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Analysis from AudienceScapes suggests that regulatory obstacles, combined with the silencing effect of threats from militant groups, have limited the sources of news media for Pakistanis in rural, impoverished or hard-to-access areas.

In Rural Pakistan, News Options Leave Little Room for Objectivity

Technological and regulatory advancements have led to the creation of a number of new media outlets in Pakistan in recent years, especially in cable and satellite television and non-state radio. Yet analysis by the AudienceScapes research team shows that regulatory obstacles, combined with the silencing effect of threats from militant groups, have limited the sources of news media for Pakistanis in rural, impoverished or hard-to-access areas.

Cable and satellite television are largely beyond the reach of people in such areas, leaving most of those with television sets only having access to news from one channel, Pakistan TV, which is run by the state. Those without television can listen to private radio stations (more than 100 private FM radio stations have been licensed in Pakistan). The government forbids these stations, however, from broadcasting their own news programs and the stations generally broadcast to more urban and affluent areas.

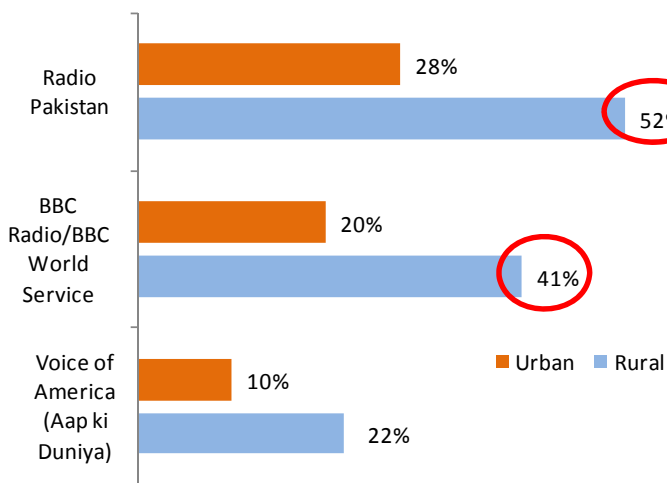
The Pakistan government has issued a number of restrictions on radio stations that limit the diversity of news sources available in the country. In addition to banning stations from producing and broadcasting their own news programs, the government recently banned many stations from carrying Urdu-language news bulletins produced by the British Broadcasting Corp. (Urdu is the official language of Pakistan).

The options for radio news are mainly limited to state-run Radio Pakistan; illegal stations often run by militant groups; or international broadcasters such as BBC's World Service in Urdu and Voice of America available through short wave or medium wave.

Our analysis, based on a 2008 national survey in Pakistan, reveals that **the highest proportional listenership for both state-run Radio Pakistan as well as the BBC and VOA is in rural locations (double the urban listenership) and among low income populations** (see charts 1 and 2). In fact, **the BBC and Radio Pakistan’s listenership shrinks as income increases. This is because privileged Pakistanis have more access to satellite/cable television, giving them access to a greater variety of non-state, independent sources of news and information.**

Chart 1 Radio Listenership in Pakistan Across Urban And Rural Locations

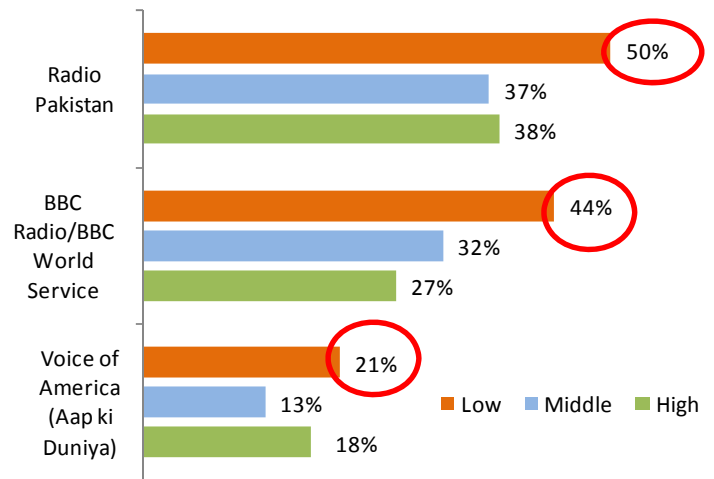
Percent who listened to the following radio stations in the previous week.



BBC, national survey of Pakistan, 2008, survey of adults, (15+), who had listened to the radio in the previous week, n = 1172

Chart 2 Radio Listenership in Pakistan Across Different Income Groups

Percent who listened to the following radio stations in the previous week.



BBC, national survey of Pakistan, 2008, survey of adults, (15+), who had listened to the radio in the previous week, n = 1172

When listenership in the rural parts of each province of Pakistan is analyzed, rural populations in Baluchistan emerge as the biggest listeners of the BBC, while those in Sindh show overall high news consumption for state radio as well as international broadcasts, including VOA (chart 1).

Pakistan’s remote Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province -- the former North West Frontier Province -- has the lowest proportion of BBC listeners and a growing presence of illegal FM radio stations. The Taliban and other militant groups are reportedly running close to 150 illegal radio stations to spread their messages in this province. Militants use the airwaves to broadcast propaganda against their opponents and Western governments. These stations thus face little competition in the news arena, given the restrictions placed on private, legitimate television and radio outlets. The Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) has only been partially successful in curbing these illegal stations; many have been shut down, but new ones sprout up soon afterward.

It is worth noting that, from September to December 2009, Radio Pakistan broadcast programming in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa from Radio Deewa, the VOA’s Pashto-language radio station (the language spoken in the province), but it stopped after receiving threats from the Taliban for airing “American propaganda.” Radio Deewa seeks to give local residents the chance to speak out against the Taliban that are heavily concentrated in this region.

In Punjab and Sindh, economically more-developed provinces, many private radio stations are available to both urban and rural dwellers. Unfortunately, the Pakistan government forbids them from broadcasting their own news bulletins.

The selective bans on broadcasting Urdu-language BBC bulletins took effect in April 2010; notably, the 24 stations hit with total bans all transmit in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, thus further restricting the availability of information in an already information-starved province. This ban did not make as many headlines as the banning of Facebook and YouTube a few months ago, but perhaps represents **a greater threat to the free flow of information. The ban curbs the availability of non-governmental and credible information sources available to those who rely solely on the radio for vital news and information in remote, rural and less developed regions.**

Table 1 Radio Listenership in RURAL Pakistan Across Provinces			
Percent who listened to the following radio stations in the previous week. Figures represent percentages			
	State Radio	International Radio	
<u>Station</u>	Radio Pakistan	BBC Radio/BBC World Service	Voice of America
National Average (Urban + Rural)			
National Average (Urban + Rural)	44	33	16
Rural Population in Each Province			
Baluchistan	47	77	22
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa*	50	24	20
Punjab	43	28	20
Sindh	65	57	27
BBC, national survey of Pakistan, 2008, survey of adults, (15+) rural respondents who had listened to radio last week * previously named North West Frontier Province			

The AudienceScapes project (www.audiencescapes.org) is aimed at bridging knowledge gaps about media preferences, personal communication habits and the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in Africa and in other developing regions. It is also a tool for identifying needs in media, communication technologies, development information and development policy.

The project's name refers to the benefits for development organizations of understanding the changing communication preferences and needs of their 'audiences'—the target populations and policymakers whom they are trying to support. Launched in April 2009 with support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation**, AudienceScapes comprises four main elements:

National quantitative surveys looking at (1) the general population's access to and use of media, access to and use of information and communication technologies (ICTs), and word-of-mouth communication habits; and (2) how these factors affect people's acquisition of knowledge about key development topics. Pilot projects are taking place in Ghana, Kenya and Zambia.

In-Depth Interviews with policymakers to find out how they gather, assess, share and disseminate critical information related to development topics, and find out how global development partners can play a constructive role in this process. The interviews were begun in the same three African countries.

The AudienceScapes website which provides access to the program's analytical reports as well as the quantitative survey data. The website also has detailed "Country Communication Profiles" of several countries in multiple developing regions, plus other resources for development practitioners working in communication, media development, technology development and policy dialogue.

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InterMedia (www.intermedia.org) is a nonprofit research, evaluation and consulting company with expertise in media, communications and development. We creatively equip clients to understand audiences, design projects, target communications and gauge project impact in developing and transitional societies worldwide.

** Some Facts were sourced from: "Pakistan's Taliban Radio Insurgency". Azami, Dawood. BBC World News Service. 22 June 2009. Accessed April 2010. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/8108881.stm

***The findings and conclusions of the AudienceScapes research project are those of InterMedia and do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.