



Revamping India's Police System

This editorial is based on “[Law and disorder: States must spend more on adequate police forces](#)” which was published in The Business Standard 18/03/2025. The article brings into picture the alarming 21% vacancy rate in India's police forces, resulting in severe understaffing that weakens law and order, endangers public safety, and hampers economic growth.

For Prelims: [Police Act of 1861](#), [Malimath Committee](#), [National Police Commission](#), [Smart Policing](#), [Community Policing](#), [Model Police Act](#), Ribeiro Committee, Padmanabhaiah Committee

For Mains: Policing and Police Reforms in India, Key Issues Associated with Policing in India

India's security-governance architecture faces critical challenges with **over 21% vacancies in state police forces**, making it severely under-policed. This shortfall is most pronounced in states notorious for poor law and order, with **West Bengal, Mizoram, and Haryana** reporting the highest vacancy rates. The **inadequate policing** not only endangers public safety, particularly for vulnerable populations, but also impedes economic growth by creating unfavorable conditions for small and medium enterprises that constitute the backbone of India's economy.

How has the Evolution of Policing and Police Reforms in India Taken Shape over Time?

- **Colonial Foundations and the [Police Act of 1861](#):** The modern Indian police system was established under the Police Act of 1861, designed by the British to maintain colonial control rather than serve the public.
 - It created a **centralized and hierarchical force that prioritized law and order over community service**.
 - This **framework** remains dominant today, making police forces more accountable to the government than to citizens.
- **Post-Independence Reforms (1950s-1970s):**
 - After independence, India retained the colonial policing structure, leading to inefficiencies, corruption, and public distrust.
 - The **Gore Committee (1971)** recommended a shift towards professional, service-oriented policing.
 - The **[National Police Commission \(1977-1981\)](#)** proposed key reforms like separating law and order from investigation and ensuring fixed tenures for officers.
 - However, these recommendations faced political and bureaucratic resistance, limiting their implementation.
- **1990s-2000s- Supreme Court Interventions & Major Committees:**

- With rising crime, communal violence, and political interference, calls for police reforms intensified.
- The **Ribeiro Committee (1998)** and the **Padmanabhaiah Committee (2000)** reinforced earlier recommendations, advocating for independent oversight bodies, modern training, and community policing.
- The **Malimath Committee (2002-2003)** pushed for specialized forensic capabilities and a Central Law Enforcement Agency for federal crimes, but most reforms remained unimplemented.
- The **Supreme Court's Prakash Singh judgment (2006)** directed states to implement crucial reforms, including the establishment of State Security Commissions, fixed tenures for senior officers, and the separation of investigation from law and order.
- **Recent Developments and Need for Modernization (2010s-Present)**
 - As policing challenges evolve with **cybercrime, terrorism, and organized crime, modernization efforts have gained momentum.**
 - Initiatives like **Smart Policing (2015)** leverage AI, data analytics, and community engagement.
 - The **Modernization of Police Forces (MPF) Scheme** aims to improve weaponry, forensic labs, and cybercrime units.
 - The **Model Police Act (2006)** and **NHRC recommendations (2021)** emphasize autonomy, accountability, and surveillance measures.
 - However, the absence of deep structural reforms continues to hinder policing efficiency.

What are the Key Issues Associated with Policing in India?

- **Acute Shortage of Personnel:** India faces a severe shortage of police personnel, leading to excessive workloads and poor law enforcement.
 - The UN recommends **222 police officers per 100,000 people**, but India has only **154.84 per 100,000**, far below global standards.
 - High vacancies further exacerbate this issue—**West Bengal (39.42%), Mizoram (35.06%), and Haryana (32%)** have some of the worst vacancy rates.
 - This affects not just crime prevention but also response time, investigation quality, and public trust.
- **Overburdened and Underpaid Police Force:** The shortage of personnel forces existing officers to work **16-18 hours a day**, leading to stress, inefficiency, and compromised policing.
 - Many officers **juggle multiple roles—from law enforcement to election duties**—without adequate rest or fair compensation.
 - **Low pay** discourages professionalism and increases susceptibility to corruption, affecting public trust.
 - Also a recent survey showcased that the **majority of the police personnel had high and very high levels of stress (83.8%)**, affecting performance and mental health.
- **Politicization and External Influence:** Political interference in police operations has eroded professionalism and independence.
 - **Frequent transfers, pressure to act against political opponents**, and misuse of investigative agencies have weakened law enforcement credibility.
 - The **arbitrary use of sedition laws** and **targeted arrests of activists and journalists** highlight how policing is often dictated by political interests rather than the rule of law.
 - For instance, a **2019 report in Delhi stated that 72% of police officers have experienced political pressure** while investigating cases.
- **Militarization of the Police and Excessive Use of Force:** The police often resort to excessive force, especially in handling protests and civil unrest.
 - The use of **tear gas, rubber bullets, and baton charges** on protesters has drawn criticism, particularly during farmers' protests and CAA-NRC demonstrations.
 - This **undermines public confidence** and raises concerns over human rights violations.
 - The **2023 wrestlers' protest saw forceful removal of peaceful demonstrators**, drawing national and international condemnation.

- A total of **669 cases of death** in police custody were registered across the country in the last five years from **April, 2017, to March, 2022**, highlighting a significant issue.
- **Inadequate Training and Outdated Policing Methods:** Many police personnel lack proper training in **modern crime-solving techniques, forensic science, and cybercrime investigation**.
 - This results in poor investigations, wrongful arrests, and case backlogs. There is also insufficient training on **handling gender-sensitive cases**, affecting justice for victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, and trafficking.
 - According to the CAG, **most states have a very low percentage of trained police officers**.
 - The audit also noted flaws in weapon training as well as a lack of adequate training infrastructure.
 - Also, even with so many opportunities in the field of criminalistics in India, **there are only 0.33 forensic scientists per 0.1 million population whereas** the foreign countries have 20 to 50 scientists per 0.1 million population, coupled with inadequate training of police officials, make the issue even more severe.
- **Weak Community Policing and Public Trust Deficit:** There is a **lack of proactive community engagement**, making the police force seem distant, intimidating, and unapproachable.
 - Many marginalized communities—**Dalits, Adivasis, and minorities**—often **fear** rather than trust the police due to past experiences of discrimination and brutality.
 - Without stronger community ties, intelligence gathering and crime prevention remain weak.
 - Despite rising urbanization, **community policing initiatives like "Janamaithri" in Kerala or "Mohalla Committees" in Maharashtra** remain exceptions rather than norms.
- **Slow Modernization and Outdated Equipment:** Many police stations lack **basic forensic tools, surveillance technology, and cybercrime tracking mechanisms**, making it hard to tackle modern crimes.
 - Even in large cities, **outdated weapons and inadequate protective gear** make police vulnerable in critical situations, including terror threats.
 - **Many police stations** still rely on manual paperwork instead of digital case management systems.
 - A recent report found that **there was just one computer/laptop for 11 state police personnel** in the country, with some large states having just one system for 30 or more personnel in 2022.
- **Underrepresentation of Women in Police Forces:** Despite rising crimes against women, gender representation in policing remains dismal.
 - There are just **11.75% women in the police forces in the country** despite the central government's repeated efforts to enhance the strength of the women
 - This lack of representation **discourages** women from reporting crimes and leads to inadequate handling of gender-based violence cases.

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)



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What Measures can be Adopted to Enhance Policing in India?

- **Addressing Manpower Shortage and Workload Reduction:** The acute shortage of police personnel must be tackled through **fast-track recruitment**, better working conditions, and increased budgetary allocations.
 - Implementing a **two-year minimum tenure for police officers**, as directed in the **Prakash Singh case**, can reduce political interference and improve efficiency.
- **Depoliticization and Ensuring Police Autonomy:** Implementing the **State Security Commission (SSC)**, as recommended by the **National Police Commission (NPC)**, can insulate police forces from undue political interference.

- The **Police Establishment Board (PEB)**, as suggested by the [Ribeiro Committee](#), should be empowered to handle transfers and promotions independently.
- Amending the **Police Act, 1861**, in line with the **Model Police Act (2006)**, can legally establish these reforms.
- **Modernizing Police Infrastructure and Equipment:** Police forces must transition from **outdated weaponry and paper-based systems** to **tech-driven policing**, including AI-based predictive policing, big data analytics, and drone surveillance.
 - The **Modernization of Police Forces (MPF) scheme** should be expanded with targeted spending on **CCTV surveillance, forensic labs, body cameras, and GPS-enabled patrol vehicles**.
 - **Upgrading cybercrime cells**, in line with the **Padmanabhaiah Committee's recommendation**, is crucial to tackle increasing online frauds and digital crimes.
 - Implementing the **NHRC's 2021 directive** to install **CCTV cameras with night vision in all police stations** will enhance accountability and reduce custodial torture.
- **Specialization and Separation of Investigation from Law & Order:** In line with the **Malimath Committee's recommendations**, police stations should have **separate wings for investigation and law-and-order management** to improve efficiency.
 - The creation of a **specialized crime investigation cadre** can help officers focus on complex cases like financial frauds, organized crime, and cybercrimes.
 - Training modules should be **updated to incorporate forensic science, legal procedures, and digital investigation techniques**.
 - **Reviving the beat policing system**, as suggested by the **Padmanabhaiah Committee**, can improve grassroots intelligence gathering and crime prevention.
- **Community Policing and Public Trust Building:** Bridging the trust deficit between police and citizens requires **community policing models**, as suggested by the [Model Police Act \(2006\)](#) and **NHRC recommendations (2021)**.
 - Initiatives like **Kerala's Janamaithri Suraksha Project** and Maharashtra's **Mohalla Committees** should be expanded nationwide.
 - **Recruiting social workers and psychologists** in police stations can aid in handling sensitive cases, such as domestic violence and juvenile crimes.
 - Regular **public-police dialogues and outreach programs** can improve relations and enhance trust among marginalized communities.
- **Gender Sensitization and Increasing Women in Policing:** Enhancing **women's representation** in police forces to the **33% target**, as recommended by the **Padmanabhaiah Committee**, is critical for ensuring gender-sensitive policing.
 - Establishing **all-women police stations in every district** and mandating the presence of female officers in every police station will improve crime reporting by women.
 - **Mandatory gender sensitization training**, as suggested by the **NHRC**, should be part of police education. Providing **childcare facilities, flexible working hours, and separate restroom facilities** can improve retention rates among female officers.
- **Judicial-Police Coordination and Reducing Undertrials:** Poor coordination between police and judiciary leads to **case backlogs, delays, and wrongful detentions**.
 - In line with the **Malimath Committee's recommendations**, **digitization of FIRs, e-court integration, and fast-tracking undertrial cases** should be prioritized.
 - Establishing **police-judiciary liaison officers** in every district can facilitate better case tracking and evidence management.
 - **Expanding plea bargaining mechanisms** can help reduce undertrial populations and ensure faster justice delivery.
- **Reforming Police Training and Capacity Building:** A **national-level Police Training Advisory Council (PTAC)**, as suggested by the **Padmanabhaiah Committee**, should oversee training curricula to ensure **modern crime-fighting techniques, forensic science, human rights laws, and technology-driven policing**.
 - Police academies should incorporate **soft skills training** to improve public interaction and sensitivity towards marginalized communities.
 - **Incentivizing higher education and specialization in policing**, through **scholarships for advanced criminology and forensic courses**, can improve professional standards.
 - **Cross-agency training with CBI, NIA, and IB** can help state police improve their counterterrorism and intelligence-gathering capabilities.

Conclusion

Addressing India's policing crisis requires urgent **structural reforms, improved recruitment, and depoliticization to ensure efficiency and public trust**. Strengthening **technological capabilities, modernizing training, and implementing community policing** can bridge gaps in law enforcement. **Gender inclusivity, accountability mechanisms, and autonomy** are critical for a people-centric policing model.

Drishti Mains Question:

“Police reforms in India have been a long-pending necessity, yet implementation has remained slow due to political, bureaucratic, and structural challenges”. Suggest measures to ensure a more accountable and efficient police system.

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