Varieties of Democracy Report - 2018

What is the issue?

\n\n

\n
- University of Gothenburg (Sweden) has recently published the “Varieties of Democracy Report” (V-Dem) for 2018.
\n
- The report provides the most sweeping global examination of democracy, and India has seen a downgrade in its overall status.
\n

\n\n

What is the study about?

\n\n

\n
- The study covers 178 countries, crunches a large number of indicators, and adds a deep historical perspective.
\n
- It is carried out rigorously, with a global team of 3,000 researchers with deep knowledge of local political contexts.
\n
- It's also backed by the European Union (EU) and funded by a multitude of different institutions and think tanks, ensuring a robust access to data.
\n
- The methodology involves classifying nations on a combination of variables and then checking for changes in overall democratic status.
\n
- Notably, the survey does a comparison over 2007-2017 on multiple indicators.
\n

\n\n

What are the various categories for classification?

\n\n

\n

- **Liberal Democracy -** This category is the ideal benchmark, and every citizen in such societies is guaranteed equal rights and full freedom of expression.
\n
- Further, equitable access to the law, institutionalised justice system, freedom of association, participatory elections etc., are other important metrics here.

\n
- Only 39 of the 178 nations that were studied had met these standards in 2017.
\n
- **Electoral Democracy -** In this category, all citizens have the vote but certain categories of people suffer exclusion due to their socio-economic status.
\n
- Further, lower standards (as compared to liberal democracies) apply here, when it comes to human rights, freedom of expression and association, etc.
\n
- In 2017, the V-Dem reckons 56 countries qualified for this category.
\n
- **Electoral Autocracy -** In this category of nations, all citizens have the vote but repression, censorship and institutionalised intimidation are very visible.
\n
- According to the study, in this domain too, there were 56 nations in 2017.
\n
- **Closed Autocracy -** While electoral Autocracy do have severe problems, they are still better off than countries that are classified as closed autocracies.
\n
- In a closed autocracy, the political executive is totally free of being answerable to its people, and their rule is carried out with fear and intimidation.
\n
- Notably, for residents of "Closed Autocracies", not being subjected to political persecution is a common big dream that many of them chase.
\n
- Worldwide, there were 27 such "closed autocracy nations" in 2017.
\n

\n\n

What is India's situation?

\n\n

\n

- India saw a slide in its ranking over the years as the quality of democracy has noticeably declined over the past decade (especially after 2014).
  \n
- The study notes that infringements on media freedom and the civil society activities have spiked since the “Hindu-nationalist government” took office.
  \n
- Nonetheless, India retains a system of free & fair multi-party elections and thus, qualifies as an electoral democracy.
  \n
- But it has seen major erosion in indicators such as Freedom of Expression, Rule of Law and Freedom of Association.
  \n
- The future remains uncertain, as India could get better from here, or slip further down to a situation akin to the emergency era (1975-77).
  \n

\n\n

What are the related concerns in India?

\n\n

\n

- **Media -** Censorship of the media and harassment of journalists can occur gradually through “inducements, intimidations, and co-optation”.
  \n
- These tactics would further lead naturally to increasing levels of self-censorship and fewer explicit criticisms of the government.
  \n
- The predictable result is a narrower range of political perspectives in the public sphere, as well as a general decline in the freedom of expression.
  \n
- **Other factors -** Only the “Voter's Registry” has improved over the past 10 years and other parameters have either stagnated, or deteriorated.
  \n
- This includes harassment of media, curtailment of NGOs and repression of cultural and academic expression, etc.
  \n
- Even in terms of electoral transparency, the study says that intimidation and violence have increased and that party agents harass and bribe voters.
  \n
- The murder and jailing of environmental and human rights activists and attempts to shut down alternate means of free expression have also increased.
  \n
- Further, rapidly worsening “Gini coefficient” (increasing economic

inequality) is another worrying indicator for sustaining democracy.
\n

\n\n

\n\n

Source: Business Standard

\n