

The Role of Social Media on Women's Movements in Afghanistan (August 2021-December 2025)

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Abstract: *When the Taliban took over Afghanistan again in August 2021, they ruled it illegal for women to work, go to school, or hold public office. As public spaces are pressed, online organizations have become important locations for resistance, documentation, survival, and activity around the world. This study investigates the utilization of social media platforms by women of Afghanistan to sustain their journeys from August 2021 to December 2025 in the context of state persecution, employing observations and resources in English, Persian/Dari, and Pashto. This study utilizes feminist political sociology, theories of communicative action, and digital repression to demonstrate how social media facilitated gendered digital labor, augmented surveillance, propagated disinformation, and heightened visibility, while simultaneously bolstering economic resilience and enabling covert education. This study enhances global sociology by situating digital resistance within the framework of gender apartheid.*

Keywords: Digital activism, gender apartheid, resistance, social media, and women of Afghanistan

1. Introduction

The Taliban took command after the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan came apart on August 15, 2021. Reuters (2021) says that they have a big impact on the social, political, and economic lives of women from Afghanistan. Women couldn't go to public schools, work at most jobs, or make decisions that affected the whole community for weeks. There were also stricter rules about how they might dress and move around (UN Women, 2023). Because the government maintains strict rules concerning public protests, many women who were campaigning were arrested, intimidated, or forced to leave their homes (Human Rights Watch, 2024). Women of Afghanistan can't talk to their friends and relatives, learn about history, or express themselves very well since they are being persecuted so badly. They do these things on social media most of the time (Al Jazeera, 2023). Instagram, Facebook, Telegram, WhatsApp, and X (formerly Twitter) are all important places for women's movements to grow. They gave people the power to speak out against abuse, organize protests, help each other, learn from their peers, and get help from people all around the world (Center for Information Resilience [CIR], 2024). Women in Afghanistan didn't just use social media to get attention. People who spent a lot of time online were at risk of being watched, threatened, and hurt. Speakers who might have been trusted had their reputations hurt because they couldn't manage the platform and propagated false material (Rukhshana Media, 2024). This study looks at how women from Afghanistan moved from August 2021 to December 2025, looking at how social media can be both a way to fight back and a way to be vulnerable.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Digital Activism and Interactive Communication

Digital activism has investigated the capacity of social media to augment the personal dimension of political involvement, remove barriers to participation, and promote decentralized organization (Bennett and Segerberg, 2013).

Communicative action is different from other types of collective action since it relies on the dissemination of individual expression through digital networks (Bennett and Segerberg, 2013). Studies show that digital movements aren't always strong, especially in places where the government keeps an eye on and punishes online behavior (Tofekci, 2017). Those can locate activists on social media, but the government can also use it to find those who don't like the government. Tofekci named this the "trap of visibility" in a book he wrote in 2017. Afghanistan is a great example of this. Women of Afghanistan were safer from physical attacks because of digital networks, but they were also more likely to be seen and punished (CIR, 2023).

2.2 Feminist Political Sociology and Digital Disagreement

Feminist scholars have shown that online groups frequently reflect the gender inequality, violence, and oppression found in the physical realm (Jain, 2017). One aspect of women's digital activism is fighting against male supremacy, and another is fighting against online harassment of women (Keller, 2019).

Feminist online activism in post-colonial and post-conflict settings requires examination through the lens of global power dynamics that influence the relative visibility or invisibility of various viewpoints (Keller, 2019). The actions of women from Afghanistan illustrate the predicament. Some stories, especially those from rural areas or in languages other than English, were more popular on worldwide platforms (Rukhshana Media, 2023).

3. Methodology

The research employs indirect participant observation by analyzing the social media profiles of 120 Afghan women, in conjunction with a qualitative sociological investigation of secondary sources published from August 2021 to December 2025. This information came from many sources, such as international news agencies, human rights groups like Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and UNAMA,

digital rights groups like the Center for Material Resilience, and news articles in Pashto and Persian/Dari, which are two of Afghanistan's languages.

This study utilized a synthesis of public sources, social media monitoring, activist perspectives, and investigative analysis to alleviate the considerable dangers inherent in primary research undertaken in Afghanistan (CIR, 2024). This strategy is often employed for research in contexts marked by widespread authoritarianism (UNAMA, 2024).

Table 1: All accounts belonged to women of Afghanistan

Social Media Platforms	Number of accounts that are reviewed
Facebook	40
X	50
Instagram	30
Total	120

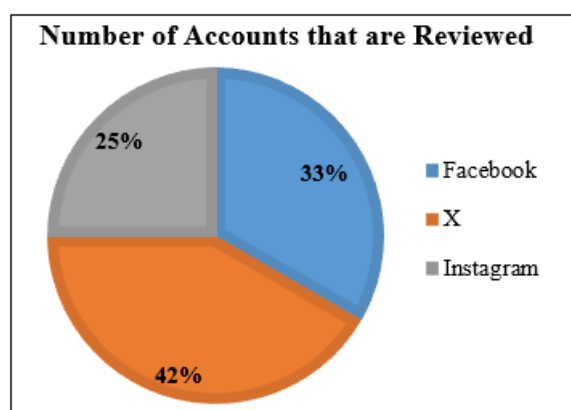


Figure 1

4. Digital Evidence and Sharing

When the Taliban took over Afghanistan, women used social media to illustrate how their rights were being abused and how they could still be active in public life (Reuters, 2023). Videos of protests, shuttered schools, and sacked employees were extensively circulated online, even though the government maintained they were unlawful. Many of these videos reached individuals outside of the nation (Human Rights Watch, 2024). These digital testimonials had both practical and symbolic purposes. UN agencies, journalists, and relief groups regularly utilized their recordings of gender-based harassment as proof (UNAMA, 2024). Social media was used to keep an eye on the opposition since there were no independent institutions in the country.

People needed to keep together because they spoke the same language. Persian/Dari and Pashto narratives that depicted authentic experiences in culturally suitable manners effectively countered the Taliban's propaganda, suggesting female support (Rukhshana Media, 2024; Afghanistan International Pashto, 2025).

5. Advocacy via hashtags and acts of symbolic defiance

Hashtag campaigns, which have become a popular means to protest online (Al Jazeera, 2022), are now open to people all around the world. The #LetAfghanGirlsLearn movement brought people from all over the world together to promote

the right to education. The #Don'tTouchMyClothes campaign turned the meaning of traditional clothes of people of Afghanistan from a sign of oppression to a sign of cultural power (The Guardian, 2021).

Bennett and Segerberg (2013) call these campaigns "personalized communicative action" because people share information that fits with their identities while being part of a bigger movement. Diaspora activists were a huge part of making these campaigns larger and translating local problems into tales that everyone can understand (The Diplomat, 2025).

6. Planning, teaching, and assisting each other

Women of Afghanistan used encrypted applications like Telegram and WhatsApp to build up hidden educational programs, support groups, and legal guidance since they couldn't meet in person (Al Jazeera, 2022). UN Women (2024) says that some girls were able to keep attending school even when the government told them they couldn't. They achieved this by employing secret passageways, recorded lectures, peer learning groups, and online classrooms.

Even if these actions are tiny, they indicate how social media has offered people new means to live with and fight against severe repression (CIR, 2023).

7. Digital Jobs and the Long-Term Health of the Economy

Women in Afghanistan who couldn't find decent jobs found other methods to generate money on social media. Migrants used Facebook and Instagram to market products like handicrafts, online courses, tailoring, and culinary services (Diplomat, 2025).

But sanctions, restricted access to digital payment methods, and the possibility of being watched made these business deals impossible (Amnesty International, 2024). Your company could garner clients, but it can also receive too much attention from the police.

8. Lying, snooping, and digital despotism

The Taliban and its supporters used a lot of digital overhearing and misleading information to go against women's rights campaigners (Human Rights Watch, 2024). Researchers discovered that counterfeit female social media profiles were used to distort genuine opposition narratives and create the illusion of female support for the government (Rukhshana Media, 2024; CIR, 2024).

Digital protest may lead to real-world repercussions, as seen by the arrest or persecution of some female activists for their online activities (Associated Press, 2024).

9. The role of immigration from Afghanistan and help from other countries

Migrants of Afghanistan continued posting about women's issues on social media until August 2021. Since many activists had to leave their homes (Al Jazeera, 2023), the

internet became the major means for people to speak to each other, both in their own nation and beyond the globe. Diaspora activists spoke directly to the media, the government, and foreign organizations. They also set up hashtag campaigns and translated Dari and Pashto material into English (The Diplomat, 2025).

Sociologists refer to this as a "transnational advocacy network," made feasible by social media. People used social media to make local problems into global problems that may have an effect on governments (Keck & Sikkink, 1998). It was quite clear in the journeys that women of Afghanistan took. For example, evidence was sent electronically from Kabul and Herat to Washington, London, and Brussels in only a few hours (Reuters, 2023).

Still, depending on diaspora empowerment led to unfair representation. People who understood English, knew how to use computers, and had access to worldwide networks were more likely to be identified. Rukhshana Media (2023) says that rural women and individuals who didn't have a continuous internet connection were left out. This dynamic may lead to internal hierarchies within the movement, even while its purpose is to liberate people (Keller, 2019).

10. Corporate Responsibility and Platform Governance

Social media corporations become political players in Afghanistan after 2021 if there aren't any systems in place to keep them responsible (Center for Information Resilience, 2024). Human Rights Watch (2024) believes that the safety and visibility are directly influenced by choices about filtering material, suspending accounts, verifying users, and strengthening algorithms.

Activists complained that platform guidelines, such as taking down protest materials for apparently "violating community norms," weren't always enforced, particularly when campaign accounts linked to the Taliban were active (CIR, 2024). The differences have made individuals less comfortable about platforms and made activists more accountable for censoring themselves and adjusting their digital strategy all the time (Tofakchi, 2017).

From a sociological perspective, platform governance in Afghanistan underscores the challenges faced by international digital enterprises under authoritarian repression (Bennett and Segerberg, 2013). Feminist researchers assert that women are disproportionately affected by these deficiencies, and their online representations are now under examination and ethical assessment (Jain, 2017).

11. Digital Labor and Emotional Costs by Gender

Women of Afghanistan had to do a lot of emotional and mental effort to utilize the internet, in addition to political concerns. Women activists did more than simply make stuff. They also had to deal with harassment, check facts, run online communities, and assist individuals who had been mistreated get well (UN Women, 2024).

This unpaid digital work was connected to typical issues, including worry, loneliness, and money troubles, which led to weariness and mental health issues (Amnesty International, 2024). This shows that feminist organizations often hide and downplay caring and emotional work, especially when they are in a fight (Jain, 2017). Many women used technology as a moral duty for those who were quiet in Afghanistan, even if a lot of people told them to. This illustrates that individuals have stayed active even when it was highly costly because of their moral obligation and sense of community (Bennett and Segerberg, 2013).

12. Ways to fight back against incorrect information and loss of trust

Women's movements in Afghanistan had to cope with misleading information all the time. Studies indicate that there were intentional attempts to persuade women to narrate tales that supported Taliban policies, particularly the prohibitions on employment and education (Rukhshana Media, 2024; CIR, 2024). These attempts to diminish support throughout the world by suggesting that repression is widespread in other places.

Because of this, activists found unofficial means to verify facts, such as collaborating with schools, giving out videos that present several sides of an issue, and using dependable networks (Center for Information Resilience, 2024). These techniques made individuals more trustworthy, but they also made it more probable that their identity or whereabouts would be discovered (Human Rights Watch, 2024).

This quest for legitimacy reveals how different institutionalized propaganda networks backed by forceful authorities are from grassroots activists (Tufekci, 2017).

13. Making a Case Study

13.1 Underground Digital Educational Networks

Many hidden digital education projects started in Afghanistan between 2022 and 2025, especially in cities (UN Women, 2024). Girls who couldn't attend school got recorded lectures, homework, and guidance from female instructors using encrypted messaging applications (Al Jazeera, 2022).

Even though not a lot of individuals took part (CIR, 2023), these efforts were little acts of resistance against the Taliban's plan to get rid of smart women. Sociologically, it is shown that although macro-level suppression of mobilization, resistance persists via micro-level acts (Scott, 1985).

13.2 Opposition to Digital Culture

People might lash back at one another via cultural expression on the social internet. The Taliban intended to make the culture of Afghanistan more homogenous, while initiatives that focused on Afghan poetry, music, needlework, and clothing proved that women had their own individual identities (Guardian, 2021; 8 Sobh Media, 2025). These acts are in line with feminist ideas that see culture as a place for political struggle, especially when governments try to control symbols and bodies (Keller, 2019).

14. Discussion

The study's results indicate that, since the Taliban's resurgence in August 2021, social media has served as both a communication medium and an institutionalized structural platform for the sociopolitical struggle of women from Afghanistan. Theories of communicative action claim that the endeavors of women from Afghanistan depended on digital and customized networks rather than centralized organizational structures (Bennett and Segerberg, 2013). Social media made it simpler for individuals to challenge the government in a decentralized fashion, even when official routes were shut, and physical protests were not allowed. They did this via testimony, art, mutual help, and international solidarity.

On the other hand, the situation in Afghanistan makes it challenging to write tales about what people do on the internet. Tofakci (2017) argues that under authoritarian regimes, visibility among a networked public might pose significant risks. Afghanistan women's internet presence made people throughout the world more aware of their condition, but it also made it more likely that activists would be followed, harassed, and detained. Digital repression has resulted in tangible outcomes, shown by arrests directly linked to online activity (Human Rights Watch, 2024; UNAMA, 2024). Social media is a socio-technical system that gives people power and takes it away at the same time.

From a feminist sociological point of view, this research shows how suppressed digital work is different for men and women. Women of Afghanistan activists undertook a lot of unpaid work to assist their peers, provide content, manage communities, and deal with mental health concerns (UN Women, 2024). Most of this labor was done in secret, but it was necessary to keep the resistance groups operating. It indicates that feminists, particularly those who work for women's rights, have spoken out against the unfair amount of emotional and caring work that women perform (Jane, 2017).

The engagement of migrants further illustrates the disparities in power relations within digital resistance. Transnational reinforcement was essential for sustaining international pressure, while simultaneously fostering the emergence of prevailing narratives by enhancing the exposure of accessible, English-speaking commentators in the media (Keller, 2019; The Diplomat, 2025). This uneven presence might generate internal hierarchies, even if that's not what the movement wants.

Ultimately, platform governance has emerged as a significant component of the framework. The liberating potential of social media was constrained by the regulation of disinformation and insufficient safeguards for vulnerable users (Center for Information Resilience, 2024). These results substantiate sociological assertions that see platforms as political entities rather than impartial mediators, demonstrating that digital resistance cannot be comprehended in isolation from corporate power and algorithmic control.

15. Recommendations

- 1) Social media corporations should run the sites. People who are in risky situations need emergency precautions, such as swift responses to abuse and clear standards for moderation.
- 2) International donors should assist women activists in understanding how to be safe online in Pashto and Dari.
- 3) Advocacy for recording and archiving: To maintain a track of gender-based harassment for future accountability measures, more secure digital archiving efforts should be put in place.

16. Limitations in Methodology and Ethics

This research has several problems. Initially, not all covert activities without secure documentation may be disclosed by indirect participant observation, examination of women's social media profiles, secondary sources, and publicly accessible data. Second, ethical considerations make it tougher to communicate with activists in Afghanistan directly because of safety risks. These limitations are significant; yet, they underscore the need for rigorous methods that minimize injury and exemplify the challenges of doing research under authoritarian control.

17. Conclusion

This study looks at how important social media has been for women of Afghanistan from August 2021 to December 2025. It shows how, despite a lot of gender discrimination, digital platforms have become important yet dangerous places of resistance. The Taliban's ascent caused the physical civic space to fall apart. The social internet enabled women of Afghanistan keep track of crimes, stay connected with their groups, figure out how to support each other, get covert education, and get help from individuals outside of Afghanistan (Reuters, 2023; Al Jazeera, 2023).

The study indicates that misinformation, administrative challenges on platforms, and authoritarian surveillance have fueled digital opposition. The experiences of women from Afghanistan demonstrate that social media does not intrinsically democratize political engagement; instead, it mirrors and perpetuates existing power dynamics influenced by gender, technology, and state brutality (Tofakchi, 2017). The Afghanistan situation illustrates the mechanics of online engagement in contexts akin to what international organizations refer to as gender apartheid, hence enhancing global (UN Women, 2024).

Our study significantly enriches sociological discourse on communicative activity by illustrating the durability of customized digital engagement despite substantial personal risk (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013). Additionally, it propels feminist political sociology by illustrating how moral imperatives, emotional investments, and gendered labor perpetuate opposition in the absence of institutional backing (Jain, 2017; Keller, 2019).

The results show that the world needs to be held accountable. When developing security standards, social media companies need to think about how authoritarian countries function.

International organizations might provide more financial support, project archiving, and digital security training to women-led digital firms concurrently (Center for Information Resilience, 2024; Amnesty International, 2024). Digital surroundings might make suffering worse instead of better if these types of steps aren't taken.

Also, the fact that women of Afghanistan used social media from 2021 to 2025 shows how strong feminist resistance is and how limited internet participation can be when it is controlled. So, social media shouldn't be seen as a cure-all for politics and society; it should be seen as a place where people disagree. As women battle for safety, power, and visibility, their movements in Afghanistan and elsewhere will vary over time.

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