

When Duty Becomes Deviance: A Psycho-Social, Political, and Legal Analysis of Police Misconduct in FIR Registration in India

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Abstract

Police misconduct in the registration of the First Information Report (FIR) — including refusal to register cognizable offences, wrongful reclassification of criminal wrongs as "civil disputes," and selective inaction — constitutes one of the most consequential yet under-theorized forms of institutional deviance in India's criminal justice system. This paper undertakes a multi-disciplinary analysis of why police personnel at the station level engage in such misconduct, integrating psychological (authority bias, moral disengagement, burnout), social (community and caste embeddedness, patron-client networks), political (local power capture, electoral protection), behavioral (habituation, discretion-as-power), corruptive sense-making (rationalization scripts that redefine crime as "civil" to avoid paperwork and liability), and educational-institutional (inadequate legal literacy and disqualifying training gaps) dimensions. The paper situates this behavior within India's evolving legal architecture, tracing the shift from the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 (CrPC) and the Indian Penal Code, 1860 (IPC) to the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023 (BNSS) and the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 (BNS), and reviews landmark Supreme Court jurisprudence — principally *Lalita Kumari v. Government of Uttar Pradesh* (2014), *State of Haryana v. Bhajan Lal* (1992), *Joginder Kumar v. State of U.P.* (1994), *D.K. Basu v. State of West Bengal* (1997), *Prakash Singh v. Union of India* (2006), and *Vineet Narain v. Union of India* (1998) — that have sought to close the gap between statutory duty and station-level practice. An illustrative, anonymized case vignette drawn from a composite of common rural North Indian station-level patterns — informants being told that a cognizable criminal matter is "civil" and refused FIR registration — is used to ground the theoretical discussion. The paper concludes with a multi-level policy framework spanning recruitment, training, technology, oversight, and accountability reform.

Keywords: police misconduct; FIR refusal; Zero FIR; Lalita Kumari judgment; Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita; corruptive sense-making; police accountability; institutional deviance; India

1. Introduction

The First Information Report (FIR) is the constitutional and procedural gateway through which the Indian criminal justice machinery is set into motion. Under Section 173 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023 (BNSS) — the successor to Section 154 of the CrPC — registration of an FIR is mandatory the moment information disclosing a cognizable offence is received by an officer in charge of a police station, irrespective of territorial jurisdiction (the "Zero FIR" principle) (Drishti Judiciary, n.d.-a). And yet, station-level practice across large parts of India routinely departs from this statutory command. Citizens reporting theft, assault, land-grabbing, fraud, or intimidation are frequently informed, without legal basis, that "yeh civil case hai" ("this is a civil matter") — a phrase that functions less as legal classification and

more as an administrative deflection strategy to avoid registering an FIR, opening an investigation file, or exposing the station to case-disposal accountability metrics.

This phenomenon — police "gustakhi" (dereliction, insolence, or wrongful liberty-taking) in the discharge of core statutory duty — is not merely an administrative failure. It is a multi-causal social phenomenon that sits at the intersection of individual psychology, organizational culture, caste and patronage networks, local political economy, and legal-institutional design. This paper asks: *why does a police officer, bound by unambiguous statutory duty and reinforced by nearly three decades of Supreme Court jurisprudence, still refuse to register an FIR or mischaracterize a criminal complaint as a civil dispute?*

The paper's contribution is threefold. First, it develops an integrated theoretical framework spanning psychological, social, political, behavioral, corruptive sense-making, and educational-institutional dimensions of station-level police misconduct — dimensions that existing literature typically treats in isolation (Verma, 2005; Raghavan, 2016). Second, it maps this misconduct against India's current dual-track legal regime (IPC/CrPC residual jurisdiction for pre-2024 offences, and BNS/BNSS for the current regime), consolidating the applicable statutory provisions and Supreme Court guidelines in one place — a resource gap that police accountability literature has not adequately addressed since the 2023–2024 code transition. Third, it grounds the analysis in an illustrative, anonymized station-level case vignette that captures a widely-documented pattern: FIR refusal accompanied by the "it's a civil case" rationalization script, which the paper treats as a case study in corruptive sense-making rather than as an isolated administrative lapse.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Police Discretion and Deviance in Criminological Theory

Police discretion has long been recognized in criminological literature as a double-edged instrument: it allows officers to exercise contextual judgment, but it also creates space for the substitution of personal, social, or institutional interest for legal duty (Skolnick, 1966; Bittner, 1970). In the Indian context, scholars have documented that police discretion at the FIR stage functions as a gatekeeping mechanism that determines whether a citizen's grievance enters the formal justice system at all (Verma, 2005). Because FIR registration triggers investigation timelines, resource allocation, and performance metrics tied to "crime rate" statistics, station house officers (SHOs) face structural incentives to suppress registration — a pattern termed "reporting evasion" in comparative policing literature (Belur, 2010).

2.2 Institutional Ethnographies of Indian Policing

Ethnographic and survey-based research on Indian policing has consistently found that FIR registration is one of the most manipulated points in the criminal justice chain. The Status of Policing in India Report series (Common Cause & CSDS, 2018, 2019) documented that a substantial proportion of citizens surveyed reported difficulty in getting an FIR registered, and that police personnel frequently exercised informal "settlement" pressure before allowing a complaint to proceed. Raghavan (2016) similarly found that station-level officers often perceive FIR registration less as a legal duty and more as a discretionary favor, reflecting an inversion of the citizen-state relationship envisioned by criminal procedure law.

2.3 Corruption, Patronage, and Local Power

A parallel literature situates police misconduct within India's broader patronage democracy. Anastasia Piliavsky's (2014) and Beatrice Jauregui's (2016) ethnographies of North Indian policing describe how station-level officers are embedded in dense networks of caste, kinship, and political patronage that condition their exercise of statutory power. Jauregui (2016) in particular describes Uttar Pradesh policing as characterized by "provisional authority," in which officers routinely trade legal compliance for social and political capital — a dynamic directly relevant to FIR refusal against politically or socially influential respondents.

2.4 Legal-Institutional Responses

The Supreme Court's jurisprudence — discussed in detail in Section 4 — represents the principal legal-institutional response to this pattern. However, implementation research (Bureau of Police Research and Development [BPRD] reports; National Police Commission recommendations) has repeatedly found that judicial pronouncements alone have limited effect absent structural reform in recruitment, training, supervision, and technology-enabled oversight (National Police Commission, 1979–1981; Prakash Singh v. Union of India, 2006).

This paper builds on this literature by proposing an integrated multi-level model rather than treating psychological, social, political, and legal factors as separate silos.

3. Theoretical Framework: Six Dimensions of Police Misconduct in FIR Registration

3.1 Psychological Dimension

3.1.1 Authority bias and role identity distortion. Police training and organizational culture in India emphasize hierarchical authority and command compliance (Verma, 2005). Officers internalize a self-concept in which the citizen approaching the station is a supplicant rather than a rights-bearing claimant. This role inversion produces what social psychologists term *authority bias* — the tendency to treat one's own discretionary judgment as inherently legitimate, even where it contradicts binding legal norms (Milgram, 1974, as applied to institutional authority contexts).

3.1.2 Moral disengagement. Bandura's (1999) theory of moral disengagement offers a useful lens: officers who refuse to register a valid FIR frequently employ cognitive mechanisms — euphemistic labeling ("this is not a real case," "this is civil, not criminal"), diffusion of responsibility ("the SHO decides, not me"), and dehumanization or minimization of the complainant's grievance ("these people fight over land every day") — to reconcile misconduct with a stable self-image as a dutiful officer. This is not necessarily conscious deception; it is often genuine, distorted sense-making that allows the officer to avoid the psychological discomfort of acknowledged wrongdoing.

3.1.3 Occupational stress, burnout, and cynicism. Indian police personnel operate under conditions of chronic understaffing, extended duty hours, inadequate housing, and high case pendency (BPRD, various years). Occupational stress research links burnout to reduced procedural diligence and increased use of avoidance behaviors — of which FIR refusal is a low-effort, low-accountability option compared to full registration and investigation (Maslach & Leiter, 2016, applied to Indian policing contexts by Raghavan, 2016).

3.2 Social Dimension

3.2.1 Caste, community, and local embeddedness. Station-level officers are frequently posted in or near the districts where they have social ties, and even when posted elsewhere, they operate within local caste and community hierarchies that shape whose complaints are treated as urgent and whose are dismissed (Jauregui, 2016; Piliavsky, 2014). A complainant from a socially subordinate group reporting an offence against a locally dominant individual or family is disproportionately likely to be told the matter is "civil" or to be encouraged toward informal panchayat-style settlement rather than formal registration.

3.2.2 Informal dispute-resolution culture. India's strong tradition of informal mediation (panchayat, biradari, or community-level settlement) creates a normative script in which police themselves position FIR registration as a last resort, to be avoided in favor of "compromise." While informal resolution has genuine value in appropriate civil contexts, its indiscriminate application to cognizable criminal offences — for example, land-related violence, assault, or fraud — constitutes a structural misclassification device that shields perpetrators from the formal justice system.

3.3 Political Dimension

3.3.1 Local political capture. Station House Officers in India operate within a system of frequent, politically-influenced transfers, which the *Prakash Singh v. Union of India* (2006) judgment specifically sought to address. Where local elected representatives or influential political actors have interests adverse to a complainant, officers face direct or indirect pressure to avoid registering FIRs that could implicate politically connected individuals (Prakash Singh v. Union of India, 2006).

3.3.2 Electoral and administrative protection of local elites. Politically embedded landholding families, contractors, or local power-brokers often enjoy informal immunity from criminal registration because station-level officers calculate that antagonizing them carries greater career risk than denying a complainant's statutory right. This produces a systematic under-registration of crimes committed by, or in the interest of, locally powerful actors — precisely the phenomenon the Supreme Court in *Lalita Kumari* sought to foreclose by removing police discretion over registration.

3.4 Behavioral Dimension

3.4.1 Habituation and normalization. Where FIR refusal is tolerated by supervisory officers and not sanctioned, it becomes a routinized behavioral script rather than an exceptional act. Behavioral research on organizational deviance shows that unpunished rule violations tend to become normalized organizational practice, spreading through peer modeling within the station (Ashforth & Anand, 2003, applied to Indian policing by Raghavan, 2016).

3.4.2 Discretion as informal power and rent-extraction opportunity. The power to decide whether a complaint "deserves" an FIR is, in practice, a form of informal authority that can be monetized. Behavioral economics of corruption identifies discretionary "gatekeeping" points — such as FIR registration — as prime sites for rent-seeking, because the officer controls a scarce, high-value good (access to the formal justice system) with low probability of sanction (Bardhan, 1997).

3.5 Corruptive Sense-Making Behavior

This paper treats "corruptive sense-making" as a distinct analytical category: the process by which officers construct internally coherent, often legally dressed-up narratives that reframe a clear statutory violation as reasonable professional judgment. The recurring script — "*yeh civil case hai, court jao*" ("this is a civil case, go to court") — is a paradigmatic example. It performs several functions simultaneously:

- It deflects legal accountability by invoking a plausible-sounding (if legally incorrect) classification.
- It shifts the burden of pursuing justice back onto the citizen, who must now navigate civil courts, file an application under Section 175(4) BNSS (successor to Section 156(3) CrPC) for a magistrate's direction to register an FIR, or approach the Superintendent of Police.
- It insulates the station's official crime statistics from an additional registered case, which in a metrics-driven administrative culture is experienced as an unwelcome burden.
- It allows the officer to maintain a self-narrative of professional competence ("I know the law; this genuinely isn't criminal") even where the classification is transparently incorrect — many disputes labeled "civil" (e.g., criminal trespass, criminal breach of trust, assault arising from a land dispute, or intimidation) plainly disclose cognizable offences under the BNS.

Sense-making theory (Weick, 1995) explains why this script is durable: once an officer or station culture adopts "we don't register land-dispute-adjacent complaints" as an operating heuristic, subsequent cases are retrospectively fitted into that frame regardless of their actual legal character, rather than the frame being tested against the facts of each case.

3.6 Educational and Training Disqualification

3.6.1 Legal literacy gaps. A substantial proportion of constabulary-rank and even some officer-rank personnel receive limited sustained legal education beyond initial academy training, and refresher training on legal amendments (such as the 2023–2024 BNS/BNSS/BSA transition) has been inconsistently implemented across states. This produces genuine, as well as convenient, confusion about the cognizable/non-cognizable distinction — a distinction central to the FIR registration duty.

3.6.2 Absence of standardized case-classification protocols. Unlike some comparative jurisdictions, most Indian police stations lack a mandatory, auditable checklist requiring the recording officer to specify, in writing, the statutory basis for classifying a complaint as non-cognizable or civil before declining registration. This procedural gap allows misclassification to occur without documentary accountability — precisely the gap the *Lalita Kumari* guidelines on preliminary inquiry sought to close.

3.6.3 Recruitment and promotion incentive misalignment. Where promotion and performance evaluation are tied to "low crime rate" or case clearance statistics rather than to registration compliance and investigative quality, officers are institutionally disincentivized from full and accurate FIR registration — an incentive-design failure identified by the National Police Commission as early as 1979–1981 and repeatedly by subsequent reform bodies.

4. Legal Framework: Statutory Duties and Supreme Court Jurisprudence

4.1 The Statutory Duty to Register an FIR

Under the pre-2024 regime, Section 154(1) of the CrPC used the word "shall," which the Supreme Court held left "no room for discretion" to the police once information disclosing a cognizable offence was received (*Lalita Kumari v. Government of Uttar Pradesh*, 2014). This provision is now replicated, with elaboration, in **Section 173 of the BNSS, 2023**, which additionally codifies the Zero FIR principle — permitting registration at any police station irrespective of territorial jurisdiction, with mandatory transfer to the jurisdictional station (*Drishti Judiciary*, n.d.-a; *iPleaders*, 2024).

4.2 Criminal Liability of Officers Who Refuse Registration

Failure to register an FIR is not merely an administrative lapse; it is itself a criminal offence under Indian law.

- Under the earlier regime, **Section 166A(c) of the IPC** made it a specific offence for a public servant to fail, without reasonable cause, to record information relating to the commission of a cognizable offence — punishable with rigorous imprisonment of not less than six months, extending to two years, along with fine (*The LawGist*, n.d.; *Law Journals*, 2022).
- **Section 199 of the BNS, 2023** is the direct successor provision, similarly penalizing a public servant's failure to record a cognizable offence under Section 173 BNSS, with a mandatory minimum of six months' rigorous imprisonment and fine, and the offence is itself cognizable (*ApniLaw*, n.d.).
- **Section 166 of the IPC** (and its BNS successor, also numbered **Section 166 BNS**) separately penalizes a public servant who disobeys the law with intent to cause injury to any person — applicable where FIR refusal is shown to be motivated by intent to shield an accused or harm a complainant (*IPCvsBNS*, n.d.).
- Where FIR refusal forms part of a broader pattern of dereliction, provisions under the **Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988** (as amended in 2018) may also be attracted if the refusal is linked to illegal gratification or undue advantage.

This dual criminal-liability architecture means that a police officer who tells a complainant "this is a civil case" and declines registration of what is, on its face, a cognizable offence is not merely committing a procedural irregularity but is potentially exposed to prosecution under Section 199 BNS (or Section 166A IPC for pre-2024 conduct).

4.3 Landmark Supreme Court Jurisprudence

4.3.1 *Lalita Kumari v. Government of Uttar Pradesh*, (2014) 2 SCC 1. This Constitution Bench decision is the foundational precedent. The case arose when police in Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh refused to register an FIR despite information disclosing the kidnapping of a minor, instead conducting an unauthorized preliminary inquiry (*Record of Law*, n.d.). The Court held that registration of an FIR is mandatory under Section 154(1) CrPC where information discloses a cognizable offence, and that police officers cannot exercise discretion to withhold registration in such cases since the use of the word "shall" in Section 154(1) clearly shows that it is mandatory to register an FIR if the information given to the police discloses the commission of a cognizable offence, and no preliminary inquiry is permissible in such a situation. The Court carved out limited categories (e.g., matrimonial/family disputes, commercial offences, medical negligence, and cases with abnormal delay) where a time-bound

preliminary inquiry may precede registration, but emphasized this is the exception, not the rule (The Legal Quorum, n.d.). Crucially, the Court also held that a police officer cannot decline to lodge an FIR merely because the incident occurred outside that station's jurisdiction, entrenching the Zero FIR principle later codified in Section 173 BNSS (Lawyers Club India, n.d.). [Drishti Judiciary](#)

4.3.2 State of Haryana v. Bhajan Lal, 1992 Supp (1) SCC 335. While primarily cited for guidelines on quashing an FIR, this judgment is equally significant for delineating the categories of cases in which criminal proceedings may legitimately be quashed as an abuse of process — including where allegations, even if taken at face value, disclose only a civil dispute with no ingredient of a cognizable offence. This precedent cuts both ways in the present analysis: it confirms that a *genuine* civil dispute should not be criminally prosecuted, but it equally implies that officers cannot invoke "this is civil" as a blanket excuse where the complaint does disclose ingredients of a cognizable offence (such as criminal trespass, criminal intimidation, cheating, or assault arising from a property dispute).

4.3.3 Joginder Kumar v. State of U.P., (1994) 4 SCC 260. This judgment, while centered on arrest procedure, established that police powers exist to serve the rule of law and citizen protection rather than institutional convenience, reinforcing that discretionary non-action by police is subject to constitutional scrutiny under Articles 21 and 22.

4.3.4 D.K. Basu v. State of West Bengal, (1997) 1 SCC 416. This judgment laid down binding procedural safeguards against custodial abuse and established that failure to follow mandated procedure by police renders the concerned officer liable to departmental action and contempt of court, reinforcing the broader principle that procedural non-compliance by police is independently actionable.

4.3.5 Prakash Singh v. Union of India, (2006) 8 SCC 1. This landmark judgment issued binding directives for police reform, including fixed tenure for key posts, separation of investigation from law-and-order functions, and the establishment of independent Police Complaints Authorities and State Security Commissions — structural reforms directly aimed at insulating station-level officers from the political capture discussed in Section 3.3 above.

4.3.6 Vineet Narain v. Union of India, (1998) 1 SCC 226. This judgment addressed institutional independence in investigation of politically sensitive matters and reinforced the principle that investigative agencies, including police, must function free from extraneous political influence — directly relevant to the political-capture dimension of FIR-registration misconduct.

4.3.7 Recent reaffirmation. Even under the new BNSS regime, courts have continued to reaffirm and refine the *Lalita Kumari* framework — for instance, in *Anurag Bhatnagar v. State (NCT of Delhi)* (25 July 2025), the Supreme Court clarified the sequencing between direct magistrate applications and the two-tier police remedy under Section 173(1) and (4) BNSS, underscoring that the mandatory-registration principle continues to govern the current statutory regime (Bhatt & Joshi Associates, 2026).

4.4 Remedies Available to an Aggrieved Complainant

Where a station refuses to register an FIR, the BNSS provides a structured escalation pathway, consistent with *Lalita Kumari*:

- Written complaint to the Superintendent of Police under Section 173(4) BNSS (successor to Section 154(3) CrPC), who must either investigate the case personally or direct a subordinate officer to do so.
- Application to the jurisdictional Magistrate under Section 175(3)–(4) BNSS (successor to Section 156(3) CrPC) seeking a direction to the police to register and investigate.
- Filing a private criminal complaint before a Magistrate under Section 223 BNSS (successor to Section 200 CrPC).
- Departmental complaint to the Police Complaints Authority (mandated by *Prakash Singh*) or the State/National Human Rights Commission.
- Criminal complaint against the refusing officer personally under Section 199 BNS.
- Writ petition under Article 226 of the Constitution before the jurisdictional High Court.

5. Methodology

This paper adopts a qualitative, doctrinal-cum-conceptual research design combining (a) doctrinal legal analysis of statutory provisions (IPC, CrPC, BNS, BNSS) and binding Supreme Court precedent; (b) secondary literature synthesis drawing on criminological, organizational-behavior, and Indian police-ethnography scholarship; and (c) an illustrative single-case vignette method. The case vignette presented in Section 6 is an anonymized composite constructed to reflect a well-documented, recurring pattern of station-level misconduct — FIR refusal accompanied by wrongful "civil case" classification — rather than a report of a specific, independently verified incident involving named individuals. This methodological choice reflects a deliberate ethical constraint: allegations of specific professional misconduct against identifiable individuals require independent verification (documentary evidence, RTI records, judicial or departmental findings) before being presented as established fact in academic literature, consistent with standard social-science research ethics regarding harm to research subjects (American Psychological Association, 2020). Readers with access to verified, documented incidents (RTI replies, court orders, NHRC/SHRC findings, or media investigations meeting journalistic verification standards) are better served citing those primary sources directly.

6. Illustrative Case Vignette: FIR Refusal and Civil-Case Mischaracterization at a Composite Rural Police Station

To ground the theoretical framework, consider a composite vignette — Station X, a rural police station in North India, reflective of patterns widely documented in police-accountability surveys (Common Cause & CSDS, 2018, 2019) and ethnographic literature (Jauregui, 2016).

A complainant approaches Station X to report that a neighboring family, following a boundary/land dispute, forcibly entered the complainant's property, assaulted a family member, and threatened further violence — facts that, if accurately recorded, disclose cognizable offences under the BNS (criminal trespass, voluntarily causing hurt, criminal intimidation). The duty officer, without recording the complaint in writing or issuing an acknowledgment, orally informs the complainant that "this is a civil land matter — go to the civil court," and

declines to register an FIR. No General Diary entry is made, no preliminary inquiry is conducted or documented, and no reasons are furnished in writing as required where registration is declined.

Applying the theoretical framework developed above:

- **Psychologically**, the officer's response reflects euphemistic labeling ("civil matter") functioning as moral disengagement, allowing him to decline a clear statutory duty while preserving a self-image of professional judgment.
- **Socially**, if the respondent family enjoys greater local social standing than the complainant, the classification decision is likely shaped by community hierarchy rather than legal merit.
- **Politically**, if either party has political connections or the dispute intersects with local land-use politics (common in peri-urban and agrarian India), the officer's calculation of career risk from registering versus declining shapes the outcome.
- **Behaviorally**, if this is a routinized station practice rather than an isolated act, it reflects habituated avoidance behavior reinforced by an absence of supervisory sanction.
- **As corruptive sense-making**, the "civil case" script performs exactly the deflective, burden-shifting, statistics-protecting function described in Section 3.5 — it is legally incorrect (criminal trespass and assault are unambiguously criminal, not civil, even where they arise from an underlying property dispute) but internally rationalized as reasonable.
- **Educationally**, the failure to distinguish between an underlying civil dispute (title to land) and the criminal offences that occurred in the course of that dispute (trespass, assault, intimidation) reflects a legal-literacy gap of exactly the kind identified in Section 3.6 — a distinction the Supreme Court in *Bhajan Lal* and *Lalita Kumari* has directly addressed, and which is codified for the current regime under Section 173 BNSS and Section 199 BNS.

Under the framework in Section 4.4, the correct escalation path for this complainant would be a written complaint to the Superintendent of Police under Section 173(4) BNSS, followed if necessary by a Section 175(4) BNSS application before the Magistrate, and — should the refusal be found to be willful — a complaint against the individual officer(s) under Section 199 BNS.

6.1 Case Study: FIR Refusal and Civil-Case Mischaracterization at Balsamand Police Station

On 1 July, 12 July, 14 July, 2026, Complaint against Vikram Jast's Trying to shoot Parmeshwari Devi by a pistaul and Against Rohtash Who Abusing Parhlad Singh, Residing in Kharia(Hisar) approached Balsamand Police Station, Hisar, Haryana, to file FI report. The complaint was received by Jaivir/Kuldeep Yadav in Balsamand Police Station, who says both these cases are related to civil, declined to register an FIR, stated the matter was a "civil case," and directed the complainant to civil court. No general diary entry was made at the time, and no written reasons were furnished for declining registration, as required under the framework laid down in *Lalita Kumari v. Government of Uttar Pradesh* (2014).

7. Discussion: Toward an Integrated Model

The six dimensions discussed above are not independent; they interact multiplicatively. A legally undertrained officer (educational dimension) operating in a resource-starved, metrics-driven station (behavioral dimension) embedded in local caste/patronage hierarchies (social

dimension) and subject to political pressure protecting locally powerful actors (political dimension) develops durable psychological scripts of moral disengagement (psychological dimension) that crystallize into standardized corruptive sense-making narratives such as "yeh civil case hai" (corruptive sense-making dimension). Legal reform addressing only one dimension — for instance, judicial pronouncement alone (*Lalita Kumari*) without corresponding investment in training, supervisory audit, and technology-enabled documentation — predictably yields only partial compliance, which is consistent with post-2014 survey findings that FIR refusal, while somewhat reduced, remains a persistent and widely reported problem (Common Cause & CSDS, 2018, 2019).

This suggests that effective reform requires simultaneous intervention across all six dimensions rather than reliance on any single lever (judicial, administrative, or technological) in isolation.

8. Recommendations

- **Mandatory digital FIR registration logs** with real-time, tamper-evident timestamping, integrated with the Crime and Criminal Tracking Network and Systems (CCTNS), such that every complaint — registered or declined — generates an auditable digital record, operationalizing the *Lalita Kumari* preliminary-inquiry safeguards.
- **Written reasons requirement:** Any decision to decline FIR registration or classify a complaint as non-cognizable/civil should mandatorily require a written, supervisor-countersigned justification citing the specific statutory provision relied upon, subject to periodic audit by the Superintendent of Police and the Police Complaints Authority mandated under *Prakash Singh*.
- **Independent, functional Police Complaints Authorities** at the district and state level, as directed in *Prakash Singh v. Union of India* (2006), with genuine investigatory and recommendatory power, not merely advisory status.
- **Structural insulation from political transfer pressure**, through strict implementation of fixed minimum tenure for SHOs and Superintendents, as directed in *Prakash Singh*.
- **Continuing legal education**, including mandatory periodic certification on the cognizable/non-cognizable distinction and the BNS/BNSS transition, with performance evaluation tied to registration-compliance quality rather than raw crime-rate suppression.
- **Community legal literacy campaigns** informing citizens of their statutory right to FIR registration, the Zero FIR mechanism, and the escalation pathway under Section 173(4) and Section 175(3)-(4) BNSS.
- **Whistleblower and internal reporting protections** for junior officers who flag supervisory pressure to suppress registration, addressing the behavioral habituation dynamic identified in Section 3.4.

9. Conclusion

Police refusal to register FIRs and the wrongful mischaracterization of criminal complaints as civil disputes represent a form of institutional deviance that cannot be adequately explained by any single disciplinary lens. It is simultaneously a psychological phenomenon of moral disengagement, a social phenomenon rooted in caste and community hierarchy, a political phenomenon of local power protection, a behavioral phenomenon of habituated avoidance, a distinct corruptive sense-making practice that dresses administrative convenience in the language of legal classification, and an educational-institutional failure of legal literacy and incentive design. India's legal architecture — from the CrPC/IPC era through the current

BNSS/BNS regime — has developed increasingly explicit statutory and jurisprudential safeguards, most notably the mandatory-registration rule in *Lalita Kumari v. Government of Uttar Pradesh* (2014) and its codification in Section 173 BNSS, alongside criminal liability for defaulting officers under Section 199 BNS. Yet the persistence of station-level misconduct indicates that legal reform alone is insufficient without parallel investment in training, supervisory accountability, technology-enabled audit trails, and structural insulation of the police from political capture, as envisioned in *Prakash Singh v. Union of India* (2006). Future research should combine verified, documented station-level case studies — built on RTI records, departmental inquiry findings, and judicial orders — with the kind of integrated multi-dimensional framework proposed here, to develop empirically grounded, context-specific reform interventions.

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