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"She's That Type Anyway": Moralized Misogyny and Bangladeshi Women's Political Visibility on Facebook

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Abstract

We develop "moralized misogyny" as an analytic concept for examining how Meta's Facebook functions as a form of informal patriarchal governance regulating Bangladeshi women's political visibility. Drawing on theories of misogyny, morally motivated networked harassment, and digital vigilantism, we argue that women's political engagement is disciplined and exposure enforces dominant moral norms. Integrating feminist and multimodal approaches to critical discourse analysis of purposively sampled Facebook items, we show how political disagreement is reframed as moral transgression. Women's participation is recoded as sexual deviance and impurity through visual and textual manipulation that render delegitimizing attacks credible, humorous, and socially acceptable. Whether audiences believe these artifacts is often secondary; their circulation enables crowd-led vigilante punishment framed as moral defense. This dynamic can constitute a form of structural equality harm that makes women's political citizenship conditional on compliance with patriarchal norms. We recommend context-specific moderation and policy responses that recognize such attacks as a barrier to women's political participation.

Keywords

Bangladesh; digital vigilantism; Facebook; online misogyny; patriarchy; women in politics

1. Introduction

Bangladesh's online spaces have become key sites where women's visibility triggers reputational punishment rather than democratic debate. This article examines how gendered attacks operate as a form of "informal patriarchal governance"—crowd-enforced policing of gender norms—regulating women's political participation, while focusing on Bangladesh's dominant platform, Meta's Facebook. Moral vocabularies,

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visual manipulation, and crowd participation converge to discipline *politically visible women*—politicians, activists, student leaders, and journalists—by conditioning legitimacy on compliance with gendered norms.

We operationalize "moralized misogyny" as attacks that *explicitly* invoke codes of conduct to justify abuse. We use "morality" descriptively, referring to group-endorsed norms grounded in purity, loyalty, and obedience (Dahl, 2023). This system disciplines women through harassment, silencing, and reputational sanctions. Online misogyny functions as an exclusionary "GTFO" ("Get The F*** Out") signal, telling women they are unwelcome in digital spaces (Jane, 2017). On Facebook, moral norms are weaponized to delegitimize authority by casting women as "immoral" or "incompetent," capitalizing on resonant tropes of sexual propriety to restrict autonomy (Morgenroth et al., 2025; Sakki & Martikainen, 2022).

Despite expanding scholarship on online harms, Bangladesh remains a critical, underexamined case of how misogyny, vigilantism, and morality converge, particularly following the shift of the July–August 2024 mass uprising—sparked by a restored public-job quota and state repression, culminating in the end of 15 years of Awami League-led government rule. An earlier assessment about Bangladesh established a baseline for digital aggression (International Foundation for Electoral Systems, 2021), but violence against women rose post-uprising, with many facing online harassment (UN Women, 2025). This escalation has served a disciplinary function, compelling female leaders to limit involvement and some to withdraw entirely amid reported mob violence and increasing barriers for women ("Efforts to establish," 2025).

The potential of this patriarchal governance became visible in the December 2025 death of a National Citizen Party leader found hanging in Dhaka. Although police investigations remain ongoing, colleagues linked her death to sustained cyberbullying and rape threats after a political confrontation ("NCP leader's body," 2025). Whether ruled suicide or murder, both her death and the discourse around it illuminate the extreme endpoint of online gendered violence in Bangladesh. For women in politics, the online sphere is not merely a site of debate but a domain of patriarchal governance where visibility can precipitate organized, life-threatening punishment.

While policy reports have begun to highlight AI-driven harms worldwide, empirical research remains scarce regarding how the continuum of visual manipulation—from deepfakes (realistic, yet manipulative AI-generated videos/images/audios) to cheapfakes (simplistic decontextualization/edits)—is weaponized, especially in the Global South. These visuals are woven into everyday political discourse to actively punish and structurally exclude women from public life (Gehrke & Amit-Danhi, 2025).

Earlier work examined activists' experiences of gendered disinformation and harassment, and the resilience strategies they adopted in response (Shuchy & Uddin, 2026). We now focus specifically on how Facebook content targets politically visible women and ask:

> RQ: How do Facebook's moralized discourses construct women's visibility as transgressive and legitimize gendered harassment?

We argue that by embedding misogynistic degradation within familiar aesthetics and humor, visuals and discourses render harassment ordinary, shareable, and socially defensible. We identify three dominant mechanisms through which harassment operates. First, women's political speech is consistently sexualized,

reframing visibility as transgression. Second, this reframing is operationalized through "moral evidence-making"—turning insinuation into apparent proof—where news-mimic photocards and AI-generated image-based sexual abuse provide "credibility scaffolding"—visual packaging that simulates authority—to justify harassment. Finally, infrastructures of vigilantism, where users participate in "punishment" to signal their own moral alignment, effectively render women's citizenship conditional.

2. Morality, Gender, and South Asian Politics

Women's digital disciplining is embedded in a historically entrenched moral–political order in which gendered control continues to shape contemporary online harassment. Social hierarchy is sustained through a "gendered social order," where customs and laws discipline women through sanctions and suppressed rights (Kar & Tiwari, 2020). Bangladesh's fundamentalist forces have long mobilized moral authority—most visibly through *fatwas*, or religious edicts/legal opinions—to subordinate women who pursue autonomy, casting independence as irreligious. Women are socialized as mothers, wives, and workers under others' authority, making participation in competitive male-dominated political space culturally transgressive.

Simultaneously, morality operates through intersectional tensions: Patriarchal codes sustain stratification, yet women negotiate *and* challenge religious-nationalist formations through "expansion and adjustment" (Bacchetta, 1999; Kar & Tiwari, 2020). This contradiction is especially pronounced in postcolonial contexts, where women may be mobilized electorally to serve male interests even as their independent political participation remains limited when it threatens male authority (Prillaman, 2023).

Historically, socio-legal systems have produced a binary in which "respectable" femininity is confined to the domestic sphere while public visibility is imbued with suspicion (Kar & Tiwari, 2020). Parliamentary politics is thus coded as a masculine domain in which women are actively constructed as "out of place" and face heightened scrutiny (Jakimow, 2023).

Kandiyoti's (1988) patriarchal bargain helps explain this punitive logic: Under classic patriarchy, women secure protection in exchange for submissiveness and propriety. Political visibility breaches that bargain, and digital vigilantism (digilantism)—crowd-enabled punitive exposure—can emerge as an extra-legal, mediated, and coordinated form of retaliation whose point of departure is moral outrage, allowing patriarchal correction to be enacted through networked exposure and punishment (Trottier, 2017).

In Asian politics, morality is also political currency. Women often cultivate "moral capital," grounded in virtue and dynastic legacy, to claim legitimacy (Derichs et al., 2006). When legitimacy depends on moral standing rather than competence, women become uniquely vulnerable to virtue-based attacks. Moralized harassment therefore functions strategically to strip women of the very capital required for political viability. It is especially significant in Bangladesh, where women hold only around 16% of parliamentary representation, largely through quotas, and only about 2.3% were elected through general seats in 2026.

Furthermore, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (2025) notes that 76% of women parliamentarians experience psychological violence, including moral policing, and many report online gendered violence, i.e., AI-generated fabrications, used as "proof" of moral transgression. Manne (2018) bridges social order and digital abuse by theorizing misogyny not as individual hatred but as the system that "polices and enforces" patriarchal norms:

When women enter political spaces, they are perceived as illicitly taking status that "belongs to men." Manne's (2018) distinction between "human beings" and "human givers" is central: Men are positioned as entitled to exist and take, while women are obligated to give attention, bodies, care, and deference. In South Asia, this logic is mediated through a moral economy of purity. So, accusations of transactional sex, i.e., quid pro quo, recode women's political ambition as impropriety. UN Women (2023) found that misogyny-related search queries in Bangladesh were disproportionately male-associated and youth-driven, though such searches are not direct evidence of misogynistic behavior; its separate social media analysis showed how online attacks invoked patriarchal and religious norms to police women's modesty, sexuality, and public expression.

These dynamics operate through affective-discursive mechanisms that construct women not as opponents but as immoral and inferior (Sakki & Martikainen, 2022). Women's bodies are disproportionately moralized, with autonomy scrutinized through purity, shame, and harm in ways not usually applied to men (Morgenroth et al., 2025). Such attacks weaponize language and sexualized stigma to erode authority, while broader "objective violence" normalizes women as secondary beings and aligns with right-wing populist "anti-gender" rhetoric (Graff & Korolczuk, 2022).

From a democratic perspective, this violence functions as a "price of participation" that preserves traditional gender roles by making visibility costly for women (Barker & Jurasz, 2019). Gehrke and Amit-Danhi's (2025) "triangle of violence" conceptualizes gendered disinformation—malicious falsehoods anchored in stereotypes—as a triadic relation among creators, targets, and audiences, where manipulated content damages reputation and mobilizes hostility. It aligns with arguments that violence against women in politics is a distinct exclusionary phenomenon (Krook, 2020, Chapter 16) and gendered disinformation cannot be reduced to generic disinformation, as doing so obscures its specific harms (Gehrke & Amit-Danhi, 2025; Sobieraj, 2020). Their effects extend beyond immediate harm, often leading women to self-modify their political expression, limit participation, retreat from online visibility, and sometimes exit political roles entirely (Koch et al., 2025). In Bangladesh, such attacks can encourage women's self-censorship, selective visibility, and withdrawal from political participation (Shuchy & Uddin, 2026).

Furthermore, public discourse can overlook how disinformation weaponizes sexualized and manipulated visuals, including pornified deepfakes, to discipline politically visible women and erode their legitimacy (Shuchy & Uddin, 2026). Advanced technology is not always required: "Cheapfakes" are often perceived as more credible than complex generations, enabling grassroots moral enforcement (Hameleers, 2024). The format—memes, photocards, and humor—can trivialize harassment. When hate is packaged as "content," the psychological barrier to participation lowers (Phillips, 2015). Visual news-mimic formats convert misogyny into "playful" content (Ledin & Machin, 2018), diffusing accountability and encouraging mass participation.

Ultimately, this ecosystem enables morally motivated networked harassment (MMNH), where ordinary users participate because accusations of norm violation are framed as moral grievances (e.g., betrayal of faith or nation; Marwick, 2021). Amplified by partisan mobilization (Huang, 2023; Trottier, 2017), these identity-based vectors utilize diverse narratives to function not just as disinformation, but as a durable mechanism of political discipline.

3. Theoretical Framework

We integrate MMNH (Marwick, 2021) and digilantism to explain how gendered political targeting operates as informal patriarchal governance. MMNH explains *why* ordinary users participate: Harassment becomes morally legitimate when accusations are framed as violations of shared norms. Digilantism explains *how* such participation becomes punitive: While resembling cyber-bullying in its persecutory effects, it is framed through a *moral* compass—often with nationalist, misogynist, or exclusionary tendencies—making exposure and circulation appear as justified rather than abusive (Huang, 2023; Trottier, 2017).

Manne (2018) specifies the normative order being enforced, conceptualizing misogyny as patriarchy's "law enforcement" against women perceived to have breached gendered expectations. Building on these theories, we explain how this enforcement is operationalized through online participation and weaponized visibility in political contexts, recoding women's political presence as moral violation and making abuse defensible as criticism, satire, or righteous anger.

We define "moralized misogyny" as a subset of *political delegitimation* distinguished by the *object* being regulated (women's visibility and authority), the gendered *codes* mobilized (e.g., femininity, propriety, modesty, purity), and the *injury* produced (revoked legitimacy as a woman in public). Analytically, we did not treat all attacks on women as "moralized misogyny." Attacks centered solely on partisan disagreement, policy criticism, corruption, or non-gendered incompetence were considered adjacent but distinct forms of political delegitimation. Table 1 overviews distinctions among these concepts.

Table 1. Analytical comparison.

Feature	Moral Policing	Moralized Political Delegitimation	Moralized Misogyny
Target	Private citizens/social minorities	Any actor	Politically visible women
Transgression	Social impropriety/nonconformity	Political wrongdoing	Political participation/visibility
Normative code	Decency, tradition, respectability	Loyalty, ideological purity, patriotism, honesty	Femininity, modesty, purity, sexual propriety
Gendered	Not always	Not inherently	Constitutively
Role of the body/sexuality	Sometimes present, especially around dress/intimacy	Usually absent/secondary	Central: body, dress, sexuality, marital status, rumor, intimate imagery
Mechanism(s)	Direct intervention, shaming, social pressure	Accusation to discredit standing	Infrastructural, coordinated, "wholesale" production of hate
Logic	Preserving "tradition"	Policing legitimacy	Enforcing patriarchy's "law enforcement"
Injury produced	Behavioral correction/social restriction	Political discredit	Political discredit plus gendered humiliation and exclusion
Intended outcome	Compliance	Loss of trust, legitimacy, or public support	Deterrence, withdrawal, and revocation of public authority

To guide our analysis, we propose a three-phase model (Figure 1), mapping the trajectory of online harassment from the initial moral accusation to coordinated punishment. First, moral framing reconstructs political action as a breach through identity-linked allegations for which factual belief is secondary. Second, networked participation mobilizes audiences as para-governors, making harassment socially rewarding and signaling in-group belonging (Marwick, 2021). Third, weaponized visibility converts outrage into extralegal punishment through naming, shaming, doxing, and circulating proof-like artifacts without formal authority (Trottier, 2017). This model is an analytic abstraction specifying how MMNH's moral participation and digilantism's punitive exposure become linked in practice, *not* a rigid sequence.

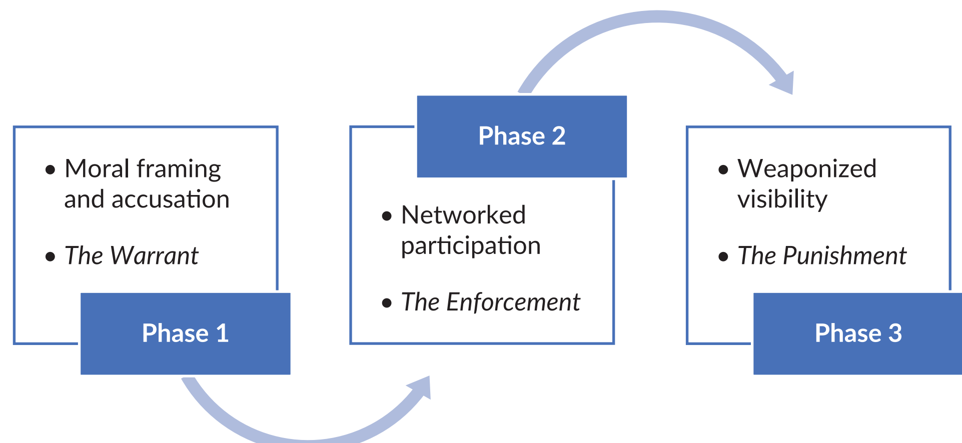

Figure 1. Theoretical framework.

The Bangladeshi case refines these frameworks by showing how morally legible allegations retain disciplinary force—authorizing ridicule and punitive exposure—even without factuality. However, our model should not be assumed to be fully instantiated in every case. Some incidents remain at the accusation level without sustained networked uptake. Others generate ridicule without durable deterrent effects, while others are better explained by partisan hostility than by explicitly gendered moral coding.

Our claims would therefore be weakened if: attacks on politically visible women were predominantly policy-based and structurally resembled attacks on men; moral accusations failed to generate participatory amplification; or circulation depended primarily on factual belief rather than instrumental use. Then, generic hostility, partisan polarization, or generic disinformation would better explain the cases. Ultimately, our model shows how Bangladesh's online sphere uses moralized misogyny not merely to contest politics, but as informal governance that conditions women's political citizenship and dictates who may speak, organize, or lead.

4. Methodology

4.1. Research Design

We adopt a qualitative, abductive design to examine how "moralized misogyny" operates through Facebook discourse in post-uprising Bangladesh. The design focuses on how culturally specific moral vocabularies mediate gendered harassment, disinformation, and the disciplining of women's visibility. We consider

Facebook not a neutral content repository but a key arena for political discourse in which gendered moral orders are articulated, contested, and enforced.

Our framework integrates feminist critical discourse analysis (FCDA; Lazar, 2018) with multimodal critical discourse analysis (MCDA; Ledin & Machin, 2018; see also Machin & Mayr, 2023). This integration reflects the empirical reality that "moralized misogyny" is produced through the amalgamation of textual, visual, and interactional elements. FCDA provides the critical lens for examining gendered power, moral regulation, and discursive policing, while MCDA enables analysis of composite digital artifacts, e.g., memes or photocards, whose material form and affordances shape how meaning circulates and gains legitimacy.

We developed analytic categories a posteriori, beginning with close immersion in the data to inductively trace recurring vocabularies, visual strategies, forms, tactics, and interactional patterns. Adopting Manne's (2018) "ameliorative" approach to misogyny, we focus on its *social* function rather than the *psychological* intent of individual users. We code content as "moralized misogyny" not based on the presence of hate speech alone, but on whether the discourse serves a policing function—specifically, whether it invokes moral sanctions (shame, disgust, impurity) to penalize women's political visibility and enforce adherence to traditional gender roles. We treated content as such when attacks relied on moral evaluation rather than policy criticism or political-partisan disagreement alone. Core constructs—moralized misogyny, national/religious (dis)loyalty, sexual impropriety, purity, pornification, and digilantism—guide the analysis.

4.2. Data Collection

Facebook, Bangladesh's dominant social media platform, served as our field site due to its political centrality and public visibility. We collected data through sustained non-participant observation of publicly accessible Facebook pages, profiles, and groups where nationally salient political events, actors, and controversies were reframed through satire, parody, ridicule, exposé, activist commentary, and news-mimic content. We adopted a "distant" role to observe the phenomenon in its natural context without influencing social dynamics (Liu & Maitlis, 2010), treating Facebook as a field of political discourse. Between September 2024 and December 2025, we systematically monitored partisan, humor, exposé-style, and news-mimic pages, profiles, and groups central to post-uprising political communication—many invoking "satire/parody" labels to evade moderation while circulating moralized attacks. We documented content in situ without engaging or intervening, enabling analysis of observable semiotic-discursive processes.

Sampling followed a purposive, iterative strategy combining systematic monitoring with keyword-based retrieval in Bangla and English, using women's names, gendered slurs, and moral vocabularies. Systematic monitoring involved repeated, criteria-based observation of public-political spaces, capturing a bounded, nationally visible subset of Bangladesh's broader ecosystem rather than Facebook as a whole. We retained content only if it was publicly accessible, politically relevant, targeted women as primary subjects, and contained at least two indicators of "moralized misogyny." Posts were prioritized by engagement, severity, and continued accessibility, with visible reactions typically ranging from approximately 1,000 to 150,000. Sampling spanned left, center, and right political spaces, while overrepresenting liberal/leftist activists. Content clustered around major political flashpoints, and lower-intensity harassment remained normalized across time. Extended procedures—e.g., monitoring protocol, AI-generated content identification, operational definitions, ethical constraints, and observed repertoires—are in the Supplementary File.

We deduplicated content, documented circulation through analytic memos, and preserved deleted/edited posts through archived screenshots. We employed thematic saturation, ceasing data collection when content yielded only recurring archetypes, e.g., news-mimic layouts. By around the 300th item, this redundancy indicated we had achieved sufficient depth to characterize the mechanisms under investigation.

Our corpus comprises content, i.e., posts, comments, captions, memes, AI-generated/heavily manipulated visuals, decontextualized screenshots, videos, and reels targeting *politically visible women*. From an initial pool of 582 monitored Facebook contents, 327 items met full inclusion criteria (see Figure 2).

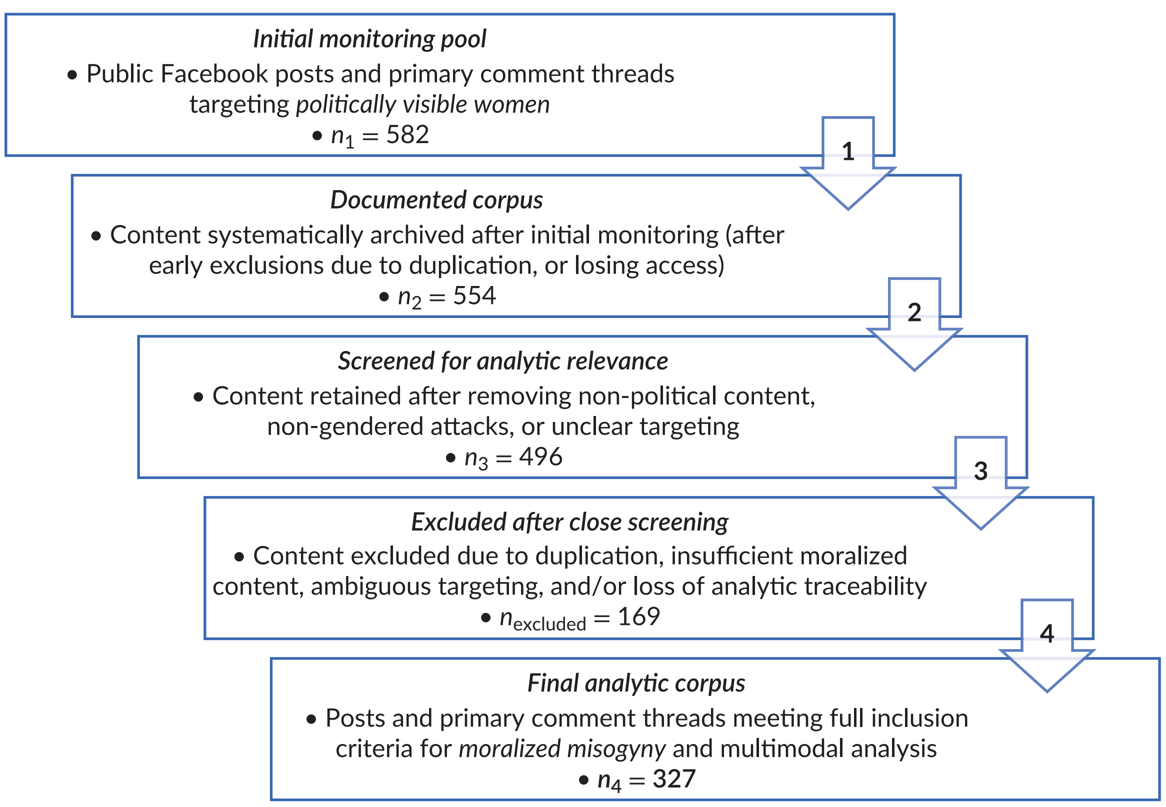

Figure 2. Sample overview.

4.3. Analysis Strategy

FCDA oriented our interpretation toward gendered power, moral regulation, ideology, and representation, while MCDA directed attention to *semiotic resources* and *recontextualizations*—lexical choices, captions, layout, framing, image–text relations, spatialization, and temporality—through which accusations were made to appear legitimate, reportable, or humorous. We paid particular attention to MCDA–FCDA integration. Analysis proceeded between close-case analysis, patterning across artifacts, and socio-political interpretation, foregrounding how they reproduce patriarchal hierarchies and authorize digilantism.

As bilingual researchers fluent in both Bangla and English, we developed and applied a shared codebook during pilot coding. We independently double-coded 36 items. We established intercoder agreement through negotiated consensus focused on aligning interpretive judgments rather than calculating statistical coefficients. We maintained reflexive memos throughout to document interpretive decisions.

Although contents were publicly accessible during collection, we treat them as ethically sensitive due to risks of amplifying harm, re-identification, and retraumatization (Franzke et al., 2020). We therefore applied double anonymization, avoided uniquely searchable phrases, paraphrased extreme content where necessary, and refrained from reproducing pornified captions/visuals. Figure 3 shows how the design moves from corpus construction to integrated interpretation.

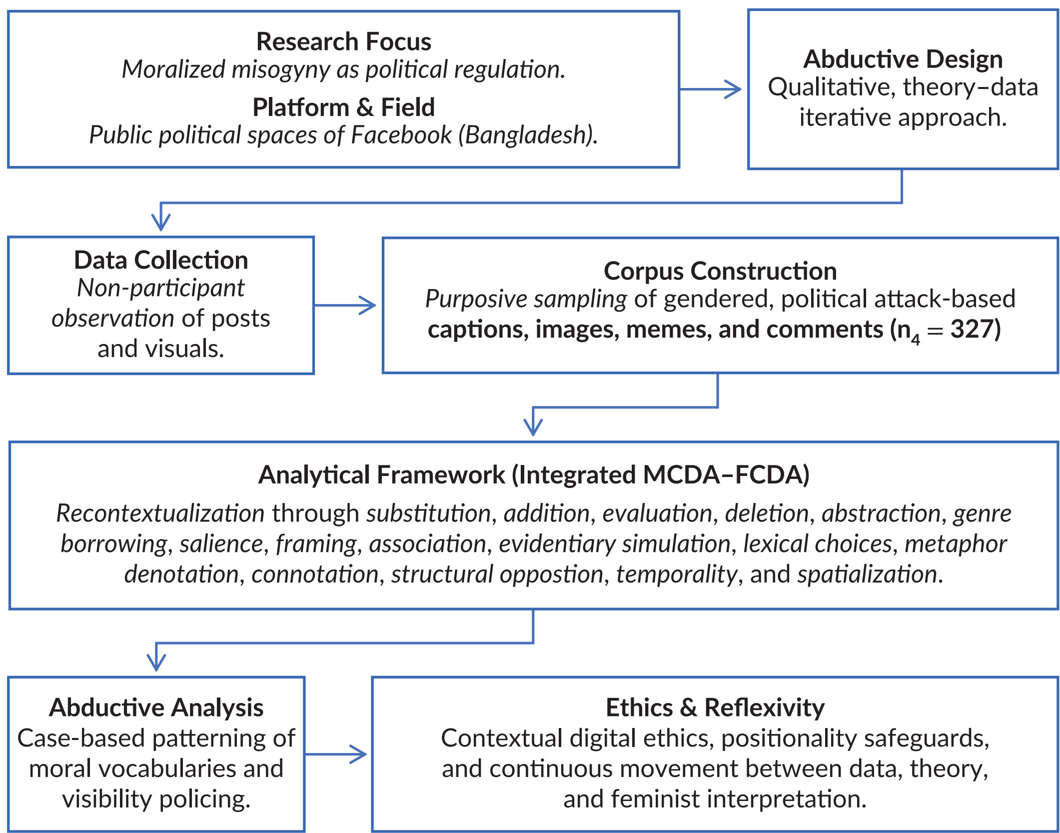

Figure 3. Research design.

We acknowledge the emotional labor involved in analyzing degrading content. Our positionalities enabled contextual interpretation while requiring reflexive safeguards, including peer debriefing. We also used contrastive memoing and negative-case analysis—including observations of male political targets from the same monitored spaces—to distinguish gendered moral coding from generic partisan abuse, noting where attacks were better explained by repertoires more commonly directed at male actors, who were more often criticized for ideology, corruption, violence, or incompetence rather than by sexualized/respectability-based moral delegitimization.

5. Findings

Within our corpus, women's political visibility is most frequently recontextualized through *sexual deviance*, followed by *improper femininity* and *partisan or national disloyalty*, making harassment appear corrective rather than abusive. Analytically, it occurs through a three-step process. First, women's visibility is re-signified through sexualized and respectability-based codes. Second, these accusations are established through multimodal artifacts simulating evidence. Third, comment-thread participation and circulation

convert accusation into punitive exposure. This process operates through the *recontextualization of social practice*: Women's speaking, organizing, contesting elections, appearing on camera, or debating are transformed into discourses of impurity, shamelessness, or betrayal.

Recontextualization operates through recurring moves (Machin & Mayr, 2023): (a) substitution recasts political action in sexual or moral terms; (b) addition inserts reactions, ridicule, and legitimating cues; (c) evaluation casts women as shameless, impure, or unfit; and (d) deletion removes policy substance, institutional context, and the labor of political participation. Through layered semiotic resources—sexualized lexical choices, derogatory captions, genre-borrowing layouts, manipulated visuals, emojis, and comment-threads—women are made legible less as political *actors* than as *bodies* and *problems*. What matters analytically is not any element in isolation, but how different modes, in tandem with different affordances, are assembled into an integrated design that makes misogynistic accusation appear coherent and actionable.

5.1. Sexualizing Political Rhetoric

A dominant mechanism is the recontextualization of women's political speech and presence as sexualized. Women's proximity to public-political life—even standing beside male colleagues—becomes evidence for insinuations that political participation is achieved through sexual exchange. Substitution predominates: "Availability" replaces competence, ideology, and labor. The pattern is carried by sexualized lexical choices and visuals designed to evade moderation while preserving recognizable connotations of impropriety—terms like "bed," "hotel," "night," and food metaphors that render women consumable. Political actors are subjected to abstraction: The specificity of their political labor is stripped away and replaced by simplified moral tropes.

For example, a student activist's public visibility is recontextualized through a photocard-style post implying that she "enjoys" immoral relations with political comrades. By borrowing the canons of use of news discourse, it turns rumor into an apparently "reportable" event. Its integrated design—headline-like syntax, image–text coupling, outlet-like layout, and familiar platform-native formatting—creates a provisional epistemological commitment to truthfulness even though it is fabricated. The ideological effect is to recast visibility as sexualized, warranting public judgment and punishment. Comment-threads then reinterpret her prior complaints of harassment as evidence of consent, intensifying this situation through body-shaming and gang-rape insinuations. Deletion is crucial: The original harassment, political circumstances, and her own statements are erased. It follows a broader victim-blaming logic where public conduct is treated as evidence of culpability rather than grounds for protection (Lazar, 2018). The accusation only needs to become sufficiently understandable to authorize ridicule, participation, and punishment. Authenticity becomes secondary to social utility.

Pages targeting women who failed to secure electoral nominations recontextualize this outcome through a textual-sexual script, suggesting "their youths" were "used and discarded." Women's political legitimacy is thus reduced to "market value," recoding electoral exclusion as proof of female disposability rather than as an effect of party structures or nomination politics. Tropes of sexual transaction substitute for the nomination process, while obscene metaphors, emojis, and comment-threads add humiliating affect and evaluative force. Institutional selection processes, party structures, and political labor are deleted. Again, abstraction is central: A complex political event is rewritten as a familiar script of female disposability.

A related pattern recontextualizes women's speech acts through selective clipping, decontextualization, and sexualized recontextualization. Similar captions detach speeches from their political context for pornographic reinterpretation in the comments. Deletion and addition work together: The original setting, sequence, and argumentative content are removed, while captions and comments impose a preferred sexualized reading. The clip, caption, and thread function as layered multimodal semiotic resources whose different affordances recast speech as sexual invitation rather than argument (Machin & Mayr, 2023). Temporality also matters: Clipping freezes one moment of speech and detaches it from the unfolding sequence, converting situated political speech into a reused scandal fragment. Once ambition is framed as sexual, harassment can be legitimized as its corrective.

Purity discourse reframes harassment as deserved discipline. A recurrent argumentative pivot is: Even if fake, she deserves it. Users often acknowledge that a visual appears fabricated *and* proceed to treat it as proof of moral failure—effectively, "she's that type anyway." Evaluation becomes central: Women are assessed not vis-à-vis truth, but vis-à-vis respectability. It also works as perpetrator mitigation, since the attack's falsity or abusiveness is downplayed once the target is constructed as "already punishable," shifting accountability away from those who produce and circulate the harassment: Women are constituted not as rights-bearing subjects but as "contaminated" bodies whose punishment can precede evidence (Lazar, 2018).

Thus, recontextualization works not by establishing factuality but by making accusation morally actionable, also resembling misogynistic policing: Men's corruption or violence attracts comparatively less scrutiny, while women's public acts are rapidly converted into sexual scandal and character-based failure (Manne, 2018).

Misogyny is also intensified through colorism and appearance-based ridicule that displaces women's political messages altogether, mobilizing heteronormative femininity and colonial beauty hierarchies as criteria of political legitimacy. Dark-skinned women face racialized sexual insults, while mainstream news clips of speeches trigger comments fixated on whether a woman "looks like" a man, is "ugly," "drugged," or "transgender." Substitution replaces argument with appearance, evaluation degrades through lexical choices and uglified visuals, and women's actual speech is erased from the discourse, resulting in deletion. These moral sorting devices mark some bodies as "inherently unfit" for politics.

In another recurring pattern, prominent male commentators turn body-shaming into spectacle through file-compression metaphors about "reducing" women; comments then treat this degradation as collective "entertainment," using humor to normalize evaluative harassment. Women's bodies function metonymically: Particular features are made to stand for a woman's whole moral-political worth.

5.2. Disinformation as Disciplinary Arsenal

Harassment is operationalized through visual disinformation that both deceives and disciplines by making accusation appear evidentiary. These artifacts function as *credibility scaffolding*: They provide semiotic frames within which women can already be considered scandalous or sexually available, activating familiar misogynistic scripts before belief is established. Across cases, three recurrent forms stand out.

News-mimic photocards offer a clear recontextualizing sequence. They utilize the canons of use of news and an integrated design binding typography, image placement, logos, and syntax into a coherent visual whole to

create provisional credibility. They attach sexual allegations to women's faces in that borrowed format, substituting misogynistic insinuation for reportable public information. The template itself is a semiotic resource whose affordances condense allegations into a portable, recognizable form that can be rapidly recirculated. It lowers the threshold for participation, allowing users to respond en masse as though *encountering* evidence rather than *helping construct* it. It aligns with findings that the laughing emoji is used to mock gender equality, signaling that abuse is treated as entertainment (UN Women, 2023).

Pornographic-equivalent templates work through condensation, connotation, and structural opposition. Circulated images visually pair politicians with adult-film referents (e.g., equating women to adult-film stars' "younger sisters") to recode them as "sexually deviant." Political figures are substituted with pornographic identity-based templates, while evaluative meanings of impurity, desirability, and vulgarity are added through the pairing itself. Threads then debate "taste" and "desirability," extending the evaluation through comment-thread participation.

These semiotic resources of condensation compress a moral accusation into a highly recognizable cultural shorthand. The woman is represented metonymically as a stand-in for sexual vulgarity or shame. The layout's framing and spatialization matter: The juxtaposition organizes comparison spatially, making the intended analogy appear self-evident *before* it is verbally argued.

AI-enabled imagery—in intimate composites—circulates as humiliating "proof." Deepfakes of a politician kissing a male comrade, posted with teasing captions, show how synthetic media mobilizes disgust and voyeurism. Here, addition, evaluation, and deletion converge: Interpretive cues are inserted, the woman is morally assessed as "contaminated," and the political context is removed. Its disciplinary force lies in attaching sexual contamination to women's visibility, creating a memeable, discussable scene of intimacy. Visual form carries a particular epistemological commitment: Even when obviously questionable, the format presents itself as if it had captured an event, providing a basis of provenance for punitive inference.

Across these forms, whether an artifact is untrue matters less than how it is recontextualized: The decisive issue becomes whether it makes misogynistic accusation socially actionable. Participation becomes sexualized, and visual formats simulate evidence strongly enough to authorize collective harassment.

5.3. Weaponizing National, Religious, and Partisan Identities

Women also bear the burden of political antagonism because ideological disagreement is repeatedly re-routed through erotic loyalty, moral corruption, or national betrayal. Consequently, women's bodies become the terrain through which purity is defended.

One critical example is the binary opposition between the "Western(-aligned)" and the "proper" woman, reminiscent of the Madonna–whore complex. A caption frames a young leader as Western-aligned, reading her discussion of sexual health not as professional expertise but as evidence of shamelessness. She is juxtaposed with another female doctor-politician portrayed as "modest" and "locally rooted." It connotes foreign excess vs. contained national belonging, substituting politically relevant speech with a civilizational morality tale. The contrast evaluates by ranking femininities through cultural norms and recoding disagreement as a loyalty test.

Discourse here naturalizes a gendered-national order in which acceptable femininity must appear non-disruptive (Lazar, 2018). The juxtaposition is reinforced through framing and spatialization: Positioning the two women invites moral comparison, so that layout itself becomes part of the evaluative claim.

Posts attacking prominent feminist Bengali thinker Begum Rokeya operate similarly. They brand her as apostate and impure. Addition supplies emotional alignment, while evaluation reframes her through betrayal rather than contribution. Male defenders are ridiculed through emasculating lexical and visual choices in the comments, producing a script where solidarity with women becomes suspect. Rokeya is mobilized metonymically: as a condensed sign for feminism, moral disorder, and dangerous modernity.

Partisan warfare frequently proceeds through this mechanism. Women associated with male politicians are sexualized to shame the party itself. Real photographs are recontextualized through captions with insinuation, pulling relatives into the target field. Their political or relational positions are substituted with sexually evaluable identities. Women operate metonymically for the party or leader: Attacking the woman becomes a way of attacking the collective.

Internalized misogyny further reveals the durability of this discursive field. Women also participate in sexual shaming and body-based ridicule using the same vocabularies of purity and honor. It demonstrates how hegemonic the repertoire has become: Patriarchal discourse has normalized these evaluative frameworks as "common sense" across speakers (Lazar, 2018). Comments reacting to the government's proposal for greater women's parliamentary participation make it visible by disproportionately fixating on the single clause concerning women's inclusion, framing it as a "deal-breaker." The key operation is evaluation through apparently neutral language. Terms like "merit," "fairness," and "religion" function as a disciplining idiom that delegitimizes women's authority, while deletion removes structural barriers and entrenched male dominance, and women's inclusion is represented as an "unfair advantage." As another form of abstraction, historically structured exclusion, here, gets concealed beneath "neutrality."

Moralized misogyny functions as "permissible infrastructures"—as repeatable systems—for scaling harassment. Exposé pages operate through a recognizable content model where photos, sexual insinuation, humor disclaimers, and cross-platform links are coordinated to turn women's reputations into tradeable assets. Photocards further increase portability by allowing the same layout to be quickly adapted to new targets. The template's value lies in how it normalizes evaluation as content (Lazar, 2018; Ledin & Machin, 2018). These forms rely on stabilized canons of use and on the affordances of platform-native circulation to remain recognizable and easy to modify.

Meta-political memes can function as ambivalent counter-discourse. An adaptation of the Spider-Man-pointing-at-Spider-Man meme depicts rival factions accusing one another, highlighting a shared cross-partisan grammar of gendered delegitimization. Yet even this apparent critique extends moralized misogyny by trivializing it, repeating vulgar slurs for comic effect.

Finally, our corpus reveals how these attacks rely on a layered multimodal sequence—moving from a political trigger through textual, visual, and comment-based escalation, amplified by platform infrastructure (Figure 4). Manipulated visuals often launch the accusation, captions supply narrative direction, and comments elaborate sexual speculation. Different semiotic resources perform different recontextualizing

tasks to make harassment and disinformation inseparable. The image supplies apparent evidence, the caption directs interpretation, and the comments collectivize punishment. Women's visibility becomes the hook through which families and factions are pulled into reputational vulnerability. Harassment unfolds through escalation and accumulation, turning a political appearance into the trigger for subsequent waves of redistribution and punishment.

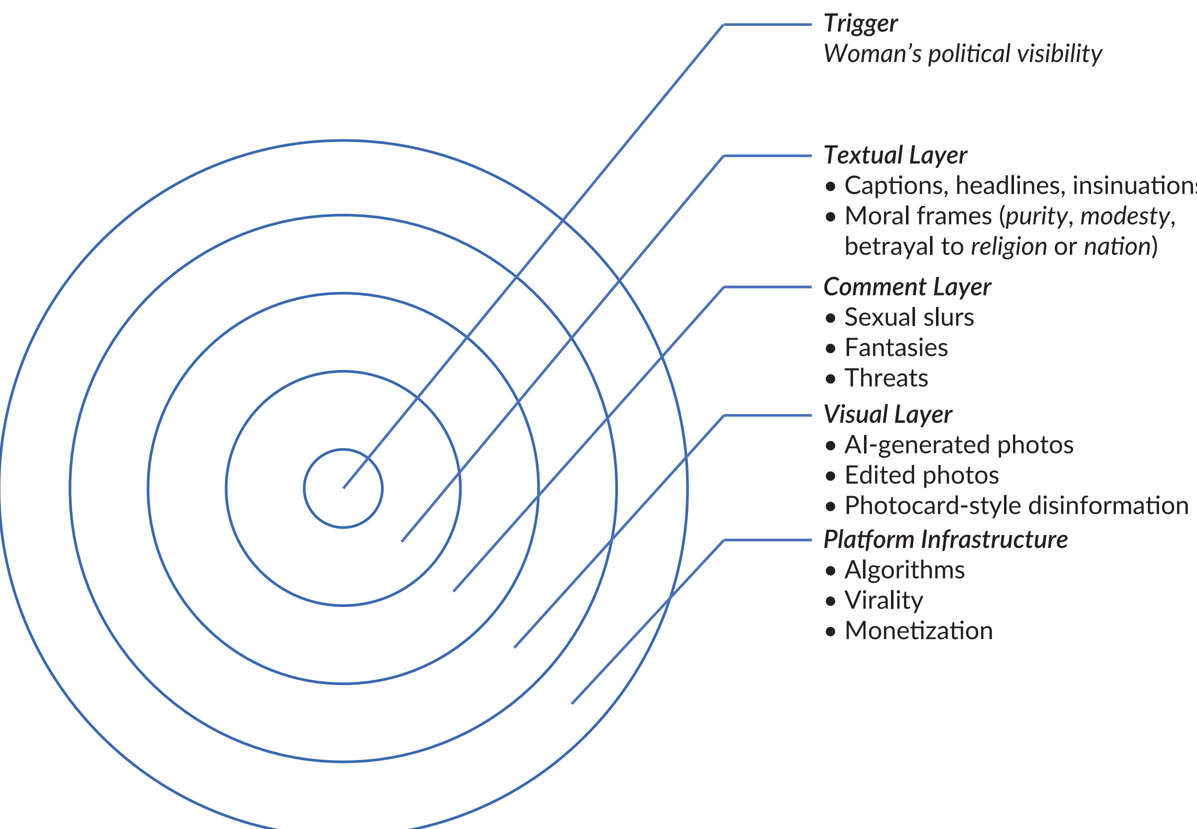

Figure 4. Multi-layered multimodal abuse.

A woman's testimony post describes renewed death threats immediately after her electoral participation became public. She notes that harassment may progress into synthetic video and edited sexualized visuals—an expectation empirically warranted in our corpus. The routine circulation of porn-equivalent photocards and exposé pages shows that sexualized recontextualization is anticipatory: Visibility itself becomes the condition for the next stage of punishment.

Moralized misogyny coalesces around specific, highly frequent thematic categories—summarized in Figure 5—that operate transversally *across* political parties. Together, these categories show a shared repertoire, recoding women's political visibility as publicly punishable transgression. Delegitimization functions less through factual adjudication than through moralized sorting: Targets are made politically unintelligible by being repositioned as "foreign agents," "shameless women," or "contaminating" figures.

Figure 5. Dominant tropes in the corpus.

6. Discussion

We set out to examine how gendered attacks targeting Bangladesh's politically visible women on Facebook function as a systemic form of moral-patriarchal governance rather than isolated hostility. We argue that these attacks operate as a coordinated disciplinary mechanism that recodes women's political visibility as moral transgression and thereby legitimizes crowd punishment as "corrective justice." Thus, harassment functions as the operational arm of "entitled sexism" (Manne, 2018): Vigilantes treat women's political participation not as a democratic right but as a theft of masculine space. What appears as online abuse is therefore better understood as a structural exclusion strategy that converts political difference into sexual deviance, failed femininity, or national-religious disloyalty.

Theoretically, we develop "moralized misogyny" as a specific mode of political delegitimation in which women's public visibility is reclassified through vocabularies of purity, modesty, loyalty, and respectability, then made actionable through multimodal evidence-making and participatory uptake. We also extend Manne's (2018) account of misogyny into an underexplored Global South setting where religious-nationalist codes intensify that enforcement by fusing shame with betrayal. Methodologically, our MCDA–FCDA integration captures high-context, infrastructural harms—news-mimic photocards, recontextualized screenshots, and AI-generated image-based sexual abuse—evading narrow moderation systems focused only on explicit abuse. Empirically, we show how these artifacts scaffold credibility, trivializing misogyny as consumable content. Analytically, we identify a cross-ideological/factional moral grammar through which netizens exercise a "moral veto" over

women's inclusion. Our contribution lies in specifying the mechanism through which patriarchal moral codes are operationalized.

Our findings consistently show that women are not primarily engaged as political opponents/actors but as violators of binding social norms (Marwick, 2021). Although women may be attacked for party affiliation or policies, these remain secondary to a more fundamental accusation: that women's *very presence* in political space is considered morally illegitimate. Once this framing is established, harassment becomes socially performative—a spectacle of enforcement warning women not to exceed their status as "givers" through public ambition—and utilitarian. It helps explain perpetrators' visible pleasure and self-righteousness. They do not necessarily consider themselves violent. Rather, they cast their conduct as a "moral duty" to defend community norms against women's public agency. Thus, while words and images inflict injury (Krook, 2020, Chapter 16), the larger structure is one of vigilante enforcement that renders women's political citizenship conditional (Manne, 2018). The crowd deputizes itself to exact the "price of participation," shifting patriarchal enforcement from domestic coercion into a public, technological mechanism (Prillaman, 2023).

This enforcement relies on the "common sense" character of gender ideology: "discursively sustained assumptions" that naturalize power asymmetries (Lazar, 2018). The proposal for women's inclusion shows it clearly. The proposal was treated *not* as policy but as a "contaminating [sic] clause" that rendered the whole package "unacceptable." Comments often adopted the apparently neutral language of "merit," anti-quota fairness, or religion, yet these idioms disciplined women while masking unequal power relations. By mobilizing liberal discourse against "substantive equality" (Gouws, 1999), users transformed fairness into a pretext for keeping political authority culturally masculine and religiously policed. Here, discourse operated as a micro-legislature in which users sought to encode women's exclusion into the normative logic of the political order. Specifically, it was a form of platformized patriarchal bargaining: Users held their votes hostage to secure women's exclusion as a condition of legitimacy.

If moral accusation provides the warrant for harassment, visuals provide the evidence, packaging, and infrastructure. Creators manipulated provenance by borrowing the aesthetic codes of legitimate journalism—sans-serif fonts, breaking-news banners, red tickers—to make misogynistic claims appear reportable and evidentiary. The forms supply *credibility scaffolding*, converting dehumanizing accusations into standardized, easily shareable political content. They also made harassment appear ordinary rather than exceptional. Their persistence is further enabled by metacommunication and playfulness (Ledin & Machin, 2018): When content is circulated as "satire," "humor," or "just a meme," perpetrators gain plausible deniability while lowering the crowd's inhibitions. It helps explain a central pattern in our corpus: Belief is often secondary. Users participate not necessarily because they fully accept a claim as true, but because circulation itself performs delegitimization, enables ritualized shaming, and signals in-group belonging. Facebook's affordances intensify this environment, making clicking, sharing, and reacting part of the punitive act.

Moralized misogyny becomes even clearer with deepfakes and AI-generated image-based sexual abuse. FCDA's "constitutive view of discourse" becomes crucial: Discourse does not merely describe identities but actively produces them (Lazar, 2018). Through the interdiscursivity of mixing political imagery with pornographic tropes, deepfakes do not simply misrepresent the female politician; they rewrite her, producing a hybrid identity of the "political whore" that can eclipse professional capacity altogether. So, technical

interventions alone are insufficient. Labels marking content as “disinformation” do not undo its core harm, because that harm does not depend only on deception. It depends on violated consent, public humiliation, and circulation. Even when viewers recognize the material as synthetic, the attack remains injurious because the woman’s body has already been publicly reconstituted as evidence of sexual-moral failure.

Bangladeshi women are disproportionately threatened with rape and death, specifically when they talk about politics (UN Women, 2023). Our findings show how audiences help complete that violence through dogpiling, link-seeking, and intersemiotic approval. Violence is not linear but triangular and participatory. Ordinary users are not passive consumers of disinformation either. They act as enforcers who amplify, validate, and extend it, showing that gendered disinformation often works through distributed participation (Gehrke & Amit-Danhi, 2025). Once accusations are boosted by prominent nodes, ordinary users join in to display adherence to group norms (Marwick, 2021). In our corpus, attacks often involved deploying triggering terms related to gang rape and choking, or portraying women who refused to disengage as “cowards” or “weak,” thereby punishing resistance itself. Harassment thus functions simultaneously as punishment and as public proof of belonging.

Gendered disinformation creates anticipatory vulnerability. Harm is not confined to the moment of attack but alters the conditions of women’s political life by making harassment appear as expected. Deepfakes intensify this environment because they manipulate experiential meaning itself. By combining visual and auditory semiotic resources, they produce hyper-realistic fabrication whose force exceeds text alone. Materiality becomes weaponized because textures, color, and resolution shape perception directly (Ledin & Machin, 2018). Targets’ bodies are inserted into pornographic narratives against their will; even when viewers know the content is fake, their visceral force can produce immediate reputational and psychological damage. Once circulated, harm becomes cumulative, searchable, and portable, rendering harassment mundane.

This mechanism also produces conditional citizenship. Pejorative labels like “Shahbagi” (a Bangla term used indiscriminately to mark someone as secular-liberal, leftist, or morally/politically suspect) or “Western agent” function as revocable tests of belonging, akin to the situational criteria used to police the national “us” (Huang, 2023). Their definitional emptiness is a strength rather than a flaw: By leaving the boundary of legitimacy unspecified, users can redraw it across shifting political contexts, continually converting women’s visibility into evidence of betrayal and keeping the moral warrant for harassment permanently available.

Women’s political speech (an unmarked action) is routinely ignored, while their gender, attributes, and propriety (marked characteristics) become the primary sites of assault. Because women’s policy positions are strategically irrelevant to vigilantes, gendered moral accusations—especially the “sexually voracious woman” trope—replace political critique as a means of stripping women of professional capacity (Liao, 2024). This policing mechanism enforces the “gendered dichotomization of public and private spheres” (Lazar, 2018) by exploiting womanhood’s “vulnerability” in a patriarchal society. By concentrating on these identity-based attack vectors, harassment can reduce a political agent to a physical body, illustrating how MMNH systematically removes minoritized voices from the public sphere (Marwick, 2021). Consequently, harm does not merely damage reputation; it structuralizes women’s exclusion from public life.

Counter-discourses *do* appear in reporting, legal threats, and institutional statements. But polarization frequently fragments them. Harassment is often denounced when it targets “our” women and reproduced

when it targets rival women, revealing why moralized misogyny functions not as an isolated partisan deviation but as a shared political strategy across camps (Marwick, 2021). Political antagonism may sustain the appearance of ideological conflict while converging in practice around a common pattern of disciplining women. Women shaming other women is especially revealing, because it signals the depth of patriarchal discursive constraint rather than its absence. By raising the participation costs of visibility across factions, the system ensures that women's political citizenship remains continuously subject to moral revocation.

Simultaneously, our claims are bounded. This study was not designed as a systematic comparative corpus across genders or target groups, and we do not claim to analyze exhaustively how *all* political actors are attacked online. However, illustrative, contrastive observations from the same spaces are revealing. Male political actors were also vilified, but more often through accusations of corruption, violence, opportunism, factional betrayal, or incompetence. Women's political visibility, contrastingly, was repeatedly recoded through sexual impropriety, shame, and respectability. The distortion thus lies not simply in the *existence* of harassment but in the *distinctive sexual-moral coding* through which women are made publicly punishable, also reflected in recent reports of coordinated digital warfare against women politicians (Jahan, 2026).

The broader significance of moralized misogyny extends beyond Bangladesh, even though Bangladesh should be considered paradigmatic of the mechanisms outlined here rather than universally representative. Bangladesh's context makes visible a wider transnational pattern: moralizing women's public-political presence and using media artifacts to convert accusation into participatory sanction. As noted earlier, women's bodies are especially moralized (Morgenroth et al., 2025), and female political figures are often framed as immoral (Huang, 2023; Sakki & Martikainen, 2022). While Bangladesh's pattern appears in an especially acute form, it also reflects a wider regional crisis (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2025) and broader "discursive logics" across the Global South (Lazar, 2018). These dynamics, however, are not confined to a simple Global South/Global North divide, since polarized moral narratives also drive abuse in established democracies (Barker & Jurasz, 2019; Marwick, 2021; Morgenroth et al., 2025; Sakki & Martikainen, 2022). Misogyny is transnational, repeatedly framing women's engagement as a moralized threat in order to deter future participation.

The broader ecology of these attacks can be read through Trottier's (2017) concept of nodal governance, in which the policing of social norms is distributed *beyond* formal institutions. Thus, enforcement is partially crowdsourced to private netizens, allowing punitive and networked norm enforcement to occur without direct institutional action. While the state may formally commit to gender equity, the persistence of these attacks shows how vigilante practices can still help sustain exclusionary norms in ways that benefit from ambiguity, deniability, and inaction. Women may retain formal citizenship, but politics remains a "masculine sphere" in which men monopolize power (Lister, 1997). Moralized misogyny thus functions as an informal enforcement mechanism that helps protect that monopoly and curtail women's political agency.

Furthermore, as misogyny is "self-masking" (Manne, 2018), efforts to name harassment as violence are easily reinterpreted as evidence that women are "playing the victim" or demanding illegitimate special treatment, thereby inviting further abuse. Current remedies also remain inadequate. User-reporting systems place an unreasonable burden on women while enabling the crowd to cast harassers as defenders of social values and targets as transgressors. Platform inaction is not merely technical failure but a structural prioritization of engagement over safety.

Echo chamber effects, amplified by right-wing and populist actors, intensify anti-feminist rhetoric and suppress dissent through sheer scale (Barker & Jurasz, 2019). In Bangladesh, it is also visible in the coordination of digilantism campaigns across platforms to manufacture a sustained hostile environment. Women are punished more harshly than men for perceived moral violations because they are judged against patriarchal norms and traditional expectations of feminine quietude (Marwick, 2021). Bangladesh's women are not simply criticized or voted against, but disciplined for infractions that male politicians routinely survive (see also Jahan, 2026).

Consequently, our study functions as a form of "analytical activism" (Lazar, 2018) by naming a mechanism too often treated as "common sense." Effective interventions require dismantling the logic of these attacks by bridging technical fixes with social realities (see Figure 6). The key implication is that gendered disinformation should be reframed less as a problem of falsehood than as one of equality harm. Among the countries studied by UN Women (2023), Bangladesh showed the highest proportion of help-seeking search behavior related to misogyny, yet platforms and legal systems fail to recognize these harms' specific moral grammars.

Platforms need interdisciplinary moderation that combines technical detection with sociological expertise and culturally grounded human review capable of recognizing high-context local moral idioms, humor, and multimodal content. Rapid-response mechanisms are especially necessary for AI-generated image-based sexual abuse, where delay consolidates harm. Civil society and legal institutions, meanwhile, must treat vigilantism not as isolated individual injury but as evidence that harassment operates as a barrier to political equity. By validating these harms through cross-partisan solidarity and recognizing the semiotic violence of manipulated visuals, institutions can counter vigilante moral authority, thereby mitigating the chilling effect on women's political participation.

RECOMMENDATIONS	*Prioritizing context-aware moderation*
	Ensuring rapid response to visual disinformation
	Mobilizing data-driven countermeasures
	Challenging vigilante authority
	Redefining disinformation as equality harm

Figure 6. Recommended interventions against moralized misogyny targeting politically visible women.

7. Conclusion

By tracing attacks on politically visible women in post-uprising Bangladesh's Facebook sphere, we show that moralized misogyny functions as informal patriarchal governance: Through multimodal evidence-making, it recodes women's visibility as moral transgression, legitimizes crowd punishment, and conditions women's political citizenship by raising the costs of visibility.

Our limitations also point to future directions. Focusing exclusively on Facebook—though justified by its dominance in Bangladesh—limits generalizability across platform architectures, e.g., X or Instagram. Restricting analysis to *only* publicly accessible content leaves the wider "abuse stack" only partly visible, especially the ways attacks may funnel targets into encrypted "dark social" spaces like Telegram. While

non-participant observation is effective for identifying harassment as a structural mechanism, it cannot reveal perpetrators' subjective justifications directly. Future research should therefore combine cross-platform comparison with attention to class, locality, religion, political affiliation, and other social positions, alongside perpetrator-focused inquiry, to better understand how differing architectures, norms, and rationalizations sustain this form of exclusion.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

Data Availability

Due to the highly sensitive nature of the data, research materials cannot be publicly disclosed.

LLMs Disclosure

ChatGPT (version 5) and Google Gemini (3.1 Pro) were used exclusively for language editing purposes.

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the authors (unedited).

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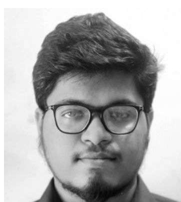

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