

BBC World Service and Aljazeera: News Frames Analysis of Girls' Education Activists' Arrests Under Strict Sharia Law in Afghanistan

Abdul Malik 

Lecturer, Media Studies Department, University of Balochistan, Quetta

Dr. Babrak Niaz 

Professor, Media Studies Department, University of Balochistan, Quetta

Abdul Khalil

Lecturer, Media Studies Department, University of Balochistan, Quetta

Journal of Quranic
and Social Studies
14-23

© The Author (s) 2023

Volume:3, Issue:1, 2023

DOI:10.5281/zenodo.8335809

www.jqss.org

ISSN: E/ **2790-5640**

ISSN: P/ **2790-5632**

OJS **PKP**
OPEN JOURNAL SYSTEMS PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE PROJECT



Abstract

The frames covering the Afghan girls' education activists' arrests in BBC World Service and Aljazeera a content analysis of both the news outlet in a time when Afghanistan is ruled by the strict version of Sharia law and activists are persecuted. Framing theory is applied on the contents published in one-year contents and studied the published stories of both organizations through code-sheet and searched the statistics differing. The way these two international organization cover activists arrests news through the arrests news, condemnation and blames frames studied shows BBC World Service is taking a more compromising both in pressure, from Taliban and the Western human rights organizations, reporting while Aljazeera—a Gulf country organization stationed in Qatar and Taliban do not feel it as a rival or propaganda organization, is bold and having more stories, version from all sides and detailed stories. The study shows how a western media organization report out of fear of ban on its journalists in Afghanistan while the Gulf country media organization utilize its freedom of expressions at the same time. The paper suggests that the media organizations covering Afghanistan under Taliban should not compromise the basic codes and ethics of journalism and give freedom of expression a chance in a time when the masses need it under the moto of voice for the voiceless.

Keywords: Girls, Education, Activists, Sharia Law, Taliban, Media Frames

Corresponding Author Email:

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0002-5193-1895>

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2566-1561>

khalildotdummar@gmail.com

Introduction

The 15th of August 2021 changed the Afghan political landscape and Taliban—once the insurgent group took control of the country in a single day as a result of the well-known Qatar Agreement—a diplomatic dialogue between Afghan Taliban and the United States,¹. After the invasion of Afghanistan as a result that had declared Taliban equal allies of the Al-Qaeda “terrorist network” who had claimed the 9/11 attack on the American twin towers of World Trade Center resulted in the killing of more than 3 thousand American citizens and George W. Bush administration had asked Taliban to oust Al-Qaeda chief Osama Bin Laden or hand him over to American government for the judicial procedure, on rejection such a demand by the then Taliban government the American coalition partners launched their airstrikes on Afghanistan on 7th October 2001,². Though, Taliban were mentioned in the terrorist group list and banned its leadership, put sanctioned. While the Taliban started their offensive against the newly organized Afghan Army and the coalition forces of ISAF and NATO in the country. The longer war in American history was criticized for its human rights violations and draining out the American exchequer accounts to get invested in Afghanistan as a result of the Bonn Conference—an international community supported conference led by the United Nations elected the interim government in the leadership of the interim leader Hamid Karzai, ³ And this longer war and investment of 2 trillion American dollars and controversy among the American government over the ending of the war went on to pave a way for the dialogue with the Taliban and for this reason the Qatar based office was given in 2010 to keep the group in the loop of the dialogue resulted in the historical Qatar Agreement signed by both parties and resulted the collapse of the Afghan Republic and a new Taliban government. These initiative finally paved the way for Taliban to get engage diplomatically and the U.S. forces withdrawal from Afghanistan, and Taliban will not let the anti-American groups use the Afghan soil against the U.S. interests. These included in particular the Al-Qaeda—once Taliban ally and partner in anti-American forces and coalition forces attacks in Afghanistan, Islamic State Khurasan Province (ISKP) and other banned and titled terrorist groups who had kept attacking the ISAF and NATO forces for the last two decades in Afghanistan, region and globally,⁴ But the control of Taliban took them to implement their rule as per the decrees from their supreme leader or emir of the faithful Maulavi Haibatullah Akhundzada—who was nominated as the leader after his predecessor Mullah Akhter Mansoor was assassinated in a drone strike in the area of Nushki, Balochistan—a Pakistani province connecting with Iran and Afghanistan. The Afghan Taliban soon banned girls' education in the country after getting control of the country as the Afghan Republic had enrolled millions of children in particular girls in schools, colleges and universities in the last two decades. After the strict regulations of the country in the light of the emir of the faithful girls education for mature girls and women is banned as per the Taliban interpreted version of Islam through Sharia law. The girls education activists are arrested, persecuted and their basic human rights as per the United Nations charter have

made headlines in international and local media houses stirring a debate in the international community. How the girls' education arrests are framed in foreign media organizations when the news organizations in the country keep a sort of self-censorship therefore the foreign media organizations BBC World Service (a Western) and Aljazeera (a Gulf country) media organizations were selected. BBC keeps its reporting up so does Aljazeera—being the Qatar based organization where Taliban and the United States reached for the well-known Qatar agreement that paved the way to topple the Afghan Republic. This paper study the framing of girls education activists arrests in international and local media houses for three leading frames were searched as following

1. Arrests of girls' education activist
2. Condemnation/Ask Release
3. Government blames/Conspiracy theory

The BBC World Service and Aljazeera news were searched to go for the above-mentioned frame and how these two media organizations frame the arrests by Taliban—the de facto government in Afghanistan.

Literature Review

Framing literature is a dynamic concept treating frames as static. Framing underspecify understanding and resolving social issues, like refugees—how it is framed by the media organizations, Framing effects theory is one of the leading theory in communication science having its roots in psychology and sociology. The theory explains the ability of news media influencing masses attitudes and behaviors through the way contents are reported on specific issues,⁵

News articles go for variety of perspectives, as an article on gun violence can focus gun control, another perspective would go for the second amendment rights and another would go for mental health issues. Therefore, in communication sciences these perspectives are described and known as frames that are used to influence opinion of the audience in different ways,⁶

News framing is categorized (a) identification of frames and its devices in news, and (b) gauging the impact of news framing. The first deal with content or textual analysis of the news texts, the second go through the experiments either in laboratories ore through surveys, ⁷

Research Methodology

The contents regarding education activists arrest is studied from two international websites of BBC World Service and Al-Jazeera a Qatar based news organization for an era of one year starting from 1st June 2022 to 1st June 2023 through the key word “arrest of girls education activists in Afghanistan” on Google engine with given time space. Stories, sources, themes are counted and presented as per the existing frames they create presenting the arrests.

The time period is mentioned because the arrests took place on three different events in the above mentioned twelve months (6 months in 2022 and 6 in 2023).

The key themes to search for positive, negative and neutral framing are counted, studied for its contents and sources quoted in both the Western and the Gulf Country media websites stories. As per one year reporting 3 stories in BBC World Service while 6 stories in the Aljazeera containing the arrests of girls' education activists in Afghanistan contents appeared as a whole. Three Aljazeera stories were skipped that had lesser contents in the light of selected frames and were therefore made in a comparative analysis way with the BBC World Service published three stories. So, two stories of Aljazeera in proportion of 1 story from BBC World Service in the same timeframe were analyzed for the below three key frames coming through different sources in these news stories in a proportion of (3:3).

Three leading frames were searched

1. Arrests of girls' education activist
2. Condemnation/Ask Release
3. Government blames/Conspiracy theory

Data

The coding sheet was applied for studying the contents of both BBC World Service and Aljazeera stories as per the pre-planned code sheet containing first frame as arrest report of the girls' education activists, second was the condemnation/ask release by the international community or the groups active for rights activists, third was the frame government blames and conspiracy theories under which circumstances the arrests were made.

As a whole five people were arrested as per these reports, a university professor, a male activist and three female activists who had demonstrated for the release of arrested girls education rights activists in the country. Though, the version from the arrested girls also had mentioned in the Aljazeera story while not such arrests victim was reported by BBC World Service.

Both BBC World Service and Aljazeera kept quoting the family sources, human rights and United Nations officials, while BBC World Service was not getting the quotes from Taliban officials though they had tried to approach. But on the other hand Aljazeera quoted the Taliban sources as well to remain balance and the quote from Voice of America English service was also mentioned by the Aljazeera where the Taliban government officials mentioned their concerns regarding the people arrested in the case of "Matiullah Wesa"—one of the Afghan girls education activist and who is yet not released.

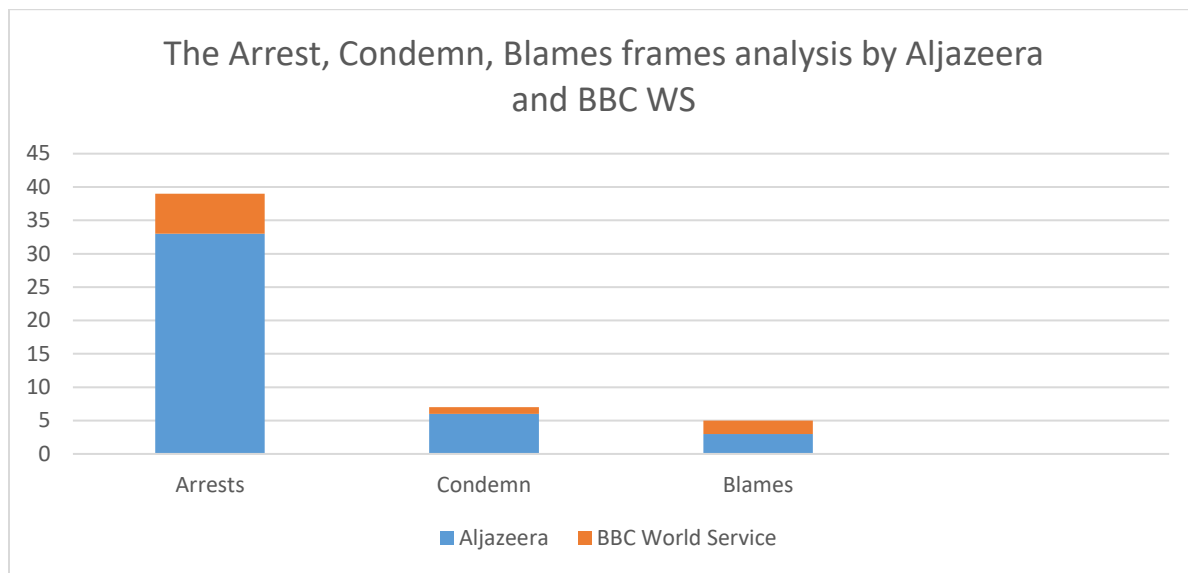


Figure (1.1)

BBC World Girls Education Activists arrest news

The headlines in BBC World Service mentions the arrests of girls' education activists in the headline as per the reports but the said organization rarely go for the condemnation of human rights regarding the arrests of the girls' education activists. "Afghanistan: Girls' education activist arrested by Taliban"⁸

"a prominent Afghan campaigner for female education has been arrested by the Taliban, even as teenage girls and women remain barred from classrooms"⁹ The same news lacks the countercheck and mentioning the alternate views of the Taliban government officials. It shows the said organization keep in view to eject both the international condemnation from the global organizations on human rights and in particular girls' education as well as the conspiracy theories and blames of the Taliban against the victims of arrests.

"The UN's mission in Afghanistan has also highlighted Mr Wesa's case and called on the Taliban to clarify his whereabouts and the reasons for his detention" Instead of the condemnation and release or asking whereabouts mentioned here none from the human rights organizations condemning the arrests and a social media trends giving opinion from the ordinary Afghans again show the BBC World Service in a compromise mood to present the news in a more diverse way. "The restrictions have continued despite international condemnation and protests by ordinary women as well as activists speaking up on their behalf, Though, here an indirect paraphrase mentioned by the BBC World Service but not specifically quoting the words of the organizations speaking on girls' education and women rights violation in Afghanistan.

The headline of the BBC World Service news on its website shows that they had highlighted the issue of women arrests when Taliban dispersed the demonstrations through the arrests of the organizers of the agitation against the girls education ban in the country in a resistive move by these women going on the roads of the city. “Afghanistan: Taliban arrest women protesting against university ban”¹⁰

These women are reportedly arrested from Kabul, the capital city of Afghanistan as they were demonstrating against the universities ban. These women who used to be the vibrant civil society activist in the last two decades are the backbone of democratic society. And the post 9/11 era brought these young women and gave them motivation to remain up for their rights and they were active in the Afghan republic days as well and calling upon the holes in the system while asking rights for minorities, gender, ethnic groups and rural vs urban areas biases and corruption in the system. Therefore, the vibrant society under the Taliban government have kept on their activism though not in a society. “Three journalists were also arrested. Protests are also understood to have taken place in the Takhar province”¹¹ Beside Kabul reports of the arrests of journalists covering the protests in Takhar—another Afghan province in the North of the country are also reported.

“The UN's education and culture organisation, Unesco, says that the rate of female attendance in higher education had increased 20 times between 2001 - the year the Taliban were ousted by the US intervention - and 2018”, (Farzan, 2022). Though, the international human rights organizations and United Nations had given their condemnation statements are not mentioned by the BBC World service in the report while giving data from the Afghan Republic years when the schoolings were mushroomed up by the girls and women enrollment. ¹²

“Ismail Mashal: Taliban arrests Afghan professor who backed girls' education”¹³ The arrest in another news of the BBC World Service mentioned a girls education rights activists and himself a university professor from Kabul Ismail Mashal arrested. Though, the same professor had stirred a condemnation and pressure against the Taliban government as it made headlines in news and the social media trends started to ask justice on international level on the arrest of a girls right activist male professor and he even had went to burn his university degrees and titles certificates as agitation against the “girls education ban in Afghanistan” ¹⁴

Though here the BBC World Service quote the Taliban official's twitter account blaming the girls education activist Masha being harming the Taliban government through the protest and asking journalists for coverage shows that the statement itself holds a symbolic message for the media organizations active outside of Afghanistan and having western journalists in the field to keep the words of the government in their mind and not cover the protests and individuals who are going out for human rights in particular girls rights to education. “He is accused of trying to harm the Taliban's government by inviting

journalists to crowd on a main road and create "chaos", Abdul Haq Hammad, a Taliban official from the Ministry of Information and Culture wrote on Twitter”

Aljazeera Girls Education Activists arrest news

The headline contains UN stating the arrest of the girls’ education activist arrest, Wesa who led the non-governmental organization Pen Path that has its mobile libraries and schools across the country, Aljazeera quoted the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan calling upon Taliban government to state the whereabouts of Wesa—a girls’ education rights activist arrested in Afghanistan and has also stressed upon his legal access to representation and contact with the family who have blamed the Taliban for keeping him in an unknown place and not knowing his conditions,

The Aljazeera quoted his last quotes where he had stated men, women, elder, young, everyone from the country’s every corner are calling upon the authorities to give them their religious rights to education as per Islam and in particular to their daughters who are equally obliged to get education to their male counter parts shows the boldness of the Aljazeera quoting Wesa quotes in a more elaborative way and not getting pressure from the government. The report also mentions that his return from Europe maybe the concern for Taliban for his arrest a speculation based mentioning his arrest when Taliban have yet made comments,

The girls’ education activists Roqiya Sai, Fatima Mohammadi and Malalai were demonstrating against the girls’ education ban and were arrested by the Taliban government in the capital city of Kabul are mentioned by the report by Aljazeera ¹⁵ The report mention the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan document having 28 arbitrary arrests and detention of the human rights activists in the last three months shows the Aljazeera going faraway to deepen up the investigation of the girls’ education activists’ arrests across the country where majority happens in the capital city of Kabul.

Aljazeera go more to express even the views of the arrested victims as anonymous sources for their protection as they are living in Afghanistan and follow this practice of independent and uncompromised reporting on the issue and this seems a more powerful quote in comparison to the ones quoted by the BBC World Service. “Tamim, another Afghan activist who requested his name be changed because he fears repercussions from authorities, says he was detained and beaten in custody for attending International Women’s Day celebrations” And the victim elaborate the story of his arrest in a more open quote while detailing the story. And give the tenure of his arrest for four days in the custody of the Taliban and his fear for not sharing the detention story even with his family out of fear. “The intelligence officer came to our house and put a black bag on my head and took me to their department,” Tamim said. “They kept me there for four days and in that time didn’t tell my family where I was”

Taliban spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid is quoted blaming Matiuallah Wesa being active organizing rallies and stirring a movement against the Taliban government in

Afghanistan—who are a de facto government, yet not recognized by the international community¹⁶ The story goes that deep even quoted an American news organization Voice of America where Zabihullah Mujahid blamed Wesa involved in the 'illegal activities'—a frame coming from the blames and conspiracy theories frame in the research, (Kumar, 2023). Such quotes are missing in the BBC World Service stories maybe due to the Western society pressure giving a de facto government a voice in the Western news outlets and media is considered a sort of siding with the Taliban against the girls' education rights activists. While another quote in the same story from a Taliban official in the ministry of Information and culture goes further mentioning the Wesa activities as suspicious.

Wesa's brother is quoted who had stated in his version that Taliban had blamed my brother for taking money from the embassy and using Afghan National Flag—the black, red and green historical flag was the official flag till the Taliban government takeover of the country.

Analysis and conclusion

The frames covering the Afghan girls' education activists' arrests in BBC World Service and Aljazeera a content analysis of both the news outlet in a time when Afghanistan is ruled by the strict version of Sharia law and activists are persecuted. Framing theory is applied on the contents published in one year contents and studied the published stories of both organizations through code-sheet and searched the statistics differing. The way these two international organization cover activists arrests news through the arrests news, condemnation and blames frames studied shows BBC World Service is taking a more compromising both in pressure, from Taliban and the Western human rights organizations, reporting while Aljazeera—a Gulf country organization stationed in Qatar and Taliban do not feel it as a rival or propaganda organization, is bold and having more stories, version from all sides and detailed stories. The study shows how a western media organization report out of fear of ban on its journalists in Afghanistan while the Gulf country media organization utilize its freedom of expressions in the same time.

As per the three frames, 1: Arrests of girls' education activist, 2: Condemnation/Ask Release, 3: Government blames/Conspiracy theory data coming in the above figure (1.1) mentioned Aljazeera more objective in comparison to the BBC WVS frames, as Aljazeera mentioned condemnation, Taliban blames and arrests as a whole more than the BBC World Service frames mentioning arrests but not going for condemnation in a direct way but keeping an indirect message in the paraphrase wording while having lesser mentions of the Taliban blames frame shows BBC WVS is keeping the self-censorship or less focus on the above frames owing to its fear as majority of the Western journalists are not allowed to visit Afghanistan and their media houses and human resource who were active in the field were forced to leave the country. And therefore, it seems BBC WVS go with much more compromises while keeping up reporting from Afghanistan up and remaining active in the area. While the Aljazeera is having a historical role in the earlier Taliban government who

played to be the only news organization reporting on Al-Qaeda, Taliban and the international coalition forces bombardment across the country as a result of 9/11 'war on terror'.

Suggestions

The paper suggests that the media organizations covering Afghanistan under Taliban should not compromise the basic codes and ethics of journalism and give freedom of expression a chance in a time when the masses need it under the moto of voice for the voiceless. Because girls' education is one of the universal liberties of the Afghan girls now banned for them through the Sharia law interpretation by the de facto Taliban government, in total contradiction with rest of the Muslim world. Media houses should not compromise universal liberties for freedom of expressions on a key issue causing humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan.

REFERENCES

1. Abbas, Hassan. *The Return of the Taliban: Afghanistan after the Americans Left*. Yale University Press, 2023.
2. Muraviev, Alexey D. "Russia's Views on and Initial Responses to the 2021 Strategic Retake of Afghanistan by the Taliban." *Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs* 9, no. 3 (2022): 424-445.
3. Katzman, Kenneth. "Afghanistan: Post-war governance, security, and US policy." (2004).
4. Schulze, Kirsten E., Thomas Ruttig, and Georgetown Protection. "Have the Taliban Changed?."
5. Kim, Suntae. "Frame restructuring: The making of an alternative business incubator amid Detroit's crisis." *Administrative Science Quarterly* 66, no. 3 (2021): 753-805.
6. National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. "Communicating science effectively: A research agenda." (2017).
7. Scheufele, Dietram A. "Framing as a theory of media effects." *Journal of communication* 49, no. 1 (1999): 103-122.
8. Yousaf, Farooq. "Bringing Afghan Women to the Table: How to Negotiate with the Taliban." (2022): 9.
9. Oluwashakin, Ajinde. "Gender equality and protection for the girl-child education in conflict environments: The case of Afghanistan and Nigeria."

- Journal of Contemporary International Relations and Diplomacy 3, no. 1 (2022): 325-340.
10. Yasa, Abdul Rahman. "Human Rights Violations in Afghanistan: An Analysis of Women Plights under the Taliban." (2022).
 11. Network, Afghanistan Analysts, and Ehsan Qaane. "Regime Change, Economic Decline and No Legal Protection: What has happened to the Afghan media?." (2022).
 12. Eckel, Jan, and Samuel Moyn, eds. *The Breakthrough: Human Rights in the 1970s*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013.
 13. Schumacher, Cassandra. *True Teen Stories from Afghanistan and Pakistan: Surviving the Taliban*. Cavendish Square Publishing, LLC, 2018.
 14. Gallagher, Nancy. "The International Campaign Against Gender Apartheid in Afghanistan." *UCLA J. Int'l L. & Foreign Aff.* 5 (2000): 367.
 15. Erdiana, Rery. "Examining social actor representation of Taliban reported in Aljazeera and Fox News regarding Taliban's control of Afghanistan in 2021." PhD diss., Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim, 2023.
 16. Do, What You Can. "Educational Challenges in Afghanistan."