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India bans Pakistani YouTube channels, withholds several X accounts in wake of Pahalgam



Short Investigative Report

About

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May 2025

Digital Rights Foundation (DRF) is a women-led, not-for-profit organization based in Pakistan working on digital rights freedoms since 2013. DRF envisions a place where all people, especially women and gender minorities, can exercise the right of expression without being threatened. DRF believes that a free internet with access to information and impeccable privacy policies can create safe online spaces for not only women but the world at large. At DRF, we aim to strengthen the protections for human rights defenders (HRDs), with a focus on women's rights in digital spaces through policy advocacy and digital security awareness-raising. In addition, one of our main aims is to protect women from cyber harassment that they have to deal with throughout their lives by making them aware of their rights and making resources accessible when they need help. With growing privacy concerns in digital spaces, DRF seeks to increase awareness about privacy issues and defend the right to privacy through research, monitoring and reporting the tactics around surveillance. To rally with other actors for strong legal protection for privacy in the country and to raise our voices against dictating censorship policies, we propose viable solutions to the government and other authoritative bodies. Contact information: info@digitalrightsfoundation.pk www.digitalrightsfoundation.pk

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Acknowledgments

This short investigative report is being released at a critical juncture, as global geopolitics continue to shift and tensions between India and Pakistan escalate in the aftermath of the Pahalgam attack. The report seeks to examine the authoritarian policies adopted by the Indian state that are curtailing freedom of expression and setting troubling precedents for the broader South Asian region. Released in the wake of a tragedy, this report comes at a time when war rhetoric and propaganda are being weaponized to stoke hostility between two nations with a deeply intertwined history. The investigation would not have been possible without the efforts of DRF's research team collecting data during this crucial time and the essential insights of an Indian journalist who, for their safety, remains anonymous. This report aims to analyze the current digital authoritarian landscape and offer concrete recommendations to social media platforms regarding their regional content moderation practices, which are contributing to the current deepening crises in the region.



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Introduction

On 28 April, the Indian government banned 17 Pakistani YouTube channels, and several X accounts of popular media organisations, political commentators, and freelance journalists. This move came in the wake of the [22 April Pahalgam attack](#) in Kashmir, which the Indian government has been alleging Pakistan's involvement in.



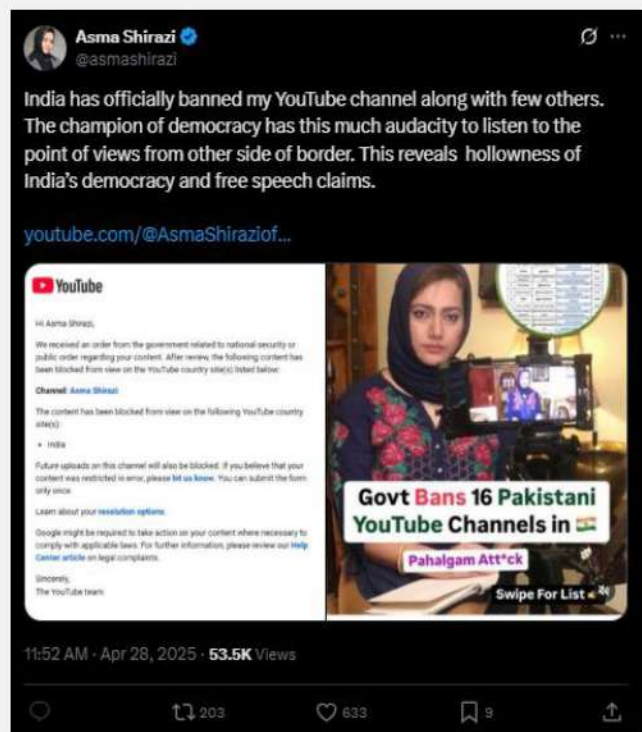
DRF's Methodology and Findings

Pakistani YouTube and X accounts banned

DRF collected data from social media platforms X, Facebook and YouTube and conducted an investigation into the number of YouTube channels and X accounts banned by the Indian government in its country, and [initially found](#) a total of 17 YouTube channels and at least 8 withheld X accounts.

The list of banned Pakistani YouTube channels, which continues to grow, includes:

1. *Samaa Sports*
2. *Samaa TV*
3. *Dawn News*
4. *ARY News*
5. *Geo News*
6. *Bol News*
7. *SUNO News HD*
8. *GNN*
9. *Raftar*
10. *The Pakistan Reference*
11. *Umar Cheema Exclusive*
12. *Asma Shirazi*
13. *Uzair Cricket*
14. *Raazi Nama*
15. *Irshad Bhatti*
16. *Muneeb Farooq*





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27 April 2025

YouTube Account Blocking Orders issued

Sl. No.	Name of the YouTube Channel	YouTube Handle	URL	No. of Subscribers
1	Dawn News	@dawnnewspakistan	https://www.youtube.com/@dawnnewspakistan/videos	1.96M
2	Irshad Bhatti	@IrshadBhatti01	https://www.youtube.com/@IrshadBhatti01	827K
3	SAMAA TV	@Samaatv	https://www.youtube.com/@Samaatv	12.7M
4	ARY NEWS	@ArynewsTvofficial	https://www.youtube.com/@ArynewsTvofficial	14.6M
5	BOL NEWS	@BOLNewsofficial	https://www.youtube.com/@BOLNewsofficial	7.85M
6	Raftar	@raftartv	https://www.youtube.com/@raftartv	804K
7	The Pakistan Reference	@ThePakistanReference	https://www.youtube.com/@ThePakistanReference	288K
8	Geo News	@geonews	https://www.youtube.com/@geonews	18.1M
9	Samaa Sports	@SamaaSports	https://www.youtube.com/samaasports/videos	73.5K
10	GNN	@gnnhdofficial	https://www.youtube.com/@gnnhdofficial	3.54M
11	Uzair Cricket	@UzairCricket786	https://www.youtube.com/@UzairCricket786	288K
12	Umar Cheema Exclusive	@UmarCheemaExclusive	https://www.youtube.com/@UmarCheemaExclusive	125K
13	Asma Shirazi	@AsmaShiraziofficial	https://www.youtube.com/@AsmaShiraziofficial	133K
14	Muneeb Farooq	@muneebfarooqofficial	https://www.youtube.com/@muneebfarooqofficial/videos	165K
15	SUNO News HD	@SUNONewsHD	https://www.youtube.com/@SUNONewsHD/videos	1.36M
16	Razi Naama	@razinaama	https://www.youtube.com/@razinaama	270K
Total Subscribers				63.08M

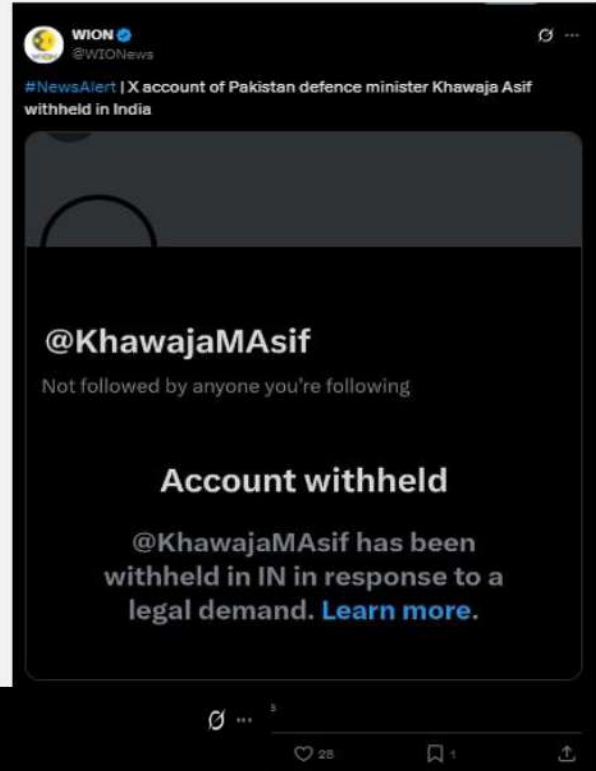
On Tuesday, the media organisation *Naya Daur* [posted](#) that its YouTube channel had also been banned in India, which brings the count to 17 and signals to the notion that this is a developing situation.

Similarly, several influential Pakistani X accounts, including the [official account of the Government of Pakistan](#), and Pakistan's Defence Minister, have been banned in India; the term for which X uses is "country withheld content".

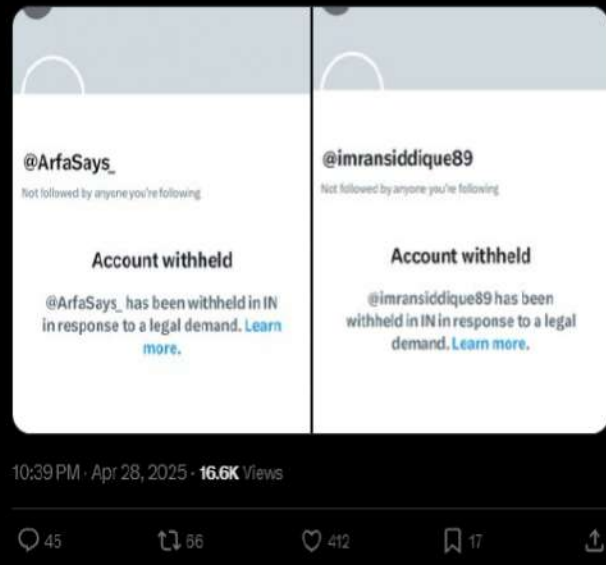


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The list of withheld X accounts in India so far includes [the Government of Pakistan](#), [Defence Minister Khawaja Asif](#), [Arfa Feroz](#), [Imran Siddique](#), [Wajahat Kazmi](#), [Bushra Shaikh](#), [Anas Mallick](#), and [Raza Haroon](#).

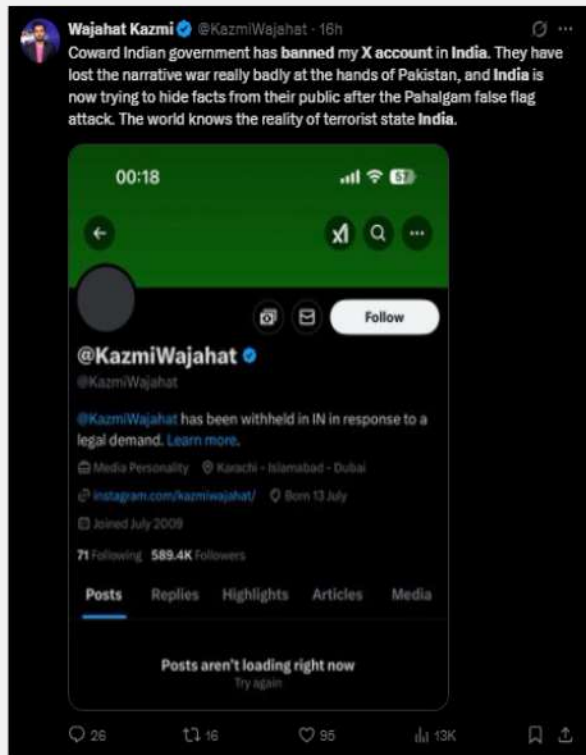


Indian govt has carried out a digital strike. This morning, we received news that all Pakistani anti-India YouTube channels have been banned in India. Now, Pakistani anti-India Twitter accounts have also been banned. A masterstroke by the Indian government!



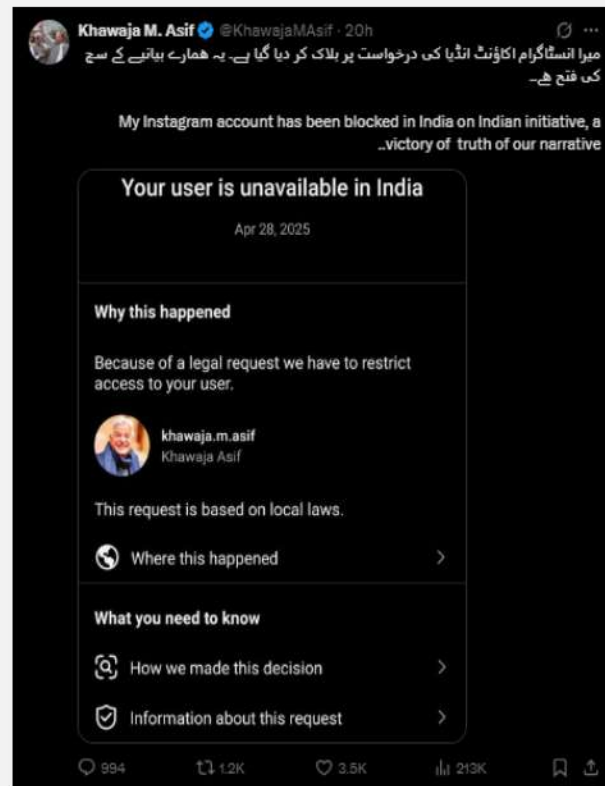
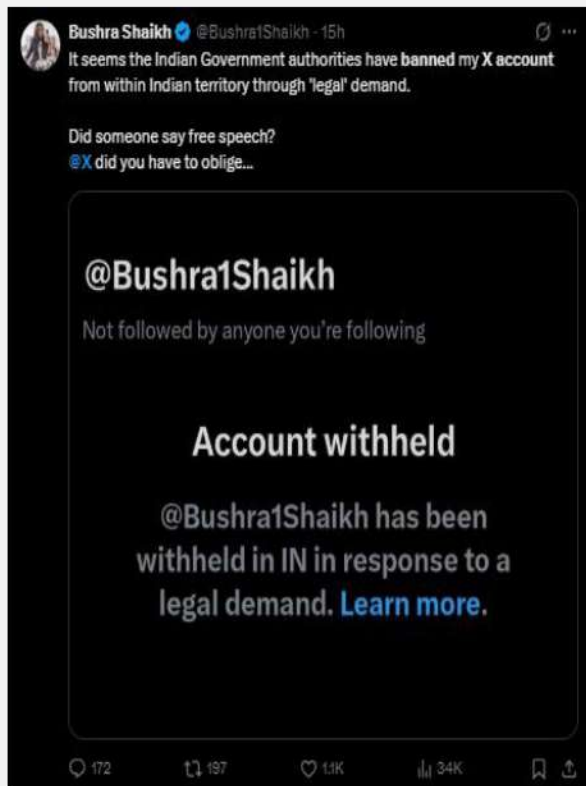


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Popular political commentator and anchorperson Wajahat Kazmi posted about his account being withheld in India, with other influential X personalities questioning X's willingness to comply with the government's directives.

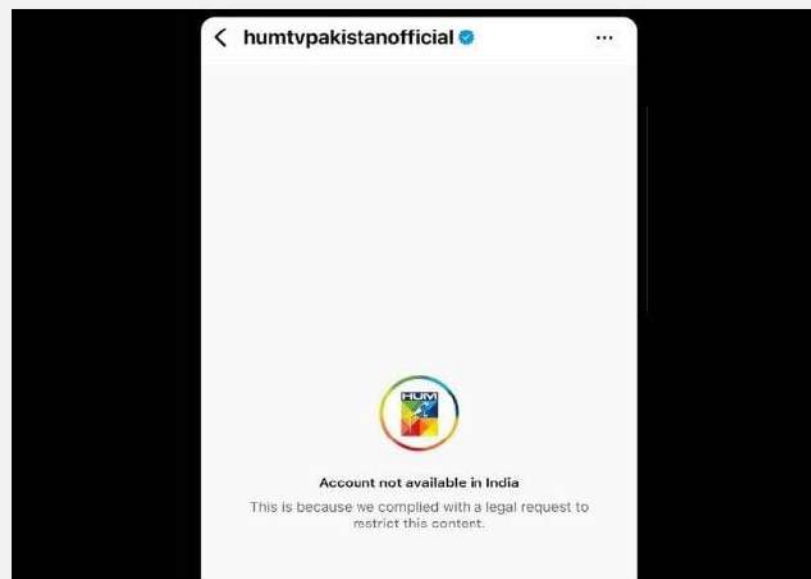
On Monday, Pakistan's Defence Minister, Khawaja Asif, posted about his Instagram account being banned in India, which marks the first instance of Instagram geoblocking by the government.



Recent developments: Pakistani entertainment channels and artist accounts blocked in India

Later that same week, starting April 30, [another wave of blocks and bans](#) hit Pakistani social media channels and accounts. This time, Pakistani entertainment YouTube channels and the Instagram accounts of artists, including those of actors and singers, were targeted.

Users in India attempting to access this content are met with the following types of messages on YouTube and Instagram.



The list of Pakistani entertainment channels and artist accounts banned in India includes:

- | | |
|-----------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. <i>HUM TV</i> | 14. Mansha Pasha |
| 2. <i>ARY Digital</i> | 15. Ali Gul Pir |
| 3. <i>Geo Entertainment</i> | 16. Arsalan Naseer |
| 4. Hania Aamir | 17. Adnan Siddiqui |
| 5. Mahira Khan | 18. Aima Baig |
| 6. Atif Aslam | 19. Asim Azhar |
| 7. Shahid Afridi | 20. Armeena Khan |
| 8. Babar Azam | 21. Muneeb Butt |
| 9. Fawad Khan | 22. Momina Mustehsan |
| 10. Ali Zafar | 23. Iqra Aziz |
| 11. Sanam Saeed | 24. Imran Abbas |
| 12. Bilal Abbas | 25. Sajal Aly |
| 13. Ushna Shah | |

This list is not exhaustive, and continues to grow by the day as the Indian government blocks more Pakistani content.

Public reactions across India

This move by the Indian government gained favour with a number of its citizens, with some Indian X accounts posting in favour of the ban, celebrating the drop in viewership of the banned channels, and further encouraging their government to ban Pakistani panelists from appearing in news debates.



While some Indian citizens supported and celebrated the ban, still many [opposed](#) the idea of these accounts being banned in India.



They [lamented](#) the loss of their choice in entertainment, claiming that this was an attack on freedom of expression.

Geoblocking: What does it mean for Press Freedom?

The digital restriction of specific or general Internet content based upon the user's geographical location, as in the case of India banning Pakistani accounts in its country, is known as geoblocking.

This strategy is often deployed by countries trying to limit access to content they consider 'harmful' for their citizens, with the definition for harmful content being rather broad and open to a country's own discretion and interpretation. For example, [X has geoblocked content in Germany](#) to avoid violating German laws, a large portion of which is related to Nazi and white nationalist ideology. In 2022, [Russian authorities blocked](#) a number of independent media outlets in an attempt to control coverage of the war against Ukraine.

Geoblocking, for better or for worse, is essentially censorship of Internet content, especially when the content in question is produced by independent media or by news organisations and journalists. If carried out in order to control the dominant narrative in times of international unrest or wartime, it politicises the Internet, and creates what [Internet Society](#) refers to as a "'splinternet' — an Internet artificially carved up along political, economic, and technological boundaries."

Geoblocking thus, restricts online freedom of expression that contradicts or subverts official narratives, hinders access to information, especially critical updates from conflict zones, creates information silos, enabling state propaganda and disinformation, and violates human rights which emphasise the universality of information access. Users are forced to resort to measures such as the use of VPNs to circumvent such restrictions, which tools themselves often become [the subject of bans and regulation](#).

The precedent of blocking certain accounts, channels, and content is particularly troubling in the context of authoritarian regimes, where freedom of expression is already under threat and space for dissenting voices is rapidly shrinking. These bans risk normalizing severe restrictions in digital spaces, especially amid shifting geopolitical dynamics, and are likely to have lasting and far-reaching consequences.

How geoblocking impacts journalists in Pakistan

DRF spoke to a Pakistani journalist, Asma Shirazi, whose account was banned in India, about the impact of this ban on her work. We discussed in particular her ability to report on critical political developments between India and Pakistan, especially during this heightened period of tension.

Shirazi noted that the ban significantly disrupted her ability to provide unbiased information to a wider audience, particularly the 20% of her viewership based in India. She described the ban as “an attempt to stop ethical journalism,” and to encourage self-censorship, particularly among voices with substantial Indian followings. Interestingly, she reported a rise in viewership within Pakistan since the ban, and also received messages from Indian viewers that they were now using VPNs to access her content.

However, she received no formal notice before the takedowns except for a brief email by YouTube citing a request from India’s Home Ministry, and nothing at all from X, despite both her YouTube account being suspended and X account being withheld. Shirazi called this a “violation of [her] rights,” and stressed that an unbiased platform would have carried out an investigation or issued a show cause notice instead of banning accounts within hours.

Shirazi warned that this sets a troubling precedent. Calling these bans a “breach of trust” and “against the norms of access to information, freedom of speech, and independent access,” she said this isn’t only a Pakistan-India problem; the same is being witnessed in the case of Palestinian journalists in Gaza, which makes this a global issue affecting journalists everywhere.

India’s Legal Framework as a Justificatory Basis for the Ban on Pakistani Content

With these extreme measures in place by state authorities, DRF spoke to an Indian journalist, who wished to remain anonymous, regarding the legal basis for the geoblocking of Pakistani content across social media platforms in India.

They pointed to the [Information Technology Act \(ITA\), 2000](#) of India as the basis for these bans, specifically pointing to Section 69A of the Act, the “Power to issue

directions for blocking for public access of any information through any computer resource", which states:

(1) Where the Central Government or any of its officers specially authorised by it in this behalf is satisfied that it is necessary or expedient so to do, in the interest of sovereignty and integrity of India, defence of India, security of the State, friendly relations with foreign States or public order or for preventing incitement to the commission of any cognizable offence relating to above, it may subject to the provisions of sub-section (2), for reasons to be recorded in writing, by order, direct any agency of the Government or intermediary to block for access by the public or cause to be blocked for access by the public any information generated, transmitted, received, stored or hosted in any computer resource.

(2) The procedure and safeguards subject to which such blocking for access by the public may be carried out, shall be such as may be prescribed.

(3) The intermediary who fails to comply with the direction issued under sub-section (1) shall be punished with an imprisonment for a term which may extend to seven years and also be liable to fine.

According to the journalist, Section 69A "allows the government to mandate removal or blocking of content on social media platforms, independent of the platforms' own community guidelines or harmful content policies." This law, which empowers the central government and those acting under its authority as its intermediaries, can be brought into use "to block public access to content if it is deemed to threaten the sovereignty or integrity of India, defence or security of the state, friendly relations with foreign states, public order, or could incite a cognisable offence."

This essentially means that because the ITA 2000 grants the government immense legal power, even to override platforms' terms of service, the government can get content blocked regardless of whether it goes against platforms' harmful content policies.

The journalist stated that this provision, combined with Rule 16 of the [IT Rules 2021](#), forms the legal basis for the recent ban on Pakistani YouTube channels and accounts of Pakistani government officials, journalists, and artists.

Legality of India's Geo-Blocking Orders

India's blocking of Pakistani accounts relies on Section 69A of the IT Act, while provides a legal basis domestically, international law requires such laws and their application to meet human rights standards. Civil society has long criticized India's blocking regime for its opacity, lack of transparency, and absence of due process. Blanket bans based on identity or viewpoint such as targeting accounts for being Pakistani or critical of India likely fail the "legality" test under international law and suggest censorship beyond what narrowly tailored laws should allow.

Must platforms comply with Section 69A?

As these bans and rules come into effect, DRF questioned the journalist on whether platforms have refused government requests to ban content in the past, or if they tend to acquiesce to these requests.

Social media platforms usually comply with government orders to take down and block content, especially when the legal backing is Section 69A, because it has binding legal force. However, they mentioned a few instances when social media companies showed some resistance to government directives, on the basis of their global policies.

One example that the journalist cited was that of the [2021 farmers' protests in India](#). "X (formerly Twitter) initially refused to block certain accounts and tweets as requested by the government, arguing that many of the accounts belonged to journalists, politicians, or activists whose speech was protected as per its policies."

However, even this did not last long, as X (formerly Twitter) eventually complied with the order "by removing or restricting access to over 500 accounts after significant pressure and threats of losing its 'safe harbour' protection under Indian law."

One other instance of platforms resisting government orders was when the government requested traceability of users involved in protests. "Platforms have [taken the government to court](#), arguing that some orders are arbitrary, overbroad, or unconstitutional."

Does India's market presence contribute to content moderation?

The journalist from India agreed, believing that "India's position as one of the world's largest markets for social media platforms directly contributes to its influence over platforms' content moderation practices since there is a lot for the platforms to lose."

They cited a [Carnegie report from 2024](#) which compared government influence on political content moderation in India and Thailand, and found that India's large market and broad regulatory powers have enabled the BJP-led government to exert more control over social media content than Thailand.

According to the journalist, "India is the largest market for Meta and YouTube, and significant ad revenue is being generated from India. At the same time, platforms like Google and Meta have invested in India's digital infrastructure. So, not complying with certain government orders could end up in significant losses."

Geoblocking Indian influencers within the country under ITA 2000 and the IT Rules 2021

On 5 May, a [notice was issued](#) by the Indian Standing Committee on Information Technology Branch, instructing the Ministries of Electronics and IT, and of Information and Broadcasting to ban even those "social media influencers and social media platforms in the country" who "seem to be working against the interest of the country which is likely to incite violence".

This means that the Indian government is now expanding its scope from Pakistan content to even Indian content which it deems to be "working against the interest of the country".

MOST IMMEDIATE
(STANDING COMMITTEE ON INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY BRANCH)

No
May, 2025

OFFICE MEMORANDUM

Sub: Action against the Social Media Influencers/Social Media Platforms working against National Interest.

The undersigned is directed to state that post terror attack in Pahalgam on 22 April, 2025 some social media influencers and social media platforms in the country seem to be working against the interest of the country which is likely to incite violence.

2. The concerned Ministries i.e. Ministry of Electronics and IT and Ministry of Information and Broadcasting are requested to provide contemplated action taken to ban such platforms under IT Act 2000 and 'Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021. The desired information may be furnished to this Committee by 8 May, 2025 positively. The soft copy of the same may also be e-mailed at comit@sansad.nic.in

3. The receipt of this communication may please be acknowledged.

1. Secretary, Ministry of Electronics and IT
2. Secretary, Ministry of I&B

Inconsistent Geoblocking: Platform content moderation policies in times of conflict

X/Twitter

X's policy on [Hateful Conduct](#), while not stating anything specific on geoblocking, outlines that it prohibits content regarding:

1. "targeting individuals or groups with content that references forms of violence or violent events where a protected category was the primary target or victims, where the intent is to harass",
2. "inciting behavior that targets individuals or groups of people belonging to protected categories",
3. "targeting others with repeated slurs, tropes or other content that intends to degrade or reinforce negative or harmful stereotypes about a protected category",
4. "the dehumanization of a group of people based on their religion, caste, age, disability, serious disease, national origin, race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, or sexual orientation",
5. "hateful imagery", and
6. "us[ing] hateful images or symbols in your profile image or profile header".

Arguably, none of the accounts withheld were in violation of X's Hateful Conduct policy, which begs the question of why X complied with India's directives. However, as in the case of Germany, whose Network Enforcement Act (Netzwerkdurchsetzungsgesetz) requires social network providers to delete unlawful content, X may have been partly forced to comply with Indian laws, which we discuss below.

YouTube

In Google's [Transparency Report](#) on government requests to remove content, it states that the company regularly receives requests from courts and government agencies around the world to remove information from Google products, including YouTube.

The report states, "Often, government requests target political content and government criticism. Governments cite defamation, privacy and even copyright laws in their attempts to remove political speech from our services. Our teams evaluate

each request and review the content in context in order to determine whether or not content should be removed due to violation of local law or our content policies."

A [Guardian report](#) from February revealed that Google facilitated content removal requests from autocratic regimes around the world, including China and Russia, and interacted with governments accused of human rights abuses, such as Taliban-controlled Afghanistan. Thus, it does not come as a surprise that YouTube would comply with the Indian government's request to ban Pakistani YouTube channels within its territory.

Meta

Regarding content violating local law, Meta's [Transparency Center](#) states that when governments, courts, or individuals believe that certain content on Facebook or Instagram violates local laws, they may request that Meta restrict it. Meta evaluates such requests based on its obligations under the [Global Network Initiative](#) and its [Corporate Human Rights Policy](#) before deciding whether to act.

While the policy states "In cases where we believe that reports are not legally valid, are overly broad, or are inconsistent with international human rights standards, we may request clarification or take no action", in the case of banning Pakistan's Defence Minister's Instagram account, we see Meta deviating from its own purported guidelines.

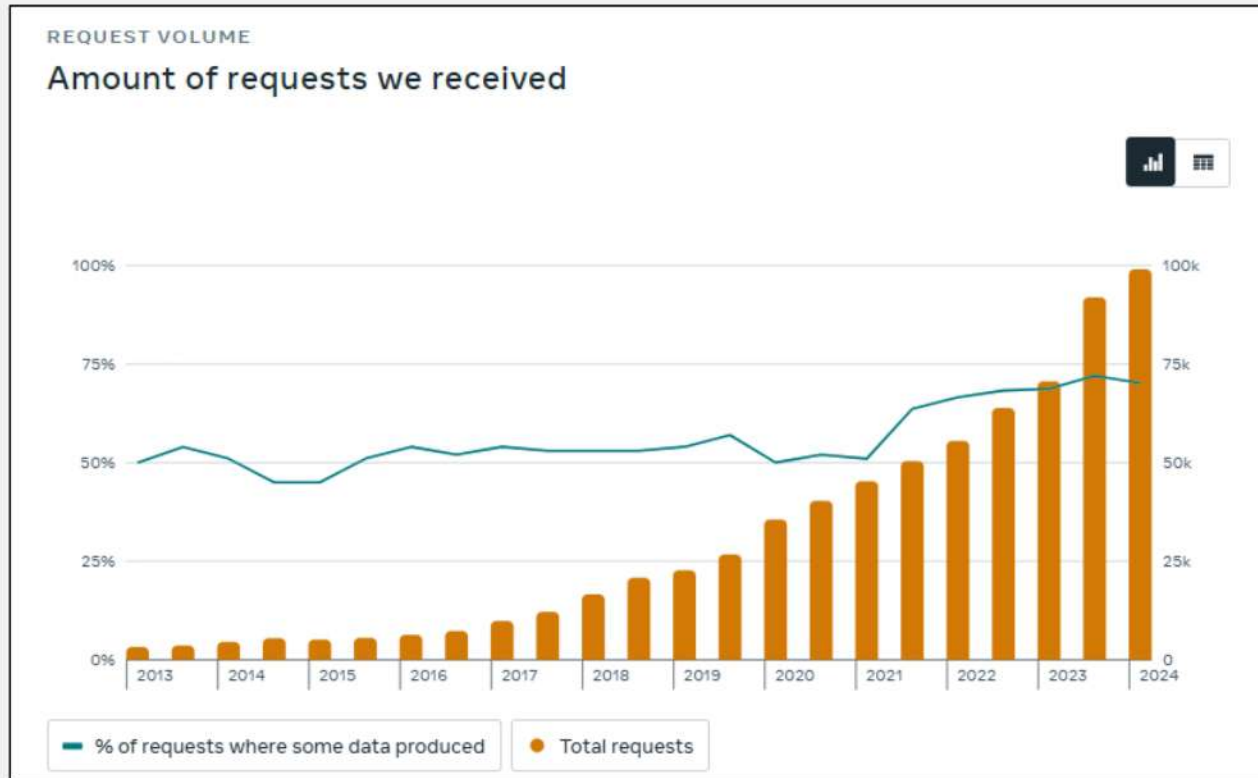
In an attempt to be more transparent about government requests, Meta reported on government requests for data (in accordance with applicable law and their terms of service), as part of their [Transparency Report](#). The latest data available [for India](#) is from January to June 2024.

It shows that there were 99,008 total requests made by the Indian government to Meta during this time period. 87,044 of these were legal process requests, and 11,964 were emergency disclosure requests. A total of 175,150 users/accounts were requested. 70.20% of these requests were those where some data was produced by Meta. However, Meta's transparency report falls short in revealing the full scope of government requests, offering little to no accountability, much like its competitors, YouTube and X.



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The graph below, also part of the report, shows the volume of requests made by the Indian government over the years.



India's Geo-Blocking of Pakistani Journalists: Violations of International Human Rights Law and Misuse of National Security Claims

India justifies these blocks on national security grounds, particularly following recent regional tensions. While national security is a recognized legitimate aim under Article 19(3) of the ICCPR, the restriction must be evidence-based and specific. Blocking accounts of entertainers, journalists, public figures, Pakistani politicians and government office holders for vague "provocative content" is not inherently linked to a security threat. Without clear evidence of incitement to violence or hate (Article 20), such broad censorship appears more political than protective, aimed at stifling dissent rather than addressing genuine risks.

Necessity and Proportionality Analysis

International law demands that restrictions be necessary and proportionate the least intrusive means to address a specific harm. Blocking entire accounts, rather than specific posts, constitutes a sweeping and disproportionate measure. India's blanket bans not only silence legitimate speech but also suggest retaliatory intent. As seen in the European Court's judgment against Turkey's YouTube ban, total platform or account blocks fail the proportionality test and violate freedom of expression. India's approach undermines the core of Article 19(2) and chills cross-border discourse.

Platform Responsibilities under the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights

Under the UNGPs, platforms like Meta and X have independent responsibilities to respect human rights. This includes conducting due diligence, resisting overbroad state requests, and ensuring transparency. Platforms should assess whether government orders are lawful, necessary, and proportionate and push back when they are not. Failure to do so risks complicity in rights violations. Legal challenges, user notifications, and transparency reporting are key measures. Meta's Oversight Board and Twitter's past court filings in India and Turkey show that companies can and should assert human rights standards, even when under pressure from states.

Comparative Examples and Precedents

Globally, states have tried to suppress foreign voices, but international bodies have consistently flagged overbroad censorship. The EU's wartime ban on RT and Sputnik



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was controversial but tied to exceptional circumstances. Turkey's blanket bans have been struck down by courts for being disproportionate. India's peacetime blocking of Pakistani accounts, absent specific threats or unlawful content, lacks such justification. Unlike bot-driven disinformation networks, these bans target legitimate speakers, violating the norm that restrictions be transparent, specific, and appealable.

Recommendations

In light of the challenges and gaps addressed in DRF's analysis above, the following recommendations are proposed to platforms, to address the key issues pertaining to platform accountability highlighted in this report.

1. Mandate clearer, more accessible, and more detailed Transparency Reports

Despite companies such as Meta and Google publishing Transparency Reports in a bid to make their internal content moderation processes more transparent and accessible to the general public, content moderation decisions continue to remain opaque and inaccessible to users for the most part.

As seen in Meta's report on government requests, the data is severely lacking beyond a limited time frame for a limited request, i.e. requests for user data. At present, the reporting does not cover the full scope of government requests. A relevant case is the 2023 Oversight Board decision regarding Communal Violence in Odisha (India). Following violent clashes, the Odisha police requested the removal of a video depicting the events. Meta assessed the content as violating its policies on incitement to violence and removed it, along with all identical videos across the platform. While the Oversight Board upheld the removal on the grounds of public safety, it also raised concerns about whether Meta's response was properly constrained. The Board emphasized that any government-driven censorship must meet the three-part test of legality, necessity, and proportionality.

Other cases by the Oversight Board further highlight systemic issues with Meta's content removal requests. In UK Drill Music (2023), Meta removed a rap video and deleted the artist's account after a police request, despite lacking sufficient evidence of a credible threat. The Board overturned the decision and criticized Meta's opaque cooperation with law enforcement, warning against discriminatory censorship. Similarly, in Shared Al Jazeera Post (2021), Meta removed a news post quoting a Hamas spokesperson during the Israel-Palestine conflict. Though later restored, the case raised serious concerns about undisclosed government influence and inconsistent content moderation, particularly against Palestinian voices.

These particular cases from the Oversight Board highlight the urgent need for platforms to improve transparency and accountability regarding government

takedown requests. Transparency reports should be updated regularly, clearly outline the full scope of government requests, including content takedowns, and provide enough context for users to understand the rationale behind enforcement actions.

Similarly, for Google, the Transparency Report cites a vague and limited scope of government requests, pertaining to defamation, privacy, and copyright, as seen above. These reports should be thorough and updated more frequently to reflect the current moment, and must be more transparent for the end-user.

Especially keeping in view the current situation in India, the scope of platforms' Transparency Reports should be expanded to include government requests for content removal and geoblocking. The decisions on content bans and blocking, including the legal grounds for the same, should be clearly stated within these reports. In the case of India, the ITA 2000 and the IT Rules 2021 should have been mentioned in the platform messages end-users could see, along with the option to appeal these blatant removals. Such appeals should be taken up by an independently functioning or regional body consisting of human reviewers and regional experts, such as the Oversight Board.

2. Establish crisis centres with local experts through the Trusted Partner Program

DRF recommends that platforms establish crisis centres with local experts through initiatives like the Trusted Partner Program, to monitor harmful content and guide platforms on regional policies.

These centres, working as dedicated units or sub-teams within pre-existing content moderation teams, should collaborate closely with the Trusted Partner Programs to facilitate a deeper understanding of local contexts and sensitivities. This is particularly relevant in crisis situations such as the current instance, where an understanding of regional power dynamics and the hair-trigger sensitivities that surround the situation, is imperative.

Involving regional experts allows platforms to avoid making broad, harmful and biased decisions with far-reaching repercussions at critical junctures. By adopting this recommendation, content moderation will become more nuanced and regionally informed while upholding the principles of freedom of expression and user safety.

3. Engage regional experts in platform governance to assess the human rights implications of state-imposed content restrictions during conflict

While platforms assert that their community guidelines and content moderation policies are implemented equally across the globe, the reality is vastly different.

As can be seen in the case of India, the robustness of the legal framework in a country has a direct impact on platform compliance with government requests and orders, regardless of whether they come at the cost of civil liberties. This situation is a particularly pertinent matter of concern in the Global South, with frequent crackdowns on platforms and content as a result of authoritarian regime policies, such as the BJP-led government in India.

For this reason, DRF recommends that platforms develop open, meaningful communication channels with activists and journalists in India who are critical of the state. By proactively engaging with civil society stakeholders independently of their communication channels with governments, platforms can ensure they remain accountable to the public interest, and reduce the risk of their content moderation policies being compromised by political pressures. This engagement would also provide marginalised voices a platform to contribute to content moderation discourse, ensuring that the process is more balanced and democratic.

Conclusion

The ready compliance of platforms with the Indian government's directives to limit Pakistani news channels and journalist/political commentator accounts in India raises questions about platform accountability and the role of social media companies in shaping public discourse, particularly during times of war, unrest, or political upheaval.

The lack of transparency and explanation provided to creators and the public at large as to these platforms' decisions to ban accounts makes it difficult to assess whether such actions are based on legitimate legal grounds or are being used to suppress dissent and control narratives, with a lack of user notification and limited avenues for appeal further undermining trust in these systems. While Meta claims to be transparent about its compliance with government requests by publishing data in its Transparency Report, there is a noticeable lack of data pertaining to content removal requests. With the lack of data from platforms in their transparency reports, governments have a free hand in the content removal directives they give to platforms. There is conveniently no documentation of adherence, or the lack thereof, to their purported terms of service.

Social media companies like Meta, YouTube, and X claim to uphold human rights; their willingness to defer to local laws calls into question the sincerity of these claims. If this unquestioned compliance with governments continues, these platforms risk becoming enablers of state censorship rather than the defenders of free expression they claim to be. The central question thus remains: are these companies truly acting in the interest of global users, or are they choosing the path of least resistance to maintain market access and political favour?



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