

Global freedom watchdog report

March 4, 2021

In news : Global freedom watchdog report has demoted India's freedom score from "free" to "partly free"

About Freedom in the World report

- **Released by:** Freedom House, based in Washington
- Freedom in the World is an annual global report on political rights and civil liberties. It has been produced since 1973.
- The report is composed of numerical scores and descriptive texts for 195 countries and 15 territories.
- Countries and territories are assessed by external analysts, primarily using in-country contacts, field research, nongovernmental and government reports, news articles, and other open-source information.
- For each country and territory, Freedom in the World analyzes the electoral process, political pluralism and participation, the functioning of the government, freedom of expression and of belief, associational and organizational rights, the rule of law, and personal autonomy and individual rights.
- **It is supported & sponsored by:** National Endowment for Democracy, the Merrill Family Foundation, Google, Inc., and the Lilly Endowment

Key highlights of the report

- It has demoted India's freedom score from "**free**" to "**partly free**", saying rights and civil liberties "have been eroding since Narendra Modi became Prime Minister in 2014", specifically referring to attacks on Muslims, use of the

sedition law, and the government's coronavirus response including the lockdown.

- **India's score:** It decreased from 71 to 67, with 100 being the ranking for the most free country, and its rank fell from 83 to 88 out of 211 countries. India's score of 67 puts it on a par with Ecuador and Dominican Republic.
- Freedom House noted that the change in India's status from "Free" to "Partly Free" was the most significant for 2020, "meaning less than 20 percent of the world's people now live in a Free country, the smallest proportion since 1995".
- **Most free countries:** The most free countries in the world, with a score of 100, are Finland, Norway and Sweden, while the least free with a score of 1 are Tibet and Syria
- As per the report, current Hindu nationalist government has presided over increased pressure on human rights organizations, rising intimidation of academics and journalists, and a spate of bigoted attacks including lynchings aimed at Muslims
- The report also underscored a "pattern in which the Hindu nationalist government and its allies have presided over rising violence and discriminatory policies affecting the Muslim population and pursued a crackdown on expressions of dissent by the media, academics, civil society groups, and protesters"
- **Kashmir:** This report listed "Indian Kashmir" separately, and retained its status as last year of "not free" (the first time it had done so), with the score for it falling from 28 to 27. Between 2013 and 2019, "Indian Kashmir" was labelled as "partly free". Its score fell from 28 to 27.
- The report says that disputed territories are sometimes assessed separately if they meet certain

criteria, including boundaries that are sufficiently stable to allow year-on-year comparisons

- **Internet Freedom in India:** The Score has stayed at 51. As per the report, “internet freedom in India declined dramatically for a third straight year”, citing Internet shutdowns, blocked content, disinformation spread by political leaders, online harassment, amendments to the Foreign Direct Investment Policy, coordinated spyware campaigns, and digital monitoring.
- **India’s score in previous years:** Between 2013 and 2015, India’s ranking had risen twice consequently by 1 point, going up from 76 to 78. The ranking had remained 77 from 2016 to 2018. It dipped to 75 in 2019 and 71 in 2020.

Why did India’s score degrade?

The organisation assesses nations on 25 different indicators. India’s score fell in relation to the following questions:

Question: “Are **individuals free to express their personal views on political or other sensitive topics** without fear of surveillance or retribution?”

- The report states this score declined because of “the use of sedition and other charges in recent years to deter free speech, including discussion of a discriminatory citizenship law and the Covid-19 pandemic”.

Question: “Is there **freedom for non-governmental organizations**, particularly those that are engaged in human rights and governance-related work?”

- This score declined because of **amendments to the Foreign Contributions Regulation Act** and the freezing of Amnesty International’s assets, leading to the shutdown of the organisation’s India operations.

Question:“Is there an **independent judiciary?**”

- This score declined because of former Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi’s appointment to the Rajya Sabha, “a pattern of more pro government decisions by the Supreme Court”, and “the high-profile transfer of a judge after he ruled against the government’s political interests”.

Question:“Do individuals enjoy **freedom of movement, including the ability to change their place of residence, employment, or education?**”

- This score declined due to the **migrant crisis and “violent and discriminatory enforcement** by police and civilian vigilantes”.