

India: Human Rights

India exhibits all the characteristics of a sound democracy: an independent judiciary, a nonpolitical military, a free press, freedom of religion, regular elections, and unfettered voting rights for all citizens. Violence associated with terrorism and clashes between religious communities and between castes of different economic levels, particularly attacks on untouchables by higher-caste Hindus, are the root of many human rights violations in India.

Evidence of police torture and brutality against human rights workers continues to cause great concern; the Asian Center for Human Rights has reported that in the decade from 2001–2010 more than four persons died each day in police and judicial custody, most as a direct result of torture. India has not ratified the international Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. A bill for the Prevention of Torture is currently pending in parliament.

Freedom of the press is standard practice in India, but journalists who work in areas with armed conflict, such as Jammu and Kashmir or Chhattisgarh, do not enjoy the same freedoms and protections as those elsewhere in India. Government surveillance of the internet has intensified in recent years, and new legislation, which requires Internet companies to remove any content that is deemed objectionable by the authorities, or face prosecution, is threatening to limit online free speech. Films are subject to a censorship board, but censors are more concerned with moral content than with politics. Homosexuality was decriminalized in 2009, but recriminalized in 2013.

Human traffickers bring in women and children from Nepal and Bangladesh for sexual exploitation, and internal trafficking for forced labor, in which women and children are held in debt bondage, is a big problem. India is both a source and destination country for human trafficking, and the areas of most concern are those suffering the highest rates of poverty, including Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa, Rajasthan, and West Bengal. Determining how many people are affected by forced labor and sexual exploitation is nearly impossible; most NGOs place the number in the tens of millions. Insufficient enforcement of existing laws, which includes the Immoral Traffic Prevention Act, allows the problem to persist, as does corruption.

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