

Digital Resistance:
Women's Activism Under Taliban rule

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1. Executive summary

This qualitative research focuses on the following themes concerning women's activism online from Afghanistan:

1. Digital resistance: Afghanistan women's activism. Which social media platforms do women activists in Afghanistan and those living in diaspora most frequently use to discuss women's rights following the Taliban takeover?
2. Women's activism beyond the borders. How do women activists in the diaspora and in Afghanistan connect and communicate to advocate for and advance women's rights, in the context of Afghanistan's post-Taliban takeover in August 2021?
3. Leveraging social media for women's rights advocacy. How do Afghan women in the diaspora and women in Afghanistan utilise social media for mobilisation efforts related to women's rights advocacy?
4. Challenges and the Taliban's response to social media activism. What are the main challenges and obstacles faced by women activists? How does the Taliban respond to women activists' activities on social media?

The findings of this research are derived from in-depth interviews conducted with nine women activists from Afghanistan, including six from the diaspora and three activists based within the country. Additionally, the study incorporates an analysis of tweets from 20 women activists engaged in women's rights advocacy, spanning the period from 1 April to 30 June 2024.

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1.1 Digital resistance: Afghanistan women's activism

Following the Taliban's resurgence in Afghanistan, a new wave of women's activism emerged, and social media provided a new platform for activists to advocate and amplify their voice for women's rights in Afghanistan. Despite a decrease in internet and social media usage among citizens of Afghanistan after August 2021, women activists continue to use these platforms to advocate for women's rights in Afghanistan. Security concerns have made it difficult for women activists to be active on social media, but some continue to do so anonymously. Many women activists who were interviewed have created their own X accounts or increased their activities on X after 2021. According to gathered data from interviewees, most of the women activists who are active on social platforms are women who live outside the country, and the women inside Afghanistan have a low presence and often use pseudonyms due to security issues.

1.2 Women's activism beyond borders

Women activists who were interviewed explained that women activists of Afghanistan use technology to stay connected and communicate, particularly through communication apps like WhatsApp, Signal, Telegram, and Facebook Messenger. They have digital groups on these apps to organise their advocacy activism. Their advocacy initiatives include events, programmes, announcements, press releases, and social media campaigns to protest against Taliban decrees and evictions. They routinely have meetings using Zoom, Google Meet, as well as WhatsApp group conversations to improve communication and develop stronger connections.

According to women activists who were interviewed in both the country and the diaspora, they believe that maintaining robust connections and open lines of communication is essential for effective resistance against the Taliban. This solidarity network empowers them to continue their advocacy, mobilise international support, and push for change despite the oppressive environment faced by women in Afghanistan. Women inside Afghanistan can reach out to those in the diaspora for assistance, such as sharing information, financial support, mental health support, and advice on how to leave the country.

When the Taliban [violently suppressed protests](#), this has prompted women activists to take new precautions to protect themselves, move their activism from the [outdoor](#) to [indoor protests](#) and then [send videos](#) and photos from their protests to fellow activists in the diaspora for dissemination online. During three years of advocacy and fighting for women's rights in Afghanistan, women activists have launched many social media campaigns with different hashtags, such as #BanTaliban, #LetHerLearn, #Free_Julia_Parsi, and #EndGenderApartheid. These campaigns were organised for various purposes, including raising awareness on the women's situation under Taliban rule, mobilising human rights defenders and resources, reaching out to human rights organisations, putting pressure on the Taliban to release activists from prisons, and highlighting the threats faced by women activists from the Taliban.

1.4 Challenges and the Taliban's response to social media activism

While women activists from Afghanistan are continuing their activism on social media platforms such as X and Facebook, women's activism online has faced many challenges, such as security concerns, a lack of support from family members and society, and the presence of fake and pro-Taliban accounts. In addition, the plan of registration and fingerprinting of SIM cards by the Ministry of Telecommunications and Information Technology, approved by the Cabinet of the Taliban government on 21 January 2023, includes a policy requiring citizens in Afghanistan to register their SIM cards, providing personal information that facilitates the tracing of activists through social media platforms.

When women activists left Afghanistan and relocated to the diaspora, they faced new challenges such as integrating into new societies, finding jobs, and rebuilding/building their lives in a new country, paying expenses, learning new languages, and dealing with trauma. According to women interviewed, these challenges result in women activists being less able to focus on their activism for women's rights in Afghanistan. The women who were interviewed stated that fake accounts related to the Taliban sending messages containing threats to their families back home. Data collected from interviews indicate that fake accounts on social media primarily focus on monitoring women activists by following them on social media pages, reporting their accounts,

spreading propaganda, leaving harassment comments, creating discord, and attempting to break women's movement groups apart.

There is no official evidence or report regarding the Taliban's responses to women's social media activism. However, interviewees believe that the Taliban has created numerous fake accounts on social media. These accounts, along with pro-Taliban accounts, are active on social media platforms, where they post content and report the accounts of women activists. Many women interviewed have reported that these fake and pro-Taliban accounts follow them to identify and threaten them, oppressing them with hateful comments.

2. Methodology

This research employs a mixed-methods approach to investigate the online activism of women activists from Afghanistan, both those in the diaspora and those residing inside the country, as they strive to advance women's rights. The research integrates qualitative methodologies through semi-structured interviews and an observational study on the X social media platform.

3.1 Research scope

This research focuses on the ways in which women activists from Afghanistan, both in the diaspora and within the country, utilise social media as advocacy tools to transform local protests into international movements and apply pressure on the Taliban. To achieve this, comprehensive interviews were conducted with nine female activists—six from the diaspora and three from within Afghanistan—and the tweets of 20 accounts belonging to women activists on X were monitored. The number of interviewees was 9 because of the difficulty in accessing women activists, especially those in Afghanistan. Security concerns and the need to build trust made it challenging to involve more participants. Despite these challenges, the activists interviewed, and the monitored X accounts still provided valuable insights into the state of women's activism.

- In this report, "connection and communication" refers to how women activists from Afghanistan in the diaspora establish contact and exchange information with women in-

country. The goal of these interactions is to advocate for women's rights, amplifying and expanding local movements into a global force.

- In this research, all the women activists in the diaspora interviewed for the research had left Afghanistan after 2021, following the Taliban's takeover of the country.

3.2 Mixed-methods approach

The research utilises quantitative methodology to provide a comprehensive understanding of women activists' online engagement on social media platform X. This approach combines the semi-structured interviews with the observation of 20 accounts of women activists on social media platforms (X) to explore the motivations, strategies, and impacts of their activism.

- Interview participants: The research involved conducting semi-structured interviews with nine female activists from Afghanistan, comprising three participants based in Afghanistan and six members of the diaspora. The interviews aim to delve into the motivations, challenges, and collaboration between diaspora activists and those within Afghanistan, strategies, and impacts of online activism on social media platform X from diverse perspectives.
- Selection of Interviewees: The research used a combination of snowball and purposive sampling. It started by contacting leading women activists in Afghanistan's women's movements. These activists were then asked to refer to other women activists, expanding the group of participants through their trusted networks. Snowball sampling was chosen to ensure safe access to these activists, protect their privacy, and build trust, making them more comfortable sharing their experiences.
- Social media monitoring: The research selected 20 accounts belonging to women activists from Afghanistan who are active on social media platform X. Eight accounts were selected from the interviewees, and additional accounts were chosen based on their activities and the prominence of the women activists leading the Afghanistan women's movements. Only two of the 20 accounts are from inside Afghanistan; the other 18 are from activists who are residing in diaspora. The study observes and analyses the content, interactions, and strategies employed by these activists. This observational component

provides insights into the types of content shared, engagement patterns, and the effectiveness of online activism strategies among women activists.

3.3 Geographic and contextual focus

The research encompasses diverse geographical and contextual perspectives by including women activists from both the diaspora and those within Afghanistan. This dual focus enriches the study by examining how differing socio-political environments influence online activism strategies and outcomes.

3.4 Research limitations

While this study provides valuable insights into the online activism of women activists from Afghanistan, it is important to acknowledge its limitations:

1. **Sample size and generalisability:** The study is based on interviews with 9 women activists, including 6 from the diaspora (Europe and North America) and 3 in Afghanistan (from 3 different provinces), aged between 25 and 40. While these insights are valuable, the small sample size limits the generalisability of the findings to the broader population of Afghan women activists.
2. **Scope of Social Media Observation:** The observational study focusses exclusively on the X social media platform. This narrow focus may not capture the full spectrum of online activism, as activists may use various platforms and digital tools to advocate for women's rights.
3. **Access and communication challenges:** conducting interviews with activists in Afghanistan presented challenges due to limited access to secure communication channels, potential risks to participants' safety, and restricted internet connectivity in the region. Reaching out to and accessing women activists inside Afghanistan is particularly difficult due to security concerns, which is why only three women activists from inside Afghanistan were interviewed.
4. **Participant Availability:** Some female activists were unavailable for interviews due to time constraints. This limited the diversity of perspectives and potentially omitted voices that could provide additional insights into the study.

5. **Temporal Constraints:** The study examines activism through interviews conducted in May 2024 and by observing X from May 1 to June 30 of 2024. The fluidity of social media activism implies that the tactics and effects observed may vary over time, which could diminish the long-term significance of the study.
6. **Data Limitation:** Many women activists in the diaspora have shared that they receive daily information from inside Afghanistan through messages on WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, and emails. However, messages could not be directly accessed. To mitigate this, tweets were used where activists shared screenshots of messages from inside Afghanistan. This indirect access may limit the depth and authenticity of the data collected.

Acknowledging these limitations helps contextualise the findings and highlights areas for future research to build on this study's insights.

3. Background and context: women's rights in Afghanistan under the Taliban

In Afghanistan, women's rights have seen many fluctuations over the years. Activists for women's rights in the country persistently strive to ensure the preservation of these rights. While women in Afghanistan gained the right to vote for the first time in 1919, long periods of civil war, conflict, and instability have interfered significantly with efforts towards progressing women's rights in the country. Following the Taliban's resurgence in August 2021 in Afghanistan, the progress made in advancing women's rights over the years has been systematically reversed. The Taliban have imposed decrees and edicts that exclude women and girls from participating in society. This entails depriving women of their fundamental rights, such as access to education, employment, political participation, economic opportunities, freedom of speech, and freedom of movement. The Taliban's policies have resulted in the isolation and marginalisation of women, leading to an [increase in domestic violence](#) due to a lack of access to justice.

One of the Taliban's first actions, on September 12, 2021, was to [prohibit girls aged 12](#) and up from attending school, infringing on their right to an education under international human rights law. The Taliban extended restrictions on September 29, 2021, by [forbidding](#) women from teaching and enrolling in Kabul University. The de facto Taliban authorities progressively restricted women's and girls' access to public and private universities, culminating in a complete [ban on female attendance](#) at universities in December 2022. They went a step further by outlawing the issuance of [transcripts and certificates](#) for female students, violating their right to education and equal opportunities as guaranteed by international conventions like CEDAW (the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women).

In addition to restricting access to education, the Taliban has imposed decrees and announcements that [prohibit](#) women from holding positions in [international organisations](#) on 24 December 2022 and working with [UN agencies](#) on 4 April 2023. In September 2021, the Taliban issued a directive ordering [female employees to stay](#) at home and not go to work. The Taliban replaced the [Women's Affairs Ministry](#) with a Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice, tasked with enforcing Islamic law, in September 2021. The female employees who were dismissed from their jobs went in front of the ministry to protest against the Taliban's actions, which they believe are taking away their rights to employment. However, as the Taliban's responses to women's protests are often violent, the protest was short and then women had to return to their homes.

This systematic discrimination extends to political representation. The Taliban's September 2021 announcement of [all-male cabinet](#) was an additional attempt to marginalise women and limit their participation in political matters. This composition evidences the Taliban's systemic exclusion of women from political participation, thereby denying them their right to political engagement. Furthermore, in an additional de facto decree aimed at suppressing dissent, the Taliban announced a ban on any [demonstrations and slogans](#) without their prior approval. The restriction on protests and freedom of speech highlights the regime's attempts to limit civil liberties and stifle dissent.

The Taliban have severely restricted women's and girls' access to justice by [suspending](#) Afghanistan's constitution in September 2021 and replacing the [Ministry of Women's Affairs](#) with the Ministry of Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice. They also dissolved the [Independent Human Rights Commission](#), invalidating thousands of cases decided during the 2001-2021. Furthermore, by decreeing that [male guardians](#) would be punished if women did not wear the hijab, the Taliban have increased violence against women. These actions, along with various other restrictions, have contributed to a significant rise in domestic violence. When women face [domestic violence](#) and seek justice, the Taliban often respond by imprisoning them.

The freedom of movement of women in Afghanistan was also restricted as a result of the decrees and dicta issued by the Taliban. In accordance with these decrees and edicts, it is [forbidden](#) for women to travel on long-distance road trips that are 72 kilometres or 45 miles in length without a mahram. Going to restaurants, hospitals, parks, and gyms without Mahram, travelling abroad without Mahram, and even selling travel tickets to women. And there were more than 100 edicts and decrees during almost three years, which severely affected the women's situation in Afghanistan.

4. Digital resistance: Afghanistan women's activism

Following the Taliban's resurgence in Afghanistan, a new wave of women's activism emerged among the women of this country. Social media has become the new platform for women activists who have lost the chance to go to the street and protest or talk in public spaces. Despite a decline in social media and internet use among citizens in Afghanistan after August 2021, women activists have turned to social media to make their voices heard. Less than ten years ago, in Afghanistan, it was taboo for women to post and share photos and videos of themselves on social media. Today, however, women are actively using social media to reclaim their lost rights by sharing videos, photos, and text on their pages. Unfortunately, security concerns make it difficult for women living in Afghanistan to be active on social media, though some still try to do so with anonymous names. However, women activists who have left Afghanistan are striving to use these digital platforms effectively to advocate for women's rights in Afghanistan.

4.1. Women activists using social media as tools of advocacy

The digital revolution has transformed global communication, information sharing, and advocacy strategies through the widespread adoption of social media. Social media plays a crucial role in advocating for justice by allowing individuals and groups to utilise digital tools to amplify their voices, mobilise support, and bring attention to important causes. According to the [Data Portal report](#) in January 2021, Afghanistan had 8.64 million internet users and 4.40 million active social media users. However, 2024 data indicates a decline in these figures, with [January 2024 reporting](#) 7.88 million internet users and 3.70 million active social media users in the country. The data indicates a decline of nearly one million in the user base of the Internet and social media following the Taliban's assumption of power in Afghanistan. This decline highlights changes in access and engagement that may be a result of many reasons, including insecurity, economic challenges, and restrictions imposed by the Taliban.

When the Taliban entered Kabul in August 2021, Meta began [locking user accounts](#) on Facebook in Afghanistan to protect civilians from Taliban access. However, [Meta also restricted](#) the use of the word "Taliban," leading to posts mentioning the Taliban being blocked, restricted, deleted, and many user accounts suspended on Facebook. [In 2024](#), around 15.6 percent of social media users in Afghanistan were female, while 84.4 percent were male. It is evident that women in Afghanistan have comparatively limited access to social media in comparison to men. Zahra Sepher, who fled and has been living in the diaspora since the Taliban's resurgence in Afghanistan in 2021, provided insights on the changes in social media usage following the resurgence of the Taliban in Afghanistan.

“For those who remained in Afghanistan and couldn't find a safe way out, they do not use their social media due to security restrictions imposed by the Taliban. Some women's and human rights activists who left Afghanistan continue their advocacy activities.” Zahra Sepher.

Regrettably, women activists who are in Afghanistan due to security concerns are unable to post or write on their social media pages. However, they are still attempting to use social media under pseudonyms.

“Because I am inside Afghanistan, I do not publish on my Instagram pages, but I use my Twitter account under a pseudonym to promote protest activities.” Maryam¹

Wahida Amiri, who is based in Diaspora and has over 10,000 followers on her X account, added that social media gives the opportunity to reach out to wider and more varied audiences.

“Social media quickly reflects voices, and a single post can reach millions of users. Online advocacy can put pressure on the Taliban. Currently, there is no other way to pressure the Taliban, but social media condemnations do pressure the Taliban. The Taliban are lobbying a lot for their recognition and are very careful about their policies to avoid condemnation from any organisation. Therefore, when a reaction is shown, and an organisation condemns it, the Taliban take note and try to suppress the crime and not broadcast its news.” Wahida Amiri

4.2 Platform preference

Based on data from [Statcounter Global Stats](#), Facebook is the most widely used social media platform in Afghanistan, with Twitter (referred to as X) and Instagram following in that order. In August 2021, Meta, the parent company of Facebook, WhatsApp, Threads, and Instagram, [took strict action](#) against the Taliban's presence on these platforms. Although Facebook has a larger user base, X is commonly used for X campaigns with hashtags for advocacy in different causes, and it is still primarily used to communicate with people outside of Afghanistan. In Afghanistan, [activists and journalists](#) are among the second category of users with the most followers on Twitter. What I have found from the interviews with women activists is that many of them created their X accounts after 2021 or increased their activities on X. Zuhail is one of the interviewees who is in Afghanistan, and she mentioned that:

“After the Taliban returned, my group suggested that I create a Twitter account to advocate for women's rights. But I have had a Facebook account for 10 years.” Zuhail²

Additionally, Hoda Khamosh explains her preference for using X over Facebook.

¹ To protect the interviewee's security, I used the pseudonym “Maryam,” as she is currently in Afghanistan.

² To protect the interviewee's security, I used the pseudonym “Zuhail,” as she is currently in Afghanistan.

“I was blocked on Facebook and Instagram for writing about the Taliban, but on Twitter, it is possible to write freely about the Taliban and discuss events in Afghanistan.” Hoda Khamosh.

Taranom Seyedi believes that Twitter, or X and Facebook are the most popular platforms among women activists.

“Twitter and Facebook are the most favoured platforms for women's struggles. If you want to make news accessible to the people of Afghanistan, it can reach thousands through Facebook. Women can promote their struggles more effectively through Facebook and Twitter.” Taranom Seyedi.

5. Women's activism beyond the borders

While women activists inside Afghanistan are unable to be active on social media due to security concerns, those living in the diaspora play a crucial role in amplifying their voices by sharing and posting online. Secure messaging apps like WhatsApp, Signal, and Telegram frequently facilitate this connection between activists. These platforms allow women inside Afghanistan to communicate discreetly with activists outside the country, sharing critical information about their current situation or seeking assistance and support.

Women activists whom I interviewed in Afghanistan often reach out to their fellow activists in the diaspora to share the latest news, personal stories, and urgent needs. The women activists who are based in diaspora ensure that the struggles and resistance efforts within Afghanistan are not silenced but instead broadcast to a global audience. Activists outside of Afghanistan strategically share and tweet demonstration initiatives and protest programs that women have organised inside the nation. This method not only amplifies the message but also protects the identities of those still within Afghanistan, shielding them from potential retaliation by the Taliban.

All the women I interviewed believe that maintaining robust connections and open lines of communication between those inside and outside Afghanistan is essential for effective resistance against the Taliban. This solidarity network empowers them to continue their advocacy, mobilise international support, and push for change despite the oppressive environment they face at home.

The collaborative effort underscores the importance of global solidarity in the fight for women's rights and justice in Afghanistan.

5.1 Connection among the Afghanistan women activists in diaspora and inside the country

There are many women activists who are working to improve women's rights in Afghanistan, employing various methods for their advocacy. While some of these activists are advocating independently through their personal networks, a significant number of women emerged following the Taliban's seizure of Afghanistan and formed a new generation of grassroots resistance movements. These women are organising their efforts by forming groups that include members from various provinces in Afghanistan, as well as those who have relocated to the diaspora. Communication apps and social media platforms play a crucial role in keeping these activists connected, regardless of their geographical location, inside or outside the country.

When the [Taliban violently](#) attacked, imprisoned, and tortured women who were peacefully protesting in the streets of different provinces and chanting in opposition to the Taliban's laws. Following that, women activists have taken precautions, like [indoor](#) protesting and then taking photos and videos of their protests. They [send these videos](#) and photos to women activists in the diaspora to share and post on their social media pages. Women activists in the diaspora have been given a significant role in amplifying the voice of those in Afghanistan. According to the data gathered in this study, women activists in Afghanistan are unable to share these videos on their social media due to security issues, even if they use aliases. Therefore, women residing in diaspora are widely disseminating and uploading videos and photos.

During my observation of platform X, I encountered tweets featuring screenshots of messages shared to disseminate information from within Afghanistan. Additionally, tweets contained photos and videos of demonstration programs by women activists.



Figure 1

Zarmina Paryani posted a message on her X platform that she received from a group of girls in Afghanistan. The message provides information about providing the Chadri in a primary school in Badakhshan.

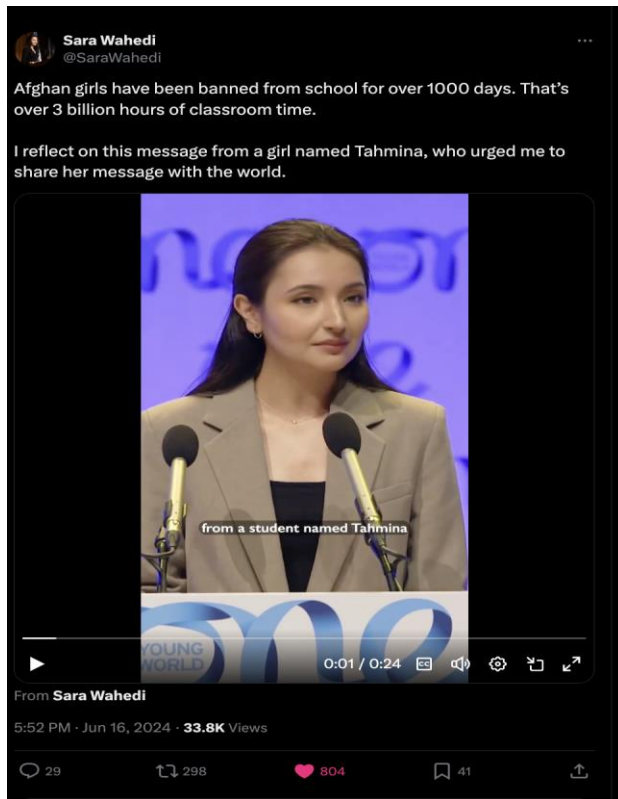


Figure 2

Sara Wahedi tweeted a video from her speech that included a message from a girl from inside Afghanistan. Her tweet was retweeted 298 times and received 804 likes and 25 comments.



Figure 3

Munisa Mubariz retweeted a post from a branch of Afghanistan's powerful women's movement in Balkh province about the Doha 3 meeting to help amplify the voices of women inside Afghanistan. The tweet was retweeted six times, received 10 likes, and garnered 585 views.

The interviewees also mentioned that they frequently received messages from inside Afghanistan, including updates on the women's situation, factual information, decrees, and announcements made by the Taliban. Zahra Haqparast also told me that she is receiving a lot of messages on her social media messengers from women who are inside Afghanistan.

“We receive many messages from women via Facebook Messenger. For example, a woman sent a photo of her head being attacked with an axe by her family, and though I couldn't help her directly, I could connect her with doctors and counsellors to talk to her and document the incident.” Zahra Haqparast.

5.2 Communication among the Afghanistan women activists in diaspora and inside the country

Afghanistan's female activists use technology, particularly through communication apps like WhatsApp, Signal, Telegram, and Facebook Messenger. They routinely have meetings using Zoom, Google Meet, and WhatsApp group conversations to improve communication and develop stronger connections, allowing them to better organise their advocacy activities. Their advocacy initiatives include events, programs, announcements, press releases, and social media campaigns to protest Taliban decrees and evictions. There are several groups of activists or protesting women, each with its own WhatsApp group to coordinate activities. These groups will occasionally form a larger WhatsApp group to facilitate coordination, allowing them to make decisions and engage in coordinated activities.

The majority of the female activists interviewed stressed the significance of establishing connections and maintaining communication between activists both within and outside the country to fight with the Taliban. And some of them have shared that they almost have connections and communication with women inside Afghanistan daily, weekly, and monthly.

“Afghanistan is in an emergency state, and we are at war. The girls in the diaspora should not think that being outside Afghanistan makes them comfortable. The women activists are on the front lines of the war and must be on high alert and defensive because an attack can happen anytime from the Taliban, and we must be prepared to respond. Therefore, communication between girls inside and outside the country is essential.” Taranom Seyedi

Zhual³ from inside of Afghanistan also responded to why this communication and connection among the women are important.

“To convey the realities and reliable news from inside Afghanistan so that they (the diaspora women) can advocate for and raise awareness about Afghanistan's situation. Unfortunately, everyone, including family and society, insults us while we are in prison and fighting against all the restrictions. Due to the limitations, we have less activity, but diaspora women should become our voice and share our problems on different platforms and in meetings.”

According to the gathered data, social media platforms have played a significant role in connecting and facilitating communication among activists, both inside and outside of Afghanistan. Women inside Afghanistan can reach out to those in the diaspora for assistance, such as sharing information, financial support, mental health support, and advice on how to leave the country. However, in many cases, they struggle to find substantial support because many [women activists in the diaspora](#) face their own personal challenges.

6. Leveraging social media for women's rights advocacy

6.1 Women's activism: shifting advocacy strategies under Taliban rule

According to [Amnesty International's 2023 report](#), Afghanistan is ranked as the worst country for women. Since the Taliban regained power in August 2021, they have systematically imposed severe restrictions on women and girls, including banning girls over the age of 12 from attending school and barring women from most jobs. In response, women have begun advocating for themselves by taking to the streets to voice their opposition to Taliban policies. They have organised numerous [protests](#), [marches](#), and [media conferences](#), consistently opposing each new restrictive measure. Unfortunately, the Taliban have [violently suppressed](#) their protests. The female activists have changed their advocacy strategies and techniques due to restrictions, as Hoda Khamosh, who left Afghanistan after 2021 and now lives in diaspora, one of the interviewees, explained:

“Since the Taliban came to power, the way and extent of social media use among women activists have changed. Women often do not have access to places to gather. Previously,

³ To protect the interviewee's security, I used the pseudonym "Zuhal," as she is currently in Afghanistan.

we would gather in the streets to protest, but due to the restrictions, we (her fellow women activists in Afghanistan) now stay at home and share images and videos of our protests against the Taliban. Lately, Twitter has been used more frequently.” Hoda Khamosh.

Furthermore, Zahra Sepher explained that after the Taliban regained power in Afghanistan, many activists were silenced on social media pages due to security issues and preferred not to be public; however, the new generation of women uses social media platforms actively.

“I can say that a significant number of new-generation activists emerged after the fall of Afghanistan, including protesting women and women's movements. They have become more active, creating pages, publishing statements, and organising programs. They widely use social media, even with the limitations, sometimes masking their identities to avoid being recognised. Social media is the only specific platform for protesting women, connecting them to national and international media outside Afghanistan.” Zahra Sepher

Zahra Haqparast shared her experience:

“When we started protesting, we didn't have everyone's support, not even our families. We stood up for our rights and went to the streets, despite all the challenges. When we were banned from the streets, we moved to closed spaces, and from there, we got arrested. Then we took to social media to continue our advocacy and protests.” Zahra Haqparast.

6.2 Success stories from social media campaigns for women's rights

AW's report “Violence Behind the Screen: Rising Online Abuse Silences Afghan Women” shows that Platform X has become one of the most popular platforms on which women activists engage to advocate for women's rights in Afghanistan since the Taliban's return to power. During three years of advocacy and fighting for women’s rights in Afghanistan, women activists have launched many social media campaigns with different hashtags, including #BanTaliban, #LetHerLearn, #Free_Julia_Parsi, and #EndGenderApartheid. These social media campaigns were organised for various purposes, including [raising awareness](#) on women’s situation in Afghanistan, mobilising [human rights defenders](#) and resources, reaching out to UN agencies or human rights organisations, putting pressure on Taliabn to release activists from prisons, and highlighting the threats faced by women activists from the Taliban.

The majority of interviewees believed that their social media campaigns had a significant impact on various topics. For instance, the social media campaign that advocates for the immediate release of Tamana Paryani, Julia Parsi, and other Taliban prisoners in Afghanistan. In such cases, a hashtag that includes the name of the incarcerated individual is typically generated and subsequently disseminated widely. By tagging human rights organisations like Amnesty International, international organisations, or individuals who have the ability to exert pressure on the Taliban, women attempt to compel the Taliban to release the prisoners sooner. Another example is the recent UN-convened Doha III meeting, where representatives from states and human rights organisations inside Afghanistan were invited to discuss the country's issues. Afghanistan civil society and women activists were notably absent from the invitation list, and only the official Afghan representative attended the meeting, rather than Taliban representatives. This time also, women activists launched different campaigns, like [posting their photos](#) that contained boycott statements for the Doha III meeting, creating [videos and photos](#), writing posts and tagging the UN page, human rights organisations, UN high-ranking employees and politics. The UN forced this meeting to be extended to one more day and invited some women activists to the 2nd of July, although many of these women refused to participate in the meeting due to the symbolic nature of this meeting. The research uncovered a large volume of tweets like the ones below while following activists and observing X in June 2024.



Figure 4

Wahida Amiri's tweet featured a video of women activists, their faces covered for anonymity, holding placards in protest against the Doha III meeting and its agenda. The tweet has received 9 retweets, 42 likes, and over 1.9 million views.

Sabira Akbari divided the impactful advocacy into two short-term and long-term campaigns:

“If we divide our campaigns into two short-term and long-term campaigns, we have some examples of successful advocacy campaigns. Short-term campaigns have focused on the release of women imprisoned by the Taliban, using specific hashtags. These have been somewhat successful in raising awareness.”

7. Challenges and the Taliban's response to social media activism

7.1 Security concerns for women activists inside Afghanistan

The first and most significant challenge for all female activists using social media is security concerns. Because of the Taliban's recent policies, women activists are concerned even when using anonymous names on social media. They implemented a policy that requires all citizens in Afghanistan to [register their SIM](#) cards, providing their personal information. This facilitates the [tracing of activists](#) through social media platforms, as the government has access to a database containing citizens' information and mobile numbers. Maryam, a female activist in Afghanistan, expressed how the Taliban are tracking activists on social media, even when they use anonymous names.

“In Afghanistan, when SIM cards are registered in someone's name, they use these numbers for their virtual pages and track protesters through these numbers.” Maryam⁴

7.2 Women activists in diaspora and challenges

Women activists in the diaspora might not have security concerns about themselves because they are in safe countries. However, many activists in the diaspora managed to leave Afghanistan after the Taliban took over the country. As newcomers in foreign countries, they struggle with integrating into new societies, finding jobs, rebuilding their lives from scratch, paying their expenses, learning new languages, and dealing with trauma.

“When women activists go to Western countries, in addition to the traumas they brought from Afghanistan and all the problems, pain, and suffering they face, they are preoccupied with how to survive in this system and not end up on the streets. There is no time or energy left for women to continue their activities. Our numbers are decreasing. The situation in Afghanistan requires us to work persistently from the diaspora.” Wahida Amiri

According to data gathered from interviewees, another challenge faced by women activists in the diaspora is the security concerns for their families and relatives still in Afghanistan. The Taliban oppresses these activists by threatening their loved ones back home.

7.3 Lack of support from family and society

Amidst women's advocacy on social media platforms, activists encounter not only opposition from pro-Taliban accounts but also a [dearth of backing](#) from society and men in Afghanistan. Rather than providing support to these women activists, certain individuals engage in posting and commenting that includes defamatory statements, offensive remarks, and derogatory language, thereby exacerbating the obstacles faced by these women in their pursuit of rights. One of the interviewees stated the following challenge for their activities:

“When we started protesting, we didn't have everyone's support, not even our families. We stood up for our rights and went to the streets, despite all the challenges. Then we

⁴ To protect the interviewee's security, I used the pseudonym “Maryam,” as she is currently in Afghanistan.

took to social media. Besides a small group of supporters, many accused us of raising our voices just for asylum cases. We ignored such accusations because we knew the people lacked the awareness to understand our cause.” Zahra Haqparast

7.4 Fake and pro-Taliban accounts on social media

The next challenge faced by women activists, both inside and outside of Afghanistan, is the presence of [fake and pro-Taliban](#) accounts on social media platforms. These accounts primarily focus on monitoring women activists, [reporting their accounts](#), spreading propaganda, creating discord, and attempting to break women's movement groups apart. These fake accounts also cause harassment and threats. Taranom Seyedi, an interviewee who fled Afghanistan following the Taliban's resurgence and currently resides in diaspora, highlighted the presence of counterfeit accounts as a significant obstacle.

“The main problems on social media are fake accounts with fake photos on Twitter and Facebook, which spread discord and hate, attempting to break groups apart. These fake accounts also cause harassment and threats. If social media management had better policies for identifying individuals, these issues could be prevented.” Taranom Saeedi.

Wahida Amiri also mentioned that the fake accounts follow her on the X platform:

“When I check, I see that a new account has been created and has only come to follow me. This is an example of an enemy attack. It is a big challenge, and I usually check my followers.”

7.5 Taliban responses to women's activism on social media

There is no official evidence or report regarding the Taliban's responses to women's social media activism. However, interviewees believe that the Taliban has created numerous fake accounts on social media. These accounts, along with pro-Taliban accounts, are active on social media platforms, where they post content and report the accounts of women activists. Additionally, according to gathered data from interviews, they threaten to publicly release personal videos and photos of these activists, send death threats to them and their families, and leave hate speech comments on their posts. [Some reports](#) indicate that the Taliban extensively use fake accounts to spread their propaganda on social media. Many women interviewed have reported that these fake and pro-Taliban accounts follow them to identify and threaten them and oppress them with

hateful comments. Sabira Akbari is an activist who lives in diaspora and she stated the Taliban's response to women's activism:

“Reporting protesters' pages, creating accounts in the names of female activists, sending threats, insults, and vulgar comments to their addresses, and using anonymous accounts for their activities.” Sabira Akbari

Mina, another woman activist from inside Afghanistan, has stated how pro-Taliban accounts on social media follow the activists in order to identify and arrest them.

“When the Taliban find a profile of a protesting woman, they follow it and try to report it or identify and arrest them. The Taliban use fake accounts on Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp, for example, they message me under a pseudonym to gain access to our WhatsApp group movement, and if we talk a little about the movement, their contact will increase and to identify and arrest active and protesting women.” Mina⁵

While I was observing the women activists accounts on the X platform, I came across comments from pro-Taliban or fake accounts under their tweets. In the following images, you can see Metra Mehran's tweets about the Doha 3 meeting, along with comments from pro-Taliban accounts containing hate speech and online harassment. For example, one comment said, *"You're a good asset, earning a few hundred dollars abroad at night... Your business is thriving... But you'll expire soon."* This statement is an example of online harassment with references to prostitution. Figure 6 shows a screenshot of a tweet by Tamana Zaryab Paryani, along with the comments it received. These comments contain significant online harassment and abuse.

⁵ To protect the interviewee's security, I used the pseudonym "Mina," as she is currently in Afghanistan.

Metra Mehran @Metra_Mehran

اینجا تاکید کردم که دوحه از لحاظ ساختاری، ارزشی، حقوقی و اهداف اساسی قلمحمله ۲۱۲۷ شورای امنیت که این جلسه بر اساس آن تشکیل شده است، در تضاد و تناقض است. محصل اصلی افغانستان ایرتاید جدیستی، انحصار و تمامیت‌خواهی طالبان است، چنین ایجاد و ساختار نمی‌تواند نتیجه مطلوب داشته باشد.

Translate post

BBC NEWS @bbcpersian · Jun 30

نخست سوم دوحه دوحه دوحه افغانستان - از امروز با حضور نمایندگان سازمان ملل و کشورها و هیئت طالبان، در پایتخت قطر برگزار می‌شود. دیدارهای دوجانبه هیئت‌ها از صبح شروع شده. گفتگو با میزبان مهراں فعال حقوق زنان:



5:41 PM · Jun 30, 2024 · 7,122 Views

10 18 108 3

Post your reply Reply

Asud_Aldin @Asud_Aldin · Jul 1

تو هم خوب مال هستی، در خارج شب چند صد دالر میگیری... خوب کار و بار تان رونق گرفته... مگر زود اکسپایر میشی...

Ghamai @GHAMAI_HAAJI · Jul 1

بی بی جان خیر نداری که مال متحد شما زندهای پروژه ای ره مثل تیشو بییر استفاده میکنه. شما نه چندان مهم استین او نه هم کف تان جای ره میگیره.

Ali @Ali56492874 · Jun 30

خوب شد گفتی این سرمنشی ملل متحد و اعضای شورای امنیت این گپ را اصلا نمی‌فهمند هاب زور سرپالا میرود در مقابل طالب بر علاوه شکست نظامی شکست سیاسی را هم پذیرفتند، بیچاره پتیمک های امریکا و ناتو عذر و زاری و فریادشان به بنادرهای شان بیفایده شد

M. Haqani Rohani @haqani12 · Jul 1

دفعه قبلی به دوحه بخاطر چهره تلویزیونی منتقل شدید وگر نه جو دو مرکب را تقسیم نمی توانید

Asud_Aldin @Asud_Aldin · Jul 1

تو هم خوب مال هستی، در خارج شب چند صد دالر میگیری... خوب کار و بار تان رونق گرفته... مگر زود اکسپایر میشی...

Ghamai @GHAMAI_HAAJI · Jul 1

بی بی جان خیر نداری که مال متحد شما زندهای پروژه ای ره مثل تیشو بییر استفاده میکنه. شما نه چندان مهم استین او نه هم کف تان جای ره میگیره.

ابو عاكشة الافغاني @aboakahsa4321 · Jul 1

تو گره خوردی

Figure 5

Tamana Zaryab Paryani @tamanaaryaniP

The world must recognize Gender Apartheid in Afghanistan as a heinous crime against humanity and take action to end this gender apartheid. Interactions with the Taliban should be hated, and they should be sanctioned and brought to trial.

#StopGenderApartheidinAfghanistan!



11:24 AM · Jul 9, 2024 · 6,081 Views

16 35 96

Post your reply Reply

eng mohammadi @m_m5653 · Jul 9

از تو کرده تروریست و فاحشه است پرتی؟ بی عتبی ناموس بلز باقیم که از حق دختر های ما یک فاحشه ایج شریبی و قیونی دفاع کند برو در نایت کلب ها وقتت را تیر کو از سر تخت زنا و لواط بلند میشی و داد حق زن وطن میزنی

Mirza Mangal @mirza_mangal · Jul 9

سعی کی خنگه بی باور و گره دیر خوردن رکه وی سخته سعی به دی وی

eng mohammadi @m_m5653 · Jul 9

از تو کرده تروریست و فاحشه است پرتی؟ بی عتبی ناموس بلز باقیم که از حق دختر های ما یک فاحشه ایج شریبی و قیونی دفاع کند برو در نایت کلب ها وقتت را تیر کو از سر تخت زنا و لواط بلند میشی و داد حق زن وطن میزنی

Mirza Mangal @mirza_mangal · Jul 9

سعی کی خنگه بی باور و گره دیر خوردن رکه وی سخته سعی به دی وی

Wahidullah Javid @Wahidullahjavi1 · Jul 9

you want misfortune for Afghanistan. You have always tried to make Afghanistan have a bad name in the world because you are the enemy of Afghanistan. You are one of those shameless women.

Talhakhani @Talhakhani1993 · Jul 9

فاحشه بی هویت کولابی

wahidalokozay1 @wahidalokozay11 · Jul 9

کي ز م د نمل شما نموره چی و جاسوس

Figure 6

8. Conclusion

This study focused on women's activism in Afghanistan, specifically on the use of social media as an advocacy tool for women activists. In addition, it highlights that women activists who are based in diaspora have a significant role in amplifying the voice of women who are inside Afghanistan. Women activists have fought against the Taliban's oppressive system, both within the country and in the diaspora. Women activists in Afghanistan struggle with trauma, lack of support from family and community, restricted access to the internet, and limitations on social media because of security concerns and Taliban regulations. Meanwhile, diaspora women face their own set of difficulties, including trauma, lack of financial support, security concerns for their families still in Afghanistan, and the challenges of integrating into new societies, learning new languages, and finding jobs in new countries to pay their expenses.

Women's activism in Afghanistan is an unstudied topic and there is a need for more study. The persistence and courage of these women activists underscore the need for continued research and support to amplify their voices and address the obstacles they face in their relentless pursuit of justice and equality.