

## Capturing crime — on the NCRB data for 2016

The [National Crime Records Bureau data for 2016](#) on two important aspects, violent crime and crime against women, should prompt State governments to make a serious study of the underlying causes. Not all States are equally affected; Uttar Pradesh and Bihar record the maximum number of murders. The national tally on crimes against women, which includes rape, abduction, assault and cruelty by husband and relatives, is up by 2.9% over that of 2015. Going by the data, there is a distinct urban geography as well for violence against women, with Delhi and Mumbai appearing the least safe: Delhi recorded a rate of crime that is more than twice the national average. As several studies have shown over the years, the annual data is useful in reviewing trends of extreme events, such as murder, but less so in the case of other offences that tend to be underreported. Viewed in perspective, the murder rate today has declined to the level prevailing in the 1950s, which was 2.7 per 1,00,000 people, after touching a peak of 4.62 in 1992. But that macro figure conceals regional variations, witnessed in U.P. and Bihar, where 4,889 and 2,581 murder incidents took place during 2016, respectively, while it was 305 in densely populated Kerala. One question that needs to be analysed is, how much does social development influence a reduction in crime?

In the years since the Delhi gang rape case of 2012 that shook the country, the definition of the heinous offence has been broadened, police forces have been directed to record the crime with greater sensitivity, and some measures initiated to make public places safer for women. This approach could lead to a reduction in violent crime over time. A focussed programme to universalise education and skills training would potentially keep juveniles from coming into conflict with the law. Last year's data indicate that there is a rise in the number of cases involving juveniles. There are also basic issues that need urgent reform, such as modernising the police, recruiting the right candidates and teaching them to uphold human rights. The orders of the Supreme Court on police reforms issued in 2006 have not been implemented in letter and spirit by all States. With genuine measures, Ministerial superintendence over the police would become more transparent and socially accountable, eliminating political interference in its working. This would lead to a reduction in crimes committed with impunity and raise public confidence in the criminal justice delivery system. As a measure of data improvement, it should be mandatory to record not just the principal offence in a case, as the NCRB does, and list all cognisable offences separately. Rather than view the available data passively, governments would do well to launch serious studies that result in policies and measures for freedom from violence.

Revving up infrastructure spending is necessary, but not sufficient

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