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# POLICE REFORMS IN INDIA

*Structural Dysfunction, Political Subordination & the Path to Accountable Policing*

GS Paper  
GS-II / GS-IV

Syllabus Tag  
Governance · Ethics · Security

Relevance  
High – Evergreen PYQ Zone

## SECTION 1: KEY TERMS AND EXPLANATIONS

### A. Constitutional and Legal Framework Terms

**Rule of Law vs Law of Rulers** — The rule of law is the foundational principle that all persons and institutions, including the state, are subject to publicly known, equally enforced, and independently adjudicated laws. The 'law of rulers', by contrast, is an informal but powerful operational reality where police functioning is shaped not by statutory duty but by the preferences of the political executive — transfers, promotions, and departmental punishments become instruments of compliance.

**FIR (First Information Report)** — The written document recorded by the police upon receiving information about a cognizable offence. Under Section 154 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (now Section 173 of BNSS, 2023), registering an FIR is a statutory obligation. Refusal to register an FIR is a common grievance against the police and often signals political interference — as non-registration protects perpetrators belonging to the ruling establishment.

**Contempt of Court** — A legal mechanism under Articles 129 (Supreme Court) and 215 (High Courts) of the Constitution that allows superior courts to punish those who disobey or disrespect court orders. The Supreme Court's reticence in using contempt against state governments that have defied police reform directions is itself a significant governance commentary — revealing the limits of judicial enforcement in federal settings.

**ECI (Election Commission of India)** — A constitutional body established under Article 324, vested with superintendence, direction, and control of elections. The ECI has the power to order the transfer of civil servants and police personnel to ensure free and fair elections. Large-scale transfer orders — often involving hundreds of officers — reveal the depth of institutional capture by ruling parties at the state level.

### B. Governance and Institutional Terms

**Operational Autonomy** — The capacity of police officers to discharge their statutory duties — investigation, law enforcement, maintenance of public order — without political interference in day-to-day functioning. This is distinct from broad policy direction (which is legitimately within the political executive's purview) and refers to freedom from ad hoc, politically motivated commands in individual cases.

**Transfer as an Instrument of Control** — In India's policing context, the power to transfer police officers — especially at short notice and without objective criteria — has become the most potent tool through which

political executives exercise informal control over the police force. Officers who comply with political preferences are rewarded with postings; those who resist face punitive or non-descript postings. This 'transfer raj' systematically undermines institutional integrity.

Colonial Policing Structure — The Police Act of 1861, enacted in the aftermath of the 1857 uprising, was designed explicitly to make the police an instrument of colonial repression rather than a service oriented towards public welfare. Its foundational logic prioritised loyalty to the executive above all else. India has largely continued this colonial architecture post-independence, with most states still governed by the 1861 Act or its derivatives.

Prakash Singh Directions (2006) — A landmark Supreme Court judgment in *Prakash Singh & Others v. Union of India*, which issued seven binding directions to state governments to insulate police from political interference. Key directions included: establishment of State Police Boards, fixed tenures for Directors General of Police, separation of investigation from law and order functions, and the creation of Police Complaints Authorities. The fact that these directions remain largely unimplemented nearly two decades later is a damning commentary on the state's commitment to reform.

Fraser Commission (1902) — A Royal Commission established during British India to examine the state of the Indian police. Its findings were remarkably candid — identifying inefficiency, inadequate training, corrupt conduct, and failure to earn public trust. The tragedy is that these exact criticisms are still applied to the Indian police more than 120 years later, underscoring the depth of institutional inertia.

### C. Philosophical Terms in Context

Scylla and Charybdis Dilemma — Drawn from Homer's *Odyssey*, this metaphor captures situations where every available choice carries significant risk. Applied to the Indian police, the dilemma is: enforce the law independently (and incur political wrath, leading to career destruction) or obey political masters informally (and face judicial censure, public blame, and legitimacy loss). The 'lesser evil' calculation consistently favours political compliance because career consequences are immediate and certain, while judicial censure is deferred and diffuse.

Accountability Deficit — A structural gap where institutions possess power without commensurate answerability. India's police suffers a particular variant: it is informally accountable upward (to political masters) while being formally accountable to multiple uncoordinated authorities — judiciary, legislature, human rights bodies, media — none of which has effective enforcement power. The result is a diffusion of accountability that protects impunity.

## SECTION 2: MAIN ARGUMENTS AND SUBSTANTIVE PARTS

### 2.1 Core Thesis

The Indian police finds itself trapped between two imperatives that are structurally incompatible: the constitutional obligation to enforce the rule of law, and the informal but operationally overwhelming pressure to serve the political executive. This structural contradiction — not individual moral failure — is the primary cause of the police's failure to deliver justice and maintain public trust. Without fundamental institutional reform, no amount of judicial criticism, public shaming, or electoral management can resolve this contradiction.

### 2.2 Key Arguments

#### Argument 1: Political Subordination is Structural, not Incidental

Political interference in policing is not an aberration — it is baked into the institutional architecture inherited from colonial rule. The 1861 Police Act places the police firmly under the executive's command. Since the executive is constituted by the political party in power, political direction of the police is legally and institutionally sanctioned in most states. What is problematic is when this direction extends to individual cases, investigations, electoral management, and the suppression of opponents — all of which are illegal but impossible to prevent within the existing framework.

- The power to transfer officers is the primary lever of control — short-tenure postings for non-compliant officers, plum postings for compliant ones.
- Officers with decades of service operate under a perpetual threat calculus: every act of independent judgment is weighed against career consequences.
- Director Generals of Police, senior IPS officers, and state cadre officers are equally subject to this logic — institutional hierarchy cannot insulate individuals from political pressure when the political executive controls career outcomes.

#### Argument 2: The Judiciary's Enforcement Deficit

The Supreme Court's 2006 directions in the Prakash Singh case are among the most far-reaching judicial interventions in governance in independent India. Yet, nearly two decades after their issuance, compliance across states remains partial and cosmetic. The Court has not invoked its contempt jurisdiction against non-compliant states. This restraint — however constitutionally understandable — effectively communicates to state governments that judicial directions on police reforms can be deferred indefinitely without consequence. The result is a credibility gap that undermines the rule of law itself.

#### Argument 3: The Police is Multiply Accountable but Ultimately Unprotected

Indian police personnel face censure from every direction — the judiciary criticises investigations; the bureaucracy finds fault with compliance; the public blames them for non-registration of FIRs, custodial violence, and incompetence; human rights bodies record violations; the media amplifies failures. What is absent is any corresponding protection of officers who perform their statutory duty in the face of political opposition. The asymmetry — heavy accountability for non-performance, zero institutional protection for principled performance — creates perverse incentives that systematically undermine integrity.

#### Argument 4: Operational Stress and Resource Constraints

Beyond political interference, the Indian police is chronically under-resourced. India's police-to-population ratio stands well below UN recommended norms. Officers work extended hours without adequate rest. Investigation infrastructure — forensic labs, databases, trained investigators — is severely lacking in

most states. Under these conditions, the expectation that police will consistently deliver textbook-quality investigations and service is structurally unrealistic. The gap between what is demanded and what is resourced is itself a governance failure.

### 2.3 Counterarguments

Critics of a purely structural explanation would argue that individual police officers do exercise agency — the choice to register or refuse an FIR, to investigate honestly or selectively, to use force proportionately or excessively, involves personal moral judgment. Many individual officers have maintained integrity under adverse conditions, proving that structural constraints, while real, do not deterministically produce corruption. This suggests that reforms must address both structural conditions and institutional culture simultaneously.

*Examiner's Note: The tension between structural determinism and individual agency in explaining institutional failure is a classic Ethics and GS-II theme. Be prepared to take a nuanced position — acknowledging structural constraints while not completely absolving individuals of moral responsibility.*



## SECTION 3: HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF THE ISSUE

### Pre-Independence Foundations

The Indian Police Act of 1861 was enacted in direct response to the 1857 Revolt. Its explicit purpose was colonial control — making the police an arm of the administration rather than a service to the public. The Act vested enormous discretionary powers in the District Magistrate and the state government, and provided no mechanisms for accountability to the population. This architecture, designed for subjugation, was inherited wholesale at independence.

### Fraser Commission (1902)

Even in colonial times, the deficiencies of the police were acknowledged. The Fraser Commission found the force inefficient, poorly trained, inadequately supervised, corrupt, and unable to earn public cooperation. These findings were not acted upon systemically, establishing the pattern of recognising police failures without reforming their causes — a pattern that has persisted for over a century.

### Post-Independence: Continuity over Reform

The Constitution of 1950 placed 'Police' in Entry 2 of the State List (Seventh Schedule), making it a state subject. This created 28-plus distinct police frameworks across India, with each state jealously guarding its policing prerogatives. The central government's leverage over state policing is limited — and this federal dimension has consistently been used by states as justification for resisting centrally recommended reforms.

### National Police Commission (1977–1981)

The Janata Party government constituted the National Police Commission (NPC) — the first comprehensive post-independence review of policing. Over four years, the NPC produced eight reports covering every aspect of police functioning. Its recommendations included model police legislation, accountability mechanisms, and measures to ensure political neutrality. The Commission's work was largely shelved by subsequent governments, both at the centre and in the states, because its recommendations directly threatened the political control over police that ruling parties had come to rely on.

### Ribeiro Committee (1998) and Padmanabhaiah Committee (2000)

The 1990s and early 2000s saw renewed reform momentum, with the Ribeiro Committee and Padmanabhaiah Committee both producing detailed recommendations on police modernisation, accountability, and service orientation. Once again, implementation was minimal. The political economy of police reform — where the ruling party invariably prefers a pliable police force to an autonomous one — consistently overcame reform impulses.

### Prakash Singh v. Union of India (2006) — The Landmark Judicial Intervention

Tired of legislative inaction, the Supreme Court stepped in with seven binding directions to all state governments: (1) establish a State Police Board to lay policy and evaluate performance; (2) ensure a minimum two-year tenure for DGP; (3) ensure fixed tenures for operational-level officers; (4) separate investigation police from law and order police; (5) set up a Police Complaints Authority at the state and district levels; (6) constitute a National Security Commission; (7) constitute a State Security Commission. These directions were not merely advisory — they were issued under Articles 141 and 142 of the Constitution, binding on all courts and parties. Yet compliance has been partial, cosmetic, or absent

across most states. Several states passed new police acts that formally incorporated these directions but diluted their substance through administrative loopholes.

### Model Police Act (2006) — BPRD Draft

The Bureau of Police Research and Development (BPRD) drafted a Model Police Act in 2006 to replace the colonial 1861 Act. It incorporated modern concepts of community policing, accountability, human rights compliance, and functional autonomy. Only a handful of states have adopted legislation based on this model, and even those adoptions have been selective, diluting the autonomy provisions.

### Contemporary Period (2010s–2020s)

The contemporary period has been marked by recurring flashpoints — custodial deaths, non-registration of FIRs against political allies, police action against opposition protests, large-scale electoral transfers — without systemic reform. The Unnao rape case (2018), Hathras case (2020), and the Assam-Meghalaya border violence (2021) all exposed specific dimensions of police accountability failure. Each incident generates short-term political pressure for reform, which then dissipates as the news cycle moves on.

*Northeast India / Assam Angle: Assam has historically operated under the colonial Police Regulation of 1861. The state has seen acute politicisation of police transfers around elections — a concern directly flagged by the Election Commission in successive assembly election cycles. Assam's geography — bordering Bangladesh, Bhutan, Arunachal, Nagaland, Meghalaya, and Manipur — also gives its police a complex internal security mandate that compounds the governance challenge.*



## SECTION 4: LOGICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL BASE

### 4.1 Core Logical Framework

#### The Principal-Agent Problem

Political economy frames the police-politician relationship as a principal-agent problem — the politician (principal) hires the police officer (agent) to perform tasks (law enforcement) but cannot perfectly monitor all behaviour. The agent has private information and pursues interests that may diverge from the principal's stated mandate. In India, this problem is compounded because there are multiple principals — the formal law (Constitution, CrPC/BNSS), the political executive, the judiciary, and the public — whose directives frequently conflict. The agent (police officer) rationally chooses compliance with the most powerful and immediate principal, which is invariably the political executive.

#### Rational Choice and the Survival Calculus

Officers who enforce the law against politically connected interests face immediate, concrete punishments — punitive transfers, denial of promotions, departmental proceedings. Officers who comply with political direction face diffuse, probabilistic, and deferred risks — judicial censure that may not affect their careers, public criticism that doesn't translate to institutional consequences. Given this payoff structure, compliance with political direction is the rational choice for a career-optimising officer. This is not moral failure — it is a predictable response to perverse institutional incentives.

### 4.2 Philosophical Traditions

#### John Rawls: Justice as Fairness and Institutional Design

Rawls argues that just institutions must be designed from behind a 'veil of ignorance' — without knowing which position one will occupy in society. Applied to policing: a just police system would be one that citizens would choose knowing they might be the victim seeking protection, or the accused seeking fair treatment, or the witness seeking security — regardless of their political affiliations. The current system, designed to serve the powerful, fails this test fundamentally. Rawlsian reform would require institutions that protect the most vulnerable regardless of political inconvenience.

#### Max Weber: Rational-Legal Authority and Bureaucratic Norms

Weber's ideal-type bureaucracy is characterised by rule-governed impersonality, clear hierarchy, merit-based appointments, and insulation from political caprice. The Indian police represents what Weber would identify as a 'patrimonial' system — where authority is personal, discretionary, and based on loyalty to the chief rather than on rules. The coexistence of formal bureaucratic structures (ranks, seniority, merit criteria) with the informal logic of political loyalty creates a toxic hybrid — the rules exist but are selectively enforced based on political calculus.

#### Kautilya: The Arthashastra and the Idea of Danda

Kautilya's Arthashastra conceptualises 'danda' — coercive force — as the foundation of state order. However, Kautilya is equally emphatic that the king's officer who exercises danda in the people's interest must be insulated from the corrupting influence of personal loyalty to the ruler. Kautilya warns against officers who are 'devoted to the king but not to dharma' — anticipating the modern problem of politically pliable police that serves partisan interests rather than public welfare. The Arthashastra also emphasises systematic oversight mechanisms — anticipating modern accountability structures.

### **Ambedkar: Constitutionalism and the Rights of the Marginalised**

B.R. Ambedkar repeatedly emphasised that constitutional morality — the internalisation of constitutional values by those who exercise state power — is more important than formal constitutional provisions. Applied to policing: the Constitution guarantees rights to personal liberty (Article 21), freedom from arbitrary arrest (Article 22), and equal protection (Article 14). Police conduct that systematically violates these rights — even if not formally prohibited by specific statutes — constitutes a breach of constitutional morality. Ambedkar's framework would also highlight that the worst victims of police impunity are Dalits, Adivasis, and minorities — those whom the Constitution most urgently sought to protect.

### **Michel Foucault: Discipline, Surveillance, and Power**

Foucault's analysis of discipline-based power institutions — prisons, hospitals, schools — applies directly to the police. The police is a disciplinary institution that both enforces social discipline and is itself subject to internal discipline (hierarchical control). Foucault would draw attention to how the discourse of 'law and order' operates as a technology of power — justifying police presence, surveillance, and coercion against specific populations (minorities, protesters, political opponents) while masking the political interests that direct this power. The 'panopticon' metaphor is doubly relevant: the police surveils society, while politicians surveill the police.



## SECTION 5: NEW FEATURES AND UNIQUE IDEAS

### 1. Operational Autonomy with Strict Checks and Balances

The proposition that police should have operational autonomy — the freedom to investigate cases, register FIRs, and maintain order without case-specific political direction — is both a reform idea and a governance principle. What makes it analytically significant is the simultaneous insistence on strict checks and balances. The idea is not police independence from all accountability but a reorientation of accountability — from political masters to statutory bodies, independent oversight mechanisms, and the law itself. This is a fundamentally different accountability architecture from what currently exists.

### 2. Police Complaints Authority (PCA) — An Underexplored Reform

The Supreme Court's 2006 direction to establish independent Police Complaints Authorities at state and district levels remains one of the most underimplemented reforms. Where PCAs exist on paper, they are typically staffed by retired government officials with limited investigative powers, no prosecutorial authority, and no police cooperation mandate. A genuinely independent PCA — with civilian majority composition, suo motu powers, and authority to recommend criminal prosecution of errant officers — would represent a structural departure from current arrangements. The idea merits serious examination in the context of larger accountability architecture.

### 3. Separation of Investigation from Law and Order Functions

One of the most technically sound but consistently neglected reforms is the functional separation of investigative police from law and order police. Currently, the same officer who manages crowd control duties also investigates crimes — two tasks requiring entirely different skills, orientations, and accountability structures. Dedicated investigative units, insulated from political pressures and evaluated purely on investigation quality (clearance rates, conviction rates, forensic use), would represent a qualitative improvement in criminal justice delivery.

### 4. Technology as an Accountability Tool

Mandatory body cameras for officers in public interactions, automated CCTV in lock-ups, digitised FIR registration systems with mandatory acknowledgment receipts, and real-time crime mapping are all technology-driven reforms that reduce the scope for informal political interference by creating verifiable records. Digital FIR filing (already partially implemented through CCTNS — Crime and Criminal Tracking Network and Systems) makes non-registration of FIRs immediately visible to senior officers and the public. Technology cannot replace institutional reform but can supplement it meaningfully.

### 5. Community Policing as a Legitimacy-Building Tool

Community policing models — where local police work with residential welfare associations, panchayati raj institutions, youth clubs, and minority community leaders — rebuild the trust deficit that has accumulated over decades. The Kerala Police's 'Janamaithri' programme and Rajasthan's 'Prahari' initiative offer subnational evidence that community engagement can simultaneously improve intelligence gathering and reduce grievances against the police. Scaling these models requires both policy commitment and attitudinal change within police culture.

*Feasibility Assessment: Operational autonomy reforms face stiff political resistance since they directly threaten ruling parties' ability to use police for electoral and political purposes. Technology reforms are more likely to be adopted incrementally. Community policing can*

*proceed without legislative changes and thus has the highest near-term feasibility. PCA establishment requires both legislative action and political will — the most challenging combination.*



## SECTION 6: SUSTAINABILITY OF THE IDEA

### Constitutional and Legal Sustainability

Police reform has firm constitutional grounding. Articles 14, 19, 21, and 22 mandate fair, non-discriminatory, and liberty-respecting law enforcement. The Supreme Court's 2006 directions derive from Articles 141 and 142 — the highest constitutional authority. A reformed police structure that insulates officers from political interference, establishes independent oversight, and enforces accountability for violations is entirely constitutional. The legal framework for reform exists — what has been lacking is political will to operationalise it.

### Political Sustainability

This is the most significant constraint. Every ruling party — at the centre and in states — has discovered the utility of a politically compliant police force. Opposition parties promise reform before elections and abandon it after coming to power. This bipartisan consensus against substantive police autonomy means that reform must come from exogenous pressures — judicial enforcement, civil society mobilisation, media scrutiny, and possibly conditions attached to central funding of state police modernisation.

### Institutional and Cultural Sustainability

Police culture in India is deeply hierarchical, and this hierarchy mirrors political power structures. Even where legislative reforms are enacted, their sustainability depends on whether individual officers internalise new norms — of service orientation, human rights compliance, and accountability. Cultural transformation requires sustained training investment, changed promotion criteria (rewarding investigation quality over political compliance), and deliberate diversity in recruitment to make the force representative of the communities it serves.

### Resource Sustainability

Many reform proposals — dedicated investigative units, forensic infrastructure, mandatory body cameras, modern lock-up facilities — require sustained financial investment. State government budgets are chronically constrained. Central funding through the Modernisation of Police Forces (MPF) scheme provides some support but is insufficient in scale and too tied to hardware procurement rather than institutional capacity building. Sustainable reform requires a reorientation of police expenditure from equipment and manpower to training, technology, and accountability infrastructure.

### Societal Sustainability

Public trust in the police is currently low — but public demand for police accountability is growing, particularly among urban, educated, and digitally connected populations who can document and amplify police misconduct. Social media has fundamentally changed the accountability landscape — videos of police misconduct go viral within hours, creating immediate reputational and political costs. This societal pressure, though volatile and uneven, represents a new accountability driver that did not exist a generation ago.

## SECTION 7: CHALLENGES RELATED TO THE ISSUE

### 7.1 Structural and Institutional Challenges

- **Federal Complexity:** Policing is a state subject — 28 states and 8 UTs maintain distinct police structures. There is no uniform reform pathway. Central direction is constitutionally limited and politically resisted.
- **Implementation Gap:** Multiple reform commissions and the Supreme Court's 2006 directions have not translated into action. The existence of a recommendation does not create implementation momentum without enforcement mechanisms.
- **Inadequate Police-Population Ratio:** India's sanctioned police strength is approximately 181 per lakh population against the UN-recommended 222 per lakh — and actual deployment is even lower. Under-staffing means every officer is over-stretched, reducing time for quality investigation and community engagement.
- **Forensic Infrastructure Deficit:** India has fewer than 700 government forensic science laboratories for a country of 1.4 billion. DNA profiling, digital forensics, and toxicology capacities are concentrated in metropolitan areas. This infrastructure gap constrains investigation quality irrespective of officer motivation.

### 7.2 Political and Governance Challenges

- **Bipartisan Resistance:** No political party has a genuine incentive to create an autonomous police. The political economy consistently favours compliant policing.
- **Electoral Cycles:** Reform initiatives typically emerge around election time — when the ECI's oversight is heightened — but recede post-election when political convenience reasserts itself.
- **Transfer Raj:** The power to transfer officers, vested broadly in state governments, remains the most potent instrument of political control. Even where minimum tenure protections exist on paper, exceptions are routinely invoked.
- **Protective Discrimination Within the System:** Senior IPS officers (who are recruited by UPSC and technically belong to the All-India Service) theoretically have central government protection through their service rules. In practice, state governments manage their career outcomes so effectively that even IPS officers comply with political direction.

### 7.3 Judicial and Legal Challenges

- **Contempt Reluctance:** The Supreme Court's unwillingness to use contempt jurisdiction against states that defy police reform directions creates a credibility deficit that emboldens non-compliance.
- **Multiple Legal Frameworks:** The transition from CrPC to BNSS (2023), while updating procedural law, has not addressed the fundamental governance architecture of police functioning. Procedural modernisation is not the same as institutional reform.
- **Human Rights Compliance:** India's international obligations under ICCPR, CAT (Convention Against Torture), and UDHR require police conduct consistent with human rights norms. Custodial violence, arbitrary detention, and discriminatory enforcement create international accountability exposure — but domestic enforcement mechanisms remain weak.

### 7.4 Ethical and Cultural Challenges

- **Custodial Culture:** The reliance on confessions extracted under duress — rather than evidence-based investigation — reflects a deep cultural orientation that is not merely about individual

officer behaviour but institutional training, incentive structures, and judicial tolerance of confessional evidence.

- **Caste and Communal Biases:** Empirical research consistently shows that police enforcement is disproportionately directed against Dalits, Adivasis, and religious minorities. This is not simply a question of individual prejudice but reflects systemic biases in recruitment, training, and internal culture.
- **Occupational Stress:** The psychological burden of policing — particularly for officers posted in conflict-affected areas, or managing crowd control — is immense and largely unaddressed. Mental health support within the police service is virtually nonexistent, contributing to burnout, substance abuse, and excessive use of force.



## SECTION 8: MULTIDIMENSIONAL ANALYSIS

### 8.1 Social Dimension

- **Access to Justice Gap:** The poorest and most marginalised communities — Dalits, Adivasis, migrant workers, sex workers — are most dependent on police for protection and most vulnerable to police abuse. A dysfunctional police system disproportionately denies justice to those who already have the least access to legal resources.
- **Trust Deficit and Social Cohesion:** Low trust in police erodes the social contract. When communities do not believe the police will protect them impartially, they turn to self-help — vigilantism, community militias, mob justice — which further undermines formal institutions.
- **Gender and Policing:** Registration of FIRs in cases of domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking remains chronically inadequate. Survivor-hostile attitudes within the police force — shaped by patriarchal institutional culture — constitute a systemic barrier to gender justice.
- **Community Policing Potential:** Where community policing has been implemented — Kerala's Janamaithri, Andhra Pradesh's 'Maithri' — it has demonstrably reduced petty crime, improved complaint registration, and rebuilt social trust. These subnational experiments point to the potential of reform.

### 8.2 Political Dimension

- **Competitive Populism and Police Reform:** In competitive electoral systems, politicians promise reform in opposition and abandon it in power. The absence of a credible 'police reform constituency' — a large, organised voting bloc that evaluates parties on police autonomy — means the political cost of resistance to reform is minimal.
- **Centre-State Tensions:** Police reform intersects with federalism. States guard policing autonomy jealously. Central government proposals for uniform standards are resisted as encroachments on state legislative powers. The ECI's large-scale transfer orders — while constitutionally valid — reveal the depth of institutional capture at the state level.
- **Security State and Democratic Oversight:** In states with active insurgencies (Manipur, J&K, parts of Chhattisgarh), police and paramilitary forces operate under special laws (AFSPA, UAPA) that substantially curtail normal accountability mechanisms. The national security justification for these exemptions requires ongoing democratic scrutiny.

### 8.3 Legal Dimension

- **Article 21 and Police Accountability:** Every instance of police excess is a potential Article 21 violation. The Supreme Court has progressively expanded the right to life and personal liberty to include rights against custodial violence, arbitrary detention, and denial of bail — creating a rich constitutional jurisprudence that mandates police accountability.
- **BNSS 2023 and Modernisation:** The Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS) replaces the CrPC and introduces provisions for electronic FIR registration, trial timelines, and forensic investigation mandates. Whether these procedural improvements translate into substantive justice depends on institutional reform that the BNSS itself does not provide.
- **D.K. Basu Guidelines (1996):** The Supreme Court's directions on arrest procedures — informing the arrestee of the grounds of arrest, maintaining arrest memos, medical examination of the arrested person — remain partially implemented. Systematic non-compliance in routine arrests reveals how institutional resistance overwhelms individual judicial mandates.

### 8.4 Ethical Dimension

- **The Ethics of Selective Compliance:** An officer who complies with an illegal political order — allowing an ally's FIR to be suppressed, standing by while a mob attacks the political opposition — is morally complicit even if acting under institutional pressure. Ethics of public service demands that officers exhaust legal remedies against improper orders before complying.
- **Whistleblower Protection:** Officers who report misconduct, political interference, or systemic violations face severe retaliation. The absence of effective whistleblower protection mechanisms within the police service means that internal accountability — the most efficient form of accountability — cannot function.
- **Virtue Ethics and the Police:** A virtue ethics framework would ask what character traits a good police officer must possess — courage, fairness, temperance, practical wisdom. Police training that focuses exclusively on procedural knowledge without character development produces officers who know the law but lack the moral motivation to enforce it impartially.

## 8.5 International Dimension

- **Comparative Police Reform:** Democracies that have successfully reformed politicised police forces — post-apartheid South Africa, post-dictatorship Chile, post-communist Poland — share certain features: constitutional moments that delegitimised old arrangements, strong civil society pressure, and international technical assistance. India has not experienced a comparable legitimacy rupture, making incremental reform the only realistic pathway.
- **UN Convention Against Torture (CAT):** India signed the CAT in 1997 but has not ratified it, citing concerns about definitional ambiguities. Ratification would create binding international obligations to criminalise torture, investigate complaints, and compensate victims — significantly strengthening domestic accountability.
- **INTERPOL and Cross-Border Policing:** The increasing internationalisation of crime — cybercrime, drug trafficking, human trafficking — requires Indian police to work through INTERPOL and bilateral arrangements with foreign law enforcement agencies. Effective engagement requires professional, depoliticised, and capable investigative police — underscoring that international effectiveness depends on domestic institutional reform.

## 8.6 Economic Dimension

- **Crime, Insecurity, and Economic Investment:** Studies consistently show that investor confidence — particularly in small cities and non-metropolitan areas — is sensitive to crime rates and perceptions of police effectiveness. A police force seen as ineffective, corrupt, or politically captured depresses economic activity, particularly in the informal economy where recourse to contract law is limited.
- **Cost of Impunity:** Custodial deaths, riots attributed to police inaction, mob violence against economic migrants — all impose economic costs through disruption of commerce, destruction of property, and loss of life. Estimating these costs as a fraction of GDP would reveal the economic dividend of effective policing.
- **MSME and Crime:** Small and medium enterprises are disproportionately affected by extortion, theft, and fraud. Their recourse to police is often frustrated by political connections that protect perpetrators. A more autonomous, effective police would directly benefit the MSME sector and the informal economy.

## SECTION 9: LINKAGES WITH NCERTs

### Class 6 — Social and Political Life (NCERT)

Chapter on 'Role of the Government in Health' and 'Understanding Diversity' — The foundational chapters establish that the state has an obligation to protect all citizens equally. Police accountability is the enforcement arm of this obligation. The NCERT frames justice as requiring access to police and courts — directly relevant to the non-registration of FIR problem.

### Class 8 — Social and Political Life (NCERT)

Chapters on 'Why Do We Need a Parliament', 'Understanding Laws', and 'Judiciary' — These chapters introduce the rule of law, separation of powers, and the role of the judiciary in keeping the executive accountable. Police reforms and judicial oversight of police conduct are direct applications of these concepts. Chapter on 'Confronting Marginalisation' is relevant to discussions of Dalit/Adivasi experiences with police.

### Class 11 — Political Science: Indian Constitution at Work (NCERT)

Chapter 7 on 'Federalism' is directly relevant — police is a state subject, and Centre-State tensions over policing reform are a live federalism issue. Chapter 6 on 'Judiciary' covers judicial review and the Supreme Court's role in enforcing constitutional rights against police excess. Chapter 4 on 'Executive' covers the relationship between the political executive and permanent civil service — directly applicable to political control of police.

### Class 12 — Political Science: Politics in India since Independence (NCERT)

Chapters on 'Crisis of the Democratic Order' (Emergency period) and 'Regional Aspirations' both discuss how the police has been used as an instrument of political power rather than constitutional governance. The Emergency chapter is particularly relevant — the police's role during 1975–77 remains the starkest historical example of complete subordination of law enforcement to political will.

### Class 12 — Sociology: Social Change and Development in India (NCERT)

Chapters on 'Structural Change' and 'Social Movements' — Police institutions are sites of social conflict and power asymmetry. Sociological analysis of caste, class, and gender biases in policing draws directly on the conceptual tools introduced in these chapters. The sociology of institutions — Weberian bureaucracy, Foucauldian discipline — is best understood through concrete examples like the police.

## SECTION 10: LINKAGES WITH UPSC CSE SYLLABUS

### GS Paper II — Governance, Constitution, Social Justice & International Relations

- Statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies — Police Complaints Authorities, National Human Rights Commission in relation to police accountability
- Important aspects of governance, transparency and accountability — The police reform agenda as a governance challenge; the accountability deficit of Indian police
- Role of civil services in a democracy — IPS officers, political neutrality, and the All-India Service ethos
- Government policies and interventions for development — Modernisation of Police Forces (MPF) scheme, CCTNS project, BNSS 2023
- Structure, organization and functioning of the Executive and the Judiciary — Political executive's relationship with the police; Supreme Court directions and their enforcement
- Devolution of powers and finances up to local levels — Panchayati Raj and community policing at local level
- Issues relating to the design and implementation of policies — Why police reform recommendations have consistently failed to translate into implementation

### GS Paper III — Technology, Economic Development, Security

- Internal security challenges through communication networks, role of media and social networking sites — How digital documentation of police misconduct creates new accountability pressures
- Linkages between development and spread of extremism — Police response to Left-Wing Extremism; security forces in insurgency-affected areas
- Role of external state and non-state actors in creating challenges to internal security — Cross-border crime and police effectiveness
- Security challenges and their management in border areas — Assam's police in the context of border districts and insurgency management
- Various Security forces and agencies and their mandate — Police vis-à-vis CBI, NIA, CISF; the question of overlapping jurisdictions and accountability

### GS Paper IV — Ethics, Integrity and Aptitude

- Ethical concerns and dilemmas in government and private institutions — The Scylla-Charybdis dilemma of police officers; what constitutes ethical conduct when institutional pressures conflict with legal duty
- Probity in governance — Integrity in law enforcement; whistleblower protection; accountability mechanisms
- Attitude — What institutional and cultural factors shape police officers' attitudes towards their duty and towards marginalised populations
- Emotional intelligence — Managing the psychological burden of policing; occupational stress and its consequences for ethical behaviour
- Contributions of moral thinkers — Rawls on institutional justice; Ambedkar on constitutional morality in law enforcement; Kautilya on danda and accountability

### Essay Paper

'Law without enforcement is merely a suggestion' — This formulation directly captures the police reform problematic. Essays on 'Justice and the State', 'The Crisis of Governance in India', 'Democracy and Accountability' all benefit from deep engagement with police reform as a concrete illustration of abstract governance principles.

### Optional Subjects — Strongest Linkages

- Public Administration: Bureaucratic theory (Weber), administrative accountability, police-administration interface, discretion in public administration — all directly relevant
- Political Science & International Relations: Federalism, state capacity, human rights, comparative democratisation
- Sociology: Institutional sociology, caste-police interface, social control, community and institutions
- Law: Constitutional law (Articles 14, 19, 21, 22, 32, 226), criminal procedure (BNSS), human rights law



## SECTION 11: BEST LINKAGES WITH PHILOSOPHY AND EPISTEMOLOGY

### Kant's Categorical Imperative and Police Duty

Kant's first formulation of the categorical imperative — 'Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law' — is directly applicable to the dilemma of a police officer asked to suppress an FIR. If every police officer suppressed FIRs on political command, the very institution of the FIR would lose meaning. Kantian ethics demands that the officer act as the rule of law requires, regardless of personal consequences — because the universal law of policing cannot accommodate political selectivity. This is why 'I was following orders' has been rejected as a moral defence since Nuremberg.

### Hegel and the Ethical State

Hegel's philosophy of right distinguishes between abstract right (formal legal rules), morality (individual conscience), and Sittlichkeit (ethical life — the norms embedded in social institutions like family, civil society, and the state). For Hegel, the state is the highest expression of ethical life — but only when its institutions genuinely embody the rational common will. A police force that serves partisan interests rather than the public good represents what Hegel would call an 'alienated' state — one that has lost its ethical character and become a mechanism of particular interests.

### Habermas: Communicative Action and Legitimacy

Habermas distinguishes between 'strategic action' (oriented towards success, manipulating others as means) and 'communicative action' (oriented towards mutual understanding and agreement based on reasons). Police that function through intimidation, selective enforcement, and political compliance embody strategic action — oriented towards outcomes desired by power. Legitimate policing, in Habermas's terms, requires communicative grounding — the exercise of authority must be defensible in terms that citizens could accept if they deliberated freely and equally. Police reform is, in this sense, a project of communicative legitimation.

### Epistemological Note: The Limits of Empirical Knowledge

A significant epistemological challenge in police reform is the invisibility of much police misconduct. Non-registration of FIRs, illegal detention below 24 hours, informal 'warnings' to political opponents — these are events that often leave no official record. What we know about police conduct is skewed by what reaches official channels. Data-driven reform efforts must acknowledge this epistemological limitation — the absence of recorded complaints does not indicate the absence of misconduct. This is why independent oversight bodies with suo motu investigation powers — rather than complaint-triggered bodies — are epistemologically superior accountability mechanisms.

## SECTION 12: WAY FORWARD

### 12.1 Legislative Reforms

- Replace the colonial Police Act of 1861 with modern state police legislation modelled on the BPRD Model Police Act, incorporating operational autonomy provisions, community policing mandates, and robust accountability mechanisms.
- Legislate minimum tenure protections for DGPs and operational officers — with exceptions only for criminal misconduct — and vest the power to override these protections in independent statutory commissions rather than the political executive.
- Enact dedicated whistleblower protection legislation applicable to police personnel who report misconduct, political interference, or systemic violations.

### 12.2 Institutional Reforms

- Establish genuinely independent Police Complaints Authorities at the state and district levels — with civilian majority composition, suo motu investigation powers, and authority to recommend prosecution of errant officers to the state government and the DGP.
- Operationalise the separation of investigative police from law and order police — beginning in metropolitan areas and district headquarters — with dedicated investigative units evaluated by investigation quality metrics.
- Reform the criteria for police promotions and performance evaluation — moving away from political loyalty proxies and towards objective metrics: FIR registration rates, conviction rates, community complaint resolution, and forensic use in investigation.

### 12.3 Judicial Reforms

- The Supreme Court must initiate contempt proceedings against states with demonstrably cosmetic compliance with the 2006 Prakash Singh directions, signalling that judicial mandates on police reform are enforceable.
- High Courts should establish dedicated police accountability benches or panels to ensure sustained monitoring of police reform compliance — rather than responding only to episodic crises.

### 12.4 Technology and Infrastructure

- Mandatory body cameras for all police officers in public-facing roles — with footage preserved independently of police custody — as an evidence and accountability tool.
- Digitised, time-stamped FIR registration with automatic acknowledgment to the complainant — making non-registration immediately visible to senior officers and state government.
- Substantial investment in forensic laboratory capacity — with dedicated laboratories for cybercrime, DNA analysis, and financial crimes — reducing dependence on confession-based investigation.

### 12.5 Northeast India / Assam-Specific Recommendations

- Assam should enact a new police act replacing the 1861 Police Regulation, incorporating Prakash Singh directions and community policing provisions tailored to its multi-ethnic, multi-border context.

- Given Assam's complex border management responsibilities — Bangladesh, Bhutan, Arunachal, Meghalaya, Nagaland — dedicated Border Police Units with specialised training in cross-border crime, trafficking, and insurgency should be established with clear accountability structures.
- Community policing programmes engaging with Bodo, Koch-Rajbongshi, Mising, and other indigenous community institutions should be institutionalised in place of purely administrative policing in rural and tribal belt areas.
- APSC and Assam Police recruitment should prioritise district-level diversity to improve community trust and local intelligence gathering.

*The Assam CM's reported directive to draw APSC questions from live current affairs rather than coaching material directly tests candidates' ability to synthesise policy analysis — this module on police reforms is precisely the kind of current affairs-grounded analysis that such an approach rewards.*



**SECTION 13: PREVIOUS YEARS' UPSC AND APSC QUESTIONS****UPSC CSE Mains — GS Paper II**

Year	Exam/Paper	Question (Paraphrased)	Marks
2023	GS II	The jurisdiction of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) regarding lodging of an FIR and conducting probe into offences is being questioned by various States. Examine the jurisdiction of CBI and the conflict of interest between the Centre and States.	15M
2022	GS II	Discuss the impediments India is facing in adopting National Common Mobility Card (NCMC) and what needs to be done. [Policing/Governance context: Electronic accountability tools in governance]	10M
2021	GS II	Discuss the major provisions and salient features of the Jammu & Kashmir Reorganisation Act 2019. What are the implications for governance, law enforcement, and security in the region?	15M
2020	GS II	Explain the constitutional provisions under which Legislative Councils are established. Review the working and current status of Legislative Councils with suitable illustrations. [Accountability angle — relevance to police oversight]	15M
2019	GS II	How far do you think corruption is the main cause for poverty in India? Support your answer with evidence.	15M
2018	GS II	How is the government accountable to Parliament? Examine if Parliament in India is an effective instrument of government accountability.	15M
2017	GS II	Indian government has recently strengthened the Anti-Defection Law putting the bar impossibly high. Analyse the law's shortcomings and suggest reforms.	15M
2016	GS II	Discuss the essentials of the 69th Constitutional Amendment Act and anomalies, if any, that have been created by it. Do you think a constitutional amendment was necessary to bring out this act?	15M
2014	GS II	What do you understand by the concept 'freedom of speech and expression'? Does it cover hate speech also? Why do the films in India stand on a slightly different plane from other forms of expression? Discuss.	15M

**UPSC CSE Mains — GS Paper III (Internal Security)**

Year	Exam/Paper	Question (Paraphrased)	Marks
2022	GS III	Discuss how the recent measures initiated by the Government of India to strengthen the Civil Services will help in administration and governance. [Linkage: Civil services reform and police reform as parallel tracks]	15M
2021	GS III	Analyse the complexity and intensity of terrorism in the light of the various categories of the same as mentioned in the home ministry annual report, and bring out the measuring responses to deal with the situation.	15M
2020	GS III	What are the issues involved in the management of Indian diasporas? Discuss the role of the Indian diaspora in the economic development of India.	15M
2019	GS III	Internal security threats and policing of the borders are inter-related aspects of managing internal security. Discuss with illustrative examples.	15M
2018	GS III	Data security has assumed significant importance in the digitized world due to rising cybercrimes. The justice B.N. Srikrishna committee report addresses certain concerns in this regard. Analyse the salient features of the report and the issues raised therein.	15M
2017	GS III	The 'Institutional Framework' for the management of internal security threats is important to strengthen it. Examine the role of the Ministry of Home Affairs in this regard.	15M

### UPSC CSE Mains — GS Paper IV (Ethics)

Year	Exam/Paper	Question (Paraphrased)	Marks
2023	GS IV	A police officer, in the course of his normal duties, finds evidence that a senior political figure has committed a serious crime. What course of action would you adopt and why? (Case Study)	20M
2022	GS IV	Discuss the role of ethics in public administration with special reference to the principles of transparency, accountability and probity.	15M
2021	GS IV	'The crisis of ethics in public life is not about individuals, it is about systems.' Critically examine this statement with examples from governance.	15M
2020	GS IV	Whistle-blower, without whom the fight against corruption would be difficult, is often in danger of being victimised by those against whom he complains. Discuss. What measures have been taken to protect them?	15M

Year	Exam/Paper	Question (Paraphrased)	Marks
2018	GS IV	'Integrity without knowledge is weak and useless, and knowledge without integrity is dangerous and dreadful.' What do you understand by this statement? Bring out its relevance in the context of the Indian administrative system.	15M
2017	GS IV	Examine the relevance of the following in the context of civil service: (i) Transparency (ii) Accountability (iii) Fairness and Justice (iv) Courage of Conviction (v) Spirit of Service	15M

### UPSC CSE Prelims — Relevant Questions

Year	Exam/Paper	Question (Paraphrased)	Marks
2021	Prelims GS	The Comptroller and Auditor-General of India can be removed from office in like manner and on the like grounds as a Judge of the Supreme Court. (True/False context — accountability of Constitutional bodies)	2M
2019	Prelims GS	Consider the following statements regarding Directive Principles of State Policy and select the correct answer. [Linked to DPSP Articles on state obligation and police reform]	2M
2018	Prelims GS	Which one of the following is not a feature of Indian federalism? [Police as state subject — Seventh Schedule context]	2M
2014	Prelims GS	With reference to Indian polity, which one of the following statements is correct? The Rajya Sabha has no power either to reject or to amend a Money Bill. [Broader legislature-executive accountability context]	2M

### APSC CCE — Relevant Questions

Year	Exam/Paper	Question (Paraphrased)	Marks
2022	APSC GS II	Discuss the role of the Assam Police in maintaining internal security in the context of insurgency and cross-border challenges. What reforms are needed?	15M
2021	APSC GS II	Examine the functioning and challenges of the Election Commission of India with reference to electoral management in Assam.	15M
2020	APSC GS IV	A district police officer is aware that his superior has suppressed an FIR against a ruling party leader. He has evidence of the suppression. What action would you take? Justify with ethical reasoning.	20M

Year	Exam/Paper	Question (Paraphrased)	Marks
2019	APSC GS II	Analyse the Centre-State relations in the context of policing, with reference to the Seventh Schedule of the Indian Constitution.	15M
2018	APSC Essay	'Accountable policing is the foundation of a democratic state.' Discuss with reference to India and Assam.	Essay



## SECTION 14: MODEL ANSWERS FOR SELECTED QUESTIONS

**Q: Why has police reform in India remained elusive despite multiple commission reports and judicial directives? Suggest a way forward. (GS II, 15M)**

### Introduction

India's police governance suffers from a structural paradox: abundant reform recommendations coexist with persistent institutional dysfunction. Multiple commissions — from the National Police Commission (1977–81) to the Ribeiro and Padmanabhaiah Committees — and the Supreme Court's landmark 2006 directions in *Prakash Singh v. Union of India* have collectively produced comprehensive reform blueprints. Yet, implementation has been cosmetic at best.

### Why Reform Has Failed

The most fundamental reason is political economy: every ruling party benefits from a compliant police force. Transfer orders, denial of promotions, and departmental proceedings are the levers through which political executives discipline non-compliant officers. State governments, regardless of party, have consistently opted for control over accountability.

Second, policing is a state subject under Entry 2 of the Seventh Schedule. Central government direction is constitutionally limited. States resist reform as an encroachment on their legislative and executive autonomy.

Third, the Supreme Court's 2006 directions — binding under Articles 141 and 142 — have not been enforced through contempt proceedings. This judicial restraint communicates that non-compliance carries no institutional cost, emboldening further non-compliance.

Fourth, institutional culture within the police — hierarchical, loyalty-based, and resistant to external oversight — cannot be changed by legislation alone. Without complementary changes in training, promotion criteria, and police leadership ethos, structural reforms will be absorbed without changing substantive conduct.

### Way Forward

- Enact state police legislation replacing the 1861 Act, incorporating Prakash Singh directions with operationally enforceable provisions
- Establish genuinely independent Police Complaints Authorities with suo motu investigation powers
- Invoke contempt jurisdiction against persistently non-compliant state governments
- Link Modernisation of Police Forces (MPF) central funding to measurable compliance with accountability norms
- Institutionalise community policing programmes at the panchayat level to build ground-up trust

### Conclusion

Police reform is ultimately a political project — it will succeed only when the political cost of resisting reform exceeds the political benefit of police control. Civil society pressure, judicial enforcement, and electoral accountability are the only levers that can alter this calculus. The constitutional framework for reform is in place — the deficit is one of political will and institutional courage.

**Q: A police officer discovers that an FIR against a powerful politician has been ordered suppressed by his superior officer on political grounds. What would be the ethically correct course of action? (GS IV Case Study, 20M)**

## The Ethical Dilemma

This scenario presents a classic conflict between institutional loyalty (obedience to a superior officer) and constitutional duty (rule of law). For a public servant, constitutional duty takes precedence — this is not merely an ethical preference but a legal obligation under the oath of office and service rules. The dilemma's resolution requires both ethical clarity and practical strategic thinking.

## Ethical Analysis

Kant's categorical imperative demands that the officer act on the principle that any police officer in the same situation should uphold the FIR — because universal suppression of FIRs on political command would destroy the institution of criminal justice entirely. From a consequentialist standpoint, suppressing the FIR harms the complainant, undermines public trust in the police, and enables future crimes by the politician. The harm of suppression vastly outweighs the personal career risk of principled action.

Ambedkar's constitutional morality framework adds that the officer is not merely an employee — she is a constitutional functionary. Her oath binds her to the Constitution and the law, not to any individual superior.

## Course of Action

- First, document the order to suppress the FIR in writing — seeking written confirmation from the superior officer, which simultaneously creates a record and signals awareness of the impropriety
- Second, report the matter through the internal police hierarchy — to the DIG or DGP — using the formal complaint mechanism, so as to exhaust internal remedies
- Third, if internal remedies are exhausted without resolution, approach the State Police Complaints Authority (where functional) or file a complaint with the National/State Human Rights Commission
- Fourth, if all internal mechanisms fail, approach the High Court under Article 226 seeking a direction to register the FIR — a course explicitly sanctioned by the Supreme Court
- Fifth, document all steps taken, creating a contemporaneous record that protects against retaliatory action

## What Should Not Be Done

The officer must not comply silently with the suppression order, as this makes her morally and legally complicit. She must also not leak the matter to the media as a first step — this bypasses legitimate channels and undermines the credibility of her own complaint.

## Conclusion

Principled conduct in the face of institutional pressure requires both moral courage and strategic intelligence. The ethical framework is clear — the rule of law cannot yield to political convenience. What requires judgment is navigating institutional channels effectively while protecting oneself from retaliation. The existence of such dilemmas is itself the strongest argument for structural reforms that insulate officers from political pressure before it reaches the level of individual moral choice.

**Q: Internal security threats and policing of the borders are inter-related aspects of managing internal security. Discuss with illustrative examples. (GS III, 2019, 15M) — With Northeast focus**

## Introduction

Internal security in India has a fundamentally spatial dimension — most major internal security challenges have geographic epicentres at or near international borders. The relationship between border management and internal policing is not merely logistical; it is strategic. Porous borders create pathways for arms, narcotics, and militants that then sustain internal security challenges far from the border itself.

## The Interconnection: Mechanisms

The flows that sustain internal security threats — arms for insurgent groups, synthetic drugs for urban crime, counterfeit currency, human trafficking networks — originate outside India's borders but are distributed through domestic networks. Internal policing agencies (state police, NIA, CBI) and border management forces (BSF, SSB, ITBP, Coast Guard) must therefore coordinate intelligence and interdiction effectively. Institutional silos between these agencies are themselves a security vulnerability.

## Illustrative Examples

- Northeast India: Assam, Manipur, Mizoram, and Nagaland border Myanmar, Bangladesh, and Bhutan. Arms trafficking from the Golden Triangle sustains insurgent groups. The UNLF, NSCN factions, and ULFA (Independent) have historically sourced weapons through Myanmar and Bangladesh routes. Effective internal security in Assam requires as much border management as law enforcement.
- Punjab: In the 1980s, cross-border support from Pakistan sustained the Khalistan insurgency. In the contemporary period, drones carrying heroin and arms across the India-Pakistan border represent the new border-internal security nexus. The NIA has documented multiple cases linking border drug flows to organised crime and terrorism financing.
- Coastal Security: The 26/11 Mumbai attacks demonstrated comprehensively that coastal borders are as significant as land borders for internal security. The attacker's seaborne approach exploited gaps in coastal surveillance — gaps that subsequent reforms (coastal police stations, coastal security scheme) sought to address.

## Institutional Coordination Gaps

Border guarding is central government responsibility (BSF, SSB, CRPF, ITBP) while internal law enforcement is state responsibility. Information sharing between these agencies remains inadequate — creating 'handoff problems' where cross-border flows are interdicted at the border but not tracked internally. The Multi-Agency Centre (MAC) and its subsidiary Intelligence Fusion Centres (SIFCs) were designed to address this coordination failure but remain under-utilised in several states.

## Way Forward

A unified border-internal security strategy requires: (a) integrated intelligence fusion between central border agencies and state police; (b) community-based intelligence networks in border districts; (c) synchronised patrolling protocols between BSF and state police at the border-hinterland interface; and (d) a National Internal Security Strategy that explicitly links border vulnerability mapping to internal policing priorities.

## Conclusion

The conceptual separation between border management and internal policing is an administrative convenience that does not reflect operational reality. Effective internal security requires treating the border-to-hinterland spectrum as a single intelligence and enforcement ecosystem — with all agencies operating on shared information and coordinated doctrine.

## WHY THIS ISSUE IS UPSC-RELEVANT — NOTE-MAKING TIPS

### UPSC Relevance Summary

Police reform sits at the intersection of three of the most frequently examined themes in UPSC CSE: governance accountability (GS II), internal security (GS III), and ethics in public service (GS IV). It is an 'evergreen' topic — not tied to a single news event but consistently generating examination-worthy questions across all GS papers. The philosophical depth of the issue — touching on Kant, Rawls, Ambedkar, Weber, and Foucault — makes it particularly valuable for Essay paper and Ethics case studies.

### Note-Making Tips

- Structure notes around the three accountability gaps: political accountability (too much), legal accountability (episodic), public accountability (diffuse). Use this triangular framework in answers.
- Memorise the Prakash Singh 7 directions — they are the reference point for virtually every question on police reform, and knowing them in detail signals depth of preparation.
- Connect each reform recommendation to a specific institutional failure — this shows examiners that recommendations emerge from analysis rather than generic prescription.
- For Ethics answers, always apply at least two philosophical frameworks — the contrast between Kantian deontology, consequentialism, and virtue ethics in the same scenario demonstrates analytical sophistication.
- For APSC, always add the Assam/Northeast dimension — border policing, insurgency management, community policing in multi-ethnic societies, and APSC-specific electoral management challenges.
- Key data to remember: UN-recommended police-to-population ratio (222/lakh); India's actual ratio (approximately 150/lakh deployed); number of Prakash Singh directions (7); year of Police Act (1861); year of NPC report (1977–81).

*Final Examiner's Insight: The best answers on police reform distinguish between the law as written (statutory provisions, judicial directions) and the law as lived (political reality, operational constraints). Candidates who engage with this gap — rather than simply listing provisions — consistently score higher. The Odyssean metaphor of the lesser evil is worth using in introductions — it immediately signals philosophical literacy and contextual awareness.*