



Custodial Torture and Need for Police Reforms

For Prelims: [Custodial Torture](#), Human Rights, [Custodial Deaths](#), [Article 21](#), [IPC](#), [CrPC](#).

For Mains: [Custodial torture and Custodial Deaths](#), Technology and Interrogation, Measures to avoid custodial deaths, Policing and Police Reforms in India

[Source: IE](#)

Why in News?

The **Status of Policing in India Report, 2025** by Lokniti-CSDS and Common Cause (an NGO), based on **inputs from 8,276 police personnel** across 17 States/UTs, reveals the continued **acceptance of custodial torture and coercive methods** within the police.

- These insights highlight the urgent need for **institutional police reforms** to curb abuse and uphold constitutional rights.

What are the Key Findings of CSDS Survey on Custodial Treatment by Police?

- **High Acceptance of Custodial Violence:** 63% of police personnel **justified violence against suspects of serious crimes** like rape and murder.
 - Even for minor offences such as theft, **30% supported third-degree methods**.
- **Institutional Endorsement of Torture:** 42% of police personnel **strongly supported torture in terror cases**, and 28% for history-sheeters.
 - **25%** of police personnel **justified mob justice** in cases like **sexual assault or child abduction**, while 22% supported **extra-judicial killings of "dangerous criminals"**.
 - While **74%** believed that **legal procedures should be followed** even when dealing with dangerous criminals, only **41% reported consistent adherence to arrest protocols**.
 - **Kerala recorded the highest compliance, with 94%** affirming that legal norms are always observed during arrests.
- **Ambivalence Towards Mandatory Reporting:** 39% of police personnel **supported mandatory reporting of custodial torture**, while **41% favoured it only in select cases**, reflecting conditional accountability.
 - **Station-level officers were more supportive of reporting** than seniors.
- **Reform Readiness:** 79% of police personnel **support human rights training and anti-torture mechanisms**, with **over 75% willing to report custodial violence if protected legally**, and **79% supported evidence-based interrogation techniques** indicating strong internal demand for reform and accountability.
- **Legal Safeguards vs Ground Reality:** Despite legal safeguards under **Article 21** and the SC guidelines in **D.K. Basu vs State of West Bengal, 1997 case**, custodial norms are **routinely violated**.
 - **Magistrates' inaction, unqualified medical checks, and NHRC's limited**

powers highlight institutional gaps, while **zero convictions in custodial death cases (2018-2022)** reveal deep impunity.

What is Custodial Torture?

Click Here to Read: [Custodial Torture](#)

What are the International Conventions Against Custodial Torture?

Click Here to Read: [International Conventions Against Custodial Torture](#)

Why is There a Need for Police Reforms in India?

- **Overburden & Manpower Shortage:** India has only **155.78 police personnel per 100,000 people**, well below the **UN norm of 222**. High vacancy rates at **West Bengal (39.42%), Mizoram (35.06%), Haryana (32%)** worsen the burden.
 - Officers work **16-18 hours a day**, with **83.8% reporting high stress**, affecting efficiency, response time, and case quality.
 - They also handle multiple roles like **VIP security and election duties**, often with **low pay and little rest**, increasing burnout and chances of corruption.
- **Politicization & Weak Accountability:** **Police autonomy** is often compromised by political interference with **72% of Delhi police officers** reported facing political pressure in investigations (Status of Policing in India Report).
 - Misuse of laws like **sedition** against journalists, activists, and minorities weakens the **rule of law and public trust**.
 - Excessive force during protests (e.g., **CAA-NRC, farmers' protests, 2023 wrestlers' protest**) and **669 custodial deaths (2017-2022)** reflect growing **militarization** and raise serious **human rights concerns**.
- **Inadequate Training:** Most states lack proper training infrastructure, with a **low proportion of trained personnel** as highlighted by the **CAG**. **Weapon training is outdated**, and police are rarely trained in modern techniques like **cybercrime investigation** or **forensic science**.
 - India has only **0.33 forensic experts per 0.1 million people**, compared to **20-50 in developed countries**, hampering scientific investigations.
 - Limited **gender sensitivity training** further weakens justice delivery in cases of **domestic violence, sexual assault, and trafficking**.
- **Outdated Infrastructure:** Many police stations lack **modern surveillance tools and digital case management systems**. As of 2022, there was **only one computer per 11 police personnel**, with some states having **just one per 30 officers**.
 - Police forces still rely on **outdated weapons and manual record-keeping**, making it difficult to address **cybercrime, terrorism**, and other emerging threats effectively.
- **Public Trust Deficit and Gender Imbalance:** Community policing initiatives like **Janamaithri (Kerala)** and **Mohalla Committees (Maharashtra)** are exceptions rather than the norm, limiting grassroots engagement.
 - **Marginalized communities** like dalits and minorities often view the police as **discriminatory and unapproachable**, reducing trust and cooperation.
 - Women constitute only **11.75% of the police force (MHA)**, despite rising crimes against women, **discouraging reporting** and affecting the **sensitivity and effectiveness** of responses to gender-based violence.

Police Reforms in India



CONSTITUTIONAL STATUS

- Police and Public Order: State subjects (7th Schedule)



NEED FOR REFORM

- Colonial Law
- Custodial Death
- Lack of Accountability
- Political Interference
- Poor Gender Sensitivity
- Communal/Caste Bias
- No Anti-Torture Law



RELATED DATA

- Police-People Ratio:** 153 police/100,000 people (Global benchmark: 222 police /100,000 people)
- Custodial Deaths:** 175 in 2021-2022 (as per MHA)
- Women's Share:** 10.5% of entire force (India Justice Report 2021)
- Infrastructure:** 1 in 3 police stations is equipped with CCTV (India Justice Report 2021)



IMPORTANT COMMITTEES/COMMISSION



RELATED INITIATIVES

- SMART Policing** (pan-India)
- Automated Multimodal Biometric Identification System (**AMBIS**) (Maharashtra)
- Real Time Visitor Monitoring System** (uses **AI and blockchain**) (Andhra Pradesh)
- CyberDome** (Tech R&D Centre) (Kerala)



CHALLENGES WITH POLICING

- Low Police-Population Ratio
- Political Superimposition
- Unsatisfactory Police-Public Relations
- Infra Deficit
- Corruption
- Understaffed/Overburdened

WAY FORWARD

- ↑ Police Budget, Resources
- ↑ Recruitment Process
- Implement Measures to Reduce Corruption
- ↑ Skills of Policemen
- Better Representation (Women, Minorities)



What Steps Should be Taken to Reform the Police System?

- Reducing Workload:** Address police shortage through **fast-track recruitment and increased funding**.
 - A **fixed 2-year minimum tenure**, as per the SC directives in [Prakash Singh Case, 2006](#), will improve efficiency and reduce political interference.
- Ensuring Autonomy and Depoliticization:** Implement the [State Security Commission \(SSC\)](#) to **protect police from political interference**, as recommended by the National Police Commission.
 - Empower the **Police Establishment Board (PEB)**, per the [Ribeiro Committee](#), to

- manage transfers and promotions independently.
- Replace the outdated [Police Act, 1861](#) with the [Model Police Act \(2006\)](#) to ensure legal backing for reforms.
- **Infrastructure Modernization:** Adopt **AI-driven policing**, big data analytics, and drone surveillance for smarter crime control.
 - Expand the [Modernization of Police Forces \(MPF\) scheme](#) to invest in **CCTV networks, forensic labs, GPS-enabled vehicles, and body cameras**.
 - Strengthen **cybercrime units** as per the [Padmanabhaiah Committee](#), and implement the **NHRC's 2021 directive** on night-vision CCTV in police stations to boost accountability.
- **Specialization and Functional Division:** As per the [Malimath Committee](#), **investigation and law-and-order duties** should be **separated** and a **specialized crime investigation cadre for complex cases** should be formed.
 - It also recommended that **confessions made before a senior police officer be admissible as evidence**, with safeguards against coercion.
- **Community Policing and Trust Building:** Adopt **community policing models** as per the [Model Police Act \(2006\)](#) and [NHRC guidelines](#). Scale up successful initiatives like **Janamaithri Suraksha** (Kerala) and **Mohalla Committees** (Maharashtra).
 - Appoint **social workers and psychologists** in police stations to handle sensitive cases. Promote **regular public-police interactions** to build trust, especially in marginalized communities.
- **Gender Sensitization:** Implement **33% reservation for women in police, all-women police stations** in each district, and **female presence in all stations**.
 - Mandate **gender sensitization training** and provide supportive facilities to improve retention.
- **Judicial Coordination and Reform:** **Digitize FIRs, link police records with e-courts, and fast-track undertrial cases** as recommended by the [Malimath Committee](#).
 - Appoint **liaison officers** and expand plea bargaining to **cut delays and ensure timely justice**.
- **Capacity Building:** Set up a **Police Training Advisory Council (PTAC)** to modernize training with focus on **forensics, human rights, and technology**. Include **soft skills and citizen interface modules**.
 - Encourage **higher education through scholarships** and enable **cross-agency training** with **CBI, NIA, and IB** for professional growth.

Conclusion

Police reforms are crucial for building a **responsive, professional, and people-centric policing** system in India. Implementing **long-pending recommendations, ensuring autonomy, leveraging technology** can transform law enforcement. A reformed police force is essential for **safeguarding democratic values, ensuring justice, and upholding the rule of law**.

Drishti Mains Question:

Why are police reforms necessary in India? Suggest key measures to improve policing.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Q.1 Instances of the President's delay in commuting death sentences have come under public debate as a denial of justice. Should there be a time specified for the President to accept/reject such petitions? Analyse. (2014)

Q.2 The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) in India can be most effective when its tasks are adequately supported by other mechanisms that ensure the accountability of a government. In light of the above observation assess the role of NHRC as an effective complement to the judiciary and other institutions in promoting and protecting human rights standards. (2014)

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