than 40 presidential contenders and other Thousands of contenders for Provincial Councils to reach out to voters through debates and other media brights. To protect equality of all media fronts, the Independent Election Commission has created the Electoral Media Commission which with the assistance of organizations such as Insight and UNDP scrutinize the TV, radio and the press for partiality. Such as presenting and making public the weekly reports, never bias channels or sources of information are allowed. Also, through the support of UNDP, local organization Nai has worked to train journalists in impartiality and in electoral processes, increasing both the professionalism and capabilities of Afghan media to inform voters of the truth. (Commission, 2020)

In April 2014 Afghanistan's presidential election, journalists were to experience considerable risks that included a predicted escalated violence based on government efforts to sanitize information, the Taliban and warlord involvement. Violence had decreased by 15% in late 2013; however, the significant risks persisted primarily due to many journalists' unsuitable professional skills, causing potential loss of media reliability and increasing ethnic tensions. These groups include the Afghan Journalists' Safety Committee (AJSC) and International Media Support (IMS) which sought to train the Journalists and ensure that they see the

media as a strategic factor for democracy. However, the situation regarding journalists was opposite: the government encouraged impunity in attacks targeting these professionals and prevented important legislation, including the one on access to information, called the ATI law, from moving forward. In summary, the strive for the safety and professionalism was inevitable to counter threats and make electorate's coverage transparent and peaceful. (Support, Afghanistan's media under severe pressure as election draws near, 2019)

This period also witnessed the emergence of independent radio stations, TV channels, and digital news platforms, which empowered people and encouraged dialogue. But with this growth come several challenges. Safety of journalists was a critical issue, as around 90 journalists were reported to have been killed between 2001 and 2021, with some being attacked by insurgent groups or during war. (Borders, Press freedom barometer, n.d.)

Graph showing total numbers of journalist killed in Afghanistan



Sources : Based on data from the RSF.

17 foreign journalists are killed during the war between 2001 and 2021, and most of them are from the US. Afghan media after the year 2001 showed the strength and commitment of Afghan journalists and media workers. This period helped to present various opinions and, thus, the

Afghan people got an opportunity to speak after the years of the suppression. However, the problems of the media community, particularly threats to their lives, reminded everyone that these freedoms remained vulnerable.

Afghan Media Restrictions under Taliban 2.0 regime (2021-Onwards)

The Taliban resumed power in August 2021 and, within no time, has imposed restrictive media policies that have limited freedom of speech and press freedom in Afghanistan. In the year 2021, the Taliban, when they seized control, prohibited and restricted television and radio from broadcasting entertainment programs, especially the ones that have music and dance. (Seattle, 2023) They also banned the media from covering the peaceful protests, with Mujahid stating that "the recent protests have been unlawful, and therefore, the coverage of such protests is also unlawful. (VOA, Taliban claim media reform as journalists decry censorship, 2022). (Newsweek, 2021)

The Taliban provided 17 new rules, including the ban on women working in the media, banning media from interviewing the Taliban's opponents, and restrictions on photo and video taking in some Afghanistan provinces, including Kandahar. (Center, The Taliban's 13 directives on freedom of media and access to information, 2023) As a result of these strict policies, 32 journalists were arrested, some of them for violating the new media guidelines. Some of them were released with warnings while others were severely punished; one of the journalists was assaulted and informed not to report on what transpired during the arrest. (Watch, Taliban severely restrict media., 2021)

After the Taliban's return to power, Afghanistan has lost 39% of its media outlets and 59% of journalists, including many women. A total of 549 media outlets were in operation before August 2021, and the number was reduced to 330 at the end of the year. The number of working journalists reduced from 11,857 to 4,759, which shows the extent of the harm caused by these policies to media freedom. (Borders, Afghanistan has lost almost 60% of its journalists since the fall of Kabul., 2022)

Ahmad, a working journalist in the northern region argues that currently a journalist earns between 3,000AF (USD 40) and 10,000 AF (USD 140) a month salary without meeting his/her basic needs. According to Malalai, a female journalist in the region, her wages are so poor that it does not cover transportation rebukes. A female journalist, who works in the western region stated, “I was doing a lot of work for only 4,000 Afghanis (USD 55).” Ahmad, another journalist says the following: Due to unemployment in the country and other economic challenges, forced him to leave the country. But when he could not get a job elsewhere, he had to come back to Afghanistan to look for a job. (Journalists I. F., Artificial independence: The fight to save media and democracy, 2024)

17 broadcast licenses of media outlets in eastern Nangarhar closed by the Afghan Telecom Regulatory Authority (ATRA) on July 22, the Taliban’s Ministry of Communications and Information Technology told the outlets that their licenses had been temporarily revoked for non-payment of taxes. The Ministry of Communications and Information Technology has been said to have released letters to the 14 media outlets where it informed them that they cannot engage in their business until they pay up their annual license fees which is 108000 Afghanis (Approx. USD 1500) per year. However, it is important to state that the media outlets under discussion are still functioning now, at least to some extent, as far as the problem with the fee is concerned, AIJU claimed. (Press, 2024)

On the 17 of April 2024 the Taliban closed two TV stations operating in Kabul, Noor TV and Barya TV on the grounds that their operations were a violation of the nation and Islamic values. Noor TV was alleged to have aired music, and some female staff were not wearing face masks and Barya TV was said to have aired some political statements in which Gulbuddin Hekmatyar of the Hezb-e-Islami group had made about the relations between the Taliban and the US. Southern Afghan journalists’ advocacy organization, the Afghanistan Journalists Center (AFJC) protested the action by the ministry as an infringement on free speech and the nation’s mass media codes and demanded a reversal. The Media Violations Commission was dissolved after the Taliban left power in 2021 and reformed by the new government; it threatened the suspension of the outlet, sparking doubting its legitimacy and questioning its role in purging Taliban media influence. (Center, AFJC condemns Taliban’s

suspension of TV stations, calls for immediate reversal., 2024) The Taliban's message in clear, said a print journalist based in Kabul: Avoid speaking or writing about “any matter that would be regarded as unfavorable to the government.” (Liberty, 2024)

The IFJ recorded 86 instances of journalists imprisoned from May 2023 to April 2024 across South Asia, The Taliban altering Afghanistan's media laws saw the imprisonment of 37 journalists within the last year while 21 journalists and media workers were released within a week. Several arrests were made during August and were followed by a second anniversary of the takeover of the Taliban. (Journalists I. F., Journalists jailed and detained in South Asia 2023-2024., 2024)

According to IFJ south Asia press freedom report 2023-2024 in Afghanistan between 2023 and 2024, several journalists have been detained. Mortaza Behboudi was arrested on January 7, 2023, for espionage and later released in October of the same year 2023 and Khairullah Parhar was arrested on January 9, 2023, and released on May 4, 2023, under certain conditions. This amounts to your reporter Ehsanullah Akbari, who was detained on January 17, 2024, for critical reports and released on January 25, 2024, disrespect. Mehboob Hakimi was fired from his position on August 10, 2023 and was detained again on September 1, 2023. Abdul Rahim Mohammadi who was detained on December 4, 2023, for reporting to the foreign media was however released. Other short vazne detainees are Sakhi Sarwar Miakhil, Mohammaduddin Shah Khyali, Pamir Andish, and Abdul Rahman Ashna all of which were detained on May 9, 2023, for playing music during Eid and released on May 14. Ali Latifi was arrested on May 19, 2023, and then released the following day, and Reza Shahir was arrested on June 18, 2023, and released the following day. Irfanullah Bidar who was kidnapped on 12th July 2023 was released on July 26. In August 2023 several others were arrested among them Hassib, Hassas Faqir Faqirzai Jan Agha Saleh Habibullah Sarab and Parvez Sargand were freed by early September. Atullah Omar was arrested on 13 August 2023 and released on 31 August 2023, and Shamsullah Omari was arrested and released in two weeks in August. Mohammad Hossein Velayati arrested on the 19 of August 2023 and was released on the 26 of the same months. On September 11, 2023, Sultan Ali Javadi Saifullah Razaee and Mojtaba

Qasemi were arrested and released on bail. On 18th of January in 2024 Abdulhaq Hamidi and Ahmad Javadi Rasouli were arrested and then released within two days. Saifullah Karimi was arrested on February 10, 2024, for reporting protests and was released after two days. Those arrested and released within 24 hours include Latif Yaqubi arrested on July 10, 2023, and released 13 hours later, Waheedur Rahman Afghan arrested on August 13, 2023, and release the following night and lastly Mansoor Nekmal arrest on February 15, 2024, and release the next morning. (Journalists I. F., Journalists jailed and detained in South Asia 2023-2024., 2024)

The year 2022 saw more stringent control by the Taliban over media and information access. They even prohibited the international broadcasting services like Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and Voice of America so that no outside influence or negative reporting could reach the people. (Journalists C. t., Taliban bans radio broadcasts of VOA and RFE/RL in Afghanistan, 2022) Three Afghan radio journalists were arrested during the Eid al-Fitr holidays for playing music and talking to women. (Journalists C. t., Taliban detain 3 Afghan radio journalists for playing music, talking to female callers., 2024)

This just goes to show how the regime still enforces the zero-tolerance policy even for minor misconducts. Furthermore, It was almost impossible for foreign journalists to report on events within the country due to the restrictive visas they were issued; many Afghan journalists fled the country for their lives. (Watch, Afghanistan. In World report 2023, 2023)

This is because the Afghanistan media index dropped from 122/180 in 2021 to 178/180 in 2024 due to the Taliban limiting the freedom of the press and the overall decline in press freedom in the country. (Borders, Press freedom index 2024. , 2024) this is the lowest ranking Afghanistan has ever had since RSF started its index in 2002.

The Taliban's activities since the group's return to power in 2021 have not only been centred on enforcing their version of Sharia law but have also been efforts to consolidate power and eliminate any form of opposition or reporting of human rights abuses carried out by the Taliban. The limitation of media freedom, the ban of international

telecommunication broadcasting companies, and the restrictions and control measures on foreign journalists suggest that there is a well-coordinated plan of ensuring that Afghanistan remains closed and any form of rebellion is suppressed within the country. Therefore, journalists avoid reporting on some issues because they are afraid of the consequences that they will face.

In this context, the censorship grew into self-censorship, which impacted greatly the quality and the diversity of the media content in Afghanistan. Some events, especially the ones that are related to human rights abuses and women's rights, are either not reported or are reported. Such an information deficit robs the people of Afghanistan of the information they need while at the same time making it hard for the rest of the international community to judge the situation and provide appropriate intervention.

Challenges for female Afghan journalists under Taliban 2.0

Another restriction that the Taliban 2.0 imposed starting in August 2021 is that women cannot work in different fields that include media. The Taliban's capture of this country with 40 million people marked the end of press freedom and journalists' safety, especially women journalists. Due to their extremism in their approach towards the application of Islamic Sharia law, they had to stop girl's secondary schooling, dismiss the major proportions of female civil servants, sack female journalists and forced women anchors of TV channels to veil their faces (VOA, Female Afghan journalists describe life under Taliban misogyny, 2023)

Female reporters cannot be on the screen when they are interviewing the Taliban if the chance to interview them is granted. Some Taliban authorities do not want to talk to Afghan women in media, and females cannot work in several ministries, such as the Ministries of Defense, Interior, Education, Higher Education, Municipal Affairs and Housing, and Justice. Also, female journalists are not allowed to interview the officials without being accompanied by a male colleague. (Network, 2023)

According to the Afghanistan Journalists Center (AFJC), there were 17 restrictions from the Taliban against media, many of them affecting women. Women's voice was prevented from broadcasting in some provinces, and women were barred from working in national radio and TV, acting in dramas or films. Ladies dressing codes such as face blousing were strictly observed, especially on the television. In Media workplaces, there was sections for female and for male so the female journalists could not even communicate with the males. They were banned for instance from visiting governmental organizations, speaking to a man alone or reporting a protest or interviewing Taliban opponents. These rules will restrict women's engagement in journalism when the Taliban is in power. (Committee, 2023)

In 2022, the Afghan National Journalists' Union (ANJU) conducted a survey on the situation of women journalists, and found that: Women journalists reveal high levels of abusive experiences during the time of the Taliban regime: 87% of the respondents reported they had experienced some kind of gender discrimination; 60% have lost their job and career; 79% have been insulted and threatened physically, verbally, and in writing and through social media by the Taliban and others. 91% of working women journalists are the breadwinners of their families. 87% of the women (Support, For women journalists in Afghanistan, showing up for work is an act of resistance, 2024) Ahmad Shah Fana, the chief executive of The Afghanistan National Journalists Union (ANJU), said there are no female journalists currently employed in 22 provinces of the country and their activity is extremely limited to 12 provinces. (TOLONews, 2023)

Therefore, the effects of the economic problem are much worse in the case of women journalists compared to men. For instance, Arzu, now a working journalist, confessed of earning a lower salary than her male working colleagues earning a journalist's salary. Sanam, a jobless journalist from the northern zone sold his camera and equipment's because of poverty and some economic issues, had no other choice than taking a job of a Taylor. (Asia-Pacific, 2024)

Despite the growth in the number of women in the media in 2024. before the Taliban coup in mid-August 2021, there were about 1400 journalists.

Two years later, only 400 were left. But today there are more women journalists – and the local investigations conducted at the beginning of 2024 showed that now there are about 600 working women journalists. (Support, For women journalists in Afghanistan, showing up for work is an act of resistance., 2024)The rise of women’s employees in journalism in Afghanistan is since more and more women journalists are still willing to work despite the Taliban’s limitations. Some have shifted their activities to other areas of journalism in other trends other for example, digital journalism or freelance journalism. Aids have also been received from international organizations and groups, solely for advocating for women, has ensured that women are provided with opportunities and safe places where they can carry out their experiences and thus have also continued to contribute to the mediators despite all the raging hurdles.

Consequences for the Afghan Society.

The restrictions imposed by the Taliban in media has serious consequences for Afghan society in aspect including social, cultural and administrative. These continue beyond simple blocking and eradicating freedom of speech; fear and repression dominate the world leading to negations of people rights and progressive change.

In this sense, media policies established by the Taliban have the most immediate effect of rather dramatically curtailing freedom of speech. Media plays a crucial role in freedom of speech, journalists and media workers are threatened, harassed, assaulted or imprisoned for sharing an unpopular opinion. In the current Ethiopian climate of fear, people do not express themselves or report on certain critical confronts due to possible repercussion by the government regime. As a result, the public square is crowded out, denying citizens multiple voices and information that might be helpful for them in decision making.

Due to the shutdown of independent media sources and limitation of foreign information access many citizens of Afghanistan are deprived of different opinions and important information. Currently, the Taliban have effectively captured the media space, which makes citizenry depend on government-elicited accounts that are often misleading. This limited participation in the flow of information in the society prevents

understanding of the processes in one's own country and the world, making society prime target for distributing propaganda and fake news.

Taliban restrictive policies also affect the media and the generally suppressed arts and cultures particularly entertainment. Liberated arts has reduced music, visual arts and even literature and this has greatly impacted the Afghan society. Creatives are threatened and hunted, and this has put a lot of pressure on artists and musicians. This suppression does not only limit talent but also hampers the richness and prominent heritage of Afghanistan and more so affect the youthful generation who are unable to cultivate creative opportunities for self-discovery and display.

The media restrictions especially target women who are left out from engaging in media workforce and participation in the social political arena. As for women, the Taliban repeat gender roles by restraining women's rights and education and employment opportunities. The lack of women representation in the media is a setback to efforts of eradicating gender disparity in the society. Lack of female journalists and media producers continue to deny women experiences and issues a voice can be a persuasive tool for change.

The rollback of media freedoms is highly political as it strengthens Taliban's authoritarianism. In this way, ideologically and politically silencing the population, a selfish regime hampers the functioning of democratize institutions and mechanisms needed for the proper political climate. There are no independent media organizations, and this leads to little oversight on Governments and as such there could be very many abuses of powers and corruption. Therefore, societal trust in governance diminishes; people lose interest in politics and country's governance.

Media freedoms have also been suppressed; as a result, civil society activism has suffered the same fate. Non-governmental organizations advocating for human rights social justice and community developments perform their activities under the looming possibility of state retribution. To some extent this has impacted civil society's capacity to rally citizens, to demand and push for change and to monitor the government. The

repression of activism only contributes to the current situation, there is less chance for actualization of change.

Thus, the Taliban's recommendations on the media lead to serious consequences that reorient Afghan society to its core. One has the feeling that censorship, the suppression of culture and political oppression form a never-ending cycle that hampers progress, perpetuates the inequality between people and threatens the very tenets of democracy. To transform the nature of political culture in Afghanistan toward a more just and equitable political culture, it is essential to fight for media freedom and for restoration of independent journalism and artistic freedom and civil activism.

Conclusion

Overall, the return of the Taliban to power has entailed dramatic restrictions of media and freedom of speech in Afghanistan that canceled the previous twenty years. Control and restriction of independent media and art threaten freedom of speech and consequently, leave the people exposed to propaganda plus trimmed down debate.

It occurs culturally and educationally, as the latter part of this analysis shows, and it concretely impact women by depriving them of their opportunities in media and in the education system. This way not only does diversity of opinion get limited, but women's rights as well, thus holding back societal progression. All these policies subvert the very political foundation of the country by eliminating both the discourse and accountability mechanisms and strengthening the Taliban authoritarian regime.

But relevant to the existing situation it is necessary for the international community to promote human rights and free media in Afghanistan. Preserving these values is vital for the purpose of creating a progressive society tomorrow in which every Afghan, particularly Afghan woman, will be heard and appreciated.

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