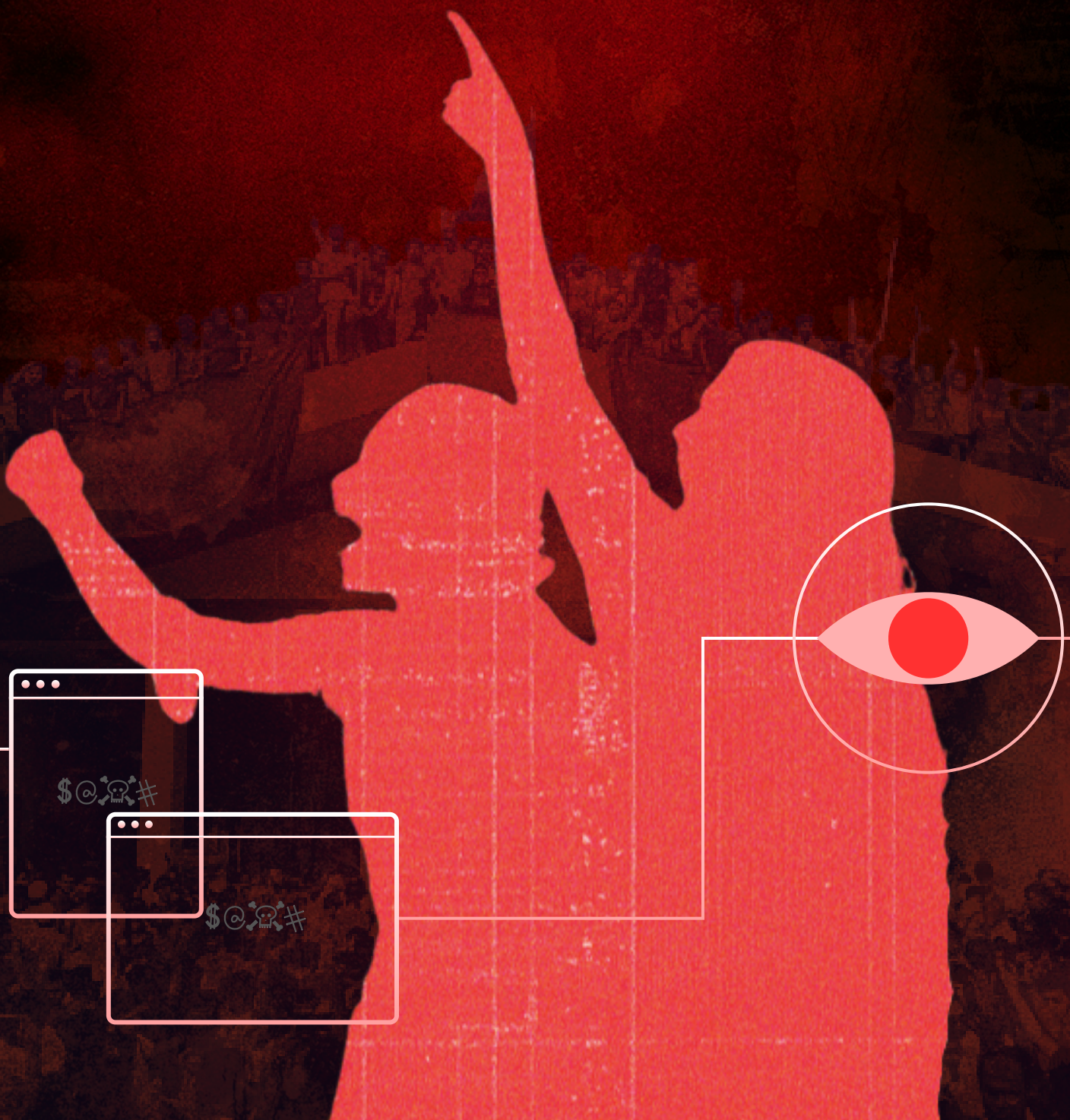


WHEN VISIBILITY BECOMES VULNERABILITY

TFGBV in Post-Uprising Bangladesh



When Visibility Becomes Vulnerability

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Summary

This report examines technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) against fourteen women who became publicly visible during and after Bangladesh's July–August 2024 uprising. Drawing on verified fact-checks, platform monitoring, and qualitative interviews, it identifies a systematic digital harassment environment aimed at discouraging women's political and civic participation. The analysis shows that TFGBV operates not as isolated abuse, but as a coordinated strategy shaped by cultural norms, political competition, and platform design.

Across cases, perpetrators employed multiple tactics, including fabricated news photocards, deepfakes, manipulated images, rumor dissemination, gendered slurs, and family-targeted intimidation. Sexualized narratives, moral policing, and religious and nationalist framing were the most common mechanisms used to undermine credibility. Attacks extended beyond individual targets to female relatives of male activists, reinforcing the social costs of political visibility. Platform amplification systems and weak moderation practices enabled this content to circulate widely, contributing to what respondents described as “anticipatory silencing,” where women disengage from public life to avoid similar harms.

The findings suggest that TFGBV produces broader democratic consequences by constraining women's participation and creating gendered barriers to representation, activism, and leadership. Addressing these harms requires coordinated responses across law, technology platforms, civil society, and research infrastructure, including improved moderation systems, legal protections, digital literacy, and systematic documentation. The study demonstrates that TFGBV in Bangladesh functions as a form of political control rather than incidental online harassment, highlighting the need for policy intervention and institutional accountability.

Executive Summary

The systematic targeting of women through technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) following Bangladesh's July-August 2024 uprising represents a coordinated digital warfare strategy designed to intimidate and silence female voices. This comprehensive analysis of fourteen prominent female activists, ranging from a multitude of professions who were active and played a crucial role in the uprising, reveals a sophisticated and patriarchal ecosystem of disinformation that weaponizes cultural taboos, advanced digital manipulation technologies, and platform vulnerabilities to systematically exclude women from democratic participation.

The campaigns demonstrate unprecedented coordination across online and social media platforms, employing deepfakes, fabricated news content, and family-targeted harassment to create what researchers term "anticipatory silencing"—a chilling effect that extends far beyond immediate victims to deter all women from political engagement. The attacks exploit Bangladesh's collectivist social structure by targeting not only the women themselves but their family members, transforming individual political participation into collective vulnerability and forcing women to choose between civic engagement and personal safety.

Key Findings:

→ Coordinated Sophistication

Disinformation campaigns demonstrate advanced technological capabilities including deepfake video production, fabricated news photocards mimicking legitimate media outlets, and cross-platform amplification strategies that suggest organized coordination with substantial resources rather than spontaneous harassment.

Gendered Targeting Patterns ←

Sexual harassment and slut-shaming constitute the most prevalent attack themes, where documented cases show targeting of female activists through fabricated intimate imagery, moral policing narratives, and cultural taboos surrounding women's sexuality and honor.

→ Political Weaponization

Political misinformation ranks as the second most common attack vector, where the systematic misrepresenting of women's statements, fabrication of controversial positions, and creation of false associations with extremist views are used to delegitimize their civic participation.

Family-Targeted Intimidation ←

Harassment campaigns deliberately extend beyond individual targets to include female relatives of male political figures, exploiting "guilt by association" strategies that transform political dissent from personal risk into family catastrophe.

→ Platform Amplification Failures

Social media algorithms consistently prioritize sensationalized false content over fact-checks, while community standards remain inadequately enforced for gendered harassment, creating an environment where systematic abuse operates with virtual impunity.

Key Findings:

→ Multi-Vector Attack Strategies

Fabricated news photocards emerge as the most common technique, followed by edited images and face-swapping, demonstrating attackers' preference for visual manipulation that exploits media credibility.

Anticipatory Silencing Effects ←

The visible targeting of prominent women creates demonstrable chilling effects that extend beyond immediate victims, with interviews revealing that other women actively avoid political engagement due to fear of similar harassment campaigns.

→ Cross-Platform Coordination

Attacks demonstrate sophisticated understanding of platform-specific vulnerabilities, with coordinated campaigns operating simultaneously across Facebook, fabricated news sites, and messaging platforms to maximize reach and persistence.

Democratic Degradation ←

The systematic exclusion of women through digital harassment creates "gendered democratic deficits" that fundamentally undermine the legitimacy of representative democracy, as authentic democratic systems cannot function when systematic barriers prevent half the population's meaningful participation.

THE BACKSTORY

When July Was on Fire

1.1 What was the July Uprising all about?

The 2024 July-August Uprising in Bangladesh was a historic, student-initiated revolt that rapidly transformed into a nationwide movement against systemic injustice and political repression of the Awami League regime. Triggered by the Supreme Court's reinstatement of a controversial quota reserving government jobs for descendants of freedom fighters, what began as a protest against discriminatory job access quickly evolved into a collective outcry for democracy. Students, joined by people from all walks of life like workers, teachers and the broader civil society, rallied not only against the quota system but also against prolonged governmental overreach and its fascist nature, seeking a more inclusive, merit-based, and democratic society. This led to the collapse of the 15 year Awami League regime, with Sheikh Hasina fleeing the country on 5th August, 2024.

A still from the quota reform movement where an activist of Bangladesh Students' League assaults two students on Dhaka University campus on 15 July 2024.

Image source:
Prothom Alo



1.2 How women and families stood up, not just alongside – but at the front

Women and their families did not just provide support, they actively led the charge against the rebellion. Mothers and sisters marched for the justice of their children, brothers or fellow countrymen, whether slain or detained, organized food lines, sheltered protesters, and put themselves directly in the face of security forces, often at tremendous personal risk. The defiance captured in viral images of women shielding injured students or leading chants infused the uprising with a defining and unifying narrative, transforming the protest culture of Bangladesh and inspiring generations.



Method in the Madness

1. SAMPLE SELECTION

We used purposive sampling anchored to four recognized Bangladeshi fact-checking outlets.

2. DATA COLLECTION

First, we scraped these sites for the study window (5 August 2024–5 September 2025), extracting all gendered fact-checks involving women who were politically or culturally visible during—and in the aftermath of—the July uprising.

3. CASE REFINEMENT

We de-duplicated cases across outlets, retained only entries where gendered misinformation/disinformation was explicitly verified by at least one organization, and then assembled a roster of fourteen women who showed persistent, cross-platform targeting.

4. CROSS-PLATFORM TRACING

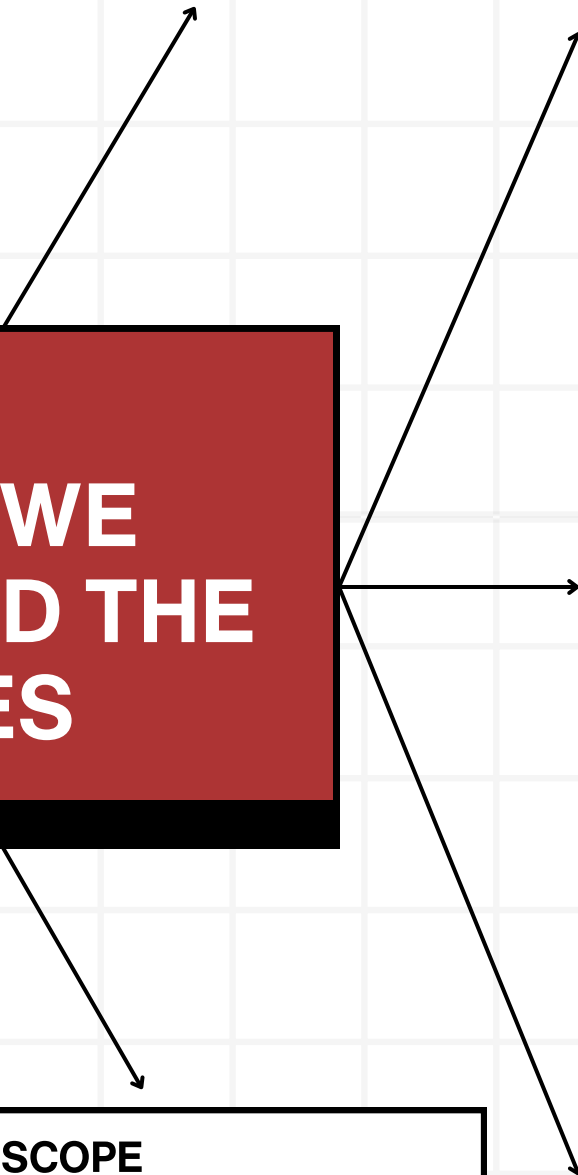
From this roster, we traced each figure across public social platforms in the same timeframe to document additional, contemporaneous attacks (e.g., sexualized captions, fake photocards, deepfakes, meme text).

5. SCOPE ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This strategy privileges confirmed TFGBV cases and surfaces the most visible targets, while acknowledging that many less-documented victims remain outside our sample.

2.1

HOW WE FOUND THE NAMES



2.2. What we looked for

We analyzed technology-enabled TFGBV modalities and their narratives:

- ➔ Fabricated news-style photocards and counterfeit “official” artifacts;
- ➔ Manipulated or repurposed visuals and AI-generated video/audio deepfakes;
- ➔ Sexualized rumor (e.g., “illicit relations,” non-consensual “leaks”), modesty policing, and appearance-based shaming;
- ➔ Lineage/national-loyalty slurs and politicized labels tied to 1971 memory; and
- ➔ Hashtagging/SEO tactics that make abuse machine-readable. We coded Bangla and English content, capturing tactic type, targets, platform, and basic engagement indicators when available. The aim was to map how sexual humiliation, religious/nationalist gatekeeping, and falsified “evidence” converge to undermine credibility, safety, and participation.

2.3. How we navigated through this storm of hate

We employed a mixed-methods design.

Qualitatively

We conducted iterative content analysis using a codebook built deductively (TFGBV literature) and inductively (Bangla platform vernacular). Coders reconciled disagreements by consensus to maintain consistency.

Quantatively

We tracked tactic frequency and co-occurrence across platforms and weeks, linking spikes to salient events (e.g., movement anniversaries).

To enrich interpretation, we ran semi-structured interviews with two targeted activists, two professional fact-checkers, and one political scientist.

Only publicly accessible content was analyzed; where necessary, personal identifiers were minimized in reporting.

This triangulated approach prioritizes verified, high-salience attacks while noting limitations: the sample skews toward cases captured by fact-check infrastructures, and abuse in private/ephemeral spaces may be undercounted.

Who Got Attacked?

3.1 Women on the frontlines: activists, students, speakers

UMAMA FATEMA

Umama Fatema is a student activist who served as a key coordinator and spokesperson for Students Against Discrimination (SAD). Her pivotal role in the July Uprising of 2024 involved organizing massive student protests, crucially mobilizing women to escalate the movement from a quota reform demand into a full-scale mass uprising that resulted in the fall of the government.




Technology-facilitated harassment against student activist Umama Fatema emerged prominently after her role as a spokesperson for the Students Against Discrimination during the July–August uprising. The online campaign combined political misinformation with gendered targeting, using Facebook as a primary site for distributing manipulated materials and coordinated verbal attacks.


Together, these practices illustrate how digital infrastructures can be mobilized to delegitimize women in public leadership and constrain their participation in political movements.

A central component of the campaign involved fabricated news-style photocards and doctored images circulated across Facebook. False photocards, attributed to outlets such as Samakal and Janakantha, misquoted Fatema as making sensational political claims such as responsibility for initiating the uprising due to infrastructure projects causing minor inconvenience, or making dismissive remarks about other student coordinators getting married. These efforts can be designed to paint her as both politically subversive and socially isolated.

In addition, images were manipulated to place her and fellow activist Nusrat Tabassum in a brothel alley – a clear attempt at slut-shaming and character assassination of the female student leaders. This blend of political misinformation and gendered humiliation to undermine her credibility as a female leader can be observed as a dual aim of silencing her activism and deterring other women from public engagement.



Beyond fabricated photocards and AI-amplified rumor, the gendered campaign against Umama Fatema relied on grinding humiliation engineered through language. Across Facebook pages, public comment threads, and in group reposts, opponents attached epithet-collages to her name: “শাহবাগী” (shahabagi) repurposed as a smear for “ultra-progressive”; “ভুস্কি” (bhuski) aimed at appearance; and “বেশ্যা” combined into phrases like “শাহবাগী বেশ্যা,” “সমন্বয়ক বেশ্যা,” (coordinator whore) and “পতিতা কর্মী,” (sex worker) which frame her leadership as sexual deviance rather than civic action. These tags were used as hashtags, image captions, and quote-share headers to make the insults machine-readable, boosting discoverability and normalizing the slurs in search results and feeds.



The tactic functioned as moral policing: reclassifying a student organizer into a figure of sexual shame, to erode solidarity within mixed-gender coalitions and to warn other women off visible roles.

FARZANA SITHI

Farzana Sithi is a student and women's rights activist from Jessore who rose to prominence through her involvement in the anti discrimination student movement. During the July uprising, she became one of the most visible faces of youth and female resistance — delivering fiery speeches, confronting security forces, and mobilizing fellow students and activists nationwide.



Sithi has been the target of a misinformation campaign, which has been characterized primarily by the production and dissemination of deepfake and AI-altered videos in which her face is superimposed onto dance videos originally featuring Indian and other female performers. These manipulated videos have then been circulated under the false claim that Sithi herself is performing provocative and sexually suggestive dances, despite the source material having no legitimate connection to her.

The content can be seen to be explicitly designed to fabricate an association between Sithi and lewd imagery, employing deceptive manipulation tactics that exploit advancements in digital editing technologies. The core themes of these disinformation pieces against her have been a mixture of gender-based harassment, sexualized character assassination, and political misinformation.

The objective can be interpreted to shame, humiliate, and delegitimize Sithi as an activist woman by exposing her to public scorn and disrepute, relying heavily on cultural stigmas associated with female propriety and sexuality.

Such attacks not only seek to undermine her credibility as a public figure but also intend to deter other women from engaging in activism by making Sithi a cautionary example.

Further reinforcing the malicious intent, the disinformation is often coupled with false narratives that misidentify her and attribute unfounded behaviors to her, thus fostering an environment of social hostility and suspicion around her identity.

This form of targeted digital campaign exemplifies both the sophistication and gendered nature of contemporary online misinformation in Bangladesh, especially against women in public life, where technological manipulation is weaponized to enforce patriarchal control and chill civic participation.

The slurs aimed at Farzana Sithi online follow a script of sexualized ridicule, dehumanization, and political delegitimization. Posts label her turn appearances into spectacle— “সেক্সি ছাত্রী” (sexy female student)—and launder harassment through gendered cartoons. Comment sections escalate to discipline and moral policing: “অশ্লিল পোশাক আশাক পরা বন্ধ করুন,” (stop wearing obscene clothes) threats that “এই ছেড়িদের...সহ্য করা হবে না,” (These girls... will not be tolerated) and hotel insinuations to mark her as impure. Newly observed tropes deepen the harm: “ডিপ ফেইক/কেন সব খুলে দিচ্ছেন সিথি” (Deepfake/Why is Sithi taking everything off) primes audiences for AI-manipulated, non-consensual sexual content; “গায়ে গন্ধ” (body odor) weaponizes hygiene shaming to dehumanize; “শাহবাগী” (shahabagi) politicizes her identity as a slur; and misogynistic epithets—“বেশ্যা/পতিতা,” (bessha/prostitute) “মাগী” (whore)—recode leadership as sexual deviance. Even organizational roles are sexualized, while “পাঠ্যবইয়ে সিথি, রোকেয়া বাদ” (Sithi is included in the textbooks, Rokeya is excluded) pits her against feminist icons to discredit contemporary activism. These terms circulate as hashtags, captions, and quote-headers, making abuse machine-readable and boosting its reach. The composite effect is reputational exhaustion and deterrence: Sithi is framed as immoral, unserious, and dangerous—signaling to other women that visibility will be met with AI-assisted smear, sexual humiliation, and coordinated pile-ons.

MEHAZABIEN CHOWDHURY

Mehazabien Chowdhury is a well-known Bangladeshi actress and model who publicly condemned violence against students and women during the 2024 uprising. She used her social media platform to denounce crackdowns and call for justice, lending her celebrity voice to the movement's moral and social pressure. Her outspoken stance helped draw wider public attention and solidarity for the protests, extending beyond just student circles.



The misinformation campaign against actress Mehazabien Chowdhury primarily comprises image-based fabrications and decontextualizations aimed at personal defamation and sensationalism.

One recurring type involves the misuse of an old image showing Mehazabien wearing a head bandage (originally for a role in a drama), which is reposted and falsely contextualized to suggest she was physically assaulted due to rising religious fundamentalism. This decontextualization is designed to evoke moral panic and portray her as a symbolic victim, leveraging public anxieties around religious violence.

Another prominent tactic is face-swapping, where Mehazabien's face is digitally inserted into intimate or suggestive photos with notable men, such as Asif Nazrul, or even with non-Bangladeshi actresses, to insinuate extramarital affairs. These altered images are disseminated to spark scandal and foster voyeuristic intrigue, directly targeting her reputation and aiming to slut-shame her in the public sphere.

The overarching themes are sensationalism, the weaponization of female celebrity for clickbait, and basic character assassination, underscoring the intersection between digital technology and gendered misinformation.

AZMERI HAQUE BADHON

Azmeri Haque Badhon is a prominent Bangladeshi actress and social-activist actively participated in the July uprising. During the July uprising she joined rallies condemning violence against students and civilians, calling for justice and peaceful resolution.

Badhon faced a severe and multi-faceted campaign of online harassment, illustrating key typologies of TFGBV, including gendered disinformation, moral policing, and hate speech.



In the first instance, a legitimate public appearance is manipulated through a false caption regarding “Aynaghar” (a secret detention center) to sexualize her image and shame her attire, effectively weaponizing disinformation to degrade her character.

The second Facebook post demonstrates how political or social activism by women is met with gendered slurs (specifically the use of the derogatory term "magi") and the weaponization of homophobia to incite public vitriol. These posts do not criticize her work but instead attack her bodily autonomy and morality, a common tactic used to shame women into silence in digital spaces.

The harassment escalates significantly in the third post, crossing into direct predatory threats against the actress’s family, specifically her minor daughter. The caption uses the same misogynistic slur while expressing a sexualized intent toward the child ("tar meye take lagbe" / "I need her daughter"), marking a transition from reputation damage to threats of physical and sexual violence. This targeting of family members is a pervasive strategy in TFGBV designed to inflict maximum psychological distress and fear, thereby raising the cost of public visibility for women.

The misinformation directed at Azmeri Haque Badhon spans both textual and visual fabrications, with a clear focus on religious, political, and sexualized defamation. Several false photocards have been propagated alleging that religious political groups demanded her arrest due to her portrayal of a homosexual character in an Indian film. These items are created to incite religious outrage and position Badhon as an antagonist to traditional values. Other misinformation includes face-swapped or digitally altered images implying extramarital affairs or sexual intimacy with public figures like Asif Nazrul, serving the twin goals of character assassination and sensational gossip.

Additional fabricated statements claim she leveraged her supposed status as a “July warrior” to coerce theatre owners or that she had been appointed as a government advisor—none of which have any factual basis. Finally, there are fabricated news cards falsely attributing controversial, anti-religious, or politically charged comments to her.

The themes threading through these cases revolve around the policing of women’s sexuality, the use of religious sentiment to fuel backlash, and the manipulation of political narratives to marginalize and undermine prominent women.

DIPTI CHOWDHURY

Dipti Chowdhury is a Bangladeshi TV presenter whose outspoken commentary during the 2024 July Uprising made her an unexpected symbol of resistance. Her televised remarks, voiced even when the internet was shut down, resonated widely, helping to keep public outrage alive and turning her into a voice for the voiceless.



Misinformation surrounding Dipti Chowdhury relies heavily on the creation and circulation of fabricated photocards under reputable news banners to question her family credentials and professional qualifications. One false photocard attributed to The Daily Star falsely claims that a distant relative of Dipti is a freedom fighter, designed to either inflate or question her legitimacy and patriotism. Another misinformation item involves a doctored examination result card asserting that she failed her physics exam, subsequently raising doubts about her competence and educational integrity.

Notably, these claims are presented in altered images designed to mimic official documentation, lending a false air of authenticity to the deceptions.

The primary themes are professional character assassination, undermining personal achievement, and the manipulation of nationalist narratives, indicating the use of credentialism as a tool for digital disinformation.

Beyond credential smears, the harassment of Dipti Chowdhury is explicitly gendered and ageist. Rumors that “she is HSC fail” are recycled as gatekeeping shorthand to deem a woman “unfit” for public work, while allegations of a “leaked” personal video weaponize sexual shaming—leveraging the threat of non-consensual intimate imagery (real or fabricated) to coerce silence. Commenters police her body and visibility through age-based slurs—“বুড়ি” (Granny)—and infantilizing/matronizing labels—“দিপ্তি খালা” (Aunt Dipti) —that frame a female presenter as either too old or the wrong kind of woman for the screen. Nationalist vilification—“রাজাকার” (Razakar)—then escalates the abuse from personal ridicule to accusations of betrayal, inviting punitive sentiment rather than debate.

Circulated as captions, hashtags, and reel overlays, these tropes convert Dipti’s name into a bundle of searchable misogyny.

The net effect is to collapse her professional identity into scandal, impurity, and disloyalty—sending a deterrent message to other women in media that visibility will be punished through credential doubt, sexual humiliation, and politicized name-calling.

SYEDA RIZWANA HASAN

Syeda Rizwana Hasan is a prominent Bangladeshi environmental activist and currently serves as Adviser for Environment, Forest, and Climate Change in the post-uprising government. After the July uprising in 2024, she publicly framed the uprising as a turning point, calling for justice, institutional reform, and a more equitable society.




Adviser Rizwana Hasan is the target of multifaceted misinformation efforts involving vulgarity, religious insinuation, and manipulated political statements.

Altered images have surfaced showing her in compromising and revealing positions—fabrications that seek to degrade her through sexualized shaming and damage her social respectability. In addition, there are fabricated news photocards falsely quoting her on controversial topics such as the environmental impact of condoms or government policy on Saint Martin’s Island, which are intended to mislead the public about her stances and generate outrage.

Some materials selectively edit or fragment her video statements to misrepresent her views, pushing miscontextualized narratives for political motives. Other items manipulate religious sentiment by fabricating commentary allegedly urging her to conform to religious dress codes or accusing her of religious impropriety.

The central themes in these attacks combine sexual and religious policing, public defamation, and political misinformation, all orchestrated to erode her credibility as a leader in civil society and environmental advocacy.



Smears against Syeda Rizwana Hasan fuse sexualized mockery, religious baiting, and nationalist conspiracy to delegitimize her environmental advocacy. Posts brand her “কনডম কুইন,” (Condom Queen) “সুন্দরী উপদেষ্টা,” (Beautiful Adviser) and “প্লাস্টিক সুন্দরী উপদেষ্টা” (Plastic Beautiful Adviser) to police appearance and trivialize expertise, while “ধর্ম বিদ্বেষী” (Religion Hater) frames her as morally suspect. Professional work is belittled as “পলিথিন উপদেষ্টা,” (Polythene Adviser) and lineage is weaponized through “রাজাকার কন্যা,” (Daughter of a Razakar) expanded into stories that she hides a father’s alleged 1971 crimes. Circulating as captions, hashtags, and meme text, these labels collapse a lawyer-activist into a caricature of sexualized vanity, religious deviance, and anti-national collusion—aimed at inciting harassment, eroding credibility, and warning other women away from public leadership.

NUSRAT TABASSUM

Nusrat Tabassum was a key coordinator of the 2024 July uprising. During the uprising she helped lead protests, mobilized fellow students, and remained in frontline activism even when detained by authorities.

The misinformation campaign against Nusrat Tabsassum is multifaceted, blending medical stigma, sexual shaming, and gendered harassment.



One of the most insidious examples involves a fabricated Prothom Alo photocard relating to the "sanitary napkin controversy" during the Ekushey Book Fair. In this digital forgery, a graphic allegedly from a credible news outlet is circulated, falsely claiming that an online crowdfunding effort is underway to finance Nusrat's uterus removal surgery. This hoax surfaced after Nusrat publicly criticized the removal of sanitary napkin stalls from the fair—a health rights issue. Here, medical misinformation is weaponized alongside personal humiliation, aiming to ridicule not only her advocacy but her bodily autonomy and to trivialize her serious activism with sarcastic, stigmatizing undertones about women's health.

Further, a particularly egregious manipulation involves an edited photograph, widely shared, in which Nusrat and fellow activist Umama Fatema are photoshopped to appear as if standing in the alleyways of a brothel. The goal is clear: to brand these women as sexually immoral and strip them of public respectability. This aligns with the classic misogynistic tactic of slut-shaming female activists to undermine their credibility, discourage participation in public life, and reassert patriarchal social controls.

The themes uniting these various types of misinformation include the sexual policing of female activists, the exploitation of medical and reproductive issues for public ridicule, and the use of visual manipulation to facilitate social ostracization. Behind the mere production of falsehood, these attacks also seek to set moral boundaries for women's conduct, reinforcing harmful stigmas about sexuality and activism.

Abuse targeting Nusrat Tabassum blends sexualized slurs, moral policing, and political stigma to erase her legitimacy as a student organizer. Posts tag her “শাহবাগী” (shahabagi) to politicize her identity, escalate to “বেশ্যা,” (prostitute) “ধূমপান মাগী,” (smoking whore) and “সমন্বয়ক খানকীমাগী” (coordinator whore) to sexualize and shame everyday behavior and leadership, and label her “সমকামী” (homosexual) to weaponize homophobia. A recurring trope—“ইমু ফ্রিল্যান্সার” (IMO freelancer)—casts her as selling online sex on messaging apps to collapse activism into “immorality.” Coordinated captions deploy “লাল স্বাধীনতা” (Red Freedom) as a sneer at July-uprising figures, reframing a pro-democracy movement as deviant. Narrative lines like “সমন্বয়ক নুসরাত নিজের ইজ্জৎ বিসর্জন” (Coordinator Nusrat has sacrificed her own honor) script her as having bartered away honor, inviting pile-ons that police women's bodies and reputations rather than their ideas.

Circulated as hashtags, meme text, and comment prompts, these terms make misogyny machine-readable and discoverable, converting Nusrat's name into a searchable package of shame meant to intimidate her and deter other women from public leadership.

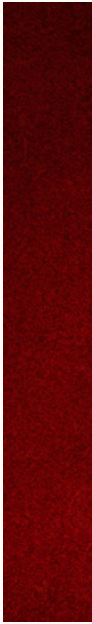
NAFSIN MEHANAZ

Nafsin Mehanaz Azireen played a key role in the 2024 July Uprising as a student activist who helped mobilize female students and led women's participation in the protests. Her efforts contributed to broadening the movement's reach and highlighting gender-inclusive solidarity during the uprising.




Misinformation targeting Nafsin Mehnaz draws heavily upon fabricated statements distributed via digital quote cards and manipulated images, often purporting to show her declaring controversial, provocative, or destabilizing claims about herself, the student movement, or political events. For example, fake photocards have been disseminated, falsely quoting Nafsin about internal dissent within student coordinating groups—suggesting, for instance, that she is isolated, overlooked, or otherwise involved in in-fighting surrounding the July Uprising, or questioning the legitimacy and unity of activist movements. These fabrications strive to plant suspicion within activist circles, generate internal mistrust, and question Nafsin's legitimacy as an activist.

What is particularly striking is the calculated strategy of entrapment: the misinformation often manufactures political statements that, if believed, would delegitimize her among both supporters and authoritative figures. Claims can include her supposed personal or political ambitions, her relationships to other activists, or her stance on critical incidents, none of which she actually expressed. The dissemination style leverages highly shareable media, like quote cards or screenshots purporting to be from well-known media outlets or social pages, thereby boosting perceived legitimacy. The dominant theme here is character assassination through manufactured political controversy; the content is tailored to polarize audiences, incite public distrust, and immobilize the organizational unity of activist groups by creating artificial rifts and power struggles attributed to Nafsin.



Abuse targeting Nafsin Mehanaz fuses AI-assisted sexual shaming with nationalist slurs to erase her credibility. Posts allege a “deep-fake private video,” leveraging non-consensual, AI-manipulated imagery to script scandal. Commenters pile on with misogynistic epithets—“খানকি,” (whore) “মাগী,” (derogatory woman/whore) “বৈশ্য,” (prostitute) “নষ্টা” (immoral woman)—to recode her identity as sexual deviance rather than civic action. Although she is Bangladeshi, opponents tag her “পাকিস্তানী,” (Pakistani) “বিহারি” (Bihari) and “রাজাকার,” “Razakar” weaponizing Liberation War memory to brand her an anti-nation actor. These labels appear as captions, hashtags, and meme text, making the abuse machine-readable and easy to amplify across feeds.



The composite tactic—fake intimate content plus accusations of foreign allegiance—shifts attention from her views to manufactured “immorality” and “disloyalty,” inviting harassment, shrinking bystander empathy, and signaling to other women that public participation risks reputational ruin through deepfakes and politicized name-calling.

TAJNUVA JABEEN

Tajnuva Jabeen is a Bangladeshi political activist and joint convener of National Citizen Party (NCP), a party formed in the wake of the 2024 uprising.


The disinformation attacks against Tajnuva Jabeen are characterized by the use of manipulated visuals and the spreading of rumors intended to invoke feelings of scandal and illegitimacy.



In several instances, doctored images circulate online—these can involve crude editing or outright photo composites—designed to falsely position Tajnuva as involved in controversial or questionable activities. These visuals may present her as being present at scenes of staged events (implying guilt by association), or in contexts suggestive of sexual, political, or social deviance.

Accompanying such images are fabricated news banners and false “exposés” purportedly from reputable news sources, adopting the style and branding of major outlets to sow confusion about the authenticity of the claims. Sometimes, fabricated narratives are embedded directly into image overlays to give the impression of newsworthiness or urgency (for example, implying illegal or unethical conduct connected to activism). The themes that recur most are gendered defamation (especially through suggestion of inappropriate behavior), attempts to undermine her legitimacy as a public figure, and the manipulation of visual credibility to intensify public suspicion.

In essence, the disinformation employed here demonstrates how digital image manipulation can be co-opted not just for sensationalism but as a potent tool of exclusion and marginalization against women and gender-diverse individuals in social movements.



Harassment of Tajnuva Jabeen blends sexualized slurs, insinuation, and audiovisual framing to delegitimize her public role. Posts tag her “বেশ্যা,” (whore) collapsing her identity into a misogynistic stereotype, while rumor-mongers push claims of “illicit relations with political colleagues” to script a whisper-campaign that reframes coalition work as promiscuity. Her personal photos are repackaged into reels and slideshows set to adult songs, using suggestive lyrics and beats to impose a sexual narrative regardless of context. These tactics—captioning, soundtrack choice, and rumor—work together to convert neutral images into “evidence,” inviting pile-ons and moral policing.

SABNAM FARIA

Sabnam Faria is a Bangladeshi actress who publicly voiced her support for the students during the July 2024 uprising. Her refusal to participate in state requested pro-government videos, at a time when the internet was shut down, and her open condemnation of violence against protesters made her a visible celebrity voice for solidarity with the movement.

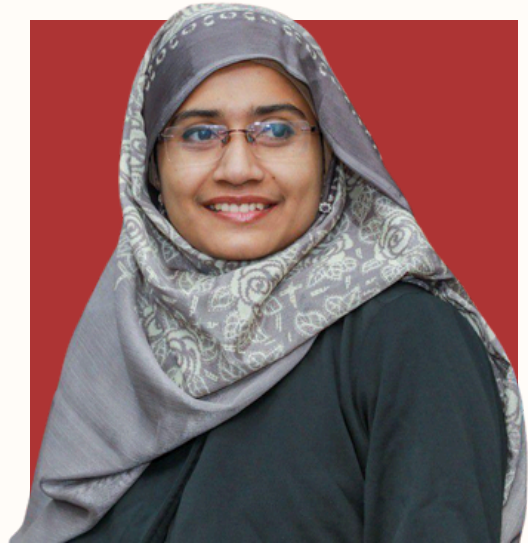


In the case of Shabnam Faria, the misinformation and narrative attacks are especially notable for its mix of visual and textual manipulation designed to provoke scandal, moral outrage, and social suspicion. One persistent element involves fake or doctored photographs—often suggesting she is engaged in extramarital or illicit affairs, sometimes by swapping her face into intimate settings or pairing her image with those of prominent men. The intent is to shame her by association, to invite voyeuristic scrutiny of her private life, and to challenge her moral fiber in the public eye.

Additionally, fabricated interviews and misleading quote graphics are used to misattribute incendiary or polarizing comments to her, often stripping out original context or distorting her actual views for maximum impact. These tactics weaponize social prejudices about women's morality, with a goal to stigmatize her professionally and discourage other women from entering the public or creative professions. The overriding themes are slut shaming, using sexualized insinuations to undermine professional women, and broader moral policing—reflecting anxieties about women's independence and visibility in media and entertainment.

SAMANTHA SHARMIN


Samanta Sharmin was the spokesperson for the Jatiya Nagorik Committee (JANAC), the student-led platform after the initial July Uprising. Her role is directly connected to the uprising, as she became a senior joint convener of the National Citizen Party (NCP), the political party formed by the core student leadership of the uprising.



The misinformation directed at Samantha Sharmin is distinctive for its use of political fabrication and sensationalism, primarily via doctored photocards or manipulated images designed to appear as legitimate news products. In these items, Samanta is falsely depicted as making radical or controversial proclamations on national politics—such as alleged statements about regime change, radical student activism, or unfounded alliances with contentious figures. These fabricated narratives not only aim to paint her as a political extremist but also risk subjecting her to legal or institutional harassment, and alienating segments of her activist support base.

A recurrent tactic is mimicking the specific styles and branding of well-known Bangladeshi news outlets to create a veneer of authenticity, further misleading viewers and readers about the source and truth of the statements. The overall theme emphasizes reprimanding and containing female political expression by associating dissent with extremism, thereby seeking to erect new barriers to women's inclusion in civic action and public leadership. The approach reveals a sophisticated understanding of how misinformation can be engineered to strategically demobilize and isolate female leaders through manufactured controversy and institutional scare tactics.

Online aggressors also delegitimize her authority by reducing her identity to sexualized tropes. The harassment employs a "side-by-side" comparison tactic, juxtaposing images of the politician with those of adult film actress Mia Khalifa to manufacture a false narrative of immorality. This strategy is designed to strip her of the dignity required for public office, shifting the discourse from her leadership capabilities to a humiliating scrutiny of her physical appearance and moral character.



The depth of this abuse is characterized by the weaponization of specific, derogatory labels such as "সামান্তা খলিফা" (Samantha Khalifa), "খলিফা সামান্তা" (Khalifa Samanta), and "গরিবের মিয়া খলিফা" (The poor man's Mia Khalifa). These slurs are not random; they are calculated to exploit the "Madonna-Whore" complex by drawing a malicious equivalence between a hijab-wearing political leader and a pornographic actress known for similar attire. By branding her as "Goriber Mia Khalifa," the attackers combine sexism with classist mockery, implying that her political aspiration is a "cheap" performance. This form of "whorephobia" serves as a potent silencing tool, intending to shame her out of the public sphere by making her visibility synonymous with sexual ridicule.

RUMEEN FARHANA

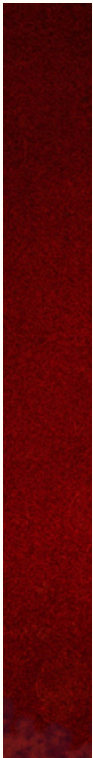
Rumeen Farhana, a politician and member of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), publicly aligned herself with the 2024 July uprising. She actively participated in the movement and also joined the protests, expressing solidarity with the student movement.



The social media narrative attacks and disinformation campaign against Rumeen Farhana can be described to be highly organized, utilizing a spectrum of fabricated digital content aimed at both personal and political delegitimization. Techniques include falsified quote cards using her image and branding of mainstream media, forged Facebook posts purporting to be official communications, and edited statements taken out of context to misrepresent her political allegiances or views. For example, fake graphics are shared that falsely quote her as making incendiary or divisive remarks about the government, state institutions, or other opposition figures—fabrications designed to either spark controversy or render her vulnerable to official censure.

Alongside political misrepresentation, some misinformation also leans on pseudo-scandals or personal rumors, implying Rumeen's involvement in inappropriate activities or dark alliances. The common denominator is the effort to erode trust among her constituents and supporters, exaggerating or fabricating conflicts to suggest she is divisive, unreliable, or morally compromised. Thematically, the campaign synthesizes elements of political sabotage, social character assassination, and digital forgery—underscoring a persistent and sophisticated deployment of disinformation as a silencing strategy against vocal women in the Bangladeshi political landscape.

There are also coordinated online harassment campaigns against BNP politician Rumeen Farhana, utilizing “malign creativity” to dismantle her political credibility. Across multiple Facebook posts (1, 2, 3), rather than critiquing her political ideology or policy positions, these posts weaponize her gender to impose a “moral hierarchy,” effectively reducing a prominent female leader to a subject of sexualized scrutiny and public shaming.



A deeper analysis reveals the heavy reliance on "whorephobia" as a silencing tactic, evidenced by the specific weaponization of gendered slurs such as "মাগি" (magi/whore), "খান্দি" (khanki/slut), and "রুমিন পতিতা" (Rumeen the prostitute). These terms are not merely insults but function as tools of social exclusion, designed to categorize politically active women as "public women" in a sexual sense, thereby stripping them of the respectability required for public office. Furthermore, the visual manipulation—such as circling her hand gestures to imply vulgarity or secret signaling—demonstrates how benign body language is reframed through a misogynistic lens to manufacture controversy. This strategy shifts the public gaze from her voice to her body, creating a hostile digital environment intended to force her withdrawal from the political sphere.

TASNIM JARA

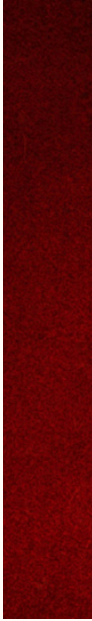
Tasnim Jara, a political figure and Senior Joint Member Secretary of the National Citizen Party (NCP), played a prominent role in the 2024 July uprising by advocating for democratic reforms and women's active participation.



Disinformation patterns involving Dr. Tasnim Jara are sophisticated, multifaceted, and deeply gendered, leveraging both her prominence as a female medical professional and her digital reach as a science communicator.

The most common tactics include fabrication and manipulation of visual content—such as using her likeness in doctored advertisements and misleading thumbnails to promote products or online platforms with dubious claims about sexual medicine and health. A particularly insidious form involves repurposing or editing her educational videos, removing context to suggest unsupported medical advice or to sexualize benign content. These attacks attempt to undermine her credibility, erode trust in female voices in science, and subject her to 'slut-shaming' and ridicule by associating her image with topics that carry social stigma.

Additionally, false rumors about her overseas affiliations and supposed financial motivations are deployed to paint her as opportunistic or untrustworthy. These disinformation campaigns function both to silence and to delegitimize women in public knowledge spaces, reflecting broader sociocultural anxieties around women's authority, sexuality, and the digital public sphere in Bangladesh. The persistent targeting of Dr. Jara typifies the intersection of gender-based harassment, professional envy, and digitally enabled character assassination—raising critical concerns for both privacy protections and the right to participate safely in public discourse.



The campaign against Dr. Tasnim Jara layers sexualized mockery, modesty policing, and nationalist slurs to erode her credibility. Posts label her “বিশিষ্ট পেনিস (নুন্ন) বিশেষজ্ঞ,” (renowned penis specialist) recasting a physician as a pornified caricature and smearing her as a “sex specialist.” A fabricated “origin story” claims that when her hijab-wearing videos “didn’t perform,” she removed her hijab/orna, then purportedly pivoted to selling “genital-medicine” content to chase virality—an insinuation designed to frame professional outreach as immodest self-promotion. Political opposition pages escalate to lineage-based vilification by tagging her “রাজাকারের নাতনি,” (granddaughter of a Razakar) invoking Liberation War memory to brand her disloyal.

3.2 Silent Victims: sisters, wives, and mothers of male activists

The harassment of female relatives of male political activists represents a sophisticated modality of political intimidation that leverages deep-seated cultural constructs of family "honor" and female "decency." This tactic systematically exploits the social vulnerability of women who, despite remaining outside the direct political fray, are transformed into collateral targets to facilitate the character assassination of their male kin. In conservative sociopolitical landscapes, where a woman's perceived chastity is intrinsically linked to the patrilineal reputation, digital environments have become the primary staging ground for these gendered assaults.

Empirical evidence from recent fact-checking investigations highlights a calculated deployment of advanced digital manipulation to execute these campaigns. A primary method involves the generation of sexually explicit deepfake material to compromise maternal and marital bonds. For instance, **Fardeen Hassan**, a student leader was targeted alongside his mother in a fabricated video. Fact-checkers revealed the footage was an AI-generated deepfake designed to portray an obscene, incestuous encounter, weaponizing the sanctity of the mother-son relationship to induce social ostracization.



In picture: Shafiqul Alam

Similarly, the daughter of **Shafiqul Alam**, Press Secretary to the Chief Advisor of the interim government, was subjected to a digital smear campaign where her likeness was edited into pornographic imagery. Investigation by FactWatch confirmed that these "travel photos" were actually digitally altered screenshots of an adult film star, Mia

Khalifa, repurposed to suggest moral turpitude within the official's immediate family.

The marital sphere is equally targeted, as seen in the repeated digital assaults on actress Nusrat Imroz Tisha, wife of filmmaker and adviser to the government **Mostofa Sarwar Farooki**. These attacks utilized deepfake technology to superimpose Tisha's face onto the bodies of professional dancers and other actresses in suggestive contexts, including fabricated bikini-clad imagery.



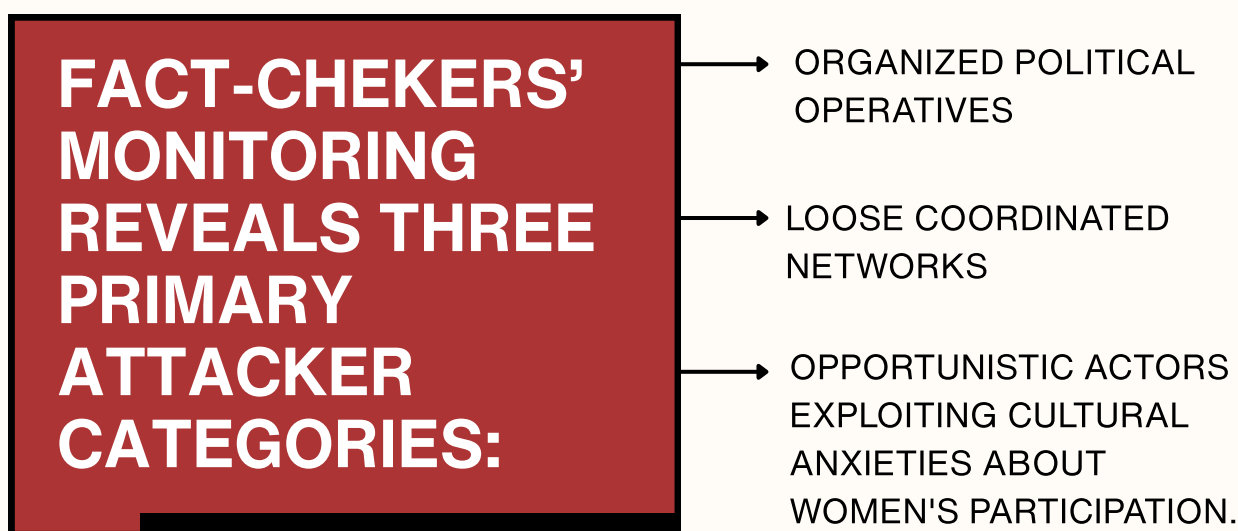
In picture: Mostofa Sarwar Farooki

Furthermore, coordinators like Khan Talat Mahmud Rafi faced "altered photocard" campaigns, where fake news templates claimed his wife had been the victim of street harassment. By manufacturing narratives of either sexual "shame" or "vulnerability," these campaigns aim to produce "anticipatory silencing," forcing male activists to withdraw from the public sphere to protect their female kin from irrevocable digital defilement.

Perspectives on TFGBV
Targeting and Platform
Responsibility

To get a more comprehensive understanding on the nature, cause and effect of TFGBV post 2024 uprising, we interviewed two fact-checkers and a political scientist - who have chosen to remain anonymous.

From fact-checkers' perspectives, the systematic targeting of female activists represents sophisticated political silencing designed to neutralize voices which are deemed “threatening” by various political actors.



Platform responsibility is evident in Facebook's algorithms consistently amplifying fabricated content over fact-checks, while community standards remain inadequately and sparingly enforced for women, and other gendered communities, in politics and social activism. Post-July 2024 campaigns demonstrate strategic sophistication, deliberately exploiting Bangladesh's social vulnerabilities around women's character, public and personal life. Attackers choose tactics designed for maximum social and reputational damage regardless of content authenticity, with fake accounts and social media posts masquerading as legitimate news sources.

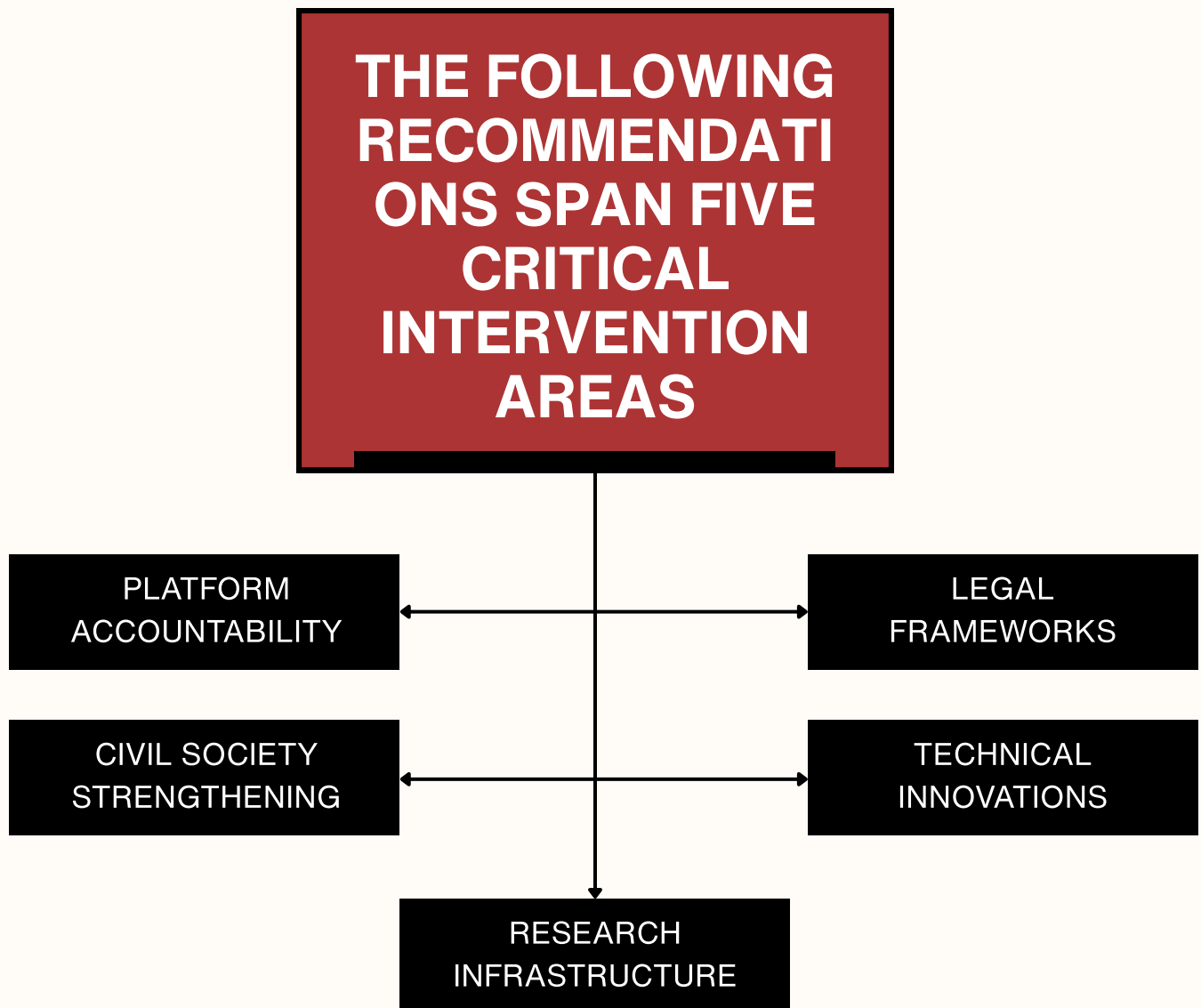
Platform design prioritizing engagement over accuracy enables fabricated content to reach thousands before fact-checks gain traction, creating an environment where systematic harassment operates with virtual impunity.

From the political scientist's perspective, TFGBV creates critical threats to democratic consolidation through "anticipatory silencing"—where visible targeting of prominent women creates chilling effects extending beyond immediate victims. The weaponization of family honor exploits Bangladesh's collectivist social structure, transforming individual political engagement into family vulnerability through "guilt by association" strategies.

The technological sophistication evident in coordinated deepfake campaigns and cross-platform amplification demonstrates TFGBV's evolution into systematic political warfare, suggesting organized efforts with substantial resources. These campaigns create "gendered democratic deficits" undermining representative democracy's legitimacy—when systematic harassment creates barriers for half the population, the resulting political system cannot claim democratic authenticity. Traditional regulatory frameworks prove inadequate for addressing harassment campaigns operating across multiple platforms and jurisdictions, threatening to institutionalize women's exclusion from public life.

Recommendations for Addressing Technology- Facilitated Gender- Based Violence

Addressing the systematic targeting of women through technology-facilitated gender-based violence requires a comprehensive, multi-stakeholder response that recognizes the interconnected nature of digital harassment campaigns documented in this research.



Each designed to address specific vulnerabilities identified in the post-July 2024 harassment campaigns while building long-term resilience against gendered disinformation. These interventions acknowledge that effective TFGBV prevention cannot rely solely on technological solutions or regulatory measures, but must integrate cultural understanding, community engagement, and systematic monitoring to create an ecosystem where women can participate safely in democratic discourse without fear of coordinated character assassination or family-targeted intimidation.

5.1 Platform-Level Interventions

→ Enhanced Content Moderation Systems

Social media platforms must develop culturally-informed AI detection systems specifically trained to identify subtle forms of gendered harassment common in South Asian contexts, including honor-based shaming, fabricated intimate imagery, and moral policing tactics.

→ Algorithm Transparency and Reform

Platforms could modify engagement algorithms to deprioritize sensationalized content targeting women and other gendered communities, whilst providing algorithmic amplification for verified fact-checks and corrections.

→ Coordinated Harassment Detection

Develop automated systems to identify coordinated inauthentic behavior targeting specific individuals, with enhanced penalties for accounts participating in systematic harassment campaigns rather than treating each violation independently.

→ Rapid Response Mechanisms

Establish expedited review processes for content targeting female public figures during politically sensitive periods, with dedicated response teams trained in recognizing sophisticated gendered disinformation tactics.

5.2 Legal and Regulatory Framework

→ Comprehensive TFGBV Legislation

Enact specific legislation criminalizing technology-facilitated gender-based violence, including non-consensual image manipulation, coordinated harassment campaigns, and family-targeted intimidation, with provisions for both criminal and civil remedies.

→ Platform Accountability Measures

Implement regulatory requirements for social media companies operating in Bangladesh, including mandatory local representation, regular transparency reports on gendered harassment, and financial penalties for inadequate content moderation.

→ Judicial System Capacity Building

Train judges, prosecutors, and law enforcement personnel in recognizing and prosecuting TFGBV cases, with specialized courts or procedures for handling technology-mediated crimes against women in public life.

→ Cross-Border Enforcement Mechanisms

Develop international cooperation frameworks for addressing TFGBV campaigns that operate across multiple jurisdictions, including mutual legal assistance treaties and platform cooperation agreements.

5.3 Civil Society and Educational Initiatives

➔ Digital Literacy Programs

Implement comprehensive media literacy education focusing on identifying manipulated content, understanding algorithmic amplification, and developing critical evaluation skills for social media information.

➔ Fact-Checking Network Expansion

Support the growth and technical capacity of local fact-checking organizations, with specialized training in identifying gendered disinformation and rapid response capabilities for time-sensitive cases.

➔ Bystander Intervention Training

Develop community-based programs teaching online bystander intervention techniques, empowering users to recognize and counter TFGBV when they encounter it on social media platforms.

➔ Support Systems for Targets

Establish comprehensive support services for TFGBV victims, including legal assistance, mental health support, technical security guidance, and economic support for those whose livelihoods are affected by harassment campaigns.

5.4 Technical and Security Measures

→ Content Authentication Standards

Promote adoption of technical standards for content authentication and provenance tracking, making it easier to identify manipulated images and videos while preserving privacy and freedom of expression.

→ Enhanced Security Tools

Develop and distribute user-friendly security tools specifically designed for female public figures, including advanced privacy settings, harassment filtering systems, and reputation monitoring capabilities.

→ Platform Interoperability for Safety

Create cross-platform systems for sharing information about confirmed harassment campaigns and malicious accounts, preventing banned users from simply migrating to alternative platforms.

5.5 Research and Monitoring

→ Systematic TFGBV Documentation

Establish ongoing monitoring systems to track trends, patterns and effectiveness of different harassment tactics, providing evidence base for policy development and platform accountability.

→ Impact Assessment Studies

Conduct regular research on TFGBV's effects on women's political participation, economic opportunities, and civic engagement, providing quantitative evidence for advocacy and policy development.

→ Platform Transparency Requirements

Mandate regular publication of detailed data on gendered harassment patterns, content moderation effectiveness, and user safety outcomes, enabling independent research and accountability monitoring.

Conclusion

Ultimately, the abuse directed at these fourteen public figures highlights a dangerous intersection of cultural misogyny, political strategy, and platform negligence. The systematic nature of the attacks, leveraging technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) through deepfakes, manipulated visuals, and fabricated news photocards which proves that digital tools are being weaponized to strip women of their agency. By making a woman's political visibility synonymous with sexual ridicule and "moral deviance," perpetrators transform the digital landscape into a hostile territory that demands her retreat.

It is important to clarify that while this report focuses on fourteen specific women, they are not the only victims. Their selection was not based on the weight of their revolutionary contributions or an assessment that they suffered "more" than others. Instead, they were identified through a fact-check-anchored methodology designed to surface verified, high-salience cases of gendered disinformation. This purposive sample represents the tip of a much larger iceberg; countless other women, whose abuse occurs in closed messaging apps or remains undocumented by fact-checking infrastructures, continue to face similar digital onslaughts outside the scope of this study.

This report serves as a formal record of the high social and psychological price paid by women at the forefront of the July revolution. By weaponizing gendered narratives and religious symbols, TFGBV has successfully created a climate of "anticipatory silencing," forcing women to calculate the risk of digital assassination before they speak. Without deliberate intervention ranging from platform accountability to robust legal protections, TFGBV will continue to function as a gendered barrier to leadership. Protecting the digital rights of female public figures is not merely a matter of online safety; it is a fundamental requirement for a democratic future in Bangladesh where women are not policed out of the history they helped create.