Available online at **HISTORIA**: Jurnal Pendidik dan Peneliti Sejarah
Journal homepage: https://ejournal.upi.edu/index.php/historia

RESEARCH ARTICLE

International Film Festivals: The Power of Censorship in Post-Reform Indonesia (1998–2008)

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To cite this article: Muhlisiun, A., Alkatiri, Z., & Kanumoyoso, B. (2026). International film festivals: The power of censorship in post-Reform Indonesia (1998–2008). *HISTORIA: Jurnal Pendidik dan Peneliti Sejarah, 9*(1), 29–40. https://doi.org/10.17509/historia.v9i1.98120.

Naskah diterima : 12 Maret 2026, Naskah direvisi : 20 April 2026, Naskah disetujui : 30 April 2026

Abstract
Indonesia's 1998 Reformasi marked a transition from the authoritarian New Order (1967–1998) to a democratic political system that expanded freedom of expression. Nevertheless, the Indonesian Film Censorship Board (Lembaga Sensor Film/LSF) continued to play a central role in regulating film circulation. This study examines the persistence of film censorship during the early Reformasi period and identifies the political, social, and institutional factors sustaining it. Using historical methods, the study integrates archival research with interviews involving organizers of international film festivals in Indonesia. Drawing on theories of social change and power, the findings reveal that the LSF remained an instrument of state control despite democratization. This continuity was driven by concerns over political and social stability, pressure from conservative groups, and diplomatic interests. As a result, films addressing sensitive issues, including politics, religion, sexuality, and violence, continued to face censorship or prohibition, including at international film festivals. The study concludes that Reformasi altered the political context of censorship but not its institutional logic, allowing state control over cultural expression to persist in post-authoritarian Indonesia.

Keywords: Film censorship; Film Censorship Board (LSF); International film festivals; Reformasi era; State control.

Abstrak
Reformasi 1998 di Indonesia menandai transisi dari rezim Orde Baru (1967–1998) menuju sistem politik yang lebih demokratis dengan jaminan kebebasan berekspresi yang lebih luas. Namun, di bidang perfilman, praktik sensor tetap berlanjut melalui Lembaga Sensor Film (LSF). Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis keberlanjutan peran LSF pada dekade pertama Reformasi serta mengidentifikasi faktor-faktor yang mempertahankan praktik sensor film. Penelitian menggunakan metode sejarah dengan memadukan analisis arsip dan wawancara terhadap penyelenggara festival film internasional di Indonesia. Analisis didasarkan pada teori perubahan sosial dan teori kekuasaan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa LSF tetap berfungsi sebagai instrumen kontrol negara meskipun terjadi demokratisasi politik. Keberlanjutan tersebut dipengaruhi oleh kepentingan menjaga stabilitas sosial-politik, tekanan kelompok konservatif, serta pertimbangan diplomatik dalam mempertahankan citra Indonesia di tingkat internasional. Akibatnya, film yang mengangkat isu-isu sensitif, seperti politik, agama, seksualitas, dan kekerasan, masih mengalami penyensoran atau pelarangan, termasuk dalam penyelenggaraan festival film internasional. Penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa Reformasi mengubah konteks politik penyensoran, tetapi tidak mengubah secara mendasar logika kelembagaan sensor, sehingga kontrol negara terhadap produksi budaya tetap berlangsung dan terus membatasi kebebasan berekspresi pada era pasca-Orde Baru.

Kata Kunci : Festival film internasional; Indonesia; Lembaga Sensor Film (LSF); Reformasi; sensor film.

INTRODUCTION

The Reform Era in Indonesia brought significant hopes for freedom of speech and expression, which had been difficult to achieve during the New Order period. The Reform movement itself was driven by public dissatisfaction with President Soeharto's regime, which had governed for over 30 years with tight control over various aspects of life, including media and cultural expression. The student movement of 1998 successfully forced Soeharto to step down following a series of large-scale protests that culminated in the Trisakti Tragedy and the May 1998 riots (Sirot & Atmaja, 2020; Adryamarthanino, 2021).

During the New Order, the government enforced strict control over the media through various repressive policies aimed at maintaining political and ideological stability. One of the key instruments used for this purpose was the Film Censorship Board (Lembaga Sensor Film, or LSF). At that time, the LSF exercised stringent control over film content to prevent the inclusion of elements deemed subversive or threatening to national stability (Wijaya, 2014).

Films with content considered controversial—whether politically, socially, or morally—were not allowed to be screened. Themes deemed taboo, such as violence, sexuality, and criticism of the government, were exceedingly difficult to express freely in films. Through such policies, the government sought to ensure that media and films would not become tools to threaten the regime's stability (Permana, 2014).

With the fall of the New Order and the advent of the Reform Era, there was widespread hope that freedom of expression would be better guaranteed. President Abdurrahman Wahid, who became the elected president, disbanded the Ministry of Information in 1999, which had previously overseen and censored media strictly. This move aimed to transition the communication system from a repressive, one-way model to a more inclusive and participatory two-way model. The dissolution was predicted to reduce the influence of censorship on films, television, and other media, allowing for more diverse and exploratory content (Cheng 2011). This dissolution aimed to create a more participatory communication system and to lessen government control over the media. The Reform movement also provided greater space for individuals to voice their opinions, whether through protests or media channels (Adryamarthanino 2021).

Despite the high hopes for media and film policy adaptation, the LSF continued some censorship practices reminiscent of the New Order era. Films considered to contain elements that incite lust or deviate from moral norms remained tightly censored. This was evident in the implementation of the Anti-Pornography Law passed in 2005, which tightened control over depictions of sexuality in films and other media (Cheng 2011). Conservative Islamic groups also continued to push for restrictions on film content deemed contrary to moral values, creating tensions between freedom of expression and moral control (Michalik & Coppens 2011).

Although censorship policies were no longer as strict as during the New Order, the LSF retained authority to determine what could and could not be shown in films. This indicates that while progress in freedom of expression has been made, restrictions imposed by the state on media and films remain (Permana, 2014). Even during the Reform Era, films such as Kuldesak (1998) and 9 Naga (2006), which attempted to explore more controversial social and political themes, continued to face censorship challenges (Wijaya, 2014). The censorship practices employed are also closely tied to regulations that still guide the LSF's operations, such as the Republic of Indonesia Law No. 8 of 1992 on Film and Government Regulation No. 7 of 1994 on the Film Censorship Board. Several studies have examined film censorship during the Reform Era. The first, an article titled "Watching Indonesia in the Mist of Reform Euphoria" (Menonton Indonesia di Remang Kabut Euforia Reformasi) (2014) by Bambang Sukma Wijaya, discusses the changes in film censorship policies in Indonesia during the Reform Era, marking the transition from the authoritarian New Order regime to a more democratic government in the late 1990s. Under the New Order, film censorship was highly strict, with the government controlling content through the Film Censorship Board (Lembaga Sensor Film, or LSF) to prevent subversive or destabilizing elements. The Reform Era ushered in broader freedom of expression, allowing filmmakers to explore taboo themes. The article highlights the film Kuldesak (1998) as a marker of a new era in Indonesian cinema, where social and political issues were addressed more openly. Another example, 9 Naga (2006), features explicit violence and complex portrayals of masculinity, reflecting a shift from previously dominant narratives of femininity. The article also explores two related studies, which describe how Indonesian cinema began to express violence and controversial issues more freely. The study concludes that Reform brought significant changes to film censorship policies, transitioning from

repressive to more permissive, supporting freedom of expression. However, challenges and debates regarding content boundaries persist, suggesting this topic remains relevant for further research.

The second article, "Genre Analysis of Indonesian Horror Films in Jelangkung (2001)" (Analisis Genre Film Horor Indonesia Dalam Film Jelangkung) (2014) by Karis Singgih Angga Permana, examines significant changes in Indonesian cinema post-Reform, beginning after the fall of the New Order regime in the late 1990s. Previously, film censorship in Indonesia was stringent, with the New Order government restricting content deemed subversive or sexual. With the Reform Era, however, censorship policies were relaxed, enabling filmmakers to experiment more freely. One example is the horror film Jelangkung (2001), which marked a transformation in the Indonesian horror genre post-Reform. The film demonstrates how relaxed censorship allowed the integration of local horror elements with modern filmmaking techniques. This reflects greater freedom in exploring taboo themes like violence and sexuality. The shift in censorship policy also aligns with broader social and cultural changes in Indonesia, including greater freedom of expression and press. The positive impact is evident in the creativity and diversity of film content, which became bolder and more reflective of evolving socio-cultural conditions. The study concludes that the Reform Era significantly impacted Indonesia's film industry, increasing its dynamics and quality.

The last article, "Redefining Indie Films: Descriptions of the Development of Indonesian Independent Cinema" (Mendefinisikan Ulang Film Indie: Deskripsi Perkembangan Sinema Independen Indonesia) (Idola P. Putri, 2013), highlights that after the 1998 Reform, film censorship policies in Indonesia underwent significant changes, providing greater space for filmmakers to express themselves. During the New Order era, the film industry was heavily controlled by the government through the LSF, limiting creativity and freedom of expression to maintain political and ideological stability. The Reform Era brought fresh air to the film industry, easing censorship policies and acknowledging the importance of freedom of expression. As a result, independent cinema began to thrive, exploring themes previously considered taboo or sensitive. Films addressing critical social, political, and cultural issues started to emerge, enriching perspectives and diversifying themes in the film industry. These new policies encouraged creativity among filmmakers, producing innovative, high-quality works that gained international recognition. Several post-Reform Indonesian films have won awards at international film festivals, introducing Indonesian cinema to the global stage. Overall, changes in film censorship policies during the Reform Era significantly impacted the Indonesian film industry, paving the way for the rise of independent cinema and contributing positively to the development of Indonesia's creative industries. The newfound freedom of expression enhanced creativity, thematic diversity, and international recognition for Indonesian cinema.

From these three studies, it is evident that most literature focuses on the positive changes and relaxation of censorship policies during the Reform Era. However, a clear research gap exists regarding the continuation of some censorship practices from the New Order era by the LSF. Although censorship was relaxed, the LSF continued to impose strict controls on content deemed harmful to morality or social norms, as reflected in the enforcement of the Anti-Pornography Law in 2005 (Cheng 2011).

For example, while the Reform Era offered greater freedom of expression, limitations remained on film content addressing issues of morality and sexuality. Conservative groups continued to advocate for strict regulations that affected filmmakers' freedom. This creates an ambiguity between freedom and censorship, necessitating further research on how the LSF perpetuated some New Order-era censorship practices in the Reform Era.

Although existing literature discusses the relaxation of film censorship during the Reform Era, few studies specifically address the continuity of LSF censorship practices from the New Order to the Reform Era. This opens a space for further research on how the LSF continues to enforce censorship, particularly concerning morality and social norms, despite demands for greater freedom of expression in the Reform Era.

This study adopts a social change approach as outlined in Social Change: Globalization from the Stone Age to the Present by Christopher Chase-Dunn and Bruce Lerro (2014). According to the book, globalization is a series of processes that have profoundly influenced human life worldwide in recent decades. Through global integration and evolving political ideologies, interactions among nations, cultures, and economies have significantly increased, triggering major changes in social life. However, these changes are not solely driven by contemporary dynamics; our identities and activities are also shaped by human actions and inventions from the past. Institutions and societies created in earlier periods continue to operate in our lives today, revealing causal patterns that shape our history and future.

Amid this globalization process, mass media plays a key role in driving social change. Media not only disseminates information but also shapes public perceptions of various issues such as inequality, violence, and social values. With its ability to reach a broad audience, media influences societal views on what is right or wrong, just or unjust, and how these values are reflected in the ever-evolving social reality.

Another approach employed in this study examines film as a tool of "power." Drawing on Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology (edited by Philip Rosen), an article by Jean-Louis Baudry (1986, p. 296) suggests that cinema can be understood as a device that fulfills psychological needs, operating according to patterns determined by dominant ideologies. This tool is designed to prevent deviations and ensure the perpetuation of these patterns (as defined by those in power). Much of this device operates "unconsciously," not in terms of the film's content but in how the apparatus itself functions behind the scenes. This unconscious aspect relates to the mechanisms of film production, including the intricate processes and technologies involved. Thus, it is crucial to examine the fundamentals of how cinema operates as part of a broader understanding of the influence of ideology in society.

In another article, Teresa de Lauretis (1986, pp. 21-22) argues that cinema is not just about films but also a social tool that affects how we think and live. When studying cinema, we must view it as an intersection of technology and its social impact. By doing so, we can gain deeper insights into issues such as feminism, history, and the practices behind filmmaking. Cinema also significantly influences how individuals are represented, including how male and female identities are constructed. Men and women are often depicted differently in films, and this is no coincidence. Such representations are part of the ideological patterns of society that continually evolve. As viewers, we are influenced by how films narrate stories and convey meaning. Films immerse us in their narratives while simultaneously shaping how we perceive ourselves and the world around us. In summary, cinema is not merely a medium for storytelling but also a tool that molds us as individuals. Understanding these differences—how men and women are portrayed—is a critical task for fully comprehending the power of cinema.

METHOD

This study employed the historical method to examine the continuity of film censorship during Indonesia's Reformasi era, with particular attention to international film festivals as sites of cultural regulation. Following the framework proposed by Gunn and Faire (2012), the research began by formulating a historical research question concerning the persistence of censorship practices despite the political democratization that followed the fall of the New Order regime. A review of previous scholarship on Indonesian cinema, censorship, and post-Reform cultural policies was subsequently conducted to identify the research gap and establish the analytical framework.

The study drew upon both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources consisted of interviews with filmmakers, film festival organizers, film critics, newspaper reports, legal documents, and government regulations related to film censorship. Interview participants were selected through purposive sampling based on their professional roles, direct involvement in film censorship, and knowledge of film festival practices in Indonesia. Interviews were conducted through face-to-face and online communication, documented with participants' consent, transcribed verbatim, and verified against the original recordings. To enhance the credibility of the findings, interview data were triangulated with archival records, legal documents, newspaper reports, and academic publications.

Secondary sources included books, peer-reviewed journal articles, reports, and media documentation addressing the development of Indonesian cinema and censorship policies during the Reformasi period. Data were analyzed through historical source criticism and qualitative content analysis to identify recurring themes and patterns concerning the relationship between censorship, state power, and freedom of expression. The interpretation of the findings was informed by theories of social change and power, enabling the analysis to situate censorship practices within Indonesia's broader political and socio-cultural transformation. Finally, the historical narrative was organized chronologically, tracing the evolution of censorship policies from the New Order to the first decade of Reformasi while ensuring the coherence, consistency, and validity of the historical interpretation through continuous source verification and triangulation (Gunn & Faire, 2012).

DISCUSSION

The New Order era in Indonesia, spanning from 1966 to 1998, was characterized by the government's stringent control over the media, including film. Freedom of expression was often stifled through strict censorship enforced by the Film Censorship Institution (Lembaga Sensor Film, LSF), which scrutinized every film intended for public screening. Films that passed censorship were frequently used by Soeharto's government as a tool to propagate pro-government ideologies (Putri, 2013, p. 123). To illustrate the rigidity of censorship during Soeharto's regime, prominent Indonesian filmmaker Riri Riza highlighted his experience prior to the 1998 reform. He stated that there was no room for negotiation; if his film was not cut, it would not be allowed to screen (Author's interview with Riri Riza, Indonesian filmmaker, January 4, 2024).

The Reform Era, which began in 1998, brought a wave of change, including the dissolution of several institutions deemed overly authoritarian. This shift was anticipated to open up greater freedom of speech and expression for all societal elements. In response to the evolving political and social climate following Soeharto's resignation, the Indonesian Ministry of Information issued more accommodating regulations to reflect the contemporary needs of Indonesian society. Ministerial Decree No. 277/SK/MENPEN/1999 on the Working Procedures of the Film Censorship Institution and Film Censorship Implementation, issued in Jakarta on October 1, 1999, by Minister of Information M. Yunus Yosfiah, marked an improvement over the previous decree, Ministerial Decree No. 216/Kep/Menpen/1994. One notable reform concerned the requirements for film censorship. While the 1994 decree mandated the submission of detailed lists of cast members, filmmakers, and production companies for Indonesian films applying for censorship, the revised 1999 decree eliminated this requirement, signaling a departure from pretense regarding the backgrounds of individuals involved in filmmaking.

In late October 1999, marking the onset of a new era with the election of Abdurrahman Wahid, commonly known as Gus Dur, as Indonesia's fourth president, a significant and radical step was taken to meet reform demands. One of Gus Dur's most consequential actions was the dissolution of the Ministry of Information, a body previously used by the government to control media and communication. This move was a major milestone in dismantling New Order-era influences on press and media freedom (Prakosa, 2004; Darmawan, 2023). Gus Dur argued that the Ministry of Information had primarily imposed restrictions and overly regulated information, which should instead be the public's right (Hadi & Indriawati, 2022). In its place, Gus Dur established the National Information and Communication Agency (Badan Informasi Komunikasi Nasional, BIKN) to replace the Ministry's role, aiming to foster more open interaction between the government and society (Darmawan, 2023).

However, the Film Censorship Board (Lembaga Sensor Film, LSF) remained in place to oversee the content of films screened in Indonesia. In 1999, LSF applied strict censorship to films intended for screening at the 1999 European Film Festival in Jakarta. Out of nine submitted films, only three passed censorship, while the rest were rejected for being deemed too vulgar (Kompas, 1999). Known as Europe on Screen (EoS), this festival is the longest-running international film festival in Indonesia. It was first held in 1990 under the name "European Film Festival," returned in 1999, and since 2003 has been an annual event under the name Europe on Screen - EoS (Europe on Screen, n.d.).

The Pertiwi magazine, issue 116 (1990), reported that the first European Film Festival was organized by the Centre Culturel Français (CCF), now known as the Institut Français d'Indonésie (IFI), as part of cultural cooperation between Indonesia and the European Economic Community. The event took place from November 20 to December 1, 1990, with films shown at several European cultural institutions in Jakarta, such as IFI, the Goethe-Institut, Erasmus Huis, the British Council, and the Instituto Cervantes (Wirayudha, 2019). Screenings were often held in diverse venues, including cultural centers, educational institutions, alternative cinemas, shopping malls, coworking spaces, and other locations supportive of the event (Europe on Screen, n.d.).

Tatiek Maliyati, who had just been appointed Chairperson of LSF for three months, shared her experience handling the 1999 European Film Festival at PPHUI (Haji Usmar Ismail Film Center) and TIM (Taman Ismail Marzuki) in Jakarta. When tasked with censoring the films to be screened, one of the embassies' representatives requested that the films remain uncut, as per the film owners' wishes. However, LSF objected to this request, asserting that anything screened outside the embassy premises fell under the sovereignty of the Republic of Indonesia. During the 1999 European Film Festival, LSF approved only three out of the nine films

submitted. The other six were rejected for containing what LSF considered excessively vulgar sexual scenes. This censorship decision was met with resistance from the European Film Committee. The festival organizers then sought discussions with Indonesia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

After consulting with LSF, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs concluded that LSF's decision was in accordance with regulations. Despite this, the European Film Festival organizers continued to seek solutions to have all films screened. They reached out to the interim Minister of Information, as Minister M. Yunus Yosfiah was abroad in the United States. Eventually, a memo was issued to LSF, instructing them to approve all nine films for screening. This development led Tatiek Maliyati to threaten resignation, arguing that if public controversy arose, LSF, not the Minister of Information, would bear the blame. Ultimately, the festival was canceled (Kompas, 1999; Wirayudha, 2019). This rejection was documented by Jonathon Green and Nicholas J. Karolides in the Encyclopedia of Censorship (Wirayudha, 2019). The European Film Festival, held again in 2000, faced similar challenges from LSF, which rejected many films for being deemed inconsistent with prevailing Indonesian norms (Prakosa, 2004).

According to Kuspujiati, Project Manager of Europe on Screen (EoS) in 2009 and 2010, the festival is essentially an international project involving the European Union and Indonesia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In practice, while censorship might occur for films to be screened, it is not overly stringent, given that the project adheres to the principle of representing the "cultural face" of nations. Consequently, censoring these works also implies censoring the culture they represent. Moreover, the films screened at EoS are commercial films in their countries of origin, meaning they have already undergone censorship mechanisms in those countries. The EoS organizing committee does not conduct censorship on these films. Instead, the films are selected based on recommendations from the respective embassies, rather than being directly submitted by filmmakers affiliated with the organizers. Procedurally, the committee receives the films from the respective embassies and submits them to the Film Censorship Board (Lembaga Sensor Film, LSF) for review (Interview with Kuspujiati, Project Manager of Europe on Screen 2009 and 2010, October 22, 2024).

Referring to the regulations governing film censorship, it becomes evident that expectations for significant freedom in the reform era were limited. Some key regulations include Government Regulation of the Republic of Indonesia No. 7 of 1994 concerning the Film Censorship Institution, Section Two on Functions, Duties, and Authorities, Article 5(1)(a), which states that censorship applies to films and film advertisements intended for distribution, export, exhibition, and/or public screening. Similarly, in the higher regulation, Law of the Republic of Indonesia No. 8 of 1992 on Film, Chapter I on General Provisions, Article 1(4), censorship is defined as the examination and evaluation of films and film advertisements to determine whether they can be shown or screened for the public, either in their entirety or with the removal of certain visuals or audio. Furthermore, Chapter V on Film Censorship, Article 33(3), specifies that censorship applies to both domestically produced and imported films.

Another example of the impact of LSF's practices was the establishment of the Queer Film Festival (QFF) around 2002 by a group of freelance journalists as part of an organization called Q-munity. This festival has been described as the only "queer" film festival held in a country with a Muslim-majority population (Minikino, 2010).

When the group planned to hold the Queer Film Festival (QFF) in 2006, the organizers were advised to submit films with gay and lesbian themes to the Film Censorship Institution (Lembaga Sensor Film, LSF) for review. According to John, in an interview with the author, QFF fundamentally did not intend to censor its films. They deeply valued the integrity of directors' works and had no plans for censorship from the outset. They only engaged with LSF when they began screening films in commercial cinemas, such as Blitz Megaplex at the time. This was because, in accordance with cinema Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), a Film Censorship Certificate (Surat Tanda Lulus Sensor) was required to screen films (Interview with John Badalu, QFF, October 29, 2024).

The festival eventually encountered issues with censorship institutions due to its controversial themes in Indonesia, including those related to gay, LGBT, and similar topics. In one report, John Badalu, director of Q-munity, recounted that when they planned to host the 2006 festival, the censorship institution's leadership summoned him and demanded the festival's cancellation because the films had not been submitted for censorship review. They allegedly threatened to detain the organizers if the festival continued. Resistance also emerged from societal groups, such as the Front Pembela Islam - FPI (Islamic Defenders Front), which opposed

the Q Film Festival held at Erasmus Huis (Michalik & Coppens, 2011; Akbar, 2010). However, according to an interview with John Badalu, the claim that they were summoned and threatened by the censorship board was untrue. He clarified that no such summons ever occurred. He described the narrative as a fabrication by the media, which he doubted had contacted LSF for verification. Foreign media outlets, such as AP, appeared to construct a sensationalized narrative by combining religious elements with LGBTQ issues, turning it into a controversial topic. Legally, QFF had not violated any regulations and had adhered to the applicable procedures. The media attacking them lacked accurate information about the censorship procedures they followed (Interview with John Badalu, QFF, October 29, 2024).

During the 2010 festival, the Minister of Culture and Tourism, Jero Wacik, firmly requested the cessation of Q! Film Festival, as several of its films had not been approved by LSF (Akbar, 2010). Additionally, societal groups, such as the UI Students' Alliance, protested at the Goethe Institute, claiming the festival promoted homosexual themes. In response, the Chairperson of the Jakarta International Film Festival (JiFFest), Lalu Rois Amri, stated that, under the law, all films screened publicly must undergo censorship. His position was based on the absence of new government regulations, meaning film festivals still adhered to older rules, which required films screened at foreign cultural institutions to be censored (BBC News Indonesia, 2010). QFF maintained that it did not violate regulations when screening films in cultural spaces, as censorship rules applied only to films screened in commercial cinemas, which are paid and open to the public. QFF, on the other hand, was a non-commercial event, did not charge fees, and required membership to view the films. Thus, it was not open to the general public but restricted to members only (Interview with John Badalu, QFF, October 29, 2024).

As a result, in subsequent years, only films deemed "safe" were submitted to the censorship board. Consequently, all films were approved without cuts (Michalik & Coppens, 2011).

JiFFest 2006 also faced issues with the Film Censorship Institution (LSF). Despite a year-long film selection process involving over 200 films from 35 countries (Source: 8th Jiffest Program Guide 2006), four films were banned by LSF on the grounds that they tarnished the government's image. The festival, scheduled to run from December 8 to 17, drew criticism from various parties. Three of the banned films were related to East Timor: Passabe (James Leong – Lynn Lee, Singapore, 2005)), Tales of Crocodile (Jan van den Berg, Netherlands, 2003), and Timor Lorosae (Portugal, 2003). Additionally, the film A Black Road (Willian Nessen, Australia, 2005), which dealt with the theme of violence in Aceh, was also prohibited. Johan Tjasmadi of LSF stated that the decision to ban these films was based on principles of conscience, ethics, and national interests (Amrullah, 2006).

JiFFest, an esteemed international film festival held annually in Indonesia since 1999, showcases films from renowned global directors, such as Oliver Stone and Michael Moore from the United States and Ismael Ferroukhi from Morocco, alongside works from various independent filmmakers. The festival not only introduces international films but also inspires the growth of cinema in Indonesia (Amrullah, 2006).

The ban faced criticism from JiFFest organizers. According to Lalu Rois Amri, JiFFest's Program Manager, the ban reflected the government's anti-criticism stance. He explained that the festival provided a space for discussion involving relevant parties, including the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI). Film critic Yusi Pareanom also criticized the ban as excessive and ineffective, noting that the public could still access the films through other means (Amrullah, 2006).

Another controversy occurred in 2009 when JiFFest planned to screen the film Balibo (2009) in two sessions (December 6 and 10). The film was deemed sensitive by LSF because it depicted the killing of five Australian journalists during the 1975 East Timor invasion. Although the film did not explicitly discredit the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI), the Indonesian government feared that its screening could spark diplomatic tensions with Australia (DetikNews, 2009).

Lalu Rois Amri suspected that TNI intervention influenced the ban on Balibo, given that TNI, the Indonesian National Police (Polri), and the State Intelligence Agency (BIN) had representatives in LSF. He argued that such a ban could harm the government's reputation. He further explained that the review process for Balibo differed from that of other films, which typically underwent a single review. In this case, the film was reviewed twice through a plenary session attended by all LSF members, the majority of whom voted to prohibit its screening (DetikNews, 2009).

These conflicts highlight the sensitive relationship between films and regulation in Indonesia, especially within the political and historical context. Such

challenges often pose difficulties for film festival organizers like JiFFest. LSF appears to continue operating under an outdated framework when responding to films addressing colonialism, fascism, imperialism, and sexuality. Citing Dunn and Lerro (2016), the practices of LSF during the New Order era have shaped the identity and freedom of expression in contemporary Indonesian society. Despite hopes that the reform era would bring change, the patterns and causal processes of strict media oversight continue to influence social practices and freedoms today and likely in the future. Abruptly altering censorship practices is feared to potentially disrupt Indonesia's unity, especially if it exacerbates or exploits religious, social, political, ethnic, or racial sentiments (Putri, 2013, p. 123).

This sentiment is echoed by Mukhlis PaEni, former LSF Chair (2009–2015), who acknowledged that government influence on film censorship remains significant. As a result, production houses are required to comply with LSF decisions, given the government's strong and authoritarian control over censorship matters (Interview with Mukhlis PaEni, former LSF Chair, October 20, 2023).

Public expectations for LSF's role in filtering media content remain high. For instance, during a workshop on "Addressing Pornography, Exploitation, and Violence Against Women in Mass Media" held in Jakarta on August 23, 2001, La Rose, a women's rights activist and novelist, emphasized that LSF must take greater responsibility for controlling the negative impact of media on society, particularly concerning pornography and violence (Suara Pembaruan, 2001).

Interestingly, the late New Order era saw the revival of the film industry, which had previously been stifled for years. This revival was marked by the success of the independent film Kuldesak (1998), which spurred the production of numerous independent and commercial films reflecting diverse artistic and cultural expressions. These works were seen as being more "free" in representing and communicating societal realities compared to the politically restricted environment under the New Order regime (Wijaya, 2014).

Quoting Christopher Chase-Dunn and Bruce Lerro (2014) on globalization, the resurgence of Indonesian cinema post-reform highlights how global integration has influenced the development of the Indonesian film industry. Globalization facilitated broader access to international ideas, introducing new practices and values in filmmaking. The success of Kuldesak (1998), which garnered significant attention and sparked the production of other independent films, exemplifies this globalization process. The film marked a new openness to global influences after years of Indonesian cinema being constrained by state control during the New Order era.

This process demonstrates that globalization affects not only economics or politics but also culture and art. The global film industry inspired Indonesian filmmakers to express broader social and cultural realities that were previously suppressed under an authoritarian regime. Chase-Dunn and Lerro describe globalization as a force that accelerates social change, including the expansion of freedom of expression in Indonesian cinema, which has become increasingly integrated into global dynamics.

Nevertheless, official censorship institutions remain a "barrier" for many Indonesian filmmakers, even in the reform era. One scene in Kuldesak, considered controversial, depicted two boys kissing and was censored. According to Heeren, this scene was deemed too "revolutionary," even amid ongoing reforms (Heeren, 2012). Similarly, *Janji Joni* (2005), a film by Joko Anwar with a simple storyline about everyday life, was not exempt from censorship. LSF cut a kissing scene in a cinema, citing concerns for the filmmakers' safety from potential attacks by militant groups (Cheng, 2011). Additionally, *Babi Buta Yang Ingin Terbang* (2008) by Edwin was never screened in Indonesian cinemas due to its provocative title and explicit homosexual scenes. The film was feared to incite inter-religious conflict because the word "babi" (pig) carries sensitive political and religious connotations (Michalik & Coppens, 2011). Similarly, *Perempuan Punya Cerita* (2008) underwent more than 190 feet of cuts by LSF, disrupting its narrative, which aimed to educate on sexuality and reproduction (Michalik & Coppens, 2011).

In an interview with Laura Coppens, a film researcher, Indonesian director Riri Riza revealed that his film *3 Hari Untuk Selamanya* (2007) also faced censorship. Romantic scenes, kisses, and lovemaking were the most heavily censored. Riri argued that LSF members, predominantly from religious and military backgrounds, tended to avoid confronting reality, as the stories in the film reflected societal truths (Michalik & Coppens, 2011).

Although Indonesia's 1998 Reform Era is often regarded as a milestone for freedom of expression, the reality reflects significant continuity in censorship practices from the New Order era. The influence of LSF remains dominant, even amidst social and political changes. Critically, LSF appears to function more as

an extension of state control over media than as an institution genuinely supporting freedom of expression.

During the New Order, film censorship was used as a state tool to ensure that films aligned with government ideology. Under Soeharto's regime, there was no space for films that challenged the government's narrative. Riri Riza's account—that without censorship, a film could not be screened—illustrates the absolute authority of censorship institutions (Author's interview with Riri Riza, 2024). In this context, LSF during the New Order served not only as a guardian of public morality but also as a highly effective political instrument for controlling public discourse through cinema.

The main concern, however, is how these practices have persisted even after Soeharto's resignation. The influence of Soehartoism is seen as enduring, despite his political departure. One factor is the wealth retained by Soeharto's family and cronies, which ensures their continued influence in the state (O'Rourke, 2002). The dissolution of the Ministry of Information by President Gus Dur in 1999 signaled a shift away from strict control over information and media. Gus Dur took this step in response to reform demands for greater freedom of expression (Hadi & Indriawati, 2022). However, paradoxically, LSF was retained and given significant authority to oversee film content. The continued existence of LSF demonstrates that, despite changes in governmental structure, entrenched censorship practices persist.

The 1999 European Film Festival, intended to symbolize artistic freedom, was subjected to strict censorship, with only about 30% of the films submitted being approved due to concerns about vulgarity (Kompas, 1999). Citing Baudry, cinema can ultimately be viewed as an ideological tool that fulfills the psychological needs of society according to patterns determined by those in power. In this context, LSF serves as a tangible representation of such ideological efforts, not only defining artistic boundaries but also regulating visual content deemed suitable for the public. When LSF argues that any film screened outside embassy grounds falls under Indonesian sovereignty, it reflects a form of hegemony asserting control over the visual narratives accessible to the public.

The production and technological processes of cinema, often unnoticed by audiences, are also part of this ideological mechanism. LSF's regulatory practices reveal how power infiltrates even artistic and technical domains. Thus, a deep understanding of cinema's mechanisms—from production to distribution and censorship—is key to uncovering how ideological power operates to create and maintain cultural dominance in society.

The handling of the Queer Film Festival (QFF) serves as a reflection of how the Film Censorship Institution (Lembaga Sensor Film, LSF) continues to uphold conservative moral views. Despite Indonesia's entry into the Reform Era, LSF persistently rejected films addressing LGBT themes. In 2006, LSF's decision to cancel the festival, accompanied by threats of detaining the organizers, demonstrated that the institution not only performed censorship but also acted as a repressive tool to maintain the dominant narrative on morality in Indonesia (Michalik & Coppens, 2011). This illustrates a continuity in censorship practices that remain largely unaffected by national political changes.

Thus, while the Reform Era promised broader freedoms, film censorship in Indonesia continues to operate under a logic similar to that of the New Order. Quoting O'Rourke (2002), "Although now touted as a democracy, Indonesia was still run by the elite, for the elite." Even international film festivals, expected to provide a platform for more progressive works, are often hindered by LSF's decisions. For instance, in the case of Kuldesak (1998), widely regarded as a milestone in the resurgence of the Indonesian film industry, its controversial scene of two boys kissing was cut by LSF. Heeren noted that this scene was deemed too revolutionary, even for the Reform Era (Heeren, 2012).
De Laurentis's insights can shed light on this issue: LSF plays a significant role as an institution that limits the creative space of filmmakers, including their efforts to represent contemporary themes relevant to social realities. These restrictions impact not only artistic expression but also the ways individuals and social groups are represented in cinema.

Through strict regulations, LSF indirectly shapes the narratives and imagery presented to the public, creating boundaries around the diverse perspectives that films might otherwise explore. In this way, cinema becomes not only a tool to reflect reality but also an arena where institutional power molds social representations to align with prevailing ideologies.

LSF's strong role in protecting the state's political interests is evident in its censorship guidelines, specifically Article 18, section (3), point d, which stipulates that censorship applies to films that could provoke social or political tensions. This principle was clearly demonstrated in the case of *Balibo* (2009), a film depicting the murder of five Australian journalists

during the East Timor invasion. Although the film did not explicitly discredit the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI), LSF banned its screening due to concerns that it might spark diplomatic conflict with Australia (DetikNews, 2009). This rejection highlights how censorship serves not only to safeguard public morality but also as a political tool to protect the state's image.

In this context, post-Reform Era censorship in Indonesia has undergone little meaningful transformation. LSF continues to operate on the basis of conservative morality and the state's political interests, ultimately limiting freedom of expression in the film industry. Despite efforts to introduce more relaxed regulations, LSF maintains tight control over visual representations in both cinemas and film festivals. This underscores that, while freedom of the press and expression is formally guaranteed by the constitution and political reforms, LSF remains highly hegemonic in shaping the content consumed by the public.

From the perspective of globalization theory, as articulated by Chase-Dunn and Lerro (2014), the Reform Era should have created opportunities for cultural and artistic shifts, including in film, with greater access to global ideas. However, the globalization of Indonesia's film industry post-Reform, as seen in the cases of Kuldesak and Balibo, remains constrained by LSF's control, which aims to maintain "social order" and political stability. This creates a contradiction between the demand for freedom of expression driven by democracy influences and the reality that the censorship institution retains significant authority in determining what is deemed acceptable for public viewing.

Overall, the existence of the Film Censorship Board (Lembaga Sensor Film, LSF) in the Reform Era demonstrates that, despite significant political changes, state control over media, particularly films, continues in ways not far removed from the New Order era. Although Indonesia has entered the Reform Era, the film censorship methods employed still adopt principles from the colonial and New Order periods, where "ruler's law still prevailed" (O'Rourke, 2002). LSF is often perceived as viewing audiences as "immature" individuals incapable of interpreting film content independently. Consequently, strict control over film content persists, and censorship continues to function as a political and ideological tool, much like in the past (Author's interview with Budi Irawanto, Indonesian film critic, October 25, 2023).

CONCLUSION

The role and policies of LSF in the post-Reform Era remain rooted in the strict control inherited from the New Order. One primary reason for the continued stringent censorship is the concern over maintaining social and political stability. While the Reform Era brought significant changes in terms of freedom of expression, the government and institutions like LSF still feel the need to control media content, particularly films, to uphold social order and public morality.

Furthermore, the changes brought by the Reform Era have not entirely dismantled the existing structures of control. Many state institutions, including LSF, continue to operate within frameworks resembling those of the New Order. This persistence is due to deeply entrenched policies and norms, where media control is seen as an essential tool to prevent social fragmentation and preserve the conservative values of society.

Another factor sustaining censorship is pressure from conservative and religious groups. These groups consistently urge the government to enforce public morality, particularly concerning issues like sexuality, LGBT, and violence in films. Content deemed contradictory to traditional Indonesian moral values is still considered necessary to regulate to avoid societal controversies.

Politically, censorship is also employed as a tool to protect the country's image, especially in the international context. The rejection of *Balibo* (2009), for instance, illustrates that censorship is not solely about morality but also about diplomatic interests and foreign relations. The Indonesian government continues to view censorship as a means to safeguard national dignity and prevent conflicts with other nations.

This continuation of censorship is shaped by several factors. Political, social, and cultural influences all play a role. LSF maintains its role as a moral guardian and stabilizer, both socially and politically, rooted in systems inherited from the New Order. The legacy of stringent censorship endures as an effort to retain state control over sensitive visual representations. As a result, freedom of expression, particularly in film, remains constrained despite Indonesia's significant political changes

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