

# CHARTING INDIA'S NEW LIBERALIZED MAPPING POLICY

Relevant for: Indian Economy | Topic: Effects of Liberalization on the economy, changes in industrial policy and their effects on industrial growth incl. Economic Reforms

The country's new policy on cartography comes with an *atmanirbhar* twist. Colonial-era provisions on who can make, modify or disseminate maps are finally set to change, although Indian entities will be granted greater leeway than foreign firms. Mint explains.

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## What reforms will the policy introduce?

Until now, [mapping in India](#) existed in a legal grey zone. The Survey of India was technically the only agency authorized to produce maps. Over the past two decades, private players like MapmyIndia and Google Maps had started to utilize satellite images to produce digital maps, but this required the help of a process called "ground truthing", wherein a person physically visited a building or a road to cross-check ground reality against the satellite-based map. In some instances, these surveyors would be hassled. Private entities could also not produce high-res maps with an accuracy of 1 metre or less. This will now be allowed.

## So, can anyone create, publish maps now?

No. While the new policy liberalizes map making, it comes with a hint of protectionism. Only Indian companies or entities that store and display the data exclusively within the country will be allowed to undertake certain key activities: terrestrial mobile mapping, street view surveys, generating high-res maps, or surveying India's territorial waters. Essentially, while all mapping firms can now operate freely, foreign players like Google Maps or Microsoft Bing will have to engage an Indian partner or a local subsidiary if they wish to enter certain businesses—for instance, street view maps.

## Why is mapping important to the digital ecosystem?

Location information is an integral part of the modern digital ecosystem. It is critical to the success of any industry that offers location-based services such as e-commerce, delivery and logistics, and urban transport. It is also essential for more traditional sectors of the economy such as agriculture, construction and real estate, and mines and minerals.

## Is there a push for a desi Google Maps?

While this might be the intent, it is not an easy task to execute. Even so, last week, Gurugram-based MapmyIndia partnered with Isro to develop a "fully indigenous mapping portal". India has also been looking to build a local variant to the US-backed global positioning system (GPS) called NavIC (Navigation with Indian Constellation). Russia and China already have local alternatives that they deploy for military purposes. The new digital maps race is about sovereignty and localizing mapping capability.

## How will it impact the end consumer?

Services like street view maps and high-res commercial mapping will become possible. But whether users will actually experience these services will depend on two factors: the pace at which the local mapping ecosystem can ramp up its capabilities and whether foreign firms manage to find workarounds to the curbs. The other area of focus will be Centre-owned mapping data, which the policy states will be published freely. The norms merely signal intent. How the Centre follows through will determine outcomes.

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