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Need for Police Reform and Suggestions in Contemporary India

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Abstract

Despite being the world's largest democracy, India continues to maintain a policing system deeply influenced by its colonial past. Enacted in 1861, the Indian Police Act was designed to serve the interests of imperial rule and suppress dissent. Over seven decades after independence, this archaic framework still shapes much of Indian policing today. With increasing reports of custodial deaths, torture, political interference, public fear, and a glaring absence of transparency and accountability, the urgency of police reform has become more pronounced than ever. Numerous expert committees, judicial verdicts, and civil society voices have echoed the need for structural, legislative, and cultural reform in Indian policing. This paper attempts a comprehensive academic evaluation of the current policing system in India. It traces its colonial origins, explores systemic and operational deficiencies, and evaluates reform initiatives. Additionally, it draws on global best practices and comparative models to propose actionable and context-sensitive reforms. The overall aim is to suggest how India's police force can transition from being a coercive state apparatus to becoming a democratic service institution committed to rule of law, justice, and public trust.

Keywords: *police reform, Indian Police Act, custodial violence, Prakash Singh case, political interference, accountability, community policing, democratic governance, public trust*

1. Introduction

India's policing system is arguably one of the most paradoxical in the democratic world. It functions at the intersection of constitutional mandates and colonial legacies, caught in the tension between preserving order and respecting rights. Although the Constitution of India enshrines liberty, equality, and dignity, the actual interface most citizens have with the state is through the police, an institution still viewed with suspicion, fear, or resignation.

In recent years, multiple high-profile incidents have amplified the demand for meaningful police reform. The custodial deaths of P. Jeyaraj and Bennicks in Tamil Nadu (2020), the Hyderabad "encounter" of rape suspects (2019), and countless unrecorded acts of police excess have sparked national and international concern (Fathima, 2025; Rai, 2023). Surveys suggest that around 44% of Indian citizens fear being physically assaulted by the police (Common Cause & CSDS, 2018). Equally alarming is the politicization of police transfers, impunity in custodial deaths, and the frequent public perception that the police are a tool of political interests rather than protectors of rights.

Despite several Supreme Court directives (notably *Prakash Singh v. Union of India*, 2006), parliamentary committee reports, and the drafting of the Model Police Act (2006), meaningful reform has remained elusive. The gap between recommendations and implementation continues to widen. This paper unpacks these challenges systematically: it begins with a historical overview, then explores institutional weaknesses, assesses legal frameworks, compares international models, and finally proposes an actionable roadmap for reform.

2. Historical Evolution and Colonial Legacy

2.1 Genesis of the Indian Police Act, 1861

The current framework of Indian policing is built upon the Indian Police Act of 1861. This legislation was introduced immediately after the 1857 Revolt, known in colonial terminology as the "Sepoy Mutiny," which shook the foundations of British imperial authority. The British Crown, recognizing the volatility of native resistance, decided to consolidate its coercive apparatus, especially the police.

The 1861 Act aimed not at community service or justice delivery but at maintaining law and order through centralized control and strict discipline. British colonial administrators regarded the police as an "instrument of domination," not as a public service. They were tasked primarily with surveillance of nationalist activities, collection of intelligence, and suppression of dissent (Rahman, 2024). The force was hierarchical, rigid, and authoritarian. Indian

officers were kept at lower levels, while decision-making and command remained with British officers. Racial distrust was woven into the fabric of administration.

The Indian Police Commission of 1902-03, ironically appointed by the colonial government itself, admitted that "the police force is far from efficient; it is defective in training and organization; it is inadequately supervised; it is generally regarded as corrupt and oppressive" (Joshi, 2005). This statement remains hauntingly relevant over a century later.

2.2 Militarization, Obedience, and Psychological Distance

The colonial model emphasized physical dominance. Recruitment criteria prioritized physical height, chest measurement, and obedience over education or empathy. "Brawn over brain" was not just an idiom, it was the policy. Training focused on drill, parade, and loyalty rather than law, rights, or public service. Police constables were often trained to obey orders without questioning. This culture of blind obedience has persisted well into post-independence India (Kaura, 2019).

Psychologically, the colonial police saw themselves as a force separate from and superior to the people. Policing was not about cooperation; it was about enforcement. The "thana" (police station) was a symbol of fear, not recourse. This distancing from the public is one of the most enduring legacies of colonial-era policing and continues to characterize citizen-police interaction in modern India.

2.3 Post-Independence Continuity

One might have expected that with independence in 1947, India would discard its colonial administrative legacy and forge a new path grounded in democratic values. However, the newly independent Indian state chose continuity over reform, especially in policing.

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, India's first Home Minister, advocated for the preservation of the Indian Civil Services, including the police, to maintain administrative stability. He believed that the same bureaucratic apparatus that served the British could be redirected to serve a democratic state. While expedient, this decision postponed the much-needed democratization of the police system.

Although several states passed their own Police Acts, such as the Bombay Police Act (1951) and Kerala Police Act (1960), they retained the essence of the 1861 framework. They maintained centralized control, allowed political executive supremacy over transfers and appointments, and lacked public accountability mechanisms (*Prakash Singh v. Union of India*, 2006).

Notably, many of these state Acts even worsened the colonial model. Political interference deepened, especially in appointments and transfers, and corruption became institutionalized in a way the colonial masters might not have foreseen.

2.4 The Structural Legacy Today

Today, most Indian police forces are still governed by the Indian Police Act, 1861, or its state-level clones. The structural characteristics, hierarchical command, centralized control, lack of community oversight, absence of institutional accountability, remain largely untouched.

The result is a paradox: a democratic republic being policed by a colonial skeleton. While the personnel may have changed, and while the Constitution provides a rights-based framework, the operating ethos of the police force remains rooted in imperial priorities. Until this structural contradiction is resolved, reform efforts will face serious limitations.

3. Systemic Challenges in Contemporary Indian Policing

As India grows more complex, demographically, technologically, and socio-politically, its policing system struggles to keep pace. The persistence of structural flaws, cultural stagnation, and operational deficits results in a law enforcement system that often fails both citizens and officers alike. The following sections analyze the core contemporary challenges undermining effective and democratic policing in India.

3.1 Accountability Failure and Legal Impunity

A defining characteristic of modern Indian policing is its near-absence of accountability. Officers who engage in misconduct, including torture, unlawful detention, or even custodial killings, are rarely held responsible. Legal provisions that were meant to shield officers from frivolous prosecution have evolved into shields of impunity.

Section 197 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) is often cited as the most significant roadblock to prosecuting police officers. It mandates prior government sanction before initiating legal proceedings against a public servant for acts done in the course of official duty. However, in practice, even egregious misconduct, including acts of torture or extrajudicial killings, are shielded by this clause (Fathima, 2025).

A closer look at the data is revealing. According to statistics released by the Ministry of Home Affairs, between 2017 and 2022, 669 custodial deaths occurred in India. In these cases, disciplinary action was recommended by the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) in just one instance (Rai, 2023). In the remaining cases, either monetary

compensation was granted or the matter was quietly closed. No legal deterrent seems to exist for extreme violations of fundamental rights.

Departmental inquiries, often led by senior officers from the same force, lack independence and transparency. Internal vigilance bodies tend to operate with the primary aim of protecting the force's image rather than upholding justice. Suspension, transfer, or temporary demotion are the most common outcomes, and these are rarely proportional to the harm inflicted. This tolerance of misbehavior normalizes brutality and erodes both public trust and institutional integrity.

3.2 Custodial Torture and “Encounter” Killings

The use of excessive force is not merely an unfortunate by-product of stressful policing, it is often institutionalized. Torture is routinely employed to extract confessions or coerce victims into silence. Despite laws and judgments prohibiting such acts, third-degree methods remain common across India's police stations, particularly in rural and semi-urban settings.

The infamous case of P. Jeyaraj and his son Bennicks in Tamil Nadu's Thoothukudi district (2020) is emblematic. Arrested for a trivial lockdown violation, they died within 72 hours in police custody. Autopsy reports and eyewitness accounts confirmed brutal sexual torture and beating. National outrage followed, and the case was handed to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), but few systemic changes emerged thereafter (Bhatnagar, 2022).

India also has a long and controversial history of “encounter” killings, wherein suspects are killed during alleged shootouts or while “attempting to escape.” These are widely seen as extrajudicial executions disguised as spontaneous acts of self-defense. The 2019 Hyderabad “encounter” involving four rape-accused men is a case in point. While public opinion was largely in favor of the police action, human rights groups condemned it as a failure of the justice system (Cheatham & Maizland, 2022).

These patterns reflect a justice system where legal procedures are bypassed for populist effect. The message is chilling: courts are slow, justice is unreliable, and “instant justice” through bullets is a viable alternative. Not only does this erode the rule of law, it also encourages vigilante attitudes within the police.

India's failure to ratify the United Nations Convention Against Torture (UNCAT) further underscores its reluctance to bring national laws in line with international standards. While the Law Commission and various parliamentary committees have recommended a standalone anti-torture

legislation, political will remains conspicuously absent (Joshi, 2005).

3.3 Politicization and Arbitrary Transfers

Political interference in policing is arguably one of the most corrosive factors undermining institutional credibility and operational integrity. Officers are often transferred based not on performance but political convenience. The arbitrary nature of transfers creates an environment in which officers understand that loyalty to the ruling dispensation may matter more than upholding the rule of law.

The Supreme Court's landmark judgment in *Prakash Singh v. Union of India* (2006) attempted to address this issue by mandating fixed tenures for key officers (like DGPs and SPs). Yet, compliance remains poor. Many states have inserted vague exceptions in their police acts, allowing premature transfers under the banner of "administrative exigency" (Indian Express Explained Desk, 2021).

In 2021, revelations from Maharashtra's intelligence department uncovered a "transfer racket" where officers allegedly paid bribes or lobbied with political middlemen to secure favorable postings. Similar scandals have surfaced in Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, and Rajasthan over the past decade. Such trends reinforce the belief that integrity and merit are less valued than political expediency.

Politicization also extends to the operational level. Police are frequently accused of turning a blind eye to crimes involving ruling party members while cracking down disproportionately on opposition workers or protestors. This selective enforcement of law undermines not only public faith in the police but the very idea of justice.

3.4 Public Mistrust and the Fear of the Police

The idea that police are feared rather than respected in India is borne out by data. According to the Status of Policing in India Report (2018), 44% of respondents admitted that they were afraid of approaching the police, fearing physical abuse, humiliation, or false implication (Common Cause & CSDS, 2018). Among women, this fear extends to apprehensions of sexual harassment. Marginalized groups, particularly Dalits, Adivasis, and Muslims, report even higher levels of anxiety and suspicion.

This fear is not irrational. Numerous documented cases have shown how police stations become spaces of coercion rather than justice. Victims of crimes often report being dissuaded from filing FIRs, being blamed for their own victimization, or even being re-victimized during the investigative process.

Anecdotes abound: a Dalit woman in Uttar Pradesh being refused entry into a police station because she "was unclean," a young Muslim man in Delhi falsely

accused during a riot, a tribal laborer in Chhattisgarh stripped and beaten for "stealing electricity", these are not isolated incidents but symptoms of deep-rooted structural bias and apathy.

Police behavior is often transactional and driven by power equations. Wealthy complainants are treated with courtesy and prompt action, while the poor are ignored or harassed. Many citizens believe that unless one has political clout or money, the police will not act, or worse, will act against them. This perception erodes trust and prevents citizens from relying on police for basic protection or justice.

3.5 Training Deficiencies and Work Overload

Recruitment and training patterns in India still reflect outdated priorities. The minimum eligibility criteria for constables in many states remains Class 10 or Class 12 education, and entrance tests emphasize physical stamina over intellectual or ethical aptitude. As Kaura (2019) observed, drill, parade, and obedience dominate the curriculum, while subjects like human rights, conflict de-escalation, or criminal law receive little attention.

Training infrastructure is often underfunded and poorly staffed. Trainers themselves may not be updated on legal developments or best practices. Modern challenges, like cybercrime, forensic documentation, or handling protest situations, require specialized knowledge, which most personnel do not receive.

In-service training, too, is abysmally low. Between 2014 and 2019, only 6.4% of serving police officers attended refresher courses (Kaura, 2019). This means that most officers go through their entire careers without being re-trained on evolving laws, procedures, or ethical standards.

The situation is further exacerbated by chronic understaffing. With a sanctioned strength far below required levels, most constables work 12-16 hour days, often without a weekly off. The physical and mental stress of such grueling routines makes personnel more irritable, prone to error, and vulnerable to corruption. Studies have linked overwork to increased rates of misconduct and poor decision-making (Officers Pulse, 2024).

Infrastructure deficits compound the problem. Many rural stations lack basic amenities, clean toilets, drinking water, proper records storage, or functional computers. In the absence of forensic labs, vehicles, or communication tools, police are forced to rely on outdated practices, which often involve coercion and improvisation.

4. Legal and Constitutional Framework for Police Governance in India

Understanding the legal architecture that governs Indian policing is critical to diagnosing the sources of both its strengths and pathologies. Despite the detailed constitutional and statutory framework, the persistent failure to uphold core democratic values in policing often stems not from a lack of laws, but from the unwillingness or inability to implement them meaningfully.

4.1 Constitutional Location of “Police” as a State Subject

The Indian Constitution, under Schedule VII (List II), places “Police” in the State List. This means that each state has the authority to legislate on matters of policing within its jurisdiction. As a result, India has not one but multiple state-level police forces, each governed by its own legislation and operational ethos.

This arrangement is rooted in the federal principle of governance. However, in practice, it has led to significant challenges in enforcing nationwide reforms. For example, even when the Supreme Court has issued binding directives on police reform (as in *Prakash Singh v. Union of India*, 2006), states have found legal or administrative ways to bypass or dilute these orders (Indian Express Explained Desk, 2021).

Despite being a State subject, the central government continues to play a significant role in policing, especially through the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), which controls Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) such as the CRPF, BSF, and CISF, as well as the Intelligence Bureau. It also funds modernisation programs like the MPF (Modernisation of Police Forces) scheme. Nevertheless, structural reform within state police remains largely at the discretion of individual state governments.

4.2 Police Acts: The Indian Police Act (1861) and State Variants

As previously noted, the Indian Police Act of 1861 remains the governing legislation in most Indian states. Even in those states where newer police acts have been enacted, such as Kerala (2011), Bihar (2007), or Assam (2007), the reforms have often been cosmetic. The fundamental structure, which gives wide-ranging powers to the political executive over police functioning, has remained unchanged.

The key criticism of these laws is their failure to establish functional autonomy for the police. Most state police acts give the executive (i.e., the Home Minister or Chief Minister) unchecked powers to appoint, transfer, suspend, or direct senior officers. In the absence of statutory safeguards, these powers are often misused for political gain, leading to frequent arbitrary transfers, distorted enforcement priorities, and protection of loyal but unethical officers (Rahman, 2024).

4.3 The Prakash Singh Case (2006): A Judicial Blueprint for Reform

In what remains the most comprehensive judicial intervention in the domain of police reform, the Supreme Court in *Prakash Singh & Others v. Union of India* (2006) laid down seven binding directives aimed at professionalizing and depoliticizing the police force. The key directives were:

1. **State Security Commission (SSC):** To ensure that the state government does not exercise unwarranted influence over the police.
2. **Selection and Tenure of DGP:** The DGP should be selected from among three senior-most officers empanelled by the UPSC and given a fixed two-year tenure.
3. **Minimum Tenure for Officers:** Operational officers like SPs and SHOs should also have a fixed two-year tenure to prevent arbitrary transfers.
4. **Separation of Law and Order from Investigation:** To allow specialization and professional crime-solving.
5. **Police Establishment Board (PEB):** To decide transfers, postings, and promotions below the rank of SP.
6. **Police Complaints Authority (PCA):** To allow independent inquiries into complaints against police personnel.
7. **National Security Commission (NSC):** To oversee appointments and functioning of central police organizations.

These directives were meant to form the backbone of democratic policing. However, as of 2023, no state has fully implemented all the directives in both letter and spirit (Officers Pulse, 2024). In fact, many have enacted laws that appear compliant on paper but negate the reforms through loopholes or executive overreach.

4.4 The Model Police Act (2006): An Alternative Legislative Vision

Drafted by a committee led by Soli Sorabjee, the Model Police Act (2006) was an attempt to overhaul the 1861 colonial framework with democratic values and international best practices. Key features included:

- A new police mission statement focused on service delivery, rule of law, and human rights.
- Clear separation of roles between police and political executive.

- Provisions for community policing and citizen oversight.
- Establishment of accountability mechanisms through independent authorities.

However, implementation has been minimal. States have not been legally obliged to adopt this model, and most have either ignored it or adopted diluted versions. Analysts argue that strong resistance from both political and bureaucratic leaderships has stalled its adoption (Joshi, 2005).

4.5 NHRC and Other Human Rights Mechanisms

The Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993, established the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) and state-level commissions. These bodies are empowered to inquire into human rights violations, including those involving police misconduct.

While the NHRC has occasionally taken suo motu cognizance of custodial deaths or torture, its overall effectiveness is limited. Its recommendations are not binding, and it lacks prosecution powers. Additionally, its composition often includes retired police or bureaucrats, raising concerns about neutrality (Fathima, 2025).

Courts have stepped in with landmark rulings in *D.K. Basu v. State of West Bengal* (1997), where guidelines were framed for arrest and detention procedures, and *People's Union for Civil Liberties v. State of Maharashtra* (2014), which set procedural safeguards for encounter killings. However, compliance with these guidelines remains inconsistent across states.

5. Comparative Models of Democratic Policing

To reform a system that is structurally resistant to change, it is helpful to examine how other democratic nations manage their police forces. Countries like the UK, USA, and Norway offer varied but instructive models of policing centered around accountability, community engagement, and professionalism.

5.1 United Kingdom: Civilian Oversight and De-Escalation

The British model of “policing by consent” underlines that the legitimacy of police comes from the trust and cooperation of the public. The introduction of **elected Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs)** in 2012 marked a significant shift, allowing local communities to hold police accountable through democratic processes.

In addition, serious misconduct is investigated by the **Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC)**, a civilian body entirely independent from the police

force. Officers involved in shootings or deaths in custody are mandatorily investigated.

The UK also emphasizes **de-escalation and minimal use of force**. Routine officers are unarmed, and special armed units are deployed only when necessary. The training curriculum covers psychology, communication, and human rights law, preparing officers to resolve conflicts non-violently (Cheatham & Maizland, 2022).

5.2 United States: Transparency and Technology in Oversight

While the U.S. has witnessed frequent police excesses and systemic racism, especially highlighted in the Black Lives Matter movement, it has pioneered technological and institutional tools for police oversight.

- **Body-Worn Cameras (BWCs):** Mandated in many cities to ensure transparency in police-public interactions.
- **Civilian Review Boards (CRBs):** Empowered to receive complaints, conduct hearings, and recommend disciplinary actions.
- **Consent Decrees:** Federal interventions via the Department of Justice when systemic abuse is proven, often leading to court-monitored reforms in local departments.

Community policing, particularly in cities like Chicago and Boston, has evolved into long-term partnerships between officers and community organizations, with shared goals of crime prevention, especially among youth.

5.3 Norway and Scandinavia: Education-Based Professionalism

Norway represents a high-trust model of policing. All police officers are required to complete a three-year bachelor's degree from the Norwegian Police University College. The curriculum blends theoretical courses in criminology, ethics, psychology, and sociology with practical fieldwork.

Police in Norway are trained as public servants rather than enforcement agents. The use of force is minimal, and police shootings are rare. Citizens are accustomed to interacting with officers as problem-solvers, not threats. Importantly, officers are well-compensated, enjoy reasonable working hours, and have access to mental health services.

The Dialogue Police units in Sweden are tasked with handling protests and large gatherings. Their training focuses on negotiation and trust-building, with a philosophy that conflict can be minimized through dialogue rather than intimidation.

5.4 Lessons for India

While India's policing challenges are unique in scale and complexity, several takeaways from these models are applicable:

- **Independent oversight** (e.g., IOPC, Civilian Review Boards) ensures impartial investigation of misconduct.
- **Professional education and long-term training** foster a service-oriented mindset.
- **Community participation** in crime prevention and public safety enhances legitimacy.
- **Transparent policing through technology** (bodycams, online portals) reduces abuse and builds trust.
- **Decentralized accountability**, such as elected PCCs or municipal oversight boards, makes policing more responsive.

Implementing these ideas in the Indian context would require legislative will, administrative restructuring, and cultural transformation, but they are not out of reach.

6. Comprehensive Reform Agenda: A Roadmap for India

The persistence of colonial features in Indian policing, coupled with contemporary challenges such as custodial violence, politicization, and a fractured relationship with the public, demands a multidimensional and well-sequenced reform agenda. While some reforms can be implemented administratively in the short term, others require deeper legislative restructuring and political commitment over the long term.

The following section provides a framework for reform across five interlinked domains:

1. Structural and Legal Reforms
2. Professionalization and Capacity Building
3. Transparency, Accountability, and Oversight
4. Community Partnership and Public Trust
5. Diversity, Gender Representation, and Inclusion

6.1 Structural and Legal Reforms

Short-Term Goals:

- **Enforce Supreme Court Directives:** Every state should fully implement the *Prakash Singh* guidelines within a fixed timeline. This includes establishing State Security

Commissions, separating law and order from investigation, and creating Police Establishment Boards to oversee appointments and transfers (Prakash Singh v. Union of India, 2006).

- **Uniform Adoption of the Model Police Act (2006):** States should adopt a modified and updated version of the Model Police Act tailored to local needs but retaining core elements such as autonomy, accountability, and citizen focus (Joshi, 2005).
- **Mandate Minimum Tenure for Key Officers:** Legislate two-year fixed tenures for District SPs and SHOs, ensuring operational stability and shielding from political interference.
- **Scrap or Amend Section 197 CrPC:** Amend the CrPC to remove the requirement of prior government sanction for prosecuting police personnel in cases involving serious abuse of power, such as torture, custodial death, or encounter killings (Fathima, 2025).

Long-Term Goals:

- **Draft a New All-India Police Code:** Like the Indian Penal Code (1860) and the CrPC (1973), India needs a comprehensive national code governing policing principles, structures, rights, responsibilities, and oversight frameworks.
- **Establish Police Ombudsman Mechanisms:** A neutral, quasi-judicial office at the state level, independent of both the police and the executive, should be instituted to handle misconduct and policy grievances.
- **Embed Rights-Based Policing in Law:** Provisions from landmark rulings like *D.K. Basu* (1997) and *PUCL v. Maharashtra* (2014) must be codified into binding statutory law with enforcement mechanisms.

6.2 Professionalization and Capacity Building

Short-Term Goals:

- **Curriculum Overhaul:** Revise training modules at police academies to include practical subjects, digital forensics, gender sensitization, conflict resolution, and criminal procedure. Constitutional law and ethics should be core courses, not electives (Kaura, 2019).
- **Mandatory Annual Refresher Training:** Require all ranks to undergo a minimum number of hours of re-training annually,

certified by police training academies or law schools.

- **Upgrade Training Infrastructure:** Invest in simulation labs, cybercrime cells, and mock courtrooms within police academies to replicate real-world investigative and procedural challenges.

Long-Term Goals:

- **Make Graduate Education Mandatory for Entry-Level Officers:** Implement a phased requirement of a bachelor's degree for constables and sub-inspectors. Parallely, set up in-service education programs offering part-time degrees in criminal justice, sociology, or public administration.
- **Promote Career Progression Based on Learning and Integrity:** Introduce competitive written and interview-based promotions that prioritize ethics, legal knowledge, and professional conduct, not just years of service.
- **Create a National Police University Consortium:** Regional police universities should collaborate on faculty exchange, research, training development, and innovations in community engagement strategies.

6.3 Transparency, Accountability, and Oversight

Short-Term Goals:

- **Functional Police Complaints Authorities (PCAs):** Each state must appoint retired judges and independent civil society representatives to oversee complaints. PCAs must be vested with investigative staff and the power to make binding recommendations (Common Cause & CSDS, 2018).
- **Mandatory Reporting of Misconduct and Custodial Deaths:** All incidents of custodial deaths, grievous injury, or firearm use must be automatically reported to the NHRC and a magistrate for independent inquiry (Bhatnagar, 2022).
- **Annual Public Audit of Police Performance:** Every police station should release an annual performance report, detailing arrests, pending investigations, citizen feedback, and rights violations.

Long-Term Goals:

- **Legislate Whistleblower Protection for Police Officers:** Introduce laws that protect

police officers who report corruption or misuse of power from retaliation.

- **Create Civilian Oversight Boards:** At the district level, establish boards composed of retired judges, academics, lawyers, and community leaders to conduct performance reviews and hear appeals in case of unjust departmental punishments.

- **Incorporate AI-Based Monitoring Systems:** Use data analytics to track behavioral patterns of officers, such as frequency of complaints, transfer patterns, or use-of-force incidents, to trigger red-flag reviews and training interventions.

6.4 Community Partnership and Public Trust

Short-Term Goals:

- **Establish Community Policing Units:** At every police station, designate officers to lead community interaction, organizing safety meetings, crime-prevention drives, and cultural programs to humanize police presence.
- **Open House Days:** Regularly schedule "Open Days" at police stations where citizens can interact with officers informally, understand procedures, and express concerns.
- **Public Complaint Kiosks and Online Portals:** Launch multilingual digital portals and helplines that track the progress of complaints and FIRs transparently, much like consumer service centers.

Long-Term Goals:

- **Institutionalize Police-Public Liaison Committees (PPLCs):** Make these mandatory in urban areas and districts prone to communal or caste tensions. PPLCs can pre-empt conflict through regular dialogue and mediation.
- **Reward Public-Approved Stations:** Recognize and fund stations based on public satisfaction ratings. High-performing teams can be awarded monetarily or through transfers to preferred postings.
- **Document Positive Policing Stories:** State PR departments should document and circulate instances of humanitarian policing in slums, disaster relief, and women's safety. This rebalances public perception and motivates internal morale.

6.5 Gender Inclusion and Diversity

Short-Term Goals:

- **Reserve 33% of New Recruits for Women:** Fast-track recruitment of women constables and sub-inspectors in each state. Relax physical test norms (without compromising service standards) where needed.
- **Infrastructure Support for Women Personnel:** Ensure clean restrooms, changing rooms, maternity facilities, and secure lodging in police quarters to retain women in service.
- **Set Up Women's Help Desks:** All police stations should have at least one woman officer trained in counseling and sensitive interviewing, especially for cases involving sexual assault, domestic violence, or trafficking.

Long-Term Goals:

- **Ensure Representation from SC/ST/OBC and Religious Minorities:** Track recruitment patterns and ensure proportional representation. Involve local community leaders in awareness campaigns during recruitment drives.
- **Create Special Gender Justice Units:** These multi-disciplinary teams, comprising psychologists, legal experts, and trained investigators, can handle cases involving gender-based violence with greater care and professionalism.
- **Gender Sensitization as Career Milestone:** Promotion exams should include an evaluation of officers' attitudes and behavior toward gender, confirmed through community surveys and past conduct.

7. Technology and Smart Policing

In the digital age, policing must evolve beyond boots-on-the-ground to include "bytes-on-the-screen." Technology can enhance transparency, efficiency, and accountability.

Digital Documentation and Filing

- **E-FIRs and Mobile Reporting:** Citizens should be able to file FIRs or complaints remotely, especially in cases involving non-violent crimes or theft.
- **Case Tracking Apps:** An app-based interface can allow complainants to monitor their case's status, view hearing dates, and request updates.

Surveillance and Evidence Systems

- **Body-Worn Cameras:** Mandate usage in patrols, traffic duty, and during protests. Recordings should be archived and regularly reviewed by internal audit teams and PCAs.
- **CCTV in Lockups and Interrogation Rooms:** All custodial spaces must be under 24/7 surveillance. The footage must be protected against tampering and subject to monthly reviews by magistrates.

Smart Analytics and Crime Mapping

- **Hotspot Mapping:** Use predictive analytics to identify areas of frequent crime and deploy targeted patrolling. Data should be shared transparently with municipal bodies for urban planning.
- **Integrated Criminal Database:** Ensure full implementation of the Crime and Criminal Tracking Network and Systems (CCTNS) across all states and link it with court records, prison databases, and forensic labs.

8. Political Will and Implementation: The Missing Link

The recurring theme in India's police reform discourse is not a lack of ideas, blueprints, or judicial pronouncements, but the absence of political will. Even the most detailed prescriptions, such as the Supreme Court's 2006 directives or the Model Police Act (2006), have been diluted, ignored, or cynically co-opted by state governments.

8.1 Reluctance of Political Executives

Politicians often resist police autonomy because a politically pliable force offers tangible advantages, control over dissent, leverage in electoral politics, and protection for loyalists. Appointments and transfers remain powerful tools to reward allegiance and punish non-compliance. In many states, the political executive's deep control over operational policing acts as a disincentive for reform (Prakash Singh v. Union of India, 2006).

Some reforms, like fixed tenures or insulated complaints authorities, would reduce political leverage, hence, governments avoid implementing them fully. The Supreme Court has not, so far, shown sufficient readiness to enforce compliance through contempt proceedings or binding timelines, thereby enabling inaction.

8.2 Judicial Oversight Without Enforcement Teeth

Although the judiciary has played a vital role in exposing and documenting the need for police reform, its enforcement mechanisms remain limited. Once orders are issued, the onus shifts to state

bureaucracies and legislatures, many of which have no incentive to comply.

The absence of independent monitoring mechanisms, like a central body to audit compliance across states, further weakens the judiciary's influence. In contrast, countries like the U.S. have federal justice departments that can intervene in case of systemic rights violations.

9. Civil Society and Media: Catalysts for Reform

Civil society organizations, journalists, lawyers, and human rights defenders have historically played a key role in documenting abuses and pushing for reform. Organizations like Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI) and People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) have not only compiled critical data but also drafted alternative legislation, trained officers, and filed PILs in court.

Media coverage, especially investigative journalism, has been instrumental in spotlighting custodial deaths, unlawful arrests, and biased investigations. Yet, civil society often faces hostility, threats, or apathy from state actors. Human rights activists working on police brutality are sometimes framed or harassed using the same coercive tools they are trying to reform.

For police reform to succeed, the ecosystem of accountability must expand: universities, bar councils, think tanks, and training institutes must engage with policing not just as a law-and-order issue but as a pillar of constitutional governance.

10. Conclusion: A Democratic Policing Vision for India

India stands at a critical juncture. The disconnect between its democratic ideals and its coercive policing culture continues to widen. A people-centric, professional, and accountable police force is not a luxury, it is a constitutional imperative.

This paper has shown that:

- The colonial legacy continues to influence structure, mindset, and public perception.
- Systemic problems, impunity, politicization, under-training, and fear are interlinked and demand integrated solutions.
- Judicial and legislative blueprints exist, but implementation has been patchy.
- Comparative models provide valuable inspiration, particularly in areas of community policing, technology, and oversight.
- A multi-pronged reform strategy, blending short-term administrative changes with long-

term structural overhaul, is both possible and urgent.

However, for reforms to take root, mindset transformation within the force, and public pressure outside of it, must converge. Officers need to be retrained as service providers, not colonial enforcers. Citizens must stop viewing the police as untouchable or untouching. Politicians must learn to see professional policing not as a threat but as a stabilizer of democracy.

Change is difficult, but not impossible. Over the past two decades, Indian society has demanded transparency in banking, bureaucracy, and elections. It is now time to demand the same in policing.

A reformed police force, responsive to law and respectful of people, will not just reduce crime, it will deepen India's democracy itself. And that, above all, is the true promise of justice.

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