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Topic of Research: Policing and Public Order: A Case Study of Lucknow Police Commissionerate System

Abstract

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This thesis explores how policing in urban India is changing in response to new governance challenges, with a specific focus on the Lucknow Police Commissionerate system. At its core, the study tries to understand a simple but important question: Has the Commissionerate system actually made policing more effective, responsive, and citizen-friendly, or is it just another administrative reform on paper?

To answer this, the research begins by placing modern policing within a larger historical context. Policing in India has never been just about crime control it has always been closely linked to governance and power. From ancient systems described in texts like the *Arthashastra*, where policing was integrated with administration, to the colonial period where the police became an instrument of control, the nature of policing has evolved but also carried forward certain legacies. One of the most significant of these is the colonial model established under the Police Act of 1861, which emphasized hierarchy, control, and authority over public service.

Even after independence, many of these features continued, shaping the way police interact with citizens. This has contributed to a long-standing trust deficit between the police and the

public. While several committees and commissions have recommended reforms over the decades, meaningful change has been slow and uneven.

It is in this context that the Police Commissionerate system has emerged as an important reform, especially in urban areas. Unlike the traditional system where policing powers are shared between the Superintendent of Police (SP) and the District Magistrate (DM), the Commissionerate system gives more authority to the Police Commissioner, including certain magisterial powers. The idea behind this shift is quite straightforward: reduce delays, improve coordination, and enable quicker decision-making in complex urban environments.

Lucknow, being a rapidly growing city with diverse social and economic challenges, provides a useful case to examine how this system works in practice. This study looks not only at administrative changes but also at how these changes are experienced by ordinary citizens.

The research uses a mixed-methods approach to capture both numbers and lived experiences. On the quantitative side, 497 citizen surveys were conducted across the five zones of the Lucknow Police Commissionerate. These surveys include responses from a wide range of groups women, elderly citizens, youth, workers, and marginalized communities so that the analysis reflects different social realities rather than a single perspective.

On the qualitative side, interviews were conducted with police officials, experts, and practitioners, including senior officers who have direct experience with the system. The study also includes case studies of specific incidents and examines crime data to understand broader trends. This combination of methods allows the research to go beyond surface-level observations and provide a more grounded understanding of policing.

The findings of the study present a mixed but insightful picture. On the positive side, there is clear evidence that the Commissionerate system has improved coordination within the police structure. Decision-making has become faster, particularly in situations that require immediate action, such as handling protests, managing public events, or responding to emergencies. The removal of the dual-control system has reduced bureaucratic delays, which was one of the major criticisms of the earlier model.

There are also improvements in how urban challenges are managed. Issues like traffic control, crowd management, and crime prevention are being handled more systematically. Many respondents reported better visibility of police personnel and quicker response times,

which has contributed to a sense of increased security in certain areas.

Importantly, the study finds that citizen satisfaction has improved to some extent. Initiatives related to women's safety, outreach programs, and the use of technology have had a positive impact, especially among specific groups. However, this improvement is not uniform. Different sections of society experience policing differently, and the benefits of the system are not evenly distributed.

At the same time, the research highlights several important concerns that cannot be ignored. One of the biggest issues is accountability. While the concentration of powers in the hands of the Police Commissioner has improved efficiency, it also raises questions about checks and balances. Without strong oversight mechanisms, there is always a risk of misuse of power or lack of transparency.

Another major concern is the quality of investigation. The study shows that even though law-and-order management has improved, investigative processes remain weak. Problems such as lack of training, limited resources, and procedural delays continue to affect the effectiveness of investigations. This gap between quick action on the ground and slow or weak investigation creates challenges for justice delivery and affects public trust.

Coordination with the civil administration is another area where difficulties remain. The Commissionerate system was expected to simplify governance, but in practice, some level of friction still exists between different agencies. Issues like overlapping responsibilities and unclear boundaries continue to create challenges, especially in areas that require joint action.

The study also looks at policing from the perspective of street-level bureaucracy, focusing on the role of Station House Officers (SHOs). These officers are the ones who interact directly with citizens and make everyday decisions that shape people's experiences with the police. The research shows that while the system at the top has changed, many ground-level practices are still influenced by traditional working styles, resource constraints, and local pressures. This suggests that institutional reform alone is not enough; changes are also needed in training, organizational culture, and everyday practices.

In conclusion, the thesis argues that the Lucknow Police Commissionerate system is a meaningful step toward modernizing policing in urban India, but it is not a complete solution.

It has brought improvements in efficiency, coordination, and responsiveness, which are important achievements. However, for the system to truly succeed, it must be supported by stronger accountability mechanisms, better investigative capacity, and deeper engagement with citizens.

The study contributes to ongoing debates on police reform in India by providing grounded, empirical insights rather than purely theoretical arguments. It shows that reform is not just about changing structures but also about changing how institutions function in practice.

Ultimately, effective policing is not only about maintaining order but also about building trust. The success of any policing system depends on how people experience it in their everyday lives. This research highlights that while progress has been made, there is still a long way to go in creating a police system that is not only efficient but also fair, transparent, and genuinely responsive to the needs of all sections of society.