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# **RETHINKING POLICE ADMINISTRATION AND CRIME INVESTIGATION IN INDIA: BALANCING AUTONOMY, TECHNOLOGY, AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

AUTHORED BY - MIMANSA MITTAL

## **Abstract**

This paper critically examines the structural, technological, and accountability-related issues that police administration faces in investigation of crime in India. The main hypothesis is that (i) political interference and the absence of power autonomy, (ii) the inadequacy of technological and forensic capacities, and (iii) insufficient accountability measures lead to the inefficiency of crime investigation. The paper is based on a case law approach, government reports, and comparative analysis in other jurisdictions. The analysis contends that despite the reforms like the Prakash Singh directives which have tried to place the police beyond unnecessary influence and modernize investigative functions, it has been implemented in bits and sporadic.<sup>1</sup> The paper concludes by arguing that, unless there is a way of insulating the investigative agencies against political influence, investing highly in forensic infrastructure, and creation of independent checks and balances, India runs the risk of continuing to have systemic failures in criminal justice.

## **I. Introduction**

Crime investigation and police administration represent the two pillars of the criminal justice system that ensure the constitutional rights and procedural fairness. The police in India are however still criticized as being politicized,<sup>2</sup> under-equipped, and not adequately responsible.

The paper will explore the following question: How far are problems of autonomy, technological capacity and accountability compromising good police administration and crime investigation in India? Structural autonomy, technological/forensic inadequacies, and ineffective accountability mechanisms are highly detrimental to investigations, which lead to

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<sup>1</sup> Gaurav Vivek Bhatnagar, 'No State Fully Complied With SC Directives on Police Reforms, Finds Study' (The Wire, 23 April 2018) <<https://thewire.in/government/sc-police-reforms-directives>> accessed 25 September 2025

<sup>2</sup> Arvind Verma, *Politicization and Legitimacy of Police in India*, available at ResearchGate, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/303972662\\_Politicization\\_and\\_Legitimacy\\_of\\_Police\\_in\\_India](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/303972662_Politicization_and_Legitimacy_of_Police_in_India) (last visited Oct. 5, 2025)

low rates of conviction,<sup>3</sup> custody fatalities, and lack of trust in the judicial system.

The methodologies applied in this paper are the legal precedent analysis, statutory provisions, and secondary sources (academic journal articles, reports of government and media). Among the recent empirical research used to draw key information are survey on the Underutilization of Forensic Expertise in India (2025),<sup>4</sup> Police Autonomy in their Functioning: A Socio-Legal Study with Special Reference to Kamrup(M) District of Assam (2024),<sup>5</sup> and readings like Evaluating India Police Accountability Framework: Internal and External Mechanisms (Dwivedi and Kaur, 2025).<sup>6</sup> Insights into comparative jurisdictions e.g., the UK and US are provided to put the deficits of India into perspective. The analysis is also informed by observational findings through field visits (e.g., cybercrime cell, police stations).

## II. Political Interference and Absence of Power Autonomy

Police independence is critical to the objective of law enforcement and effective crime investigation. Nevertheless, Indian politics has long been a factor that interferes with the police operation by affecting the responsibility of the investigations and the trustworthiness of the justice system by the citizens. The real independence of police, that is, a stable tenure, absence of arbitrary transfers, and independence in operations is the key to a fair investigation. In its absence, the political factors can influence the investigation of serious crime instead of facts.<sup>7</sup>

India had legal requirements that are expected to diminish political infiltration of police such as Prakash Singh v. Union of India that prescribes fixed tenure and formation of State Security Commissions that check random transfers but, most police force continue to be under external pressure.<sup>8</sup> The results of socio-legal study on police autonomy in their functions with a special

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<sup>3</sup> Police Reforms in India, PRS Legislative Research, <https://prsindia.org/policy/analytical-reports/police-reforms-india>

<sup>4</sup> I. Kanishga & H. R. Bhargava, *Survey on the Underutilization of Forensic Expertise in India: Examining the Dominance of Law Enforcement in Evidence Collection and Investigations*, 9 J. Forensic Sci. & Res. 67 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.29328/journal.jfsr.1001083>

<sup>5</sup> R. Sil & R. Deori, *Police Autonomy in Their Functioning: A Socio-Legal Study with Special Reference to Kamrup (M) District of Assam*, 7 Int'l J. L. Mgmt. & Human. 4008, 4020 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.1000/IJLMH.117882>

<sup>6</sup> A. Dwivedi & P. K. Kaur, *Evaluating India's Police Accountability Framework: Internal and External Mechanisms*, 9 NUJS J. Reg. Stud. 4 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.69953/nurs.v9i4.211>

<sup>7</sup> Times Face-off: Is it time to loosen political control over police?, Times of India (Apr. 20, 2021), <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/times-face-off-is-it-time-to-loosen-political-control-over-police/articleshow/82154911.cms> (last visited Sept. 25, 2025)

<sup>8</sup> Prakash Singh v. Union of India – Case Materials, COMMON CAUSE, <https://commoncause.in/pdf/PRAKASH-SINGH.pdf> (last visited Sept. 25, 2025)

reference to Kamrup(M) District of Assam (2024)<sup>9</sup> were the following: the police personnel in the district of Kamrup reported frequent interference of posting, transfers and even to an investigation by political actors who were not subject to any formal control. It shows that the reforms of the law have not led to the autonomy of operations.

Most police structures weaken the performance of oversight institutions, and that executive power control is still prevalent in most police offices.<sup>10</sup> The influence of the politics is seen in the way communal riots or politically sensitive cases are investigated, whereby selective prosecution and bias is often claimed and selective arrests and postponement of inquiries within communities, based on the ruling party in the state.<sup>11</sup> These are typical ways in which the inability to exercise autonomy is converted into the distortions of justice in the real world. Accountability must go hand in hand with structural autonomy, otherwise, reforms are just deceptive.

### **III. Inadequacies of Technology and Forensic Capacities**

The investigative system of India is characterized by acute shortage in technology and the capabilities of forensic. The further hindrance to the investigations is delays in processing digital evidence and other technical evidence. As a case in point, more and more cybercrimes, online scams, sextortion etc, are conquering police departments, which have neither trained personnel nor the latest forensic equipment. Digital crime (forensic evidence, modern crime, digital offences) requires complex equipment and professionally trained specialists.<sup>12</sup> The level of investigation in India is far behind the mark, and such a distance undermines the quality and speed of investigations.

Despite the scientific superiority of the forensic approach in most situations, forensic experts are usually marginalized, and it is the traditional policing approach (eyewitness reports,

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<sup>9</sup> Police Autonomy in their Functioning: A Socio-Legal Study with Special Reference to Kamrup District of Assam, IJLMH, <https://ijlmh.com/paper/police-autonomy-in-their-functioning-a-socio-legal-study-with-special-reference-to-kamrupm-district-of-assam/> (last visited Sept. 25, 2025)

<sup>10</sup> A. Dwivedi & P. K. Kaur, *Evaluating India's Police Accountability Framework: Internal and External Mechanisms*, 9 NUJS J. Reg. Stud. 4 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.69953/nurs.v9i4.211>

<sup>11</sup> Delhi Police on Trial: Three Court Orders Reveal Collusion, Cover-ups and Custodial Torture by Police Officers During 2020 Delhi Riots, Sabrang India, <https://sabrangindia.in/delhi-police-on-trial-three-court-orders-reveal-collusion-cover-ups-and-custodial-torture-by-police-officers-during-2020-delhi-riots/> (last visited Sept. 25, 2025)

<sup>12</sup> Indian Digital Forensics Market Growth 2030: Deloitte-DSCI, Business Standard (June 5, 2025), [https://www.business-standard.com/industry/news/indian-digital-forensics-market-growth-2030-deloitte-dsci-125060501088\\_1.html](https://www.business-standard.com/industry/news/indian-digital-forensics-market-growth-2030-deloitte-dsci-125060501088_1.html) (last visited Sept. 25, 2025)

material evidence collected without expert involvement) that is still predominant.<sup>13</sup> Emphasis should also be given on the fact that lots of reforms ideas touch upon the technological component and infrastructure, yet the state budgets and priorities have trailed, resulting in a disjointed implementation.<sup>14</sup> The imbalance between the increasing number of complaints of digital crimes and investigative ability undermines the justice and the deterrence.

#### IV. Insufficient Accountability in Investigations

The accountability (ensuring that officers are kept in check), and transparency (open processes, citizen monitoring) are necessary to avoid such abuses as custodial torture, wrongful arrests, and biased or poor-quality investigations. Both internal systems (disciplinary procedures, police control) and external ones (NGOs, judicial control, media) prove to be wanting they have little power, slow bureaucracies, and in many cases no follow-up.<sup>15</sup> Custodial deaths are typically explained by such causes as the state of health or suicide without proper investigation, especially in the case of marginalized individuals; institutional unwillingness and non-disclosure are widespread.<sup>16</sup>

Government records in Rajasthan indicate that between 2023-25 reported 20 deaths in the police lockups. Those who claimed twelve were health-related (six heart attacks), six were suicides, one was an escape attempt, and one is disputed. Inquiries are often awaiting in most instances and examples of culpability to officers are few or non-existent.<sup>17</sup>

The UK and US support transparency in oversight by ensuring the various complaints regarding police are investigated through statutory powers of the oversight bodies that advocate disciplinary action;<sup>18</sup> transparency can also be achieved through mandatory reporting, accessing investigation report by the public and media critical questioning. This results in a

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<sup>13</sup> I Kanishga & H R Bhargava, Survey on the Underutilization of Forensic Expertise in India: Examining the Dominance of Law Enforcement in Evidence Collection and Investigations, *J. Forensic Sci. & Res.* 9(1): (2025), <https://www.forensicjournal.com/articles/jfsr-aid1083.php> (last visited Sept. 25, 2025)

<sup>14</sup> Police Reforms in India: An Overview, ABCD Index, [https://abcdindex.com/Article\\_1/police-reforms-in-india-an-overview-9714](https://abcdindex.com/Article_1/police-reforms-in-india-an-overview-9714) (last visited Sept. 25, 2025)

<sup>15</sup> A. Dwivedi & P. K. Kaur, *Evaluating India's Police Accountability Framework: Internal and External Mechanisms*, 9 *NUJS J. Reg. Stud.* 4 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.69953/nurs.v9i4.211>

<sup>16</sup> J. Lamba & E. Jain, *A Study on Police Accountability and Custodial Violence in India*, 13 *IARS Int'l Res. J.* 01 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.51611/iars.irj.v13i01.2023.227>

<sup>17</sup> Rajasthan Witnessed 20 Custodial Deaths in Two Years: Govt Report, *Millennium Post*, <https://www.millenniumpost.in/big-stories/rajasthan-witnessed-20-custodial-deaths-in-two-years-govt-report-626279> (last visited Sept. 25, 2025)

<sup>18</sup> Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC), GOV.UK (UK), <https://ministryofjustice.co.uk/independent-office-for-police-conduct-iopc/> (last visited Sept. 25, 2025)

culture of impunity because of weak accountability and transparency. A slow or symbolic response to police misconduct investigations destroys public trust. Powerful reforms should provide the capability of the oversight bodies, their independence, and the visibility of their findings and their enforcement.

## V. Critical analysis

The police forces are limited in terms of budget, human resources, location, and political demands; some believe that complete independence is impractical under a democratic system.<sup>19</sup> The technological upgrades are costly in terms of capital and technical skills; this may not be available in the rural areas. There is also likely to be a slow process of accountability that may disrupt the urgency of law enforcement. The political interference, lack of forensic capacity and poor accountability combines to fuel weakness in each other.

The citizen satisfaction can be enhanced in resource-constrained jurisdictions, including India and other developing countries, with the help of focused reforms, including the presence of superior-trained forensic laboratories, localized control, and community policing.<sup>20</sup> Technologies, although expensive to invest in, improve the validity of beliefs and serve as deterrents. Responsibility should be prompt, transparent, equitable and not delayed by crises. Still, the most important bottleneck is power relations. The changes in structure are not enough, but a significant change in norms, behaviors of officers, trust of people, and internal responsibility can make the difference in the way in which justice is really served.<sup>21</sup>

## VI. Recommendations and Conclusion

To sum up, the present paper has demonstrated that the crime investigation system in India is still in a disadvantaged position due to three interrelated shortcomings: the absence of autonomy, deficit in technological and forensic capacities, and poor accountability. It is worth noting that the introduction of the new criminal justice laws, the BNS, BNSS, and BSA is a watershed moment, as it supplanted colonial era criminal justice laws and provided legal bases

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<sup>19</sup> Maja Daruwala, India Needs More Than Just Money to Truly Reform Its Police, Quartz (India), <https://qz.com/india/1878688/india-needs-more-than-money-to-prevent-cases-of-police-brutality> (last visited Sept. 25, 2025)

<sup>20</sup> N. Sinha, Community Policing in India – Prospects and Challenges, J. of SAGE (2025), <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0032258X251334720> (last visited Sept. 25, 2025). SAGE Journals

<sup>21</sup> Media on Police Reforms (Workshop Report), Human Rights Initiative, [https://www.humanrightsinitiative.org/programs/aj/police/india/workshops/media\\_on\\_police\\_reforms.pdf](https://www.humanrightsinitiative.org/programs/aj/police/india/workshops/media_on_police_reforms.pdf) (last visited Sept. 25, 2025)

in the more rights-oriented evidence-based practice. States such as Bihar have integrated massive modernization schemes (Rs. 190 crores plus resources of mobile forensic vans, CCTV, digital evidence apparatus) to furnish investigating officers with equipment and forensic help.<sup>22</sup> The opening of new CFSLs (Central Forensic Science Laboratories) in such locations as Rajarhat and the development of the forensic facilities is an indication that the evidence-centered policing is not ignored anymore.<sup>23</sup>

Still, to reach their potential, three important recommendations are clear, first, the fixed tenures and independent boards of police establishment should be implemented.<sup>24</sup> Second, forensic and technological capacity should be decentralized and consistent, such that functioning forensic labs, mobile forensic units, and trained staff should be available in the rural and district police stations; it is important to introduce forensic science and digital investigation into the training programs.<sup>25</sup> Third, accountability institutions, including Police Complaints Authorities,<sup>26</sup> community oversight institutions, and performance standards relating to transparency (e.g., custodian audits, compulsory public reporting, CCTV coverage) need to be given binding, rather than advisory authority.

India is at a crossroad, legal reforms offer an encouraging framework, but unless it is supported by political will, cultural transformation within institutions in police, and long-term investment in human and technical capabilities, it can turn out to be a failure in the same way it has been in past. It is only in the combination of legal change with operational and cultural change that policing can be effective, fair, and trustworthy in the contemporary India.

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<sup>22</sup> Govt Unveils ₹190-Cr Plan to Modernise Police Force, Times of India (July 11, 2025), <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/patna/govt-unveils-190-cr-plan-to-modernise-police-force/articleshow/122391801.cms> (last visited Sept. 25, 2025)

<sup>23</sup> Under the leadership ... (Press Release, PIB) (June 1, 2025), <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2133128> (last visited Sept. 25, 2025). Press Information Bureau

<sup>24</sup> Need to Modernise Investigation Methods, HC to DGP, Times of India (date unknown), <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/kochi/need-to-modernise-investigation-methods-hc-to-dgp/articleshow/122909368.cms> (last visited Sept. 25, 2025)

<sup>25</sup> Parveen Arora, Forensic Labs to Be Set Up in Every District of State, The Tribune (May 13, 2025), <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/haryana/forensic-labs-to-be-set-up-in-every-district-of-state/> (last visited Sept. 25, 2025)

<sup>26</sup> Police Complaints Authorities in India — Status, Gaps & Challenges (CHRI, Dec. 2023), <https://www.humanrightsinitiative.org/download/Briefing%20Paper%20on%20Police%20Complaints%20Authority%20CHRI%202020.pdf> (last visited Sept. 25, 2025)