Analysis of Women's Participation in the Political and Social Processes of Afghanistan

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Abstract:

Purpose:
This study examines the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace, and security in Afghanistan, focusing on the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan's action plan.

Methodology:
The research employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative analysis, and is a field study. The sample consisted of 100 well-known activists in women's participation studies and advocacy, chosen based on their professional experience and interactions over the past fifteen years. Data collection involved distributing 110 questionnaires with 35 closed-ended and three open-ended questions, resulting in 101 valid responses. The study utilized books, reports, surveys, and existing scientific studies to categorize and present the findings.

Findings:
The study revealed that since adopting the National Action Plan for Women, Peace, and Security to implement Resolution 1325, the Afghan government and national and international partners have undertaken various initiatives to enhance women's social and political participation.

Implication:
Numerous challenges and obstacles remain, necessitating severe attention from the government, legislative bodies, and their

INTRODUCTION

At the dawn of the 21st century, on October 31, 2000, the global community took a significant step by adopting UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (Willett, 2010). This resolution mandated member states to implement measures at the national level to increase women's participation in political and social spheres, such as peace processes and the security sector, and to ensure their protection by preventing conflicts and violence while providing necessary welfare services (Reilly, 2018).

As an active member of the United Nations, the Afghan government, in collaboration with civil society organizations and women's rights advocates, developed the National Action Plan for Women, Peace, and Security in 2015 (Kotokey & Borthakur, 2021). This plan aimed to implement the resolution's provisions, with some measures already put into practice. Participation, defined as individuals' voluntary and free involvement in development processes, requires that both men and women jointly engage in decision-making and government programs, especially in peace and security initiatives in post-conflict societies transitioning toward democracy and stability (Schulz et al., 2024).

Since regaining independence, women's participation in Afghanistan's social and political life has experienced various ups and downs. The Bonn Agreement 2001 marked a new chapter in Afghanistan's history, emphasizing the expansion of human rights commitments, including facilitating women's participation in

governance, security, and peace processes (Smith et al., 2016; Yar & Nasih, 2024). The emergence and growth of civil institutions advocating for peace and women's rights, along with awareness campaigns, advocacy, surveys, and research reports, have highlighted both progress and ongoing challenges in women's active participation, necessitating a thorough analysis of the current state (Watson-Parris et al., 2020; Yar & Hajinejad, 2023).

Given the numerous social and political challenges facing Afghanistan, this study aims to assess existing progress, empower relevant institutions, identify challenges, avoid past mistakes, and propose effective strategies to achieve better the objectives of Resolution 1325 and the National Action Plan, particularly concerning women's participation (Carvalho et al., 2021). The ultimate goal of women's political and social participation is to enable them to contribute alongside men in various aspects of social life, including politics, security, economy, Education, and administration, within the legal framework, thereby benefiting from the services and rights provided and protected by the state (Mwenyango, 2023).

The historical fluctuations in women's participation in Afghan society, particularly in the post-independence era, underscore the need for continuous study and action to ensure sustained and necessary progress (Ramos, 2023). These historical ups and downs, coupled with the current sensitive phase in Afghanistan, have heightened concerns among activists about the future of women's participation in peace agreements and the potential structures emerging from them, casting uncertainty over women's political involvement (Rohlinger et al., 2020). Despite Afghanistan's recent adherence to several international human and women's rights instruments, including Resolution 1325, the National Action Plan for Women, Peace, and Security remains crucial for realizing this important international mandate (Kokabisaghi, 2019).

Literature Review. Women's participation in Afghanistan's political and social processes is a crucial aspect that requires attention and analysis. While existing literature has explored various aspects of citizen participation, social justice, and peace processes in different contexts, such as Indonesia, Austria, Colombia, and Chile, there is a need for a focused examination of women's involvement in Afghanistan specifically. (Farisi, 2019) highlighted the role of social media in promoting people's participation in political and democratic processes in Indonesia, emphasizing the importance of defending rights and duties. (Potter, 2020) discussed citizen participation and social justice in the context of recent protests in the United States, drawing parallels to historical events. (Giessmann, 2020) emphasized the need for wise linkage in negotiating peace processes, which could be relevant to understanding women's participation in Afghanistan. (Praprotnik & Perlot, 2020) Focused on discontent as a motivation for engaging with the democratic process, providing insights from a survey in Austria. (Praprotnik & Perlot, 2020) Examined the mainstreaming of intersectionality in the Colombian peace process, highlighting the importance of feminist aims and social transformations. (Scherman & Snow, 2021) Explored the relationship between social media use and protest participation in Chile, indicating the potential influence of online platforms. While these studies offer valuable insights into citizen participation, social justice, and peace processes, there needs to be more literature regarding women's participation in the specific context of Afghanistan. (Nataliia et al., 2021) Discussed women's political rights in the context of gender equality, emphasizing the importance of increasing women's political representation for a more democratic state system. Therefore, a focused analysis of women's participation in Afghanistan's political and social processes is essential to understand women's challenges and opportunities in this context. By building on existing literature and incorporating insights from diverse perspectives, future research can enhance women's involvement in political and social processes in Afghanistan.

Theoretical Framework. Theories and feminist movements provide the foundation for understanding women's political and social participation, which can be traced through the three waves of feminism.

First Wave Feminism: The first wave of feminism began with the French Revolution in 1789, primarily focusing on advocating for equal political and civil rights for women alongside men. This movement ultimately led to women's suffrage being recognized in the United States in 1920 and Britain in 1918(Hinterhuber & Günther, 2023).

Second Wave Feminism: Attributed to Simone de Beauvoir, the second wave emerged in the 1970s, emphasizing complete equality between women and men across all aspects of life, including social, political, cultural, psychological, and economic dimensions (Pickard, 2023).

Third Wave Feminism: The third wave, recognizing that patriarchal culture is the root of the oppression faced by women, advocates for a worldview interpreted through a feminine lens. This movement advocates embracing women's perspectives to overcome patriarchal culture (Özdemir, 2023).

Feminist Perspectives on Political Participation: Feminists argue that women are actively involved in political activities like men. Women participate in elections, join labor unions, and are active members of political parties and unions (Fetner, 2022). Participation should be voluntary and satisfactory, enabling individuals to act as active members of society in a conducive social environment (Fetner, 2022).

Political Participation: Political participation involves safeguarding and exercising political rights, allowing individuals to engage in their country's political and social life. It includes voting in elections, holding political and social office, and freely expressing opinions and ideas in public forums (Sainz & Vázquez, 2024).

Social and Political Participation: Citizens' social and political participation is based on rights exclusive to citizens, not foreigners. It encompasses voting, standing for election, managing specific jobs like ministries and ambassadorships, and exercising political rights. Two fundamental indicators of women's participation in political and social spheres are women's rights and their presence in political leadership and governance (Sarumi et al., 2019).

Challenges in Traditional Societies: However, studies and evidence show that creating an environment for women's participatory roles in traditional, conflict-ridden, and war-torn societies is challenging. Due to the vulnerable status of women in such societies, various international and national mechanisms have been established to guide and encourage member states of the United Nations towards active social, political, cultural, and economic participation of women. These mechanisms will be discussed later (Rincker et al., 2019).

Political and Social Participation of Women in Afghanistan. Women's political and social participation in Afghanistan has experienced significant highs and lows, marked by periods of struggle, oppression, and progress (YAR et al., 2023). Historical records indicate a need for substantial evidence of women's social and political involvement before Afghanistan's independence and the reign of King Amanullah Khan (1919-1929). During this period, women began to gain legal recognition in the constitution (Yar & Shaheedzooy, 2024).

Early Reforms under King Amanullah Khan: Recognizing the importance of Education and skills, King Amanullah Khan initiated several measures to promote women's Education and participation in society (Ruducha et al., 2019). In 1920, the first girls' school, Masturat, was established in Kabul, followed by the opening of the Ismat School in 1921 and several others, totaling seven girls' schools. In 1928, the Women's Protection Association was formed, marking the first time women in Kabul actively participated in governance alongside men. Initiatives such as publishing the women's magazine "Ershad-ul-Niswan" and sending girls abroad for Education were significant steps towards women's empowerment (Owen et al., 2018).

Challenges during and after King Amanullah Khan's Reign: However, these advancements faced setbacks with the fall of King Amanullah Khan. Habibullah Kalakani's rule (1929) curtailed women's rights, emphasizing religious values and Afghan honor, leading to the closure of girls' schools and women's organizations (Ruducha et al., 2019).

Nader Khan's Reign: Nader Khan's rise to power further restricted women's rights, closing girls' schools, disbanding women's associations, and recalling female students from abroad. His policies reversed many of Amanullah Khan's reforms (Yar et al., 2022).

Post-Taliban Era: The events of September 11, 2001, led to US military intervention and the Bonn Conference, which marked a turning point for women's rights in Afghanistan (Yar et al., 2022). The establishment of the Interim Administration and subsequent democratic reforms aimed to revive women's status (Lee et al.,

2021). The Bonn Agreement included the creation of a 21-member commission to organize an emergency Loya Jirga, including three women: Mahboba Hoqomal, Suraya Parlika, and Humaira Naqib. Of the 1,501 participants, 160 were women, with Sima Samar elected deputy of the emergency Loya Jirga (Ruducha et al., 2019).

Progress in Women's Participation: Massouda Jalal was a candidate in the first presidential elections, demonstrating women's potential in political leadership. In 2002, a nine-member commission, including women Asifa Kakar and Makrama Ekrimi, was established to draft a new constitution. Subsequently, a 35-member commission, including seven women, was appointed to review the constitution, and a 20-member women's committee was formed to advocate for women's rights (Grabo & van Vugt, 2018).

Policy Impact and Democratic Reforms: These policies and democratic developments have significantly advanced women's political and social participation in Afghanistan. Despite ongoing challenges, these initiatives have led to notable improvements, ensuring women's involvement in the country's governance and social development (Saleem et al., 2021).

METHODS

This study is an applied and forward-looking research. Regarding nature and method, it is an explanatory survey conducted through field research with quantitative and qualitative data analysis. Explanatory research aims to understand the nature and characteristics of a phenomenon, exploring its current state and systematically describing its present condition. Such research has both applied and fundamental aspects: applied findings aid in decision-making, policy formulation, and strategic planning, while fundamental research seeks to uncover facts and realities without altering the studied variables or environment.

The data collection methods included library research and exploratory or in-depth interviews. In the library research, books, articles, strategies, policies, documents, and relevant materials were reviewed. The exploratory interviews gathered insights from experts and key informants regarding women's political and social participation in Afghan society (Suryanti et al., 2022). Additionally, data from the target population were collected through a standardized or researcher-developed Likert-scale questionnaire.

The questionnaire's content validity was established, ensuring its appropriateness for measuring and surveying the necessary information. The data collected in the appendices were analyzed using Excel and SPSS software. The distribution of questionnaires targeted specialists in civil activities, peace, and women's rights based on their professional roles.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In a world where structural and cultural violence has long hindered women's participation, the discussion on women's political participation is essential. Despite historical movements advocating for women's rights, governments can no longer ignore women's roles in political and social life (Gustiani et al., 2023). One significant challenge is the non-implementation of women's programs in developing countries like Afghanistan. Given the current situation, the role of women has become more pronounced in recent years.

This study examines Afghan women's social and political participation following the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325. It analyzes women's progress in peace and security processes, the effectiveness of international and community efforts, and the challenges in implementing the action plan and resolution.

Due to the broad scope of activities by civil activists, peace workers, and women's rights advocates, a sample of 100 informed individuals in these fields was selected. The survey consisted of a 35-question Likert-scale questionnaire designed to evaluate the implementation of UNSCR 1325 and the action plan. The sample included

58 women (57.4%), 36 men (35.6%), and seven individuals (6.9%) who did not respond. The survey was conducted among civil activities, peace, and women's rights specialists. Data were analyzed using Excel and SPSS software.

- Hypothesis 1: The impact of government actions on women's progress under UNSCR 1325 showed a mean score of 3.04. The detailed question analysis yielded average scores ranging from 2.61 to 3.41, indicating moderate satisfaction and partial confirmation of the hypothesis.
- Hypothesis 2: Approving the action plan for implementing UNSCR 1325 had an average score of 3.17. Questions related to political participation scored between 2.94 and 3.74, suggesting significant progress in this area.
- Hypothesis 3: The action plan for enhancing women's participation in peace processes was approved with an average score of 3.188, confirming the hypothesis based on quantitative and qualitative data.
- Hypothesis 4: Ensuring women's security in political and social participation had an average score of 3.67, affirming the hypothesis.
- Hypothesis 5: Monitoring by internal and international bodies and reporting on the implementation of UNSCR 1325 showed an average score of 3.55, supporting the hypothesis.

The overall analysis of sub-hypotheses indicates that the central hypothesis—that the implementation of UNSCR 1325 and the action plan in the past three years has been effective for women's political, social, and civil participation—has been partially confirmed, with an average score of 3.299. The reasons for this partial confirmation and recommendations for further improvement are detailed in the conclusion and suggestions sections.

Table 1. Hypothesis

Hypothesis	Description	Average Score
Hypothesis 1	Impact of government actions on women's progress under UNSCR 1325	3.04
Hypothesis 2	Approval of the action plan for implementing UNSCR 1325	3.17
Hypothesis 3	Enhancement of women's participation in peace processes	3.188
Hypothesis 4	Ensuring women's security in political and social participation	3.67
Hypothesis 5	Monitoring and reporting by internal and international bodies	3.55

These scores reflect the average responses from the study participants regarding the effectiveness and impact of various initiatives and conditions related to women's participation in political and social processes in Afghanistan.

CONCLUSION

The research indicates that implementing the action plan and UNSCR 1325 is essential for women's progress in Afghanistan, especially during crises and conflicts. Strategies, laws, and policies must be amended and approved with practical and relevant programs to achieve political, social, and civic participation for women.

Given that women's political and social participation is a significant issue in developing countries, this study aimed to examine the implementation of UNSCR 1325 in Afghanistan over the last three years. The research focused on the effectiveness, challenges, and progress made.

The study was applied, forward-looking, explanatory, and involved content analysis. It was field research with mixed (quantitative and qualitative) data analysis. The population studied included civil, peace, and women's rights activists, with 110 recognized activists selected and 101 completing the questionnaire.

Data was collected through library research and field surveys and analyzed using SPSS software. The questionnaire included 35 closed questions and three open-ended questions.

Key findings include the crucial role of the action plan and UNSCR 1325 in women's progress, the need for more outstanding government commitment to fulfill the action plan's provisions, and the necessity of government support for political and civil activists and women's rights groups. However, awareness among civil activists about the action plan and UNSCR 1325 needs improvement.

Recommendations include enhancing individuals' capacity to achieve meaningful participation, strengthening political will at the leadership level to implement strategies and policies promoting women's participation, pragmatically addressing cultural and security challenges, and ensuring better coordination and effectiveness in resource allocation for women's participation programs.

This study opens the door for future research on the comprehensive implementation of the action plan and UNSCR 1325, which aims to increase women's political and social participation in Afghanistan.

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