The latest edition of the Democracy Index spells gloom for India. The world’s biggest democracy slipped 10 places in the 2019 global ranking to 51st place.

About the study

- The report, “A year of democratic setbacks and popular protest”, published on Wednesday by The Economist Intelligence Unit — the research and analysis division of The Economist Group, which is the sister company to The Economist newspaper — records how global democracy fared, analysing 165 independent states and two territories.

India’s performance on the Index

- India’s overall score fell from 7.23 to 6.9, on a scale of 0-10, within a year (2018-2019) — the country’s lowest since 2006.
- India was graded in electoral process and pluralism (8.67), government functioning (6.79), political participation (6.67), political culture (5.63) and civil liberties (6.76).
- In the Asia and Australasia region, India ranks eighth, behind Taiwan and Timor-Leste.

Reasons given for India’s low score

- The survey attributes the primary cause of “the democratic regression” to “an erosion of civil liberties in the country”.

- The report talks about the repeal of both Article 370 and Article 35A and how ahead of the move, “the government deployed a large number of troops in J&K, imposed various other security measures and placed local leaders under house arrest, including those with pro-India credentials.”
“The government also restricted Internet access in the State,” it notes. It says the NRC exercise in Assam excluded 1.9 million people from the final list, and that “the vast majority of people excluded from the NRC are Muslims.”

On the CAA, the report says, “The new citizenship law has enraged the large Muslim population, stoked communal tensions and generated large protests in major cities.”

The Index also categorises India under “flawed democracies”, countries that hold free and fair elections and where basic civil liberties are respected, but have significant weaknesses in aspects of democracy, such as problems in governance, an underdeveloped political culture and low levels of political participation.

According to the report, there are only 22 “full democracies” as compared to 54 “authoritarian regimes” and as many “flawed democracies,” that include the U.S.

Global score

The average global score also recorded its worst value ever, down from 5.48 in 2018 to 5.44, driven by a sharp regression in Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa, a lesser one in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, and by stagnation in the remaining regions that were covered.

Almost one-half (48.4%) of the world’s population live in a democracy of some sort, although only 5.7% reside in a “full democracy”, down from 8.9% in 2015 as a result of the US being demoted from a “full democracy” to a “flawed democracy” in 2016.

The total score of some 68 countries declined from 2018, but almost as many (65) recorded an improvement. Thailand registered the biggest improvement in score owing to an election in March 2019, which was the first since the military coup d’état in May 2014, while China registered
the greatest decline as discrimination against minorities, especially in Xinjiang, intensified, and digital surveillance of the population continued apace.

- The report describes the year in Asia as one filled with “drama and tumult,” with Hong Kong being the epicentre of protest in the continent. Globally, “the sheer number of protests spanning different time zones” caught the attention of commentators everywhere, says the report, topped by Norway (9.87) and followed by Iceland, Sweden and New Zealand. North Korea (1.08) figures at the bottom.

About Economist Intelligence Unit

- The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) is a British business within the Economist Group providing forecasting and advisory services through research and analysis, such as monthly country reports, five-year country economic forecasts, country risk service reports, and industry reports.

- The EIU provides country, industry, and management analysis worldwide and incorporates the former Business International Corporation, a UK company acquired by its parent company in 1986. The EIU has several offices across the globe including two offices in China and one in Hong Kong.

Publications:

1. E-readiness rankings
2. Global Liveability Ranking
3. Quality-of-Life Index
4. Democracy Index
5. CHAMPS (China)