



BETWEEN SHADOWS AND STORIES: NAVIGATING THE JOURNEY OF AFGHAN JOURNALISTS

FROM AUG. 15, 2021 TO AUG. 15, 2023



*Journalists
& Media*

**DIVING DEEP: AN IN-DEPTH
INVESTIGATION**

AUGUST 15, 2023

Between Shadows and Stories: Navigating the Journey of Afghan Journalists
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I. Introduction

Before the Taliban takeover, Afghanistan boasted a thriving media landscape with a significant presence of journalists and media workers. The statistics reveal a total of 11,858 individuals engaged in journalistic endeavors, including 7,746 journalists and 4,112 media employees. Among these, 5,608 were male journalists and 2,138 were female journalists. Female participation extended to media employment, with 1,343 female media employees compared to 2,769 male counterparts. However, following the Taliban's rise to power, these numbers plummeted drastically. The post-takeover period saw a stark reduction to 4,600 journalists and media personnel combined, comprising 2,964 journalists and 1,636 media employees. Male journalists remained prominent at 2,575, but female journalists and media employees witnessed a concerning decline, with only 389 and 710 respectively, underscoring the challenges faced by media professionals, particularly women, in this transformed landscape.

The media landscape in Afghanistan witnessed significant changes before and after the Taliban takeover. Prior to the fall, the media sector was vibrant with 160 television channels, 311 radio stations, 90 print newspapers, and 26 news agencies. However, following the takeover, there was a notable decline in media activity, with only 70 television channels remaining, marking a decrease of around 56%. Similarly, the number of radio stations decreased to 211, reflecting a decrease of approximately 32%. The print newspaper industry suffered the most, with only 11 newspapers left, experiencing an alarming decline of about 88%. Furthermore, the number of news agencies reduced to 9, indicating a decrease of around 65%. These percentages underscore the substantial challenges faced by media outlets in maintaining their operations amid the shifting political landscape.

Amid the shifting landscape, the role of media as an information conduit underwent profound changes. Before the Taliban's ascendancy, diverse media outlets played a pivotal role in disseminating information, shaping public opinion, and holding those in power accountable. Journalists and media workers acted as the eyes and ears of the public, ensuring transparency and facilitating dialogue. However, the subsequent decline in media outlets and personnel has raised concerns about the accessibility of accurate and unbiased information. The reduction in news agencies and print newspapers has not only impacted diversity but also raised questions about the range of viewpoints available to the Afghan public. As the media struggles to adapt to these new circumstances, the ability to provide reliable information remains a pivotal challenge, impacting both the media's credibility and the public's access to vital news.

II. Research Methodology

This comprehensive report draws its insights from a meticulously designed research methodology that amalgamates diverse approaches to provide an insightful exploration of Afghanistan's evolving media landscape. Employing a blend of desk research, surveys, and in-depth interviews, the study endeavors to capture a holistic and nuanced understanding of the multifaceted dynamics at play.

1. Desk Research: The foundation of this report rests upon a rigorous desk research process that delves into a spectrum of secondary sources. Reputable news agencies, academic studies, governmental documents, and reports from international organizations serve as valuable repositories of information. This method enables a comprehensive contextualization of the subject, anchoring the narrative in an informed background of events, trends, and opinions.

2. Surveys: Complementing the desk research, a structured survey approach has been employed to capture the perspectives of a wide range of stakeholders. Through carefully crafted questionnaires, media professionals, journalists, and relevant organizations have been invited to share their insights. The survey method adds a quantitative dimension to the analysis, providing a snapshot of prevailing sentiments and experiences across the media landscape.

3. In-depth Interviews: Further enriching the study, in-depth interviews were conducted with Afghan journalists, media workers, and experts with direct experience of the changing media environment. These qualitative interactions enable the exploration of personal narratives, unique challenges, and nuanced viewpoints. The interviews not only shed light on the challenges faced but also uncover the resilience, adaptability, and aspirations of those who navigate the complex terrain of Afghan journalism.

Collectively, the combination of desk research, surveys, and in-depth interviews serves as a robust methodological scaffold, allowing this report to delve into the intricate layers of Afghanistan's media landscape. This approach seeks to paint a comprehensive picture, ultimately contributing to a better understanding of the journey of journalists and media workers in this evolving context.

III. Unveiling Afghanistan's Shifting Media Terrain

Before the Taliban's rise to power, Afghanistan's media landscape thrived with a substantial presence of journalists and media workers. Statistics reveal that a total of 11,858 individuals were actively involved in journalistic pursuits, encompassing 7,746 journalists and 4,112 media employees. Among these, 5,608 were male journalists, and 2,138 were female journalists. This inclusivity extended to media employment, with 1,343 female media employees compared to 2,769 male counterparts. However, with the

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Taliban assuming control, these figures witnessed a stark decline. In the post-takeover period, the journalist and media personnel tally plummeted to 4,599, consisting of 2,964 journalists and 1,636 media employees. Although male journalists remained relatively consistent at 2,575, female journalists and media employees faced a disconcerting drop of 91% and 73.5% respectively, leaving only 194 and 355. This paradigm shift underscores the formidable hurdles encountered by media professionals, especially women, in an evolving landscape.

Year	Metric	Before Takeover	After Takeover	Percentage Change
2021	Journalists	7,746	2,964	-61%
	Media Employees	4,112	1,636	-60%
	Male Journalists	5,608	2,575	-54%
	Female Journalists	2,138	194	-91%
	Female Media Employees	1,343	355	-73.5%

The media landscape of Afghanistan underwent substantial transformation due to the Taliban's takeover. Preceding their ascendancy, the media sector thrived with a robust presence of 160 television channels, 311 radio stations, 90 print newspapers, and 26 news agencies. However, this vigor was curtailed significantly in the aftermath, leaving merely 70 television channels, reflecting a decline of about 56%. A parallel decrease in radio stations brought their number down to 211, signifying a reduction of approximately 32%. Print newspapers bore the brunt of change, dwindling to a mere 11, experiencing a drastic drop of around 88%. Similarly, the number of news agencies decreased to 9, illustrating a decline of about 65%. These percentages emphasize the substantial challenges faced by media outlets in sustaining their activities within the evolving political landscape.

Year	Metric	Television Channels	Radio Stations	Print Newspapers	News Agencies
2021	Before Fall	160	311	90	26
2023	After Fall	70	211	11*	9*
	Percentage Drop	-56%	-32%	-88%	-65%

*The 11 Print Newspapers that are active are operating online.

*The 9 News Agencies are also not having their previous structure and operation, however, they are only active as social media outlets and usually publish second hand news.

A. The Impact of De Facto Rule on the Current State of Journalism and Media

In the early months of the de facto's establishment, a notable wave of media outlets closure and journalists emigration swept through the country. Concurrently, officials of the Islamic Emirate issued statements aimed at offering encouragement to Afghan journalists, media professionals, outlets, and supporting organizations. Consequently, as the year 2022 dawned, Afghan journalism found itself in a realm of ambiguity and uncertainty. Against this backdrop, journalists, media professionals, support entities, and outlets embarked on 2022 grappling with a blend of challenges and occasional flickers of reassurance.

The new regime has had a profoundly negative impact on the situation of journalists and media in Afghanistan. The media landscape, once marked by diversity and relative freedom, has been dramatically constrained under their rule.

1. **Censorship and Self-Censorship:** The de facto's strict rules on media has led to pervasive censorship of media content. Journalists now face limitations on what they can cover, write, or broadcast. Fear of retribution has also fueled self-censorship, curtailing the reporting of critical or controversial topics.
2. **Threats and Intimidation:** Journalists and media workers have been subjected to threats, harassment, and intimidation. Their physical safety is at risk, leading many to fear for their lives. This atmosphere of fear has forced some to abandon their profession or flee the country.
3. **Violence and Attacks:** The de facto's takeover has coincided with a rise in violence against media professionals. Assassinations, abductions, and attacks on media outlets have created an environment of danger and instability. These incidents not only harm individual journalists but also instill a chilling effect on the entire media community.
4. **Dwindling Press Freedom:** The de facto's control has eroded press freedom, leading to a significant reduction in media outlets and the dissemination of independent information. Many newspapers, TV stations, and radio channels have been forced to shut down or alter their content to align with the de facto's policies.
5. **Suppression of Investigative Reporting:** Investigative journalism, which plays a crucial role in holding authorities accountable, has been stifled. The ability to uncover corruption, human rights abuses, and other critical issues is severely curtailed under the constraints imposed by the Taliban.
6. **Loss of Access to Information:** The Afghan public's access to accurate and unbiased information has significantly decreased. As a result, citizens are often

left uninformed about critical developments, inhibiting their ability to make informed decisions.

7. **Exodus of Journalists:** Faced with threats, violence, and limitations on their work, many journalists have chosen to leave the country, resulting in a brain drain of skilled media professionals. This exodus weakens the media's ability to fulfill its vital role in the society.

Opinions from Managers of Journalists' Supporting Organizations:

We spoke with Mr. Ali Asghar Akbarzada, who expressed, "The current situation for media in Afghanistan is challenging and uncertain compared to the past. Issues like financial constraints, limited access to information, censorship, and the absence of a specific media activities law have greatly hindered media operations." He emphasized that if serious actions aren't taken to protect media activities, the future for media in the country could become critical.

Muhammad Zarif Karimi, CEO of Nai-Supporting Afghanistan Open Media, stated, "Following the return of the Islamic Emirate, Afghan media has faced pressure from various directions. The scope of media activities has significantly narrowed for radio, television, and publications. The media struggle to cover critical programs, address government shortcomings, and discuss challenges. As a result, Afghan media has lost nearly 50% of its two-decade progress in terms of diversity and quality. Journalists' financial difficulties are particularly concerning, as they are often the sole providers for their families."

The consequences of media closures are far-reaching, including restricted information flow, suppressed free speech, diminished news dissemination, lower quality and diversity of content, dwindling audience engagement, and an overall precarious state of the media industry. Karimi proposed collaborative efforts between the Islamic Emirate, the international community, and media support organizations to prevent the collapse of Afghanistan's media landscape.

Perspectives from the Islamic Emirate

Mr. Abdul Matin Qani, spokesperson for the Ministry of Information and Culture, shared, "Our ministry has taken proactive measures to safeguard media and journalists' rights, aiming to create a secure environment where they can effectively serve as communication bridges between the government and the people."

Responding to questions about media closures, he clarified, "I cannot confirm the closure of 300 media outlets and cessation of their activities. According to our statistics, 212 media outlets are closed, and we currently have 367 active media entities, including

international outlets." He underlined the ministry's commitment to prevent media closures and discussed the case of Kabul News, attributing its closure to financial reasons.

He assured, "We appreciate the resilience of media outlets operating under challenging economic circumstances in Afghanistan. We stand ready to support them and address their information access and security concerns."

Regarding legal matters, he noted, "Journalists are facing a legal vacuum currently. Until a new law is enacted, the previous media law and the access to information law remain in effect."

Steps have been taken toward a new media law, and it's awaiting higher-level approval. If delays occur, the ministry plans to formulate a policy preserving media rights and addressing challenges. Qani asserted, "The Ministry of Information and Culture bears responsibility for all media. We've addressed complaints from various outlets and are working to resolve issues in cooperation with security forces and related authorities."

In conclusion, Qani emphasized the ministry's dedication to supporting media and resolving issues promptly.

Positive points

There have been few improvements in terms of establishing few facilitating structures, such as establishment of a committee that will probe cases of violence against journalists in the country, as well as establishment of a committee to protect copyright, and introduction of spokespersons to governmental entities, have been among positive actions taken during the year 2022.

B. Under the Shadow of Danger: A Three-Year Analysis of Violence Against Journalists and Media Workers

The statistics reveal a distressing trend of violence against journalists and media workers over the three-year period. In 2021, following August 15, 7 individuals lost their lives, 5 were injured, 16 were arrested, and 16 faced physical assault. Additionally, 8 were summoned for questioning. The year 2022 saw a continued threat, with 5 fatalities, 2 injuries, 49 arrests, 22 incidents of assault, 3 summonses, and a concerning 46 cases of harassment. The violence persisted into 2023, with 7 reported deaths, 14 injuries, 26 arrests, 2 instances of harassment, and 12 summonses. These figures underscore the dangers and challenges faced by journalists and media employees during this tumultuous period.

Year	Metric	Deaths	Injuries	Arrests	Assaults	Summonses	Harassment
2021	Following Aug. 15	7	5	16	16	8	-

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Year	Metric	Deaths	Injuries	Arrests	Assaults	Summonses	Harassment
2022		5	2	49	22	3	46
2023		7	14	26	-	12	2

Testimony from Violence Victims: Insights from Mohammad Ismail Azad

1. Mohammad Ismail Azad, Sulh TV Network

In our interviews with individuals who have experienced violence firsthand, we spoke with Mohammad Ismail Azad. His father's name is Abdul Hamid, and during the period marked by violence, he was associated with the Sulh Television Network. His account sheds light on the challenges faced by media professionals during tumultuous times.

Question 1: What type of violence did you experience, and who were the perpetrators of this violence?

Answer: I faced insults, physical assault, and intimidation in the presence of the public. This violence was inflicted by the head of Information and Culture in Herat, along with his guards.

Question 2: What was the reason behind this violent behavior directed at you? In other words, why were you subjected to violence?

Answer: I was covering a religious event, specifically the funeral of a renowned religious scholar who had been killed in a suicide attack. I had adhered to all religious laws and principles in my coverage. I could not discern any valid reason for this violence, as I believe I had conducted myself in accordance with all norms. To this day, I remain unaware of the precise motive behind this aggression.

Question 3: What were the consequences of this violence? Did you lose your job or experience any other challenges, such as migration? Please provide some clarity on this.

Answer: I lost my job as a result of this incident and have faced numerous restrictions. The impact of these consequences has been ongoing, and I continue to grapple with them.

Note: Kindly provide a concise overview of the general context of the issue.

On Saturday, July 22nd, 2023, we went to the funeral of Mujib al-Rahman Ansari to record a program for Peace Television, in coordination with security agencies and the leadership of the Taliban in Herat. At the conclusion of the event, as people were leaving, I was capturing images. It was then that I noticed the head of Information and Culture for the Taliban in Herat, standing just a few meters away, instructing me to stop filming or taking

pictures. His associates lunged at me, assaulting me by first violently seizing my camera and striking my back with force. They then used their belts to strike my face, an act witnessed by a considerable number of people present. I became a victim of insults, physical assault, and intimidation.

Following this incident, not only did I lose my job, but I also found myself entangled in numerous other challenges and accusations.

2. Ekram Esmati, Wardak Province, Kabul News Reporter,

Question 1: Could you describe the nature of the violence you experienced and identify the individuals responsible for these acts?

Answer: I encountered physical violence, specifically, and it was perpetrated by members of the Taliban.

Question 2: Can you shed light on the reasons behind this violent behavior directed at you? Why do you think you became a target of violence?

Answer 2: It seems that the reports I was preparing had criticisms of the policies of the current government, and this might have made me a target for such violent actions.

Question 3: What impact did this violence have on you? Did you lose your job or were there other consequences? Could you please provide some clarity on this?

Answer 3: Initially, I lost my job, and later, I was forced to leave the country due to the circumstances.

Note: Please provide a concise overview of the general information regarding the issue.

In 2022, I was a journalist at Kabul News Television. After I produced several critical reports on the current government's policies, I faced threats. After publishing the reports in June 2022, I was caught at a checkpoint by the Taliban. After being detained for a few hours, I was subjected to physical violence. I was severely injured, and as a result, I had to leave both my job and my country.

3. A Narrative of a Journalist

Sultani, one of the journalists of Al-Arabi News, was engaged in preparing a report about Professor Mash'al, a prominent university lecturer, in Kot-e Sangi of Kabul. However, he wasn't the only journalist working on this story. Others were also busy crafting reports. After completing their work, they all wanted to go home. Mr. Sultani hailed a taxi when suddenly security forces arrived, apprehended him, confiscated his mobile phone and camera, and escorted him to a security area. Later, he was taken

from room to room, subjected to insults and humiliation. Finally, he reaches the office of the police district commander, who was from Kandahar and proves to be understanding and sympathetic towards him. Inside the room, another person is also present who insists that Sultani should be imprisoned because he is acting against the policy. However, the district commander once again states that Sultani has not committed any wrongdoing, has not acted against Islam, and should be released. But the other person is not willing to accept this and insists otherwise. They contacted the intelligence authorities, and soon the intelligence officers arrived. They took Sultani to the local intelligence headquarters, where he was handed over to the higher-ranking intelligence officials. The situation remained tense until late at night. Mr. Hammad¹ arrives as they later serve him food. Later, two individuals from the intelligence agency arrive, their faces covered, and they tie Sultani's hands and feet before transferring him to a prison. After two days and nights, they release him, apologizing for a misunderstanding.

The unfortunate incident involved Sultan being held amidst a circle of pressure, with his neck constrained and his hands bound, causing both physical and psychological distress. His eyes, affected by the physical and mental pressure, added to the ordeal.

C. Media Laws in Afghanistan: Pre-Fall and Post-Takeover Dynamics

In the era preceding the downfall of the republican system, Afghanistan had two significant laws in place: the Mass Media Law and the Access to Information Law. Accompanying these legal frameworks were an array of procedures and regulations that served to uphold and bolster the media sector. However, with the transition from the republic system to the emergence of the Islamic Emirate, a profound transformation occurred. All these laws and regulations were abruptly suspended, ushering in a period of uncertainty. For a span of two years, the Afghan media community operated in a legal vacuum, functioning without the essential legal safeguards that had once supported their work. The ramifications of this legal hiatus have been profound, engendering significant challenges and disruptions within the media landscape.

At the onset of 2022, Zahibullah Mujahid addressed a gathering of journalists, stating that the Mass Media Law was in effect. Despite this assertion, no tangible steps were taken towards the implementation of the executable provisions of this law by the Ministry of Information and Culture.

The spokespeople of the Islamic Emirate have repeatedly addressed the matter of the law's executability. Despite their assertions, the authorities supporting journalists have

¹ Abdul Haq Hammad, Head of Media Publications Monitoring at the Ministry of Information and Culture of the Islamic Emirate

consistently urged the Islamic Emirate to formally communicate the enforcement of this law to the provinces through written notices. However, this directive has yet to materialize, leaving the fate of this law in a state of ambiguity.

The Access to Information Law, renowned as one of the most reputable access to information laws in the region, has been suspended. This ambiguous fate has posed significant challenges for journalists and media workers, grappling with the uncertainties brought about by the suspension of this crucial legal framework.

Not too long ago, the spokesperson of the Ministry of Information and Culture of the Islamic Emirate mentioned on a television program that the Access to Information Law is on the verge of amendment and is poised for implementation with minor modifications. However, there have been no further updates on this matter.

Furthermore, if these laws are indeed subject to amendments, it's worth noting that no consultation has taken place with media stakeholders and supporting organizations for the proposed modifications. While an established practice in Afghanistan is to involve experts in law amendments, the process of altering media-related laws has sidestepped involving media professionals, potentially neglecting the nuanced needs and considerations of the media community. This oversight could inadvertently impact the refinement and shaping of these laws, potentially influencing their interpretation and implementation.

D. Contrasting Media Landscapes: Kabul vs. Provinces

Once again, the stark reality of Afghanistan's fragmented media landscape comes to the forefront. The absence of a comprehensive and adaptable legal framework has paved the way for divergent media activities between Kabul, the capital, and the provinces. Notably, the absence of an all-encompassing law capable of unifying media practices has yielded varying levels of media freedom and accessibility across the country.

In Kabul, the heartbeat of the nation's media activity, the accessibility to information stands in stark contrast to other provinces. Female journalists in Kabul possess a relatively greater latitude in participating in official events and programs, facilitating their information-gathering endeavors. This contrasts sharply with some provinces, where women journalists often find themselves excluded from such opportunities. Moreover, media operations in provinces, particularly those geographically distanced from the central hub, wrestle with the regulatory oversight of the Ministry of Information and Culture. However, the same administrative scrutiny appears to have a less perceptible presence in Kabul.

In this diverse landscape, the contrast between media experiences in Kabul and the provinces serves as a poignant reminder of the evolving dynamics faced by journalists across Afghanistan.

E. Startling Statistics: Absence of Female Journalists and Media Workers in 26 Provinces

A jolting reality emerges from the data, underscoring an unsettling truth: across 26 provinces, a disturbing statistic persists - a complete absence of female journalists and media workers. This revelation casts a stark light on the gender disparity deeply entrenched within Afghanistan's media landscape, raising pertinent questions about the barriers that hinder the inclusion and representation of women in the field.

This alarming trend paints a picture of inequity, underscoring the need for targeted efforts to bridge this gender gap. While the nation's capital, Kabul, may exhibit a more diverse and inclusive media environment, these shocking figures echo a critical call for action on a larger scale. The absence of female voices not only limits the perspectives brought to light through media but also perpetuates a cycle of underrepresentation that challenges the core principles of a vibrant and diverse media landscape.

Amidst the challenges that plague the media landscape, a singular path emerges as the beacon of change: the deliberate shaping of comprehensive laws. This is the key – the unequivocal solution to untangle the web of disparities.

The pressing need to address the two-fold treatment of media necessitates a systematic approach that can only be achieved through the creation and effective implementation of laws that bridge the gap. Beyond mere regulations, these laws have the potential to dismantle entrenched biases, catalyze gender equality, and fortify the foundation for a diverse and inclusive media realm. It is a clarion call for a transformation that transcends rhetoric, ushering in an era where media treatment is unwavering, irrespective of geographic boundaries or gender lines.

F. International Media Under Strain: Surveillance and Restraints in Afghanistan

In the transformed landscape of Afghanistan, international media outlets have found themselves navigating an environment marred by surveillance, constraints, and prohibitions. A striking example of this encroachment is the closure of the BBC office and Radio Azadi's operations within the country, emblematic of the broader trend stifling media voices. Afghanistan International TV channel, once a platform for information dissemination, now stands branded as an adversary of the de facto regime. Its personnel have faced not just surveillance, but even arrests and violence. Similarly, Amu TV channel finds itself cast as an "enemy" and an outlaw in the eyes of the regime.

Such an environment has led to a stifling atmosphere, where international media's capacity to operate freely is significantly curtailed. Operating under close scrutiny, these media outlets must tread cautiously, facing the inevitable constraints placed upon their activities. As a consequence, the dynamics of reporting, dissemination, and communication within Afghanistan have undergone profound shifts, with the press and media grappling with a transformed reality that restricts their freedom and challenges their role in shaping public discourse.

G. Social Media Under Strain Amidst Taliban Control

The Taliban's recent decision to shut down TikTok in the country marks another step in their control over media activities. Alongside other forms of media, the current regime exercises tight surveillance, restrictions, and even self-censorship across social media platforms. Individuals deemed to be critical of the regime are closely monitored, leading to arrests and the removal of their posts. This indicates a lack of freedom of speech, even in the realm of social media.

Reports suggest that the Taliban's measures extend beyond traditional media, as they strategically clamp down on digital platforms to control the narrative. Their actions not only limit the public's access to diverse viewpoints but also contribute to an environment of fear and self-censorship. The closure of TikTok aligns with their broader approach of controlling information flow and maintaining a firm grip on dissent.

This pattern highlights the challenges faced by journalists and citizens who seek to express their opinions or share news online. While social media has historically provided an outlet for alternative voices, the current restrictions underscore the shrinking space for free expression and open dialogue under the Taliban regime.

Opinions from Journalists on the state of Social Media

1. Simah Mayar, Female Journalist

Simah Mayar, a female journalist, highlights that social media platforms have taken control over both our personal and professional lives, exerting a significant and lasting influence on how people communicate.

Social media platforms inform, educate, and entertain people. They shape people's perspectives on the world and influence how they view things. These platforms play a significant role in shaping public opinion. Millions of people watch television and read newspapers in their leisure time.

Social media platforms provide new methods for students to learn about various subjects.

Media holds a special and significant importance among us, the people. Through it, we can gain awareness of the developments, news of Afghanistan, the region, and the world. Media plays a crucial role in our lives.

The high constraints on media undermine the quality of their work and prevent them from delivering accurate and reliable information to the public. Even faced with failure, media struggles to function properly. Consequently, these limitations lead to the closure of media outlets, negatively impacting the country's economy and families.

The state of media is currently precarious. While some outlets have managed remarkable activities, others are grappling with economic difficulties that are causing them to falter and even face closure. The situation for media is now unfavorable, demanding serious attention from both international bodies and media organizations. It is crucial to support media because, in our daily lives, staying informed about the state of the country and the world is important. This is particularly significant due to the significant influence that social media networks have on our daily lives.

2. Maisam Nazari, Freelance Journalist, Bamyan,

For the past decade, social media has exerted a profound influence on all aspects of human life. However, the role of social media in the realm of information dissemination and media community has been exceptionally remarkable, playing a crucial and invaluable part in the realm of media. Through these social platforms, information spreads rapidly and becomes accessible to citizens.

Exactly, imposing restrictions on social media platforms disrupts a significant portion of media activities. Today, most citizens have access to social media, and it's through these very platforms that they become aware of events and news.

For now, citizens have access to social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and others. However, there is strict control over the dissemination of content by the relevant authorities of the Islamic Emirate. Content that contradicts the policies of the Emirate is censored by the central controllers of social media networks. This even leads to the pursuit and arrest of those who publish such content.

Meaning that users do not have complete freedom in broadcasting and disseminating their opinions.

3. Meena, Female Journalist,

Question: How valuable are social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and others, and what role do they hold in the realm of media in society?

Answer: In my opinion, social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and others hold significant value in a society. This depends on the people of a society whether they use these platforms positively or negatively. Today, we can see that in our society, people heavily utilize social media in comparison to visual and audio media outlets. They watch various programs through social media platforms.

In fact, media plays a vital role in democratic governments. Media holds a prominent position within a society. Social media serves as a bridge of communication between the government and the people. Through social media platforms, individuals have the opportunity to voice their concerns and opinions, reaching the government directly.

Question: Does restricting social media affect the activities of all media negatively? Please clarify.

Answer: Restrictions on all types of media, whether social, visual, or audio, have an impact. A reporter cannot independently present a report, an interview cannot be conducted properly, and all programs are subject to censorship when such limitations are imposed on the media.

Question: What is the current state of social media in Afghanistan, and how does the government treat social media journalists?

Answer: In my opinion, social media platforms in Afghanistan are not in a favorable state compared to other countries. If we say that some individuals misuse these platforms, others threaten each other through these channels.

Social media journalists are facing a challenging situation. In some places, they are subjected to disrespectful behavior from both government officials and the public.

IV. Conclusion: Afghan Media Landscape Amidst Turmoil and Transformation

The Afghan media landscape stands at a crossroads, navigating a landscape rife with challenges and uncertainties in the wake of the Taliban's resurgence. The post-Taliban era, marked by a thriving media sector with 160 television channels, 311 radio stations, 90 print newspapers, and 26 news agencies, has witnessed a drastic transformation. The current media landscape, with 70 television channels, 211 radio stations, 11 print newspapers, and 9 news agencies, reflects a significant decline in numbers and diversity.

Under the de facto rule of the Taliban, the media sector has encountered substantial constraints. Censorship and self-censorship have become rampant, with journalists and media outlets navigating the perilous territory of permissible content. Threats, intimidation, and violence against media professionals have created an atmosphere of

fear, leading to an exodus of skilled journalists. Investigative journalism, once a cornerstone of accountability, has been stifled, and access to unbiased information has dwindled, leaving citizens ill-informed.

The closure of media outlets has far-reaching implications, including restricted information flow, suppressed free speech, and diminished content diversity. The narrative has further fragmented between Kabul and the provinces, where media freedom varies significantly. Female journalists remain conspicuously absent in many regions, underscoring the entrenched gender disparity in the field.

International media outlets, under surveillance and restraints, grapple with maintaining their operations and integrity in an increasingly controlled environment. Social media, once a platform for open dialogue, faces censorship and restrictions, hampering the exchange of ideas.

As Afghanistan's media landscape evolves, the absence of comprehensive legal frameworks has exacerbated challenges. The suspension of the Mass Media Law and the Access to Information Law during the transitional phase has left media professionals in a legal gray area. The need for inclusive consultations with media stakeholders to shape these laws cannot be overstated.

In this complex milieu, it is evident that safeguarding the media's role as a communication bridge between the government and the people is paramount. Collaborative efforts between the Islamic Emirate, the international community, and media support organizations are essential to prevent the collapse of Afghanistan's media landscape.

The journey ahead necessitates not only addressing the current challenges but also fostering an environment where media can thrive, reflect diverse perspectives, and promote transparency. This demands the establishment of adaptable legal frameworks, gender-inclusive policies, and an unwavering commitment to press freedom. Only through these concerted efforts can Afghanistan's media reclaim its vitality, ensuring that the nation's citizens are well-informed and empowered in the years to come.