

Why India is being ranked disappointingly and what have we done to change that standing in global rankings?

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Why India is faring in most global ratings at the lower end year after year for some years? Since these ratings are viewed as yardstick for development and democracy, can we afford to ignore them or allege conspiracies behind the exercise? The number of global rankings are proliferating of-late. All kind of agencies are taking to them as some kind of toolkit for control and command in global political supremacy. There are more than thirty different such global ratings by different agencies, mostly from USA, UK, Switzerland and Germany. The UN agencies like UNDP, and World Bank, IMF are involved directly or indirectly and at one point or other in coming up with these global rankings. These agencies include not only well known academic institutes, but also stakeholder activists and even public relation agencies. They are directly prompting global rankings.

These ratings are often in conflict with what the Government of India contends. From all these it is obvious that India's claims, data being put out by the Govt sources and research bodies are not taken credibly and not considered on face value. I have critically analysed some 33 global ratings in my recent book, "The Emperors Mirror. State of Research in India (Speaking Tiger 2024). A brief summary of a chapter in that book is presented here for an understanding of general public.

Even the rankings of India by the U N sustainable development goals (SDGs) are disappointing as the most global indices are. For 2023 India stands in SDG at 112 which was below Bhutan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka. And India has fallen nine positions in the last five years. It even indicated that the country faces challenges on nine critical goals, including potable water. These SDGs of UN are arrived after prolonged consultation and consensus by the member countries unlike in the case of the countries covered by global index.

What should be intriguing is that despite pioneering standing of India in statistics and research few decades ago including in guiding many countries and even the UN, Today locally generated data including the govt data and research is not taken on face value. Even our own pioneering initiatives in ranking independently outside the govt are not taken seriously. not one or two but more than a few examples like the PEE, Citizen Report, Social Report, ASER, NeHS, and even the example of india Today magazine more than twenty years ago were not considered as seriously by the govt as these global index are. . These research initiatives in India were with public service concern not to influence or control or homogenise markets as the global indexes tend to.

Table a

S.No	Global Index	India Rank in 2023 and the number of countries covered
1	Environmental Performance	180/180
2	Press Freedom	161/180
3	Happiness	126/143
4	Gender Gap	127/146
5	Human Development	134/193
6	Inequalities	123/161
7	Human Freedom	109/165
8	Liveability	Mumbai and Delhi, 141/173
9	Hunger	111/125
10	Corruption	93/180
11	Rule of Law	79/142
12	Food Security	68/113

As the table shows the number of countries covered range anywhere between 110 to 190 from one index to another. This number is decided by the agency on its own obviously on the basis of the compatible data it is able to gather from the country covered. In most of the global index india's rank is not even midway, it is much below in many cases and humiliatingly below many neighbours whose development otherwise is nowhere comparable to india on vital statistics. Even more wondering is that over the decade the impression many global index have spread is that India has declined in its growth path including on its democratic traditions, just the opposite of what the Govt has been claiming consistently. . What does this trend reveal? Either the Govt is bluffing its people or the global agencies together are positioning India adversely. Endowed with high standing professionals, research institutes and even academic bodies of global standing, the Govt has failed in unfolding the potential of India.

Table. B

Year	Democracy Index (by EIU)	Liberal Democracy Index (LDI) (by V-DEM)	Economic Freedom Index (EFI) (BY Heritage Foundation)	Corruption Perception Index (by Transparency International)
2015	35/167	–	128/178	76/168
2016	32/167	–	123/178	79/176
2017	42/167	70/174	143/180	81/180
2018	41/167	81/178	130/180	78/180
2019	51/167	85/179	129/180	80/180
2020	53/167	90/179	120/180	86/180
2021	46/167	97/179	121/184	85/180
2022	46/167	93/179	131/177	85/180
2023		104/179	126/184 (2024)	93/180

The govt seems dithering conveniently as the occasions call at home and abroad as to the very relevance of most of the global ratings. In the last two years twice the President of the country and more than twice the Prime Minister echoed one or other global index in support of their claims. But both formally and informally someone or other on behalf of the govt phoo phooe the ranking or tried to debunk or even influence. The urgency is not to come up with Govt sponsored ratings as a counter move to a global index but to take introspective and retrospective view with correctives at home but not in a political context or compulsion.

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