



Netflix U.S. Cancellations Spike following the Release of Controversial Film, *Cuties*

The release of the highly controversial film *Cuties* on Netflix has propelled into motion a widespread #CancelNetflix campaign that is already having an impact on the streaming platform, though Netflix has given no indication that they can be swayed to remove the pedophilic content.



Cuties follows 11-year-old “Amy,” a Senegalese Muslim living in France who finds herself caught between her family’s traditional values and a group of rebellious young girls in a dance troupe. The film, which has a TV_MA rating, won a jury award for directing at the Sundance Film Festival this year and is described as a “coming of age” story, but critics opine the film’s use of sexually inappropriate portrayal of minors and have called on Netflix users to cancel the platform. By September 10, the hashtag #CancelNetflix was at the [top](#) of Twitter’s trending lists in the United States and the U.K.

In an interview with *Variety* magazine this week, YipitData, a global research firm, noted the campaign against Netflix over the film’s sexualized portrayal of young girls may have directly resulted in a surge in U.S. subscription cancellations. *Variety* reports,

On Saturday, Sept. 12, Netflix’s cancellation rate in the U.S. jumped to nearly eight times higher than the average daily levels recorded in August 2020 — reaching a multiyear high, the data-analytics provider told *Variety*. With the #CancelNetflix hashtag continuing to trend on social media, it is possible elevated churn could continue in the coming days, according to the firm.

YipitData also told Fox Business that Netflix shares dropped by 3.34 percent on Monday, and that the “churn” — referring to the amount of customers who opt against renewing their subscriptions — may continue to increase substantially, as an online [petition](#) against *Cuties* has more than 700,000 signatures. And that petition is one of [many](#).

Netflix and the film’s creator, writer, and director Maimouna Doucoure have defended the film as some kind of “social commentary” against the sexualization of young girls, even as the film is equally guilty of that very sexualization.

“*Cuties* is a social commentary against the sexualization of young children,” a Netflix spokesperson [said](#) on September 10. “It’s an award-winning film and a powerful story about the pressure young girls face



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on September 17, 2020

on social media and from society more generally growing up — and we'd encourage anyone who cares about these important issues to watch the movie."

Yet, undermining its assertions, Netflix was compelled to issue an apology last month for the artwork associated with the film that first drew attention to its pedophilic nature. The poster, dropped ahead of the film's September 9 Netflix release, features several young girls from the film baring their legs and midriffs and posed in sexual dance positions.

Social-media users also criticized the trailer, which revealed scenes from the film wherein the young girls are performing overtly sexual dance routines and make themselves up to look older through clothing and makeup.

"We're deeply sorry for the inappropriate artwork that we used for *Mignonnes/Cuties*," a Netflix spokesperson told FOX Business in a statement. "It was not OK, nor was it representative of this French film which premiered at Sundance. We've now updated the pictures and description."

The opposition to the film appears to be largely bipartisan. Republican Senator Ted Cruz (R-Texas) attacked the film as "child porn" and has called for a Department of Justice investigation into the film to determine potential legal violations. In a letter sent to the Justice Department on September 11, Cruz wrote, "The film routinely fetishizes and sexualizes these pre-adolescent girls as they perform dances simulating sexual conduct in revealing clothing, including at least one scene with partial child nudity."

"These scenes in and of themselves are harmful," the letter adds, "And it is likely that the filming of this movie created even more explicit and abusive scenes, and that pedophiles across the world in the future will manipulate and imitate this film in abusive ways."

Democratic Representative Tulsi Gabbard (Hawaii), a former Democratic presidential candidate, articulated similar sentiments and has also called on the DOJ to take action. "Child porn 'Cuties' will certainly whet the appetite of pedophiles & help fuel the child sex trafficking trade. 1 in 4 victims of trafficking are children," she tweeted. "It happened to my friend's 13 year old daughter. Netflix, you are now complicit."

The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), not exactly a conservative group, issued a statement calling on Netflix to remove the film from its platform due to the movie's disturbing sexualization of children as well as its offensive and stereotypical depiction of Islam and Muslims."

The National Center on Sexual Exploitation (NCOSE) acknowledged the film's intent may not have been to provide fodder to faceless pedophiles but adds the film indeed does just that. The organization asserts Netflix should either remove the more explicit scenes from the film or pull the movie entirely.

"While we commend director Maïmouna Doucouré for exposing the very real threats to young girls having unfettered access to social media and the internet, we cannot condone the hyper-sexualization and exploitation of the young actresses themselves in order to make her point," Lina Nealon, NCOSE's director of corporate and strategic initiatives, said in a statement. "The audience does not need to see the very long scenes with close-up shots of the girls' bodies; this does nothing to educate the audience on the harms of sexualization."

Still, *Cuties* has found support amongst film critics who claim it is meant to highlight the exploitation and sexualization of young girls. But making a film that heavily exploits girls to underscore that it's bad to exploit girls is sort of like having young children get "real-life" drunk in a TV special to show young viewers why they shouldn't drink. *Forbes* called it the "depiction equals endorsement" firestorm.



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Unfortunately, the controversy surrounding the film has made it one of Netflix's most [popular](#) movies this week. And while it's possible that much of that viewership is from users who have confirmed their criticisms of the film, it does little to assuage them of the guilt of having now watched a sexually inappropriate film featuring minors.

Image: Screenshot of logo Netflix/public domain



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