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ACCEPTED PAPER

Resilience Amid Diffused Surveillance During a Political Movement in Bangladesh

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Based on 23 in-depth interviews with protesters, activists, and digital organizers

The Context

July 2024 Quota Reform Movement, Bangladesh

- A student-led uprising against discriminatory civil service quotas escalated into a nationwide movement against the government.
- Social media was the backbone of mobilization: organizing protests, sharing real-time updates, documenting state violence.
- The government responded with nationwide internet blackouts and intensified digital surveillance.
- Our study sits inside that collision.



Mobilization tool

Social media was simultaneously...



Site of repression

That tension is the whole paper.

Research Questions

1. How did participants experience surveillance and censorship during the July 2024 movement, and in what ways did these practices extend beyond the state to involve peers, family members, and social ties?

2. What strategies of digital resilience and resistance did protesters develop to navigate censorship, internet shutdowns, and fear?

How We Did It

A worked example for your own thesis

Purposive + snowball sampling	23 participants, recruited deliberately for relevant lived experience, not randomly.
Saturation as a stopping rule	We stopped not at a fixed number, but when new interviews stopped revealing new themes.
Manual transcription & translation	Done by native Bengali speakers, by hand, to preserve political and emotional nuance lost to automated tools.
Independent coding, reconciled as a team	Three coders worked separately, then resolved disagreements collectively, no single bias drove the analysis.
An explicit ethical boundary	Coding schemas and transcripts withheld from publication given the political sensitivity of the data.

Lateral Surveillance

How it uniquely played out in July 2024, Bangladesh



Internet Service Providers



Pro-Regime Wings



Kin & Family

Surveillance born of fear, not malice

Family members frequently monitored participants out of protective fear and safety concerns, not control or punishment. This blurs the boundary between care and surveillance: the same act, checking someone's phone, asking where they've been, watching who they talk to, can be read simultaneously as love and as discipline.

Lateral surveillance is a known concept; our contribution is showing how it took this distinct shape under the fear and stakes of a real, high-risk political movement.

Digital Resilience

How participants pushed back

Encrypted Tools

Signal and offline encryption software, valued for emotional reassurance as much as security.

Social Ciphering

Coded language, subtle hashtags, and collective ways of concealing meaning from monitors.

Dual-Phone Strategies

Separate devices to compartmentalize risk between activist and everyday life.

Panic Deletion

Wiping devices before leaving home, often erasing irreplaceable personal data in the process.

Satire & Coded Speech

Cultural tactics that conveyed dissent while evading direct censorship.

Layered Privacy

Repurposing everyday platform features into improvised, layered protection.

Broader Implications and Limitations

Tying it together, and being honest about limits

Beyond Protester Mode

- Layered access control for shared or seized devices
- Rapid, reliable erasure tools that don't destroy everything indiscriminately
- Offline or mesh-based communication that survives shutdowns

Limitations, Stated Plainly

- 23 interviews cannot capture the full spectrum of experience, especially those tangentially involved
- Political uncertainty during fieldwork may have shaped what participants disclosed
- Findings are grounded in Bangladesh and don't claim universal generalizability

Naming what a study can't claim is part of doing it well.

THE TAKEAWAY

Surveillance in the Global South isn't just state vs. citizen.

It's distributed across laws, infrastructure, and the people who love you.

Resilience, in turn, is an ongoing negotiation: part technical ingenuity, part cultural tactic, never purely one or the other.