

A COMPARATIVE STUDY ON PRESS FREEDOM: THE INTERNATIONAL SCENARIO

Yamini Taneja*

ABSTRACT

All over the world, democratic freedom is offered to the citizens and their right to speak is protected. Every nation offers to its citizens the freedom of expression as one of the fundamental rights, considered good for the health of a democracy. This is also supposed to be a powerful tool to strengthen the democracy. Since, press or media is known to be the forth pillar of a democracy, its freedom has to maintain at any cost. This right, of course is subject to legislative framework of the nation of the citizen. However, the degree of press freedom keeps on varying based on the social, political, administrative and other factors. Literacy, economic development and legislative situations can decide how much freedom the citizens can avail. Globally we find different degrees of this right in different countries at different times. Current study is an effort in finding out the degree of press freedom available in various countries internationally.

Keywords: Freedom, Index, Press.

Introduction

Wikipedia defines the term freedom of press as the principle that communicates and expresses through various mediums, including printed and electronic media, especially published materials, should be considered a right to be exercised freely. Such freedom implies the absence of interference from an overreaching state; its preservation may be sought through constitutional or other legal protections. The United Nations' 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights states: "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference, and to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any media regardless of frontiers".

Freedom of expression is vital for the success of a democratic setup. In modern age, with the development of communication media, the expression has become vibrant. Communication tools such as TV, News paper and social media has brought revolution in the ability to express. Citizens' voice directs the government of a country to set its policies and planning in almost every part of the globe. However, in some special situations, the right to express may be withdrawn completely or partially by a government in the interest of the nation. Such withdrawal may intend to suppress people's voice to stop them from opposing the actions of the government, which is not good for in democracy. Numbers of instances are there in the history when restrictions on media and press have been imposed. The subject has been a point of discussion and analysis for many academicians and researchers,

* Advocate, District Court, Karkardooma, Shahdara, Delhi, India.

Objectives of the Study

- To understand the concept of Press Freedom Index to rate the level of freedom
- Comparing the press freedom available in various countries of the world

Review of Literature

Accordingly, **McQuail (2005)** maintained that, in liberal democracies, the press freely operates within spectrum of law, but conflicts still occur in relations with government and with the powerful institutions.

Akkerman (2005) while referring the religious freedom found that they are better 'replaced' by the freedom of expression which is seen as a more central concern to modern democracy.

Kohnert (2006) observes that, pluralism of private radio stations which regarded as agents of cultural change facilitate the promotion of democracy at local level through public discourse and political communication.

Markandey Katju (2011), in his article in *The Hindu* observed that the importance of the freedom of the press lies in the fact that for most citizens the prospect of personal familiarity with newsworthy events is unrealistic. In seeking out news, the media therefore act for the public at large. It is the means by which people receive free flow of information and ideas, which is essential to intelligent self-governance, that is, democracy.

The **Leveson (2012)** report revealed cases in which individual citizens' rights and their freedom of expression were indeed curtailed by the media practices defended in the name of press freedom.

Worldwide Press Freedom Index

Every year, 'Reporters Without Borders' a French NGO, establishes a subjective ranking of countries in terms of their freedom of the press. Press Freedom Index list is based on responses to surveys sent to journalists that are members of partner organizations of the RWB, as well as related specialists such as researchers, jurists and human rights activists. The survey asks questions about direct attacks on journalists and the media as well as other indirect sources of pressure against the free press, such as non-governmental groups.

Research Method

This paper has utilized the report of the RWB on Press Freedom Index which has surveyed 180 countries around the world in 2018. The data has been divided in two categories; countries with top index ranking and the countries with worst ranking. The degree of freedom available to journalists in 180 countries is determined by pooling the responses of experts to a questionnaire devised by RSF. This qualitative analysis is combined with quantitative data on abuses and acts of violence against journalists during the period evaluated. The criteria evaluated in the questionnaire are pluralism, media independence, media environment and self-censorship, legislative framework, transparency, and the quality of the infrastructure that supports the production of news and information.

Interpretation

Table-1 contains the countries which are at the top of freedom index worldwide. In order to confine the list, the countries with ranking up to 20 index points, or less than 21 index points have been included.

**Table 1: Press Freedom Index-2018
(Countries with top ranking)**

S. No	Country	Press Freedom Index (from top to bottom ranking)
1	Norway	7.63
2	Sweden	8.31
3	Netherlands	10.01
4	Finland	10.26
5	Switzerland	11.27
6	Jamaica	11.33
7	Belgium	13.16
8	New Zealand	13.62

9	Denmark	13.99
10	Costa Rica	14.01
11	Austria	14.04
12	Estonia	14.08
13	Iceland	14.10
14	Portugal	14.17
15	Germany	14.39
16	Ireland	14.59
17	Luxembourg	14.72
18	Canada	15.28
19	Australia	15.46
20	Uruguay	15.56
21	Surinam	16.44
22	Samoa	16.69
23	Ghana	18.41
24	Latvia	19.63
25	Cyprus	19.85
26	Namibia	20.24

The table shows that the first five countries are Norway, Sweden Netherlands, Finland and Switzerland. Norway has been at the top position for 11 times in all 16 rankings conducted so far. During the period of 2007 to 2012 also Norway was on the first position.

Britain and America could secure only 40th and 45th ranks respectively.

India's place is at 138, just one step above Pakistan, which falls at 139th position among total 180 countries in the world.

Among the countries with poor index marks, only last 20 countries names have been included in table-2.

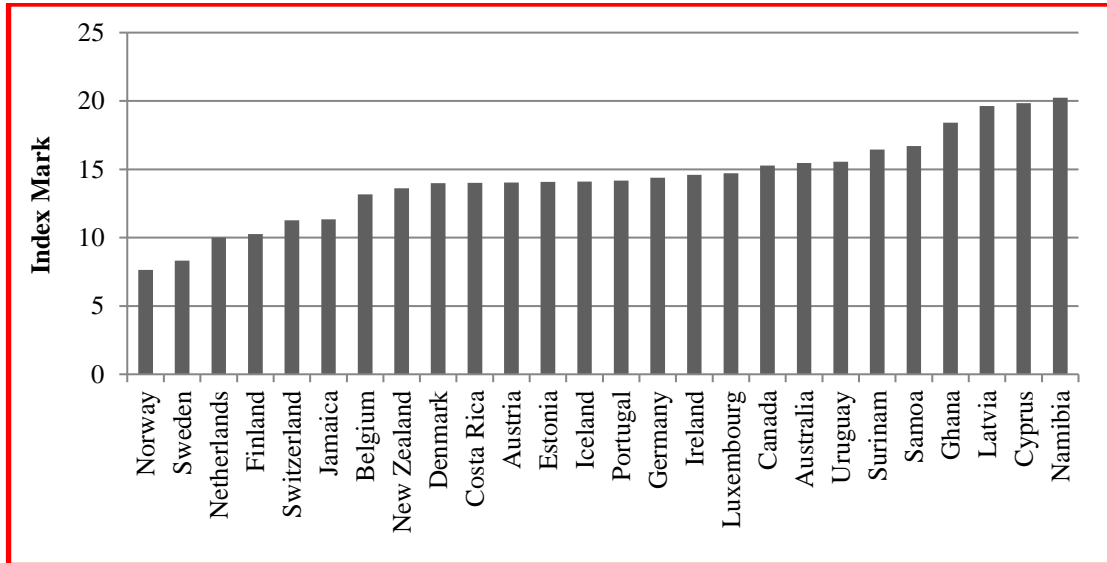
**Table 2: Press Freedom Index
(Countries with Worst Ranking)**

S. No	Country	Press Freedom Index (from Top to Bottom Ranking)
1	Egypt	56.72
2	Libya	56.79
3	Azerbaijan	59.73
4	Iran	60.71
5	Uzbekistan	60.84
6	Bahrain	60.85
7	Yemen	62.23
8	Somalia	63.04
9	Saudi Arabia	63.13
10	Laos	66.41
11	Equatorial Guinea	66.47
12	Cuba	68.90
13	Djibouti	70.77
14	Sudan	71.13
15	Vietnam	75.05
16	China	78.29
17	Syria	79.22
18	Turkmenistan	84.20
19	Eritrea	84.24
20	North Korea	88.87

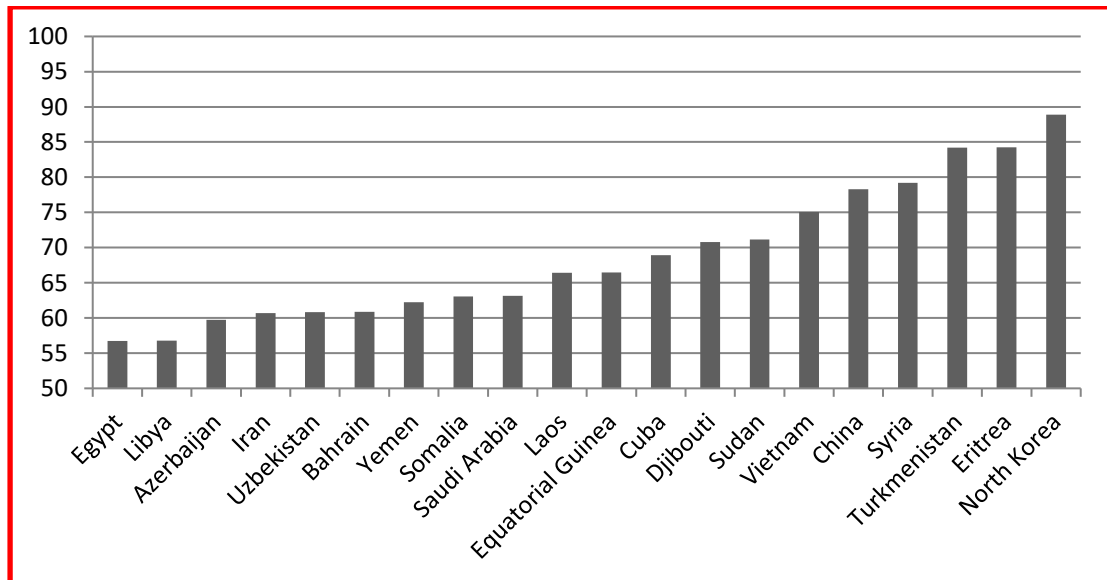
Source: Press Freedom Index Report (Reporters without Borders, France)

To enhance clarity, the tabulated data have been presented here using a bar graph.

**Graph 1: Press Freedom Index
(Graphic Conversion of Table 1)**



**Graph 2: Press Freedom Index
(Graphic Conversion of Table 2)**



Observations

Following observations have been made out of this comparative study:

- Most countries with good index ranking are developed ones.
- Though the above two observations are noticeable, there is no high correlation between the development of the country and the level of press freedom.
- Norway has secured a remarkable position in press freedom ranking for most of the years.
- Size of the country also does not have significant relation with the freedom index.
- India stands at 138th place which reflects a poor ranking.

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