

MANUFACTURING THE FOREIGN HAND: HOW REPUBLIC TV TURNED A STUDENT PROTEST INTO A FOREIGN CONSPIRACY IN SEVEN DAYS

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ABOUT CARE

The Center for Culture-Centred Approach to Research and Evaluation (CARE) at Massey University, Aotearoa New Zealand, is a global hub for communication research that uses participatory and culture-centred methodologies to develop community-driven communication solutions to health and wellbeing. Through experiments in methods of radical democracy anchored in community ownership and community voice, the Centre collaborates with communities, community organisers, community researchers, advocates and activists to imagine and develop sustainable practices for prevention, health care organising, food and agriculture, worker organising, migrant and refugee rights, indigenous rights, rights of the poor and economic transformation.

Prof Mohan J Dutta is the Director of CARE and author of books such as *Neoliberal Health Organizing*, *Communicating Health*, and *Voices of Resistance*.

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WHAT THIS PAPER FOUND

Between 20 and 26 July 2026, students gathered at Jantar Mantar to demand accountability for a leaked national medical entrance examination, a broken education system, and the deaths of young people who had staked their futures on it. Republic TV, India's most-watched English news network, spent those seven days telling a different story.¹ This paper measures that story. We analysed 25 broadcasts, stripped out the repetition, and counted what remained: 58,941 words of unique broadcast content about a student protest, from which the students themselves are almost entirely absent.¹

Finding 1. The foreign hand is American now. References to the United States as a hostile actor (164) outnumber references to China (89) and Pakistan (76). The CIA is named 43 times, the American embassy 29. The enemy that organised a decade of Hindutva broadcasting has been swapped out, and the grammar around it has not changed by a word.

Finding 2. Pakistan was not retired. It was held in reserve. For five days Pakistan barely registers. On the final day it multiplies 25-fold. It returns not as a state with armies but as a stain attached to foreign sympathisers, and the statistical company it keeps is not the CIA but a Swedish climate activist.

Finding 3. A funding law sits at the centre of the conspiracy. The strongest sustained associations in the corpus bind the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act to religious conversion and to Marco Rubio. The protest is narrated as American retaliation for a law that will choke evangelical money. The same law is the state's principal instrument for shutting down civil society. The frame defends the weapon.

Finding 4. Protecting yourself from surveillance became evidence of crime. A protest safety guide advising young people to leave their phones at home and cover their faces was renamed a "toolkit" and broadcast as proof of criminal conspiracy, while the same programmes celebrated facial recognition and demanded that those it captured be punished. The vocabulary of goons, gundas, hooligans, and lynching appears 84 times, more often than any geopolitical frame except America itself.

Finding 5. The cycle did not end when the protest did. After the education minister resigned and the students went home, a foreign activist posted a message of solidarity. Republic TV received it as a confession.² The celebrity frame reached the highest intensity recorded for any frame anywhere in the corpus, Pakistan was reactivated, and panellists were ordered to apologise for ever having doubted. The machine does not need new facts to start again.

The single most important thing in this paper. An expression of solidarity from abroad was processed, on air, as an admission of authorship. Under that logic, any movement that is heard beyond its own borders can be declared foreign-made. This is a template, and it travels.

1. SEVEN DAYS

On the evening of 21 July, a few hours after Delhi police lathi-charged students at Jantar Mantar, Arnab Goswami opened his broadcast with a question. The nation, he said, wants to know how the American embassy knew in advance about the mass mobilisation, down to the last detail.

The protest he was describing had by then been running for six weeks. It began on 6 June 2026, after the NEET medical entrance paper leaked and some two million students were ordered to retake the examination; it drew in left student federations and the activist Sonam Wangchuk, whose fast ran 26 days; and by the week in question it had spread to more than a dozen cities, in what international correspondents were describing as perhaps the biggest challenge Narendra Modi had faced in 12 years in office.³ On 20 July, police lathi-charged marchers moving from Mandi House toward Jantar Mantar; by the police's own count nearly 180 people were injured.³

The anchor's question was not a question. It was a verdict wearing the costume of an inquiry, and everything that followed was built to make it feel inevitable. Over seven days the network assembled a cosmology: a CIA that writes protests, an embassy that publishes the script, a messaging app that smuggles revolution past the jammers, a safety guide reclassified as a criminal toolkit, a Ladakhi engineer unmasked as a foreign-funded dynast, an America-returned student leader directing lynch mobs with a pointed finger, and behind them all the deep states of Washington and Beijing, working through the opposition to stop a bill.

The bill matters. Across the whole week, the one consistent answer the network gave to its own question of motive was the FCRA amendment, the law that would tighten the state's grip on foreign funding to Indian civil society and, in the network's telling, stop the conversion of Hindus to Christianity. A protest about a leaked examination was thereby narrated as the last desperate move of a global evangelical intelligence complex defending its money pipeline.

Then, on 25 July, the education minister resigned. The students withdrew. The network declared victory and told its viewers to mobilise, to become more visible, more vocal, and to join the "nationalist collective" of the Republic Media Network.

And then, with the streets empty, Greta Thunberg spoke at a London rally organised by the Students' Federation of India UK to celebrate the movement's victory, telling the crowd the Indian students had shown "the true meaning of people's power."² The network reopened the case it had just closed. The foreign hand, Goswami announced, is out. She has taken full ownership. Admission in law is something you cannot get out of. The network's own website ran the story under the headline "Global Toolkit At Work?"²

Nothing had been proven. Something had been supplied, and supply was enough. It bears recording that the Ministry of External Affairs, the arm of the same government the network exists to defend, had publicly dismissed the allegations of foreign funding to the CJP.⁴ The frame did not survive contact with the government's own diplomats. It did not need to. It was never addressed to them.

2. HOW WE COUNTED

We assembled transcripts of 25 Republic Media Network broadcasts aired between 20 and 26 July 2026: the flagship evening debate, daytime bulletins, short social clips, an expert interview, a strategic affairs commentary. Compilations of this kind repeat themselves, with some monologues appearing five or six times, so we removed duplicated passages by machine before counting anything. What survived was 58,941 words of unique broadcast content.¹

We then defined each frame we wanted to track as an explicit list of words and phrases, including the mangled spellings that automatic transcription produces, and counted them. To find out which frames travel together, we cut the corpus into 1,472 overlapping 80-word windows and measured how often any two frames appear in the same window, using a standard statistic that is not fooled by frames that are simply everywhere. We

grouped the results into clusters.⁵ Finally, we split the week into five phases and measured the intensity of each frame in each phase, so that the movement of the argument over time becomes visible.

Two safeguards matter for how much weight these numbers can bear. Every count reported here is a floor, not a ceiling, because transcription errors suppress matches and the Hindi-language material is under-captured. And every headline statistic is anchored to passages you can read: the strongest association in the paper is accompanied by verbatim broadcast text, so the reader can verify that the thing being counted is the thing being claimed. The full technical specification and replication materials are available from CARE on request, and a companion academic article reports the analysis in the form journals require.⁶

We should also say plainly where we stand. This is not a view from nowhere. It is written from a commitment to the young people whose voices this coverage erased, and the methods are set out precisely so that the reading can be tested, replicated, and argued with.

3. THE ENEMY IS AMERICAN NOW

For a decade and longer, the enemy in this genre of Indian broadcasting has been Pakistan, and behind Pakistan, the Indian Muslim. The genealogy is well documented: scholars have traced the medialisation of Hindutva from the privatisation of Indian television through the digital platforms of the present, and the enemy has been the constant around which the form organised itself.⁷ That hierarchy has been rebuilt.

Before turning to the numbers, one point of genealogy matters. The vocabulary this paper counts is not new, and it was not invented for the CJP. The tag “anti-national” has been documented across a decade of Indian broadcasting as the instrument through which dissent of any kind is disqualified, applied to journalists, students, Kashmiri photojournalists, and Dalit and Adivasi voices alike, to the point where a BJP spokesperson could publicly treat “anti-India,” “anti-Hindu,” and “anti-BJP” as synonyms.⁸ Ashwini Falnikar has named the cumulative effect media violence: the exclusions and aspirational framings, carried through ordinary news routines, that produce a national imaginary in which some lives register and others do not.⁹ What the present study adds is measurement, and a shift in the referent of the foreign hand.

Across the seven days, the United States is named as a hostile actor 164 times. China follows at 89. Pakistan trails at 76, and as we show below, almost all of that is produced in a single day. The CIA appears 43 times, the American embassy 29, Donald Trump and Marco Rubio 28.

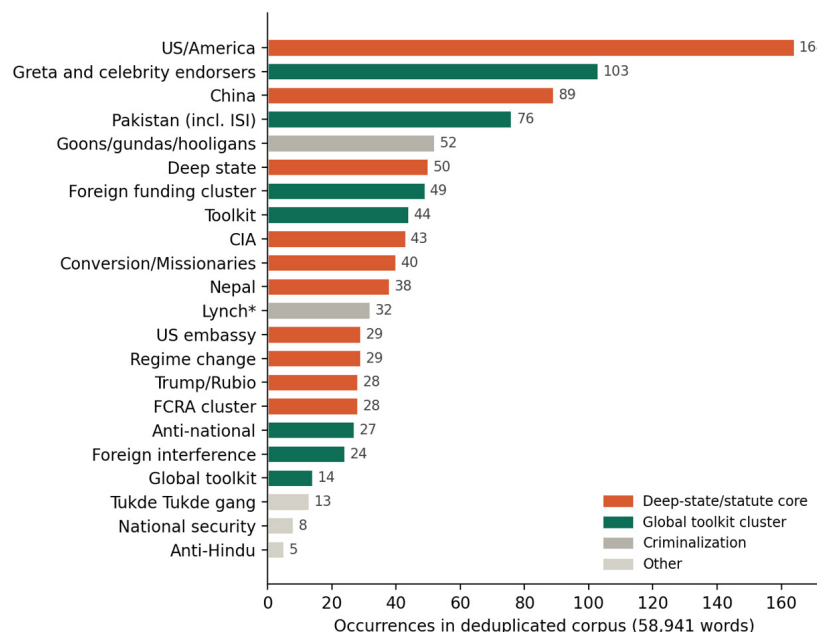


Figure 1: What Republic TV talked about across seven days. Colour marks the two argumentative clusters identified in Section 4.

Read that distribution alongside the political moment and it stops looking mysterious. India was under American pressure on a trade deal, on agricultural and dairy access, and on the FCRA. A network whose function is to supply the government with an enemy each night simply re-tenanted the enemy slot. The trope did not have to be rebuilt, only refilled.

This is the first thing worth understanding about the foreign hand: it is a structure, and the country that occupies it is a variable. That is why America and China, geopolitical rivals with incompatible interests, sit inside the same cluster in our analysis, invoked in the same breath as “the two deep states.” An enemy that must be consistent is a claim about the world. An enemy that need only be present is a claim about power.

Notice also what is missing. The phrase “foreign interference” itself appears only 24 times. The frame is built instead from material that sounds forensic: a funding statute, an embassy advisory with dates, a figure of 65,000 rupees per social media post multiplied into 65 crore, a money trail, millions of dollars from a named American missionary project. Precision is the aesthetic. Evidence is not the point. The frame works because it feels like investigation while functioning as accusation.

4. TWO MACHINES: MOTIVE AND PROOF

Frames in this corpus do not form a single soup of conspiracy. They organise into two distinct machines, and they barely touch: the statistical association between the clusters never rises above trivial.⁵

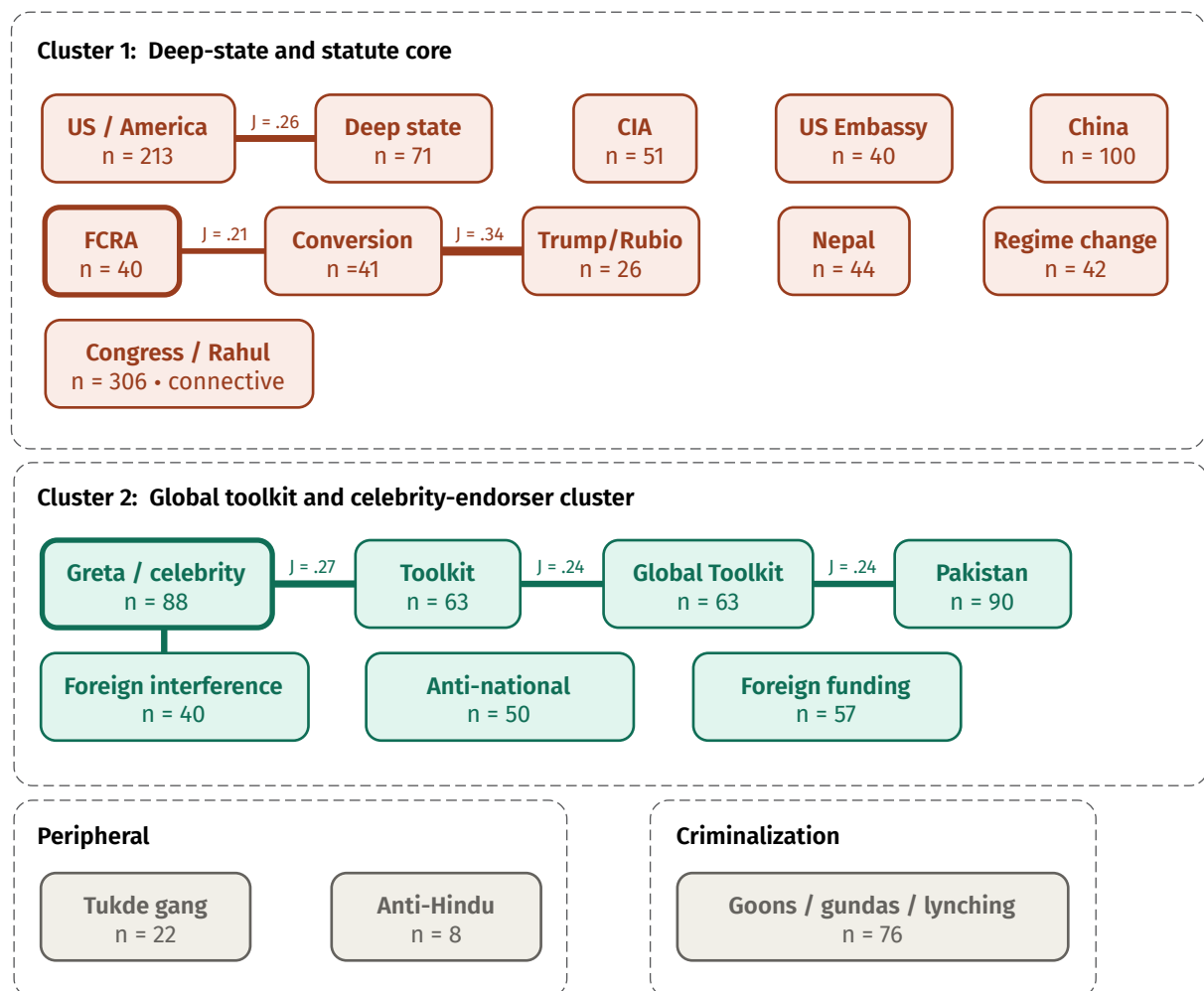
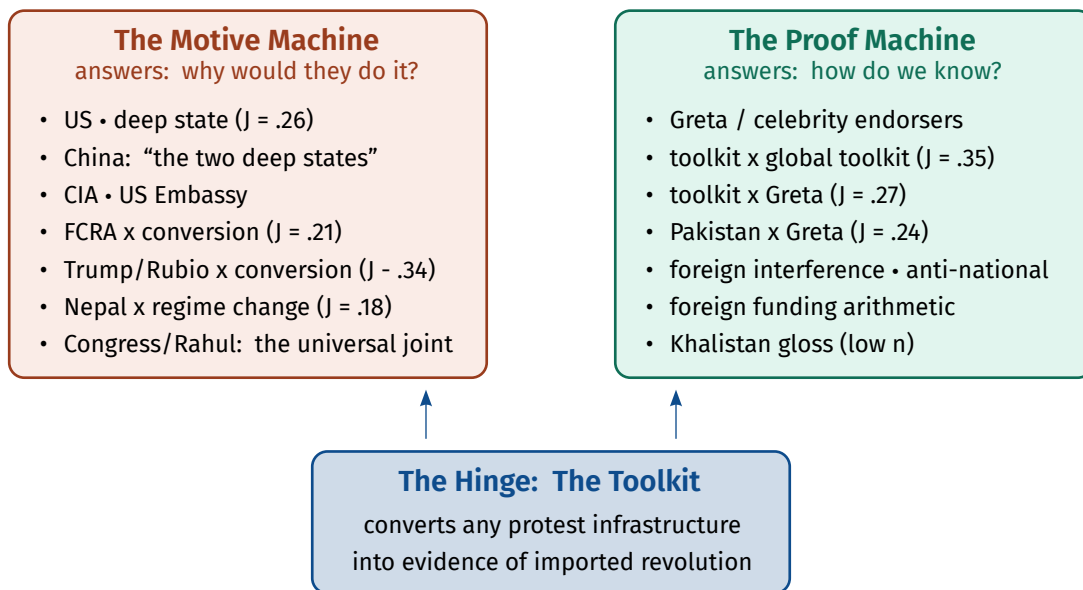


Figure 2: The full cluster architecture. Every frame in the analysis, placed in the cluster it belongs to, with n reporting the number of 80-word windows in which each frame appears. The two substantive clusters are joined by two peripheral groupings: the residue of the older Hindutva repertoire, and the criminalising vocabulary.

Two smaller groupings sit at the edges of this structure, and both are informative. The first is the residue of the older repertoire: the Tukde Tukde gang tag and the anti-Hindu register, which after deduplication shrink to a handful of occurrences confined to single monologues. These were the load-bearing frames of the anti-CAA and Jawaharlal Nehru University cycles; here they survive as habit. The second is the criminalising vocabulary of goons, gundas, hooligans, and lynching, which is the busiest single grouping in the corpus and yet sits apart from both machines, because its work is not to explain the protest but to disqualify the people in it.



*A conspiracy that had to prove its motives would collapse when checked.
This one keeps motive and proof in separate rooms.*

The first machine answers why. It binds America, China, the CIA, the embassy, the deep state, the FCRA, religious conversion, Trump and Rubio, the Nepal precedent, regime change, and the domestic opposition. This is the motive machine, and its answer is material: trade pressure, the Indian Ocean contest, and above all a funding law and the evangelical money it threatens. Inside it, the tightest bonds are America with the deep state, and religious conversion with Trump and Rubio.

The second machine answers how we know. It binds Greta Thunberg and the other named Western endorsers, the toolkit, the phrase “global toolkit,” Pakistan, foreign interference, the anti-national label, and foreign funding. This is the proof machine, and its evidentiary logic is celebrity endorsement read as admission. Its tightest bond, and the strongest association anywhere in the corpus, is the toolkit with its own intensified form, the global toolkit.

The division of labour is worth pausing on, because it is what makes the discourse durable. A conspiracy narrative that had to prove its motives would collapse the first time a fact was checked. This one keeps motive and proof in separate rooms. The motive room runs on statutes and geopolitics and can absorb any policy dispute. The proof room runs on foreign faces and needs nothing but a photograph.

5. THE STATUTE AT THE HEART OF IT

If you want to know what the foreign interference frame is actually about, follow the law.

The Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act is the state’s principal instrument for strangling independent civil society. Successive amendments and cancellations have shut down thousands of organisations, from Amnesty International India to community health groups to, briefly and notoriously, the Missionaries of Charity. Across our corpus, the FCRA is bound tightly to religious conversion, and conversion in turn is bound to Marco Rubio more tightly than to any other actor.

The articulation is consistent across the week, across programmes, and across speakers: the anchor, BJP panellists, a senior advocate, a strategic affairs commentator. On the first evening, the full causal chain is assembled within 24 hours of the lathi charge:

A few days back, the American Secretary of State flew straight to Kolkata, and Marco Rubio met the Missionaries of Charity. Sonia Gandhi wants to support conversion into Christianity in India; that has been her clear campaign. Now she's not in power, the BJP government is bringing an FCRA amendment which will stop this forced, money-based Christian evangelism. ... Is this violent protest being supported, directly or indirectly, by the Americans, funded through the American routes, in order to block the FCRA?

On 24 July it acquires its fullest form, fusing the conversion panic, the foreign money trope, and the Maoist register in a single breath:

This government is just about to bring in the FCRA amendment in Parliament. You should read about it, because this amendment will stop dangerous groups like the Joshua Project, which are pumping in millions of dollars from America for mass conversion of Hindus and tribals into Christianity, and also stop that money from reaching Maoist-affected areas.

And in the closure broadcast the chain is recited backwards, as a trophy:

They wanted to stall the entire Parliament session. They didn't want the FCRA bill to be brought in; they wanted the conversion of Hindus. But the government outplayed them.

Here is the closure that makes the frame airtight. The FCRA is simultaneously the thing the conspiracy is said to be attacking and the weapon justified by the conspiracy. The evidence that foreign interference exists is that foreigners and their supposed agents object to the law against foreign interference. Objection is guilt. There is no position from which the law can be criticised that the frame does not already classify as proof of the thing the law exists to prevent.

This is why the finding matters beyond media criticism. It marks the exact point where Hindutva's oldest anxiety, the fear of conversion, is welded to the authoritarian state's newest instrument, foreign funding regulation, with an American enemy supplying the charge. The frame produced in the studio is the frame enforced in the statute, and both are aimed at the same people: students, minorities, NGOs, and the journalists who cover them.

6. HOW STUDENTS WERE TURNED INTO CRIMINALS

Running alongside the foreign hand is a second production line, and it is busier. The vocabulary of goons, gundas, hooligans, lumpens, and lynching appears 84 times in the corpus, more often than any geopolitical frame except America. The pattern extends a tendency long documented in protest coverage worldwide, in which mainstream media emphasise deviance and disorder over demands, and it repeats what Indian outlets did to the farmers' agitation of 2020 to 2021.¹¹ It also belongs to what scholars of India have analysed as extreme speech: a spectrum of practices, ambiguous by design, deployed to delegitimise and silence the speaker rather than to argue with them.¹² During the anti-CAA protests of 2019 and 2020, the same disqualifying logic ran in parallel with physical attacks on journalists covering the demonstrations, and with an Information and Broadcasting Ministry advisory warning private channels against content promoting "anti-national attitudes."¹³ It works through three operations.

First, disaggregation. The claim is repeated relentlessly that these are not students. Selectively edited street interviews are run and rerun, in which people say they are not sitting the examination. From this the network empties the category of the authentic student and refills it with its own creation, the professional gunda paid to attend. The move is elegant and vicious: it does not deny that students have grievances, it denies that the people on the street are students. By the final broadcast the anchor is describing what the real youth of India look like, and they are at home, fit, sober, filing patents.

Second, direction. A freeze-frame of the CJP convener pointing a finger is broadcast repeatedly and narrated as an instruction to lynch. A gesture becomes a command. A crowd becomes an organised criminal conspiracy. The conspiracy provisions then appear in the police first information reports.

Third, and most consequential, the criminalisation of self-defence. The Internet Freedom Foundation published a protest safety guide advising participants to leave primary phones at home, disable fingerprint and face unlock, and cover their faces against facial recognition cameras. Republic TV renamed it a toolkit and broadcast it as proof of criminal intent:

Why does the Internet Freedom Foundation ask the CJP workers to leave their primary phone at home, to avoid detection? To keep fingerprint and face unlock off on their phones, and to keep their phone on airplane mode, to avoid detection by security agencies? ... This is a toolkit, I believe, to avoid getting caught.

In the same programmes the network celebrates the Delhi police's use of facial recognition and demands that everyone it identifies face action. Put the two together and the trap is complete: to protect yourself from identification is to confess, and to be identified is to be convicted. There is no lawful way for a young person to attend a protest in this framework. Digital security is criminal intent; the absence of digital security is a criminal record.

This should be read as what it is: an attack on the basic infrastructure of political participation. It targets not a movement but the conditions under which any movement can protect its participants from a surveillance state.

7. THE CONFESSION THAT NEVER HAPPENED

Our analysis divided the week into five phases and measured the intensity of each frame in each of them. The shape that emerges is the most important result in this paper, and Figure 4 sets it out as a process before Figure 5 gives it in numbers.

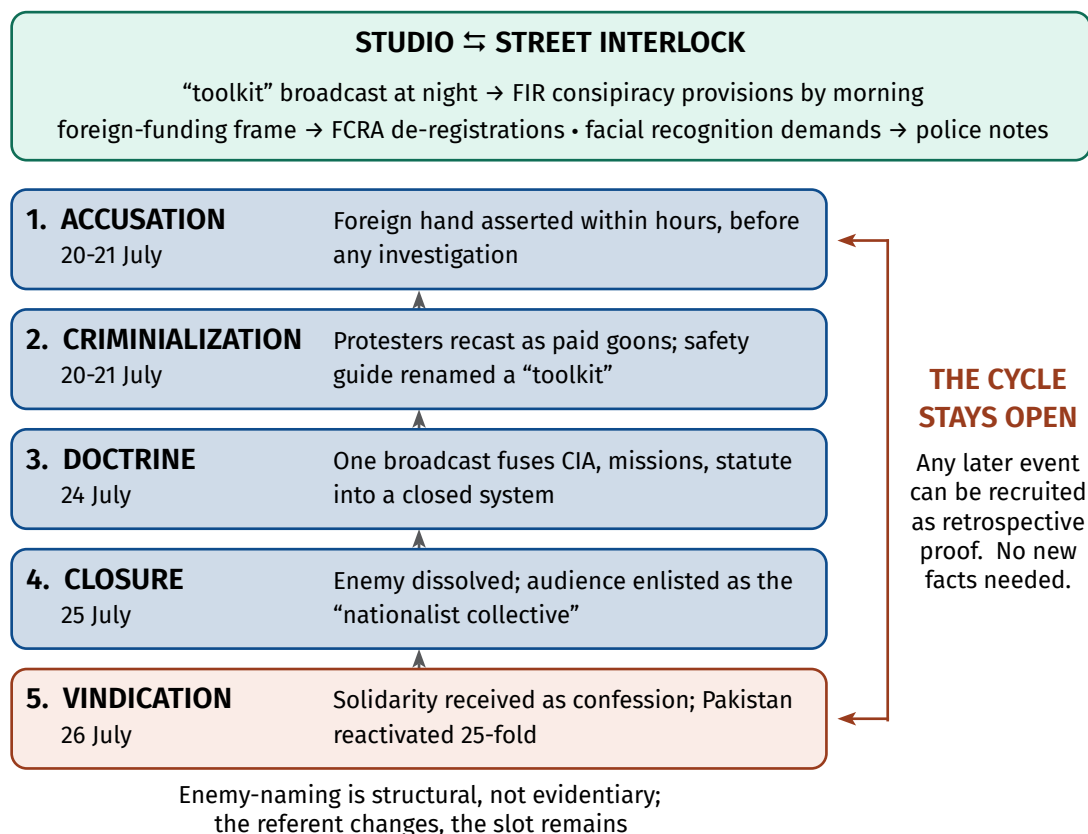


Figure 4: The process. Five phases, the studio-street interlock that runs above them, and the feedback loop that keeps the cycle open after resolution.

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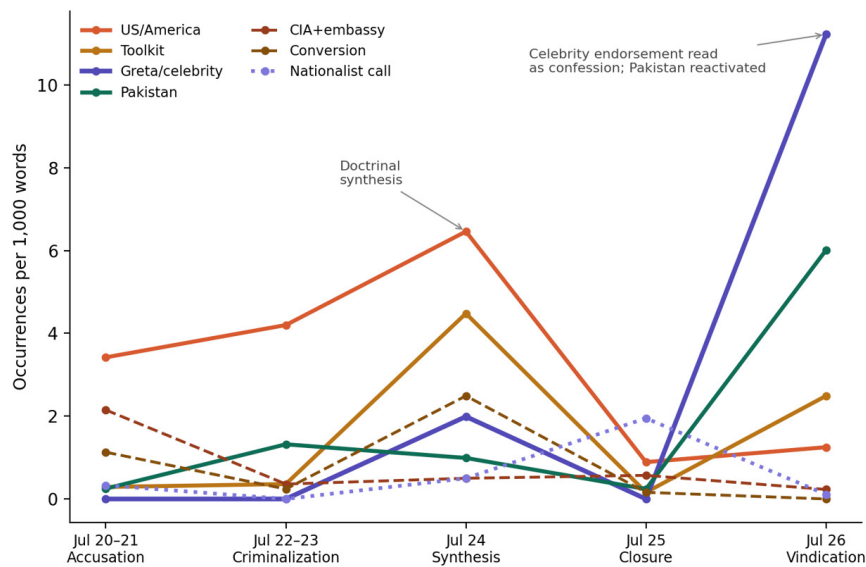


Figure 5: How the argument moved. Rate is occurrences per thousand words, which controls for the differing length of each phase.

Phase 1, accusation. The CIA and embassy frame peaks on the first day and never recovers. The foreign hand was asserted within hours of the lathi charge and before any investigation existed. That timing is the whole point: this was not a conclusion, it was a premise.

Phase 2, criminalisation. State-level enemy naming recedes and the discourse turns downward onto bodies. The goons and lynching vocabulary peaks as the network runs its exclusives on the messaging app, the hired-crowd allegations, the injury testimony.

Phase 3, doctrine. On 24 July a single broadcast performs the entire theory as a closed system. America peaks. The toolkit frame multiplies 15-fold. Conversion, regime change, and the anti-national label all reach their maxima. Jack Dorsey, the Internet Freedom Foundation, Greta Thunberg's 2021 toolkit, the Joshua Project, the FCRA, delimitation, one nation one poll: everything confirms everything else.

Phase 4, closure. The minister resigns, the students withdraw, and the enemy apparatus collapses. America falls to a fraction of its peak. The toolkit and conversion frames almost vanish. And one frame rises to its highest level of the week: the direct address to nationalists, telling them to mobilise, to become more vocal and more visible, to join the network's own collective. The conspiracy was scaffolding. The product was a subject.

Phase 5, vindication. With the protest over, Greta Thunberg addressed the London solidarity rally.² The network reopened the case. The celebrity frame reached 11.22 occurrences per thousand words, the highest rate recorded for any frame anywhere in this corpus. Pakistan multiplied 25-fold. The toolkit returned and acquired its explicit global form. Meanwhile the FCRA and conversion frames, which had anchored the doctrine two days earlier, dropped to zero. The two machines traded places: the argument stopped explaining motive and started displaying proof.

What was displayed was not proof. It was a stranger's message of support, processed on air as a legal confession:

So when we were saying earlier "foreign hand," "Greta Thunberg," all of you said, "No, you're making it up, Arnab, this is not true, it can't be Greta Thunberg, this is an organic students' movement in India." ... Would you apologise tonight, because you said, "No, no, it's not a foreign hand," and now we're showing the foreign hand? It's time to choose, viewers: are you with India or with Greta Thunberg?

Two operations follow. Panellists are ordered to apologise for having doubted. And the CJP is required to publicly repudiate support it never asked for, a demand engineered to be unmeetable, because silence proves complicity and repudiation proves there was something to repudiate.

This is where Pakistan comes back. Thunberg is glossed through her supposed links to “Pakistan-backed groups” and “Khalistani groups”; Jeremy Corbyn is introduced as the voice of the Pakistani constituency in Britain; and the resulting composite, the pro-Pakistani foreign sympathiser, is handed to Indian panellists as a loyalty test designed for them to fail. Pakistan does not return as a country. It returns as a contaminant, transmitted by association, which is why its closest statistical partner across the corpus is not the CIA but a Swedish climate activist.

The inversion of solidarity. Transnational solidarity is how movements at the margins have always amplified claims their own institutions refuse to hear. This coverage converts it into the proof of their inauthenticity. To be supported from abroad is to be authored from abroad. A movement's capacity to be heard beyond its borders is turned into the instrument of its delegitimation, and the cost is paid entirely by the movement, never by those who offered support.¹⁵

Any government facing protest can now run this template. It requires no intelligence finding, no evidence, and no cooperation from the accused. It requires only that somebody, somewhere, expresses sympathy.

8. THIS IS NOT ONE CHANNEL

It would be comfortable to treat Republic TV as an outlier, a loud channel with an eccentric anchor. It is not an outlier. It is the working model of a captured media system.

The network was launched in 2017 with seed investment from a parliamentarian allied to the ruling coalition, who later became a minister in the Modi government. Its record includes police allegations of ratings manipulation and a finding by Britain's broadcast regulator that its Hindi affiliate aired hate speech against Pakistanis on a UK licence.¹⁶ The genre it perfected, the nightly prosecutorial debate, has been analysed as the signature form of a 24/7 English news cycle that renders neoliberal and majoritarian violence as spectacle.¹⁷ Around it, the ownership of Indian television news has consolidated into the hands of industrialists whose fortunes depend on state favour, a process completed when the Adani Group acquired NDTV in 2022 and removed the last major critical voice in English broadcasting.¹⁶

Indian journalists have a name for the resulting formation. Ravish Kumar called it Godi Media, the press that sits in the lap of power, and scholarship has documented both the formation itself and its distinctive hostility to the remaining independent press.¹⁸ The evidence in this paper supports a sharper description: this is extremist capture, the occupation of a mainstream national media system by a far-right movement, such that the system's ordinary daily output is movement propaganda. The description draws on the scholarship of media capture and extends it, because what is captured here is put to work as infrastructure, a durable, owned, revenue-generating apparatus through which enmity is manufactured at scale and delivered on schedule.¹⁹ It belongs to the wider political formation that scholars have analysed as authoritarian populism and competitive authoritarianism under Hindu nationalism.²⁰ Three features distinguish it from ordinary partisan media, and all three are visible in our data.

The enemy production is systemic, not episodic. Our corpus shows an enemy slot that survives the replacement of its occupant, which is the signature of a movement medium organised around the friend-enemy distinction rather than a news medium organised around events.

The discourse interlocks with state action. The toolkit frame broadcast at night appears in FIR conspiracy provisions by morning. The foreign funding frame prosecutes the same organisations the FCRA de-registers. The anchor's demand that facial recognition captures be punished is answered by police notes citing captures.

And the closure is mobilisational and provisional. Each cycle ends by enlisting the audience rather than informing it, and, as the vindication phase demonstrates, it stays open to reactivation indefinitely. Because the enemy is structural rather than evidentiary, any later event can be recruited as retrospective proof.

9. THE OTHER HAND: WHAT CAPTURE IS PAIRED WITH

A captured mainstream cannot be understood on its own, because it is produced together with the repression of everything outside it. Every mechanism that elevates Republic TV degrades its alternatives.

The record is not contested and it is not ambiguous. When the Modi government took office in 2014, India stood at 140 of 180 countries in the Reporters Without Borders World Press Freedom Index. By 2023 it had fallen to 161, its lowest position ever recorded, below several states in active armed conflict. It stood at 151 in 2025, still inside the cohort classified as facing a very serious or difficult situation.²¹

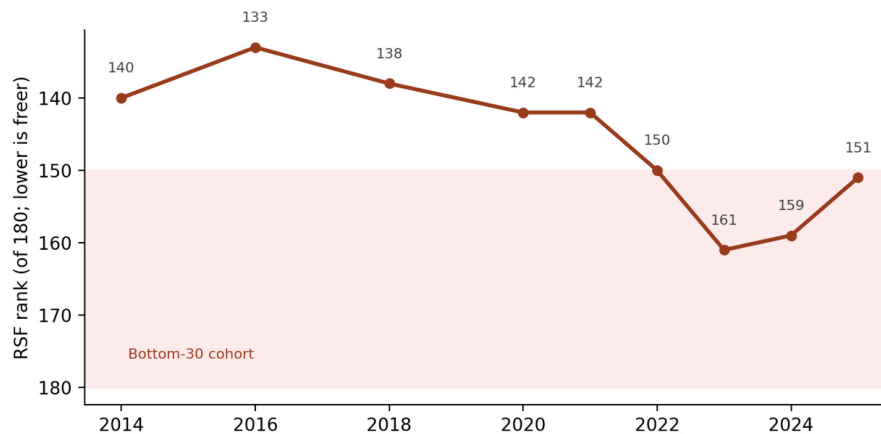


Figure 6: A decade of decline. India's rank of 180 countries in the RSF World Press Freedom Index; lower is freer.

Indicator	Record
Press freedom rank	140/180 in 2014; 161/180 in 2023; 151/180 in 2025
Regime classification	Electoral autocracy since 2021 (V-Dem)
Freedom status	Downgraded to Partly Free in 2021 (Freedom House)
Internet shutdowns	Highest in the world, five consecutive years and counting
Journalists jailed	Present in every recent annual census; most held under security laws without conviction
Exemplary cases	NewsClick editor arrested under UAPA; Siddique Kappan held 28 months before trial; tax raids on the BBC's Delhi offices

Table 1: The repression side of the ledger

Kashmir is the template on which much of this apparatus was built and tested. The communications blackout that followed the abrogation of Article 370 in August 2019 ran for months and produced the longest internet shutdown recorded in any democracy; independent Kashmiri journalists were silenced and charged under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act while national channels were granted access to shape the narrative; and a young photojournalist was booked for “uploading anti-national posts,” with police declining even to identify her as a journalist.²² Scholars have read that sequence as colonialism in a contemporary register, and the UAPA amendments as legislation that treats Indian citizens as subjects of a colonial sovereign.²³ The harassment is also gendered: the slur “presstitute,” introduced into circulation by a serving minister, has been turned on women journalists for a decade, alongside abusive calls and death threats.²⁴

Read the two halves together and the structure becomes clear. Capture manufactures the frames. Repression prosecutes people through them. The independent journalists and fact-checkers who contest the output do so at a documented personal cost, sustaining an exhausting counter-infrastructure while the captured channels stream unimpeded.²⁵

The foreign interference frame is the hinge between the two hands. It supplies the vocabulary that turns the criminalisation of dissent into counter-intelligence, the strangulation of civil society into financial hygiene, and the surveillance of protest into national defence. That is its function, and it is why the frame is worth measuring.

10. WHAT THE FRAME ERASES

One number in this study should be read more slowly than the others. Across 58,941 words of broadcast content about a student protest, the students' demands are structurally absent.

The leaked examination that destroyed a cohort's chances, the young people who died, the dismantling of public universities, the unemployment that shadows an entire generation: these appear only as objects to be explained away, attributed to previous governments, or drowned in the recitation of enemies. The erasure is not a side effect of the coverage. It is the coverage.

There is a structural dimension to this erasure that predates the CJP. Studies of Indian newsrooms have found Scheduled Tribes almost entirely absent from bylines and Scheduled Castes represented mostly by activists and politicians rather than journalists, and comparative work on English- and Hindi-language news routines has shown how journalists from under-represented backgrounds are socialised into newsroom cultures that reproduce the consensus of ruling elites.²⁶ An examination system that decides who becomes a doctor is, in this light, precisely the kind of story a newsroom built on inherited privilege is least equipped to hear as urgent. The erasure documented here is the acute form of a chronic condition.

Every minute spent asking how the CIA knew is a minute in which nobody asks how the paper leaked, who profited, and why students died. This is the measure of what a captured media system delivers to power. It goes beyond favourable reporting to the substitution of a fictional question for a real one, night after night, until the real one has no public in which to be asked.

And when the young people of the CJP built their own media on ordinary social platforms, assembling an audience of 22 million outside the gatekept system, they were constructing something worth naming: communicative sovereignty claimed from below,²⁵ continuous with the digital repertoires through which the farmers' movement sustained its own account of itself against the same erasure.²⁷ The seven days documented here are the captured mainstream striking at that infrastructure with every instrument it owns, and then continuing to strike after the protest itself had ended.

11. WHAT FOLLOWS: RECOMMENDATIONS

The frames analysed here do not stay in India. Republic TV streams globally and its clips circulate through diaspora networks in Aotearoa New Zealand, Australia, Britain, Canada, and the United States, where they license the harassment of diaspora critics as anti-national and of scholars as foreign agents. This transnational circuit is not incidental to Hindutva; diaspora communities have been central to its financing and its ideological reproduction since well before the digital era.²⁸ The recommendations below are organised by who can act.

For broadcast regulators in receiving countries

The tools already exist. When Republic Bharat aired hate speech on a British licence, Ofcom investigated, found breaches, and fined the licensee. The same regulator revoked CGTN's licence over foreign state editorial control.¹⁶ No new censorship powers are required.

1. Audit carried foreign news channels against existing incitement, accuracy, and fairness standards, rather than waiting for individual complaints.
2. Treat a demonstrated pattern of criminalising identifiable civilian protesters and religious minorities as a licensing question, not an editorial preference.
3. Publish findings in full, so that carriage decisions elsewhere can rely on them.

For platforms

The harm documented here is not a collection of violating posts. It is sustained, coordinated frame production, amplified by recommendation systems.

4. Apply systemic risk assessment, on the model of the European Union's Digital Services Act, to state-aligned media ecosystems rather than to individual items.²⁹
5. Extend state-affiliation labelling to party-seeded and state-dependent media. Outlets of this type receive labels when they are Russian or Chinese; the same standard should apply here.
6. Resist the asymmetry. Platforms currently comply with government demands to remove the work of independent journalists and movements while monetising the propaganda aimed at them. That asymmetry is a choice.

For governments, including Aotearoa New Zealand

7. Do not import the frame. Foreign interference legislation now spreading through democracies should treat the FCRA as the explicit cautionary case. Broad, discretionary funding-control regimes justified as counter-interference become the primary legal instrument for strangling civil society. Scope statutes tightly to covert state-directed activity, exclude civil society funding and journalism from operative provisions, and require independent judicial oversight.
8. Stop separating press freedom from the commercial relationship. Governments negotiating trade and security agreements with India, and New Zealand is at this moment among them, routinely treat media freedom as a matter for another conversation. It is the same conversation. Media freedom clauses, consular protections for journalists and researchers, and formal human rights dialogue belong inside these agreements.
9. Protect diaspora communities. People in New Zealand who criticise the Indian government are being labelled anti-national in media their families watch. Police, universities, and human rights agencies should treat transnational repression as a recognised category, with reporting pathways that do not require the target to prove foreign state direction.

For journalists, editors, and civil society

10. Refuse the frame's premises when reporting it.³⁰ Repeating "foreign hand" allegations as a live controversy, however sceptically, transfers the burden of proof onto the accused, which is what the frame is designed to achieve.

11. Report solidarity as solidarity. When international support for a movement is treated as evidence against it, name that operation explicitly rather than covering the resulting controversy as a two-sided dispute.
12. Fund and cite the counter-infrastructure. Independent Indian outlets and fact-checkers are the primary source of contestation, and they operate under legal, financial, and personal pressure that international partners can materially offset. The digital journalism start-ups that emerged over the last decade carry much of this work, and research on them cautions that their reader base remains largely the English-speaking elite, so support should extend to regional-language and Dalit-led outlets rather than concentrating at the top.³¹

For researchers and standard-setting bodies

13. Name media capture, including extremist capture, as a threat category in media freedom frameworks, standing alongside censorship rather than beneath it.
14. Examine foreign funding laws as instruments of repression within existing UN special procedures on freedom of expression and human rights defenders.
15. Build shared, replicable monitoring. This paper is a small demonstration of what systematic measurement can do. Propaganda systems rely on the nightly spectacle dissolving before anyone can hold it still. Measurement removes that deniability, and it can be done at scale.

12. CODA

Between 20 and 26 July 2026, a television network conducted a demonstration of how an authoritarian media infrastructure processes a democratic uprising. It opened with an accusation that required no evidence. It criminalised the accused through a vocabulary of goons and toolkits. It condensed the accusation into doctrine in a single monologue that fused the CIA, the Missionaries of Charity, and a funding statute into one enemy. It closed by dissolving the enemy and enlisting the audience. And then, after the students had gone home, it received a stranger's message of solidarity as a confession and called back an enemy that had been dormant all week.

The students who assembled at Jantar Mantar asked for a fair examination and a future. In 58,941 words of coverage about them, they appear as raw material. This paper has counted the frames, mapped the machinery, and traced its movement, because the machinery depends on remaining uncounted, on the spectacle dissolving each night before anyone can hold it still.

Godi Media is a name for a captured press. The question this paper leaves is not whether the capture exists. It is what regulators, platforms, governments, and the rest of us intend to do about a system that can now convert an act of solidarity into evidence of treason, and will do it again the next time young people gather anywhere.

NOTES

1. Corpus: 25 Republic Media Network broadcasts concerning the Cockroach Janta Party protest, aired 20 to 26 July 2026, machine-transcribed and deduplicated by eight-word shingle matching (55 percent overlap threshold, 40-word chunks) to 58,941 words of unique content. Frame dictionaries were specified as explicit regular-expression lists including transcription-error variants; all counts are conservative floors. Quotations are lightly edited for readability: punctuation and capitalisation restored, transcription errors in proper nouns corrected, editorial insertions in square brackets, wording otherwise unaltered. Full technical specification, dictionaries, and replication materials available from CARE (M.J.Dutta@massey.ac.nz).
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3. For contemporaneous international reporting on the protest and its chronology, see “India’s youth-led Cockroach movement vows to continue protest after police crackdown,” *NPR*, 21 July 2026, <https://www.npr.org/2026/07/21/g-s1-134722/>; “India’s ‘cockroach’ movement ousts minister, but can Modi calm youth?” *NPR*, 25 July 2026, <https://www.npr.org/2026/07/25/g-s1-135483/>; “What to know about India’s youth-led Gen Z ‘cockroach’ protests,” *PBS NewsHour*, July 2026, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/>; and the chronology compiled at “2026 Delhi Jantar Mantar protests,” Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2026_Delhi_Jantar_Mantar_protests (accessed 30 July 2026). The injury figure of nearly 180, including 118 security personnel, is Delhi Police’s own count as reported by *NPR* (21 July 2026). The two-million retake figure and the reported student suicides following the NEET leak are reported by *NPR* (25 July 2026).
4. The Ministry of External Affairs’ dismissal of foreign-funding allegations against the CJP is recorded in the chronology compiled at “2026 Delhi Jantar Mantar protests,” Wikipedia (accessed 30 July 2026), with contemporaneous wire reporting.
5. Association between frames is measured with the Jaccard coefficient across 1,472 overlapping 80-word windows; clusters are derived by average-linkage hierarchical clustering on the resulting distances, stable across four, five, and six cluster specifications. Inter-cluster associations do not exceed $J = .09$.
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About CARE

The Center for Culture-Centered Approach to Research and Evaluation works with communities at the margins to build voice infrastructures, developing communication theory and practice anchored in the everyday struggles of the poorest and most disenfranchised. CARE is based at Massey University, Te Kunenga ki Pūrehuroa, in Palmerston North, Aotearoa New Zealand.

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