



How politics is shaping stardom and cinema

BY RAHUL VERMA AND SHAMIK VATSA

Shah Rukh Khan is favoured more by Congress supporters, and Akshay Kumar by BJP supporters, shows our latest biannual survey. Meanwhile, most Indians are comfortable with the state having the power to control what they watch.

Chart 1
Akshay Kumar more popular than SRK and Deepika Padukone

Respondents, by their opinion on these personalities (in %)



The question asked was, "Do you have a favourable or unfavourable opinion of the following personalities?" In Chart 1, rows don't add up to 100 as the rest said they were not aware of the person.

Chart 2
Politics is shaping Bollywood actors' popularity, suggests survey

Respondents who rated Bollywood stars favourably, by party choice (in %)

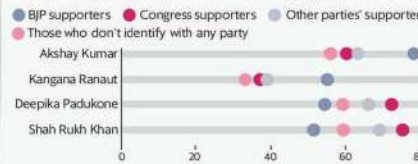


Chart 3
Indians favour censor cuts, but divided on politics-cinema link

How respondents picked between following pairs of statements (in %)



Chart 4
Most respondents associate film industry with rampant nepotism

Respondents who agree with:
Statement 1: Talented actors from small-town India don't get enough chances because film industry is monopolized by few families
Statement 2: The film industry is very welcoming to new and talented actors from small-town India

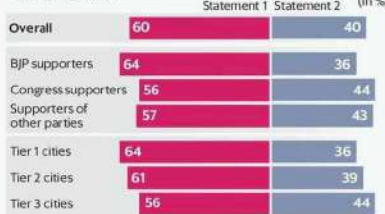
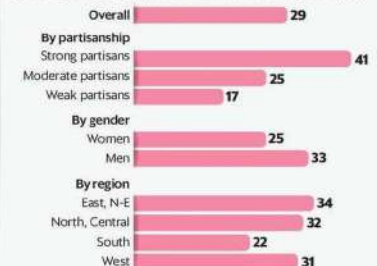


Chart 5
Highly political Indians a lot more likely to shun a film than weak partisans

Q: Have you actively opposed a film in the last two years? (in %)



The survey had 9,698 respondents across 207 cities and towns. PARAS JAIN/MINT

Political fissures in Indian society have entered the world of entertainment, shaping opinions on not just art, but artists, too, the latest YouGov-Mint-CPR Millennial Survey suggests. Among a list of four Bollywood actors listed in the survey, Akshay Kumar was rated more favourably than Shah Rukh Khan, followed by Deepika Padukone and Kangana Ranaut. However, the approval ratings depended heavily on political alignment.

The survey sought to find out how urban Indians viewed these four actors, all of whom have been at the receiving end of, and in some cases contributors to, the polarized discourse in recent years. Kumar got a positive view from two in three (67%) respondents, followed by Khan (61%) and Padukone (60%). Ranaut found favour from only 44% respondents (see chart 1). But Kumar's support level went up to 78% among supporters of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Among Congress supporters, Khan was the most popular (75%), followed by Padukone (72%). Ranaut got a 50%-plus approval rating only from BJP supporters (55%) (see chart 2).

The survey took place in December 2022, before the release of Khan's film, *Pathaan*.

The findings are part of the latest round of our biannual survey, conducted online by Mint in association with survey partner YouGov India and Delhi-based think-tank Centre for Policy Research (CPR). It had 9,698 respondents across 207 cities and towns. Over 42% were post-millennials (born after 1996), and 40% were millennials (born between 1981 and 1996).

FAMILIAL FILMS

Apart from actors' approval ratings, the survey also asked for opinions on other aspects of the film industry, such as censorship, nepotism and political boycotts.

Most respondents (63%) favoured having an authority with the power to ban, edit, or censor films considered offensive. Almost half of the respondents (47%) were in favour of streaming platforms depicting adult themes such as abusive language, sex, and nudity, while 53% believed such content should not be allowed (see chart 3). On the state's role in cinema, 61% of the respondents believed that the government should encourage films that it considers important by making them tax-free, including those with political or historical messages. The rest, almost two-fifths, disagreed.

However, in another question, over half (54%) said politics should be kept separate from entertainment and movies, while the rest (46%) believed that cinema should closely reflect our history and political landscape. Interestingly, this

is at odds with the views about *The Kashmir Files*, one of the most polarizing films of recent years. Almost 58% said such films play an important role in capturing the genuine plight of certain communities, and the rest believed that they are primarily made for political propaganda. While BJP supporters were in line with the rest of the respondents in feeling that cinema should be separate from politics (46%), they held a rather sympathetic view (64%) on *The Kashmir Files*.

In the last few years, India's film industry has been criticized for favouritism towards established families. Around 60% of respondents were of the view that talented small-town actors do not get opportunities due to the monopoly of a few families. BJP supporters were more likely (64%) to say so, as were, ironically, respondents from Tier 1 cities (64%) in comparison with Tier 3 (56%) (see chart 4).

#BOYCOTTRENDS

The survey investigated the growing trend of film boycotts as an expression of political views. Around 29% respondents said they had actively opposed a film or a TV show in the last two years. There was a huge gap between strong partisans (41%) and weak partisans (17%). (This is based on our "partisanship index", a measure of how strongly a person feels attached to their favourite political party. Refer to Part 3 of the series: <https://bit.ly/3Zgdj0>.)

Only three men had opposed a film; only 25% women had. Respondents from South India were the least likely (22%) to oppose a film, whereas roughly one in three respondents from other regions of the country had opposed a film or TV show in the last two years (see chart 5).

Cinema and popular culture are no longer apolitical as some would want them to be, the survey's findings show. Political affiliation and level of partisan attachment are exerting a significant influence on attitudes about cinema's role in society and the government's role in cinema. Producers across art forms will increasingly have to manoeuvre both the content as well as the politics of their creations.

(The authors are with the Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi.)

This is the fourth part of a series about the survey's findings. The next part will look at India's continuing search for a viable Opposition party. The previous parts covered the economy and jobs, evolving views on remote work and changing political preferences. Note that these surveys are skewed towards urban well-to-do netizens, with 82% respondents falling under the NCCS-A socio-economic category of consumers. Read other parts of the series here: <https://bit.ly/3KE9T5I>.



Part 4: Cinema and politics