

INDIA IS 'PARTLY FREE', SAYS U.S. THINKTANK

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Important Aspects of Governance, Transparency & Accountability including Right to Information and Citizen Charter

Freedoms in India have reduced, according to a report from a U.S. thinktank, Freedom House, resulting in India being classified as 'partly free'.

India's score was 67, a drop from 71/100 from last year (reflecting 2019 data) downgrading it from the free category last year (based on 2020 data).

"The government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and its State-level allies continued to crack down on critics during the year...", the report "Freedom in the World 2021: Democracy under Siege" said. "The ruling Hindu nationalist movement also encouraged the scapegoating of Muslims, who were disproportionately blamed for the spread of the virus ...," it said.

"Rather than serving as a champion of democratic practice and a counterweight to authoritarian influence from countries such as China, Mr. Modi and his party are tragically driving India itself toward authoritarianism.

"The private media are vigorous and diverse, and investigations and scrutiny of politicians do occur. However, attacks on press freedom have escalated dramatically under the Modi government, and reporting has become significantly less ambitious in recent years," the report said, citing the use of security, defamation, sedition and contempt of court laws to quiet critical media voices.

"Separately, revelations of close relationships between politicians, business executives and lobbyists on one hand and leading media personalities and owners of media outlets, on the other, have dented public confidence in the press," the report said.

On the U.S., the Freedom House said the risky state of American democracy was on display during the January 6 attack on the Capitol. It listed what it called the Trump presidency's "unprecedented attacks" on American democracy (examples included were dismissing inspectors general to sowing mistrust over the electoral system). The U.S. dropped three points over one year, down to 83/100.

"...The United States will need to work vigorously to strengthen its institutional safeguards, restore its civic norms and uphold the promise of its core principles for all segments of society if it is to protect its venerable democracy and regain global credibility."

China, classified as 'not free', dropped a point from last year going down to 9/100.

"The malign influence of the regime in China, the world's most populous dictatorship, was especially profound in 2020," the report says citing Beijing's disinformation and censorship campaign following the outbreak of COVID-19.

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