From Censorship to Resistance: Mobilisations in Defence of Freedom of Artistic Expression in Brazil

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Abstract

This article examines online and offline responses to attempts to censor artistic productions in Brazil between 2017 and 2022. It focuses on identifying and analysing instances of artistic censorship attempts and the mobilisations they provoked. By situating these events within the broader Brazilian political context, the study highlights new repertoires of action that enable agency and creativity in resistance efforts. It also explores how these mobilisations defended freedom of expression, a fundamental principle for fostering plurality and inclusion in public debate. The research employs content analysis, following Krippendorff and Boc's (2007) criteria, to investigate censorship mechanisms and media narratives drawing on data from journalistic websites and social media platforms. The findings reveal that opposition to censorship unfolded through four main dynamics: campaigns, street protests, alternative actions, and hashtag activism. Notably, alternative actions emerged as the most expressive form of resistance, characterised by creativity. These protests against censorship took shape through diverse artistic performances, underscoring the ongoing adaptability of artists as they challenged restrictive norms and expanded their repertoire in defence of freedom of expression.

Keywords

censorship, political mobilisation, freedom of expression, arts

Das Ações Censórias à Resistência: Mobilizações em Defesa da Liberdade de Expressão Artística no Brasil

Resumo

Este artigo explora as manifestações online e offline que surgiram em resposta às tentativas de censura a produções artísticas no Brasil entre 2017 e 2022. O foco é identificar e analisar episódios e tentativas de censura à arte, examinando as reações e mobilizações desencadeadas. Ao lançar luz sobre as influências do contexto político brasileiro, o estudo destaca os novos repertórios de ação que conferem agência e criatividade aos confrontos. Além disso, reflete sobre como essas mobilizações de resistência atuaram na defesa da liberdade de expressão, que é crucial para a promoção da pluralidade e da inclusão no debate público. Utilizando dados coletados em *sites* jornalísticos e plataformas de mídias sociais, a pesquisa emprega a análise de conteúdo nos critérios de Krippendorff e Boc (2007) para examinar os mecanismos de censura e as narrativas midiáticas sobre eles. Os resultados revelam que as manifestações contra a censura se desdobraram em quatro dinâmicas principais: campanhas, protestos de rua, ações alternativas e ativismo de *hashtags*. Notavelmente, as ações alternativas se destacaram como a categoria mais expressiva, impulsionada pela criatividade. Essas manifestações contra a censura se materializaram em diversas performances artísticas, evidenciando a constante adaptação dos artistas ao desafiar normas e expandir o repertório em prol da defesa da liberdade de expressão.

Palavras-chave

censura, mobilização política, liberdade de expressão, artes

1. Introduction

Despite democratic progress and the internationalisation of human rights — particularly those related to the defence of freedom of expression — many countries have recently experienced an anti-democratic shift marked by the erosion of fundamental rights. Brazil was no exception: following the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff in 2016, the country underwent a process of "scorched earth", dismantling democratic advancements and social justice initiatives established since the end of the military dictatorship (1964–1985). The democratic gains achieved, particularly since the promulgation of the 1988 Constitution, led to progressive inclusion policies that amplified the voices and visibility of historically marginalised groups, including within the cultural sphere. In response to these social transformations, conservative groups aligned with the new right perceived a loss of power as a dominant class (e.g., Rocha, 2021) and, from 2017 onwards, implemented strategies to suppress various forms of expression. These included monitoring artistic productions, exerting political influence in legislative bodies and political parties, and leveraging social media platforms and disinformation tactics to mobilise supporters.

Following the parliamentary coup against Dilma Rousseff and the subsequent inauguration of then Vice-President Michel Temer as President of the Republic, the persecution and attempted censorship of intellectuals, teachers, and artists intensified (Miguel, 2018; Sanglard et al., 2023). Since 2017, Brazil has witnessed a growing movement to

suppress scientific, journalistic, and artistic productions, with repeated attempts to curtail freedom of expression and press freedom — often culminating in the criminalisation of those involved. Many of these actions were concealed to avoid overtly resembling censorship, with the State, its representatives, and religious and political groups among the main perpetrators (Sanglard et al., 2023).

This movement to undermine diversity through the construction of anti-democratic and anti-institutional narratives, particularly online, gained momentum following the presidential election of Jair Bolsonaro, a far-right conservative politician who took office in January 2019. His campaign was marked by the use of bots and the spread of fake news (Harbath, 2018; Ruediger et al., 2021). The actions of ultraconservative and extremist groups emboldened by Bolsonaro's rise to power exposed the fragility of Brazilian democracy, which faced relentless attacks — including calls for a return to military dictatorship and the closure of the National Congress and the Federal Supreme Court. These efforts, particularly within digital environments, culminated in the attempted coup of January 2023, when the headquarters of the Three Powers were stormed following Bolsonaro's electoral defeat.

Against this backdrop of democratic regression, this article examines the mobilisations against artistic censorship in Brazil between 2017 and 2022. The study is based on research that monitors cultural productions censored and/or targeted by conservative groups that gained national prominence and sparked public debate, whether through media or social networks. The mapping was conducted using mixed methods, including data collection from social media platforms (such as Facebook, Instagram, and X), monitoring Brazilian news outlets (such as *Folha de S. Paulo*, *O Estado de S. Paulo*, and the G1 portal), and applying content analysis. This process resulted in a database comprising 89 emblematic cases of artistic censorship.

Thus, this article aims to (a) examine the responses to censorship and attacks on Brazilian artists; (b) contextualise the mobilisation processes within the broader national political landscape; and (c) explore how these resistance movements defended freedom of expression, which should be recognised as a fundamental pillar for ensuring plurality and genuine inclusion in public debate (Scabin & Leite, 2021).

2. Contemporary Art Censorship: Is There Respect for Freedom of Expression?

Conflicts and symbolic disputes over the concept of "freedom of expression" in Brazil have gained increasing prominence over the past decade[1]. These disputes not only serve to justify intolerant positions — highlighting the rise of conservative groups in civil society and formal political representation who actively patrol collective and individual freedoms — but also fuel movements defending these freedoms. This paper examines various social mobilisations that have engaged in protecting freedom of expression.

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[1] This phenomenon is also linked to the process of platformisation (Poell et al., 2020) and informational disorder (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017), where social actors appropriate specific terminologies to defend controversial viewpoints — particularly within the platformised environment — on topics that were once considered to be subjects of social consensus.

Given that this right has been subject to epistemic disputes and has polarised political groups in the country (Oliveira et al., 2022; Sanglard et al., 2021, 2023), it is crucial to understand freedom of expression as a fundamental element in building a democratic and participatory society. Accordingly, it is important to consider the State's role in ensuring the creation of opportunities for inclusive debates (Barendt, 2017; Edström & Svensson, 2016; Fiss, 1996/2022; Miguel, 2018; Sodré, 2021). The 1988 Federal Constitution is a key example, reaffirming the defence of this freedom to restore public debate and uphold the free exercise of individual autonomy (Fiss, 1996/2022).

Freedom of artistic expression, the focus of this article, is also protected by the right to culture in Brazil, as stipulated in Article 5, IX, of the Federal Constitution. Furthermore, both the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 1945 Constitution of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation affirm the concept of "freedom" as a safeguard for other social objectives, such as peace and democracy (Nordenstreng, 2016).

As noted by Hal Foster (2013), contemporary society is experiencing a notable scarcity of spaces dedicated to art criticism, which conservative groups and commercial pressures have undermined. Foster argues that criticism has been hollowed out, leaving room for even pluralism to be overshadowed. Driven by power, criticism has lost its reflexive nature concerning its own claims. Consequently, works of art that challenge the *status quo* are frequently subjected to censorship and criminalisation (Sanglard et al., 2023).

Rodrigo Santos, author of the short story *Baratária* and creator of the performance *A Voz do Ralo É a Voz de Deus* (The Voice of the Drain Is the Voice of God), which was censored in 2018 in Rio de Janeiro for criticising Jair Bolsonaro (Liberal Party), states: "I really like discomfort. In some way, we need to provoke. It was a brilliant move on their part to connect it with the present, give it new meaning, and also create a record of its time" (Cavicchioli & Cruz, 2018, para. 7). The literary work by Santos recounts the story of a woman who endured torture during the military dictatorship, which involved the insertion of cockroaches into her vagina. Based on this narrative, the És Uma Maluca collective staged a performance in which one of its actresses lay on the floor surrounded by cockroaches, with audio clips of Bolsonaro's speeches emanating from a maintenance hole. As Santos emphasises, the purpose of art is to evoke discomfort and shock. Art has an impact, and its primary role is to provoke unease in the face of realities and moralities that need to be criticised (see also Miguel, 2018; Sanglard et al., 2021).

3. Collective Actions: Defending Freedom of Expression as a Rallying Cry for Political Engagement

The criminalisation of Brazilian artistic expressions, as explored in previous research, highlights how issues related to politics, religion, and sexuality can provoke censorship (Oliveira et al., 2022; Sanglard et al., 2021, 2023). Nudity and the representation of gender diversity in artworks are frequently distorted, interpreted as obscene or erotic, and, in some cases, criminalised. Political critique, particularly that which questions Brazil's

authoritarian past or involves political figures — whether elected or contesting elections — is often suppressed in an effort to silence opposing viewpoints and prevent public debate. Meanwhile, religious arguments are predominantly invoked to disguise the reinforcement of conservative and intolerant agendas, resulting in the restriction of freedom of expression under the guise of religious justification.

Censorship, or attempts at it, not only aims to stifle public dialogue but also seeks to obscure subjects and themes that are frequently underrepresented in the public sphere. However, it is precisely the political and social critiques embodied in artistic expressions that carry an inherent potential to challenge dominant systems. This underscores the relevance of the concept of "collective action" in this context. As Sanglard and Santos (2013) assert, drawing from the work *Collective Action in Organisations* by Bimber et al. (2012),

> collective action is understood as the coming together of individuals who advocate for a cause, recruit participants to protest or unite in order to gain a voice and representation before public institutions, corporations, and other entities. It can be driven by the goal of promoting public debate on a particular issue (such as health) or the necessity of gathering people to advance a shared "public good". (p. 117)

According to the authors, the proliferation and use of information technologies, coupled with the ability to develop movements in a decentralised manner without reliance on formal organisations, have brought significant changes to collective action.

Charles Tilly's (2008) approach, which views performance as a repertoire of action, provides a useful framework for understanding how artists, when confronted with censorship, can create innovative and impactful performances as a response.

By conceptualising performance as a series of symbolic and cultural actions, we can observe how those subjected to censorship often employ their bodies and artistic expressions as forms of resistance. These performances, as part of a repertoire of action against censorship, not only challenge conservative forces but also defend diverse artistic representation within society, reinforcing the necessity of debating freedom of expression.

In a broad process of reviewing and understanding the political processes of the time, Charles Tilly (2008) conceptualised the repertoire of collective action as a set of variable performances deeply shaped by local culture, traditions, and values. Focusing on the performances inherent in political mobilisations, Tilly argues that these are continuously evolving due to processes such as choice, interpretation, improvisation, and learning. The author emphasises the essential interdependence between mobilisations and institutionalised political systems. This suggests that to fully understand the dynamics of political mobilisations, it is crucial to view them as partly the outcome of transformations within institutionalised politics. Similarly, changes in institutionalised politics often reflect and influence mobilisations. In this context, the repertoire of responses to censorship takes on various forms, depending on the nature of the censorial action and vice versa.

Tilly's (2008) latest book introduces a type of political action known as "performing", which stands out by not adhering to conventional repertoires. It unfolds unpredictably, challenging traditional expectations of political confrontation. In this context, "political action as performance" redefines the conventional view of political conflict, expanding the very concept of action repertoires. Participants in such actions are continually improvising — either adapting existing routines to convey their demands or responding to the reactions of others. This spontaneity, theatricality, and improvisation infuse these confrontations with agency and creativity, resulting in a dynamic and evolving set of actions.

In this study, we analysed collective initiatives aimed at safeguarding freedom of expression, which took various forms in response to attacks and/or attempts to restrict artistic manifestations in Brazil between 2017 and 2022. We argue that contemporary mobilisations have been pivotal in shaping and influencing public opinion, both in support of censorship and in opposition to it, adopting diverse strategies and introducing new repertoires for action.

4. Methodological Procedures and Analytical *Corpus*

This article stems from a broader study aimed at documenting cases of censorship of artistic manifestations in Brazil between 2017 and 2022 (Oliveira et al., 2022; Sanglard et al., 2021, 2023). The year 2017 was selected as the starting point for data collection due to its symbolic significance in the context of Brazil's democratic recession, which began following the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff in 2016. Until then, since the end of the military dictatorship (1964–1985) and the promulgation of the 1988 Constitution, instances of censorship appeared to be isolated occurrences in Brazil.

However, since 2017, there has been a marked shift, with coordinated acts of censorship, attacks, and persecution targeting artistic productions and artists — driven by ultraconservative groups exhibiting a form of moralistic hysteria (Duarte, 2018; Sanglard et al., 2023). This emerging form of censorship, along with the responses to it, warranted analysis, particularly in the context of the online public sphere, which has become a key arena for debate and mobilisation (Costa & Souza Junior, 2018). The final timeframe chosen was 2022, marking the end of President Jair Bolsonaro's term. As an ultraright-wing politician, Bolsonaro implemented anti-democratic policies and endorsed censorship and intimidation tactics against various artistic expressions throughout his administration.

The research identified 89 instances of censorship, attempted censorship, artist intimidation, or repression of artistic expression, which we will collectively refer to as "censorious practices". To document these cases, we employed research techniques that included keyword searches on Brazilian news websites such as *Folha de S. Paulo*, G1, and *O Estado de S. Paulo*, as well as on social media platforms like X and Instagram. Data collection combined manual methods with artificial intelligence, using the Python programming language to access websites via their application programming interfaces. We established three criteria for selecting the cultural productions examined: (a) artistic

manifestations targeted by conservative efforts to judge or criminalise art; (b) cases that gained national visibility in traditional media; and (c) events that triggered reactions and/or mobilisations in defence of artistic expression.

The 89 cases were classified into 18 predefined categories, which included the date and location of occurrence, the type of artistic expression involved (such as exhibitions, performances, musical and theatrical productions), and the form of censorship enacted (e.g., prior censorship, subsequent cancellation, artist arrest, material seizure, self-censorship). We also identified the agents responsible for the censorship (governments, parliamentarians, the judiciary, police, and cultural institutions), the justifications or motivations cited (sexuality, religion, or political criticism), and the individuals or groups supporting the censorship. Additionally, we examined whether physical violence was involved, whether cancellations or online attacks occurred, and the nature of responses to censorship (street protests, online campaigns, alternative actions, or hashtag activism). This article focuses on the latter category, exploring how responses to censorship unfolded.

To categorise the episodes according to the variables mentioned, we applied the principles of content analysis as defined by Krippendorff and Boc (2007) to data collected from social media platforms and journalistic narratives. After coding the material, we conducted reliability tests, obtaining a Krippendorff's alpha index ranging from 0.86 to 1[2]. All episodes were categorised and subsequently subjected to statistical analysis using SPSS Statistics, alongside a qualitative study, to explore their characteristics and nuances.

In all 89 cases of censorship of the arts identified in this study, some form of opposition emerged on the monitored social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, and X). Nonetheless, in 67 of these cases[3] — amounting to 75.28% — protests extended beyond social media, evolving into street demonstrations, campaigns, alternative actions, and/or hashtag activism. These cases are detailed in Table 1.

Number	Case	Type of artistic manifestation	Date*
1	*DNA de Dan* (Dan's DNA)	Performance	July 2017
2	*La Bête* (The Beast)	Performance	September 2017
3	*Queermuseu* (Queermuseum)	Exhibition/visual arts	September 2017
4	*Não Matarás* (Thou Shalt Not Kill)	Exhibition/visual arts	September 2017
5	*Pedofilia* (Paedophilia)	Exhibition/visual arts	September 2017
6	Caetano Veloso Homeless Workers' Movement	Music/show	October 2017
7	*Faça Você Mesmo Sua Capela Sistina* (Make Your Own Sistine Chapel)	Exhibition/visual arts	October 2017

[2] Krippendorff's alpha is a coefficient that measures the level of agreement among two or more coders when categorising a set of analysis units. The closer the value is to 1, the higher the reliability.

[3] The other 22 cases, although included in the *corpus* as instances of opposition to censorship, did not reach the level of mobilisation necessary to be classified as street protests, campaigns, alternative actions, or hashtag creation. Instead, they consisted solely of isolated comments from individuals expressing their opposition to the attack on the artistic manifestation in question.

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8	*História da Sexualidade* (History of Sexuality)	Exhibition/visual arts	October 2017
9	*Pequenas Igrejas Grandes Negócios* (Small Churches Big Businesses)	Theatre performance	March 2018
10	Graffiti Without a Name	Graffiti	May 2018
11	*Todos Podem Ser Frida* (Everyone Can Be Frida)	Exhibition/photography	September 2018
12	*Meninos Sem Pátria* (Boys Without a Country)	Literature	October 2018
13	Roger Waters	Music/show	October 2018
14	*A Voz do Ralo É a Voz de Deus*	Performance	December 2018
15	Banco do Brasil	Advertising piece	April 2019
16	Sawdust mat	Other	April 2019
17	*O que Pode um Casamento (Gay)?* (What Can a [Gay] Marriage Do?)	Exhibition/visual arts	May 2019
18	Jaraguá do Sul Book Fair	Literature	July 2019
19	*Coroação de Nossa Senhora das Travestis* (Coronation of Our Lady of the Transvestites)	Performance	July 2019
20	*M'Bai*	Exhibition/visual arts	July 2019
21	Show BNegão	Music/show	July 2019
22	Facada Fest	Music/show	July 2019
23	*Res Pública 2023*	Theatre show	August 2019
24	Linn da Quebrada	Music/show	August 2019
25	Calls for LGBTQIAP+ films	Cinema/audiovisual work	August 2019
26	Gramado Film Festival	Cinema/audiovisual work	August 2019
27	Léo Lins	Show	August 2019
28	Chico Buarque	Cinema/audiovisual work	September 2019
29	*Caranguejo Overdrive* (Crab Overdrive)	Theatre performance	September 2019
30	*Gritos* (Screams)	Theatre performance	September 2019
31	*Abrazo* (Embrace)	Theatre performance	September 2019
32	Avengers at the Biennale	Comics	September 2019
33	"O Riso É Risco: Independência em Risco" (Laughter Is Risk: Independence at Stake)	Cartoon	September 2019
34	*Marighella*	Cinema/audiovisual work	September 2019
35	Graffiti with Greta Thumberg	Graffiti	October 2019
36	"Colégio Loyola" (Loyola College)	Opinion article	October 2019
37	Nova Hartz Book Fair	Literature	November 2019
38	*Consciência Negra* (Black Awareness)	Exhibition/visual arts	November 2019
39	*Isso Não É Arte* (This Is Not Art)	Exhibition/visual arts	December 2019
40	*A Vida Invisível* (Invisible Life)	Cinema/audiovisual work	December 2019
41	Porta dos Fundos/Netflix	Cinema/audiovisual work	January 2020
42	*Todxs xs Santxs - #eunãosoudespesa* (All Saints - #IAmNotAToll)	Exhibition/visual arts	February 2020

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43	Censored books in Porto Velho/Rondônia	Literature	February 2020
44	Festival Cannabis	Music/show	February 2020
45	*Ruína* (Ruin)	Exhibition/photography	March 2020
46	Letícia Sabatella	Cinema/audiovisual work	April 2020
47	Biographies Fundação Palmares	Literature	June 2020
48	"Charge Aroeira"	Cartoon	June 2020
49	Natura	Advertising piece	July 2020
50	*Lindinhas* (Cuties)	Cinema/audiovisual work	September 2020
51	*Um Povo Heróico* (A Heroic People)	Cinema/audiovisual work	September 2020
52	Caetano Veloso Live	Music/show	October 2020
53	Criola Graffiti	Graffiti	December 2020
54	Print	Graffiti	January 2021
55	*O Santo Inquérito* (The Holy Enquiry)	Theatre performance	March 2021
56	Capão Jazz Festival	Music/festival	July 2021
57	Neutral language	Other	October 2021
58	*Praia* (Beach)	Performance	February 2022
59	*Obra com Nu Feminino* (Work With Female Nude)	Exhibition/visual arts	March 2022
60	*Sobre Vivências* (About Lived Experiences)	Exhibition/visual arts	March 2022
61	Lollapalooza	Music/festival	March 2022
62	Culture and Human Rights Festival	Music/festival	March 2022
63	*MST no Masp* (Homeless Workers' Movement at the Museu de Arte de São Paulo)	Exhibition/photography	May 2022
64	*Sem Medo do Futuro* (Fearless of the Future)	Literature	May 2022
65	*Versa: Brados em Linhas* (Verse: Shouting in Lines)	Literature	August 2022
66	*Deslocamento* (Displacement)	Exhibition/visual arts	September 2022
67	*Gente de Bicas* (People of Bicas)	Exhibition/photography	December 2022

Table 1. *Responses to the censorship of artistic manifestations*

Note. * The date of the first identified episode of censorship is considered, although in some cases, cultural productions may have been attacked or prevented from being realised on multiple occasions.

The 67 demonstrations represent collective protests against attacks on the arts, publicised across social networks such as Instagram, X, and Facebook. Some of them promoted the creation of hashtags, while others, garnering significant attention, led to street protests against censorship, initiated campaigns, and/or even inspired alternative actions to ensure the continuation of artistic expressions despite censorship. We define "alternative actions" as gestures against censorship and in support of freedom of expression that diverge from traditional reactionary practices. In other words, these are disruptive acts designed to surprise or capture society's attention strikingly. For example,

if a theatre performance is banned from a cultural space and the artists relocate it, this is a typical or expected action. However, if the artists decide to perform in front of the same venue that banned them, in the street, this becomes both a street protest and an alternative action. In this case, the artists do not simply protest in the conventional manner (e.g., with banners or a march) but do so creatively through art and disruption. Such alternative actions align with Tilly's (2008) concept of "performing" political action presented here.

These demonstrations against censorship were categorised into four distinct types of actions in defence of freedom of expression: (a) campaign, (b) street protest, (c) alternative action, and (d) hashtag. Figure 1 quantifies the presence of these categories within the analysed *corpus*. It is important to note that these categories are not mutually exclusive; a single case of censorship can provoke multiple types of reactions, as illustrated in the graph below.
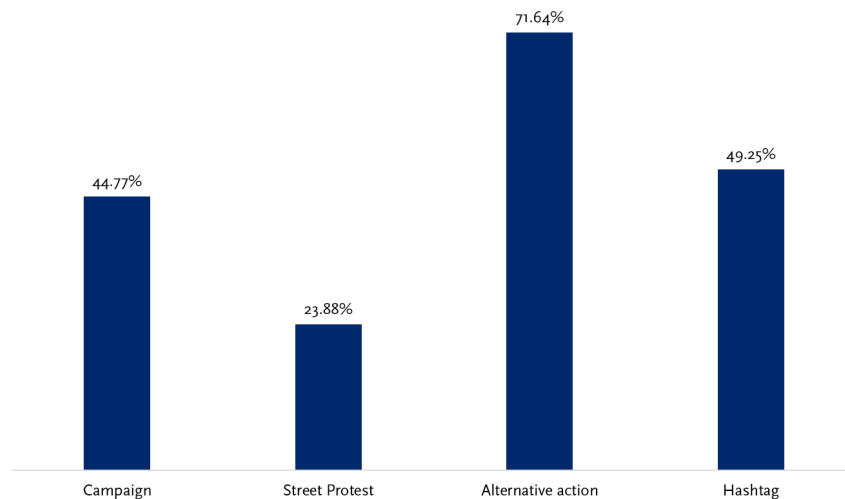

Figure 1. *Types of mobilisations against censorship*

5. Civil Society Mobilises Against Censorship

In this segment, we will examine each of the categories analysed, providing examples of cases that have been subjected to censorship attacks. To achieve this, we will draw on the information in the database compiled from traditional media outlets and discussions on the aforementioned social media platforms. This approach enables us to connect specific instances of censorship to broader social and political dynamics, in line with Charles Tilly's (2008) concept of the repertoire of collective action, which emphasises the importance of understanding specific performances within the wider context of political mobilisations.

5.1. Alternative Action

Alternative action was the most common form of mobilisation, occurring in 71.64% of cases where demonstrations against censorship took place. This type of action can be understood as a creative attempt to circumvent censorship and/or prevent it from recurring in a different context. These demonstrations, moving beyond traditional repertoires of political mobilisation, such as online campaigns or street protests, employ artistic expression itself as a means of resisting censorship.

An emblematic example of alternative action took place in 2017 with Maikon Kempinski's installation *DNA de Dan.* The artist was performing in Brasília (Federal District) on July 15 when military police unexpectedly intervened, preventing him from continuing. Arrested and charged with committing an obscene act, he also witnessed the destruction of the plastic bubble that housed the performance. *DNA de Dan* had been touring the country since 2013, and this was the first time in four years that Kempinski's work had been forcibly halted. Subsequently, the same performance was staged around lake Igapó in Londrina (Paraná). Once again, the police arrived and threatened to arrest the artist. However, this time, the audience staged a counter-demonstration, forming a protective cordon around Kempinski to prevent police intervention — an act categorised as an "alternative action". In other words, through a creative and unexpected response, the public successfully resisted the repetition of censorship.

Among the emblematic cases, the exhibition *Queermuseu: Cartografias da Diferença na Arte Brasileira* (Queermuseum: Cartographies of Difference in Brazilian Art) also sparked alternative actions. In 2017, while on display at Santander Cultural in Porto Alegre (Rio Grande do Sul), the exhibition was abruptly shut down before its scheduled end date and without prior notice to the organisers, following intense criticism from conservative groups. It was later censored again in Rio de Janeiro by Mayor Marcelo Crivella (Republicans), prompting widespread protests both on and off social media, with expressions of support from anonymous individuals and well-known figures alike. In 2018, a crowdfunding campaign — considered an "alternative action" — successfully enabled the exhibition to be restaged, this time at Lage park in Rio de Janeiro.

Caetano Veloso's concert celebrating the 20th anniversary of the Homeless Workers' Movement in December 2017 serves as another example that led to an alternative action. The concert was eventually held in São Paulo after the artist was barred from performing at the Homeless Workers' Movement occupation in the Planalto neighbourhood of São Bernardo do Campo (São Paulo). The São Paulo judiciary, responding to a request from the Public Prosecutor's Office, imposed a R$ 500,000 fine and authorised police intervention should the ruling be defied. Authorities justified the decision by claiming that the venue (occupation) lacked the necessary infrastructure to host a concert of Caetano's scale. However, the move was widely perceived as censorship by the artist and supporters of the cause, particularly given that the occupation was already under threat of eviction.

After the event was cancelled, producer Paula Lavigne, the artist's wife and a leading figure in the movement 342 Artes, organised a second performance in São Paulo.

The show began with a speech in which she thanked the judge who had banned the concert at the occupation. According to her, the decision had unintentionally enabled the organisation of an even larger event, drawing even greater public attention to the case.

This category highlights how, through creativity, collective actions take shape as diverse performances in response to censorship. These expressions encompass a broad spectrum of actions, all guided by resistance to attempts to suppress artistic expression. This landscape underscores the ongoing adaptability and improvisation of artists and their supporters, who challenge established norms and expand the repertoire of actions in defence of freedom of expression. As artists and art advocates adjust, innovate, and defy conventional expectations, new forms of action emerge, becoming essential tools for advocating for freedom of expression and resisting censorship. This perspective aligns with Charles Tilly's theoretical framework, emphasising the repertoire of collective action as a dynamic and adaptive response to evolving practices of social control, contributing to collective actions and political activism. It highlights how political mobilisation extends beyond traditional forms — such as activism and protest — to encompass creative interventions that enhance the disruptive power of artistic expression.

5.2. Hashtags

This category applies when comments on the digital media index a word or phrase with the "#" symbol, always carrying a claim or protest content. With a frequency of 49.25%, the use of hashtags for political mobilisations has been referred to as "hashtag activism" (Gunn, 2015) and has been studied across various political repertoires (Malik et al., 2018). The core of hashtag activism lies in its ability to disseminate information and connect people around specific causes using relevant keywords. These tags serve as virtual labels that allow users to categorise and share content related to a particular issue or movement. Given the massive communication flow across social networks, hashtag activism becomes a node capable of bringing together discourses and narratives, whether supportive or opposing. In our research, when applying statistical correlation tests, hashtags appear to be associated with other forms of reaction, as shown in Table 2.

Cross-references	Pearson's chi-square *p*-value
Hashtag and street protest	0.039
Hashtag and campaign	0
Hashtag and alternative action	0.006

Table 2. *Test of association (chi-square) between categories*

Note. Table compiled by the authors, based on data from SPSS Statistics software.

To interpret Table 2, we must consider that Pearson's chi-square is a statistical test used to measure the strength of the results (Arsham, 1998). The lower the *p*-value, the stronger the evidence of the relationship between the data. A *p*-value of less than 0.05, as seen in the three highlighted cases in the table, indicates moderate evidence of a relationship and can be considered statistically significant. In contrast, a *p*-value of less than

0.01, as seen in the cross-references between hashtag/campaign and hashtag/alternative action, indicates strong evidence of a relationship. This suggests that the data cross-references are not random. In other words, there is a meaningful connection between the categories, indicating that they can be strategically aligned as tactics within a repertoire.

Social media and the nature of mobilisations may vary depending on the target of the demands. However, the literature highlights that hashtags function as collective action performances due to their low cost, rapid dissemination, and lack of reliance on a centralised formal organisation (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). In this study, hashtags are linked to various other forms of performance, including alternative actions, campaigns, and street protests.

In the analysed *corpus*, artists and supporters used hashtags to categorise content and facilitate users' ability to follow specific discussions on the topic. Additionally, activists employed keywords to amplify the movement's visibility, connect with external audiences, and promote messages related to bans and/or attempts at censorship. From this perspective, hashtags stood out as performing elements with a distinct repertoire compared to other categories. Nevertheless, by integrating into these protests, they emerged as essential complements within the field of struggle.

The #342Artes campaign exemplifies the use of hashtags in conjunction with other forms of reaction, in this case, a campaign. Launched in 2017, the movement — comprising artists from various fields — emerged in response to Mayor Marcelo Crivella's censorship of the *Queermuseu: Cartografias da Diferença na Arte Brasileira* exhibition in Rio de Janeiro. Beyond opposing censorship, the group also stands against the conservative wave that has been denouncing exhibitions and performances on unfounded charges since 2017. With the support of renowned artists such as Caetano Veloso, Fernanda Montenegro, and others, #342Artes leverages digital platforms to address issues including misinformation and copyright.

Another example was the attempted censorship of the Lollapalooza festival in 2022 when artists supporting candidate Lula were banned from expressing their views. The use of hashtags such as "Lulapalooza" and "LollaLivre" became a means of opposing censorship and showing support for the event and the performers, drawing on the Lula Livre campaign, which had advocated for the politician's release from prison. The Liberal Party argued that the event constituted irregular electoral propaganda, leading to a case before the Superior Electoral Court. Social media mobilisation, particularly through the creation of hashtags, played a crucial role in resisting censorship. Public figures such as Luciano Huck and Anitta spoke out against the decision, underscoring the significant role of digital platforms in public debate and challenging censorship.

Hashtag activism, as demonstrated in the cases of #342Artes and the hashtags associated with Lollapalooza 2022, represents an effective form of online mobilisation against censorship and in defence of freedom of expression. These hashtags not only serve to index content and facilitate engagement with specific discussions on relevant topics but also act as powerful tools for amplifying voices, connecting diverse audiences, and disseminating messages of resistance. Social media engagement through hashtags

not only expresses opposition to censorship but also plays a crucial role in shaping public opinion and fostering critical debates on political and social issues. By integrating hashtag activism with other forms of resistance — such as campaigns, street protests, and alternative actions (as shown in Table 2) — it contributes to the development of dynamic and performative repertoires of action, reflecting the adaptability and creativity of activists in responding to contemporary challenges to freedom of expression. This phenomenon is particularly significant because the repertoires of action devised in response to censorship are strategically designed to reach diverse groups and take multiple forms (e.g., hashtag activism, campaigns, and alternative actions). In doing so, they become multifaceted instruments in the defence of plural voices and freedom of expression.

5.3. Campaigns

Online campaigns, which accounted for 44.66% of the cases, were the most visible, aiming to expand political and social influence and organised to reach the public sphere. Through these mobilisations, artists gain media attention and secure the support of other users. The campaigns vary and can be initiated by artists or collectives linked to social movements, as seen in the campaign led by *youtuber* Felipe Neto after the mayor of Rio de Janeiro, Crivella, ordered the Book Biennale to remove copies of the comic book *Avengers: The Children's Crusade* in September 2019. The justification was that the comic by Allan Heinberg and Jim Cheng, published by Marvel, contained depictions of two boys kissing and was deemed "inappropriate". However, the event organisers refused to remove the books, and in response to the attempted censorship, influencer Felipe Neto purchased copies for free distribution among attendees. Notably, this case was also coded as "alternative action".

Other campaign cases include crowdfunding initiatives, such as the *Queermuseu* exhibition — also classified as a type of alternative action — which launched a campaign to raise funds for relocating the exhibition to another venue. Through online fundraising, they managed to collect approximately R$820,000, with around 1,500 donors contributing to the campaign.

Another online campaign that mobilised a large number of people unfolded in November 2019 following an act of vandalism by federal deputy Coronel Tadeu (Social Liberal Party – São Paulo). He attacked an art exhibition launched in one of the corridors of the Chamber of Deputies in Brasília (Federal District) in honour of Black Awareness Day. The exhibition featured works depicting, among other themes, police violence against Black people. The deputy destroyed a piece that presented data on violence against Black men and women, illustrated by a cartoon by Carlos Latuff. The cartoon depicted a dead, handcuffed person wrapped in a Brazilian flag, with a policeman standing nearby holding a smoking gun. After the incident, numerous parliamentarians condemned the act. The then president of the Chamber of Deputies, Rodrigo Maia (Democrats – Rio de Janeiro), classified the episode as "serious". Deputy Orlando Silva (Communist Party of Brazil

– São Paulo) stated: "it is unacceptable, dishonourable for this House that a federal deputy has no tolerance, does not respect the history of Black people in Brazil, and does not recognise the genocide perpetrated by society against Black youth and the poor in the periphery" (*Maia Repreende Deputado que Vandalizou Exposição do Dia da Consciência Negra*, 2019, para. 12). Congresswoman Áurea Carolina (Socialism and Freedom Party – Minas Gerais) also reacted on X: "UNACCEPTABLE! MP @CoronelTadeu has just BROKEN a plaque with a cartoon by @LatuffCartoons referring to racist police violence. Coward!"

The campaigns against censorship reveal not only the resilience of these actions but also their effectiveness in raising awareness and mobilising society. The diversity of strategies adopted — from confrontation against censorship attempts to crowdfunding for banned exhibitions — highlights the richness and complexity of repertoires of action in defence of freedom of expression. The strategic use of social networks and digital platforms plays a crucial role in amplifying these campaigns, fostering connections between a broad spectrum of supporters, from public figures to engaged donors. These initiatives do more than contest specific instances of censorship; they contribute to shaping a collective narrative in defence of artistic freedom. By increasing the visibility of censored works, artists, and movements, these campaigns transcend individual resistance, becoming essential components in fostering a culture that values and safeguards the diversity of artistic expressions — an indispensable element for the vitality of a democratic and plural society.

5.4. Street Protests

Street protests, on the other hand, encompass strictly offline manifestations, characterised by mobilisations in public spaces. In many cases, these actions occur alongside online demonstrations, with in-person protests offering a way to engage with diverse audiences. In our *corpus*, street protests accounted for 23.88% of the cases analysed.

In Campo Grande (Mato Grosso do Sul), for instance, in September 2017, around 50 artists closed Treze de Maio Street in the city centre to protest against the seizure of the painting *Pedofilia* by Alessandra Cunha, an artist from Minas Gerais known as "Ropre". During the demonstration, traffic slowed, and military police were present, but the protest remained peaceful. The canvas was part of the *Cadafalso* (Scaffold) exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art. It was confiscated by the Specialised Police Station for the Protection of Children and Adolescents on charges of promoting paedophilia, which the artwork actually condemned. The painting depicted two men with exposed genitals next to a child, portrayed smaller in size, with the phrase: "machismo kills, violates, and humiliates". The artist commented on the situation via Facebook: "it's not promotion, it's a denunciation. It's a silent but colourful cry that this happens in our society". The seizure followed a police report filed by three state deputies — Paulo Siufi (Brazilian Democratic Movement), Coronel David (Christian Social Party), and Herculano Borges (Solidarity) — after heated debates in the Legislative Assembly of the state of Mato Grosso do Sul.

However, the various repertoires of action, whether online, offline, or a combination of both, are not limited to the defence of artistic freedom. While social movements strive to make their demands viable through campaigns and protests, opposing groups seek to attack these narratives in order to promote conservative and intolerant agendas. Street protests are no exception to this dynamic, serving as the setting for reactions from both advocates and opponents of censorship actions, underscoring the complexity and polarisation involved in the disputes over artistic freedom of expression.

An emblematic example of this dispute over repertoires occurred during the exhibition *Faça Você Mesmo Sua Capela Sistina* by artist Pedro Moraleida (1977–1999), held in October 2017 at the Palace of Arts in Belo Horizonte (Minas Gerais). In this case, a group opposed to the exhibition, led by city councillor Jair Di Gregório (Progressists), mobilised in the streets of the city to denounce and call for the exhibition's censorship, accusing it of promoting pornography, paedophilia, and disrespect for Christianity. This group was able to stop traffic on Afonso Pena avenue, where the gallery is located, and also promoted protests on online platforms, publicising a video made by the councillor. In response, the day after the protests against the exhibition, a group gathered in front of the Palace of Arts to show their support for Moraleida's work. In this scenario of ambiguity and polarisation, the dispute over not only narratives but also repertoires of action stands out. After visiting the show, artist Caetano Veloso expressed his support for freedom of expression in cultural exhibitions, denouncing the attempted closure as a "prelude to oppression". The then mayor of Belo Horizonte, Alexandre Kalil (Social Democratic Party), also visited the exhibition and spoke out in favour of the right to freedom of expression, emphasising the sacredness of this right. These events illustrate the complexity of the social and cultural dynamics behind the protests and reveal the diversity of repertoires of action at play.

6. Final Considerations

Faced with the intricate web that surrounds the conflicting notions of freedom of expression in the Brazilian context, a landscape emerges in which debates are manipulated to justify intolerant attitudes, and civil society actors and political representatives rise as watchdogs of individual and collective freedoms. Simultaneously, within the public sphere, a plurality of social movements dedicated to defending freedom of expression emerges, grounded in the principles enshrined in the Brazilian Federal Constitution of 1988, which establishes this freedom as the foundation of public dialogue and the free exercise of personal autonomy (Fiss, 1996/2022).

It is important to emphasise that while freedom of expression is considered a key element in the formation of a participatory democratic society (Edström & Svensson, 2016), it also has boundaries and limitations. It should not be regarded as an incontestable and sacred right that takes precedence over others (Habermas, 1996/2002; Kunelius, 2016). In this sense, through quantitative and qualitative analyses of reactions to contemporary artistic censorship, this work aimed to address the country's political context, discuss the overlap between these reactions and the logic of online collective actions, and reflect on the defence and limitations of freedom of expression.

The popularisation of the internet has significantly transformed the landscape of political mobilisation, distinguishing itself from offline activism. It offers innovative opportunities, primarily related to the appropriation of platform affordances, such as hashtag activism, which complements more traditional forms of mobilisation like street protests and campaigns. Online collective actions are notable for their adaptability, speed, broad reach, and ability to unite diverse demands. An analysis of the interactions between digital actions and offline resistance movements in the face of censorship reveals that contemporary mobilisations have played a crucial role in shaping public opinion, both supporting and challenging censorship. Investigating these dynamics through specific case studies provides a deeper understanding of the complex interactions between freedom of expression, collective actions, and political contexts, enhancing our comprehension of the intersection between artistic expressions and public space in Brazil.

Focusing on the period between 2017 and 2022 and examining the censorship landscape that impacted Brazilian artistic expressions, this study analysed the mobilisations against these attacks and attempts to curtail them. A total of 89 cases of censorship were identified, with 75.28% (67 cases) provoking counter-demonstrations. These responses included individual and collective protests on social networks such as Instagram, X, and Facebook, which resulted in hashtags and even in-person protests advocating for freedom of expression. The reactions were categorised into four groups: campaigns, street protests, alternative actions, and the use of hashtags, as a single case could encompass multiple forms of response. The findings reveal the complexity of the reactions to the censorship of artistic manifestations in contemporary Brazil. This multifaceted scenario indicates that disputes over freedom of expression reflect intricate and often polarised social dynamics. The interplay between artistic manifestations, popular reactions, and the digital public sphere underscores the need for a comprehensive analysis that considers the intersection of political, social, and cultural dimensions. The defence of freedom of expression is central to the preservation of a democratic and plural society. Yet, its understanding and practice require continuous reflection on the limits and challenges inherent in this fundamental principle.

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