

# The Impact of Media on Society in Post 9/11 Afghanistan

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**Abstract:** This paper aimed about the Impact of Media on society in Post 9/11 Afghanistan. Afghanistan has been one of the countries that have been dominated by instability and conflict over the last few decades. When the U.S army toppled the Taliban government in November 2001, peoples of Afghanistan gained greater freedom to participate in public life and access to education, healthcare, media, technology, and employment. Afghanistan once housed tourists from around the world intrigued by the Silk Road stories, the poetic and mystic culture, the majestic landscape and the hospitable people. Their experience in Afghanistan was frequently captured through journalism and photojournalism of the early 1900s. However, Afghanistan's very own media culture was born during this same time with Seraj-ul-Akhbar being the country's first newspaper, published on 11 January 1906. Media has dominated the society, culture and method of training people. Television programs, movies, music, videos and internet are most popular forms of media in this era. The role of media in Afghanistan has been felt to be very much vital, but unfortunately, it is has been developed only in the last decade. Today, it is claimed that Afghan media is independent, yet there are many issues that have to be dealt with to really make it free and independent in the true sense of the word. At the same time, the international media active in Afghanistan has also played a role that cannot be neglected at all. In this paper, I discussed about the Role of Media in society, effects of media on Afghans society after 9/11event, and also interviewed with some residents and officials of Ministry of Information and culture, and Afghanistan Independence Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) in Kabul City, Afghanistan.

**Keywords:** Impact of Media, Afghanistan, Post 9/11 event, Role of Media, Society, Communication, TVs role, People's opinion.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The media plays a very productive role in today's society. Media play an important role in increasing of public awareness and collect the views, information and attitudes toward certain issue. Media is the most powerful tool of communication in emerging world and increased the awareness and presents the real stage of society. In this decade of Knowledge and awareness there is a huge and grand role of media, it is all around us when we watch on Television, listen to on the radio, read to the books, magazines, and newspapers, everywhere we want to collect some knowledge and information and a part of this media has to present a very responsible role for our society. Without the media, people in societies would be isolated, not only from the rest of the world, but also for the total formation of creditable world. Afghanistan has been one of the countries that have been dominated by instability and conflict over the last few decades. The Taliban's occupation of the country in 1996 resulted in a complete halt to freedom of expression. The extremist regime lasting from 1996-2001 set out to wipe out the country's tolerant and vibrant culture and re-establish law and order under the pretext of religious decree. As part of its extremist rule one of the major undertakings by the Taliban was a widespread ban on journalism and photography. The few media sources were strictly controlled by the Taliban and became a means to convey their radical perspective and legitimize their rule. Hence, media by definition became a propaganda tool for the Taliban (Gerner, 2011). In post 9/11 event, however, the prospects for the country changed dramatically as an international coalition formed to

fight terrorists in Afghanistan and promised to establish peace, security, and democratic rule in the country. Schools were established, the infrastructure was rebuilt, a promising political regime was installed, and women's rights were championed once again.

The role of media in Afghanistan society has been felt to be very much vital, but unfortunately, it has been developed only in the last decade. Today, it is claimed that Afghan media is independent, yet there are many issues that have to be dealt with to really make it free and independent in the true sense of the word. At the same time, the international media in Afghanistan has also played a pivotal role that cannot be neglected at all. The role of media, both national and international, in the last decade, especially in the era of war against terrorism has been very much important. As it mentioned above, before 9/11 event, between 1996 and 2001, during the Taliban regime, media outlets were banned almost entirely. Only one radio station operated under strict control of the Taliban in Kabul Afghanistan. This station did not provide informational or educational programming but rather operated solely as a channel for conveying religious messages. A small number of Afghans had access to international broad-casts from the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and the Voice of America (VOA), but they listened with utmost secrecy and only in areas where the Taliban had failed to seize household radio devices. Television and the internet were banned altogether. Left with few alternative sources of information, the Afghan people grew accustomed to tuning in for news and information to the ad hoc radio stations operating clandestinely within Afghanistan or those they could pick up from abroad. Through necessity Afghanistan developed a strong radio culture over the years (United Nations, 2006).

Media in Afghanistan and in particular those committed to democracy and professional journalism are working to highlight and recognize the inequalities and limitations that exist in the lives of Men and women in the country. To take one example: Mask (Niqab- in dari), a one-hour program on TV channel 1, continually discusses domestic family violence and the crimes committed against women in Afghanistan. It also covers the situation that women in the security shelters are experiencing (most of the time women who run away from home because of family violence go and stay in security shelters if they don't have anywhere else to go). Like TV channel 1, almost every radio and TV station in Afghanistan follows such cases either regularly or sporadically and airs different programs that discuss these same challenges in the lives of women. Nowadays TV and Radio are much progress in rural area as well, TV and Radio both broadcast any social problems for the people around the country, by these broadcast the people in rural areas are easily can complain and present their social problems through the media (Shabir, et. al 2011). In the past fifteen years, Afghanistan's media sector has evolved at warp speed. In a country with one of the world's lowest literacy rates, radio and television serve the population with news and information otherwise obtainable only in print. Under Taliban rule (1996–2001), secular radio was silenced and television programming which had debuted in 1964 with the government-owned Radio Television Afghanistan (RTA) but plunged into decline in the 1990s as civil conflict overtook the country was forbidden. One religious radio station, the Voice of Sharia, remained open during those years under strict Taliban guidelines. Radio Kabul, founded in 1925 and recast as Voice of Sharia during Taliban rule, reopened with the Taliban's overthrow in 2001. By 2016, Afghanistan had 180 radio stations, 79 private television stations, 22 state-owned provincial channels, and RTA, all adding up to a media juggernaut (Shabir, et. al 2011).

**Access to Information:** Technology-driven developments over the past 15 years have revolutionized the speed at which citizens share information on elections, security, and Afghanistan's place in the broader international community. The recent growth in mobile phone and television ownership in Afghanistan reflects a country catching up with the times. However, long before the Taliban banned television, cinema, and music, Afghanistan's media sector was modernizing parallel to neighbouring Iran and Pakistan. In Afghanistan today, the legacy of civil war and Taliban rule makes "access to information" a broad concept: access to the outside world through any means possible, and well beyond access to news and public information.

Television broadcasts stopped in 1992 during the civil war, and under Taliban rule, television, films, satellite dishes, and music were banned. The primary sources of information to the outside world were print and AM news radio. Today, as well as before 2001, radio continues to be the primary source of news and information for most Afghans. Before 2001, a handful of satellite phones and Public Call Offices (PCOs) were available in cities and towns. The Afghan Ministry of Communication and Information Technology reports 21.6 million mobile phone users and 700,000 internet subscriptions nationwide, with coverage in most but not all rural areas (Ministry of Communication and Technology, 2014).

Access to information is considered a fundamental right in Article 50 of the Afghan Constitution (MOJ Afghanistan, 2014). Despite this, Freedom House classifies media in Afghanistan as “not free” relative to other countries (Freedom House Afghanistan, 2014). Reasons cited include the Afghan Ministry of Culture and Information’s recently issued a letter to local media outlets ordering “self-censorship” of anything that is against the Islamic Shari’ah laws. 6 Journalists have been threatened, physically abused, or killed while carrying out their duties (Ehsanullah Amiri, 2013). Protections for press and activists may improve with the Access to Information Law, which was ratified this year by the Lower House of Parliament (*Wolesi Jirga*). This law consists of 32 articles, and aims to protect journalists, civil society, and human rights activists from censorship when performing duties to disseminate public information (Ghanizada, 2013). As of October 2014, the Upper House and president have not yet approved this law.

## 2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology included the following steps.

For achieving the above objectives both primary and secondary data were used in the research.

The primary data was collected through survey and focus group discussions (FGDs) with the residents and officials of Ministry of Information and Culture to survey about the “Impact of media on society, and what change Media convey to Afghans people in their social lives in Post/9/11. The secondary data was collected from different sources including the Afghanistan Independence Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), Ministry of Communication and Technology, Ministry of Information and Culture Afghanistan, books, research articles, thesis, Newspaper and internet.

## 3. DISCUSSION

As I argued that 9/11 event, brought many changes in Afghans social live, and they gained greater freedom in education, healthcare, public lives, entertainment, government and to go abroad. One of the most important work which impacted on Afghans it was and it is Media that today we can see all of these changes and improvements on Afghans society. After 9/11 event The National and international media played a massive role in the reconstructions and development of Afghanistan society.

In following paragraphs, I discussed about Media effects in Afghans society, and also interviewed with some Afghan residents and officials about the impacts and role of media post 9/11 in Afghanistan society.

### 3.1. MEDIA EFFECTS ON AFGHAN SOCIETY POST 9/11 EVENT:

No doubt press and media are intertwined with socio-political and economic conditions at any given society. Media develops and grows within the society, and is responsible to reflect people's voice to rulers. It is a medium through which people and government should interact with each other. Certainly, the modern media as we know it today has acted in two ways: one, it is used by government to justify and prolong rulers dominance and breed the so-called "yes" culture. Post 9/11 event with the emerging of media in Afghanistan after a long time it brings many changes for the improvements and awareness of afghan people in every walks of their lives, Media has an important and vital role in social change, by encouraging equality and social inclusion. Therefore, the emerging media in Afghanistan must make an effort to incorporate the rural perspectives of women into the regular media content and to challenge the pervasiveness of domestic violence, gender disparities in health and education, and gender discrimination. The emerging media can accomplish these aims through several means. First, the media can feature male change agents who have had a positive impact on the lives of women and girls. Second, the media can condemn both obvious and hidden forms of gender discrimination. Third, the media can introduce to the public positive images of women as experts, authorities, and skilled resources on various issues such as health, education, security, politics, and governance. Fourth, the emerging media can take steps to strengthen its investigative research capacity and employ it to examine and bring to light the effects of domestic violence on women’s and children’s health, and the need to further the education and political participation of women and girls in society (Norma,2014).

#### 3.1.1. *Opinions of afghan residents and officials about the impacts of 9/11 on their society:*

The 9/11 attack was planned from Afghanistan, sparking the US-led invasion of the country. But what has the decade of 9/11 meant for Afghans? I interviewed with some afghan officials and residents in Kabul, the capital city of Afghanistan.

Correspondent **Yama Wolasmal** gives me a sense of the mood among Afghans on how their lives have been affected by the invasion. Kabul, a city that has seen its share of violence in the three decades Afghanistan has been at war. Today it is bustling with life, creating opportunity for millions of well-educated young Afghans in the society.

**Mujibullah**, Property Developer, said, "We are pleased with our lives. Compared to the time of the Taliban, we are happy. But of course the security situation and our living standards could be improved. "The relative calm and stability in the city has made it a safe haven for Afghans escaping the fighting that's raging on in the countryside.

**Zar Jan**, Displaced Farmer, said, "My life hasn't changed at all. Neither the government nor the foreigners care about people like me. We struggle from day to day. "Question: So nothing has improved in your life in the past decade? "No. Nothing. Apart from being forced to flee my village because of the fighting."

But a lot has changed in Afghanistan since the fall of the Taliban. 7 million children now attend school, 64% of the country's population now has access to basic healthcare, and the Afghan economy has grown by a staggering 700% since 2002. But the biggest achievement has been in women's rights, says **Shukria Barakzai**, one of the top women's rights activists and parliamentarians. But, the development in Afghanistan is not sustainable, according to the Afghans we spoke to.

**Akbar Khan**, University Lecturer, said, "The minute the foreigners leave, we will go back to living in the same misery like we did when the Taliban were in power." The US-led alliance in Afghanistan has announced it will withdraw all combat troops from Afghanistan. This announcement has raised fear of yet another bloody civil war in Afghanistan. Ten years, and tens of thousands of lost lives later, the Taliban-led insurgents are stronger than ever. Fear is that possible peace talks with the Taliban, will result in a setback in the positive developments in Afghanistan. But the country's most vocal opposition politician says the Taliban will not be able to roll back the positive achievements in the past decades.

**Daud Sultanzoy**, Opposition Politician, said, "Nations should not be side-lined for the interests of political organizations, groups or paramilitary groups. If those groups are truly intending to serve the national interest, they should be under the umbrella of national interest, not the other way around. If the Taliban are planning to bring puritanical Islamic regime of the fifth and sixth century, which is impossible."

### **3.1.2. Television's role in public opinions and behavior:**

Media can play a major role in shaping public opinion. Television is considered a particularly influential source for obtaining information because it provides visual content that radio cannot and is a primary source of exposure to new ideas and foreign cultures. In developing countries, television often plays a critical role in social change, including in such arenas as public health (Nelson, 2013). Evidence suggests it plays a major role in shaping mood and social attitudes. While the survey cannot isolate the impact of watching specific television content on public opinion and behaviour, there are patterns in attitudes and opinions that emerge from comparing respondents who do and do not use television as a source of information on measures of voting behaviour, sports participation, sympathy with Armed Opposition Groups (AOGs), and attitudes toward women.

While media use may not directly relate to voter participation, Afghans who report using television and radio for obtaining news and information are significantly more likely to report having voted in the first round of presidential elections than those who do not use television and radio. Meanwhile, use of a mobile phone, the internet, and the local mosque for news and information had no significant effect on whether or not respondents voted in the presidential election (Johnston, et.al, 1997). The 2014, presidential candidates and the Independent Election Commission (IEC) used television and radio to disseminate election campaign information and generate public interest in the election. Television and radio programs also discussed topics such as the relationship between Islam and the election, and the importance of women's voting.

### **3.1.3. Communications is right:**

Like any other country, the role of media in Afghanistan is very significant. In the 2014 presidential elections one in three Afghans (33.5%) stated media was their primary source (including TV, radio, and the Internet) to learn about the candidates and to decide on their vote. Civil society benefits from media as it provides a third dimension to public affairs hence it is critical to maintain the fragile gains in Afghanistan's media development and freedom. The Asia Foundation reported 72.7% of Afghans express confidence in the media. However, considering the barriers and challenges for media,

one questions to what extent does media freedom really exist? Communication rights promote the individual freedom to express oneself, but they are also a valuable tool for greater political and social justice. Afghan media professionals are important agents in the peace and reconstruction of the country and they are the means to change Afghanistan's representation in the international community. One can only hope that the day will come when the obstacles to free media and communication are shattered not the dreams of the young men and women seeking to rebuild their country and their future (Asia foundation, 2014).

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This paper demonstrated about the impact of media on society in post 9/11 Afghanistan. Now a day the impact of media in every walk of life is very significant. It plays a vital role to promote awareness among people about different field of life. It can be used as an important tool for sharing of information to people within a short period. It is an unconscious way of bringing changes in attitudes of people. Since the U.S army toppled the Taliban government in November 2001, peoples of Afghanistan gained greater freedom to participate in public life and access to education, healthcare, media, technology, and employment. After the event of 9/11 the emerging of media in Afghanistan is continuous and is bringing positive changes in improving and awareness of afghan people in every walks their lives. Media has an important and vital role in social change, by encouraging equality and social inclusion. Media in Afghanistan and in particular those committed to 52 democracy and professional journalism are working to highlight and recognize the inequalities and limitations that exist in the lives of Afghan people, particularly about women rights in the country. Problems like disparities, restrictions and violence against women are the issues the media and press have focused on and tried to draw the attention of the people to in recent years. Currently media in Afghanistan plays a pivotal role in promoting of woman education and to highlight women violence cases and giving awareness to adopt impressive life styles. Furthermore, it is promoting social awareness among young men and women and educating them about their rights, responsibilities and problems in the society. Afghanistan is one of the countries where the society needs peace and stability. Peace is the basic need of the Afghan people, and education is one of the approaches which are required to help in bringing stability to Afghanistan. Therefore, all citizens of Afghanistan both men and women should be cooperate with media in their society in order to improve the current situation and bring peace and stability.

#### 5. RECOMMENDATIONS

The end of extremist Taliban government in November 2001 raised hopes that the men and women across the country would rapidly regain their human rights. As I argued the media played a very significant role in today's afghan society. Afghans are much blissful with the reemerging of media in post 9/11. But Afghans are quiet need security, peace and stability in their society. However the threaten and warning of media is still continuous by some Afghans religious leader in the society.

Here I have some recommendations to Afghan government, policy makers and donors for the support and improve of media in the society.

1. The afghan government need to do more support the media outlet in the society.
2. Those who are threaten and warning journalist, and they are against human rights in any part of the country, the government should soon take action to investigate about it.
3. The international donors who are activating in different sectors of the country include of media. They should support and invest more on media outlet in any corner of the country.
4. Strengthen government monitoring system on the projects implemented by the government itself, its contractors and NGOs. The budget should not be spent based on favouritism and biases. The government and international donors should focus on the areas with the greatest need
5. The government and policy maker should organize a mechanism under the framework that can bring much facilities for both young man and women to easily accesses in today's media and technology.
6. As we know that media also play a massive role in women experiment in any society. As frequency of use of media is related to women empowerment, so women in Afghanistan may use different forms of media to learn ways to educate and empower themselves.



7. Women may utilized all forms of media especially radio and internet to learn about the women education programs.
8. Media may introduce gender laws through different programs and educate strategies to men and women to improve their status in society.

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