



The Success of the July Revolution Movement in Overthrowing the Government of Sheikh Hasina in Bangladesh in 2024

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the dynamics of the July Revolution Movement that overthrew Sheikh Hasina's government in Bangladesh. The movement emerged after the government reversed its plan to abolish the quota system for descendants of independence fighters in civil service recruitment — a policy widely regarded as discriminatory and as reinforcing political patronage. What began as student protests focused on a specific policy issue grew into demands for Sheikh Hasina's resignation. This study employs a qualitative approach using Braun and Clarke's (2006) deductive thematic analysis method. Political process theory serves as the thematic framework, encompassing three elements: political opportunities, mobilizing structures, and framing processes. The findings indicate that a crisis of legitimacy, military neutrality, and elite opposition support created political opportunities for the movement. Mobilization was led by a student alliance, expanded through digital networks, and supported by civil society. The framing process utilized symbols, art, and social media to build emotional solidarity and reinforce resistance narratives. The interaction of these three elements enabled the movement to drive changes in the power structure, ultimately ending Sheikh Hasina's rule.

Keyword:

July Revolution Movement,
Students, Sheikh Hasina,
Quota System, Political
Process Theory

INTRODUCTION

Social movements represent one of the most important elements in the dynamics of political transformation and social change, particularly in countries experiencing democratic

backsliding and the consolidation of authoritarian regimes. In such political climates, social movements not only serve as outlets for expressing discontent but also act as agents that challenge state authority and offer counter-narratives to formal power structures. In recent decades, this phenomenon has been evident in large-scale mobilizations such as the Anti-Coup Movement in Myanmar (2021), the Pro-Democracy Movement in Hong Kong (2014 and 2019–2020), the civilian uprising in Sudan (2018–2019), and the Arab Spring across Africa and the Middle East (2010–2011) (Alam et al., 2025). These movements emerged in response to systematic patterns of repression and the weakening of democratic institutions in their respective countries.

One contemporary example of a similar pattern of resistance is the July Revolution Movement in Bangladesh in 2024. This movement arose from the accumulation of grievances over various structural crises, including political repression, economic inequality, and the erosion of democratic values. Its primary trigger was the reversal of the abolition of quotas for descendants of Bangladesh's independence fighters in civil service recruitment policy. This policy was perceived as discriminatory because it obstructed access for more qualified job seekers and was used as an instrument of political patronage by the Awami League party (Corea & Erum, 2024; Hushen, 2024). The decision drew protests and rejection from students and job seekers beginning in June 2024. These protests subsequently grew into a national movement led by students from various universities through the formation of the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement alliance in July 2024. The movement had four main demands: the abolition of the discriminatory quota system, a fairer distribution of affirmative quotas, a prohibition on repeated use of quotas, and the reform of the recruitment system to make it more meritocratic (Akter, 2024). The protest actions employed disruptive tactics such as road and transportation blockades (Bangla Blockade), mass strikes (*hartal*), sit-ins, and a Long March to Dhaka.

The government's response to the movement was repressive, marked by the negative labeling of students as "*razakaar*" — a politically charged term historically applied to national traitors — as well as physical attacks by security forces and Chhatra League, the student wing of the Awami League party (Parmar, 2024; Tanima & George, 2025). The government's repressive actions transformed peaceful protests into large-scale clashes, resulting in numerous casualties and unrest across various cities in Bangladesh. The violence against demonstrators, documented and widely shared through social media, escalated the conflict and broadened support and protest participation across social groups. By the end of July 2024, the movement's demands — initially focused only on reforming civil service recruitment policy — had shifted to calls for Sheikh Hasina's resignation and her accountability for the violence, deaths, and abductions that occurred during the protests. The protests reached their peak on August 5, 2024, through the Long March to Dhaka, in which hundreds of thousands of Bangladeshis converged to besiege Sheikh Hasina in the city of Dhaka. This action successfully forced Sheikh Hasina to flee to India and announce her resignation as Prime Minister (Yee & Ripon, 2024).

While the July Revolution Movement succeeded in ousting Sheikh Hasina and driving a transfer of power, it is more accurately categorized as a social movement than a formal political movement. Della Porta and Diani (2006) identify three defining characteristics of social movements: conflictual relations toward power, informal networks with high mobilizing capacity, and collective identity grounded in shared values. All three are evident in this case — from resistance against state policy and repression, to the involvement of students and

civil society without institutional structures, to solidarity built on the basis of shared oppression rather than electoral interests. Unlike political movements that operate within formal arenas such as elections and lobbying, the July Revolution Movement demonstrated horizontal, morally-grounded mobilization dynamics from outside the system.

Despite being one of the most notable examples of a successful social movement in Bangladesh or South Asia, scholarly analysis of the July Revolution Movement remains limited. Existing studies tend to focus on the expressive dimensions of the movement. Afrin (2024), for instance, examines how memes were used to construct shared meaning and channel collective frustration in digital spaces during the July Revolution Movement. Ahana (2024) describes how visual art, writing, and music emerged as media of protest that expanded the political imagination of society during the movement. Hushen (2024), meanwhile, traces how students leveraged Facebook to strengthen coordination, broaden the reach of actions, and enhance field mobilization during the protests. Similarly, earlier studies on social movements or protests in Bangladesh — such as Jackman (2020) and Roy (2019), which examined the 2018 Quota Reform Movement and the 2013 Shahbagh Movement — generally position students as moral actors and emphasize identity expression and the use of digital spaces in protest actions. At the regional level, studies on protests in Asia also tend to map state repression, digital manipulation, and tactical adaptation without explaining how such actions develop into threats to power (Choi & Kim, 2019; Lukito et al., 2022; Estuar et al., 2013). Therefore, the July Revolution Movement remains insufficiently analyzed in terms of how a student-based, informal, and morally-rooted movement can evolve into a revolutionary force capable of influencing regime change.

This gap calls for a theoretical framework that not only describes the expressive and cultural dimensions of the movement, but also explains the structural conditions that open opportunities for mobilization and the framing processes that enable the movement to expand and gain public legitimacy. Political Process Theory is relevant to filling this gap, as it offers a framework of three key analytical elements for understanding the development and success of social movements: political opportunities, mobilizing structures, and framing processes (Caren, 2007). These three elements make this approach more comprehensive than New Social Movement Theory — which focuses on identity and values — and Resource Mobilization Theory — which emphasizes organizational capacity and strategic calculation, but does not fully explain how mobilization potential forms under conditions of repression (Klandermans, 1986). The selection of political process theory also aims to provide a theoretical contribution by explaining the causal mechanisms that bridge changes in the political context, students' mobilizing capacity, and the rapid spread of anti-regime narratives. This approach not only fills the gap in studies of student movements in Bangladesh, but also extends the application of political process theory to the context of authoritarian regimes in the Global South — a context that has thus far rarely been analyzed within the same framework. Through this approach, this study aims to explain how the July Revolution Movement evolved from a rejection of the quota policy into a collective force that successfully drove a shift in power.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach using deductive thematic analysis adapted from Braun and Clarke (2006). According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is

the process of identifying patterns of meaning in data through flexible and interpretive stages. Deductive thematic analysis itself is an approach in which themes are determined in advance through a process of data selection, data mapping onto themes, and interpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This approach was chosen because it enables researchers to organize and interpret data systematically based on theoretically predetermined themes. As previously noted, the three key elements of political process theory — political opportunities, mobilizing structures, and framing processes — are established as thematic categories that form the basis for reading and interpreting the data.

The unit of analysis in this study encompasses texts and information drawn from journal articles, news articles, reports from international organizations, academic publications, and official documents that describe the chronology and context of the movement. Data were collected through digital documentation, then read in their entirety as a familiarization stage. Data segments containing relevant information were selected and grouped into three thematic categories before being analyzed to identify patterns consistent with the political process theory framework.

Data validity was maintained through source triangulation, comparing findings across multiple documents to ensure consistency of information. This step was taken to prevent the analysis from relying on a single type of source. The entire process of selection, grouping, and interpretation was recorded systematically to ensure transparency and traceability, in accordance with the principles of procedural clarity in thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

To facilitate the analytical process, this study employs the following deductive thematic analysis model:

Table 1. Deductive Thematic Analysis Model

Theme	Analytical Focus	Type of Data Identified	Interpretive Approach
Political Opportunities	External factors that open space or trigger the emergence of the movement	Political conditions, state policy, elite dynamics	Analyzing how these conditions create opportunities for the movement
Mobilizing Structures	Mechanisms of organization and movement networks	Actors, social networks, coordination patterns	Reading how structure supports mobilizing capacity
Framing Processes	Narratives, meanings, and political messages constructed by the movement	Slogans, demands, media framing	Interpreting how framing influences participation

Source: table compiled by the authors (2025)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Chronology of the Protest and Revolution Movement

Before becoming a mass movement, the July Revolution Movement was fundamentally rooted in a long history of protests against the quota system in civil service recruitment in Bangladesh. This quota system was first introduced by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman — the country's first president and founding figure of the Awami League party — in 1972. The system generated widespread public discontent, as it was seen as creating discrimination in access to civil service employment. Descendants of independence fighters (and their descendants), known as loyalists of the Awami League party (Sheikh Hasina's party), were allocated a 30% quota, while marginalized groups and merit-based applicants shared the remaining portion. This quota imbalance was viewed as inconsistent with the population's actual composition and was seen as further entrenching political patronage practices.

Protests against this system had been ongoing since its implementation and had appeared at various scales. In 2018, a wave of protests surged dramatically amid an unstable political and economic environment in Bangladesh. Initiated by students, these protests occurred sporadically from February 2018 and subsequently grew into a national mobilization that peaked in July 2018. The protest movement caused widespread disruption and clashes between demonstrators and security forces throughout 2018. Ultimately, the government responded to public pressure by announcing it would abolish the quota system. On October 4, 2018, the Bangladesh Ministry of Public Administration issued an official circular declaring the elimination of quotas from civil service recruitment, with positions to be filled 100% based on merit. This decision temporarily eased tensions, though small protests continued afterward.

The situation shifted again following the elections in early 2024, when the Awami League once again won and Sheikh Hasina returned to office as Prime Minister of Bangladesh. On June 5, 2024, the Bangladesh Supreme Court overturned the government's 2018 decision and reinstated the quota allocation for descendants of independence fighters. This ruling was widely perceived as a betrayal of the political commitment to social justice reform. The decision immediately triggered a new wave of protests across campuses and major cities in Bangladesh.

On July 1, 2024, student protests that had been emerging sporadically coalesced into a national movement with the formation of the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement alliance. The movement put forward several demands: reform of the quota system, a fairer affirmative distribution for minority groups and people with disabilities, a prohibition on using quotas more than once, and reform of the recruitment system to make it more merit-based and free from corruption. Actions were carried out through various forms of protest, including the Bangla Blockade, which blocked major roads and transportation routes. In mid-July 2024, the intensity of protests escalated following clashes with government student wing organizations such as Chhatra League.

Faced with an increasingly uncontrollable situation, the government began imposing repressive measures. Security forces — including the Bangladesh Police, Rapid Action Battalion, and Border Guard Bangladesh — were deployed in large numbers to suppress

protests through arrests, abductions, and physical assaults. Physical violence against protest participants was also carried out by Chhatra League and other pro-government organizational wings. Repression was further intensified through internet shutdowns, mass arrests, enforced disappearances, and intimidation of activists. However, this sweeping repressive approach failed to suppress the protests and instead ignited public outrage, forging solidarity that had long accumulated in response to limited public participation, inflation, economic inequality, and various human rights violations.

Growing public pressure prompted the government to open a space for negotiation. Representatives of the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement were invited to meet with the government on July 19 and 22, 2024, but these meetings ended with the abduction and detention of movement representatives. On July 21, 2024, the Supreme Court announced a reduction of the quota from 56% to 7% (restricted to minority groups only) and abolished the quota for independence fighter descendants. Yet the government's abduction and torture of student representatives had provoked fresh outrage. This caused clashes to flare up again on July 29, 2024, and the movement's demands expanded to include justice for human rights violations and calls for Sheikh Hasina's resignation.

Symbolic actions such as the March for Justice and Remembering Our Heroes were carried out by student groups and civil society to strengthen the collective memory of victims and broaden the support base. Public support and legitimacy for Sheikh Hasina began to erode, and on August 3, 2024, student and civil society representatives launched the Non-Cooperation Movement, aimed at pressuring Sheikh Hasina to step down from her position as Prime Minister. The movement's protests reached their peak on August 5, 2024, through the Long March to Dhaka, which involved hundreds of thousands of participants marching toward the city of Dhaka. The action laid siege to Sheikh Hasina's residence in Dhaka. Despite the massive unrest, the march proceeded without military intervention and successfully compelled Sheikh Hasina to flee Bangladesh and announce her resignation. What had begun as a movement focused on a single discriminatory policy ultimately evolved into a revolution that ended Sheikh Hasina's hold on power.

Political Opportunities in the July Revolution Movement

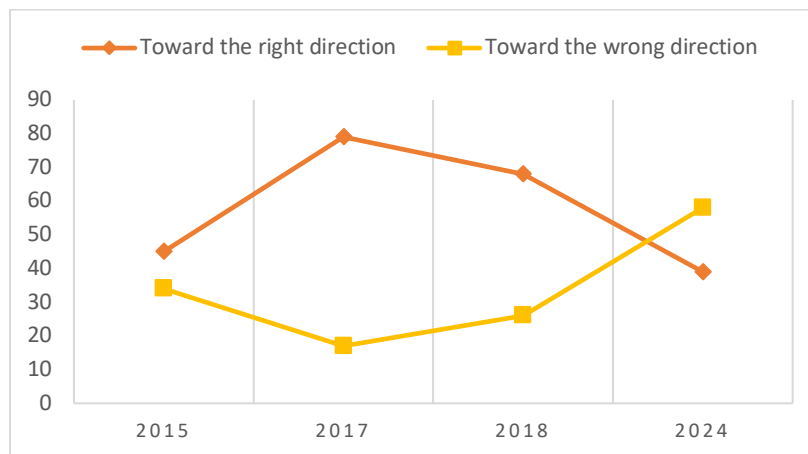
As McAdam (1982) explains, political opportunities are conditions within the political system that can enable social movements to grow and succeed. In the context of the July Revolution Movement, the primary trigger for student protests was the Bangladesh Supreme Court's decision to reinstate the quota allocation for descendants of independence fighters in civil service recruitment — a decision that overturned the government's own 2018 commitment and reignited public frustration with a patronage system rooted in lineage. However, the emergence and success of a movement are not solely attributable to public grievances or anger. Social movements can grow effectively when certain external conditions exist: socio-economic crises that undermine state legitimacy, fractures within government elite alliances, weakening state repressive capacity, and conditions of excessive authoritarianism or repression (McAdam, 1982).

Since Sheikh Hasina rose to power in 2008, the Awami League became the ruling party that occupied nearly all parliamentary seats, leaving no meaningful opposition capable of providing checks and balances in governance. In social life, many citizens faced criminalization or political violence for opposing the government. From October 2018 to

September 2023, there were 7,001 cases of criminalization under the digital security law. The Bangladesh Centre for Law and Arbitration recorded that, from 2009 to 2023, as many as 2,617 people were killed in shootouts, armed confrontations, violent arrests, or as a result of torture in police custody (Mustafa, 2024). In economic terms, while Sheikh Hasina's rule produced statistical economic growth, it was accompanied by very high inflation: by 2021, inflation in Bangladesh reached 5.5%, and by 2024 it had risen further to 10.5%.

Public frustration over these structural issues was captured in survey data conducted by The Asia Foundation, which surveyed Bangladeshi citizens on their perceptions of political, economic, and social issues following Sheikh Hasina's reelection in 2024. The survey found that, broadly, 58% of respondents felt the country was "moving in the wrong direction," 39% felt it was "moving in the right direction," and the remainder did not know or declined to answer. See the following chart:

Chart 1. Public Perception of Bangladesh's Direction of Development (2015–2024)



Source: data reprocessed by the authors from The Asia Foundation (2024)

The survey also identified the main reasons for this assessment as rising basic commodity prices, low wages and employment opportunities, corruption, increasing poverty, and political instability (Hassan et al., 2024). This was further reflected in the declining voter turnout in Bangladesh's 2024 elections, which fell to just 40.8% — a sharp drop from 80.2% in 2018 — indicating a crisis of public confidence in the democratic process and weakening the legitimacy of Sheikh Hasina's re-election. This deteriorating socio-economic and political situation created political opportunities for the protest movement to gain broad support, enabling it to reach across class and group lines — including civil society and segments of the elite — thereby expanding mobilizing capacity and strengthening pressure on the state.

A further political opportunity that bolstered the July Revolution Movement was the support and involvement of political elite actors who had previously been marginalized by Sheikh Hasina's regime. For more than a decade, Sheikh Hasina had systematically weakened opposition parties through criminalization, the disbanding of affiliated organizations, and the arrest of their leading figures. This generated resentment and tensions among political elites that ultimately backfired on Sheikh Hasina, as their support shifted toward the movement. This support came from several major parties, including the

Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), Jamaat-e-Islami, Gono Odhikar Parishad, Bangladesh Jatiya Party (BJP), and Amar Bangladesh Party (Chowdhury, 2024).

By mid-July 2024, affiliated organizations of these parties had begun to actively participate in demonstrations organized by the July Revolution Movement. Student wings such as Bangladesh Jatiotabadi Chatradal (BNP) and Islami Chhatrashibir (Jamaat-e-Islami), along with organizational wings including the Youth Front, Labor Party, Peasant Party, and BNP's metropolitan networks, all joined the protests alongside the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement. Their participation expanded the social and geographic spectrum of the movement, reached grassroots constituencies beyond university campuses, and strengthened the logistics and coordination of actions, thereby increasing the scale of the movement (Chowdhury, 2024). Nonetheless, their support and involvement in the July Revolution Movement was not formally structured or bound by organizational ties. These political elites were not under the command of the July Revolution Movement nor were they part of the movement's coordinating body; rather, they participated from outside the movement by mobilizing their own constituencies to protest and demonstrate.

Beyond the civilian sphere and political parties, the military's position became a crucial factor in creating political opportunities for the movement. When the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement alliance announced its plans for the Long March to Dhaka in early August 2024, the government reportedly requested military assistance to form armed barricades to prevent the march. However, two days before the action, Army Chief of Staff General Waker-Uz-Zaman, together with former Chief of Staff M. Nuruddin Khan, publicly declared that the military would not intervene. They expressed concern over the high number of civilian casualties and refused military involvement in confronting the protests (Paul et al., 2024). The military's refusal to comply with the government's request to suppress the Long March to Dhaka marked a turning point in the dynamics of power — for the first time, one of the state's primary pillars of strength was no longer standing behind Sheikh Hasina.

The military's neutrality and refusal to suppress the movement also signaled a fracture in the elite alliance and a withdrawal of military support for Sheikh Hasina's government. This decision had the effect of weakening the regime's repressive capacity, thereby encouraging public participation in large numbers as fear of state violence was significantly reduced. In this situation, the public perceived that the government had lost its most powerful coercive instrument (Paul et al., 2024). The Long March to Dhaka ultimately proceeded without military obstruction and became the final decisive blow that drove Sheikh Hasina to flee to India and announce her resignation as Prime Minister on August 5, 2024.

Finally, the political opportunities within the July Revolution Movement were shaped not only by domestic factors, but also by geopolitical dynamics that undermined the external legitimacy of Sheikh Hasina's regime. In recent years, the United States, Western nations, and the United Nations had consistently criticized democratic backsliding and human rights violations in Bangladesh. Beginning in 2021, the United States imposed sanctions on Bangladeshi political elites, including the elite Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), on allegations of human rights violations. The U.S. also excluded Bangladesh from the Democracy Summit in both 2021 and 2023. Relations further deteriorated after Sheikh Hasina rejected the establishment of a U.S. military base on Saint Martin's Island in the Bay of Bengal. Ahead of Bangladesh's 2024 elections, the United States implemented visa restriction policies against individuals deemed to be undermining the democratic process (Ramachandran, 2024b).

While these external pressures were not a direct trigger of the revolution and involved no participation in protests or the movement itself, such pressures and policies indirectly constrained the room for political elites to pursue repressive actions, intimidated the military through diplomatic pressure, and strengthened the moral standing of the movement in the eyes of both domestic and international audiences.

Mobilizing Structures in the July Revolution Movement

In addition to political opportunities, the success of social movements is also shaped by the strength of mobilizing structures that underpin collective action in an organized manner. These structures encompass the networks, organizations, and coordination mechanisms that enable movements to sustain and grow (McAdam et al., 1996). In the context of the July Revolution Movement, the mobilizing structure that served as the primary engine of mobilization was the student alliance known as the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement (*Baishammo Virudhi Chhatra Andolan*). This alliance was formally established on July 1, 2024, following a series of sporadic actions in the preceding month demanding reform of the quota system in civil service recruitment (Akter, 2024). In its early stage, the alliance comprised 65 coordinating members representing various campuses across Bangladesh. As the protests continued and more universities across the country joined, the number of coordinating members expanded to 158 (Chowdhury, 2024).

In addition, the movement's alliance had principal coordinating leaders who also served as the public faces of the movement, including Abu Sayed, Ali Ahsan Zunayed, Asif Mahmud, Hasnat Abdullah, Mahfuz Alam, Nahid Islam, Sarjis Alam, and Shadik Kaye (Akter, 2024). They played an important role in uniting students who felt discriminated against by the quota policy and frustrated with Sheikh Hasina's authoritarian government. Through this collective leadership, the alliance successfully planned and organized major actions, including the Bangla Blockade, March for Justice, Remembering Our Heroes, Non-Cooperation Movement, and Long March to Dhaka. The existence of this alliance was critical because it served as the primary organizing force, connected campus networks across regions, and kept the movement's direction consistent.

Beyond formal organizational networks, the movement's mobilizing structure also rested on the strategic use of digital platforms. To reach participants beyond campuses and student groups, the movement's alliance also used social media platforms — Facebook, Instagram, X, and Telegram — for coordination and the dissemination of information about the movement's agenda and protest developments. Facebook pages and groups were the most dominant platform used, as affirmed by movement coordinators Hasanat Abdullah and Sarjis Alam (Hushen, 2024). Facebook pages and groups — including *Baishammo Virudhi Chhatra Andolan* — were created in various regions as communication channels between students and members of the public who wished to engage with and support the movement. Through these channels, information about protest schedules, field conditions, documentation of violence, and invitations to digital activism — such as profile photo changes and online campaigns — were shared intensively (Hushen, 2024). These digital networks allowed protest organizing to proceed in a coordinated manner across regions, strengthened mobilizing capacity, and simultaneously expanded public awareness regarding discrimination in the quota system and the political repression carried out by Sheikh Hasina's regime.

Finally, but no less importantly, the mobilizing structure of the July Revolution Movement was also strengthened by the broad participation of civil society from various sectors. The violence perpetrated by Chhatra League and security forces against student demonstrators had ignited social solidarity and public outrage. Support came from academics who openly condemned the government's repressive actions (Reza & Bhuiyan, 2025). Civil society organizations such as Odhikar, Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB), and Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST) participated in mobilizing labor groups, women, and other marginalized groups to join the movement. They also provided legal assistance to victims of criminalization and enforced disappearances (Alam, Roy, & Bíró, 2025). Artists and musicians contributed through artworks and songs disseminated on social media to reinforce the movement's collective narrative (Reza & Bhuiyan, 2025). Even the Bangladeshi diaspora raised its voice in support from abroad and contributed to building international pressure on the regime (Reza & Bhuiyan, 2025). This cross-sectoral participation ensured that the movement not only survived in the face of repression, but grew into a massive collective force with deep roots across society.

Framing Processes in the July Revolution Movement

The strength of the July Revolution Movement cannot be separated from the power of the framing processes carried out consistently by its actors. As presented in the theoretical framework section, framing processes are understood as deliberate efforts to shape collective perceptions of issues, actors, and symbols that function to bridge political opportunities and mobilizing structures in order to drive broad social action (Snow & Benford, 1988; Zald, 1996). In the case of the July Revolution Movement, students were not only able to articulate structural injustice as a political issue, but also constructed emotionally resonant moral narratives — a factor that also drove civil society's decision to provide support and engage with the July Revolution Movement. One notable example was when Sheikh Hasina attempted to delegitimize demonstrators by labeling them "*razakaar*" (traitors to the nation) — a term historically referring to those who sided with Pakistan during the 1971 War of Independence. Rather than weakening the movement, this accusation was turned into a counter-slogan: "*Tumi ke? Ami ke? Razakaar! Razakaar! Eta ke bole? Tanashah! Tanashah!*" (Who are you? Who am I? Razakaar! Razakaar! Who said that? Dictator! Dictator!) — which rapidly spread across public spaces and social media (Marof, 2024).

Additionally, resistance-laden slogans articulating the movement's demands — such as "*Tear down authoritarianism, liberate democracy! One, two, three, four... Sheikh Hasina is a dictator! What do we want? Resignation! One demand, one condition: resign, resign!*" and "*Who's coming? Who's coming? The police are coming. What are they doing? They've come to lick the feet of the dictator*" — were used in speeches and on posters circulated throughout city streets. Beyond slogans, hashtags such as #StepDownHasina went viral on X (Twitter), used more than 80,000 times between July 1 and August 5, 2024, demonstrating the movement's success in framing resistance as a moral demand backed by broad public support.

The framing process was also carried out through symbolic visualization in public spaces. Across various parts of Bangladesh, urban spaces — including main roads, university campuses, and train stations — were adorned with posters, murals, and graffiti depicting portraits of victims of violence, mockery of Sheikh Hasina, and revolutionary calls. Digital

posters such as *Rokto Gorom Matha Thanda* (Blood hot, head cool), *Ek Nodi Rokto Periye* (Crossing a river of blood), and *Muktibahini X Gen-Z* (Liberation Army Generation Z) became widely circulated visual icons both online and offline (Ahana, 2024). Public spaces were also transformed into stages for speeches and artistic performances, where students and citizens recited resistance poetry, sang protest songs, and staged theatrical performances depicting state repression. Several Bengali-language songs — including *Amar Desher Maati* (The Soil of My Country) and *Kotha Ko* (Speak) — became symbols of collective grief and resolve that reinforced emotional solidarity among movement members. The movement not only created an alternative political space, but also produced forms of cultural expression that extended the dimensions of legitimacy beyond institutional channels.

Beyond physical public spaces, the movement's framing also unfolded intensively in digital spaces, particularly social media. Social media played a vital role as a channel for the mass, rapid, and cross-class distribution of narrative framing. Facebook was the most dominant platform for disseminating information about actions, strategies, documentation of violence, and digital calls to action — such as profile photo changes and online campaigns. Facebook pages such as *Baishammo Virudhi Chhatra Andolan* (Anti-Discrimination Student Movement) and local pages in various districts shared protest schedules, locations of clashes, and victim testimonies in real time (Hushen, 2024). One of the most publicly galvanizing events was the shooting of Abu Sayed — one of the movement's principal coordinators — by security forces, which was recorded and spread widely on social media. This tragedy prompted waves of solidarity posts, including illustrations of Abu Sayed's face bearing the caption "Our martyr, our voice," and reinforced the narrative that the state had become a genuine threat to its own people. Memes and comments mocking the government and pro-regime elites also spread through popular humor and satire pages such as *Ranrages* and *Oi Mama Na Pls*, which proved effective tools for sustaining cultural resistance through political humor (Afrin, 2024).

Beyond visual forms, digital framing was also reinforced by the production of protest music and online artistic activism that reached young audiences. The song *Awaaz Utha* (Raise Your Voice) by Mucus Hannan and SnareByte went viral on YouTube and Instagram, sung at nearly every major action. Other songs — including *Bhoy Banglay* (Fear in Bangladesh) by Farzana Wahid Shayan and *Kotha Ko* (Speak) by Shezan — garnered millions of views and were played at numerous student forums and protest discussions (Misra, 2024). Through songs, poetry, digital illustrations, and campaign videos, movement activists built a powerful atmosphere of collective emotion that not only inspired courage but also strengthened social cohesion among the movement's diverse groups. The distribution of these artistic works not only extended the reach of the ideology of resistance, but also reinforced the narrative that the struggle against authoritarianism is a legitimate and honorable form of human expression.

All forms of the framing process within the July Revolution Movement formed the foundation that sustained the movement's continuity and success, revealing a current of resistance deeply rooted in cultural expression and collective emotion. The movement's success in framing its opposition to the quota system, security force repression, and authoritarianism as a moral and national struggle demonstrates the political consciousness and tactical creativity of Bangladesh's younger generation. The July Revolution Movement

was able to construct such powerful framing that the movement was able to maintain its moral legitimacy, broaden its support base, and generate large-scale mobilization.

The Relationship between the Three Theoretical Elements and the July Revolution Movement

To understand how the July Revolution Movement succeeded in becoming a force that drove contemporary political change in Bangladesh, it is important to recognize how each element — political opportunities, mobilizing structures, and framing processes — is interrelated and mutually reinforcing. To examine these relationships and interconnections, the interplay between the elements of political process theory in the context of the July Revolution Movement is mapped in the following table to provide a more systematic overview of how these three elements operated simultaneously in shaping the movement's strength.

Table 2. Deductive Thematic Analysis Based on Political Process Theory

Political Process Theory Theme	Empirical Evidence (from journal and news data)	Thematic Meaning (analytical interpretation)
Political Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supreme Court ruling of June 5, 2024 reinstating the independence fighter descendant quota. • 7,001 criminalization cases under the digital security law and 2,617 victims of security force violence (Mustafa, 2024). • Inflation rising to 10.5% in 2024. • Public perception: 58% felt the country was "moving in the wrong direction," and voter turnout falling to 40.8%. • Elite opposition support: BNP, Jamaat-e-Islami, Gono Odhikar Parishad, BJP, ABP (Chowdhury, 2024). • Military refusal to suppress the Long March to Dhaka (Paul et al., 2024). 	The regime's legitimacy crisis, deteriorating economic conditions, and the military's refusal to intervene created new political space that weakened the state's legitimacy and coercive capacity. Elite tensions and external pressure opened opportunities for the movement to grow and gain cross-group support.
Mobilizing Structures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formation of the Anti-Discrimination Student 	The student organizational structure, digital networks, and cross-sector support

Political Process Theory Theme	Empirical Evidence (from journal and news data)	Thematic Meaning (analytical interpretation)
	<p>Movement alliance on July 1, 2024.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Movement coordinators expanded from 65 to 158 campus representatives (Chowdhury, 2024). • Principal coordinating figures: Abu Sayed, Ali Ahsan Zunayed, Asif Mahmud, et al. (Akter, 2024). • Use of Facebook, Instagram, X, Telegram; BVCA Facebook page as coordination hub (Hushen, 2024). • Civil society involvement: Odhikar, ASK, TIB, BLAST; academic and diaspora support (Reza & Bhuiyan, 2025). 	<p>strengthened the movement's capacity to maintain momentum, broaden participation, and respond adaptively to repression. Horizontal mobilization across campuses and society created a broad and repression-resistant movement base.</p>
Framing Processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Counter-slogan against the "razakaar" accusation: "<i>Tumi ke? Ami ke? Razakaar!... Tanashah!</i>" (Marof, 2024). • Resistance chants: "<i>Tear down authoritarianism, liberate democracy... Resign!</i>" • Hashtag #StepDownHasina used more than 80,000 times. • Posters, murals, and graffiti: <i>Rokto Gorom Matha Thanda, Ek Nodi Rokto</i> 	<p>The movement framed its actions as a struggle against authoritarianism through historical symbols, narratives of injustice, and youth generational identity. This framing united diverse public grievances, strengthened the movement's moral legitimacy, and broadened demands from the quota issue into a national call for Sheikh Hasina's resignation.</p>

Periye, Muktibahini X Gen-Z (Ahana, 2024).

- Widespread sharing of Abu Sayed's shooting video and the "Our martyr, our voice" illustration.
 - Protest music: *Awaaz Utha, Bhoy Banglay, Kotha Ko* (Misra, 2024).
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Source: data reprocessed by the authors (2025)

Based on this table, the success of the July Revolution Movement arose from the dynamic interaction between political opportunities, mobilizing structures, and framing processes. The legitimacy crisis experienced by Sheikh Hasina's regime — marked by political repression, mass criminalization through the digital security law, electoral manipulation, and deteriorating socio-economic conditions — opened space for student action to flourish. The fracturing of opposition elite support and the refusal of segments of the military to suppress the Long March to Dhaka weakened the state's coercive capacity and expanded the movement's opportunities to gain cross-group societal support.

These political opportunities were channeled through strong and adaptive mobilizing structures. The Anti-Discrimination Student Movement alliance built horizontal networks across campuses, with coordinators expanding from 65 to 158 representatives, supported by civil society, academics, and the diaspora. Digital spaces functioned as means of coordination and information dissemination that accelerated communication among movement members and helped sustain the consistency of actions. This inclusive and flexible mobilizing structure enabled the movement to maintain its momentum and respond effectively to security force pressure.

Framing processes strengthened the moral legitimacy and public appeal of the movement. Slogans, chants, hashtags, posters, murals, videos, and protest music unified the students' collective identity and transformed local demands into a national call against authoritarianism. The interaction of political opportunities, mobilizing structures, and effective framing enabled the movement to respond adaptively to pressure, broaden public participation, and generate collective pressure that contributed to the delegitimization of the regime and the fall of Sheikh Hasina. The movement's success demonstrates that mobilizing capacity, strategic framing, and a structural context that opens political space must be understood as a mutually reinforcing unity.

CONCLUSION

The July Revolution Movement began with student protests against the government's discriminatory policy of reserving a special quota for descendants of independence fighters in civil service recruitment. This policy was seen as perpetuating patronage practices and violating the principle of meritocracy, thereby triggering widespread public outrage. When the state responded with excessive repression, the student actions evolved into a national

movement participated in and supported by various segments of society. This study demonstrates that the success of the movement was shaped by three key elements of political process theory. First, political opportunities emerged through a legitimacy crisis, opposition elite support, and military neutrality, which diminished the state's coercive power. Second, mobilizing structures were built upon the consolidation of the student alliance, the use of social media for coordination and campaigning, and the involvement of civil society across multiple sectors. Third, framing processes were executed through symbolic narratives emphasizing the values of justice, democracy, and rejection of state violence. The synergy of these three elements produced a collective force capable of broadening participation, sustaining the movement's resilience against repression, and ultimately destabilizing Sheikh Hasina's power.

Furthermore, this study affirms that social movements in authoritarian systems are not merely spontaneous reactions to crisis, but rather the result of a structured and strategically executed political process. The July Revolution Movement illustrates how fractures in ruling alliances, weakening elite support, and declining state legitimacy can be leveraged to build political pressure from within society. These findings reinforce arguments in prior studies emphasizing the importance of the interaction between political opportunities, mobilizing capacity, and framing strategy in explaining protest dynamics in Asia. However, unlike much existing research that focuses on symbolic protest or moral pressure, this study demonstrates how the combination of structural factors and the capacity of movement actors can directly produce a transfer of power within an authoritarian regime.

The principal contribution of this study lies in its application of political process theory to the contemporary context of Asian countries experiencing democratic backsliding, as well as in its affirmation that the transformation of social movements into political forces becomes possible when digital spaces, cultural expression, and cross-sector solidarity are deployed in an organized manner. This study therefore expands understanding of how social movements operate under repression and enriches the literature with a case in which student movements not only serve as moral actors, but also as strategic actors capable of driving regime change. The study recommends further research into cross-national comparisons and deeper examination of movement actors' experiences, the role of technology, and the dynamics of social solidarity, in order to strengthen the analysis of social movement resilience in governments moving toward authoritarianism.

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