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FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

INDEX IN MYANMAR

SURVEY REPORT

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Freedom of Expression Index in Myanmar

Survey Report (December 2025)

1. Introduction

Freedom of expression is a fundamental human right that upholds individual opinions, thoughts, beliefs, and the right to access information.[1] Since the military coup in February 2021, the military regime has imposed strict controls on freedom of expression and the right to information.[2] This regime has arbitrarily punished journalists and artists for voicing their opinions and beliefs.

According to the "Global Freedom Index" published by Freedom House, a nonprofit organization based in Washington, D.C., Myanmar is classified as "not a free nation."[3] The country has received a score of only 7 out of 100 for fundamental freedoms and 9 points for internet freedom. Additionally, the 2023 Press Freedom Index by Reporters Without Borders ranked Myanmar 173rd out of 180 countries.[4]

The preparation of the questionnaires considers how extreme digital restrictions, displacement, and multiple administrative systems have affected freedom of expression in Myanmar. The survey is organized into four main parts: (1) fundamental rights and safety, (2) digital and online spaces, (3) access to media and diversity, and (4) self-censorship. These categories assess the impact on the freedom of expression experienced by the people of Myanmar across various dimensions.

2. Objectives

This survey aimed to analyze the situation regarding freedom of expression, media freedom, and the right to information across various regions of Myanmar under different administrative systems, particularly in the context of the civil war that followed the military coup. The findings will be used to advocate for local authorities and administrators. The survey was conducted between September and October 2025 and involved 134 participants, including journalists, civil society workers, and young people, from different administrative systems throughout Myanmar.

3. Methodologies

Responses from this survey were collected using the KoBoToolbox online survey tool and through quantitative research. A set of questionnaires was distributed among partner organizations and individuals of Athan to ensure a diverse range of respondents across Myanmar.

This online survey consists of 35 questions designed to help respondents explore their personal emotions in relation to external factors. Given that different administrations partially control various regions of Myanmar, the survey categorizes these areas based on the current situation within the country—identifying which administration is in power, whether it be the military regime, the National Unity Government, or Ethnic Armed Organizations.

This survey presents three approaches for respondents to consider regarding the administrative territory in which they reside: (1) Protection of freedom of expression, (2) practical restrictions on freedom of expression, and (3) legal restrictions on freedom of expression. The survey differentiates between the laws and practices of each administration using these three approaches.

4. Challenges

The primary challenge for this survey is the occurrence of internet and communication blackouts. Respondents need internet access to participate. For instance, in Rakhine State, where internet access is completely shut down, there is only one respondent. Athan has advised respondents from military-controlled areas to answer the questions only in safe places, such as their homes.

5. Findings

5. (a)Background of Respondents

This survey form is available online and has received responses from 134 participants across Myanmar.

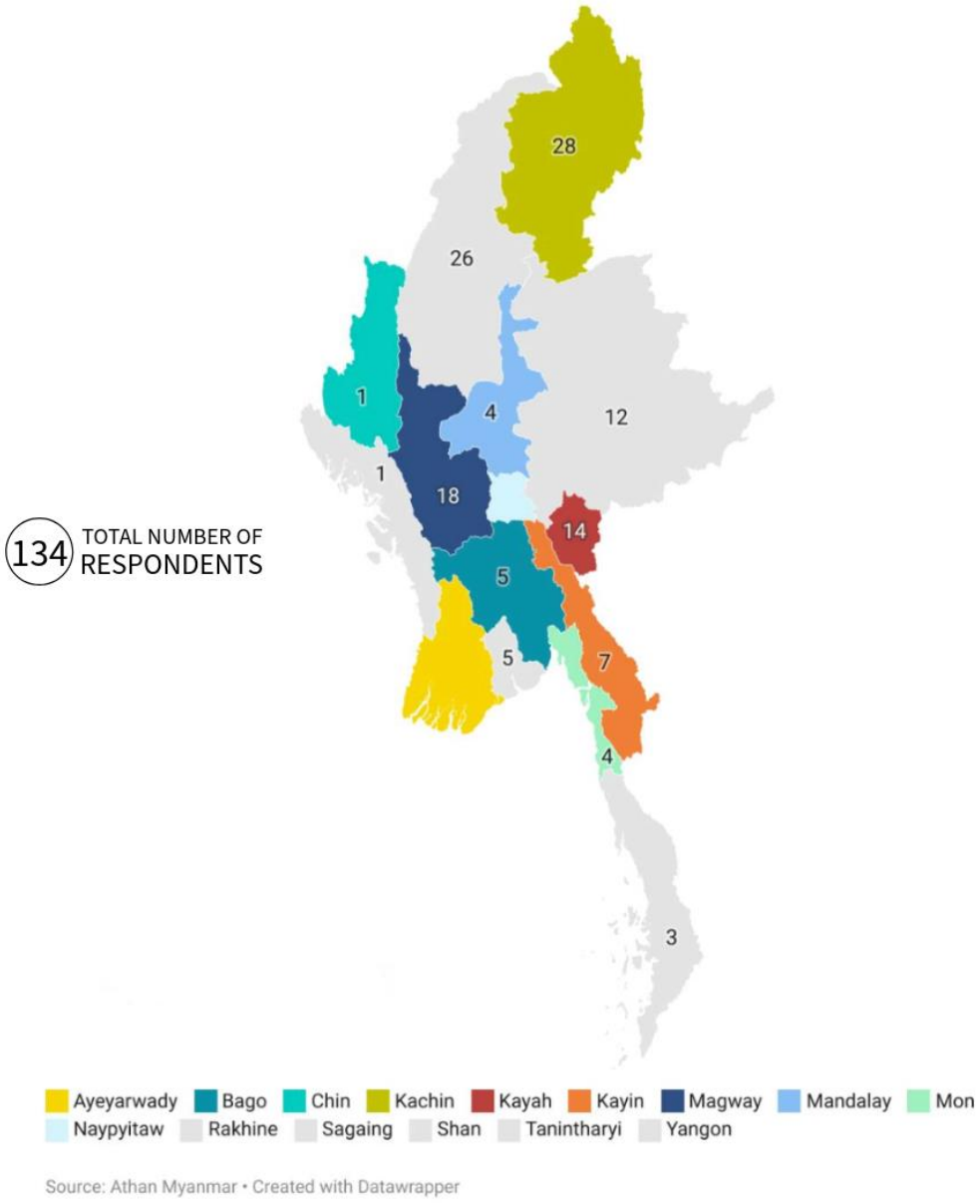

***Figure 1**: Map of Myanmar showing number of participants from each state and region*

Out of the total participants, 53 individuals (39.6%) are from areas controlled by the National Unity Government, 49 individuals (36.6%) are from regions controlled by the Myanmar military, and the remaining 26 individuals (19.4%) are from areas governed by ethnic armed organizations or resistance forces.

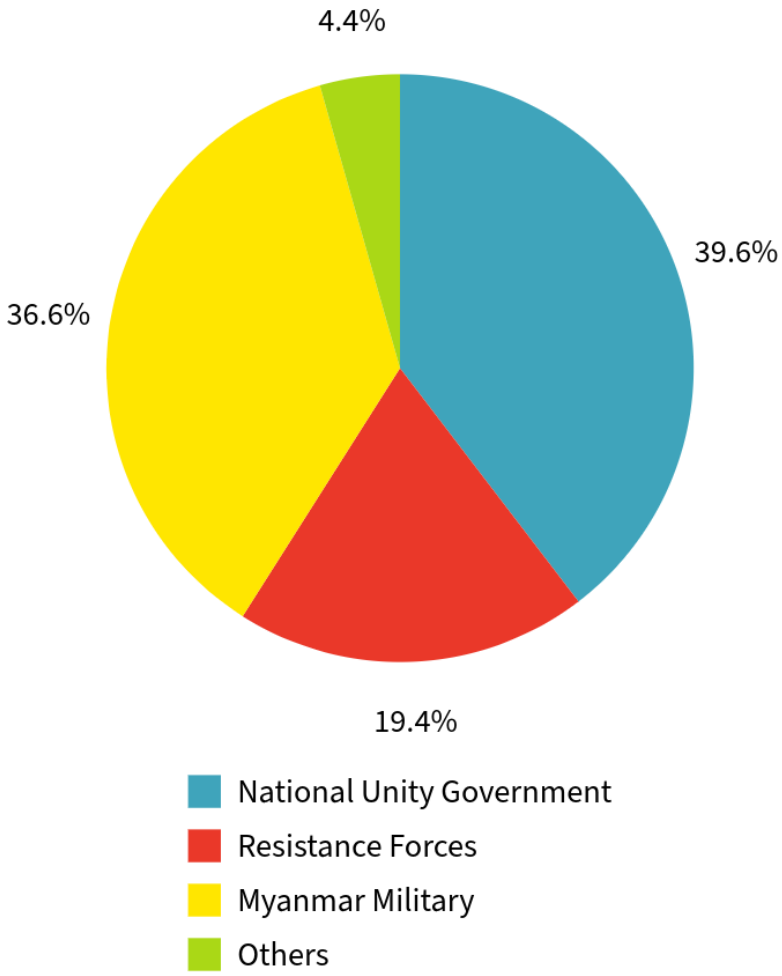

Figure (2): This pie chart shows data percentage of participants from different areas under different administration systems.

The majority of the respondents are aged 18-30; 44% are in the 18-25 age group, 33.5% in the 26-30 age group, and the rest are between 40 and 60.

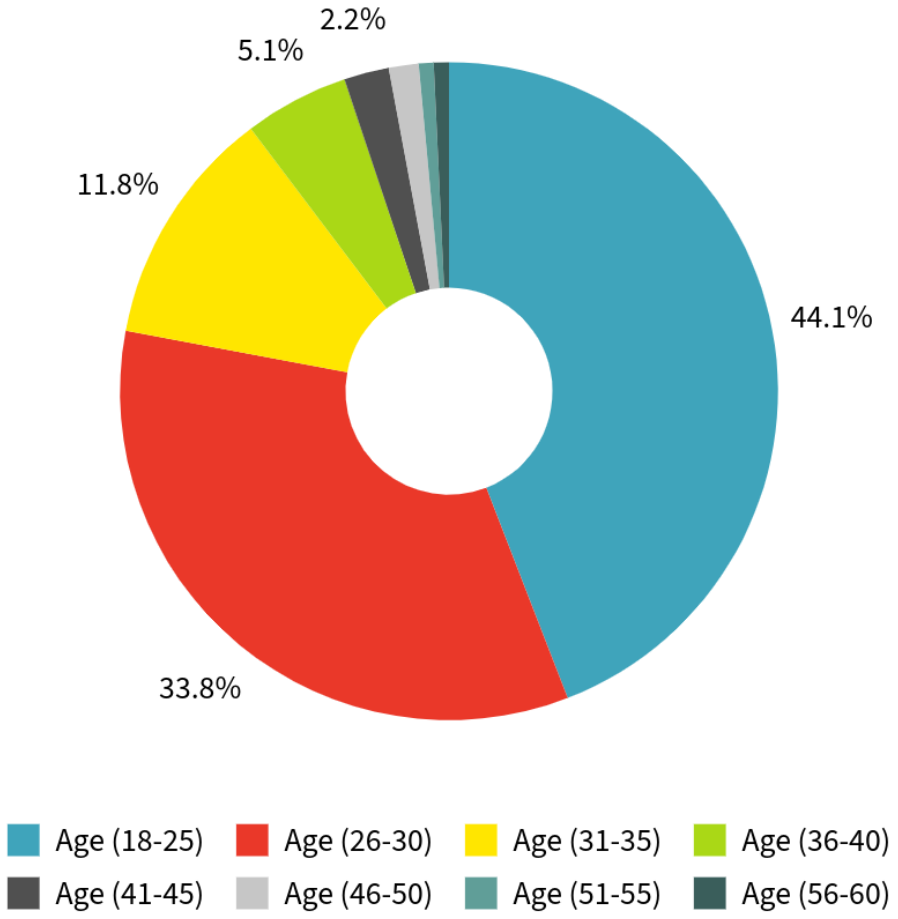

Figure (3): This chart shows data percentage of participants from different age groups

31% of respondents are students, and 13% have their own businesses. 5% work for the National Unity Government (NUG), 23% are members of civil society organizations, and 8% are media professionals.

5. (b) How Authorities Respond to Freedom of Expression

The first question asks about whether they can share news and information freely on social media and the internet. 43% believe that "they have limited freedom", 25% believe that they have "complete freedom", and 19% said they do not have freedom at all.

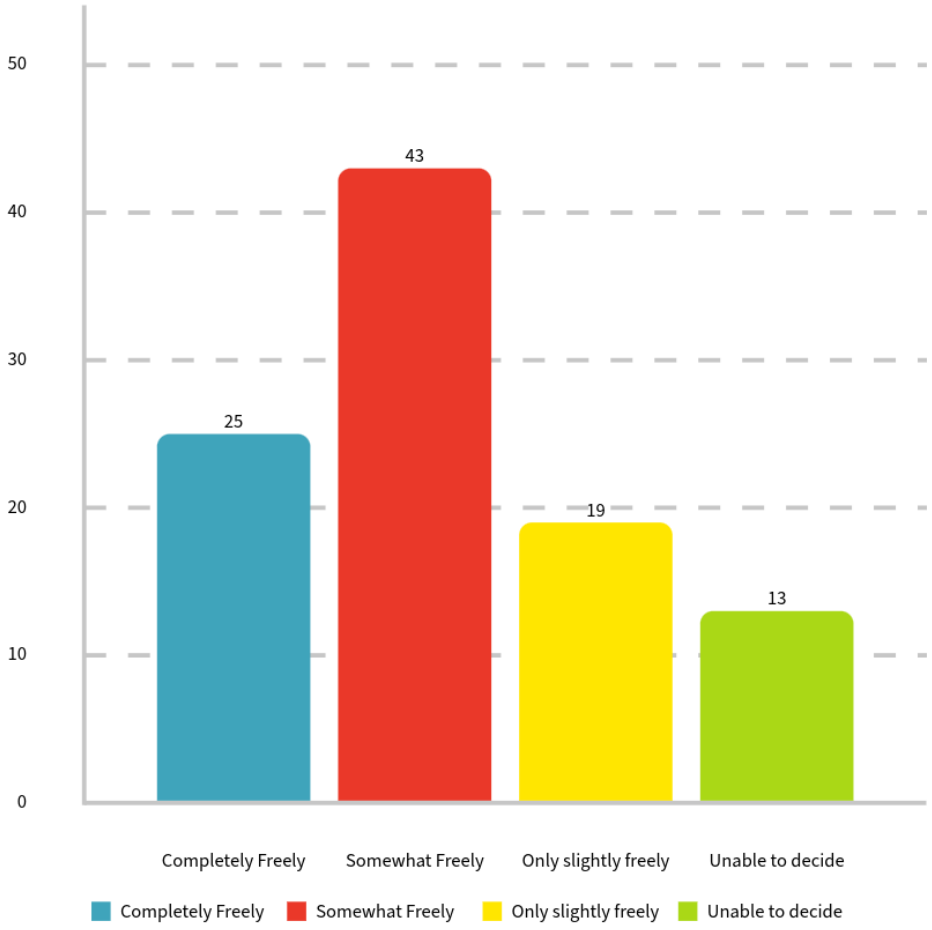

Figure (4): This table shows respondents view on whether they can share news and information freely on internet

44.5% of respondents said they have "limited freedom" to share their beliefs and opinions, 27% said they have "complete freedom", and 19% said they have no freedom at all to share their beliefs and opinions.

Each respondents live in a different administrative area, and the survey asked them whether their administrative body respects freedom of expression. 37% of respondents said local authorities do not respect freedom of expression, 34% said they are slightly respectful, and 19% said they have no respect at all.

Most respondents, 38%, said authorities imposed restrictions on freedom of expression, and 19% said they are pretty easy on freedom of expression.

Figure (5) - a: Responses on whether the local administrators respect and protect freedom of expression

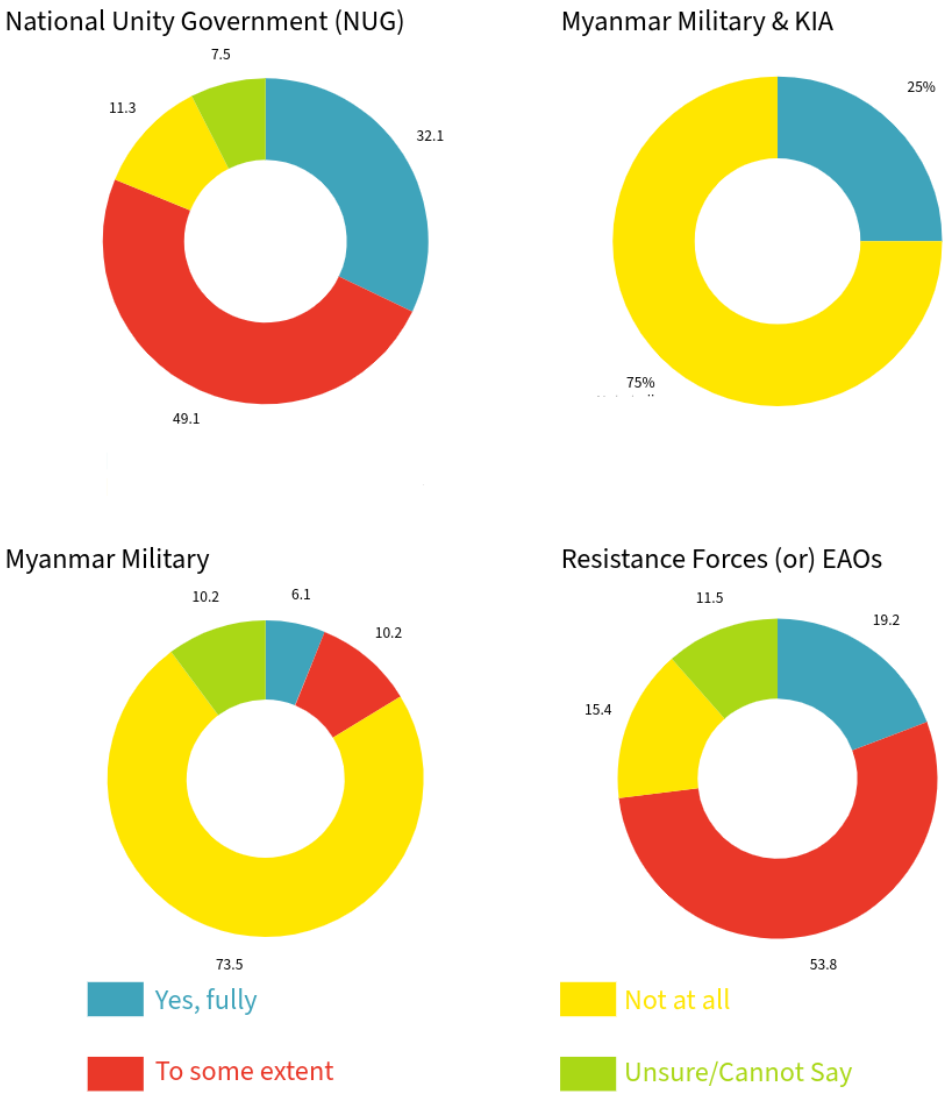

Figure (5) - b: Responses on whether the local administrators limit freedom of expression by laws and regulations

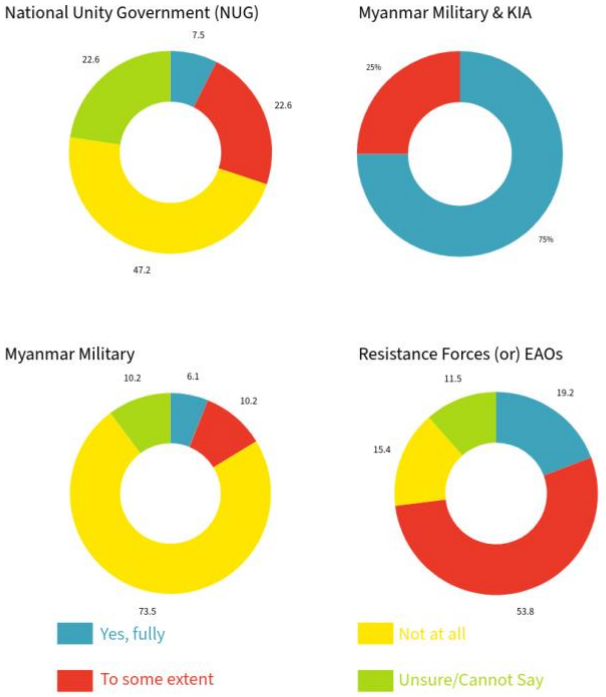

Figure (5) - c: Responses on whether the local administrators restrict freedom of expression

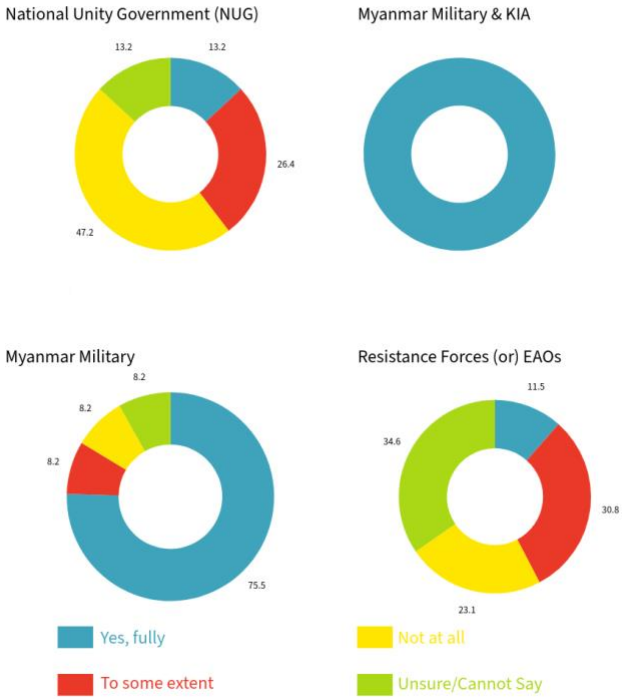

Figure (5): Pie charts showing responses on protections, limitations, and restrictions of administration groups on freedom of expression

All administrative areas controlled by the administrative parties (such as the National Unity Government (NUG), theMyanmar Military, Ethnic Armed Forces, and Resistance Forces) have almost no protection of freedom of expression. In NUG-controlled areas, 32% of respondents said they believe their local administrators protect freedom of expression. This survey found the highest restrictions in Myanmar's military-controlled areas; more than 75% of respondents said freedom of expression is restricted.

36.5% of respondents, the majority, believe that their local region does not have the right to assembly and protest, and the other 30% responded the opposite.

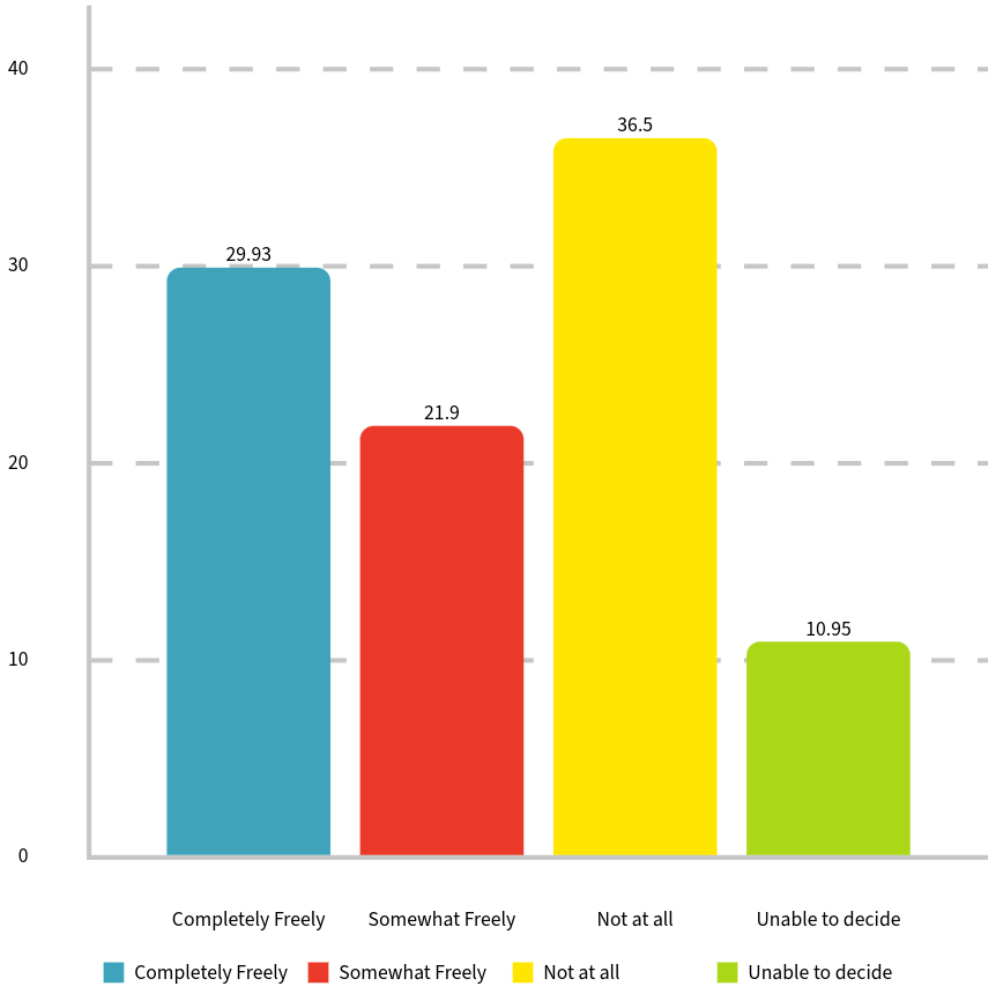

Figure (6): This table indicates respondents' perception of their right to assemble and protest.

32% believe they cannot criticize their administrators in full, and the other 25% said they can.

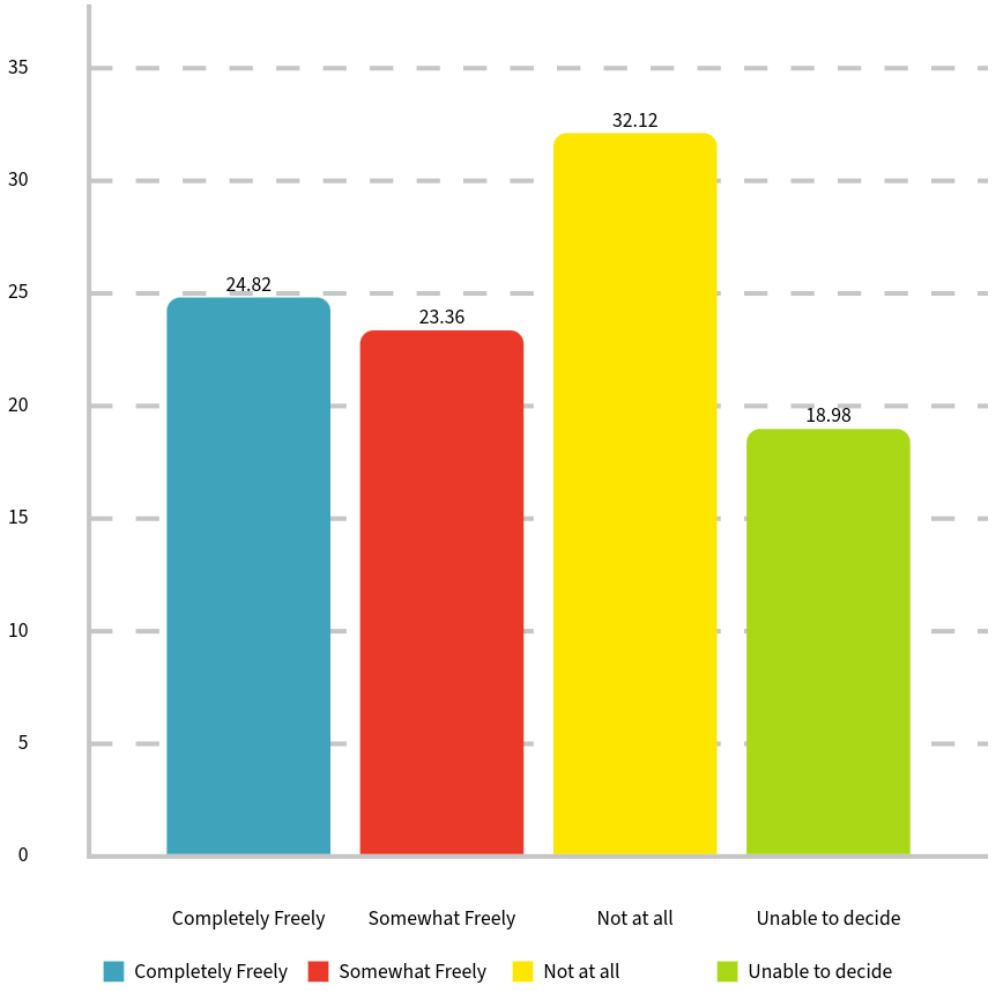

Figure (7): This table indicates respondents' perception on ability to criticize authorities

29% of respondents believed they do not have any legal rights to challenge punishments for freedom of expression, while 18% said the opposite.

41.6% said local administrative bodies punished people for exercising freedom of expression, and 22% said there was no punishment at all. Furthermore, the other 20% do not know precisely about this matter, and the other 15% said there is some level of punishment.

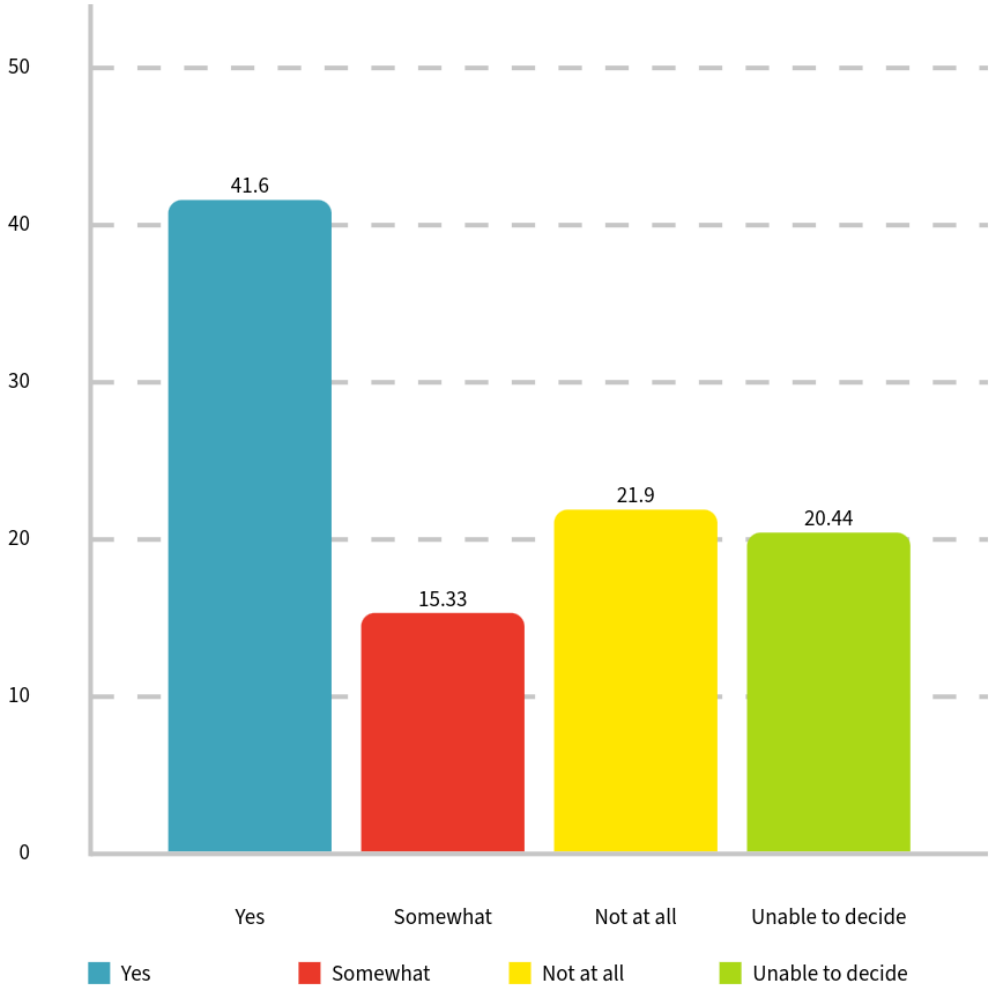

Figure (8): This table indicates respondents' perception on the possibility of being punished on practicing freedom of expression

5. (c) Situation of Press Freedom

20% of participants responded that they believed authorities imposed censorship on news and media; 19% believed there is a certain level of censorship; 19% said they do not see any censorship from authorities; and 40% were not sure about this question.

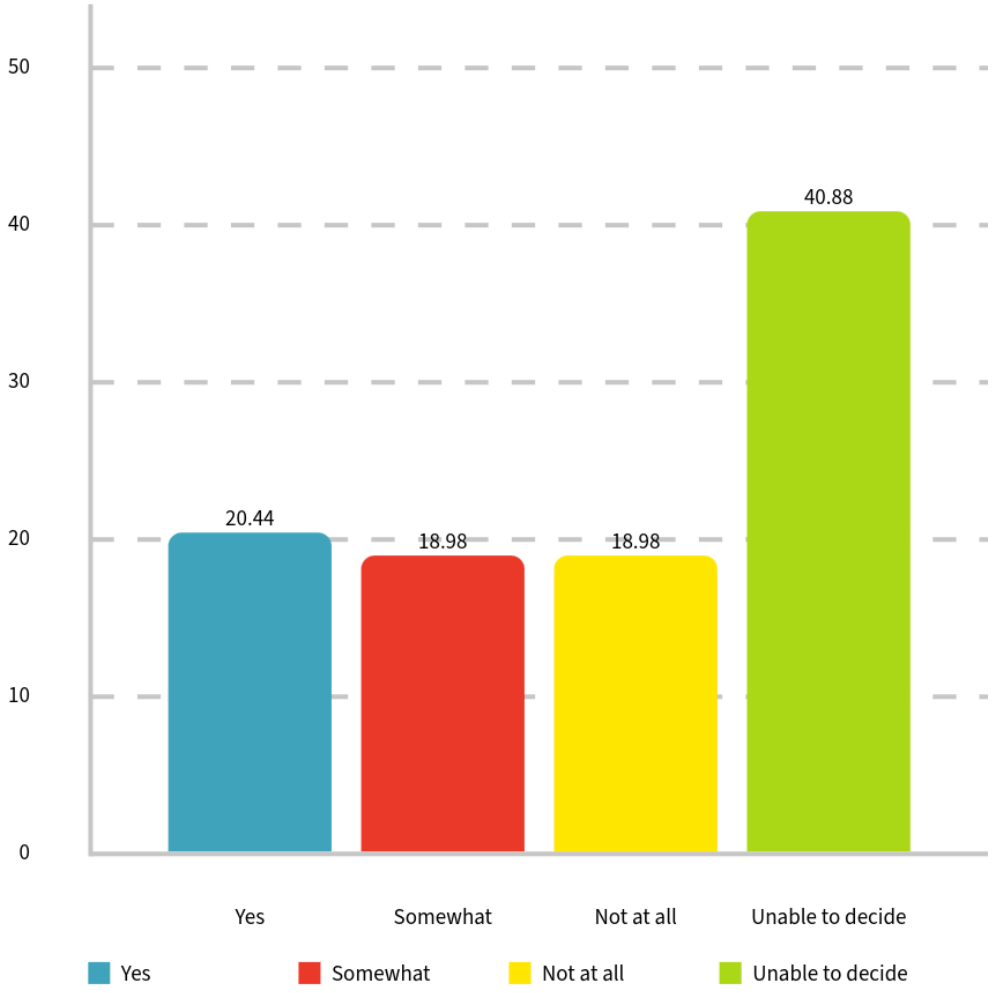

Figure (9): This table indicates respondents' perception of authorities imposing censorship on the media.

35.7% of respondents believed that local authorities had arrested journalists, while 28% stated that there had been no arrests. Additionally, 8% felt there had been some level of arrests against journalists, and the remaining respondents were unsure how to answer this question.

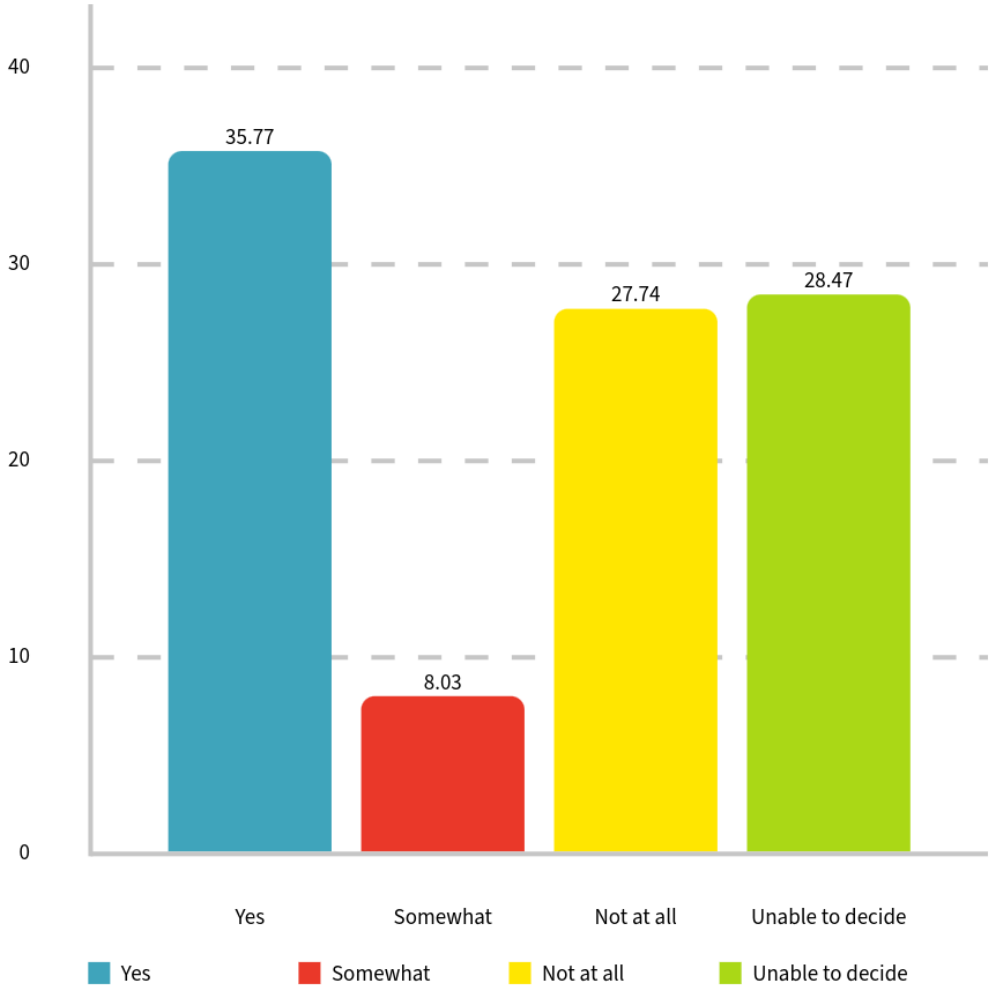

Figure (10): This table indicates respondents' perception of authorities arresting journalists.

35.7% of respondents indicated that local authorities do not have any policies or practices in place to protect individuals' personal rights and promote digital freedom. Additionally, 23% believe that there is a moderate amount of policies and practices addressing these issues. In contrast, 9% feel that local authorities are performing well regarding this matter.

42% of people believe there are no laws and regulations protecting journalists' freedom, while 11% hold the opposite view.

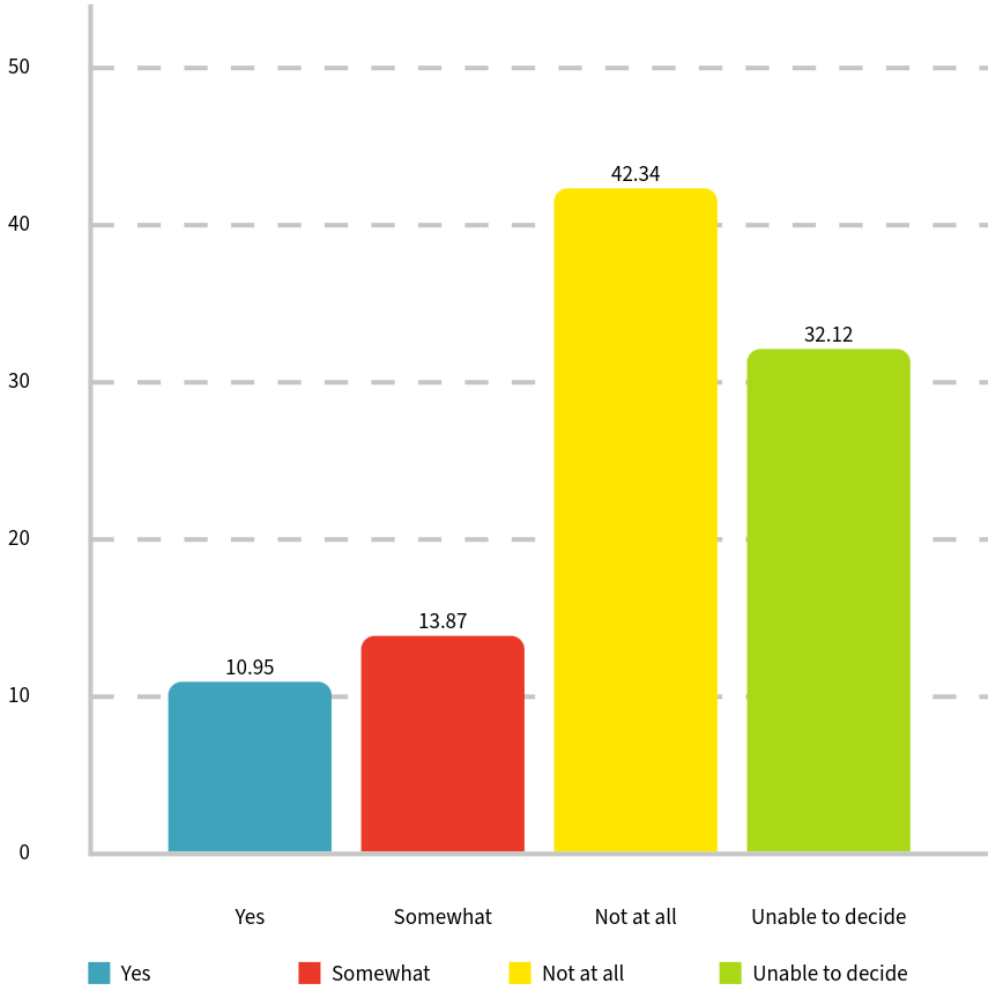

Figure (11): This table indicates respondents' view on whether media reporting and presentation are protected by laws and regulations.

37% of participants believed journalists do not have the freedom to travel to conflict areas for reporting, while 26% believed they have some level of freedom to do so. Additionally, 16.8% said journalists can travel freely.

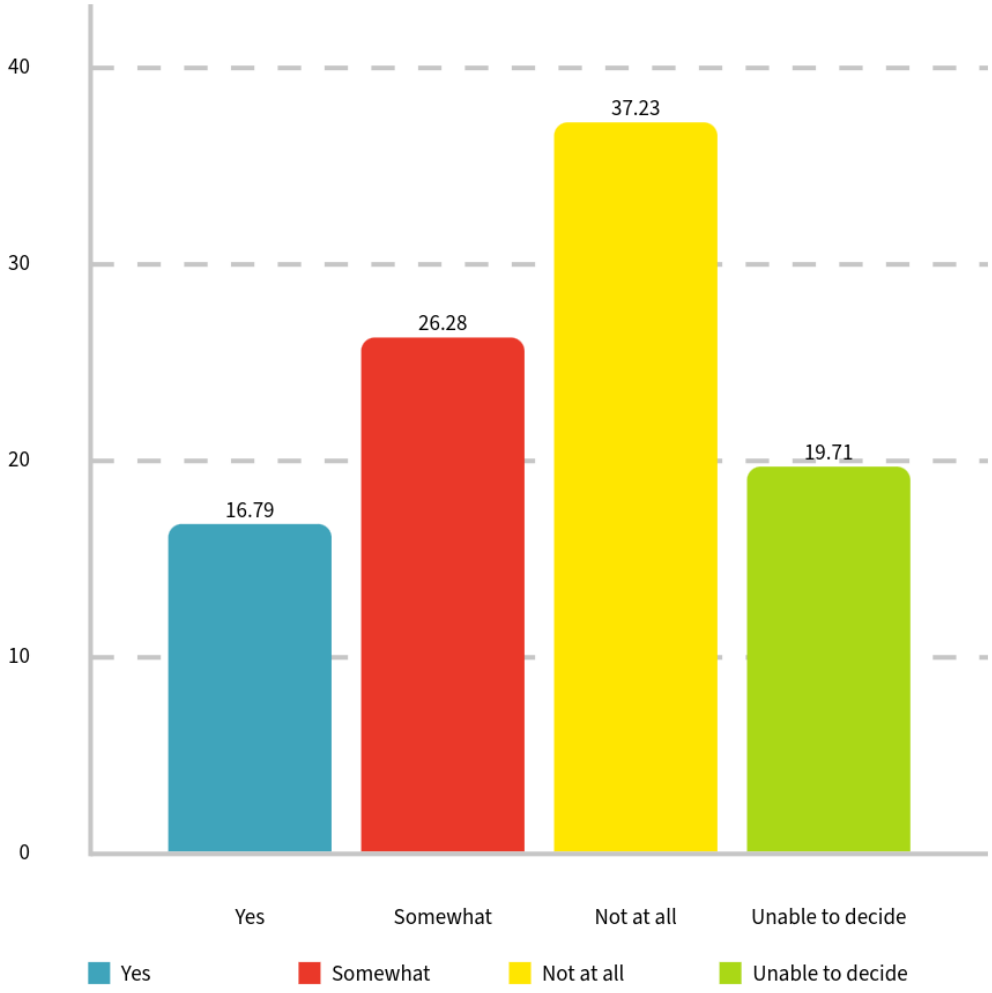

Figure (12): This table indicates respondents' view on whether journalists are permitted to travel to conflict areas for coverage.

39% of respondents believe that journalists, including critics, cannot safely perform their duties. Additionally, 19.7% of respondents feel they have only a slight level of safety.

33% of respondents reported that authorities have warned, arrested, or punished journalists for their writing and reporting. Meanwhile, 30% were uncertain about any such responses. Twenty-seven percent indicated that such actions had not occurred in their area, and 9% acknowledged that there were a few cases of this nature.

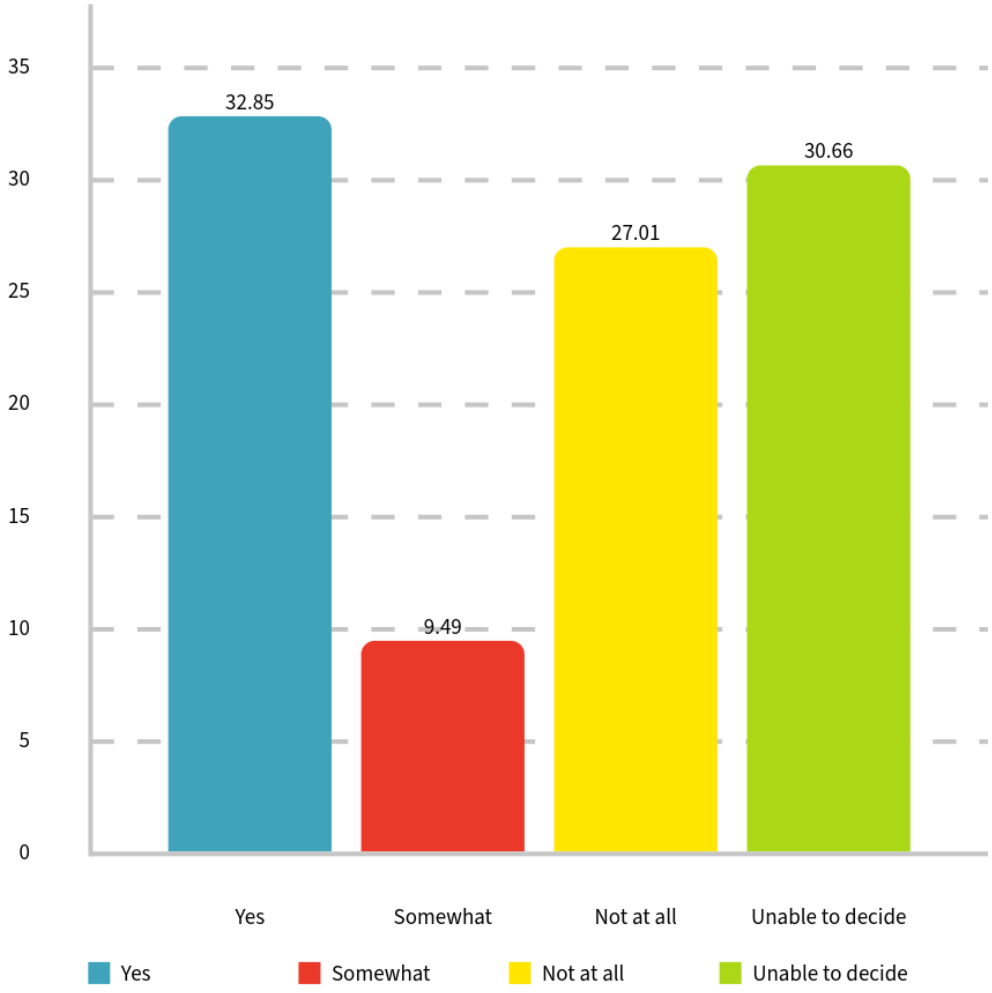

Figure (13): This table indicates respondents' view on whether journalists are permitted to travel to conflict areas for coverage.

Despite the repression regarding the role of media in various aspects, regional representative media organizations are operating, as documented in this survey. About 58% of respondents reported that there is a media organization (such as TV, radio, newspaper, or online media) in their region, while 11.6% disagreed with this statement.

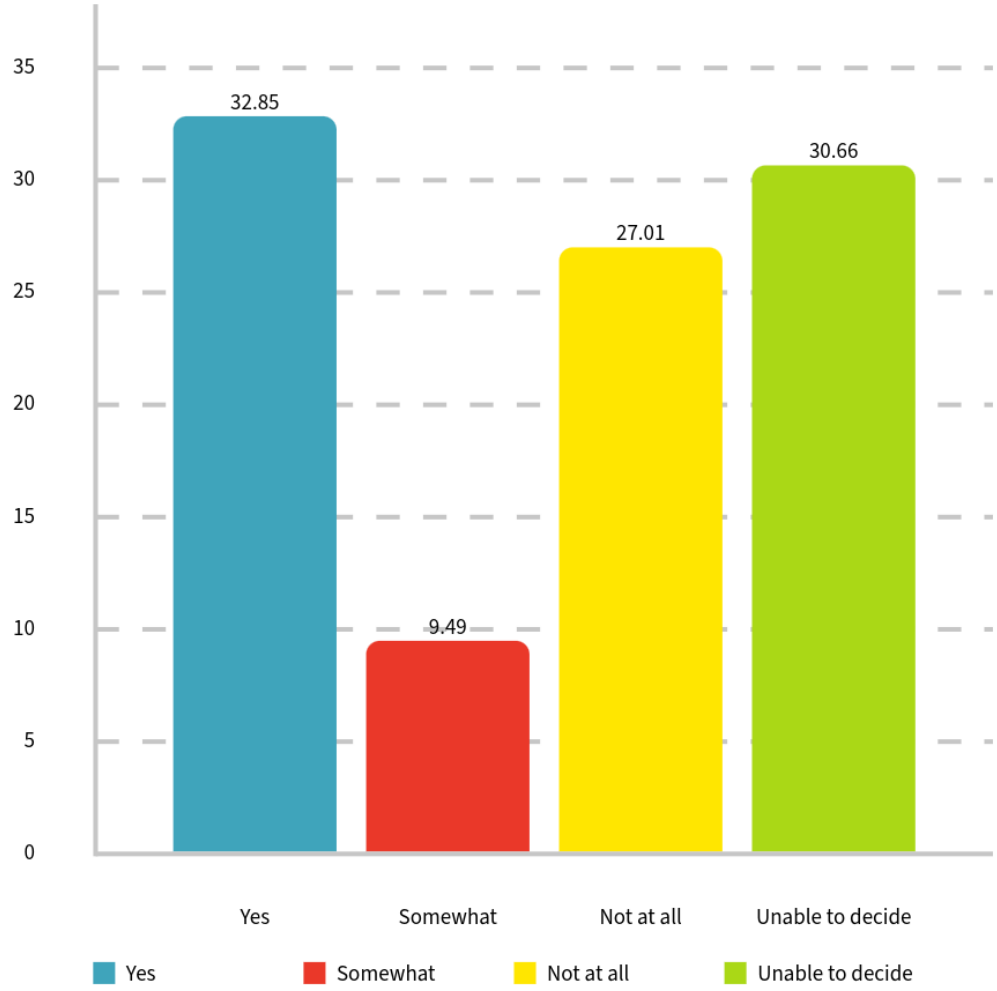

Figure (14): This table indicates respondents' view on whether their region has representative media organizations (TV, radio, newspaper, or online media).

5. (d) Role of Authorities on Right to Information

This survey examined the right to information outlined in this chapter, focusing on restrictions, as well as instances of mobile internet shutdowns, communication outages, and electricity blackouts.

Among the respondents, 41.6% reported that local authorities had shut down or restricted internet communication, while 40.8% disagreed. Additionally, 11% indicated that there were minor restrictions or shutdowns of the internet, and 6% provided no answer to the question.

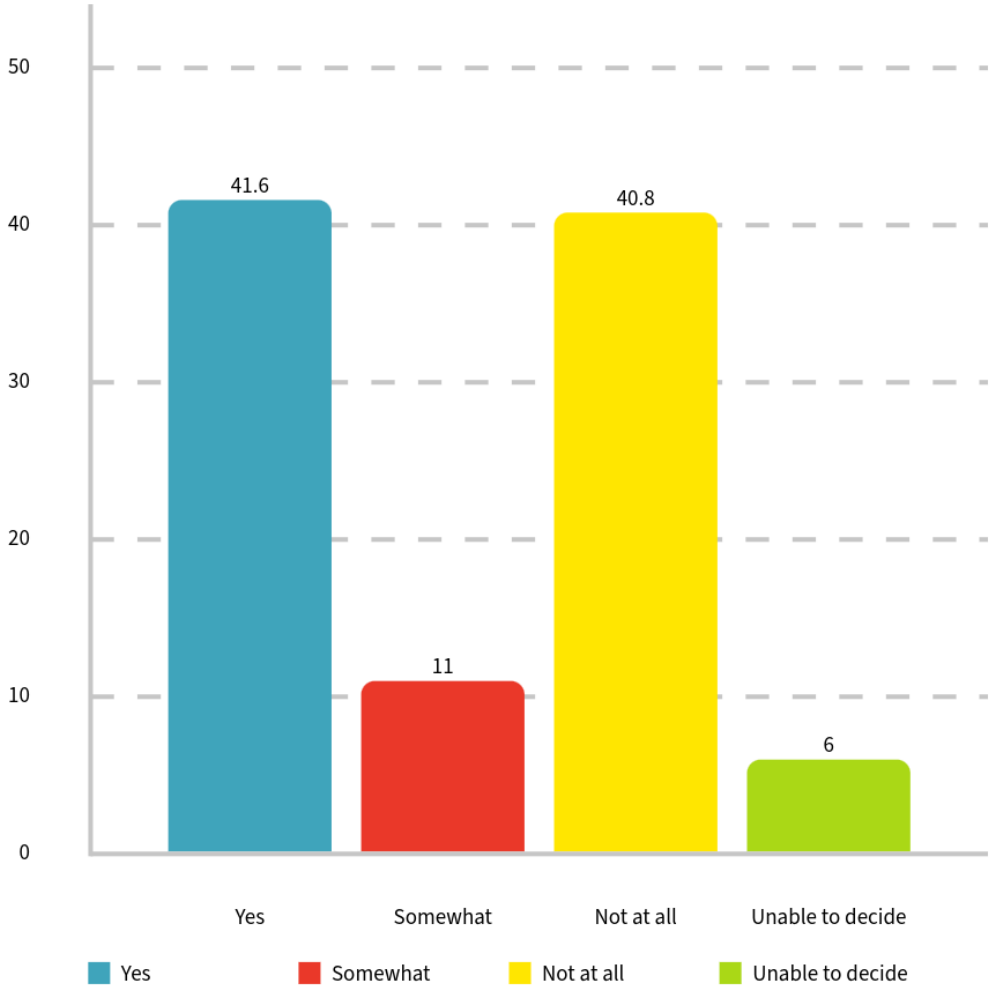

Figure (15): This table indicates respondents' view on whether authorities banned or restricted internet access.

This survey documented a significant challenge faced by many people in accessing the internet. It found that almost 79% of respondents reported having difficulty accessing the internet due to the high cost of mobile data or a lack of SIM cards. In contrast, only 1.4% indicated that they do not experience such difficulties.

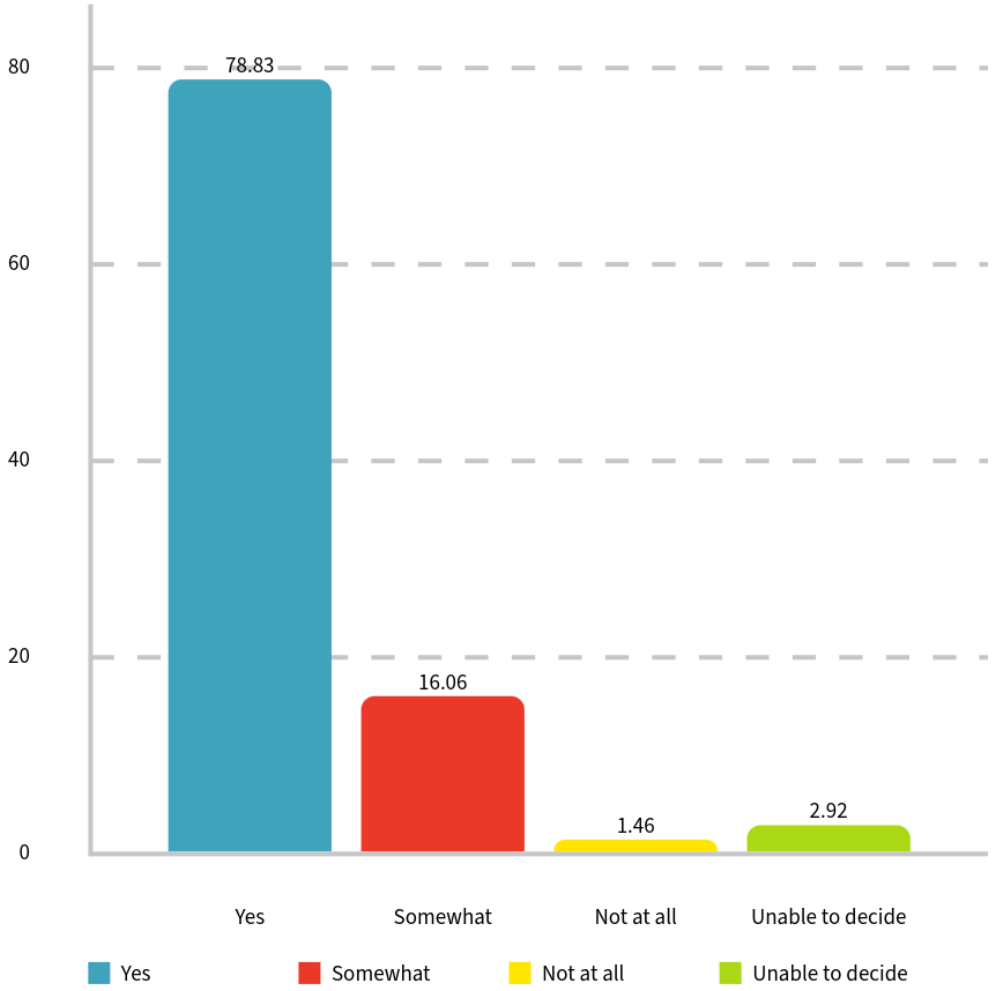

Figure (16): This table indicates respondents' view on whether they have difficulties to access the internet due to the price of mobile data or lack of SIM cards.

According to the survey, 58% of respondents stated that they can access news through the internet and social media platforms. Meanwhile, 23% reported having a limited ability to access news, and 6% indicated that they cannot access news from these sources at all.

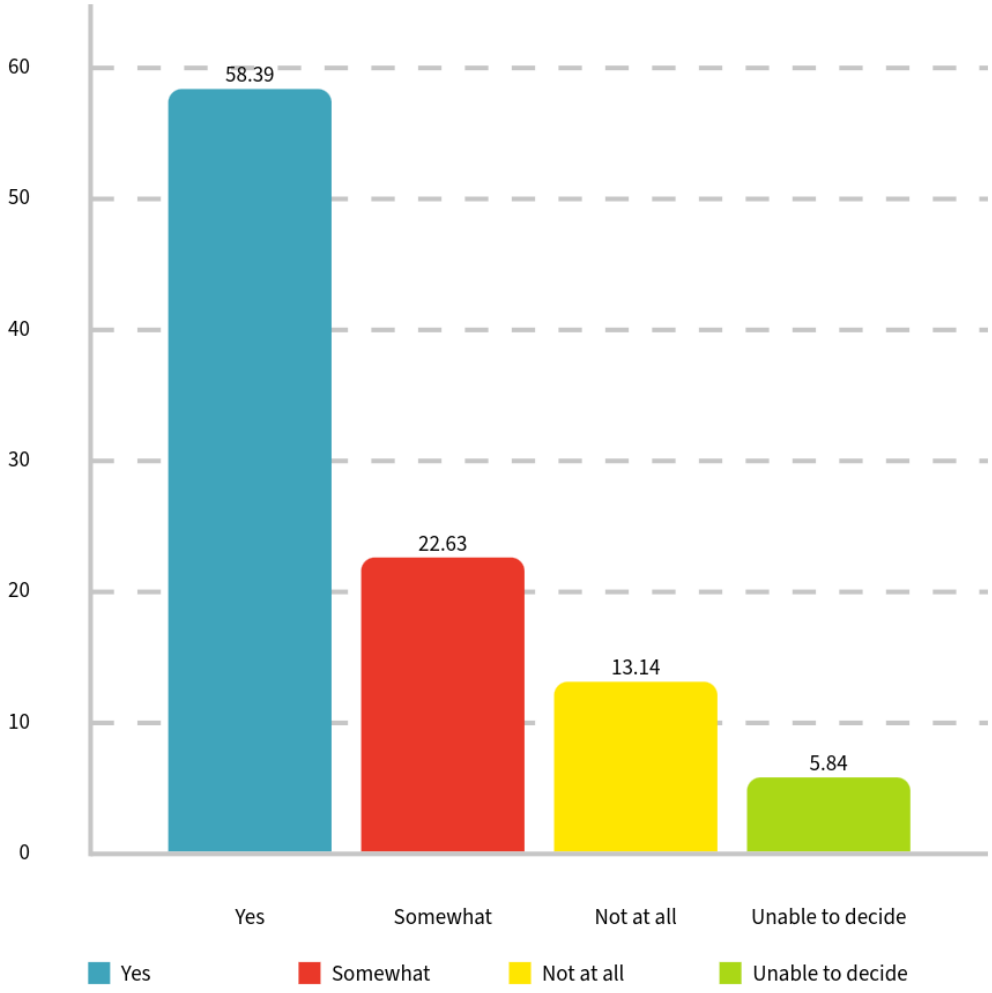

Figure (17): This table indicates respondents' view on whether they have access to news through the internet and social media platforms.

5. (e) Resilience Actions on Restrictions and Limitations

This survey documented freedom of expression, the right to information, and internet freedom while also addressing the restrictions on internet access and communication. Additionally, it highlighted resilience actions taken against these limitations.

35% of respondents said independent organizations can take some level of action towards the protection of freedom of expression, while another 25.5% believed that those organizations are working hard on it.

40% stated that people have limited access to educational programs about freedom of expression, while 25% reported that no such programs exist.

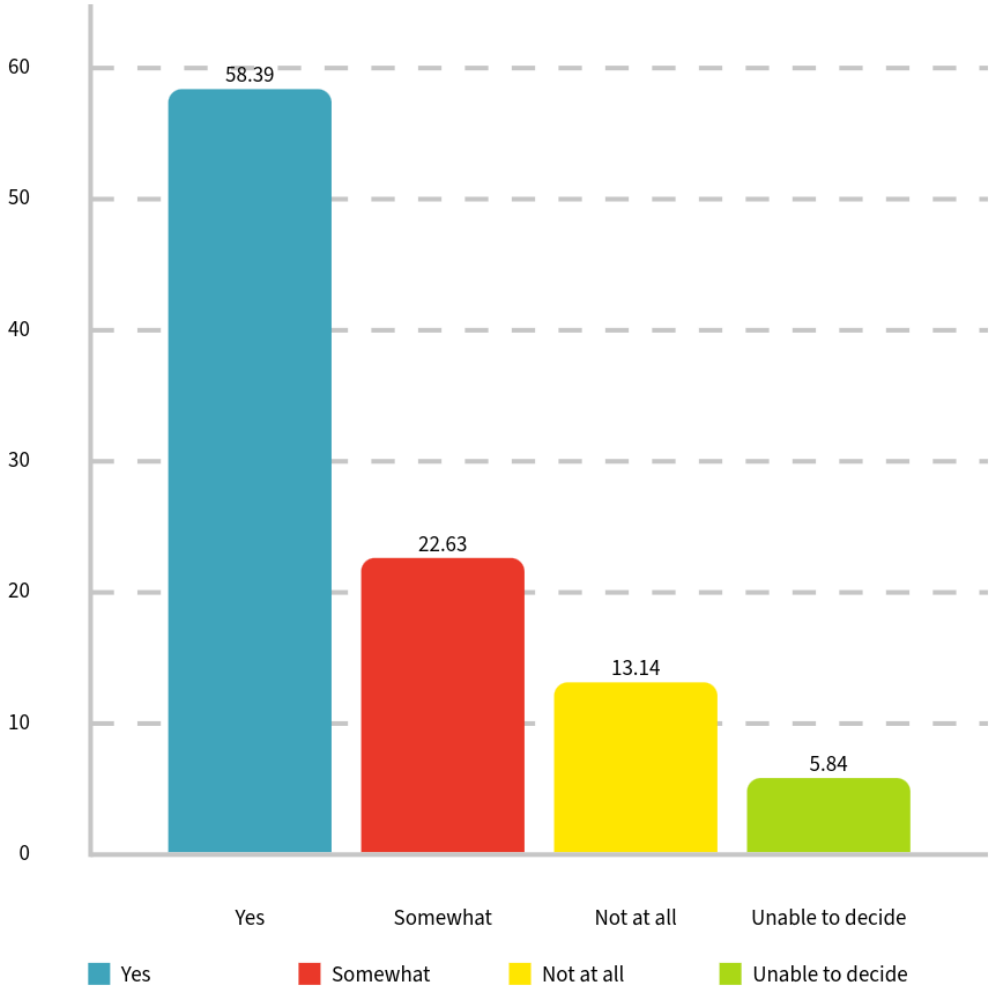

Figure (18): This table indicates respondents' view on whether their regions have advocacy programs on freedom of expression or not.

The military regime in Myanmar has conducted campaigns to shut down internet and communications. Additionally, there have been instances of restrictions and oppression against journalists and media organizations, which have been carried out directly or indirectly by some resistance forces, alongside the actions of the military regime.

5. (f) Other Comments from Respondents

Survey respondents highlighted challenges to freedom of expression, media freedom, the right to information, and the safety of journalists.

Several of them also addressed other human rights issues, gender equality, and the voices of individuals in Myanmar.

A respondent from the Sagaing region in Central Myanmar expressed that he has timely access to information in his hometown, but nearby villagers do not have the same opportunities. Another respondent from Katha township in Sagaing stated, "Media freedom is severely suppressed in our region."

A resident of Myitkyina township in Kachin State expressed, "Information is a vital lifeline for people in conflict areas." Another local from Myitkyina noted that freedom of expression has completely disappeared in the region, making it impossible for journalists, media organizations, and activists to continue their work in Kachin State. They stated, "We cannot even take our mobile phones when we go outside."

A resident of the area controlled by the military regime stated, "We cannot post freely on social media because this town is under military control. Many people are forced to remain silent."

6. Discussion

According to this survey report, the state of freedom of expression in Myanmar varies depending on the area governed by specific administrative groups. In regions controlled by the Myanmar military and the Kachin Independence Army, freedom of expression is more heavily oppressed and restricted by laws. Monitoring data by Athan have also indicated a significant loss of expression rights for the people. Journalists, celebrities, and even ordinary citizens can face imprisonment and punishment for expressing their opinions or reacting to social media posts, even if those posts do not convey any criticism.

Areas governed by the National Unity Government and various ethnic armed forces enjoy somewhat more freedom than those controlled by the military. However, our survey data indicates that these regions still do not experience complete freedom. In particular, freedom of expression is limited both in practice and by law.

The press freedom index and the fundamental freedoms index in Myanmar are at nearly the lowest levels. However, a resident from Myitkyina township in Kachin State stated,

"Information is a vital vein for people in conflict areas," indicating a growing awareness and interest in media among the population. Decentralized internet services, such as Starlink, has allowed people to access the internet despite the restrictions in Myanmar.

7. Conclusion

The "Freedom of Expression Index Survey" has documented that the people of Myanmar have lost their freedom of expression and right to access information due to the so-called "legal provisions" and threats from the Myanmar military. Most respondents indicated that they experience only limited freedom, while authorities in Myanmar restrict the practice of free expression. Furthermore, media organizations and journalists face significant pressure due to threats from authorities and safety concerns.

Some resistance areas, where the military has implemented internet shutdowns, still have minimal internet access. However, decentralized satellite internet services like Starlink have enabled people to connect with the outside world. Despite this, freedom of expression and the right to information are severely suppressed nationwide.

8. Recommendations

a. For the National Unity Government and Ethnic Armed Organizations - to maintain the trust of the people, they must impose a code of conduct that protects freedom of expression in their controlled areas.

b.For the international community - to continue supporting Myanmar's independent media with financial and sustainable assistance.

c. For technical support - to enhance technological assistance for the communication blackout areas in order to maintain the information flow and keep connected.

9. References

1. United Nations. (1948). *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. https://www.un.org/

2. Amnesty International. (2022). *Myanmar: Repression of dissent since the coup*. https://www.amnesty.org/

3. Freedom House. (2024). *Freedom in the World 2024: Myanmar*. https://freedomhouse.org/

4. Reporters Without Borders. (2023). *2023 World Press Freedom Index*. https://rsf.org/