

## **Safeguarding or Suppressing: Assessing Online Journalists' Perspective of the Digital Security Act, 2018, During the Awami League Regime**

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### **Abstract**

The expansion of online media and the increasing prevalence of cybercrimes have necessitated government intervention to safeguard digital spaces. Between 2018 and 2023, during the Awami League government, Bangladesh enforced the Digital Security Act (DSA) to address growing concerns about cybercrime and digital threats. While the law aimed to safeguard digital spaces, it crucially generated significant controversies, particularly among online journalists, and obstacles to press freedom. This study examines how online journalists in Bangladesh experienced the impact of the DSA over the five years. Applying the conceptual framework of “freedom of the press as a basic human right,” this research employed a qualitative approach, conducting semi-structured interviews with twelve experienced ( $N=12$ ) journalists from news organizations. A qualitative approach was used to explore the lived experiences and perceptions of journalists, which cannot be adequately examined through quantitative measures. This study investigates the challenges and obstacles participants faced under the act. Semi-structured interviews allowed participants to articulate personal experiences of fear, self-censorship, and legal pressure, providing in-depth insights that structured surveys or legal analysis could not address. The study also emphasized the need for a separate legal framework dedicated to online journalism. Overall, findings suggested that while the act addressed some online threats, it mostly curtailed press freedom and fostered fear and self-censorship among journalists.

**Keywords:** Digital Security Act, online journalism, media freedom, cybercrime, digital security

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## **Introduction**

With the increasing use of the Internet and social media in recent years, online media has emerged as one of the primary sources of daily news. More people are now preferring online news for daily updates instead of traditional print or TV. As people's presence and activities on online platforms have increased, the rate of various forms of online crime trends, such as phishing, ransomware attacks, mobile malware, data breaches, cyber activism, etc., has also increased considerably, causing the general public to confront a variety of issues.

In response to these growing issues, the government enacted the Digital Security Act (DSA) in 2018, which aims to curb the rising incidence of cybercrimes and safeguard citizens' safety when accessing online media. The main objectives of the Act were to establish legal safeguards for data integrity, protect digital security, and discourage different types of cybercrime. Considering its noble goals, the Digital Security Act had generated an immense amount of discussion and controversy during the Awami League (AL) government, especially about its effects on free speech and the roles of journalists in the digital age. Though in 2023, former Prime Minister Sheikh stated, "DSA much better than Western laws" (UNB, 2023). However, foreign media framed it 'Draconian Digital Act' (Mahmud, 2023). In 2023, Sheikh Hasina led the Cabinet to approve the final draft of the Cyber Security Act (CSA), which replaced the Digital Security Act (Daily Star, 2023).

The act drew harsh criticism for its ability to restrict journalistic freedom, despite its claims to improve digital safety. Journalists claim that the act was used to intimidate and restrict them, limiting their freedom of reporting, especially those employed by online media. Many of the provisions of the law have been viewed as being excessively extensive or ambiguous, which could be abused by authorities and discourage investigative reporting, especially when it comes to sensitive or divisive subjects. Furthermore, because cybercrimes are still on the rise in the digital sphere, the act's effectiveness in addressing online crime is still being evaluated.

This research aims to explore the impact of the DSA on online news media and journalistic freedom, focusing on the challenges faced by online journalists. Also, the research will examine the effectiveness of the Act in addressing cybercrimes and analyze the perspectives of media professionals on these issues.

### **Research Aims and Objectives**

This study aims to investigate the difficulties online journalists encounter when negotiating within the complex framework established by the Digital Security Act. By analyzing their perspectives, the study aims to understand how the act impacted their ability to practice free, independent, and secure journalism under the Awami League (AL) government. Additionally, the study will evaluate the act's alleged efficacy in lowering online crime, including whether its implementation has genuinely made the Internet a safer place or if it has unintentionally caused more limitations on the right to free speech, by offering insights into how online journalists view the Digital Security Act and its implications for their work in the rapidly changing online world. This study will contribute to the ongoing conversation about establishing a balance between digital security and freedom of expression.

### **Research Questions**

This study aims to explore the impact of the Digital Security Act (DSA) 2018 on online journalists in Bangladesh, focusing on its implications for freedom of speech, journalistic independence, and its effectiveness in combating online crimes. Following the research aims & objectives, this research has been focused on two primary research questions:

*RQ1: How do journalists perceive their experiences about the impact of the DSA 2018 on their freedom of speech in online media?*

*RQ2: What obstacles and challenges did online journalists encounter in the integration of this act?*

On the flip side, two secondary questions also followed in this study, based on the primary research questions and conceptual framework:

*RQ3: How effective has the act been in defeating online crimes?*

*RQ4: How necessary is it to have a separate law or policy for the overall development of online journalism?*

### **Literature Review**

Since the enactment of the Digital Security Act (DSA) in 2018, the law has faced strong criticism for its broad and vaguely defined provisions, which lack legal certainty and precision. Scholars and rights groups have further argued that the DSA has become a tool used by the government and ruling

party to stifle freedom of expression (Riaz, 2024). First, the act was developed based on Section 57 of the Information and Communication Technology Act 2006, which had already posed significant risks to journalists. The Act granted law enforcers the right to search and arrest anyone without a warrant (Islam, 2018). Moreover, offenses under Section 57 were made non-bailable, and the maximum penalty was 14 years of imprisonment (Islam, 2018). However, several provisions of the Digital Security Act (DSA) have raised serious concerns among journalists and media workers, as they contribute to self-censorship and create a climate of fear that undermines press freedom and journalistic practice. In response to these concerns, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR, 2022) recommended the repeal or amendment of sections 8, 21, 27, 28, 29, 31, 32, 43, and 53 of the Act. Also, these sections lack clarification with grey areas where many terms have not been defined properly. The DSA provides the government with absolute power to initiate investigations into anyone whose activities are considered a “threat” and gives law enforcement agencies the power to arrest without a warrant, simply on suspicion that a crime has been committed through the use of social media.

The implementation of this act has led to journalists and media workers losing their freedom of the press and expression, as the government and people in power, such as political parties, ruling party allies, and certain corporate elites, exert control and abuse the act to control journalists. The think-tank Centre for Governance Studies (2021) examined detailed information from 668 of the approximately 1,500 cases filed under the Digital Security Act over a period of 20 months and found that only two cases had been resolved during that time.

Despite the government enacting the DSA to defeat online crimes, it remains ineffective in curbing modern cybercrimes, as criminals are undeterred by its penalties (Hossain, 2020). The president of the Cyber Crime Awareness Foundation (CCAF), Kazi Mostafiz, said, “Cybercrimes are increasing rapidly with the rising number of internet and social media users in the country” (Hossain, 2020). The records from Bangladesh’s Cyber Tribunal in Dhaka show that 33 cases were filed with the tribunal in 2014, and the annual number rose gradually to 1,189 in 2019. People filed 1,128 cases amid the 2020 pandemic (Biswas, 2021). The special public prosecutor of the Cyber Tribunal, Md Nazrul Islam Shamim, said that the number of cases filed regarding digital crimes has increased manifold in

the last few years, and the tribunal is now dealing with thousands of cases. (Hossain, 2020).

The DSA was enacted to address the rising and sensitive issues related to cybercrime in Bangladesh, especially with the advancement of the Internet and more social media users. There is a necessity for this kind of law and acts, but mixing up online journalism with online crimes is not acceptable. Therefore, to create a favorable atmosphere for democracy and online journalism, the law should be appropriately changed (Rahman & Rashid, 2020).

The Digital Security Act (DSA) has faced strong criticism from various human rights organizations. For instance, Amnesty International (2018b) described the Act as a “grave threat to human rights”, arguing that “it is plagued by a lack of clear definitions, explanations, and exceptions, including repressive non-bailable penalties for at least 14 offences.” In a later report, Amnesty International (2023) further contended that the Government of Bangladesh must remove the Act’s draconian provisions from the draft Cyber Security Act. Similarly, Human Rights Watch (2018) noted that at least five different provisions of DSA criminalize vaguely defined forms of speech, effectively turning the law into a mechanism that enables the suppression of critical voices.

To examine the impact of the DSA on investigative journalism in Bangladesh, a study was conducted to explore various effects of this Act, as well as focusing on different directions of protection while facing fears associated with the Act (Rahman & Rashid, 2020). The finding showed that the fear of negative impacts from the DSA is highly dominant, although the aim of the law, as described, is to provide security for information and communication. From the analysis of the opinions of veteran journalists, it is observed that some particular articles of this act created serious threats in the way of investigative journalism, considering its applicable effects. Most of the journalists expressed concerns about the negative impacts the law has, as shown in the findings. It is also reflected that these harmful effects would ultimately fall on the shoulders of the state, creating such a bad situation where the government is feared to have lagged in terms of making the right decisions at the right time (Rahman & Rashid, 2020).

Another study on the effectiveness of the acts like the DSA and the Information and Communication Technology Act, 2006 in resisting cybercrimes on social media, particularly Facebook, showed that even

though the legal framework is broad, it remains technically insecure and complex (Babu & Siddik, 2021). Highlighting the prevalence of harmful content on social media, the study suggested that there is a need for new significant laws that will emphasize the “safety of social media and misuse restriction act” as a solution (Babu & Siddik, 2021). In their study, Bari and Dey (2019) showed that the enactment of the ICT and the DSA weakened the ideology of a law-based society that upholds freedom of speech, expression, and diversity. Section 57 of the ICT, which the government used to suppress free speech, was eventually revoked with the introduction of the DSA.

Aiming to discuss how the DSA has been utilized over the past two and a half years, drawing on information from primary sources, a policy paper found that the DSA became a tool for silencing dissent, with ruling party supporters and activists leveraging it to create an environment of fear and intimidation. The law is used disproportionately against journalists, especially local reporters, and younger individuals, by stifling freedom of expression (Riaz, 2021).

Despite the repeal of the DSA and the introduction of the proposed Cyber Security Act (CSA, 2023), basic concerns regarding freedom of expression and arbitrary censorship suggest a continuation of repressive control under a different label. In a critical commentary, Khan (2023) argues that the transition from the DSA to the proposed CSA does not signify substantive reform but rather an improved rebranding of state control mechanisms. The author characterizes the DSA and CSA as “the same two bottles of agony,” pointing to their shared capacity to restrict freedom of speech, enable arbitrary state surveillance, and foster opacity in governance.

In its position paper, Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) (2023) provides a detailed comparative analysis of the DSA 2018 and the draft CSA 2023. According to TIB, “the draft CSA is essentially a renamed version of the DSA, with only a few alterations in the form of apparently reduced severity of punishments.” For instance, while the CSA omits second-offense penalties in some provisions, the structural mechanisms that enable criminalization of digital speech and surveillance remain largely untouched. This suggests that the CSA attempts to address public and international criticism of the DSA by adjusting punitive optics rather than reforming the substantive legal architecture.

### **Conceptual Framework**

This research is relevant to the concept of ‘Freedom of the press as a basic human right’ as it seems more rational that allows for an in-depth examination of the relationship between security concerns and fundamental freedoms, providing insights into how acts like the DSA can either safeguard the right to information or contribute to the suppression of free expression, especially in the digital age. Press freedom is always crucial in safeguarding democratic values by enabling free expression and unbiased dissemination of information (Habermas, 1989). Also, Media freedom plays a crucial role in safeguarding democracy and security (Nord, Lundstedt, & Lindberg, 2024). Authors also argued that independent media ensure the free flow of information, foster transparency and accountability of government, and serve as a civic forum for public debate.

Freedom of the press is universally recognized as a fundamental human right for democratic governance, transparency, and the free exchange of ideas. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), specifically Article 19, states that everyone has the right to “seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.” This right is critical for journalists to perform their duties, including reporting on government actions, corporate practices, societal issues, and other matters of public concern. As a democratic country, the constitution of Bangladesh acknowledges the freedom of the press and expression as fundamental rights in Article 39 (Legislative and Parliamentary Affairs Division, 2019). Article 39(1) guarantees the freedom of thought and conscience, and Article 39(2)(a) protects the freedom of speech and expression of every citizen. In contrast, freedom of the press is assured under Article 39(2)(b). But the AL government restricted this freedom through acts like the Digital Security Act (DSA), which had been criticized for infringing on free speech and human rights. The Act had wide or ambiguous sections that could lead to arbitrary arrests, intimidation, and legal persecution of journalists, particularly those covering sensitive subjects like corruption, human rights violations, or government malpractices. Journalists had to self-censor because of such acts, undermining press freedom and possibly having a chilling effect (Article 19, 2019). According to Amnesty International, the act places “dangerous restrictions on freedom of expression” (Amnesty International, 2018a). According to the press, the act went against the main spirit of the constitution, freedom of speech, and freedom of expression to impede

independent journalism (Hasan, 2018). The possible repression of press freedom under the DSA was in opposition to the international human rights law norm of freedom of expression. A fundamental right to receive and distribute information is violated when laws are used to suppress journalistic independence. This right is necessary for informed citizenship and a healthy democracy.

### **Methodology**

This study followed a qualitative approach utilizing in-depth interviews with twelve veteran journalists from twelve different news organizations in Bangladesh. A semi-structured questionnaire with open-ended questions was used to gather data from the participants.

### ***Recruiting participants***

As the research focused on online news media, twelve veteran journalists (N=12) were recruited from twelve different online news portals. During the recruitment, participants were selected based on their experience in the field, following purposive sampling. Although while recruiting the participants, a balanced gender ratio was tried to achieve, but it was not fully attained. It also highlights the subtle dynamics of the working environment and the participation of women in senior positions. Participants were initially communicated with by utilizing personal communication platforms such as Facebook, Messenger, and WhatsApp. Finally, during the recruitment process, a consent form was provided, assuring them that their privacy would be protected and no data from the in-depth interviews would be shared. To maintain anonymity, each participant is referred to by a pseudonym, such as (Participant 1).

<b>Participant</b>	<b>News Organization</b>
Participant 1	BBC Bangla
Participant 2	BDNews24.com
Participant 3	DhakaMail.com
Participant 4	Banglanews24.com
Participant 5	Bangla Tribune
Participant 6	Channel I (Online)

<b>Participant</b>	<b>News Organization</b>
Participant 7	Prothom Alo (Online)
Participant 8	Newsbangla24.com
Participant 9	Jagonews24.com
Participant 10	DhakaPost.com
Participant 11	The New Age (Online)
Participant 12	Dhaka Times

**Table 1:** List of participants selected for interview

Interviews were conducted using Zoom, lasting between 40 and 60 minutes. A semi-structured interview guide was employed to explore major themes. Data collection continued until thematic saturation was achieved. After completing each interview, no new significant themes emerged. Eight additional journalists were contacted but declined to participate, citing security concerns and indifference to this study. The study acknowledges the limitations posed by its relatively small sample, which is primarily reflective of urban perspectives. For analysis, thematic coding was utilized. Two coders independently performed the initial coding, followed by a cross-checking process to ensure inter-coder reliability. Any inconsistencies were resolved through discussion to ensure coding consistency.

### **Findings and Analysis**

This section presents four key themes that emerged from the in-depth interviews with online journalists, reflecting their lived experiences under the Digital Security Act (DSA). The findings reveal how the law functioned less as a tool for digital safety and more as a mechanism of control. Journalists described facing legal threats, professional barriers, and punishment for critical reporting, while political actors often exploited the law to silence dissent. The DSA also blurred the line between journalism and criminal behavior, creating confusion and fear. Together, these themes highlight how press freedom was systematically compromised in the name of cybersecurity.

#### ***Legal Repression and Professional Barriers***

The findings from in-depth interviews revealed that the Digital Security Act (DSA) was widely perceived by online journalists as both a structural

obstacle to press freedom and a source of constant fear in their everyday professional lives. This theme answers the primary research question by unloading how journalists experienced and interpreted the impact of the DSA on their freedom of expression, reporting practices, and professional autonomy. Participants consistently reported that the DSA directly undermined their ability to report freely, particularly on online platforms. They described the law as a powerful tool used to silence independent journalism, restrict critical voices, and criminalize dissent. Participant 4 highlighted how the provision allowing individuals to file complaints directly in court without prior investigation opened the door to arbitrary arrests and legal harassment. This concern was echoed by Participant 8, who noted that while the law may have been introduced with good intentions, it had the opposite effect—“It acts as a barrier to objective journalism. Journalists are forced to consider the potential consequences of the law before reporting, which leads to self-censorship.”

The act’s chilling effect was not limited to direct arrests or lawsuits. Participants 5, 6, and 9 pointed out that powerful individuals and groups frequently used the DSA to threaten or intimidate journalists indirectly. These indirect forms of control further deepened the culture of fear within newsrooms. Participant 7 reflected on the broader political logic behind the act, stating that it was designed not only to suppress journalists but also to prevent ordinary citizens from criticizing the government through social media or online activism. These experiences reflect broader authoritarian tendencies, where legal tools are strategically used to limit press freedom while maintaining a façade of legitimacy (Siebert, Peterson, & Schramm, 1956).

In addition to structural repression, journalists also described a wide range of personal and professional barriers that affected their ability to work. 8 out of 12 participants, including shared accounts of being threatened with arrest, receiving legal notices, or witnessing the arrest and harassment of their colleagues. A participant described, “A colleague, after being arrested under the DSA, became seriously ill in jail and was hospitalized while still handcuffed; this incident was both traumatic and dehumanizing” (Participant 9).

Participants from newsrooms such as Bangla Tribune, Dhaka Times, and NewsBangla24 expressed that the DSA not only affected their current work but would likely deter future generations of journalists from pursuing investigative or sensitive reporting. They shared that while newsroom

management did not always issue explicit instructions, there were subtle pressures to avoid certain topics, particularly religion, the military, or political controversies, "When writing about sensitive issues or criticizing powerful individuals, I gather solid evidence like quotes, recordings, and documents to defend myself in case of defamation claims. My news organization subtly advises avoiding such topics" (Participant 7).

The accumulation of these experiences paints a sobering picture of online journalism under the DSA. Participants had to constantly balance their professional responsibilities with legal and personal safety, often leading to self-censorship and compromised reporting. Rather than protecting digital spaces, the DSA created a repressive environment that weakened independent journalism and discouraged investigative reporting, specifically in online platforms, where critical discourse and public engagement are often most vibrant.

### ***Controlled by powerful people***

Participants shared that the AL government and powerful political leaders were using this act for their own benefits to control the press and suppress those who exposed unethical activities, 'This act allowed police to arrest journalists immediately without any investigation which gave the ruling party more power to do immoral activities to break the society's stability and democracy...it also increased criminal activities' (Participant 10). Expressing concern about this, another participant said, "The act stopped us from revealing the truth of the powerful people. It created a fear among us of being arrested at any time. Suppose a mayor is involved in misappropriating rice intended for the public, and it is reported that the next day, he files a defamation case, and the police would arrest me" (Participant 11). A participant from Bangla Tribune shared, "I cannot reveal the truth, and if I did, I could get arrested. So, how can this law be effective in controlling crime? I think the act is more controlling of journalistic freedom" (Participant 7).

### ***Journalists' punishment under DSA***

We have already seen that many journalists from online platforms were harassed, threatened, and arrested for their news under the DSA. They argue that while gathering information for objective reports can be challenging, journalists should not face immediate punishment for mistakes. A participant emphasized, "Journalists providing ethical

information should not face immediate arrest or torture. While a news portal may be shut down or unlicensed, arresting journalists without investigation undermines press freedom” (Participant 6). They suggested that if errors occur, journalists should first be informed of the issue and given time to correct it (Participant 12). Participant 3 added, “If anyone thinks he was defamed or harmed, the affected parties should inform the Press Council or PIB. They can come to a proper conclusion after investigation or discussion about what steps can be taken for the mistake”. Another journalist mentioned that a journalist can be unlicensed or lose his job for his mistake after a proper investigation, but it is not fair to arrest the journalist under this kind of law (Participant 9).

### ***Blurring the Line between Journalism and Criminal Behavior***

The key finding of this study is that the DSA, while introduced as a legal tool to combat cybercrime, has been largely ineffective in addressing its intended purpose. Instead, participants overwhelmingly felt that the act had been used disproportionately against the media, contributing to an environment of fear and repression rather than public safety. Participants shared that the rise of internet users and increasing incidents of cybercrimes such as online fraud, harassment, and digital financial crimes justified the need for a strong cyber law. However, most interviewees expressed that the DSA did little to meaningfully reduce such crimes. (Participant 10) noted that serious online crimes, like information smuggling, gambling, and money laundering, continued to be unchecked, while the law is often misused to target journalists. A participant said, “The law lacked the technical and procedural mechanisms to effectively identify actual digital crimes, especially in the context of gathering digital evidence” (Participant 3).

A more concerning issue, voiced by all participants, is how online journalism has been wrongly equated with online crime under the DSA framework. All participants reported that factual reporting, or minor editorial errors, were treated as criminal offenses under the law: “As a journalist, if I write against someone with evidence and later get arrested without investigation under this law, that’s a dangerous misuse of power” (Participant 1). Participant 2 similarly noted, “Mistakes in reporting are not the same as cybercrime; they should be checked through proper journalistic accountability, not criminal law.” This conflation, according to another journalist (Participant 5), had a chilling effect not just on

professional journalists but also on bloggers and citizen journalists who may fear legal consequences for expressing dissent or reporting sensitive topics.

These findings suggest that the DSA, rather than effectively curbing digital crimes, blurred the line between journalism and criminal behavior. This misapplication undermined the core objectives of cybersecurity and contributed instead to the shrinking of civic and journalistic space in the digital domain.

### **Discussion and Recommendation**

This study argues that the legal treatment of journalism under the same framework as cybercrime is both conceptually flawed and practically harmful. When journalistic activity is governed by laws designed to address digital offenses, it results in the erosion of press freedom and the misdirection of legal resources away from actual cyber threats. The DSA, as experienced by most participants, did not function primarily as a protective instrument against cybercrime. Instead, it became a mechanism for surveillance, legal intimidation, and suppression of dissent. Journalists frequently reported that factual reporting, even when supported by evidence could trigger legal action. The use of vague legal terms allowed powerful actors to manipulate the law in ways that criminalized public interest journalism. This conflation of journalism with criminal behaviour undermines both democratic accountability and the rule of law.

Every participant in this study shared that the law created a suffocating environment in the newsrooms, encouraging pre-emptive self-censorship. This not only weakens journalistic autonomy but also deprives the public of critical information. The fear of arrest, reputational damage, or institutional pressure discourages journalists from covering sensitive yet socially necessary topics such as corruption, governance, or state violence. From a policy standpoint, a clear boundary must be drawn between journalism and cybercrime. Online journalism requires ethical regulation, but not criminalization. Participants strongly recommended a separate legal framework specifically designed for digital journalism. This law should recognize journalists, bloggers, citizen reporters, and freelance media actors under a single legal category, such as “news publishers,” and ensure protection of their rights while promoting ethical standards.

Furthermore, the idea that harsher laws create safer digital spaces is not supported by evidence. Participants emphasized the need for mass

digital literacy to equip citizens with critical skills to navigate online content, understand journalistic practices, and engage responsibly on digital platforms. Legal control without civic education only leads to fear, not safety.

Finally, the Cyber Security Act (CSA), which has replaced the DSA, risks repeating the same mistakes unless it is revised considering these lessons. A participatory process, involving journalists, legal experts, and civil society, is essential to draft laws that protect both security and freedom. Accountability for misinformation should not equate to punishment for honest reporting. Journalistic integrity must be addressed through independent media oversight bodies, not through blanket criminal charges. However, this study recommends a paradigm shift in Bangladesh's digital governance. Cybersecurity and press regulation must be seen as distinct domains, each requiring its own legal logic, oversight mechanisms, and institutional cultures. Without such separation, the digital future will remain shaped not by safety or ethics, but by silence and fear.

### **Future Implications**

This study is significant because it documents how online journalists in Bangladesh were affected by the DSA between 2018 and 2023. Although the act was introduced to fight against cybercrime, it was often used to control critical voices and limit press freedom. By sharing the real experiences of journalists, this research shows how such laws can create fear, force self-censorship, and damage the role of free media in a democracy.

Even though the DSA has later been replaced by the Cyber Security Act (CSA), many of the same problems still exist. The mindset, legal risks, and fear created by the DSA are still present in the way journalists work today. This study helps us understand how those earlier experiences continue to shape the media environment in Bangladesh.

Academically, this research adds to global discussions about media freedom, digital rights, and state control over online spaces. It provides useful insights for researchers studying press laws in South Asia and other countries facing similar challenges. On the other hand, policy-makers and human rights advocates, the study offers valuable evidence to rethink how digital laws should be written and applied, thus that they protect people's rights instead of taking them away. By focusing on the voices of journalists

themselves, this research calls for reasonable, more transparent, and human rights–based approaches to digital governance.

### **Conclusion**

The impact of the Digital Security Act of 2018 on journalists has undoubtedly generated an extensive amount of discussion. Although the act initially protected digital spaces and reduced online crimes, it has become a tool for repressing journalists, consequently limiting their freedom and independence. Journalists lack the freedom to report freely and without fear of punishment because of the environment of self-censorship generated due to the fear of harassment, arrest, and legal consequences. Rather than addressing its main objective of combating online crimes, the act

has been increasingly abused to suppress opposition and control the narrative, frequently at the expense of journalists trying to serve the public interest. Legislators must evaluate the Digital Security Act to make sure it maintains a balance between maintaining press freedom and ensuring online security. The law needs to be changed to provide journalists with clear protections so they may carry out their jobs without worrying about retribution. The entire potential of online journalism can only be achieved with such reforms, which will guarantee that journalists may keep serving the public interest free from excessive intervention or persecution.

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