

Call for papers

Transnational repression and social movements

SPECIAL ISSUE

CALL FOR PAPERS:

TRANSNATIONAL REPRESSION AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

In an era of global connectivity and rising authoritarianism, governments increasingly target exiled activists, journalists, and dissidents abroad. From assassinations and deportations to digital harassment and family intimidation, transnational repression (TR) has become a defining challenge for global activism.

*Interface: A Journal for and
about Social Movements*

HOW DO STATES REACH ACROSS BORDERS TO SILENCE DISSENT, AND HOW DO ACTIVISTS RESIST?

This special issue invites contributions exploring the forms, causes, and consequences of TR and the creative strategies of resistance it provokes. We welcome empirical, theoretical, historical, and methodological studies, as well as regional case analyses, toolkits, and movement-led reflections on concerns not limited to:

- How movement activists protect and adapt themselves from cross-border action
- The complicity of liberal democracies in TR, South-South dynamics, and regional hegemonies
- The role of media, technology, and surveillance in shaping TR
- New conceptual frameworks for understanding TR and social movements

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We recognise that visibility can pose risks to some of our contributors.
We accept anonymous submissions and a variety of contribution types.
See the full *Call for Papers* as well as submission guidelines on our website.



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What is the issue about?

In a highly interconnected world political movements have become ubiquitous. Movement activists, particularly in authoritarian regimes, have sought refuge in more liberal states. However, a decline in liberalism and innovations in response to local oppositional challengers by the state beyond its geographical borders requires serious attention.

Freedom House defines Transnational Repression (TR) as governments reaching across borders to silence dissent among diasporas and exiles through methods such as assassinations, illegal deportations, abductions, digital threats, Interpol abuse, and family intimidation. TR practices by authoritarian regimes in the Middle East are well documented. Falun Gong activists in Western countries face coercion from the Chinese state through threats to family members in Mainland China. Similarly, activists from the Khalistan and Balochistan movements residing in North America have been targeted in assassination campaigns allegedly orchestrated by Indian and Pakistani state agents.

While TR is often associated with authoritarian governments, liberal democracies have also played a role, through direct collaboration with repressive regimes (e.g., INTERPOL red notices) or indirectly via initiatives like the War on Terror. With authoritarianism rising in countries such as Israel, India, and the United States, it is critical to examine how democracies traditionally seen as champions of human rights are implicated in these practices. Because TR projects domestic political control into international spaces (Lewis, 2015), it raises urgent questions about its impact on global activism and the responses of activists. Palestine solidarity activists face harassment, deportation, and arbitrary detention, particularly in the U.S. and Germany. Information workers in the “global fact-checking movement” (Graves, 2018) are also pursued in ways that challenge the relevance of national borders. The case of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, Washington Post journalist Jamal Khashoggi and the systematic and unprecedented assassinations of journalists in the ongoing Gaza War (Turse, 2025) further highlight the global reach and consequences of a different kind of movement repression.

Why is it important?

The May 2011 issue of *Interface* focused on “movement repression,” but the scale and complexity of repressive practices with global consequences suggest revisiting this topic. While repression of dissidents, exiles, and émigrés from authoritarian states is well documented, the phenomenon of *transnational repression* represents a distinct and ever evolving challenge. It involves diverse regime types employing increasingly sophisticated technologies to extend their reach beyond borders. These transnational repressive repertoires warrant fresh theoretical formulations. For instance, Earl and Braithwaite (2022) argue for a “layered framework” of social movement repression that can account for up-stream and down-stream effects of political repression; how systematic

repression of entire populations significantly impacts specific protests, and how specific movements become pivotal in pushing transnational human rights regimes and the state's commitment to civil rights. Such a formulation shifts, although not necessarily, from a common rational-choice explainers for movement repression to a pervasive Foucauldian account of power.

The role of media censorship and global information flows in transnational repression (TR) requires particular examination. In the digital age, regimes exploit cyberspace to suppress transnational solidarity, particularly through online surveillance and harassment, as in the #MilkTeaAlliance in Thailand, Hong Kong and Taiwan. Big tech is directly implicated in censorship, surveillance and suppression of activists as the case of Facebook approval of ads promoting assassination of Pro-Palestine activists (Intercept, 21st November 2023) demonstrates. It is understood that certain protests are politically convenient and media scholars have typically demonstrated this through questions of news representation, suppression and cooptation of political events (see Gamson 2004; Cottle 2008; Tufekci 2014). But less is understood about the outcomes, and in particular consequences for social movements, of selective media spotlight. This requires new ways of thinking of media repression, transnational activism and activism in the peripheries.

The end of the Cold War and the emergence of a multipolar order is accompanied by movements and populist formations that often lie outside neat ideological binaries. In this area Moss et al. (2022) highlight specific attention to be paid on how host country contexts, bilateral alliances, and regional security arrangements shape the contours of transnational repression. Greater understanding is also required on the motivations behind repression beyond calculated deterrence to notions of fury, revenge, perceived injustice or even as a performance (Earl and Braithwaite, 2022).

Some key questions the issue will address

This issue seeks to examine the forms, causes, and consequences of transnational repression (TR) across regimes, and how activists resist or adapt to reshape the legitimacy and resilience of their movements. It invites reflection on how repertoires of contention respond to digital surveillance, cyberattacks, and information control, and under what conditions they succeed or fail. Contributors are encouraged to consider how movements can draw from global strategies of resistance amid evolving censorship and repression. We invite in-depth empirical, historical and theoretical analyses, case studies and regional explorations, reports, opinion pieces, relevant interviews and other significant material, short contributions centred on transnational repressive repertoires from around the world. We also welcome toolkits, cheat sheets, tutorials and

repositories that promote open source information sharing and fact-checking. They can address questions that are not limited to the following:

1. How do targeted activist communities reconfigure their activism, alliances, and security practices in response to TR? How do movement activists protect, resist and adapt to challengers from abroad, and in liaison with local partners?
2. How do South-South dynamics complicate the standard authoritarian-liberal binary in movement repression? How to explain TR within regional hegemonies or security communities?
3. Do we require new theoretical or methodological approaches to examine repression, in particular TR? Is there a need to rethink the meaning of TR given its diverse, interdisciplinary and cross cutting manifestations? What conceptual integration would that entail with social movement theory?
4. In what ways are liberal democracies complicit in repressing movements—through passive mechanisms (e.g., surveillance technology exports, data sharing with hostile states) or active complicity (e.g., deportations, red notices)? What are the emotional, affective, and performative dimensions of repression beyond strategic deterrence—e.g., revenge, humiliation, or sovereign assertion?
5. How do host country legal systems, intelligence cooperation, and bilateral security arrangements enable or resist TR practices? How do legal frameworks—such as international human rights law, asylum law, or extradition treaties—constrain or facilitate the reach of repressive states?
6. How are the various dimensions of TR intersectional and gendered? Are some forms of movements and movement actors under heightened risk of repression?
7. To what extent do global media platforms act as both sites of exposure and instruments of suppression in TR campaigns? What lessons can movements draw from the experience of TR victims with regards to media awareness, media coverage and representation?
8. How does media coverage, or lack thereof, movements in the peripheries by societies in the core impact their legitimacy and success? What is the discursive, symbolic, and representational nature of this impact for activists, their actions and targets? How can movements respond to these reflexive interventions in their practice? Is there a potential for substantive outcomes from performative activism?
9. How does digital repression, including cyber harassment and algorithmic censorship, restructure global information flows and activist ecologies? What are some of the ways activists can protect themselves from censorship and surveillance in the digital realm?
10. Are there best practices, movement and/or community-led initiatives, for fact-checking and truth seeking, specially in the digital realm? What are the

ethics and limits of journalistic, fact-checking, or whistleblowing labor under sustained transnational surveillance and threat?

Submission information and important dates

All contributions should go to the appropriate regional editors listed on our website. The deadline for initial submissions to this issue, to be published in October/November 2026, is 30 March 2026. We encourage authors to submit a 250 to 500-word abstract to help us engender a coherent conversation between the various contributions to this issue. For non-standard academic contributions (interviews, audio-files, toolkits, literary writings, social movement and activist notes, etc), we recommend you provide us with a short description of the content and form of your submission. This is not mandatory for your submission to be accepted, but it will also help you prepare your submission.

Anonymous submissions:

To support researchers at risk of repression, we are happy to publish articles with a pseudonym where necessary. We have set up a secure ProtonMail address for submissions, interface_submissions@proton.me, where you can let us know both your official name and the one you want to publish under. We can then confirm the authenticity of your claim as author of the article, if repression eases or if you move to another country etc. To submit your work securely, please create your own ProtonMail account and use it to send your submission to our email address. When creating your account, do not provide a recovery email or phone number – select “skip” if asked. Set strong passwords and enable two-factor authentication for added protection.

Timeline and deadlines:

- Abstracts and descriptions of submissions: 30 January 2026
- Deadline for all submissions: 30 March 2026
- Review and production process until publication: October/November 2026

Please see the guidelines for contributors (<http://www.interfacejournal.net/submissions/guidelines-for-contributors/>) for more indications on content and style. Submission templates are available online via the guidelines page (<http://www.interfacejournal.net/submissions/guidelines-for-contributors/>) and should be used to ensure correct formatting. *Interface* is a completely voluntary effort, without the resources of commercial journals, so we have to do all the layout and typesetting ourselves. The only way we can manage this is to ask authors to use these templates when preparing submissions. We can accept material in Bengali, Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian, Bulgarian, Czech, Danish,

Dutch, English, Farsi, French, German, Hindi, Italian, Norwegian, Polish, Romanian, Slovak and Spanish.

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