

## RECORDING CRIMES: ON NCRB REPORT

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Rights & Welfare of Women - Schemes & their Performance, Mechanisms, Laws Institutions and Bodies

After a delay of two years, the Crime in India Report for the year 2017 was finally released by the National Crime Records Bureau on Monday. A few months ago, government officials had blamed the States of West Bengal and Bihar for lackadaisical responses in sending data, and said that more subheads for the data would be added in the latest report requiring further collation and error corrections. These new subheads reportedly included data on hate crimes besides those related to mob lynching, killings ordered by khap panchayats, murders by influential people, besides “anti-national elements”. Except for the last category — Crimes by Northeast insurgents, left wing extremists and terrorists — the other subheads are missing in the report which suggests that the Bureau was not keen on including them. The Supreme Court last year had, in an order, called for a special law to deal with lynching, and data on such hate crimes would have been useful in both law enforcement and jurisprudence. The Central government has time and again argued against the need for a separate law and has affirmed that curbing lynching was a matter of “enforcement”. Without a proper accounting of hate crimes — as of now there exist only a few independent “hate crime trackers” based on media reports — the question arises if the government is serious about tackling them effectively.

The NCRB data on crime hide significant variances in case registration of serious crimes such as rapes and violence against women across States, which make it difficult to draw State-wise comparisons. The total number of crimes committed against women country-wide increased by 6% since 2016, while those against Scheduled Castes went up by 13%. However there is the possibility of some States reporting such crimes better. This is pertinent, particularly in rape cases, where the Union Territory of Delhi registered a rate of 12.5 per one lakh population, surpassed only by Madhya Pradesh (14.7) and Chhattisgarh (14.6). But the filing of rape complaints in Delhi have significantly increased following public outcry over the December 2012 rape incident and this could partially explain the high rate of such cases. The fact that Delhi recorded a 40.4% of the total IPC crimes registered among metropolitan cities in 2017 is also likely due to the use of easier (online) means to register them. The other drawback in the report is the use of the census base year as 2001 to calculate crime rates for States and 2011 for metropolitan cities, which make the assessments unwieldy. Despite these issues, the report offers a useful snapshot of crime in the country. Some crimes, murders for example, do not suffer from registration issues as much. The 2017 report shows that the States in the northeast and others in the rest of the country with a significant tribal population (Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Odisha) have relatively higher murder rates and this is a cause of worry.

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