INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES BULLETIN
ISSN: (E) 3007-1917 (P) 3007-1909
Volume 3, Issue 9, 2025

FREE SPEECH UNDER SIEGE: MEDIA CENSORSHIP IN PAKISTAN

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DOI:https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17099007

Received	Revised	Accepted	Published
20 June 2025	08 August, 2025	28 August 2025	11 September 2025

ABSTRACT

The research paper titled "Free Speech under Siege: Media Censorship in Pakistan" delves into the complex and controversial issue of censorship within Pakistani media, shedding light on the dynamics that drive the suppression of creative and political expression. It examines the underlying factors that lead to bans or censorship, with a particular focus on the influence of political and religious entities, especially in cases where topics such as sexuality come into play. The award-winning film Joyland served as the initial case study, offering a starting point to understand the theoretical framework of censorship practices. However, the study did not remain confined to this example; it expanded its scope to encompass broader and more contemporary cases, including the political turmoil surrounding Imran Khan and the ongoing challenges faced by his party, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf. These instances illustrate how censorship often extends beyond cultural issues to deeply impact political narratives and public discourse. Additionally, the research thoroughly reviewed existing theories and documented cases from both national and global contexts to establish a strong conceptual foundation. The study aims to critically analyse how censorship operates in Pakistan's current media landscape, highlighting its implications for freedom of expression, cultural representation, and democratic values. These examples demonstrate how censorship extends beyond cultural or moral concerns to become a tool for political control and narrative shaping.

INTRODUCTION

Media censorship remains a deeply contested and multifaceted issue in Pakistan, where political, religious, and cultural forces often intersect to shape what content is deemed acceptable for public consumption. In recent years, this dynamic has become increasingly visible, particularly through high-profile cases where films, television, and news media have faced bans or heavy regulation. One such example is the internationally acclaimed film Joyland, which faced censorship in Pakistan due to its portrayal of gender and sexuality—subjects that continue to provoke public and institutional discomfort.

This research paper uses Joyland as a launching point to investigate the broader mechanisms and motivations behind media censorship in Pakistan. It explores how controversial themes—especially those related to sexuality, political dissent, or religious sensitivity—often lead to suppression, revealing underlying socio-political anxieties. The study further examines recent political developments, including the censorship of narratives surrounding former Prime Minister Imran Khan and his party, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), to highlight how political control can extend into media regulation.

Through analysis of existing literature and policy documents, this research aims to offer a comprehensive understanding of the current state of media censorship in Pakistan. Ultimately, the paper seeks to question not only the mechanisms of censorship but also its implications for freedom of expression, artistic autonomy, and democratic discourse in the

country.

Background

Censorship in Pakistan is not merely a regulatory act—it is a reflection of deeper ideological, political, and cultural tensions within the society. Historically rooted in concerns about morality, national security, and religious values, censorship has evolved into a tool often employed to manage public perception, suppress dissent, and reinforce dominant narratives. The intersection of political authority, religious conservatism, and cultural sensitivities plays a central role in determining what content is allowed to reach the public, creating a media environment that is heavily filtered and selectively controlled.

Recent events have exposed the increasing visibility and intensity of censorship, particularly in the arts and news media. Films like Joyland have sparked controversy due to their focus on gender and sexuality—subjects often seen as challenging traditional values and norms. This has revealed a pattern in which topics that confront societal taboos or question authority are systematically silenced. Furthermore, the media blackout surrounding political figures like former Prime Minister Imran Khan and his party, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), underscores how censorship is also wielded for political purposes.

This study investigates these trends to understand the underlying motivations behind censorship—whether to preserve cultural identity, uphold religious orthodoxy, or maintain political control—and examines their implications for Pakistan's democratic and creative future

i.Problem Statement:

The initial emergence of this topic began with the case of the censored movie *Joyland*. While it is not hidden that films treading on delicate subjects like sexuality can often be targeted to a ban, it was unusual to see a pattern even on movies that were to be showcased for the sake of awareness, for example *Javed Iqbal: An Untold Story of a Serial Killer*. Hence, the research was started from the censorship policies imposed by the National Censor Board. This analysis provides an insight on the effects of widespread censorship in today's modern media, including but not limited to news, gaming, media, television, and cinema. The purpose of the research was to determine whether the reasoning behind these censors was something trivial — or whether it had deep rooted, perhaps superficial origins. Religion is the main consideration behind censorship, and politics is secondary.

The findings of this are varied research and have been generalized due to the gradual understanding of the implications of censorship, as they are being limited not only to films, but to various political conflicts and crises as well.

Media censorship in Pakistan has become a persistent and escalating concern, revealing the intricate interplay between cultural, religious, and political forces. This research was initially inspired by the controversial censorship of the critically acclaimed film *Joyland*. The movie, which explores themes of gender identity and sexuality, was banned in certain parts of the country despite receiving international recognition and being selected as Pakistan's entry to the Oscars. Its censorship raised critical questions about the boundaries of creative freedom and the motivations behind such regulatory decisions. While it is somewhat expected in Pakistan's conservative society for films tackling subjects like sexuality to face scrutiny or prohibition, what was particularly striking was the growing pattern of censorship even in content designed for social awareness and education.

A significant example of this pattern is the film *Javed Iqbal: The Untold Story of a Serial Killer*, which, despite its purpose of shedding light on a real and disturbing chapter in the country's history, was also barred from screening. The film's cancellation underlines a broader, more troubling tendency: censorship in Pakistan is no longer limited to content considered morally or religiously offensive but extends to narratives that are educational, critical, or politically sensitive. This led to an inquiry into whether the act of censoring media in Pakistan is being guided by objective standards and ethical responsibilities—or whether it is increasingly being used as a tool of suppression rooted in ideological bias and power consolidation.

The core problem identified in this research is

the inconsistent and opaque nature of censorship policies in Pakistan, especially as implemented by bodies such as the National Censor Board. While censorship is theoretically meant to protect public morality and social cohesion, in practice, it often seems to serve selective interests, reinforcing religious orthodoxy or political agendas rather than responding to legitimate societal concerns. This ambiguity raises significant concerns about freedom of expression, the right to information, and the ability of creative industries to function independently within the country.

Furthermore, the scope of censorship has extended well beyond the film industry. Through this research, it became evident that censorship in Pakistan is a systemic issue that now affects multiple dimensions of media, including television broadcasts, online content, digital gaming, journalism, and political discourse. News outlets have faced suspensions or pressure to alter coverage, political leaders have been banned from media appearances, and digital platforms have seen increasing regulation under vague cybercrime or blasphemy laws.

The implications are not only cultural but deeply political, as censorship becomes a mechanism for shaping public opinion and muting opposition. While religion is often cited as the primary justification for censorship, particularly in cases involving sexuality, gender roles, or perceived immorality, the research reveals that political motivations are also deeply embedded in these decisions. The suppression of political narratives, especially those opposing the current ruling elite or challenging national security narratives, highlights the extent to which censorship is used to control the national discourse.[1]Their portrayal in mainstream media has been heavily regulated, and their voices often marginalized or silenced outright. This blurring of lines between moral guardianship and political manipulation forms the crux of the problem that this research aims to dissect.

The challenge in identifying and addressing the problem of censorship in Pakistan lies in its layered and often contradictory nature. There is no singular, clearly defined censorship policy; instead, there are overlapping frameworks shaped by legal, religious, political, and bureaucratic influences. This leads to arbitrary enforcement and inconsistent decisions, where some content is passed without issue while similar material is restricted or banned without clear explanation. This unpredictability not only stifles creativity and innovation but also cultivates a climate of fear and self-censorship among artists, journalists, and content creators.

Another critical aspect of this issue is the lack of transparency and accountability in censorship decisions. The processes by which content is evaluated and censored are largely closed to public scrutiny. Filmmakers and journalists often receive vague or non-specific reasons for the rejection of their work, and appeals mechanisms are either weak or non-existent. This has led to frustration and disillusionment among media professionals, many of whom are forced to navigate a system where the rules are unclear, and the risks are high.

The research also uncovers the superficial nature of many censorship justifications. Often, the reasoning presented is based on assumed public sentiment or vague cultural norms rather than empirical evidence or open dialogue. In many cases, censorship appears to be driven more by the fear of backlash or controversy than by any real threat posed by the content itself. This creates a dangerous precedent where offense is assumed rather than proven, and where the avoidance of discomfort takes precedence over meaningful discussion or artistic integrity.

Moreover, this widespread and often superficial censorship has far-reaching implications for society at large. When media is censored not for genuine harm but for ideological or political convenience, it deprives the public of critical perspectives and diverse narratives. It weakens democratic structures by limiting access to information and stifling dissent. It also undermines the potential of the arts and media to challenge norms, inspire dialogue, and promote social progress.

In light of these concerns, the present research sets out to identify the underlying causes and consequences of censorship in Pakistan. By examining a range of case studies—from banned films like *Joyland* and *Javed Iqbal* to the political silencing of PTI figures—the study aims to determine whether censorship is being wielded responsibly or opportunistically. Through engagement with existing scholarly literature, the research constructs a comprehensive picture of how censorship operates and who it ultimately serves.

The central problem, therefore, is not merely that censorship exists, but that it exists in a form that is inconsistent, politically motivated, and harmful to both cultural development and democratic governance. It is essential to investigate how and why censorship is implemented in Pakistan, what forces drive its expansion, and what can be done to ensure a more transparent, fair, and balanced media environment. Only through such inquiry can we begin to imagine a media landscape where freedom of expression is protected, diversity is embraced, and critical discourse is not only permitted but encouraged.

ii. Critical Framework:

Monika Mehta's (2001) definition of censorship, on the other hand, is less generalized. According to her research, censorship is a state-mandated act of prohibition. Instead of organizations or institutions, it is the state, the film business, and the populace that exert power in relation to one another in the censorship theatre. She also builds onto the role of these institutions by investigating the power of state censorship in postcolonial nations. The results claim three assumptions from her investigations, including that:

1. The state only prohibits and cuts representations, overlooking other state practices such as certification and classification;
2. The state solely exercises power in the field of censorship. This approach ignores the role of citizenry, film industries, corporations and non-governmental organizations in advocating for censorship;
3. The state discourse on censorship is totalizing, thereby neglecting possibilities of collaboration, negotiation and resistance. Within such accounts, censorship is cast as a sign of state authority, and is located within the ambit of state laws, rules, committees and juridical cases[2]. (Monika Mehta, 2021, pg. 49)

Garth Jowett (1991, pg.163) has taken a more theoretical approach by claiming that film censors have been serving a significant role in deciphering the patterns of political and cultural assertion. He takes an example of the famous U.S. Supreme Court case *Mutual Film Corporation* [3]*Industrial Commission of Ohio* (1915) which made clear the connection between politics and morality. The Court unanimously denied the motion picture the constitutional protections of freedom of speech and press despite the fact that films have proven their capacity to "communicate ideas."

In response to social and religious unrest in Pakistan, General Zia added to and expanded the blasphemy laws in an effort to establish state authority and sovereignty. These laws have supported specific stagings of state legitimacy and sovereignty during both the colonial and postcolonial periods [4](Asad Ali Ahmad, 2009, pg. 177), and they still aid the government in restricting the constantly emerging artistic expressions that are conveyed through media.

iii. The Significance of Research

This study is significant because it sheds light on the increasingly complex and politically charged nature of media censorship in Pakistan—an issue that directly impacts freedom of expression, cultural development,

[2] *What Is Behind Film Censorship*, Mehta, M. (2001), *The Khalnayak Debates,* University of Minnesota

[3] *The "Facts" of the "Censored" Film:* Jowett, G. (1991), *Theoretical and History Approaches*, University of Kansas

[4] *Censorship in South Asia*, Ahmad, Ali, A. (2009), *Cultural Regulation from Sedition to Seduction,* Indiana University Press

and democratic integrity. In a country where media is one of the few platforms available for public discourse, the act of censoring content based on religious, political, or moral grounds can have far-reaching consequences. As censorship becomes more systemic and inconsistent, it affects not only filmmakers and journalists but also the general public, who are denied access to diverse viewpoints and critical information.

The need for this study arises from the growing frequency of censorship cases that go beyond traditional boundaries of "protecting morality." From the banning of *Joyland* for its LGBTQ+ themes to the silencing of political opposition in mainstream and digital media, these examples show that censorship is being used not just for cultural or religious preservation but increasingly as a tool of political control. Despite this growing trend, there is a lack of comprehensive academic research that investigates the underlying motivations, patterns, and implications of media censorship in Pakistan today.

This approach helps in understanding not only what is being censored but *why* it is happening and *who* benefits from it. It also highlights the psychological and professional toll censorship takes on artists, journalists, and creators, many of whom are pushed toward self-censorship out of fear of retribution or backlash.

In addition, this research contributes to the broader academic and public dialogue on the role of media in society. By documenting real-world examples and analysing the socio-political structures that enable censorship, the study offers valuable insights for policymakers, media practitioners, human rights advocates, and scholars alike. It aims to encourage critical reflection on current censorship practices and advocate for greater transparency, consistency, and fairness in media regulation.

Ultimately, this study is needed not just to expose problems, but to contribute toward a vision of a more open and democratic media environment in Pakistan—one where creativity, dissent, and dialogue are not punished, but protected.

Literature Review

Wajiha Raza Rizvi (2018) speaks in her article about the revolutionary change in the Pakistani media in terms of visual pleasure or visually appealing content, and has conducted an examination through the lens of media censorship. Going through the history of Pakistani and Indian cinema, her analysis mentions how the media revolved around controversy surrounding the sexuality and honour of women mostly in relation to religion. The biases of the CBFC (Central Board of Film Censors) can be proved with the fact that Pakistani audiences are allowed to watch nudity in western films whereas a minor depiction of intimacy in Pakistani films can cause a debate. Rizvi has provided several examples from the Pakistani media industry. After a Pashto film portraying two wives beating their husband with shoes, the outrage caused by this led to Pathans setting fire to the Taj Mahal Cinema in Karachi. They saw this as a negative portrayal of their culture. (pg. 139). According to Rizvi, the interference of religion in the film business is extremely significant. This has a direct link to the censorship. The involvement of religion can prove to be beneficial as the reaction of the community can be predicted beforehand through it. The data collected by the author from the CBFC supports the religious point of views in various samples. The element of modesty opposes the sexual portrayal in films or as the CBFC calls it, “Sexually overwhelming content”. [5]

Parveen and Bhatti (2018) examine the history of media censorship and freedom of expression in Pakistan. Since the country's independence in 1947, the government has used various means to control the media and limit freedom of expression, including the use of laws and regulations, censorship, and harassment of journalists. Their viewpoint provides a historical overview of the different periods of media censorship in Pakistan, including the military dictatorships of Ayub Khan, Zia-ul-Haq, and Pervez Musharraf. Discussions also talk about the role of the judiciary in protecting freedom of expression and the challenges faced

[5] Rizvi, Raza, W. (2018) *The London Film & Media Reader 5: The Censorship of Visual Pleasure in Pakistani Cinema.* The London Symposium.

by journalists and media organizations in Pakistan today. Facts can be ignored or censored by journalists for a variety of reasons, including governmental constraints, political pressure, media owners` corporate or political interests, cultural and religious standards, as well as their own opinions and political and religious connections.[6]

Jamil (2020) emphasizes that journalism in Pakistan has become increasingly perilous, with risks extending beyond physical safety to include psychological, financial, legal, gender-specific, public, and particularly digital threats. Journalists face online harassment, hacking, data theft, blackmail, and surveillance, forcing many to adopt self-censorship practices. Although some efforts have been made to address physical security, digital safety remains largely neglected. Reports indicate that digital exposure has heightened physical vulnerabilities, contributing to kidnapping, unlawful detention, and even murders.

Self-censorship also stems from journalists' personal ideologies, ethnicity, religious affiliations, media organizations' policies, and political or military pressure. Sensitive topics such as politics, religion, military affairs, and sexuality are often avoided. Journalists lack training in digital security, preferring to censor communication rather than adopt protective tools. To counter these challenges, legal reforms are needed to protect journalists' rights and freedom of expression. Comprehensive digital safety education in journalism curricula, alongside organizational training, is crucial. Failure to address these issues will intensify self-censorship, undermining press freedom, public access to information, and democratic development in Pakistan.[7]

Research Methodology

The aim of the research revolved around developing an understanding of media censorship in Pakistan. To ensure focused research, the topic was narrowed down in accordance with the film industry in Pakistan. To delve deep into this research, studying the laws of censorship in Pakistan and exploring the policies of the Central Board of Film Censorship (CBFC) were considered essential. The research strategy involved organizing the collected data in relevance to political and religious contexts, among other factors.

i. Research Methods and Data Collection:

The secondary sources that were collected, given the primary focus on the film industry, consisted of previous articles written by authors on the censorship of Pakistani films. Additionally, Analyses of contentious films that the government had prohibited as well as the public's reaction to them were also conducted. These resources were obtained from the internet, as well as libraries and industry archives, when available.

The research required access to various kinds of documentation, including official censor board documents, articles, and archives. Previous articles on the censorship of Pakistani films and archives of the film industry were analysed to understand the industry's evolution and changes in censorship policies over time. These documents played a crucial role in providing a strong foundation for referencing and comparing the subject matter of the study in different time periods.

ii. Data Analysis:

The data collection tools utilized for this research on censorship in the Pakistani film industry comprised a combination of secondary and primary sources. The secondary sources consisted of previous articles on censorship in Pakistani media, and an analysis of controversial films that had been banned by the government. These sources provided valuable insights into the historical context and public response to censorship measures. The primary sources adopted for this research was the survey questionnaire and filled from the different individuals from the local public and the people which have experience of

[6] Parveen, S. & Bhatti Nawaz, M. (2018). *Freedom of expression and media censorship in Pakistan: A historical study.* Bahauddin Zakariya University Journal of Humanities, 4(2), 1-18.

[7] Jamil, S. (2020) *Digital surveillance, safety risks and journalists' self-censorship in Pakistan,* Routledge

censorship in the Pakistani film industry to supplement the primary and secondary sources, and articles about the film industry was crucial.

iii. The Limitations:

The research faced limitations due to the political implications of the topic. The government's influence on media censorship could impact the depth of information obtained, and difficulties might arise during survey questionnaires and analysis due to potential biases related to religious policies. The political ramifications of the subject might **present challenges** for the investigation. The extent of the information received can be affected by the government's influence on media censorship, and challenges can develop during **surveys and research** due to potential biases related to religious policies.

Results and Findings

Results showcase a major involvement of religious biases. Secondary factors involve politics and lack of attention towards censorship policies. The table below summarizes the core themes found common within the findings.

Table. 1: Main themes discovered in research.

Core Themes	Description
Religion being a major reason behind censorship and the involvement of Islamic Political Parties (TLP)	Within the initial stages of research, religion was assumed to be a much more minimal factor behind the bans of Joyland or Zindagi Tamasha. The abuse of religion was revealed upon the findings of TLP — or Tehreek-e-Labbaik — sparking controversy when Sarmad`s film was nearing its release (courtesy of Dawn, 2020). Holding such power, it is not hard for TLP to forcefully impose censors on films and coverages that do not please them.
Political involvement	Another major theme discovered was the unnecessary political involvement behind the censors of Pakistani media. Whether it be movies or political speeches portraying a wrong image of the army or other, more influential political parties get them censored or banned. There is no freedom of speech in politics itself, taking Imran Khan's recent arrest as an example, or Arshad Sharif's murder for exposing the Sharif family.
Outdated censorship laws	For better and well-grounded research, the study concluded that the censorship laws implemented when censoring anything and a major finding was that the rules implemented in today's age and time are from 1979.

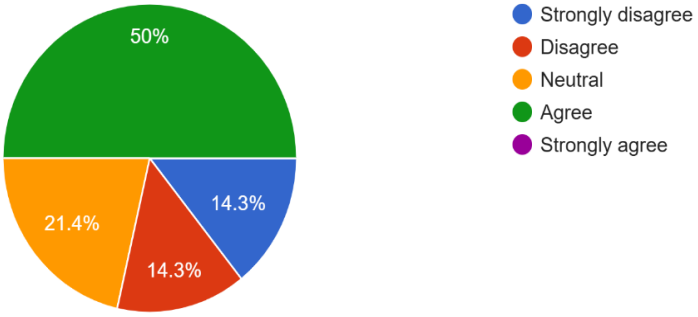
Results

Core Theme 01: Religion being a major reason behind censorship and the involvement of Islamic Political Parties (TLP)

Within the initial stages of research, religion was assumed to be a much more minimal factor behind the bans of Joyland or Zindagi Tamasha. The abuse of religion was revealed upon the findings of TLP — or Tehreek-e-Labbaik — sparking controversy when Sarmad`s film was nearing its release (courtesy of Dawn, 2020). Holding such power, it is not hard for TLP to forcefully impose censors on films and coverages that do not please them.

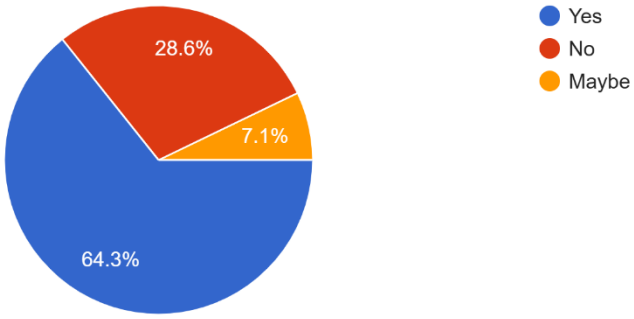
To what extent do you agree with the statement: "Religion is a primary driver of censorship in Pakistan"?

14 responses



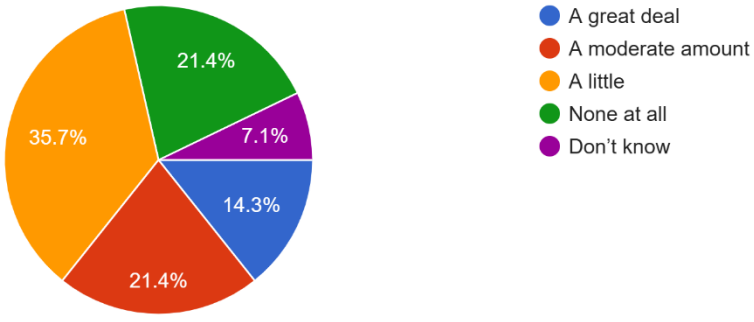
Have you personally experienced or observed censorship (e.g., blocked content, banned books, social media restrictions) that you believe was influenced by religious sentiments?

14 responses

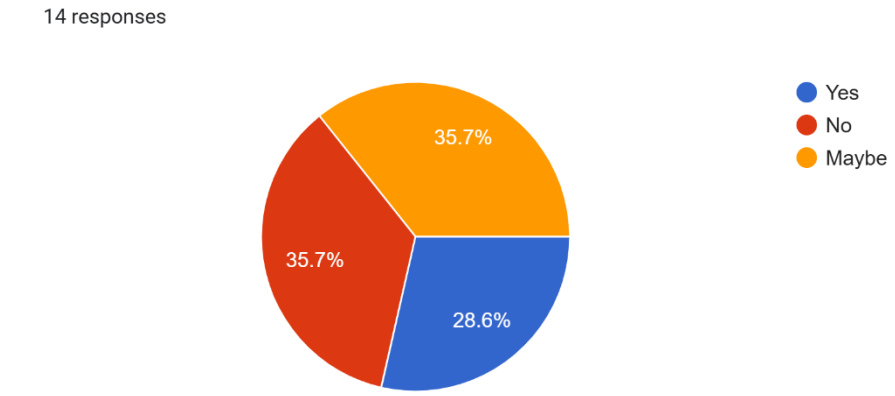


In your opinion, how much influence do Islamic political parties (like Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan) have on government censorship policies?

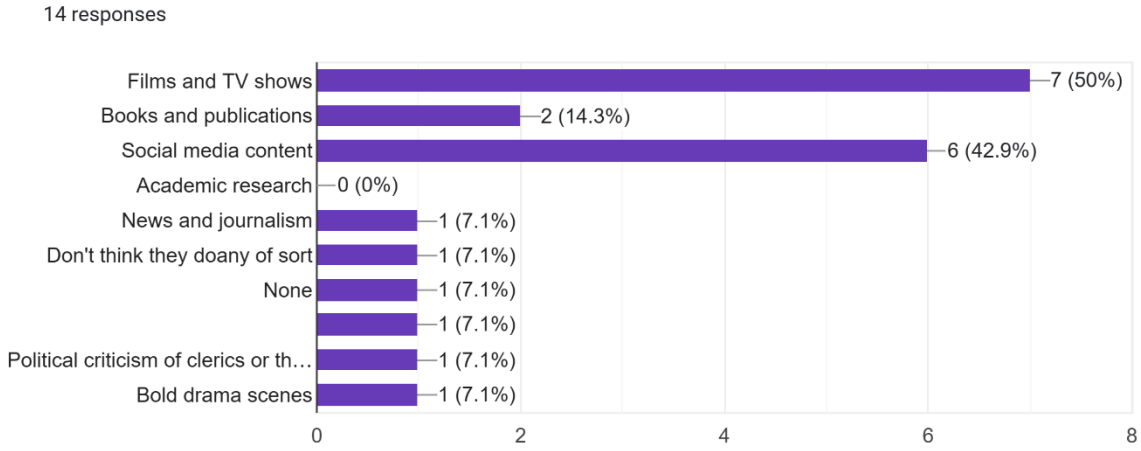
14 responses



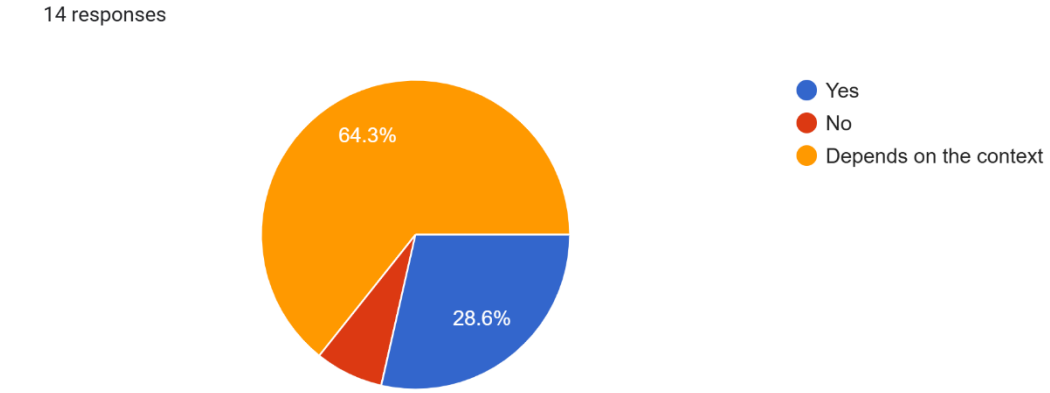
Do you believe Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan's actions have led to increased censorship in media and education?



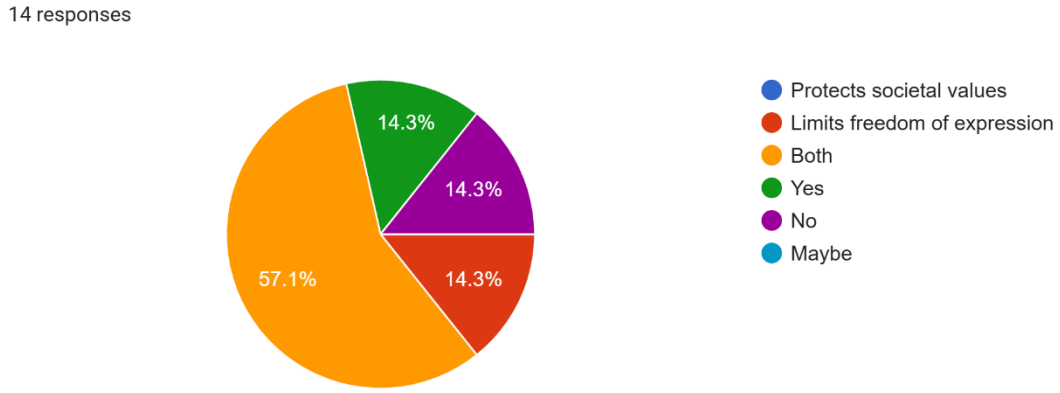
Which types of content do you think are most likely to be censored due to religious reasons in Pakistan? (Select all if apply)



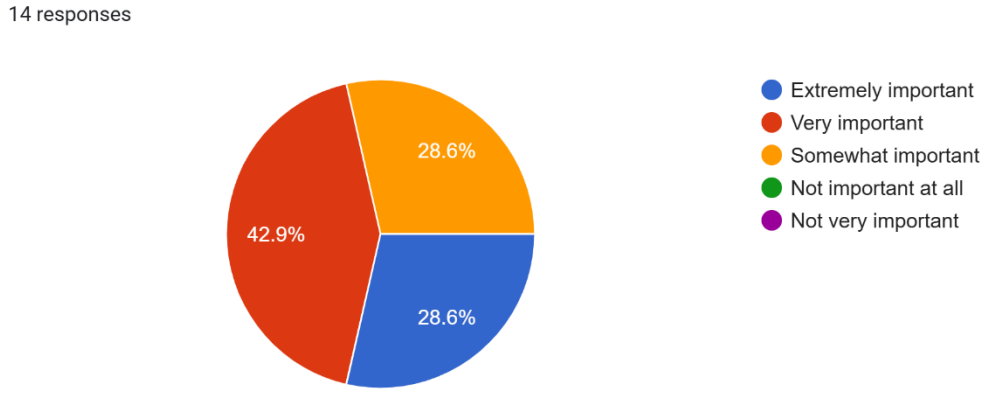
Should political parties with strong religious ideologies have a say in what content is censored in a country?



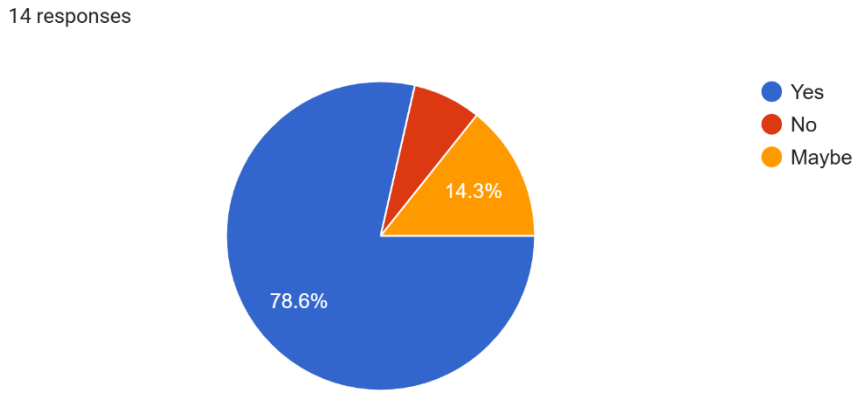
Do you think censorship driven by religious pressure protects societal values or limits freedom of expression?



How important is it to maintain a balance between religious values and freedom of expression in policymaking?



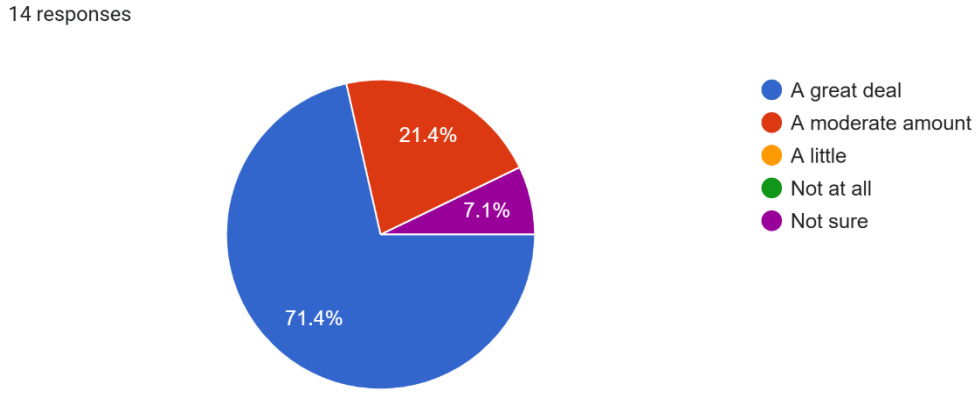
What do you think that perspective of religion should be kept in mind while making a film?



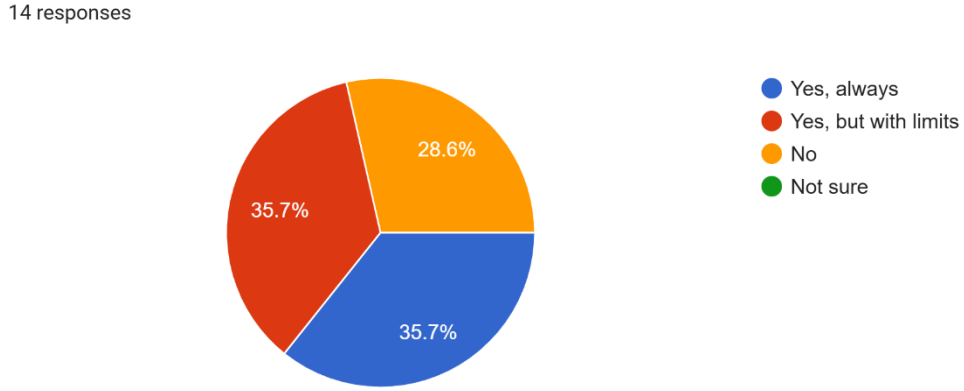
Core Theme 02: Political involvement

Another major theme discovered was the unnecessary political involvement behind the censors of Pakistani media. Whether it be movies or political speeches portraying a wrong image of the army or other, more influential political parties get them censored or banned. There is no freedom of speech in politics itself, taking Imran Khan's recent arrest as an example, or Arshad Sharif's murder for exposing the Sharif family.

To what extent do you believe political influence is responsible for media censorship in Pakistan?

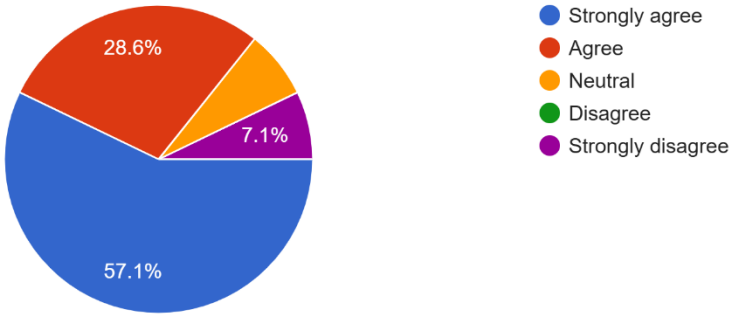


Do you think criticism of powerful institutions (e.g., the military or major political parties) should be allowed in Pakistani media?



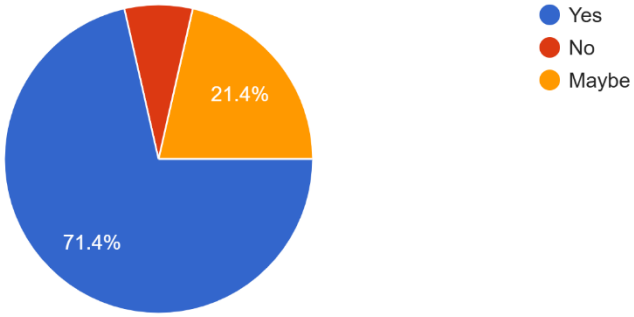
In your opinion, was Imran Khan's arrest an example of political suppression rather than legal action?

14 responses



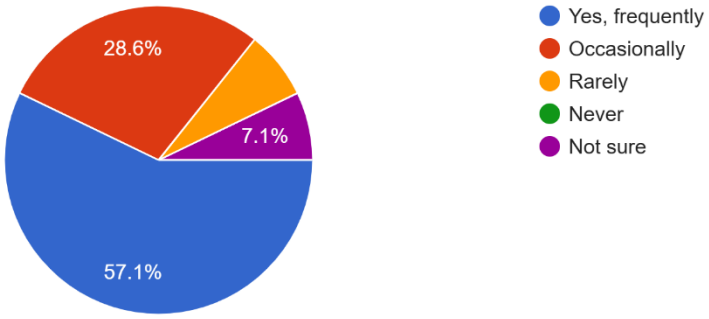
Do you believe the murder of journalist Arshad Sharif was related to his criticism of powerful political figures?

14 responses



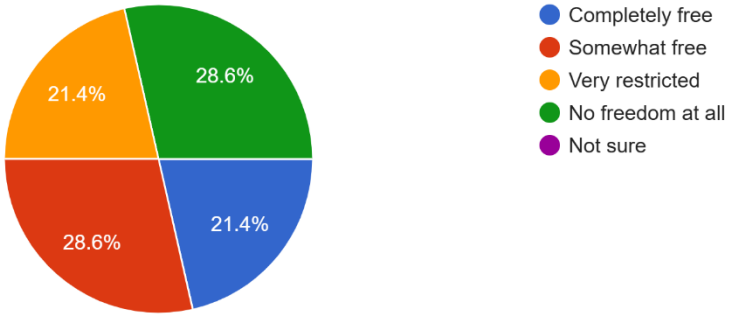
Have you seen or heard of content (e.g., films, news segments, speeches) being censored for portraying the military or political elites negatively?

14 responses



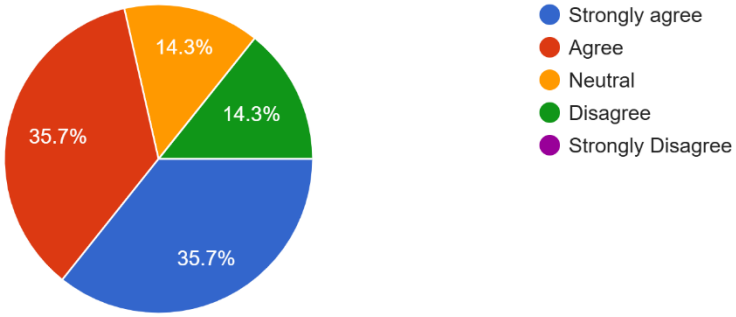
How would you describe the current state of freedom of speech in Pakistani politics?

14 responses



Should political interference in media censorship be limited through independent regulatory bodies?

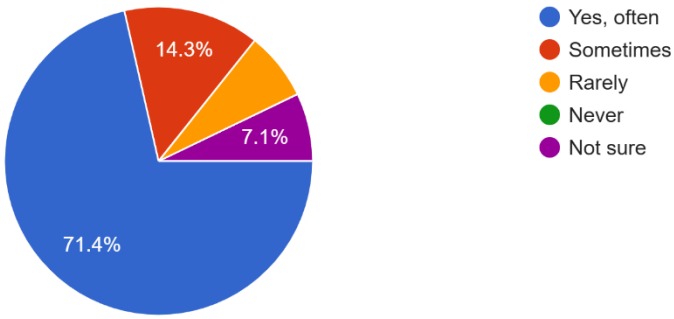
14 responses



Institute for Excellence in Education & Research

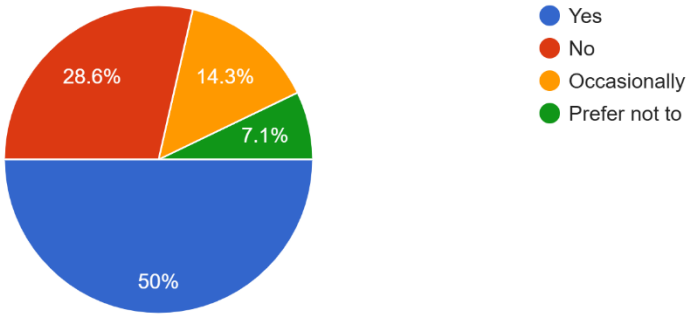
Do you think Pakistani media outlets practice self-censorship out of fear of retaliation from political or military authorities?

14 responses



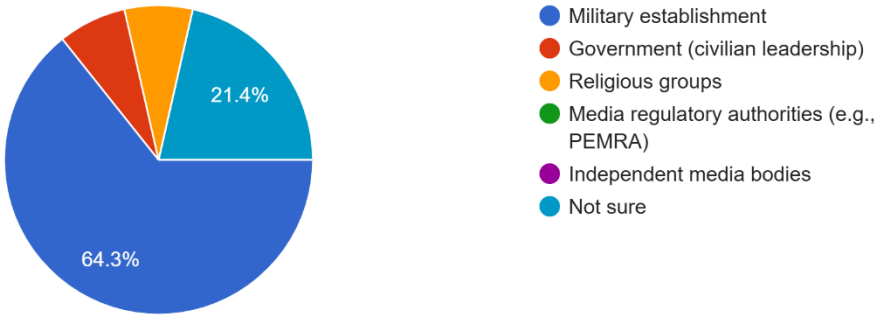
Have you ever avoided discussing political topics (online or in public) due to fear of censorship or legal consequences?

14 responses



Which institution do you believe has the most control over what is allowed or censored in Pakistani media?

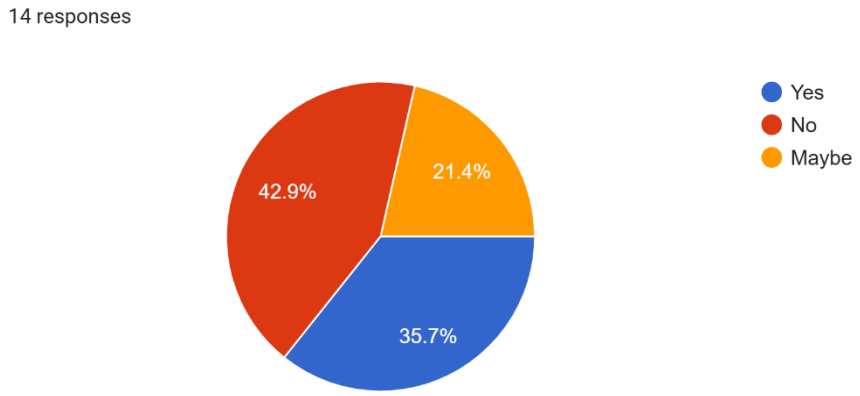
14 responses



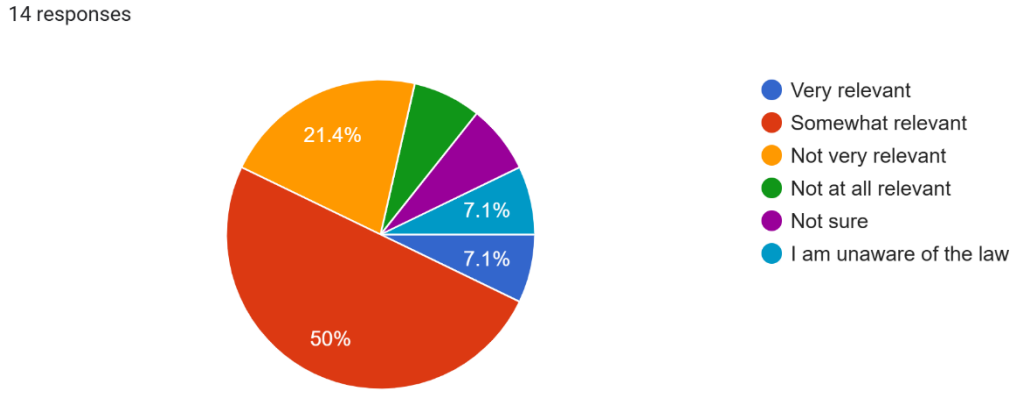
Core Theme 03: Outdated censorship laws

For better and well-grounded research, the study concluded that the censorship laws implemented when censoring anything and a major finding was that the rules implemented in today's age and time are from 1979.

Are you aware that some current censorship laws were originally implemented as far back as 1979?

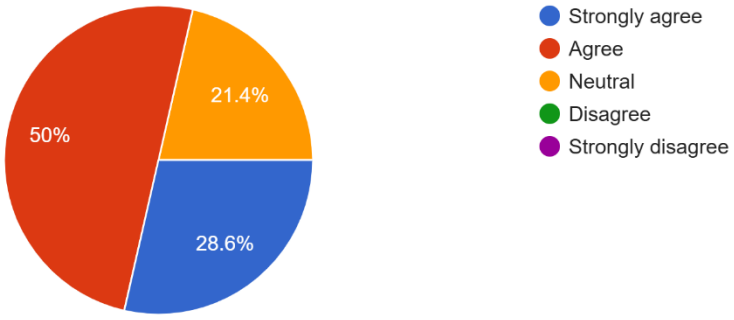


How relevant do you believe censorship laws from 1979 are in today's digital and globalized world?



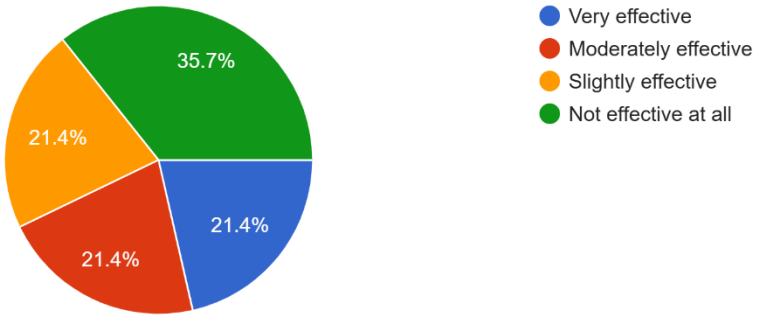
Do you think the government should review and update censorship laws to reflect current social, cultural, and technological realities?

14 responses



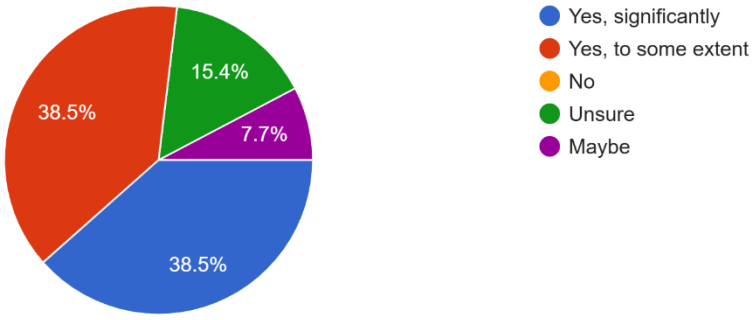
In your opinion, how effective are current censorship laws in protecting citizens from harmful or inappropriate content?

14 responses

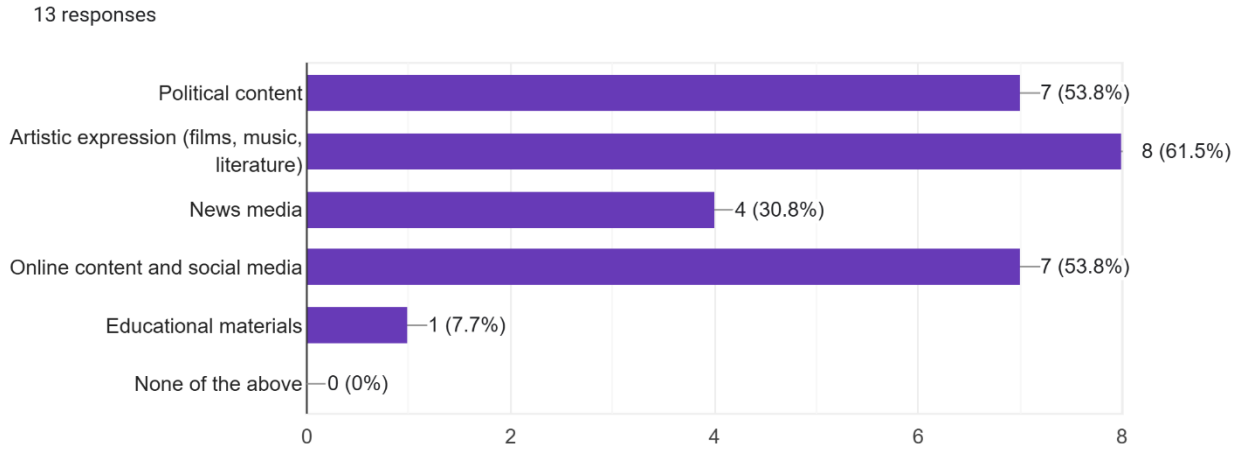


Do you feel that outdated censorship laws limit freedom of expression today?

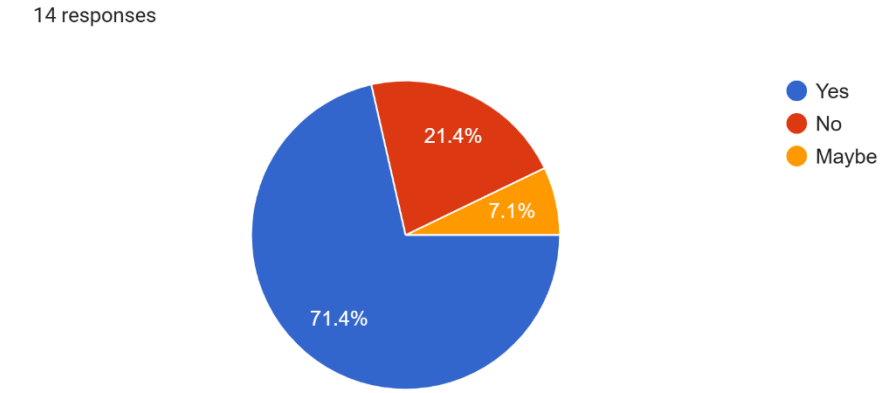
13 responses



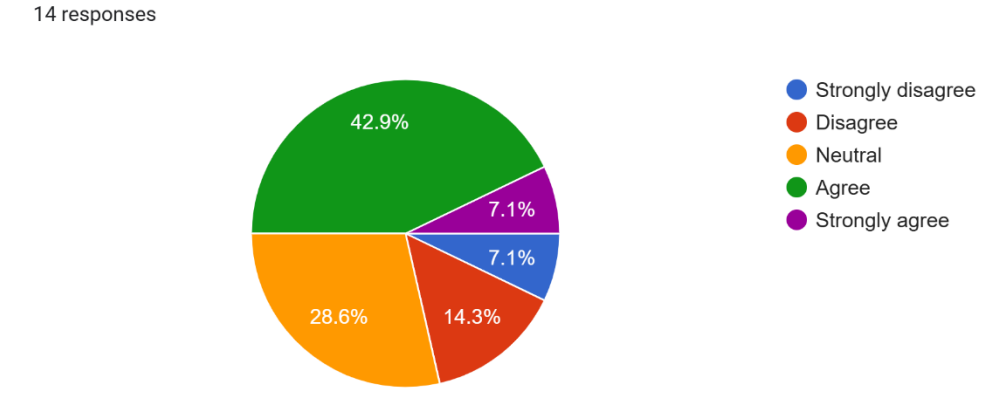
What type of content do you believe is most affected by outdated censorship laws? *(Select all that apply)*



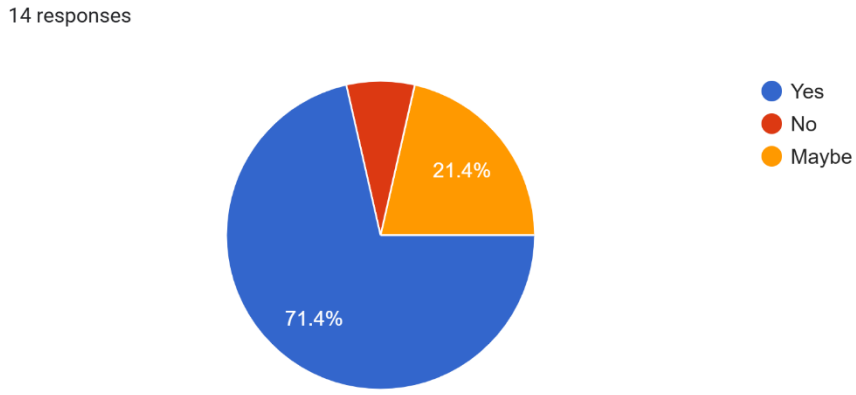
Do you support the idea of involving public opinion in the revision of censorship laws?



To what extent do you agree with the following statement: "Censorship laws should evolve as society evolves."



Have you ever encountered content that was censored, but you believed it should have been available to the public?



What would you recommend as the best approach for updating censorship laws? (Open-ended) Free text response.

The conclusion emphasizes the need to distance from harmful influences and uphold genuine democracy without authoritarianism. It highlights the importance of creating awareness regarding censorship, particularly considering the prevalence of fake news on social media that is often driven or controlled by hostile entities.

Pakistan should update its censorship laws by clarifying vague terms, ensuring transparency, involving civil society, incorporating judicial review, and aligning with human rights standards, while maintaining a firm stance on blasphemy laws without compromise.

Updating censorship laws requires a thoughtful and multi-faceted approach. Key considerations include stakeholder engagement to ensure diverse perspectives; clear definition of objectives balancing freedom of expression and protection of vulnerable groups; sensitivity to cultural, social, and technological contexts; transparency and accountability in enforcement; flexibility to adapt to technological and societal changes; grounding in a human rights framework; international cooperation; and establishing regular review mechanisms to maintain relevance and effectiveness.

Potential approaches to updating censorship laws involve revising existing legislation, introducing new laws to address emerging challenges such as online content regulation, developing regulatory frameworks for enforcement and compliance, encouraging industry self-regulation through codes of conduct or voluntary guidelines, and applying hybrid models that combine various strategies for a balanced and effective outcome.

Ultimately, the most effective approach will depend on the specific context and goals, and it is advised to first thoroughly analyse all existing censorship bylaws before developing possible recommendations.

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this research underscore the multifaceted and deeply entrenched nature of censorship within Pakistani media, illustrating that it is neither a neutral nor an isolated phenomenon. Rather, censorship emerges as a strategic instrument wielded by dominant socio-political and religious forces to control narratives, regulate public opinion, and maintain ideological hegemony. The analysis derived by watching movies for the sake of entertainment, it is also quite important to dig deeper behind the stories of movies that were banned. This research will be helpful to discover a reality that not many people feel bothered to search for. Censorship is considered such a trivial matter by most, and yet, it is one of the clear cases where politics and religion play an unfair game of control unbeknownst to the population.

Beginning with the case of the critically acclaimed film *Joyland*, the study revealed how issues surrounding sexuality and gender identity, though culturally sensitive, became disproportionately politicized, resulting in restrictions that highlight the precarious balance between artistic freedom and societal norms. This case not only reflects cultural

anxieties but also exposes how these anxieties are often exploited by institutions seeking to preserve specific power structures.

The research further expanded beyond cultural censorship to examine its pervasive influence on political discourse, exemplified by the suppression of narratives surrounding Imran Khan and his party, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf. These examples demonstrate that censorship in Pakistan is not confined to safeguarding cultural or moral values; instead, it frequently functions as a mechanism for political control, enabling powerful actors to silence dissent and manipulate collective consciousness. Such practices raise critical questions about the integrity of democratic processes and the viability of free expression in contemporary Pakistan.

Insights derived from survey questionnaire with media and film professionals provided a ground-level perspective on the pervasive fear, self-censorship, and economic vulnerability experienced by content creators. These accounts affirm that censorship is not merely a top-down imposition but also generates ripple effects across the creative ecosystem, discouraging innovation and perpetuating a culture of compliance.

When juxtaposed with global theoretical frameworks, Pakistan's case reflects broader patterns observed in other politically volatile societies where censorship is used to shape ideological conformity. However, the localized context—marked by the intersection of religious conservatism, political instability, and weak regulatory transparency—renders the problem uniquely complex. The persistence of outdated censorship laws, combined with opaque decision-making processes, exacerbates these challenges, reinforcing systemic barriers to reform.

Ultimately, this study highlights the urgent need for a paradigm shift in Pakistan's media governance, one that prioritizes transparency, accountability, and the protection of fundamental rights. Addressing censorship requires a multi-pronged approach involving legal reform, institutional independence, and public advocacy to safeguard freedom of expression as a cornerstone of democratic life. Without such measures, censorship will continue to function as a tool for preserving entrenched power hierarchies rather than promoting social harmony or ethical standards. By revealing the underlying motives and consequences of these practices, this research contributes to the broader discourse on media ethics and democratic resilience, calling for sustained scholarly and policy attention to dismantle structures that inhibit open dialogue and cultural plurality. As a new era of liberation arises all over the world, it is important to look back on these findings to spread awareness about the old laws regarding media, as well as the corrupted biases within our own country.

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