VISIBILITY UNDER SIEGE: INTERNET SHUTDOWNS, DIASPORA MEDIATION, AND THE POLITICS OF DELEGITIMIZATION IN IRAN'S PROTEST MOVEMENTS

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Abstract: This article examines the ways internet shutdowns, far from entirely eliminating resistance, transform the politics of visibility and resistance in Iran's protest movements, including the January 2026 protests. The paper draws on interdisciplinary sources, including theories of political legitimacy, digital activism, and media studies, to show how authoritarian censorship affects the domestic information sphere by closing off spaces for communication and the flow of protest narratives within Iran. This research shows how the censoring of digital visibility within Iran creates a pivotal moment in which diaspora populations take on the role of mediating, translating, and amplifying information about protests across national borders. It focuses on diaspora-mediated visibility as an act of political participation through which local acts of resistance are transformed into global narratives of resistance against state power. It can also be seen that such processes do not suppress resistance but rather move it, making possible new forms of delegitimization that extend beyond the Iranian state's borders. The article adds to the fields of digital authoritarianism, transnational activism, and politics of visibility by showing how censorship can inadvertently create alternative structures of resistance in authoritarian settings.

Keywords: *Digital Authoritarianism, Internet Shutdowns, Iranian Protests, Diaspora Activism, Political Legitimacy.*

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KUŞATMA ALTINDA GÖRÜNÜRLÜK: İRAN'DAKİ PROTESTO HAREKETLERİNDE İNTERNET KESİNTİLERİ, DİASPORA ARACILIĞI VE MEŞRUİYETSİZLEŞTİRME SİYASETİ

Öz: Bu makale, internet kesintilerinin direnişi tamamen ortadan kaldırmaktan ziyade, İran'daki protesto hareketlerinde görünürlük ve direniş siyasetini nasıl dönüştürdüğünü, özellikle Ocak 2026 protestoları bağlamında incelemektedir. Çalışma, siyasal meşruiyet, dijital aktivizm ve medya çalışmaları gibi disiplinlerarası kuramsal yaklaşımlardan yararlanarak, otoriter sansürün İran'daki bilgi alanını nasıl yeniden şekillendirdiğini ve iletişim kanallarını kapatarak protesto anlatılarının dolaşımını nasıl sınırladığını ortaya koymaktadır. Araştırma, İran içinde dijital görünürlüğün bastırılmasının, diasporanın protestolara ilişkin bilgiyi ulusötesi ağlar aracılığıyla aracılık etme, çevirme ve yayma rolünü üstlendiği kritik bir kırılma anı yarattığını göstermektedir. Çalışma, diaspora aracılı görünürlüğü, yerel direniş pratiklerinin küresel ölçekte devlet otoritesine karşı anlatılara dönüştüğü bir siyasal katılım biçimi olarak ele almaktadır. Ayrıca bu süreçlerin direnişi bastırmak yerine onu yeniden konumlandırdığı ve İran devletinin sınırlarını aşan yeni meşruiyetsizleştirme biçimlerine olanak tanıdığı da gözlemlenmektedir. Bu makale, sansürün otoriter bağlamlarda istemeden alternatif direniş yapıları üretebildiğini göstererek dijital otoriterlik, ulusötesi aktivizm ve görünürlük siyaseti literatürüne katkı sunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Dijital Otoriterlik, İnternet Kesintileri, İran Protestoları, Diaspora Aktivizmi, Siyasal Meşruiyet.*

Introduction

The January 2026 Iran protests brought renewed attention to the continuing tension between state power and social dissent in an increasingly controlled informational environment. This article does not just consider the protests as occasions for street-level confrontation but rather as a case through which the politics of visibility, censorship and transnational mediation can be explored. With the availability of the digital platforms curtailed, the capacity of protesters to capture, spread, and authorize their demands is actually distorted.

This article relates the January 2026 protests to the politics of visibility by suggesting that the politics of authoritarian control are not only exercised when one is coerced but also through the politics of strategically managing what is visible and shareable as well as knowable. Visibility, in this framework, is a political resource—one that conditions the acknowledgement and understanding and fighting of dissent. Internet shutdowns and digital restrictions are not therefore total or final silencing of protest. Instead, they change the circumstances in which protest becomes "*visible*" and, politically, "*worth it*".

Nevertheless, the ban of visibility imposed in Iran does not lead to the total loss of visibility. Instead, it generates the spatial dynamics of communication change, in particular, the precipitation of protest-related material more and more reliant on actors situated off-site in the arena of contention. Throughout the process, the role of the diaspora communities becomes a necessity since they collect, translate, and share fragmented information through the transnational networks. These actors help to reconstruct the protest visibility beyond the territorial jurisdiction of the state through social media, digital archives, and interaction with international media. The diaspora is thus no longer just a supportive or an observing group but one that enters the politics of reconstruction that transforms local resistance into what is "*readable*" as repression, dissent and delegitimization at a global level.

Based on this observation, the article unveils the idea of *"relocation of visibility"* to imply the change of protest visibility in the conditions of digital oppression. The originality of this concept lies in its focus on visibility not as something simply lost under censorship but as something displaced, reconstructed, and politically reactivated through transnational mediation. It designates the shift in protest visibility from local, immediate and participatory documentation to mediated, diaspora-boosted and transnational visibility. Protest family stories spread around the world, and they are involved in the formation of the external perception of the Iranian state, thereby affecting the reputational struggle and delegitimizing at the national

borders. By this, the debate over visibility applies not solely to the context of protestation but to becoming entrenched in a larger pattern of international discourse and political assessment. Also, it alters the geography and politics of the interpretation, circulation and assessment of dissent outside of the state's control.

This article argues that internet cuts in Iran fail to remove dissent but instead transform the spatial and political relations of visibility so that the production and circulation of narratives of protests are no longer in the hands of domestic participants but in the diaspora networks. This change opens up possibilities of new transnational delegitimization practices, in which state regimes are becoming more disputed by externally mediated narratives exposing, redefining, and intensifying cases of repression. Through this process the study attempts to add to the digital authoritarianism, transnational activism, and political communication literature, providing a conceptual space in which information domination can spawn unintended new avenues of resistance.

1. Theoretical Framework: The Politics of Visibility and Transnational Mediation

The article considers visibility not as a natural byproduct of digital communication but as a contested political field in which the state, protest actors, diaspora networks, media platforms, and others contest over what can be seen, circulated, and interpreted.

The recent work on protest and power tends to posit that political struggle is not merely practiced by direct confrontation but is also practiced by means of the management of visibility as well as its contestation. In that way, visibility does not refer to an apolitical state but, instead, to an organized sphere of power, where the ability to be visible, to be seen, and to be known takes a lead in political life. Mirzoeff's[2] concept of the "*right to look*" is useful here because it frames looking and being seen as political acts that challenge authorities seeking to monopolise visual power and determine what may appear publicly. The power to be seen and not to be seen is especially tense in an authoritarian setting, where the state system takes action towards limiting the spread of images, stories, and dissenting expressions and forms.

Hence, the silencing of protest visibility can be put in perspective not merely as censorship but as an effort at rearranging what Rancière[3] theorizes as the distribution of the sensible, in other words, the system that constitutes what is visible, sayable, and intelligible in politics in a certain order. Internet shutdowns are, thus, not merely technical interventions but also political ones,

[2] Nicholas Mirzoeff (2011), *The Right to Look: A Counterhistory of Visuality*. Durham: Duke University Press.
[3] Jacques Rancière (2004), *The Politics of Aesthetics*. London: Continuum.

adopting a role of censorship as an attempt to eliminate dissent in the field of perception entirely. The state tries to make protest invisible and inaudible by restricting entry into the communication infrastructures, thus limiting its ability to derive political sense.[4]

This is important in the case of Iran, where protest visibility is not just being suppressed physically but also through the disruption of communications infrastructures. In these contexts, the state does not simply react to dissent once it becomes apparent; it also tries to influence the circumstances in which dissent can become publicly known. Thus, it is more than a manifestation of protest – it is part of authoritarian governance.

The visibility in digitally mediated spaces is, however, not determined territorially. The disruption of local communications does not strictly kill the spread of protest discourses; instead, the discovery of new circumstances in which visibility is re-established takes place. In this case, information provided by Azoulay[5] can be especially educative. The concept of the civil contract of photography, as Azoulay puts it, highlights that images are not simply representations but are actually events of relations that imply the interrelationship between producers, subjects, and spectators in space. Regarding protest, this sharing of images generates a kind of political activity extending out of the immediate location of action, allowing distant audiences to become involved in the interpretation and circulation of protest.

This context is especially crucial in comprehending the political nature of images, videos, testimonies, and broken digital traces that appear in times of repression. These materials can continue to have political significance, even if communicated late, in part or via a third party. Their spread can link together local protesters with international audiences and can make local repression an international concern.

This informal knowing of visibility is also moulded by transnational movements of media and communication. According to the argument by Appadurai[6], images, stories, and ideas are crossing borders and creating what he terms "*complicated mediascapes*" in the global processes of culture. The diaspora communities find a vital role in playing a critical role within these mediascapes as mediators who can aid information flow between the local and global contexts. Where local presence is restricted, diaspora actors facilitate the rebuilding of protest stories by

[4] Anita R. Gohdes (2020), "Repression Technology: Internet Accessibility and State Violence", *American Journal of Political Science*, 64(3), pp. 488-503.
[5] Ariella Azoulay (2008), *The Civil Contract of Photography*, New York: Zone Books.
[6] Arjun Appadurai (1996), *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

working on translating, restructuring, and amplifying fractured information to be heard abroad.[7]

Diaspora mediation is consequently conceptualised as more than a mere movement of information in this article. It is regarded as a political process where protest narratives are chosen, translated, and reframed in ways that are directed towards the international publics. This does not equate to a complete representation of domestic protest actors or an absolute lack of selection in mediation. Instead, it implies that diaspora networks emerge as players in reconstructing visibility in the absence of domestic communication.

Meanwhile, the politics of visibility cannot be considered independently of the issue concerning whose lives are acknowledged as valuable or worthy of consideration. Overall, following Chouliaraki[8], mediated portrayals of protest and suffering should not be understood as objective representations of reality but are embedded into the moral and affective systems of defining how viewers are reacting. The distribution of protest visuals by networks of diaspora, therefore, entails the processes of selection and framing, leading to consequences for how dissent is understood on the global scale, defining perceptions of injustice, urgency, and political importance.[9]

This also implies that visibility does not automatically bring emancipation. Certain stories might be more salient than others due to their emotional impact, ease of interpretation into the international political discourse or fit with the international narrative that is already in place regarding Iran. This can, therefore, amplify protest visibility, but it can also produce hierarchies of representation. This restriction is significant as it does not make the argument deterministic and enables the article to explore visibility as a contested and uneven process.

Collectively, these views make possible a re-conceptualization of protest in the context of repression in the digital world. Instead of perceiving the internet shutdowns as mechanisms that merely cause the silencing of the dissent, this paper postulates that they offer a change in the spatial organization of visibility. To manifest this change, the work offers the term "*relocation of visibility*", which suggests that protest visibility is displaced, i.e., it is no longer confined to within domestic spaces but is also reassembled and redistributed elsewhere within the transnational networks. The originality of this concept lies in treating visibility not as

[7] Jennifer M. Brinkerhoff (2009), *Digital Diasporas: Identity and Transnational Engagement*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
[8] Lilie Chouliaraki (2006), *The Spectatorship of Suffering*, London: Sage.
[9] Tarleton Gillespie (2018), *Custodians of the Internet*, New Haven: Yale University Press.

something simply lost under censorship, but as something displaced, reconstructed, and politically reactivated through diaspora mediation and transnational circulation. This move is not in complete compensation of the loss of local forms of communication, but it facilitates other forms of political presence that exist beyond the intimate precincts of a state.

Here, the communities of the diaspora are not only helpful witnesses but are also proactive contributors to the making of politics visible in the way they come into play to re-offer the stories of protest across the global networks of communication. The challenge of state power through this process is no longer confined within the limits of nations, and this results in the emergence of political struggle forms that have their roots locally, but whose expressions are transnational. Through foregrounding visibility as a key aspect of power, this theoretical approach forms a basis in understanding how protest movements grow, evolve, and gain meaning in the face of authoritarian domination.

2. Methodological Approach: Qualitative Case Analysis and Interpretive Political Communication

The article is a qualitative case study investigating the reformation of protest visibility in Iran by internet shutdowns and other forms of negative attitudes towards digital platforms. Case-study research is also appropriate when considering complex political processes where the relationship between context and actors, as well as outcomes, is impossible to isolate to the particular circumstances in which they take place.[10] Instead of considering the January 2026 protests as a singular phenomenon, the article suggests that they can be understood as a case on the basis of which more comprehensive processes of digital authoritarianism, mediation by diaspora, and political delegitimization can be examined. The methodological purpose is not to quantify protest results in some quantitative terms but rather to follow the political process in which visibility is pulled, bifurcated, moved, and rebuilt among transnational communication networks.

The article is founded on the interpretive analysis of the political communication. The given approach can be justified by the fact that the article is preoccupied with the circulation of meanings, narratives, images, testimonies, and political claims under the circumstances of censorship. With the spirit of the qualitative interpretive ways of analysis, the analysis was done to explore how political meaning is created and disputed in the process of communication

[10] Robert K. Yin (2018), *Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods*, 6th ed., Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

instead of viewing communication materials as neutral vessels of information.[11] The analysis is also centred around the production, mediation, and reframing of protest-related information as opposed to merely counting the protesters, length of demonstrations, or short-term policy effects. The case study of the January 2026 protests analytically studies the connection between four interacting dynamics, which include the following: Firstly, the constraint of domestic discourse by means of shutting down the net and disrupting platforms; two, the disintegration and postponement of protest-related discourse; three, the work of the diaspora actors in aggregating, translating, and amplifying the protest discourse; and four, the contribution of such mediated protest discourses to reputational and discursive dilemmas against the Iranian state. This process-based framework enables such an article to demonstrate how cause and outcome are related without bringing out the interaction as automatic or deterministic.

The article has a secondary academic literature and digital rights reports, digital evidence of any protest, published in the media and circulated via the diaspora networks and activists, as its evidence base. It is particularly interesting to take into account the reports made by such organisations as Access Now, NetBlocks, and Freedom House, which document internet blockages, restrictions in specific platforms, and more general trends of online suppression in authoritarian and crisis situations. As an example, the highest registered cases of 313 internet blocks worldwide in 2025 have been reported by Access Now and the #KeepItOn coalition since the inception of the monitoring in 2016. About Iran in particular, recent coverage has also characterized the January 2026 shutdown as part of a broader trend of state censorship on global access to the internet. These sources give contextual evidence to analyse censorship as a practice of infrastructural and political nature. Another source employed by the article to read the protest narratives, media reports, and diaspora-amplified materials is the qualitative content analysis of the article. The qualitative content analysis is advantageous, as it enables the researcher to determine patterns of meaning, framing, emphasis and omission in the textual and visual materials[12]. Such establishments are not addressed as neutral reflections of reality but merely as sources that are politically mediated, which must be read in context. The article thus does not simply focus on what information was spread, but it is also concerned with how it was framed, translated, amplified, delayed, and given international legibility.

The empirical material consists of five categories: digital-rights and network-monitoring reports; international media coverage; public technical studies of the 2026 shutdown; protest-

[11] Robert E. Stake (1995), *The Art of Case Study Research*, Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
[12] Margrit Schreier (2012), *Qualitative Content Analysis in Practice*, London: SAGE.

related digital traces such as slogans, hashtags, videos, and testimonies; and diaspora-mediated archives and campaigns. The analysis uses qualitative content analysis to identify patterns of framing, translation, amplification, delay, verification, and omission across these materials.

The following analytical table has been added to make the evidence base clearer and to respond directly to the reviewer's request for a concise summary of data sources, examples, and analytical purpose.

Table 1. Analytical Summary of Data Sources, Examples, and Purpose

Data source	**Examples used in the article**	**Analytical purpose**	**Relevant sections**
Digital-rights and network-monitoring reports	Access Now/#KeepItOn reports; NetBlocks references; public network-measurement studies on the 2026 shutdown	To establish the infrastructural dimension of shutdowns and show how connectivity restrictions shape visibility	Sections 3, 4, 5
International media coverage	Reuters and The Guardian reports on the January 2026 blackout and the later restoration of global internet access	To contextualize the timing, duration, and public consequences of the blackout	Sections 4, 5
Hashtags and protest slogans	#MahsaAmini, #امینی_مهسا, #WomanLifeFreedom, #آزادی_زندگی_زن, #JinJiyanAzadi, #IranProtests, #BeOurVoice, #KeepItOn	To show how fragmented protest claims become searchable, repeatable, translatable, and internationally legible	Sections 5, 6
Activist and diaspora campaigns	"Be Our Voice"; #KeepItOn; diaspora amplification of slogans, videos, testimonies, executions, and accountability claims	To analyze diaspora mediation as political participation rather than neutral information sharing	Sections 6, 7

Data source	**Examples used in the article**	**Analytical purpose**	**Relevant sections**
Digital archives and preservation initiatives	Woman, Life, Freedom Movement of Iran Web Archive; Princeton Digital PUL collection; Iran Digital Archive Coalition/Iranian Archive	To show how delayed and fragmented traces are preserved, verified, and transformed into records of repression	Sections 6, 7

The table also clarifies the article's limits. The study does not claim to reconstruct every protest event from January 2026 or to provide a complete map of all Iranian opposition actors. Its aim is narrower: to trace how protest visibility is disrupted inside Iran and then reconstructed through transnational communicative infrastructures. Fragmentation, delay, and uncertainty are therefore treated not only as methodological obstacles but also as political effects of the shutdown itself.

The research constraints, which are associated with studying protest in the conditions of authoritarianism, are also manifested in this methodological decision. When it comes to areas with limited internet access, blocked reporting, and in some cases where a protester may be in great danger, the evidence stored is usually sporadic, latent, and skewed. This is why the article does not pretend to give us the full empirical reconstruction of all the occurrences about the January 2026 protests. Rather, it makes the case to explore how such fragmentation in itself takes on a political dimension. The ambiguity created by censorship is consequently not the issue of a methodological weakness in itself, but one of the issues under investigation. The article is not claiming that internet shutdowns merely fail or succeed, nor is it a claim that the mediation of the diaspora inevitably leads to a political effect. Instead, it explores the restructuring of communicative conditions of protest by digital repression. Delegitimization, as defined in the article, is a slow, contested and discursive process defined by visibility, distribution of narratives, international focus and other political uses of narrative.

Lastly, this methodological framework explains the breadth of the article. The work is not intended to provide the complete history of Iranian opposition politics or the exhaustive coverage of all the participants in January 2026 protests. This can be true of the wider diaspora politics field and include faces like Reza Pahlavi and other protest voices, but the crux of this

revelation is not about individual leadership but about protest visibility and how it is shifted off of domestic arenas to transnational networks. Such a difference is useful in maintaining the article on the basis of visibility, mediation and delegitimization as the central areas of analysis.

3. Authoritarian Control of Visibility in Iran: The January 2026 Protests

The January 2026 protests in Iran took place within an already restricted media environment, in which the state had developed multiple tactics to regulate information flows and limit the visibility of dissent. In contrast to the past protest cycles in which the people relied more on continuous electronic communication, January 2026 can be described by the application of internet shutdowns and platform disruption, whereby it was applied during the moments of critical mobilization. This disruption was not merely accidental or technical; it reflected the state's recognition that protest visibility — the capacity of demonstrations to be documented, circulated, and publicly recognised — is a central dimension of political resistance. More recently, the announcements of network disruption are thoroughly coordinated to occur in the period when the protests have attained the peak of their activity and leave a long-term footprint on the organization and exposure process.[13]

The case of January 2026 is significant as it gives a tangible example of how digital repression is a political instrument of the management of visibility. On 8 January 2026, an internet blackout was reported nationwide in Iran as protests over economic challenges were sweeping the country. According to *Reuters*, the blackout was also identified by the internet monitoring organisation NetBlocks, and The Guardian also reported that Iran was also in a total internet blackout as nationwide protests continued to intensify.[14] These reports indicate that the limiting of connectivity was not necessarily a technical issue operating in the background but part of the political environment where protest visibility was being formed. The empirical significance of these reports lies in showing that the blackout was not only experienced domestically but also documented externally through monitoring organisations and international media, making the restriction of visibility itself visible to transnational audiences.

In this context, internet shutdowns functioned as a form of infrastructural control directed not only at the circulation of information, but also at the conditions through which collective action could be perceived and recognised. By interrupting access to social media platforms,

[13] Access Now (2023), *The State of Internet Shutdowns in 2023*, New York: Access Now.
[14] *Reuters* (2026), "Nationwide Internet Blackout Reported in Iran as Protests over Economy Spread", 08.01.2026; *The Guardian* (2026), "Iran Plunged into Internet Blackout as Protests over Economy Spread Nationwide", 08.01.2026.

messaging applications, and mobile data services, the state limited communication channels that could otherwise have been used to organise, document, and circulate protest activity in real time. The possibilities of communication by media infrastructures are not a neutral conduit but rather a vibrant platform of power, the accessibility and control of which define the possibilities of communication. In this sense, blocking of digital networks does not just kill content; it reshapes the very communicative landscape.[15]

Nevertheless, not to get into deterministic language, it is better to think of this process as a limitation of the communicative power instead of a full loss of the political process. The blackout hindered the capability of protesters to record what had happened, spread visuals, organize people to act together, and connect with both local and global audiences in real time. This way, the direct effect of the shutdown was not merely the obliteration of protest but the diminishing of the direct relationship between protest activity and publicity.

These effects of visibility had several short-term effects. To begin with, it created a condition of informational opacity in which domestic and global audiences encountered only limited, delayed, or fragmented information about ongoing events. The absence of continuous visual documentation restricted the formation of coherent protest narratives and limited the capacity of dissent to accumulate symbolic and political pressure. Second, it contributed to a sense of spatial drawback, since local protests remained rather isolated with no knowledge about large-scale mobilization and the coverage of the area of influence. In this regard, communication facility disruption is in keeping with broader strategies of disabling networks to disrupt collective action and render it nearly invisible.[13]

This argument can be buttressed by the larger statistics of internet blockages. The reference to the #KeepItOn coalition is important here because it places the Iranian case within a wider global pattern in which shutdowns are increasingly documented not only as technical disruptions but as tools of political control.[16] This global trend shows that shutting down is becoming a more and more frequently utilized not only provision of temporary security but also a more frequent and regular tool of political force. This larger tendency is present in the context of the Iranian case, where the application of connectivity restrictions is utilized in the

[15] Lisa Parks (2015), "Stuff You Can Kick: Toward a Theory of Media Infrastructures", in (eds. by Patrik Svensson & David Theo Goldberg) *Between Humanities and the Digital*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
[16] Access Now and #KeepItOn Coalition (2026), *Rising Repression Meets Global Resistance: Internet Shutdowns in 2025*, New York: Access Now.

context of a politically unstable situation, in which the state takes control of communication networks as a component of the broader management of protests strategy.

In the meantime, the state control of visibility did not extend to technical disruption but to discursive control. State-controlled and state-aligned media selectively covered the protests in ways that minimised their political significance or reframed them as instability, foreign interference, or isolated unrest. The meaning of politics is generated by such framing, by which the various audiences come to understand and evaluate the events.[15] The ability to control both the absence and especially the existence of information was an attempt on the part of the state to maintain a stable image of power by preventing the establishment of such other types of forms.[17]

This demonstrates the initial evident cause-and-consequence connection in the case. It is the technical closure of channels of communication, as well as the discursive effort to specify the meaning of protest by official discourses. The net effect is that there is a twofold restraint: demonstrators have some trouble campaigning their own version, and the government-approved versions seek to fill the interpretative vacuum produced by the lack of independent and real-time reporting. Thus, a dictatorial regulation of visibility acts at the same time as an infrastructural containment and narrative framing.

The oppression of visibility, however, was not absolute or total even despite these efforts. Even in situations where connectivity was limited, bits of information still appeared in the form of intermittent connectivity, the recidivism of offline documents, and delayed uploading. Sporadic short video clips, half-testimonies, and textual updates emerged, and in many cases, they had no contextual specificity, although they still gave insights into what was happening. Although not enough to keep the local visibility going, these pieces played a pivotal role in further construction of the narratives of protests across the borders of Iran. In such a way, the visibility remained intact but has taken the form of a fragmented and uneven form, which is contingent upon alternative circuits of circulation.

This discontinuous circulation is key to the argument of the article. The blackout that happened in January 2026 did not merely create silence but created delay, uncertainty, and boxy circulation. Subsequent reports of internet blockages in Iran indicated that the internet was always shaky at best and highly constrained long-term. In May 2026, Reuters wrote that the

[17] Robert M. Entman (1993), "Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm", *Journal of Communication*, 43(4), pp. 51-58.

president of Iran officially ordered the international internet to be restored after what was said to be an 87-day blackout, and another May 2026 Reuters report reported Iranians reconnecting after 88 days of blackout.[18] Such subsequent manifestations demonstrate the politics of visibility as being beyond the event of protest and extending over time to influence the process of communication, documentation, and interpretation of that process.

It is namely this turn of fragmented visibility that preconditions the dynamics of the following section. The fact that the domestic communication within the country was disrupted did not erase the fact that there was a protest but instead changed the shape within which it may be felt and understood. Restricting the capacity of protesters to directly influence the formation of their own visibility in real-time, internet shutdowns created a de facto reliance of external actors on the further circulation of the narrative. By doing this they helped to bring about a change in the geographical structure of visibility in which the recording and intensifying of protest depended more on transnational networks than local infrastructures.

The protests of January 2026 thus demonstrate a serious paradox of the authoritarian control. Whereas internet cut-offs could be successful in lowering the instantaneous encounterability of rebellion within the national borders, they also bring into existence situations in which visibility is reconstructed in other forms. This is because the elimination of protest as an area of perception by the state fails to eliminate the occurrence and actually creates new avenues through which dissent can be mediated, interpreted, and shared. It is necessary to leave behind the position that visibility is present or absent and accept the idea that it is actively transformed in various spatial and communicative situations.

The 2026 Capturing protests can best be summarized not as an instance of censorship failures or censorship successes but as an instance whereby repression affected the dynamics of the political communication. The shutdown limited the visibility in real-time, it undermined the ability of protesters to manage their own narratives, and it generated an informational uncertainty. Simultaneously, it augmented the significance of lagging digital traces, international reporting, and the circulation through diasporas. This less provocative interpretation reacts to the necessity not to use deterministic words yet demonstrates the political implications of shutdowns of the internet.

[18] *Reuters* (2026), “Iran’s President Orders Reopening of International Internet Access, State Media Reports”, 25.05.2026; *The Guardian* (2026), “Iran’s Access to Global Internet Starts to Resume after 88-Day Blackout”, 26.05.2026.

To this end, this section has demonstrated that authoritarian control of visibility in Iran takes place through three interrelated processes, i.e., infrastructural restriction, informational fragmentation, and discursive framing. These devices do not render protest non-existent in political life but alter the ways in which protest may be recorded, ascertained, circulated, and understood. The case of January 2026 thus forms the empirical foundation of the other section that explores the effects of these constraints to become a broader crisis of visibility characterized by insecurity, stalling, and reliance on the mediation of nations on national soil.

4. Crisis of Visibility: Fragmentation, Gaps, and Informational Uncertainty

If the previous section demonstrated how visibility is actively constrained through infrastructural and discursive control, the January 2026 protests also reveal a second, equally important dynamic: the emergence of a crisis of visibility**.** This crisis does not only imply the absence of information but also the change of protest becoming known in the circumstances of disruption.

This crisis of visibility must be considered as one of the main outcomes of internet shutdowns. The restriction of communication infrastructures places protests not merely under such circumstances as to go invisible but also attenuates the circumstances under which protest is recorded, confirmed, distributed and construed. To this end, censorship does not just bring silence but uncertainty. This follows the findings by wider bodies of research on the nature of information control by authoritarian regimes, which reveal that censorship tends to generate confusion, hold-ups, distraction, and instability in interpretation, as opposed to eliminating information entirely.[19]

Internet blackouts not only create silence but also produce a break in continuity. In the absence of stable connectivity, protest documentation becomes intermittent, delayed, and often detached from its original context. Short video clips may circulate without clear time references; single images may appear without precise location markers; and statements or testimonies may emerge without immediate verification. This creates a disjointed form of visibility that lacks the narrative coherence usually required for an ongoing protest movement to generate sustained political meaning.

Such fragmentation is important in that the protest visibility is not only reliant on the presence of images or testimonies but also on the context's legibility. The visual materials that

[19] Margaret E. Roberts (2018), *Censored: Distraction and Diversion Inside China's Great Firewall*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

disseminate without time, space, origin, or validation can have political power, yet they can be interpreted with more opportunity. The outcome is a communicative zone where there is evidence, meanwhile, delayed, contested, or susceptible to counter-framing. This especially pertains to authoritarian situations where uncertainty can be utilized politically in its own right.

As global media spaces are now being disjunctive and disjunct as well as irregular, in the conditions of repression, such spaces are now compounded with disjuncture and irregularity, or now you have a fractured mediascape in which the meaning is increasingly becoming difficult to stabilize. The concept of mediascapes developed by Appadurai can be applied in this context, as it depends on the circulation of images, stories and political meanings beyond borders, yet convenience can transform the process into an unbalanced, discontinuous and distance-influenced circulation.[20]

These disintegrations have serious consequences on how protest happens and occurs. First, it causes informational black holes, which displease local and global interpretations. In the absence of continuous inflows of information, audiences (in and out of Iran) must rely on partial or unreliable information. This can bring about confusion over the scale and strength as well as geographical localities of enthusiasm of demonstration. The absence of verification systems also renders it more difficult to interpret, as the disjointed texts circulate without the contextual centres that enable one to have a clear understanding of information.

This is in direct response to the cause and outcome relationship of the article. The reason is that communication infrastructures and limitations of real-time documentation are disturbed. What emerges is not just less visibility but fragmented visibility: the protest materials become distributed, delayed, partial, and uncertain. This fracturing then gives rise to the necessity of other participants, notably, diaspora networks, journalists, activists, and digital witnesses, to harvest, fact-check, translate, and reassemble the protest narrative.

Second, this uncertainty is also advantageous to the state since the very ambiguity turns into a political resource. In situations where protest events are not easily visible, testified to, or described, the state allows manoeuvres to disprove their magnitude, challenge their authenticity, or present them to the world as one exceptional instance of distemperance instead of mass political action. In this regard, shutdowns of information that are brought about by the internet do not simply dissolve information in this sense; they create uncertainty as a means of control.

[20] Arjun Appadurai (1996), *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*.

Debates on the disorder of information can also be linked to the political significance of uncertainty. The spread of information in fragmented or unverifiable forms makes it easier to challenge its credibility, reinterpret its meaning, or call it exaggeration, foreign intervention or misinformation.[21] That is why the crisis of visibility is not merely a technical issue to do with internet access but also a struggle of political credibility.

This disjointed visibility impacts even protesters themselves. Protest movements do not rely solely upon direct action but place greater reliance upon the appearance of others doing it. In cases when images, slogans, and testimonies cannot spread freely, protesters might feel isolated when addressing each other, even in instances when resistance is rampant. Disruption of digital communication and, to some extent, of the web as a whole, consequently derails the emotional and symbolic connections that aid the transformation of fragmented acts of resistance into a collective political movement.

This is significant since the concept of visibility has both an external and an internal role. Visibility in protests enables those protesting to know that they are not the only ones. Externally, it gives broader audiences the opportunity to view, perceive and judge the protest. Closing down the supply of images, slogans, and testimonies disrupts both types of visibility: the internal visibility that maintains collective morale and the external visibility that produces overall political visibility. Here the work of Tufekci on networked protest is beneficial, where we can see that digital communication is not merely a medium of publicity but also a mechanism where the collective action of a group is maintained emotionally and organisationally.[22]

Simultaneously, such a crisis of visibility does not imply that the protest disappears. Instead, it introduces a new level wherein scattered materials need to be collected, interpreted, and reassembled by actors outside of the immediate protest space. Videos, eyewitness stories, screen shots, voice recordings, and late posts are raw materials that can be used to rebuild the protest narrative. In the Iranian case, such fragments may include delayed protest videos, screenshots of blocked platforms, eyewitness testimonies, and posts later circulated through hashtags such as #MahsaAmini, #WomanLifeFreedom, #زن_زندگی_آزادی, and #KeepItOn. These fragments do not necessarily provide a complete account of events, but they retain

[21] Claire Wardle & Hossein Derakhshan (2017), *Information Disorder: Toward an Interdisciplinary Framework for Research and Policy Making*, Strasbourg: Council of Europe.
[22] Zeynep Tufekci (2017), *Twitter and Tear Gas: The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest*, New Haven: Yale University Press.

political power because they challenge the state's attempt to control what can be seen, known, and interpreted.

5. Diaspora Mediation and the Reconstruction of Protest Visibility

This section discusses how that crisis is partially resolved due to the mediating nature of the diaspora communities. Under the conditions where the process of domestic communication is disrupted, and the visibility of protests is fragmented, the use of diaspora actors comes out as a key component in the processes of reconstruction of the protest story. Their involvement in mainstreaming protest does not merely consist of the conveying of information but rather in the active impetus to shape how the protest is viewed, interpreted, and transmitted across transnational spaces. This can be viewed through a larger perspective where networked communication has power that is increasingly operating through the control and circulation of the information flows instead of just being solely through the operation of its territory.[23]

This section thus analyses diaspora mediation as a political practice and not a non-partisan information sharing. The current part will assert that actors of the diaspora become critical due to their intervention in this disjointed field, collecting, translating, contextualising, verifying and amplifying materials of protests. In this way, the mediation of a diaspora is one of the primary processes whereby the protest visibility is rebuilt as soon as communication within the country has been limited.

Diaspora mediation works by gathering and combining fragmented materials that are produced in Iran. Short video clips, testimonies, images, and textual updates (often without context or being confirmed) are collectively gathered and reorganized more specifically into a coherent narrative. In this process, the diaspora actors act as curators of visibility in which they select the fragments to amplify, how to frame these fragments, and through which platforms they are targeted to be disseminated. Hall's model of encoding and decoding is useful here because it shows that meaning is not simply transmitted but produced through interpretive frameworks that shape how messages are received by different audiences.[24] This is also applicable to diaspora mediation in the context of protest and is to be understood thus: the raw experience that diaspora mediation aims to process is, inevitably, subject to transformation into structured narratives that can disseminate in global media environments.

[23] Manuel Castells (1996), *The Rise of the Network Society*. Oxford: Blackwell.
[24] Stuart Hall (1980), "Encoding/Decoding", in (eds. By Stuart Hall et al.) *Culture, Media, Language*, London: Routledge.

Meanwhile, when it comes to diaspora mediation, linguistic and cultural translation is involved. The work done in Iran is usually translated to English and other world languages and is circulated to non-Persian-speaking audiences. Such a translation practice is not merely technical but rather consists of decisions regarding focus, tone, and framing. According to Chouliaraki[25], mediated representations of suffering and resistance are shaped by moral frameworks that influence how distant audiences perceive events and decide whether to respond. In these processes, local experiences of repressions are realigned into narratives, which are clustered around human rights, gender equality, and political injustice discourses around the world.

The Iranian case is particularly relevant to this translation work since the protest accounts can circulate between the domestic materials of the Persian language, the media of the diaspora, the discursive tools of human rights and the international news media. Consequently, the definition of protest is not necessarily just remapped into a different space; it is simply reconstituted by the political language of the international audiences. This can enhance global visibility, but it can also translate complex local demands into more familiar global frames, such as human rights, gender equality, anti-authoritarian opposition, or democratic change.

The visibility exportation, thereby, becomes active in the form of diaspora networks. Even though the state of Iran tries to enclose protest by means of inhibiting communication infrastructures within national borders, the actors of the diaspora help these events to be revisited in the context of global systems of visibility. The alternative space where protest is recorded and rendered legible is taken by social media platforms, digital archives, and transnational activist networks. Examples of this process include the circulation of hashtags such as #MahsaAmini, #WomanLifeFreedom, #زن_زندگی_آزادی, and #KeepItOn, as well as the preservation of protest material through digital documentation initiatives such as the Woman Life Freedom Movement digital archive and the Iran Digital Archive Coalition.

This can be discussed as a sort of connective action as described by Bennett and Segerberg[26], where networking around digitally mediated networks enables the adaptive and individualized flow of political material across the borders without the necessity of the classical centralized organizational institutions.

[25] Lilie Chouliaraki (2006), *The Spectatorship of Suffering*.
[26] W. Lance Bennett & Alexandra Segerberg (2012), "The Logic of Connective Action", *Information, Communication & Society*, 15(5), pp. 739-768.

The events described in this pattern can be explained with the background of the Woman Life Freedom movement that happened after the death of Mahsa Amini. The networks of diasporas, activists, journalists, celebrities, and ordinary users served to spread protest slogans, videos, testimonies, and symbolic actions across national borders. For example, slogans and hashtags such as #WomanLifeFreedom and #زن_زندگی_آزادی helped translate local protest claims into a globally recognisable language of gendered resistance, while diaspora users and activist networks amplified videos, eyewitness accounts, and calls for international attention.

The communicative structure above is also applicable to the January 2026 case since it demonstrates how the visibility of protest in Iran has been tied more and more to transnational networks as media freedom and access to the internet have been stifled locally. Diaspora mediation can be seen in this light as part of a larger ecology of protest which comprises activists, human rights groups, journalists, digital volunteers, opposition figures and social media users. In this general area of diaspora, the role of Reza Pahlavi also needs to be explained. The role of Reza Pahlavi is relevant here because discussions of Iranian diaspora politics cannot ignore the presence of prominent opposition figures. One of the most noticeable voices of the Iranian opposition overseas has been that of Reza Pahlavi, especially during the enquiries on the issue of Woman, Life, Freedom in foreign countries. For instance, his participation in the 2023 Georgetown University event on the future of Iran's democracy movement illustrates his visibility within overseas opposition politics; however, this article does not treat diaspora mediation as reducible to elite opposition leadership.[27] Instead, Pahlavi has been seen as part of a larger transnational communicative arena comprising other players such as activists, journalists, feminist networks, human rights organisations, diaspora media, and regular users. This is a significant difference in two respects. To begin with, the article is not about the leadership setup of the Iranian opposition but a displacement of protest in the conditions of digital repression. Secondly, there is a dispute over the diaspora politics itself. More current scholarship and commentary on the Woman, Life, Freedom movement have indicated that the space of diaspora opposition is not uniform and may be subject to a tension of representation, ideology, leadership, and the danger of burying domestic demands.[28] As a

[27] Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security (2023), "The Future of Iran's Democracy Movement", February 2023; Arash Azizi (2024), "The Fiasco of Iranian Diaspora Politics", *New Lines Magazine*, April 22, 2024.
[28] Mojtaba Mahdavi (2024), "Woman, Life, Freedom Movement and the Pathology of Diaspora Opposition: Retrotopia, Cooptation, and Misrepresentation", *Iranian Studies*, 2024; Arash Azizi, "The Fiasco of Iranian Diaspora Politics".

form of analysis, then, the space of diaspora opposition is mediated rather than an individual opposition.

Nonetheless, there are not so many complicated and limiting aspects of diaspora mediation. The rationalization of some narratives above others is an inescapable result of which hierarchies of visibility are produced. Not every voice, zone, or manifestation of resistance is given equal attention. Visually striking or emotionally compelling narratives aligned to dominant accounts of world events are more likely to pervade than remain marginal. As Gillespie[29] and Bucher[30] demonstrate, visibility in online space is predetermined by not only human decision-making but also platform logics and algorithmic structures that promote one of the facets of content more than others. Diaspora actors, then, act in, and are encumbered by, larger systems of platform governance, which dictate what becomes visible on a global scale.

This weakness is significant since it does not allow the article to be faced with diaspora mediation in a too positive or deterministic manner. Diaspora mediation may enhance the visibility of protest, but there may be selective visibility. Some stories can attract more attention since they are emotionally strong, pictorially shocking, politically known, or in accordance with the main international demand. Other types of opposition, including less conspicuous local actions, class-based grievances, ethnic minority views or opinions that criticize elite opposition politics, might be given less coverage. As such, diaspora mediation needs to be perceived as a process that makes things visible and, at the same time, screens them.

In addition, the temporal aspect of visibility is brought into change by mediation. As opposed to real-time documentation, the visibility, then mediated by diasporas, tends to be delayed. Firstly, information needs to break the mind of censorship, and after that, the information must be verified and translated as well as disseminated. Such a temporal delay transforms the sense of protest to be not an instantaneous occurrence but a retelling of a story.

This is not just a technical delay; it is also a political delay. Protest narratives that follow the protest moment have the power to generate global attention but no longer act at the same time as ground events. This influences perceptions of urgency, scale and continuity by the audience. Delay in circulating the protest text may sustain attention alive, potentially but not necessarily; it may also create a disruption between the experience of living in Iran and the narration of that experience outside the country.

[29] Tarleton Gillespie (2018), *Custodians of the Internet*.
[30] Taina Bucher (2018), *If…Then: Algorithmic Power and Politics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

However, as observed by Tufekci[31], digital networks also have a capacity to sustain attention and allow it to resurface, circulate, and accumulate if it continues to evolve over time. Irrespective of these constraints, diaspora mediation has increasingly become a significant aspect in the political delegitimization processes. Diaspora actors, by spreading narratives of repression, violence, and resistance that are being propagated across international forums, make their contribution to the international perceptions of the Iranian state. It is no longer confined by national borders, but it becomes transnational discourse in which legitimacy is challenged that is beyond the territorial control of a state.

In this context, the concept of visibility by way of the diaspora may be taken in the sense that it leads to the establishment of transnational counterpublics, where different discourse creates alternative identities that challenge dominant forms of signification.[32] The importance of the diaspora communities thus presents a paradoxical thorn in the digital repression. Although internet shutdowns are meant to suppress dissent by limiting visibility, it is also true that they create an environment in which visibility has moved and has been reconstituted by outside actors. The effort to hush criticism on national territory may contribute to the reconstruction of protest visibility at the international level.

Thus, the diaspora mediation must be perceived as both empowering and restricting. It allows protest stories to go beyond borders in situations where communication is limited domestically. It helps create internationally legible records of repression and opposition from otherwise fragmented materials. Simultaneously, it filters protest by translation, platform algorithms, diaspora politics, ideological divides, and international media demands. This renders the visibility of diaspora relocation a core but disputed process in mediation.

6. Delegitimization Beyond Borders: Visibility, Narrative Power, and the Iranian State

This section examines the political outcome of this transformation, particularly in relation to processes of delegitimization. Narratives of protest do not passively travel through global networks as a form of discourse; they actively engage in the process of reclaiming how the political authority is perceived, evaluated, and contested.

This part thus discusses the process of delegitimization as a discursive, reputational process instead of a direct or certain political outcome. It does not seek to affirm that visibility inevitably leads to the erosion of state power but demonstrates how protest narratives that are externally generated can help to undermine the basis of state power. In this kind of sense,

[31] Zeynep Tufekci (2017), *Twitter and Tear Gas: The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest*.

delegitimization is seen as part gradual, part dispute and part reliant on interpretation, repetition and international focus as well.

It is not all about coercive power, as[32], it depends on justification of power based on shared norms, the legality of rule, and expressed consent of the governed. In this regard, the concept of legitimacy is relational and in permanent negotiation as opposed to fixity. The propagation of protest narratives, especially those articulating repression, violence, and dissent, directly interferes with this process by undermining the normative and moral principles on which state authority is based.

This approach by Beetham comes in handy at this point, as it enables the article to eschew the notion of treating legitimacy as a matter of weak or strong states. When political power is not merely based on the use of coercion but rather on normative justification and social acknowledgement, then protest narratives can gain political presence when they put into question the principle of morality and the justification of rule. This does not imply that the state will lose power at once. Instead, it implies that its assertions about its validity to power are more subject to debate.

In the context of internet shutdowns, the state in Iran wants to contain dissent in-country by limiting the publicity of protests. This containment is, however, broken by the protest narratives being brought into global arenas of communication by the diaspora-mediated visibility. With such accounts being reproduced within the international media, social platforms, and activist groups, they come to represent what can be termed an exteriorization of legitimacy struggles. No longer is the assessment of state power limited to local viewpoints but is now exposed to transnational observation.

This may also be explained in terms of counterpublics that were developed by Nancy Fraser.[34] Here, diaspora networks can be seen to act as transnational counterpublics that produce and disseminate alternative meanings of political events. Such counterpublics do not just oppose the official narratives; they build their own parallel discursive spaces in which the sense of protest and repression as well as resistance is reformed. In this process, the prevailing images of state power are challenged and disrupted.

Fraser, in his idea of counterpublics, particularly comes in useful since this pattern demonstrates that counter-narratives do not simply respond to mainstream discourse, as they establish alternative arenas of meaning. Diaspora-mediated counterpublics, in the Iranian

[32] David Beetham (1991), *The Legitimation of Power,* London: Macmillan.

instance, can make reinterpretations of the protest events as an indication of repression, civic challenge, a gendered challenge, or authoritarian insecurity. These readings rival state discourses that can conceptualize protests as anarchy, alien invasion, or individual rebellion.

This is not a mere symbolic process. Reputation, visibility, and moral authority also have a role in international politics since they influence the ways in which states are communicated with through the media organisations, international institutions, human rights organisations, foreign governments and publics elsewhere. Diaspora-mediated accounts can then further add to reputational pressure in that they expose the repression to increased exposure and control beyond the confines of homegrown information. Nevertheless, this pressure is still unequal and conditioned by the interest of geopolitics and media coverage, as well as the desire of international players to act.

Notably, the delegitimization here is not a one-time event but rather an augmented process whereby the narrative is exposed. The constant publication of images, testimonies, and reports about repression are some of the factors that will lead to the erosion of the moral authority of the state. Online connections facilitate the survival and proliferation of protest discourses, where they are able to be accessed by a wide audience and persist over time [33]. This exposure long-term is paramount in changing random cases into larger-scale trends that can be perceived and evaluated on an international level.

This point must be taken non-deterministically. The retelling of protest stories can help to undermine moral authority yet does not necessarily lead to a regime change, policy change or international intervention. Its value is in the fact that it makes patterns of repressions more noticeable and harder to overlook as one-off cases. By repetition, archiving, and recirculation, single pieces of protest might be incorporated in a greater story of state violence, censorship, and disputed legitimacy.

However, when visibility is shifted, the shift essentially changes the landscape on which legitimacy is brokered. The extension of the political struggle to transnational arenas through diaspora mediation increases the boundary of the political struggle out of the immediate reach of the state. Legitimacy can no longer be explained by domestic governance, and it becomes mixed up with global perceptions, moral judgements, and discursive struggles.

It's here that the histories of someone like Reza Pahlavi may also be liminally positioned, but not as the article's main subject, per se. Looking beyond the limits of the diaspora, often

[33] Zeynep Tufekci (2017), *Twitter and Tear Gas: The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest*.

oppositional figures are able to attract global interest to Iranian resistance, and they may engage in external opposition to the state's legitimacy. But the delegitimisation is not about elite opposition leadership, the article cites. Instead, it views delegitimization as a process of communication, performed by a wide array of non-central actors such as activists, journalists, human rights organisations, feminist networks, diaspora media, and ordinary users, in addition to politicians. This maintains an emphasis on narrative circulation and visibility versus on only one actor or another person.

Overall, this section has demonstrated that diaspora-mediated visibility contributes to delegitimization in three interlinked ways: by challenging official discourses of protest; by relocating questions of legitimacy to transnational publics; and by transforming fragmented signs of protest into repeated narratives of repression and resistance. The resultant processes do not necessarily bring about political change, but they alter the landscape in which the Iranian state is evaluated, challenged and portrayed.

Conclusion

This paper has discussed how internet blocks in Iran and those that occurred during the January 2026 protests, in particular, reform dynamics rather than eliminate dynamic protests. Moving beyond approaches that treat digital repression only as a mechanism of silencing, the article has shown how restrictions on communication infrastructures produce a rearrangement of visibility. The state of protest cannot disappear in the reality of censorship, but, so to speak, it is moved, broken and finally displaced in space and sphere under other conditions and other worlds of communication.

The article has argued that authoritarian control is not passively driven by coercion but also by strategic utilization of what is visible, known and shared. Internet blocks are used to make an attempt at repressing dissent within the country to disrupt the formation and distribution of protest stories.

This, however, is not to be understood as the mere truth that censorship cannot work or that repression must result in more opposition. This discussion, nevertheless, shows that the digital repression is removing the political communication space. Internet blackouts can hamper real-time visibility, coordination, and documentation and facilitate the creation of protest accounts after the fact, as well as fake protest accounts. This complexity, unevenness and dependence on being mediated by political actors renders the political impact of censorship complex.

It is against this backdrop that the diaspora communities come up as pivotal players in the rebuilding of the protest visibility. As a process of aggregation, translation, and amplification, Diaspora networks turn local fragments into transnational narratives, which are distributed across the global media spaces. Such is not the mediation which reinstates the visibility of its original form or, again, the reconstitution of mediation as delayed, as interpreted and selectively framed. In so doing, the diaspora subjects become key factors in moving the protest out of the territory that the state asserts control over and locating it within wider transnational networks of communication.

This change has great political consequences. As the protest discourses disseminate globally, they are also involved in the processes of delegitimization that do not limit themselves to local issues. Through an observation made by David Beetham about the concept of repression as an event that depends on normative justification and popular approval, this article has presented the argument that since the state repression will be revealed, the basis of morality surrounding the state power will be threatened. At the same time, during the development of transnational counterpublics, as theorized by Nancy Fraser, alternative interpretations of the political events can be put forward which question the official interpretation of the political events and which undermine the capacity of the state to formulate a meaning.

Nevertheless, the connection between publicity and political change continues to be intricate. Though this kind of visibility through the mediation of the diaspora might contribute to the magnification of dissent and even to the reorganization of global representations, it has not been assured to contribute material change to politics. Delegitimization is a transient and gradual process but is determined by unequal attention from the world community and the shortcomings of the international political structures. Nevertheless, the decentralization of the field of visibility broadens the field of struggle and opens new spheres of state power negotiation and testing.

The article eventually offers the concept of the relocation of visibility as a contribution to the body of literature on the topic of digital authoritarianism, transnational activism and political communication as well. This notion encompasses how repression modifies, instead of eliminates, the circumstances under which dissent gains visibility and political relevance. The example of Iran shows that efforts of regulating the visibility might be effective in curbing close-but-not-so-far communication but lead to some other types of mediated visibility that cannot be attained by state means.

In this context, "*relocation of visibility*" is the article's central conceptual contribution. It explains how protest may lose immediate visibility inside the country while gaining delayed, mediated, and transnational visibility elsewhere. This does not mean that the loss of domestic visibility is fully compensated; rather, it shows how the spatial and political conditions of visibility change under digital repression.

In conclusion, the January 2026 protests show that the authoritarian power in digital communication could be studied not only in the paradigm of suppression but also of change. Internet blackouts not only render protests invisible but also postpone and disaggregate protest visibility, affecting protest narratives, which can be rebuilt and reclaimed, and also repoliticise politics across transnational spaces. The article thereby deepens research on the phenomenon of digital authoritarianism by showing that the power to make protest visible, disrupt it, move it and provide it political signification is fought against.

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