

## Religious Freedom Report 2020

### Why in news?

The US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) has released its report for 2020.

### What is the USCIRF?

- The USCIRF is an independent, bipartisan **U.S. federal government commission**.
- It was created by the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA), 1998.
- The USCIRF is dedicated to defending the universal right to freedom of religion or belief abroad.
- It monitors religious freedom violations globally and makes policy recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State, and Congress.

### What did the report say?

- In the 2020 report, the USCIRF has downgraded India as “Country of Particular Concern (CPC)”.
- It has placed India alongside countries, including China, North Korea, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan.
- [In the 2019 report, India was characterised as a “Tier 2 country”.]
- The commission recommended that the U.S. government take stringent action against India under the IRFA.
- It called on the U.S. administration to impose targeted sanctions on Indian government agencies and officials responsible for severe violations of religious freedom.

### Why did the USCIRF characterise India as a CPC?

- The USCIRF noted that India took a sharp downward turn in 2019.
- The report included the specific concerns about,
  1. The Citizenship Amendment Act,
  2. The proposed National Register for Citizens,
  3. Anti-conversion laws and
  4. The situation in Jammu and Kashmir
- The commission stated that these concerns are the reasons why it

downgraded India in the report.

### What was the Indian response?

- The Indian government repudiated the report and ridiculed the USCIRF.
- The Ministry of External Affairs had rejected the USCIRF statement as neither “accurate nor warranted”.
- It also questioned the body’s “locus standi” in India’s internal affairs.

### Will U.S. act as per these recommendations?

- Whether or not the U.S. government acts on the commission’s recommendations depends on American strategic interests.
- The U.S. has used arguments of freedom, democracy, tolerance, and transparency as tools in its strategic pursuits.
- But there is no proof of any uniform or predictable pattern of enforcement of such moral attributes.
- The process can be selective and often arbitrary in spotlighting countries.

### What is the pattern that India mirror?

- Mirroring the U.S. pattern, India selectively approaches global opinions on itself.
- It embraces the laudatory ones and rejects the inconvenient ones.
- Overall, the global reports contribute to the construction of an image of a country, and the Indian government is aware of this pattern.
- In March 2020, the Indian government told NITI Aayog to track 32 global indices and engage with the bodies that measure them, to advance reform and growth.

### What should India focus on?

- **Ambitions** - India advertises itself as a multi-religious democracy and as an adherent to global norms of rule of law.
- It also aspires to be on the table of global rule making.
- For a country with such stated ambitions, its record on religious freedom as reflected through events of the last one year is deeply disconcerting.
- **Essentials** - Reputation is important for a country’s economic development and global standing.
- But, the rule of law and communal harmony are essential for any functioning democracy.
- Religious freedom is of paramount importance, not because it is about religion, but because it is about freedom.

**Source: The Hindu**

