

World Press Freedom Index

Journalism is considered the fourth pillar of democracy. Therefore, the presence of journalistic freedom in the country, is to a large extent, required for democracy to work properly. Journalists have the power to question the government. Unlike the opposition parties, journalists ideally don't need to have any hidden agenda. Their task is to show the truth, no matter how bitter it seems.

It is necessary to keep a close watch on the health of media and journalism around the world. This is where the WPF Index comes in. It compares the state of the press in around 180 countries, and ranks them according to how much freedom a journalist has in the countries. This ranking system is what we call the World Press Freedom Index.

What Is the World Press Freedom Index?

It is the brainchild of Reporters Without Borders (RSF) that took birth in 2002. The main purpose of this index is to examine how free a country's press is. It mainly evaluates three things-

- **Pluralism of the press.** In other words, the index examines whether a country's media organisations have varied leanings or whether they lean towards a particular paradigm.
- **Independence of the press.** In other words, the index examines whether a country's press is stopped from reporting the truth.
- **Legislative framework.** In other words, the index tries to examine if the government of a country is actively threatening the media, by employing predatory laws and activities. Basically, the index tries to know how safe a journalist is in a country.

The World Press Freedom Index, an important topic for the IAS Exam, has gained a status of importance over a period of time. It is one of the dependable measurements of press freedom across the world. The ranking of the country can be a source of major diplomatic embarrassment or pride for the governments of the 180 countries concerned. That is why you'll see that many government mouthpieces across the world are actively trying to discredit the WPF Index.

India's Rank In World Freedom Index

India has been steadily ranking dismally in the World Press Freedom Index. In fact, it had slipped down to rank 142 in 2020 from 140 in 2019. In 2021, India once again ranked 142.

The dismal score of India is attributed to the recent violence against journalists. In 2021, four journalists were killed and seven journalists had been imprisoned in the country, till the time this survey was conducted.

The World Press Freedom Index is not just an index of media independence. It is a diplomatic tool. The ranking in the index can bring a lot of international shame to the country concerned. Hence, the index acts as a deterrent as well.

How Is The World Press Freedom Index Created?

The organisation, Reporters Without Borders, sends out a detailed questionnaire to journalists across the world. Based on this questionnaire and on the number of abuses and acts of violence upon journalists, the organisation formulates the index. The questionnaire sent to the journalists is linked to aspects of pluralism, media independence, the overall environment in the countries, laws and legislative framework that help or hurt the press, how transparent the press and its activities are in a country, and the quality of infrastructure used by the press in a country. The score calculated based on these six aspects is called ScoA.

In addition to the questionnaire, the index also takes into account the violence against journalists in the countries under evaluation. Finally, the index gives importance to the amount of time a journalist has remained imprisoned in a country. The score calculated on the basis of this seventh aspect is called ScoB.

The country that receives the lowest overall score is ranked #1.

The Nature of Questionnaire Sent To Journalists

Although the questions sent to journalists belong to the six categories mentioned above, they take into account a large number of things that happen in the country.

The questions are mostly choice-based. Journalists are asked a question, and then they are given a measurement from 1 to 10. Based on the question, they have to choose one of the numbers - 1 being the lowest intensity and 10 being the highest intensity. Some questions are also in the form of a Yes or No choice.

Here are three examples of questions asked in the 2016 survey-

- Does the government in the country actively monitor journalistic content put up by independent news reporters on the internet?
- Whether a journalist who is arrested is made aware of the charges against, and whether she has access to the case file.
- Whether the government distributes its ads equitably among the media organisations. What this question wanted to know was whether the government paid ad money only to certain sections of the media.