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Freedom in the World 2017 - Indian Kashmir

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Freedom Status: Partly Free

Aggregate Score: 50 (0 = Least Free, 100 = Most Free)

Freedom Rating: 4.0 (1 = Most Free, 7 = Least Free)

Political Rights: 4 (1 = Most Free, 7 = Least Free)

Civil Liberties: 4 (1 = Most Free, 7 = Least Free)

Quick Facts

Population: 12,540,000

OVERVIEW

Control of Kashmir has been divided between India and Pakistan since 1948. In Indian-administered Kashmir, both separatist and jihadist militants have waged a protracted insurgency against the government. The state enjoys substantial autonomy under Article 370 of India's constitution. Competitive elections are held, but they have often been marred by the threat of violence and other flaws. Indian security forces are frequently accused of human rights violations and effectively enjoy broad impunity under the law. Curfews, newspaper bans, and internet and mobile phone blackouts are routinely imposed during times of unrest.

Key Developments in 2016:

- Chief Minister Mufti Mohammad Sayeed died in January. He was succeeded in April by his daughter Mehbooba Mufti, president of the ruling People's Democratic Party, making her the state's first female chief minister.
- There was a dramatic increase in violence after security forces killed a popular separatist militant leader in July. Protests and strikes over the subsequent months resulted in the imposition of prolonged curfews, media censorship, and internet and mobile phone outages.
- A militant attack on an Indian army base in September led Indian forces to launch "surgical strikes" on Pakistani targets across the Line of Control (LoC).

Executive Summary:

After several years of relative stability, the situation in Indian-administered Kashmir deteriorated sharply in the second half of 2016. In July, security forces killed Burhan Muzaffar Wani, a 22-year-old separatist militant leader who was active on social media and enjoyed broad popular support. Months of protests and clashes with police ensued, during which about 90 civilians reportedly died. The use of birdshot – lead pellets fired from shotguns – by security forces was also blamed for thousands of injuries, many of them resulting in blindness. Curfews were imposed in parts of the state, limiting freedom of movement and other civil liberties.

At the same time, internet services and mobile phone connectivity were suspended, printing of newspapers was briefly disallowed, and public transportation came to a standstill. Schools remained shut for extended periods. In October, the state government drew heavy criticism for prohibiting the publication of a local English-language newspaper, the *Kashmir Reader*, on the grounds that it carried incendiary content. The ban was lifted in December.

With the sharp drop-off in tourism, the region's economy suffered. In addition, panchayat (local council) elections scheduled for 2016 were postponed until 2017. In September, Khurram Parvez, an activist who was set to deliver a report on abuses in Kashmir to the UN Human Rights Council, was prevented from leaving India without explanation. He was then detained without charge under the Public Safety Act until a court ordered his release in November.

In September, four militants crossed the LoC and launched an attack on Indian army brigade headquarters in the town of Uri; 18 Indian soldiers were killed. Suspecting Pakistani involvement, India retaliated in a series of "surgical strikes" across the LoC. A total of 267 civilians, security personnel, and militants were killed in militant-related violence in 2016, compared with 174 deaths in 2015.

The annual Amarnath Yatra – a major Hindu procession – was repeatedly suspended in July for security reasons. In September, Hindu-Muslim clashes erupted in Rajouri district and a curfew was put in place after a man was beaten based on false suspicions that he had slaughtered a cow.

Explanatory Note:

This territory report has been abridged for *Freedom in the World 2017*. For background information on political rights and civil liberties in Indian Kashmir, see [Freedom in the World 2016](#).

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