

EXPLAINER



Unsettling Truth Behind Global Indices

Published October 20, 2023

Publication No. 437-201023



CIHS Centre for Integrated and Holistic Studies

Centre for Integrated and Holistic Studies (CIHS) is a non-partisan, independent, research think tank headquartered in New Delhi, India. CIHS is dedicated to enriching individual decision making by presenting innovative ideas, fostering informed public debate, and advancing effective policy and programme development to advance humanity. Aspiring to positively shape the future of society, CIHS works to share knowledge on pressing global challenges and opportunities by fostering a ‘culture of scholarship’ and advancing informed public engagement.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in these publicly available briefings, factsheets, reports are correct at the time of publication. However, if you have any comments on our documents, please email info@cihs.org.in

Disclaimer and Limitation of Liability: This report is for public distribution and has been furnished solely for information and must not be reproduced or redistributed to others without written consent. None can use the report as a base for any claim, demand or cause of action and, also none is responsible for any loss incurred based upon the report.

Table of Content

Executive Summary	4
Abbreviations	5
Context and Back Story	6
Methodology and Controversy on Studies	8
Data Interpretation and Inference	12
Case Studies	18
Concluding Observation	23
References	24

Executive Summary

1. The recent unveiling of the Global Hunger Index (GHI) report on October 12, 2023, has ignited a fervent discussion in India. Central to this discourse are concerns about the index's precision, methodologies, and the resultant rankings.
2. India's position at 111 out of 125 countries, with a hunger prevalence of 28.5%, has notably raised eyebrows, especially when juxtaposed with Pakistan's 102nd ranking and its 26.6% hunger rate. Such discrepancies have led many to question the integrity of the GHI's assessments.
3. Several global indices, including those by Reporters Without Borders (RSF), Freedom House (FH), and Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem), are facing critical examination regarding their methodologies and potential predispositions.
4. The outcomes of these rankings frequently influence foreign policy, investments, and global perceptions of nations. Yet, when the validity of their methods is contested, it invariably ignites debates and strains, highlighting the imperative for utmost transparency and precision in such assessments.
5. Primary challenges include subjectivity, biases inherent in data sources, excessive dependence on particular data types or regional contributions, lack of in-depth nuanced analysis, and partiality towards certain political or economic agendas.
6. The 2023 annual report on press freedom placed India at the 161st spot out of 180 countries. Surprisingly, both Pakistan and Taliban-governed Afghanistan achieved higher rankings on this index.
7. Many organizations frequently publish reports addressing a spectrum of socio-political and economic matters. Yet, a persistent concern arises when these entities either deliberately or unintentionally conceal their data sources. Even when they opt to disclose their primary references, a significant portion of these sources have previously been under scrutiny or confronted with allegations of impropriety.
8. The report underscores certain "organizations of particular concern" notorious for disseminating reports without undertaking thorough on-the-ground research, and relying on data sets that are deemed biased or prejudiced.
9. The report also emphasizes responses that debunk these reports, asserting that they are "misleading, incorrect, and misplaced."
10. Some questions in these indices are not apt for a universal assessment of democracy. For example, one query disregards the practicality of executing direct referendums in expansive nations such as India, making it inappropriate. Intriguingly, even nations like Afghanistan are awarded non-zero scores in this specific sub-index.
11. However, simply dismissing these indices as mere opinions is not a sustainable stance. It's imperative for these institutions to emphasise transparency and accountability. The demand for genuinely autonomous and neutral think tanks to actively formulate and showcase objective indices for the global landscape has never been more pressing.

Abbreviations

GHI- Global Hunger Index

RSF- Reporters Without Borders

V-Dem- Varieties of Democracy

ICMR- Indian Council of Medical Research

WPFI- World Press Freedom Index

IRF- International Religious Freedom

FIACONA- Indian Christian Organization in North America

UCF- United Christian Forum

EFI- Evangelical Fellowship of India

ICC- International Christian Concern

IAMC- Indian American Muslim Council

MEA- Ministry of External Affairs

OCP- Organization of Particular Concern

FH- Freedom House

CJR- Columbia Journalism Review

WGI- Worldwide Governance Indicators

ESG- Environmental, Social and Governance

Context and Back Story

On October 12, 2023, Global Hunger Index (GHI) was published. The Global Hunger Index generated serious controversy in the context of India due to disagreements about accuracy of its rankings, data quality & methodology, government responses, effectiveness of hunger and nutrition programmes and relevance of global comparisons.

There is need for substantial debate and critical discussion on this report as it appears to serve as a diversion from pressing issues. While Pakistan's ranking has been categorized as 'serious,' a closer examination reveals a significant disparity. India's hunger level stands at 28.5 percent whereas Pakistan is down below at 26.6 percent.

While assessing their positions among 125 countries, India is placed at 111th position, in contrast to Pakistan's 102nd position at a time when the latter is facing serious food shortages, a major chunk of its population facing hunger with no or little access to food.

Serious and apparent discrepancies in the GHI that are obvious lead us to a fundamental question: Did the ranking agency fail to recognize severe conditions prevailing in Pakistan? According to reports, in the last six months, over 36 per cent (check the percentage pl) inflation has created a dire situation in Pakistan and landed many impoverished individuals not being able to afford only one meal a day.

In the realm of global rankings and surveys, the issue of biased and selective methodologies has transcended confines of Global Hunger Index. This phenomenon is not limited to one specific index but instead permeates various well-known outfits like Reporters Without Borders (RSF), Freedom House and The Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Institute, among others.

These organizations that often wield considerable influence on public perception and policy decisions, utilize ranking systems and surveys to assess a wide range of factors, from hunger and democracy to press freedom and human rights. However, the methods and criteria employed in these assessments have come under scrutiny due to concerns of bias, selectivity and possible hidden agenda.

Impact of these rankings and surveys is significant. They can influence foreign policy decisions, economic investments and perception about countries. Rankings often affect a nation's global standing and can impact its citizens' access to resources, related costs and opportunities. Thus, when methodologies are questioned, it can lead to disputes, diplomatic tensions, or even policy changes.

Specific challenges surrounding these rankings and surveys are indeed multifaceted. Subjectivity often plays a significant role as the methodologies employed may inherently reflect perspectives and interests of the organizations, their financial backers, potentially introducing intentional bias in the results. Data sources derived to construct these assessments are subject to choice and often influenced by bias. Over-reliance on specific data or particular geographic regions may also lead to an imbalanced portrayal of global landscape. Additionally, a dearth of nuanced analysis and contextual understanding can oversimplify intricate issues, resulting in rankings that fail to

capture even basic realities of the countries under scrutiny. Related intricacies are never measured. There have been allegations against certain organizations, suggesting that their rankings may align with political or economic interests thus raising concerns about their credibility and independence.

In May this year, Reporters Without Borders published World Press Freedom Index. Taking a critical perspective, India was positioned at the 161st spot out of 180 countries, trailing behind nations like Afghanistan (152), Pakistan (150) and Somalia (141). At that time, India's external affairs minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar expressed his anguish and said, "I was amazed at our number. I thought we had the most uncontrollable press and somebody is getting something fundamentally wrong. Afghanistan was freer than us. Can you imagine? Look, these are all I mean, I see the democracy index, freedom index, religious freedom index, and press freedom index." He described the entire assessment as a form of "mind games," suggesting that these rankings could be manipulated to favour or disfavour specific countries for strategic reasons.

This explanatory piece will delve into operations, linkages, lineages and quality of such organizations and their historical backgrounds.

Methodology and Controversy on Studies

Global surveys and indices provide valuable insights into issues and they should be interpreted with caution. It's important to critically evaluate methodologies, data sources, and potential biases to gain a more accurate understanding of the issues being measured. These tools are most useful when used in conjunction with other sources of information and analysis to form a more comprehensive perspective.

Global surveys and indices rely on subjective data collected from experts or respondents. This subjectivity can introduce bias as perspectives and opinions of those providing the data may not accurately represent ground reality. Additionally, the selection of experts or respondents can be skewed, leading to potential biases in the results.

GHI is an annual measurement aimed at addressing hunger and mobilizing efforts to combat it. India, the world's fifth-largest economy and a strong performer in various other global indicators has consistently received poor rankings in the GHI. These rankings have sparked significant controversy prompting a critical review of appropriateness in GHI's indicators. Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) challenged the validity of indicators such as undernourishment, stunting, wasting, and child mortality as accurate measures of hunger, arguing that these indicators may not adequately represent the complex issue of hunger in Indian context.

GHI's methodology faced criticism for its alleged oversimplification, misrepresentation, and lack of statistical rigour. To address these concerns, ICMR established an Expert Committee to evaluate the GHI's indicators and concluded that the existing measures fail to capture hunger accurately. This debate underscores the need for nuanced and context-specific approaches to evaluating hunger and underlines the complexities involved in measuring such a multifaceted issue.

How the GHI Is Calculated

Each country's GHI score is calculated based on a formula that combines four indicators that together capture the multidimensional nature of hunger:



Undernourishment: the share of the population whose caloric intake is insufficient;



Child stunting: the share of children under the age of five who have low height for their age, reflecting chronic undernutrition;



Child wasting: the share of children under the age of five who have low weight for their height, reflecting acute undernutrition; and



Child mortality: the share of children who die before their fifth birthday, reflecting in part the fatal mix of inadequate nutrition and unhealthy environments. ^[2]

Source: GHI

Through a written reply in Indian upper house of Parliament, Rajya Sabha, Women and Child Development minister Smt. Smriti Zubin Irani said that the Index “suffers from serious methodological issues and shows malaise in intent. Three out of four indicators used for computation of the values related to health of Children and cannot be representative of the entire population.” The fourth and most important indicator estimate of Proportion of Undernourished (PoU) population is based on an opinion poll conducted on a very small sample size of 3000.

Similarly, RSF has been in the business of publishing Press Freedom Index (PFI) annually since 2002. This index ranks 180 countries based on journalistic freedom, surveying factors like pluralism, media independence, self-censorship, legislative framework, transparency and quality of news production infrastructure.

POS.	COUNTRIES	GLOBAL SCORE	SCORE POL.	SCORE ECO.	SCORE LEGIS.	SCORE SOC.	SCORE SECU.	DIF. POSITION 2022
145	United Arab Emirates	42.99	45.63	45.1	36.79	30.68	56.77	▼ -7
146	Jordan	42.79	47.71	34.64	37.74	32.2	61.68	▼ -26
147	Cambodia	42.02	38.5	27.84	46.42	57.27	40.05	▼ -5
148	Sudan	40.83	42.08	28.43	31.45	40.15	62.05	▲ 3
149	Libya	40.22	49	34.31	30.19	45.23	42.36	▼ -6
150	Pakistan	39.95	42.71	37.25	48.11	48.11	23.57	▲ 7
151	Azerbaijan	39.93	35.45	25.91	38.95	50	49.35	▲ 3
152	Afghanistan	39.75	48.96	44.93	42.77	30.68	31.41	▲ 4
153	Tajikistan	39.06	34.17	37.09	51.57	36.17	36.3	▼ -1
154	Kuwait	38.84	41.25	24.51	30.19	20.45	77.78	▲ 4
155	Oman	37.87	36.25	33.82	15.09	38.07	66.11	▲ 8
156	Palestine	37.86	40.47	40.2	44.34	36.36	27.95	▲ 14
157	Belarus	37.17	32.34	47.67	28.07	48.3	29.45	▼ -4
158	Nicaragua	37.09	35.81	45.49	28.21	44.32	31.65	▲ 2
159	Venezuela	36.99	34.89	35.74	34.82	38.53	40.96	= 0
160	Laos	36.66	36.04	33.33	25.47	38.26	50.19	▲ 1
161	India	36.62	33.65	34.15	42.92	45.27	27.12	▼ -11

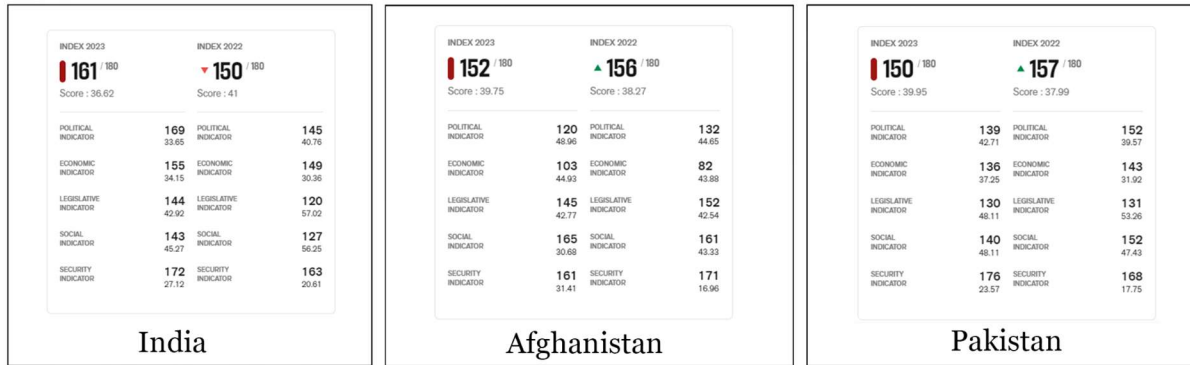
Source: RSF

In its report on press freedom in 2023, it has ranked India at 161st position in a list of 180 countries. Ironically, Pakistan and Taliban-ruled Afghanistan have secured better positions on this index as well.

Lack of transparency on number of participants in the survey raises concerns about its representativeness. It's likely that a limited sample, possibly comprising a select group of individuals such as journalists, activists and social scientists form the sample base. This sample may not reflect broader population's view on press freedom. For instance, WPMI 2020 report relied on about 150 correspondents and 18 NGOs with each participant responding to 83 questions about every country. Such an approach questions the survey's real-world applicability.

Numerous countries and experts have expressed concerns regarding WPMI criteria and methodology, as well as about RSF's perceived biases, lack of objectivity in ranking and absence of transparency. One primary concern pertains to opacity of the WPMI survey. A former Singaporean Prime Minister (name pl) referred to WPMI as “a subjective measure computed through the prism of Western liberals.”

SAB - UNESCO Chair of Media and Democracy at Rhodes University (who at this university?) commented, “Freedom of the Press Index (Freedom House) displays a neo-liberal inclination that views the state as inherently predatory, continually encroaching upon media freedom and independence.”



Source: RSF

The mentioned snippet illustrates RSF's sampling and scoring methodology. Its study operates under the assumption that RSF's press freedom classification tends to penalize a state's performance as the protector of citizens' rights, including journalists. Consequently, certain countries secure more advantageous positions not necessarily due to their domestic freedom of expression status but because of external factors that bolster their ranking.

It appears that these organizations and entities evaluate countries based on freedom indicators but a pertinent question arises: are these assessments conducted impartially or are they influenced by a particular perspective?

Coming back to the point, there may be political or economic attempts of intimidation that one can't ignore while analyzing the whole picture and arriving at a conclusion. But, surveys using such an outdated methodology and blatant bias will not help the cause either.

Also, if press freedom was lacking or inadequate, such reports would not have seen light of the day. A quick look at sheer number of newspapers, TV channels, radio networks, hundreds of thousands websites and social media handles that operate uninterrupted in India is proof of 'substantive freedom' that press enjoys in India.

Publications and Broadcaster in India

Daily Newspaper	1,46,045
Periodicals	1,25,767
News Broadcasters	903
Radio Stations	815

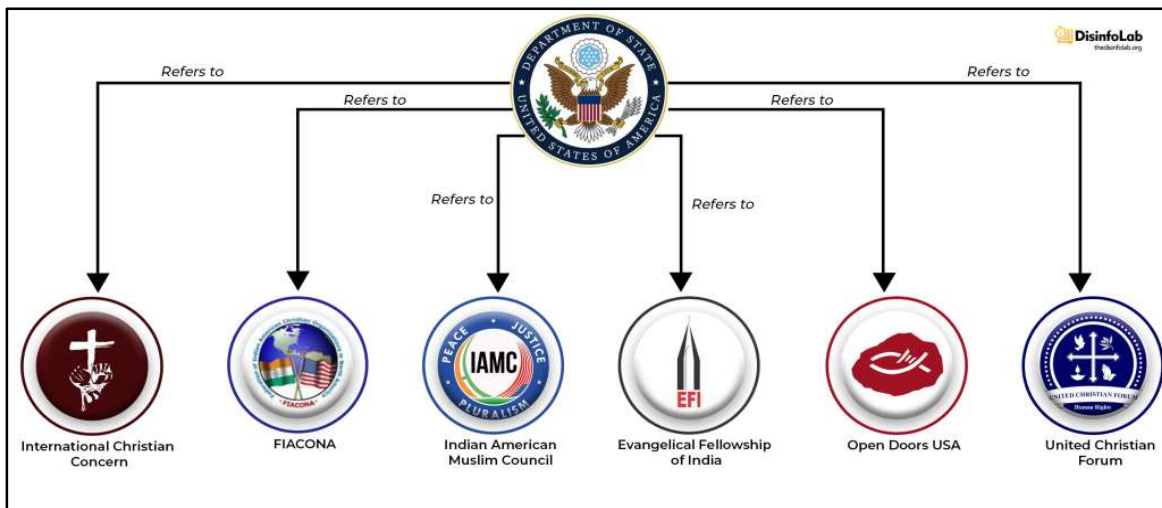
Source: TRAI

Data Interpretation and Inference

Many of the mentioned organizations published reports on socio-political and economic issues. But, they often fail to disclose their data sources. When they do disclose their sources, many have faced suspicions or have been labeled for misconduct.

In last two decades, US State Department have had routinely released a report on international religious freedom, which has been a source of controversy when it comes to its claims about India. Concerns have arisen due to the annual report's reliance on what critics argue is misleading and inaccurate data provided by Christian evangelist groups and radical Islamist organizations.

This report, produced by Office of International Religious Freedom (IRF) under the State Department, heavily depends on information from various organizations, including Federation of Indian Christian Organizations in North America (FIACONA), United Christian Forum (UCF), Open Doors USA, Evangelical Fellowship of India (EFI), International Christian Concern (ICC), and Indian American Muslim Council (IAMC). Regrettably, these organizations have faced allegations of fabricating data related to purported atrocities against religious minorities in India.



Source: DisinfoLab

FIACONA, a United States-based organization allegedly involved in producing data related to atrocities against Indian Christians, holds a prominent role in shaping this narrative. Its reports have often been cited news articles to highlight an increasing sense of marginalization within Indian Christian community which is at odds with reality.

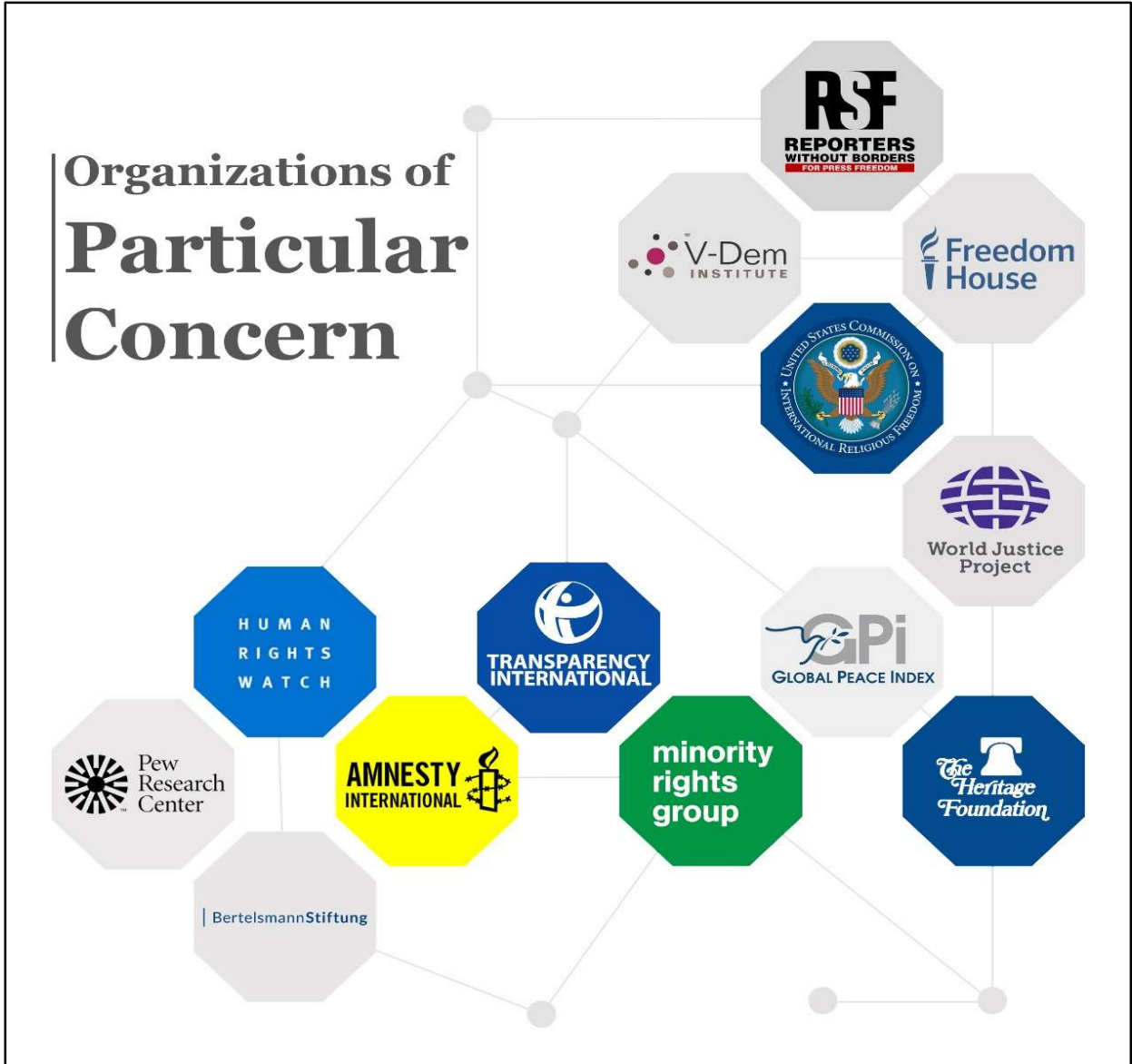
Notably, the organization's data has been criticized for being riddled with issues such as duplication, fabrication, and inaccuracies, to the extent that even a single report might present three different sets of data concerning atrocities against Christians.

Instances of family disputes, government efforts to address illegal conversion practices and unlawful activities by evangelist groups were wrongly portrayed as acts of oppression against

religious minorities. They also misleadingly counted cases of child sexual abuse by pastors as atrocities against the Christian community.

Interestingly, the USCIRF, an organization that has been known for propagating anti-India narratives for years without any helping data, is also entangled in this network of data manipulation. It has persistently projected a misleading image of India on the global stage, disseminating unverified assertions regarding religious freedom in India. This has included raising concerns about a potential genocide within the country, all without substantial evidence to support such claims.

USCIRF's portrayal of a genocide narrative in India raises significant concerns due to lack of credible data to substantiate its claims. While the organization is using clever tactics to sway public opinion, absence of concrete evidence calls into question the accuracy and reliability of its assertions. It is essential for organizations like USCIRF to maintain transparency and provide verifiable data when making such grave allegations to ensure that their claims are taken seriously and are based on factual information. And, on the recommendations of suspicious outfits linked to terror has been designating India in the 'country of particular concerns.' In this context, CIHS paper enlists the organizations of particular concern that are identified for terror links with anti-India standing and backed by financiers of concern.



Exposing contrarian and baseless claims of USCIRF, Centre for Integrated and Holistic Studies had documented the socio-economic progress and prosperity achieved by minorities in India, particularly, Christians and Muslims. Hollowness of USCIRF as an organization and individuals piloting such false claims need closer scrutiny.

State of Religious Minorities in India



Also, Indian officials have consistently denounced the biased and agenda-driven reports dished out faithfully by USCIRF. Arindam Bagchi, official spokesperson for India's Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said, “The US Commission on International Religious Freedom persistently recycles prejudiced and motivated remarks about India, as seen in its 2023 annual report. We firmly reject this distortion of facts, which ultimately undermines the credibility of the USCIRF itself. We urge the USCIRF to refrain from such endeavors and strive for a more comprehensive understanding of India, its diversity, its democratic values, and its constitutional mechanisms.”

USCIRF Raises Serious Concerns and Eyes Sanctions Recommendations for Citizenship (Amendment) Bill in India, Which Passed Lower House Today

WASHINGTON, DC – The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) is deeply troubled by the **passage** of the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill (CAB), originally introduced by Home Minister Amit Shah, in the Lok Sabha (the lower house of the Indian Parliament) given the religion criterion in the bill. The CAB will now move to the Rajya Sabha (Indian Parliament's Upper House). If the CAB passes in both houses of parliament, the United States government should consider sanctions against the Home Minister and other principal leadership.

The **CAB** enshrines a pathway to citizenship for immigrants that specifically excludes Muslims, setting a legal criterion for citizenship based on religion. The CAB is a dangerous turn in the wrong direction; it runs counter to India's rich history of secular pluralism and the Indian Constitution, which guarantees equality before the law regardless of faith. In conjunction with the ongoing National Register of Citizens (NRC) process in **Assam** and nationwide **NRC** that the Home Minister seeks to propose, USCIRF fears that the Indian government is creating a religious test for Indian citizenship that would strip citizenship from millions of Muslims.

The Lok Sabha first passed the CAB in January 2019, but due to protests, the government withdrew it before it could be voted on by the Rajya Sabha. Both houses of parliament must ratify a bill before it can become law. The BJP included the passage of the CAB as part of its manifesto released ahead of its overwhelming electoral victory in May 2019.

Source: USCIRF

In response to unwarranted and inaccurate comments by USCIRF on Citizenship Amendment Bill, the MEA set the record straight.



**Ministry of External Affairs
Government of India**

Attributable to the Official Spokesperson :

"The Statement made by the USCIRF on the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill is neither accurate nor warranted. The Bill provides expedited consideration for Indian citizenship to persecuted religious minorities already in India from certain contiguous countries. It seeks to address their current difficulties and meet their basic human rights. Such an initiative should be welcomed, not criticized by those who are genuinely committed to religious freedom.

The CAB does not affect the existing avenues available to all communities interested in seeking citizenship from doing so. The recent record of granting such citizenship would bear out the Government of India's objectivity in that regard.

Neither the CAB nor the National Register of Citizens (NRC) process seeks to strip citizenship from any Indian citizen of any faith. Suggestions to that effect are motivated and unjustified. Every nation, including the United States, has the right to enumerate and validate its citizenry, and to exercise this prerogative through various policies.

The position articulated by USCIRF is not surprising given its past record. It is, however, regrettable that the body has chosen to be guided only by its prejudices and biases on a matter on which it clearly has little knowledge and no *locus standi*."

Source: @MEAIndia

After exploring the prejudices, biases, lack of data and transparency, manipulation, and misinterpretation, it becomes evident that the USCIRF can be categorized as an 'organization of particular concern.'

Case Studies

Numerous instances worldwide highlight double standards and selective approach adopted by organizations and individuals while reporting on different countries. These indices may impact perception on countries including India. In this section, we illustrate the case of global indices - Freedom in the World Index by Freedom House, V-DEM indices by the Varieties of Democracy Institute.

Freedom House

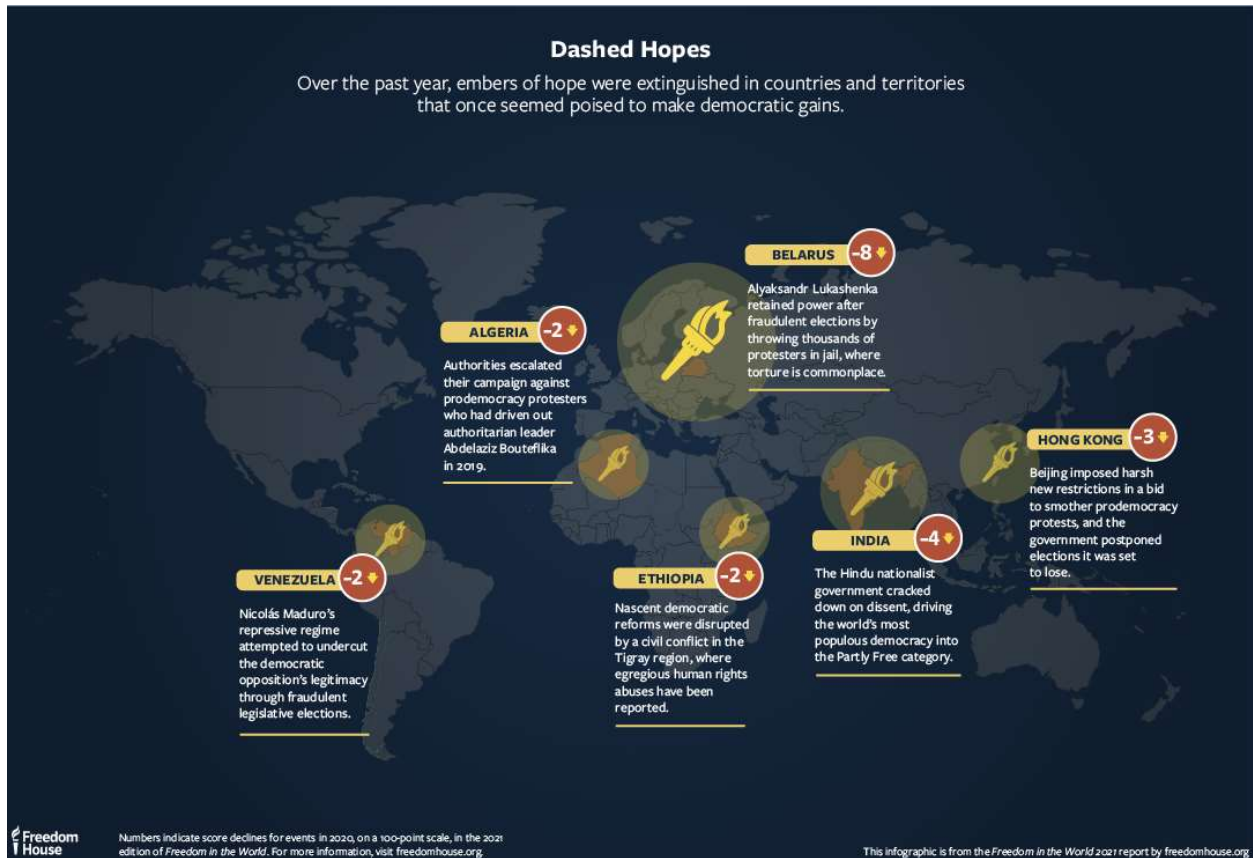


Freedom House (FH) is an organization that was formally established in New York in 1941 with the primary objective of advocating for American involvement in World War II and combating fascism.

An assessment of FH's methodology has brought to light significant disparities between the organization's stated principles and practical application of its criteria. FH frequently references Article 19 of Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which proclaims, "...everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression." As a result, in principle, the freedom of information is considered a fundamental human right that every nation should protect. Nevertheless, upon closer examination, it becomes apparent that Freedom House's assessment methodology does not conform to universal nature of this human right or role of the State as its guardian. Instead, it tends to portray it as an individual right primarily influenced by economic factors.

In a research paper titled "Media Freedom Indexes in Democracies: A Critical Perspective Through the Cases of Poland and Chile", author Ewa Sapiezynska and Claudia Lagos wrote about FH methodologies and said "FH's methodology, far from evaluating freedom of expression, focuses on freedom of the press and even more so on the freedom of private media owners, in detriment to the rights of journalists and ignoring citizens, the holders of the right to freedom of expression.

Its questionnaire seeks to discover, in the first place, the extent to which states "interfere" in freedom of private media companies, physical attacks, legal and governmental constraints against journalists. Restrictions on freedom of expression, information, or communication in the media by private actors – and not just the state – are included, but minimally and with scant weight in methodology."



Source: Freedom House

In January 2021, FH released a report titled, “Democracy Under Siege.” Focusing specifically on India, the report highlighted purported erosion of political rights and civil liberties since Narendra Modi assumed reins as Prime Minister in 2014.

As per the report “There has been a noticeable increase in pressure on human rights organizations, along with a rise in the intimidation of academics and journalists. Disturbingly, incidents like large-scale attacks and lynchings, often targeting Muslims, have been on the rise. This decline in democratic values and freedoms only intensified after Modi's re-election in 2019.”

Further the report said, “During the COVID-19 pandemic, the government imposed a sudden lockdown in the spring, resulting in millions of migrant workers in cities left without employment or basic resources. Under Modi's leadership, India seems to have veered away from its potential as a global democratic leader, instead prioritizing narrow Hindu nationalist interests over its foundational values of inclusion and equal rights for all.”

Citing these alleged arguments, outfit categorizes India in a partly free section in terms of internet freedom. Issues flagged in the report have little and nothing that relate to freedom of press. There was no lynching of journalists or media professionals nor muslims targeted. Freedom House’s antipathy for Prime Minister Narendra Modi comes out ‘loud and clear’ and

not lack of 'press freedom'. Similarly, attacking democratic credentials of India seem to have been done with a purpose. Here again, changing perception about India and derailing the country's economic growth and development story seems to be the unstated objective.

The extent to which certain institutions disseminate misleading propaganda becomes apparent when we consider the stance on press freedom. While one particular institution asserts that US boasts highest level of press freedom, a contrasting perspective emerges from Columbia Journalism Review (CJR). In 2021, this reputable source highlighted deeply concerning trends surrounding the safety and freedom of journalists. Press Freedom Tracker's data for that year revealed a distressing increase in number of physical assaults on journalists, surpassing the cumulative count of such incidents from 2017 to 2019. This surge in violence against journalists is undeniably a cause for grave concern.

Furthermore, the Tracker documented a significant uptick in cases involving damage to journalists' equipment, exceeding the combined reports from 2017 to 2019. Equally disconcerting is the data that shows 59 documented arrests or detentions in 2021 nearly matched total number of such cases recorded in 2017 - 19. These disheartening statistics underscore the intensifying threats and challenges faced by journalists in their pursuit of reporting, emphasizing the urgent need for more robust safeguards for press freedom.

In response to the 'Democracy Under Siege' report, which asserts that India's status as a free country has declined to be 'partly free,' the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting in India issued a comprehensive rebuttal. In this rebuttal, the government systematically addressed each of the allegations, vehemently characterizing the report as 'misleading,' 'incorrect,' and 'misplaced.'

This is evident from the fact that in the veil of ranking and index institution spreading a motivated, manipulated and fabricated narration showcase the discriminatory behaviour of FH.

Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem)



The V-DEM rankings originate from Varieties of Democracy Institute, headquartered at University of Gothenburg in Sweden. The V-DEM report

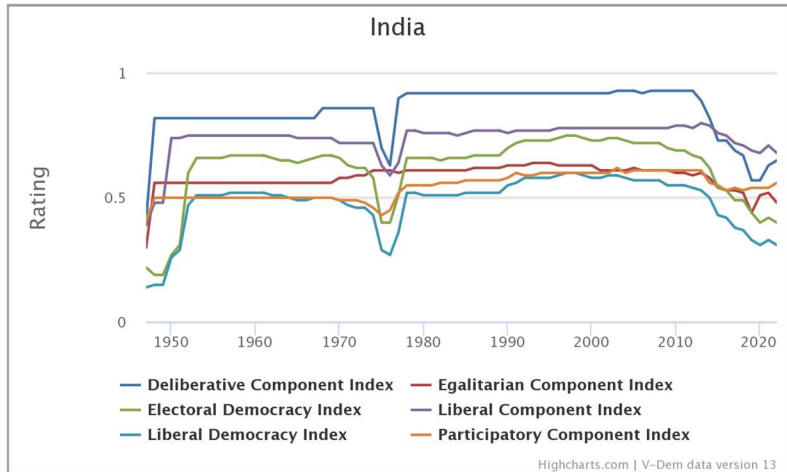
features a range of indices including Liberal Democracy Index, Electoral Democracy Index, Liberal Component Index, Egalitarian Component Index, Participatory Component Index and Deliberative Component Index.

All of these indices encompass various sub-components, generated from diverse array of variables including factual and evaluative indicators sourced from expert ratings.

However, a significant challenge arises due to the inherently subjective nature of the questions, making it exceptionally challenging for experts to provide objective responses. This subjectivity, in turn, complicates cross-country comparisons.

Below are illustrative questions directed at experts:

1. Does the government directly or indirectly attempt to censor the print or broadcast media?
2. Is political power distributed according to social groups?
3. How centralized is legislative candidate selection within the parties?
4. Is there self-censorship among journalists when reporting on issues that the government considers politically sensitive?
5. Of the major print and broadcast outlets, how many routinely criticize the government?



Claims in the report are as follows. India's performance on various V-DEM indices has exhibited a consistent decline since 2014, leading to its downgrade to an 'Electoral Autocracy' in 2021. Specifically, this decline is evident in four key indices: the Liberal Democracy Index, Electoral Democracy Index, Liberal Component Index, and Deliberative Component Index.

For instance, the score on Liberal Democracy Index plummeted from 0.567 in 2013 to 0.357 in 2021 while Electoral Democracy Index saw a decline from 0.695 to 0.444 during the same period.

Additionally, Deliberative Component Index decreased from 0.885 to 0.605 and Liberal Component Index slipped from 0.806 to 0.744. These downward trends in scores have correspondingly resulted in a decline in India's rank across these four categories.

On the other hand, the scores on the remaining two indices, the Egalitarian Component Index and Participatory Component Index, remained relatively stable during this time frame.

As we delve deeper into intricacies of indices and sub-indices, a closer examination reveals that India performs admirably in objective parameters including proportion of population with suffrage and share of direct popular votes. However, a decline has been reported in categories primarily reliant on 'expert opinion.'

Year	Deliberative Component Index	Electoral Democracy Index	Liberal Component Index	Liberal Democracy Index
2013	0.886	0.663	0.798	0.534
2014	0.823	0.624	0.786	0.499
2015	0.727	0.542	0.756	0.426
2016	0.727	0.532	0.748	0.417
2017	0.688	0.49	0.723	0.376
2018	0.674	0.488	0.712	0.37
2019	0.574	0.436	0.689	0.331
2020	0.572	0.404	0.68	0.31
2021	0.629	0.42	0.714	0.332
2022	0.647	0.399	0.679	0.306

Source: V-Dem Database

India's scores in critical areas have seen a noticeable decline from 2013 to 2021 as per V-Dem report. For instance, in the 'Freedom of Expression and Alternate Information' category, the score dropped from 0.882 to 0.598.

This category assesses aspects like self-censorship among journalists on politically sensitive matters and media bias against opposition parties.

In the 'Clean Election Index,' India's score diminished from 0.785 to 0.552, focusing on the autonomy of the Election Management Body and the prevalence of repression, intimidation, and violence against opposition candidates and campaign workers. Finally, the 'Deliberative Component Index' showed a decline from 0.885 to 0.605, evaluating the breadth and independence of public deliberations during significant policy changes and the transparency of political elites in justifying their positions. These shifts warrant attention, emphasizing the need for continued scrutiny and efforts to uphold democratic values and freedom of expression.

The analysis of V-DEM reports indicated a selective approach, where media articles appear to have been cherry-picked, leading to judgments being formed on this biased basis.

Concluding Observation

In recent years, India's standing on global opinion-based indices focusing on subjective aspects like democracy and freedom have waned. This paper has scrutinized reports from vocal think-tanks. Notably, both Freedom in the World Index and V-DEM indices have placed India on par with the era of the 1970s Emergency raising legitimate questions about their credibility.

Upon closer examination of these reports, it's startling to find that India's ranking falls even below that of Northern Cyprus or Islamic Republic of Pakistan. However, dismissing these indices as mere opinions is not an option, as they indirectly influence tangible factors like the WGI, which, in turn, affects sovereign ratings. Moreover, given the increasing emphasis on utilizing ESG indicators for investment and trade, these indices are poised to gain even more significance.

This paper highlights significant issues with methodology employed in these perception-based indices. Primarily, rankings assigned by agencies rely on viewpoint of a small, un-identified group of "experts." The lack of transparency regarding selection criteria or expertise of these individuals raises substantial concerns about credibility of these indices.

Questions in the assessments are intrinsically subjective, often framed in a way that hinders objective responses. The uniform administration of these questions does not automatically render the scores comparable, a fact substantiated by the paper's numerous examples demonstrating arbitrary nature of these rankings and indices.

Some questions within these indices are not universally suitable for measuring democracy across nations. A prime illustration is the 'Direct Popular Vote' sub-index in V-DEM, centered on the question, "To what extent is the direct popular vote utilized?" This query however disregards the practicality of implementing a system of direct referendums or votes in large countries like India, making it an inappropriate yardstick. Paradoxically, even countries such as Afghanistan garner more than zero scores in this sub-index.

The methodologies employed in these perception-based indices are fundamentally flawed. Given that these indices serve as inputs into the World Governance Indicators, it is imperative for governments and experts to insist for enhanced levels of transparency and accountability from these institutions.

Now is the reasonable moment to challenge the dominance of a select few institutions. Truly independent and impartial think tanks should take the initiative to develop and present independent indices for the global order.

References

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1769572>
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UH5qw_rjRI
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9131786/>
<https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1907187>
<https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1868103>
<https://www.niti.gov.in/index.php/deciphering-world-press-freedom-index>
<https://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/data/pdfdoc/20051031995.htm>
<https://pure.eur.nl/en/publications/when-theory-meets-practice-critical-reflections-forom-the-field-o>
https://traf.gov.in/sites/default/files/CP_21092023.pdf
<https://thedisinfolab.org/manipur-unrest/>
<https://cihs.blog/2022/06/15/state-of-religious-minorities-in-india/>
<https://x.com/MEAIndia/status/1653423963119439874?s=20>
<https://www.uscirf.gov/news-room/releases-statements/uscirf-raises-serious-concerns-and-eyes-sanctions-recommendations>
<https://x.com/MEAIndia/status/1204322008495837184?s=20>
<https://freedomhouse.org/about-us/our-history>
<https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/292158733_Media_Freedom_Indexes_in_Democracies_A_Critical_Perspective_Through_the_Cases_of_Poland_and_Chile
<https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2021/democracy-under-siege>
<https://www.cjr.org/analysis/2021-press-freedom-prior-restraint-arrests.php>
<https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1702697>
https://v-dem.net/documents/19/dr_2022_ipyOpLP.pdf
https://v-dem.net/data_analysis/CountryGraph/

CIHS | Centre for Integrated and Holistic Studies

Centre for Integrated and Holistic Studies (CIHS) is an non-partisan, independent, research think tank headquartered in New Delhi, India. It is committed to bringing innovative ideas to the society, fostering informed public debate, promoting good policy and programme formulation. Ultimately, enhancing individual decision-making on some of the world's most pressing issues.

