

# Understanding Gangs and Organized Crime: A Focus on the Indian Context

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## ABSTRACT

This paper explores the complex landscape of crime in India, examining its diverse manifestations across various social, cultural and economic spheres. The paper delves into the deeply entrenched issues plaguing Indian society, including violence against women, child abuse, human trafficking, cybercrime, terrorism, organized crime, caste-based discrimination, religious violence, environmental crimes, drug abuse and honor killings. Recognizing the alarming illiteracy rate exceeding 60%, the paper investigates its influence on the dynamics, patterns and prevalence of crime. By examining these multifaceted challenges, this paper aims to shed light on the complexities of crime in India, paving the way for potential solutions and interventions.

**Keywords:** India; Crime; Diversity; Illiteracy; Gender-based violence; Child abuse; Human trafficking; Cybercrime; Terrorism; Organized crime; Caste-based crimes; Religious violence; Environmental crimes; Drug abuse; Honor killings

## INTRODUCTION

Crime manifests as a complex and diverse phenomenon present in all societies and India is no exception. India boasts a highly diverse population comprising individuals from various cultural backgrounds, organized into tribes, castes and village kinship groups. These communities are dispersed across rural and urban settings, with a significant proportion engaged in agriculture. Of note, tribal populations encompass approximately forty million individuals, primarily involved in agricultural activities, while the majority of the populace, approximately 75 percent, relies on agriculture for sustenance. Concurrently, almost 20 percent of India's population resides in urban areas, reflecting the nation's growing urbanization trend. It is alarming to recognize that over 60 percent of India's populace still grapples with illiteracy, thereby influencing the dynamics, patterns and prevalence of criminal activities.

Indian society grapples with a myriad of complex crime-related issues, deeply entrenched and often intersecting with cultural, economic and political factors. Here are some key crime-related challenges in India-violence against women: Gender-based violence, encompassing domestic abuse, sexual harassment, rape and dowry-related crimes, remains pervasive despite legal reforms and heightened awareness; child abuse: Physical, sexual and

emotional abuse of children persists, alongside issues of child labor and trafficking, subjecting many to exploitative conditions; human trafficking: India serves as a source, destination and transit point for human trafficking, forcing victims, including women and children, into sex work, bonded labor or forced marriages; cybercrime: Rapid technological growth has seen a surge in cybercrimes like hacking, online fraud, identity theft and cyberbullying, posing challenges for law enforcement; terrorism: India confronts domestic and cross-border terrorism, resulting in bombings, insurgencies and loss of life and property; organized crime: Organized criminal groups engage in drug trafficking, extortion, smuggling and racketeering, often connected to political and economic elites; caste-based crimes: The deeply rooted caste system contributes to caste-based discrimination, violence and atrocities against Dalits; religious violence: Communal tensions occasionally escalate into religious violence and riots, a sensitive issue due to India's religious and cultural diversity; environmental crimes: Illegal activities harming the environment, such as poaching, illegal mining, deforestation and pollution, impact ecosystems and natural resources; drug abuse and illicit trafficking: Rising drug abuse, especially among youth, coincides with the operation of illicit drug trafficking networks; honour killings: Honour killings persist in some regions, driven by notions of caste, religion or family honor, often targeting individuals who marry against family wishes or violate perceived norms [1-5].

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## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Theme (crime)

Crime is a theme that offers a window into the complexities of society, its structures and its norms. Sociology, as a discipline, perceives crime as an outcome of societal structures, norms and disparities. It scrutinizes how factors such as poverty, education and socialization influence individuals' choices to engage in criminal activities. Durkheim's concept of anomie underscores the role of societal breakdown in nurturing deviance, highlighting that crime often arises as a reaction to societal strains and the weakening of social bonds. Moreover, crime becomes a mirror reflecting the power dynamics within a society, unveiling the holders of authority and those marginalized by prevailing norms. Consequently, the criminal justice system becomes a focal point for investigating social control mechanisms, inviting inquiries into issues of fairness, discrimination and bias. It is crucial to investigate disparities in arrests, sentencing and incarceration rates along racial and socioeconomic lines as crime disproportionately affects vulnerable segments of society, thereby shedding light on broader societal concerns.

Viewing crime from a sociological lens-social norms and deviance: Societies establish norms, which are shared expectations and rules about how individuals should behave. Crime is essentially a violation of these norms but in a legal sense. It tackles-Social inequality: Crime is often intertwined with issues of social inequality. We can examine how factors like poverty, lack of education, discrimination and limited access to resources can contribute to criminal behavior and then study the relationship between crime rates and socioeconomic disparities in different communities. Socialization and culture: Investigating how cultural influences, such as media, family, peers and education, can either discourage or promote criminal behavior; Social control: Societies employ mechanisms of social control to discourage and prevent crime. This includes the legal system, law enforcement and informal social controls like peer pressure and community values; Labeling theory: How labeling individuals as "criminals" can influence their future actions. Labeling theory suggests that when individuals are stigmatized as criminals, they may internalise this identity and engage in further criminal behavior; Crime patterns and trends: Collecting and analysing data on crime patterns and trends by examining factors like location, time, demographics and types of crime to identify underlying social cause; Social change: Crime can be a catalyst for social change-how movements for criminal justice reform, changes in laws and shifts in public attitudes can impact crime rates and the treatment of offenders [6-9].

Before the year 2000, there was no internationally accepted (*i.e.*, approved by the UN General Assembly) legal definition of 'organised crime' or '(international) terrorism'. Now there is at least a UN draft definition of terrorism and a finalized one for 'organized criminal groups' in the Palermo Convention of 2000, however, organized crime proves to be a complex notion to delineate. Organized crime is characterized as a clandestine entity driven by the pursuit of profits and prone to using violence, which operates in the shadows and offers illicit services or unlawfully acquired lawful or unlawful goods that fulfill a significant demand. This demand remains unaddressed by

governments or conventional market operations. The structure of these groups may either be hierarchical and rooted in familial or clan affiliations or it could take the form of networks molded by the specific activities the organization engages in, such as drug trade, prostitution, extortion, fraud, arms smuggling, counterfeiting, money laundering, migrant trafficking, gambling, internet-based blackmail and contract killings, among others [10].

Gangs and organized crime groups have long been a part of India's criminal landscape. These groups operate with varying levels of sophistication, engaging in a wide range of illicit activities, including drug trafficking, extortion, smuggling, human trafficking and more. The presence and activities of these criminal networks pose significant challenges to law enforcement and public safety in India [11].

The emergence of gangs and organized crime in India can be traced back to historical and socio-economic factors. Many criminal groups have their roots in regional power structures, including political patronage and protection. Over time, these groups have diversified their activities and expanded their influence across the country. Some infamous examples include the D-Company, responsible for drug trafficking and organized crime and the Mumbai underworld (Dawood Ibrahim, Arun Gawli, Memon brothers, Chota Ranjan), known for its involvement in extortion and contract killings.

Challenges in combating gangs and organized crime in India are multifaceted. Corruption within law enforcement agencies, porous borders and a lack of coordinated efforts across states hinder effective law enforcement. However, Indian authorities have taken steps to address these challenges through specialized agencies like the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) and the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI). Moreover, legislative measures like the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) provide legal tools to prosecute organized crime members [12].

## DISCUSSION

### Determining the causes

Organized crime in India is a multifaceted issue with roots in various socio-economic, cultural and systemic factors. This paper delves into the diverse causes of organized crime in the country, shedding light on the economic disparities, corruption, cultural dynamics and legal weaknesses that contribute to its persistence. The following sections explore these causes in depth.

**Economic disparities and limited job opportunities:** One of the primary drivers of organized crime in India is economic disparities. The country is marked by significant wealth gaps, with millions living in poverty while small elite enjoys immense riches. Limited job opportunities, especially for the youth, further exacerbate these disparities. Unemployment and underemployment create a fertile ground for recruitment by criminal gangs offering quick financial gains.

**Corruption and weak legal systems:** Corruption is endemic in India and permeates various levels of society and government. This corruption extends to law enforcement agencies and the judiciary, impairing their ability to combat organized crime effectively. Criminals often exploit legal loopholes and manipulate the system, undermining the rule of law.

**Cultural factors and historical disruptions:** Cultural factors play a significant role in the perpetuation of organized crime. India's diverse cultural landscape includes caste systems, family hierarchies and patronage networks that can be manipulated by criminal groups. Historical disruptions, such as invasions and colonial rule, have left lasting scars and created environments conducive to criminal activities.

**Technological advancements and globalization:** Technological advancements and globalization have transformed organized crime in India. Cybercrime, in particular, has witnessed a sharp rise, with criminals exploiting digital tools for financial fraud, identity theft and cyberbullying. Globalization has opened new avenues for criminal enterprises, facilitating the smuggling of goods and drugs across borders.

**Social marginalization and geopolitical conflicts:** Social marginalization, particularly of marginalized communities and tribal populations, has contributed to the allure of organized crime. Disenfranchised individuals may turn to criminal activities as a means of survival. Geopolitical conflicts in certain regions of India have also led to the rise of insurgent groups engaged in criminal enterprises.

**The irresistible lure of financial gains:** Ultimately, the irresistible lure of significant financial gains drives many individuals into organized crime. The promise of quick wealth, even at the lowest rungs of criminal organizations, entices recruits. This economic incentive, combined with the minimal risks associated with criminal activities, makes organized crime an appealing option.

Organized crime in India is a complex issue rooted in a web of causes. Addressing this challenge requires comprehensive efforts, from economic reforms to legal reforms, to tackle the root causes and create a more just and equitable society.

## Analysing the problem

Organized crime in India presents a complex set of challenges with significant social, economic and political implications. Some of them are-

**Violence and public safety:** Organised crime groups in India are often associated with violent activities such as extortion, contract killings and territorial disputes. This violence not only poses a direct threat to the lives of individuals involved but also endangers public safety in affected regions;

**Economic drain:** Organised crime diverts resources from legitimate economic activities. Extortion, illegal gambling and money laundering undermine local businesses and hinder economic development. It siphons off significant funds that could otherwise contribute to growth, corruption and weakened institutions;

**Criminal organizations seek to corrupt law enforcement agencies and institutions.** When police, politicians and bureaucrats become complicit, it erodes trust in these institutions, leading to a breakdown of the rule of law;

**social fabric erosion:** The presence of organized crime can fragment communities. Residents may live in fear, distrust their neighbors and hesitate to cooperate with law enforcement due to fears of reprisals. This undermines social cohesion and communal harmony;

**narcotics and health issues:** Organised crime is deeply involved in drug trafficking, leading to a rise in substance abuse

problems. Communities with high drug-related crime often experience increased rates of addiction, overdose and associated health concerns;

**human trafficking and exploitation:** Criminal groups in India engage in human trafficking, forced labor and sexual exploitation, leading to severe human rights violations and compromising the well-being of vulnerable individuals;

**environmental impact:** Organised crime can harm the environment through activities like illegal mining, wildlife poaching and illegal waste disposal. These practices result in ecological degradation and resource depletion;

**National security threat:** Organised crime's transnational nature and potential links to terrorism pose a significant national security threat. It can destabilize governments, compromise political systems and facilitate terrorist activities.

## Future prospects: How can the situation be improved?

The issue of gangs and organized crime in India is complex, deeply entrenched and multifaceted, necessitating comprehensive strategies for improvement. The potential avenues for addressing these pressing concerns are:

**Strengthening law enforcement and judicial system** improving law enforcement capabilities and the judicial system is paramount. This includes:

**Enhanced training:** Law enforcement agencies should receive specialized training in dealing with organized crime, cybercrime and modern investigative techniques.

**Fast-track courts:** Establishing specialized courts to expedite organized crime cases, ensuring swifter justice and discouraging criminals.

**Legislative reforms** reviewing and amending existing laws to better combat organized crime:

**RICO-like laws:** India should consider legislation similar to the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) Act in the United States, which allows for the prosecution of entire criminal organizations.

**Asset forfeiture laws:** Enacting stringent laws to seize and forfeit assets acquired through criminal activities.

### Intelligence and coordination

Improving intelligence gathering and coordination among law enforcement agencies:

**Centralized database:** Developing a national database to centralize criminal information and facilitate interagency cooperation.

**International collaboration:** Strengthening collaboration with international law enforcement agencies to combat transnational organized crime.

**Community engagement** fostering community engagement and trust-building:

**Community policing:** Expanding community policing initiatives to enhance public cooperation and reduce fear.

**Public awareness campaigns:** Launching campaigns to educate citizens about the dangers of organized crime and the importance of reporting suspicious activities.

## Socioeconomic interventions addressing root causes

**Poverty alleviation:** Implementing poverty alleviation programs to reduce the socioeconomic vulnerabilities that drive individuals towards organized crime.

**Youth empowerment:** Focusing on skill development and employment opportunities for youth to deter them from criminal activities.

## Technology and cybercrime adapting to the digital age

**Cybercrime units:** Establishing specialized cybercrime units to combat online criminal activities.

**Cybersecurity awareness:** Raising cybersecurity awareness among individuals, businesses, and government entities.

## International cooperation

Promoting international cooperation by strengthening bilateral agreements with countries affected by transnational organized crime.

Addressing the issue of gangs and organized crime in India requires a multi-pronged approach. By adopting these strategies, India can take significant steps towards mitigating the impact of organized crime and improving the safety and security of its citizens.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, understanding gangs and organized crime within the Indian context requires a nuanced approach that considers the socio-economic, cultural and political factors at play. The intricate web of relationships among various stakeholders, including law enforcement, communities and the criminal underworld, highlights the complexity of the issue. Addressing these challenges necessitates comprehensive strategies that promote social development, enhance legal frameworks and foster community engagement. By acknowledging the unique characteristics of organized crime in India, policymakers and

society can work towards effective interventions that not only combat criminal activities but also contribute to a more just and equitable society.

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