



## India's States of Armed Violence

### Assessing the Human Cost and Political Priorities

A traditional preoccupation with military threats to the state has long dominated Indian policy and activism aiming to prevent and reduce armed violence. This realist perspective has the effect—whether intended or not—of displacing consideration of other sources of danger related to armed violence. In recent years, the government has increased its focus on secessionism and foreign-sponsored terrorism, influenced by external events such as the 11 September 2001 attacks on US targets, but also by domestic terrorist incidents, notably the attacks of 13 December 2001 on the Indian parliament and the Mumbai attack of 26–29 November 2008. Yet other forms of violence are far more devastating in terms of numbers of killed, injured, victimized, and affected. Some of these other forms of violence are especially serious in India, such as caste and dowry crimes, while others, such as criminal violence and suicide, are found in all countries.

Although India's violence-related problems are serious and widespread, its rate of violent death is not especially high when compared with that of many other countries. In terms of international homicide rates, India is among the lower–middle ranking countries (see Table 1). But India's national statistics conceal wide variation among its 28 states and seven union territories. Armed violence is much more serious in the north, the north-east, and the Maoist-affected regions. It is believed to be far lower in much of the country's

south. Divergence can be seen also among major cities, with violence much more of a problem in Delhi, for example, than in Calcutta.

This *Issue Brief* focuses primarily on the three problems of insurgency, terrorism, and criminal violence in comparative perspective. In addition to examining patterns and trends, it reviews government policy and spending devoted to tackling the problem of armed violence. Among its key findings are the following:

- Criminal violence caused more than 14 times as many violent deaths as

terrorist activity in 2009, when there were 32,369 homicide victims and 2,231 deaths linked to terrorism.

- Terrorist violence between 1994 and 2009 resulted in 58,288 deaths, an average of more than 3,600 per year. More than half of the dead, 52 per cent, were reportedly civilians and members of the security forces.
- Between 1988 and 2009, the Kashmir conflict caused at least 42,657 deaths, according to official data (more than 80,000 according to other sources).
- The Maoist (Naxalite) insurgency has intensified in recent years,



The Taj Mahal hotel burns during the Mumbai terrorist attack of 26–29 November 2008.  
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spreading to 20 of the country's 28 states and close to one-third of the country's 626 districts. It led to 896 deaths in 2009, of which 392 were those of civilians.

- Rates of violent crime reported in 2009 varied greatly across the country, ranging from fewer than 10 reported crimes per 100,000 people in the north-eastern state of Nagaland to 111 reported crimes per 100,000 in the southern union territory of Puducherry.
- In 2009 police received reports of 8,383 deaths from domestic violence, including dowry deaths, and 89,546 non-fatal cases of torture or cruelty by husbands and relatives.
- Government spending prioritizes international threats over domestic threats. The 2008–09 budget allocated five times more funds to national defence (INR 1,056 billion, or USD 23 billion) than to policing and paramilitaries (INR 206 billion, or USD 4.5 billion).

- Effective policy on armed violence requires highest-level political commitment and whole-of-government coordination, bringing together the ministries of Defence and Home Affairs, with systematic civil-society engagement. Evidence-based evaluation is needed to ensure that baselines are established and tracked over time.

The India Armed Violence Assessment (IAVA) project examines the many dimensions of armed violence, with the aim of broadening debate on the causes and responses to armed violence. The themes introduced here will be explored at greater length in future IAVA *Issue Briefs*. In forthcoming editions, Indian experts will consider the geographic distribution and causes of violent mortality and morbidity, the impacts of Maoist and other insurgencies, the scale and distribution of caste violence, trends in law enforcement and policing, and wider patterns of small-arms and

light-weapons acquisition and proliferation. All these issues are the subject of domestic debate and will also interest the international community of governments, non-government organizations, and diaspora groups.

## A note on statistics

As in many countries, data on armed violence in India should be regarded as suggestive rather than exact. For example, different data sources show significantly different levels of homicide. Most analysts regard criminal-justice data as the most accurate, but public-health sources—collated by the World Health Organization—consistently show homicide in India to be twice as high. As Table 1 shows, this disparity is not unique to India. In general, criminal data shows lower levels of homicide, due to reliance on narrower, juridical determinations. Public-health data usually relies on extrapolation from samples of death certificates, which reflect the finding of a medical examiner. Weaknesses and idiosyncrasies in national reporting systems affect both categories.<sup>1</sup>

A lack of accurate national data on violence and victimization also makes it difficult to compare levels of violent death within India. Analysis of the problem at the national level must rely on two principal sources, both flawed by serious weaknesses. The most exhaustive source of data on violent deaths and other forms of homicide is the annual reports of the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), a police agency operating under the Ministry of Home Affairs. The NCRB collects data from state and city police agencies. The data reflects major differences in the way in which the police agencies report on crime. Differences in state reporting practices might explain why southern states have the highest crime rates in the country according to the NCRB, even though they are widely reputed to have low crime rates (NCRB, 2011a). Consequently, the official data used in

Table 1 International homicide rates for selected countries, according to public-health and criminal-justice sources

	Country	Year	Homicides per 100,000, criminal-justice sources	Homicides per 100,000, public-health sources
1	South Africa	2008	37	68
2	Brazil	2008	22	25
3	Russian Federation	2008	14	20
4	Sri Lanka	2008	7.4	6.8
5	Pakistan	2008	6.8	3.4
6	USA	2008	5.2	6.0
7	Iran	2004	2.9	2.5
8	India	2007	2.8	5.5
9	Nepal	2007	2.2	13.6
10	China	2007	1.2	2.1
11	Germany	2008	0.8	0.6
12	Indonesia	2004	0.7	9.3
13	Japan	2008	0.5	0.5

Note: Latest available data are shown, rounded to two significant digits.

Sources: UNODC Homicide statistics (2003–08). The source of all public-health data is the World Health Organization, except for Brazil (Brazilian Ministry of Health), Germany, and Russia (WHO European Health for All Database), and United States (Pan American Health Organization). Sources of criminal-justice data are Ministry of Justice (Brazil), national police (India, South Africa, and Sri Lanka), national statistics office (China, Nepal, and Pakistan), UN Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems (Germany, Iran, Japan, Russian Federation, and United States), and Interpol (Indonesia).



NCRB reports is suggestive rather than conclusive.

No Indian government agency is known to keep comprehensive records of casualties from terrorist violence in India. Rather, the South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP), a private institute in New Delhi, collates data on terrorism and armed conflicts from published reports, including the news media and annual reports of the Ministry of Home Affairs. SATP data is widely used, but is limited by weaknesses in its sources. The categorization of the dead as terrorists or civilians, for example, or *killed in battle* or *died after arrest*, is notoriously unreliable. Allegations of *encounter deaths*, or extra-judicial killings attributed to Indian security forces, are almost impossible to identify and interpret through such statistics.<sup>2</sup> Whether this significantly affects overall statistics on violent death is unknown.



Villagers at a public rally organized by Maoist rebels in Gaya district, Bihar, 2009.  
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## Armed violence or terrorism?

Terrorism is India's most prominent armed-violence issue. But it is not the cause of most deaths. That claim belongs, rather, to individual acts of murder. As Figure 1 shows, in 2009 more than 14 times as many violent deaths were attributable to criminal murder as to terrorist activity: 32,369 cases of criminal murder, compared with 2,231 deaths from terrorism (NCRB, 2011a; SATP, 2010). While violent crime might attract more day-to-day media coverage, terrorism is

clearly the government's priority, as the annual reports of the Ministry of Home Affairs reveal (MHA, 2010a).

Insurgent and terrorist dangers in India are complex and multifaceted. Almost all the conflicts underlying such violence are decades old, with strong local roots (Acharya, 2006, p.320). India's many forms of secessionist warfare and terrorist conflicts involve old-fashioned nationalist or ethno-nationalist movements, as in Kashmir and the north-eastern states, as well

as more contemporary issues such as the lack of effective governance that is propelling the Maoist insurgency.

Major terrorist attacks in recent years include the following (SATP, 2009, 2010):

- Jaipur, 13 May 2008, killing two, injuring about 20 people;
- Bangalore, 25 July 2008, killing two, injuring about 20;
- Ahmedabad, 26 July 2008, killing 56, injuring more than 200;
- Mumbai, 26–29 November 2008, killing 164 people and injuring at least 308;
- New Delhi, 13 December 2008, killing 30, injuring more than 100;
- Pune, 13 February 2010, killing nine, injuring 45; and
- New Delhi, 20 September 2010, injuring 2.

Figure 1 Comparing fatalities from crime and terrorism, 2005-09



Sources: NCRB, 2011; SATP, 2010

Islamist groups were reportedly responsible for most of these terrorist attacks. Indeed, the dangers of secessionist insurgency have different ideological roots. The Maoist insurgency is concentrated in the large

'Red Belt' but has spread to 20 of 28 Indian states and roughly 200 of the country's 626 districts, most of them relatively remote and impoverished. Although the insurgency had previously been confined to tribal and rural areas, it is now beginning to be felt in Indian cities as well (Ramana, 2009). On 15 February 2008, for example, some 400 to 500 Maoists attacked police facilities in the towns of Nayagarh and Daspalla in Orissa, killing 14 (Venkataramani, 2010).

In dealing with these threats, India has used strategies of both negotiated settlement and military force, although the latter has been more prominent. The results have been mixed: in places such as Punjab the government has used military means to contain militancy almost entirely, while in Mizoram (see below) the insurgents were brought into the mainstream through their participation in the electoral process (Gill, 1997; Bhaumik, 2007, pp. 12–13). The government has begun to address the Maoist insurgency by using a mixture of development incentives and military force, but no one is sure how long this will take, or how many lives will be lost before the threat is contained.

Terrorism and separatism dominate Indian official priorities, as manifested in the budgets of the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Home Affairs (see below). Realist political perspectives—which prioritize dangers to the Indian state—focus on the military capabilities of neighbouring states and groups trying to undermine the authority of the central government (Chakma, 2009). The emphasis on internationally contested areas, especially Kashmir and the north-east, overshadows other threats to human security, such as those arising from communalism, sectarianism, and crime. This gap is attracting greater recognition. Many among India's vast NGO community acknowledge the discrepancy (Acharya and Acharya, 2002).

## Terrorism and armed conflict

'Terrorism' typically refers to politically motivated secessionist violence, or to internationally sponsored political violence. It usually does not include communal or sectarian violence (Hoffman, 2006, chapter 1). Even when the definition is narrowed in this way, India ranks among the world's most terrorism-afflicted countries (USDoS, 2009, p.141). Although many academic observers find the concept of terrorism problematic, among Indian academics the concept is widely accepted, even by observers who are most concerned with root causes of terrorist violence (Acharya, Singhdeo, and Rajaretnam 2010). SATP statistics show that between 1994 and 2009 terrorist violence resulted in 55,643 deaths, an average of more than 3,400 per year. Of this total, 52 per cent of the dead were reported to be civilians or members of the security forces (see Figure 2).

Given the magnitude of the threat, it is not surprising that the Indian government ranks terrorism among its foremost national security priorities. Recent attacks on urban centres and the rapid spread of the Maoist rebellion reinforce this concern (Prakash, 2009). Contrary to official claims, militancy in Kashmir is not waning either, as shown by the sudden rebirth of violent opposition and the harsh crackdown since the summer of 2010 (*The Economist*, 2010). The following sections consider

each of the three main terrorist or insurgency threats: in Kashmir, in north-east India, and Maoist insurgency.

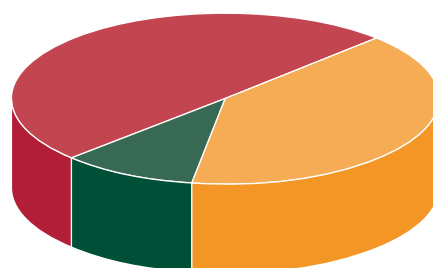
## Terrorism and insurgency in Kashmir

Since India and Pakistan became independent in 1947, Jammu and Kashmir is still the major source of contention and conflict between them. Kashmir joined India under an Instrument of Accession in 1947. Pakistan claims that because most people of the state are Muslims and were not consulted in the accession process, the territory should join Pakistan. India has resisted demands for a referendum, preferring a scheme known as 'Line of Control (LoC) plus', under which it would concede areas taken by Pakistan in the 1947–48 war (Chari, 2006, pp. 130–31). India rejects external mediation, insisting that the bilateral Shimla Agreement of 1972 provides the framework for negotiation of Kashmir issues.

India and Pakistan fought major wars over Kashmir in 1947–48 and 1965, and have engaged in a number of smaller confrontations, most notably the Kargil war of 1999. Beginning in 1989, foreign insurgents, including veterans from wars in Afghanistan, infiltrated Kashmir from Pakistan. These incursions, coupled with an escalation of public uprisings, marked the bloodiest period of militancy in Kashmir (Acharya, 2004, p. 55). Since then these militant groups have engaged Indian security forces in a protracted

Figure 2 Breakdown of fatalities from terrorist violence, 1994–2009

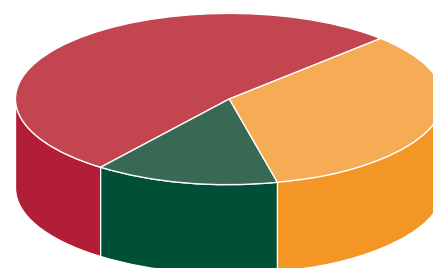
■ Terrorists (27,529)  
 ■ Civilians (22,286)  
 ■ Security forces (5,828)



Source: SATP, 2010

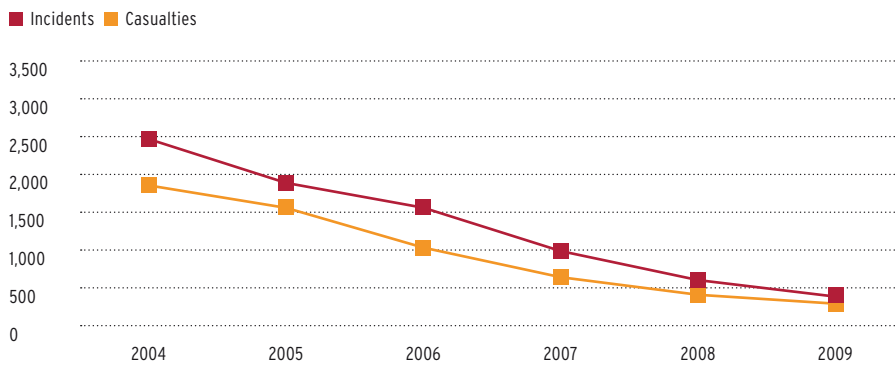
Figure 3 Fatalities from terrorist violence in Kashmir, 1988–2009

■ Terrorists (22,174)  
 ■ Civilians (14,566)  
 ■ Security forces (5,917)



Source: SATP, 2010

Figure 4 **Violence trends in Jammu and Kashmir**



Sources: MHA, 2010a, p. 6

conflict which has cost at least 42,657 lives, according to official data, and more than 80,000 according to other sources (SATP, 2010; Mishra, 2010). This is an average of at least 1,900 deaths per year between 1988 and 2009—and possibly twice as many (see Figure 3).

Estimates of the number of Indian soldiers and paramilitary troops deployed to Kashmir range from 170,000 to 500,000 (AFP, 2011; BBC, 2011). Even the lowest estimate would make this the largest military deployment in the world today, larger than the total armies of Britain, France, or Germany, bigger than the entire International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan (IISS, 2010, pp. 129, 134, 168; NATO, 2010). Accusations of human-rights abuses by the security forces are rampant. Amnesty International’s 2009 report on abuses in Jammu and Kashmir claims that in 2008 security forces killed at least 40 people for defying curfew restrictions. The report also found that ‘impunity continued

for past offences including enforced disappearances of thousands of people during the armed conflict in Kashmir since 1989’ (AI, 2009).

The Ministry of Home Affairs contends that the incidence of violence has declined progressively since 2004 (see Figure 4). It sees a ‘perceptible improvement’ in the overall security situation in Kashmir, due to ‘several holistic measures taken by the government and the people’s yearning for peace’ (MHA, 2010a, p. 6). Successes include countering the challenge ‘posed by the terrorists and violence sponsored from across the border’ (MHA, 2010a, pp. 7–11). The lack of independent data makes it difficult to evaluate such statements, however, and the resumption of violence in 2010 suggests that these statements should be viewed with caution.

These measures, coupled with more effective security operations by Indian forces and more sensitive official leadership, led to a steady decline in fatalities in Kashmir in the early years of the

present century. But in 2010 the conflict re-emerged suddenly as a locally led uprising, where civilian protests are more important than insurgent attacks, in a scenario comparable to the Palestinian Intifada of 1987–91 (*The Economist*, 2010). Outbreaks of violence still occur. In lop-sided clashes, Indian security forces killed 100 Kashmiri protestors and by-standers in 2010. Protestors have also been perpetrators of some deadly violence, as in November 2010 when Kashmiri men killed two police officers (*The Economist*, 2010).

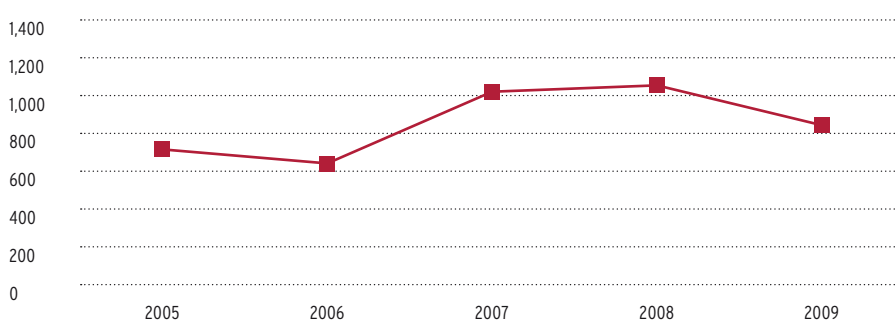
The continued violence suggests that exclusive reliance on armed forces to deal with terrorism or insurgency brings limited results. At the same time, democratic governance and a massive infusion of development aid to the state has not contained or reversed discontent among Kashmiris, especially among surrendered militants. The problems posed by reintegrated surrendered militants are not unique to India. Rather, they illustrate the importance of issues that have proved hard to manage everywhere (Muggah 2009).<sup>3</sup>

## Terrorism and insurgency in north-east India

North-east India is the site of considerable ethno-political unrest and armed violence, in the form of ethnic secessionist movements and even ethnic cleansing. Important groups in the multi-ethnic and multi-cultural states of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, and Tripura have never fully accepted integration into the country. They remain politically sensitive and prone to revolt. As measured in fatalities, however, most of these conflicts have been relatively stable in recent years (see Figure 5).

Although the roots of north-eastern conflict vary among states, there are some common features. In the state of Assam several insurgencies fight for attention and domination. The xenophobic United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) spearheads violent

Figure 5 **Fatalities from terrorist violence in India's north-east, 2005-09**



Source: SATP, 2009a



Figure 6 Fatalities from Maoist violence, 2005-09



Source: SATP, 2009a

opposition to non-Assamese authority, to legal migration from the rest of India, and to illegal migration from Bangladesh. In the same state, the Bodo uprising arose from tribal perceptions of neglect and discrimination (Bhaumik, 2007, p. 3). The insurgency among Mizo people originated from a perceived loss of identity to Assamese domination and discrimination (Bhaumik, 2004, p. 225). In Nagaland, militancy stems from the independence demands of indigenous people represented by the Naga National Council. The insurgency in Tripura involves parochial religious and ethnic issues. In Manipur, the unrest is rooted in attempts to protect the multi-ethnic and multi-cultural character of the native population (Saikia, 2001).

New Delhi's efforts to deal with north-eastern militancy rely on military force and political accommodation, typically bringing rebels into state government. This combination has yielded mixed results. In cases such as Mizoram, the government has brought rebel groups into the mainstream elec-

toral process (Bhaumik, 2007, pp. 12-13). In Assam, by contrast, the situation remains precarious. Local residents and advocacy groups denounce excessive reliance on the military to stem violence which has led to human-rights violations (Nepram, 2009). Legislation such as the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act of 1958, which gives the military legal immunity for their actions, reinforces the tendency to rely on violent suppression rather than negotiation (AFSPA, 1958).

### The toll of Maoist insurgency

In the Indian heartland, various left-wing extremist groups collectively operating under Naxalite or Communist Party of India (Maoist) leadership continue to perpetrate violence in the extensive 'Red Belt' of Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa, West Bengal, and other areas. The Maoist insurgency began as a peasant uprising in 1967 in the village of Naxalbari in West Bengal. Although it

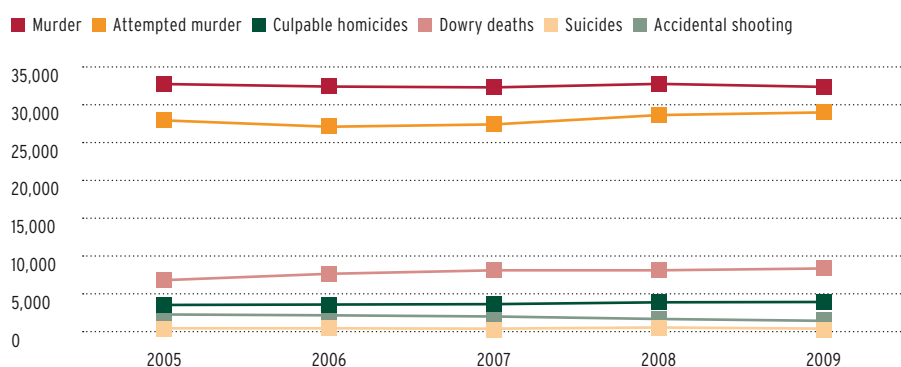
declined in intensity in the late 1970s, when most senior leaders had died or were in prison, the movement is expanding once more.

Maoist violence seems to be increasing in terms of both number and lethality of attacks. These escalations are taking place despite the ongoing Operation Green Hunt: a 'coordinated and joint action' by central government paramilitary and state police forces which began in November 2009 in affected states (MHA, 2010a, p. 6). The number of casualties caused by Maoist activities has increased in recent years (see Figure 6) to 896 dead in 2009, of whom 392 were civilians (SATP, 2009b).

In a widely cited statement, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said that left-wing extremism poses 'perhaps the gravest internal security threat' facing the country, adding that 'despite efforts, the level of violence in the affected states continues to rise' (*Indian Express*, 2009). The movement has successfully infiltrated tribal areas, where illiteracy levels are high and where there is a lack of basic facilities and almost no official government presence. According to the Indian Ministry of Home Affairs:

*Left Wing Extremists operate in the vacuum created by functional inadequacies of field level governance structures, espouse local demands, and take advantage of prevalent dissatisfaction and feelings of perceived neglect and injustice among the under privileged and remote segments of population. (MHA, 2010a, p. 17)*

Figure 7 Reported murders, attempted murders, and related deaths, 2005-09



Sources: NCRB, 2010, 2011a, 2011b

Maoist insurgents engage in systematic attacks on development works in an effort to undermine the government's authority and perceived effectiveness. They have targeted school buildings, railways, roads, and power and telecom infrastructure (MHA, 2010a, p. 17). The threat posed by the rebellion has a national reach. Maoist strongholds in the states of Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Orissa, and

West Bengal contain 85 per cent of India's coal resources, and all are heavily affected by Maoist depredation (Magioncalda, 2010). Since coal constitutes more than 40 per cent of India's primary energy and 70 per cent of its fuel for electricity generation, the implications extend across the country (USEIA, 2010, pp. 1, 8).

The Maoist threat is therefore both a manifestation of the economic and social underdevelopment that has plagued rural India for decades and an obstacle to the future development of those same areas. It is an example of how 'a sense of injustice, related particularly to gross inequality, can be a good ground for rebellion—even bloody rebellion' (Sen, 2008, p. 8). Improving the lives of the people in rural areas requires concerted developmental efforts on the part of the government, but these efforts are being, and will continue to be, compromised by the Maoist threat.

## Crime, domestic violence, suicide, and unintentional injury

Terrorism is an issue of immense importance for India, but crime, domestic violence, and suicides are just as pressing. NCRB statistics show a continuous increase in the reporting of crime, both in absolute numbers and proportionately. In 2009 police received more than 6.6 million complaints relating to criminal incidents, compared with 5 million in 2005, a figure which represents an increase of 30 per cent (NCRB, 2011a, p. 23; see Figure 7).

In the absence of valid and reliable national polling, it is impossible to determine whether this rise reflects an increased willingness to report crimes or an increase in their actual incidence. In terms of incidences of violent crimes (crime against the body) reported in 2009, rates varied greatly across the country, ranging from fewer than 10 reported crimes per 100,000 people in the north-eastern state of Nagaland to

111 reported crimes per 100,000 people in the southern union territory of Puducherry (NCRB, 2011a, pp. 23, 26).

### Violent death: murder and suicide

According to the NCRB, the most frequent motives cited for murder and culpable homicide (manslaughter) are personal vendetta, disputes over property, financial gain, intimate-partner conflicts and sexual affairs, dowry, politics, communalism, and lunacy, as defined by the NCRB (NCRB, 2010, pp. 55–56). The victims tend to be young adult men, with 45 per cent of murder victims aged between 18 and 30 years (NCRB, 2010, p. 59). Since young adult men are the most economically productive segment of the population, their deaths represent a significant loss of productive human capital for the country.

Dowry deaths are an especially serious Indian pathology. Official statistics show that there were 8,383 deaths from domestic violence, includ-

ing dowry deaths, in 2009. Even more common are non-fatal cases of torture or cruelty by husband and relatives, with 89,546 cases reported to police in 2009 (NCRB, 2011a, p. 81). Despite the stigma and a harsh punitive regime, dowry gifts remain a local custom. 'With get-rich-quick becoming the new mantra, dowry became the perfect instrument for upward material mobility', and consequently dowry harassment has become a part of family life (Vinayak, 1997). According to a study by the Institute of Development and Communication, 'the quantum of dowry exchange may still be greater among the upper classes, but 80 per cent of dowry deaths and 80 per cent of dowry harassment occurs in the middle and lower strata' (Vinayak, 1997).

Suicide is not exceptionally common in India, but suicide, often by pesticide consumption, ranks among the foremost causes of fatal deaths in rural areas (Eddleston and Konradsen, 2007). Rural areas are home to the majority of the population (about 72 per cent



A shelter for victims of dowry violence, New Delhi.  
© Elizabeth Dalziel/AP Photo

in the 2001 census), most of whom depend on agriculture for their livelihoods (MHA, 2001). Farmers are often compelled to commit suicide to escape ruinous debt following crop failures or household disasters (Patel, 2007; Nagraj, 2008). According to an April 2009 report, some 1,500 farmers in the state of Chhattisgarh committed suicide after being driven to debt by crop failure in the previous year (*The Independent*, 2009). The provinces most affected by Maoist insurgency, such as Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal, also have the highest number of suicides (NCRB, 2011b, pp. 171-72).

As shown by the NCRB, consuming poison and hanging were the most common methods of suicide, used in 34 and 32 per cent of cases respectively, followed by self-burning and drowning, at 9 and 6 per cent respectively (NCRB, 2011b, p. 184). The largest number of suicides was reported among people who were self-employed: almost 40 per cent of the total of 127,151 officially registered victims in 2009 (NCRB, 2011b, p.182).

## The context of violent crime

A number of socio-economic factors contribute to crime, including poverty, inequality, unemployment, rapid urbanization, and uncontrolled urban migration (GD Secretariat, 2007, chapter 3). The inefficiency of the security apparatus and the pervasive sense of impunity are further influencing factors. The causes of inefficiency are not all inherently structural; in many cases

a lack of personnel, uneven deployment of available forces, and a lack of equipment and training limit the effectiveness of the security forces. NCRB data shows that in 2009 just 49.2 police personnel were deployed for every 100 square kilometres, and just 1.3 constables per 1,000 people (NCRB, 2011a, p. 169).

Endemic corruption has reportedly made the police more susceptible to the influence of criminals, unscrupulous politicians, and private entrepreneurs (Venugopalan, 2002, p. 97). Somaiah describes the widespread popular perception that police personnel—whether from the central government, state, or community—are not apolitical or impartial in the application of the laws (Somaiah, 2002, p. 908). Venugopalan finds that it has ‘become common practice for politicians and bureaucrats to use the police in their power struggle, thereby undermining its independence and accountability’ (Venugopalan, 2002, p.97). Corruption leads police to under-report crime and potentially avoid thorough investigations. Although this does not apply to all Indian policing, issues of police corruption, as well as inadequate facilities, equipment, and training, are widely accepted as part of the country’s growing crime problem (Verma, 1999).

Organized criminal networks exacerbate the problem of crime in cities. These networks extort money, kidnap hostages for ransom, and launder money, besides trafficking firearms, women and children, and drugs (Lal, 2007). A particular cause of

concern is the crime–terrorism nexus. Crime syndicates help terrorist groups by providing resources to support, conceal, or conduct their activism, while criminal entrepreneurs benefit from terrorists’ military skills and networks (Gunaratna and Acharya, 2007, p.100). In one prominent example, two perpetrators of the 1993 Mumbai bomb blasts, Tiger Memon and Moolchand Shah (also known as Choksi), are alleged to have used criminal networks to channel illegal earnings and fund their bombing operations. Likewise, Dawood Ibrahim masterminded the 1993 Mumbai bomb blasts and also has a huge national and international criminal network (Sarkar and Tiwary, 2001).

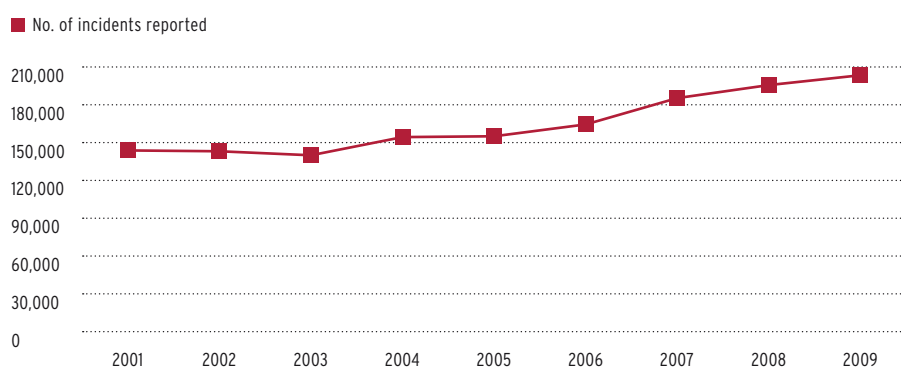
Criminal gangs are heavily involved in the trade in illegal firearms (Lal, 2007). Most crimes are committed with illegal weapons (NCRB, 2011a, p. 340). During a ten-year period police seized 4,500 illicit arms. NCRB statistics suggest that licensed firearms were used in only 371 murder cases in 2009, while 2,722 cases involved unlicensed firearms (NCRB, 2011a, p. 340). Although some murders are committed with licensed, legally owned guns, most crime guns are illegally made craft weapons (*kattas*), mostly made in the states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. A small proportion of illegal guns are manufactured abroad and smuggled into the country.

## Women and violence

Women are especially vulnerable to armed violence, although their vulnerability and suffering is overlooked in official statistics. But reports of crimes against women have grown rapidly in recent years (Figure 8). Not only are women especially vulnerable to direct violence, they are disproportionately victimized by less visible, *indirect* effects. Both aspects require better monitoring and more aggressive action.

The Geneva Declaration notes that, ‘Women and girls are affected by armed

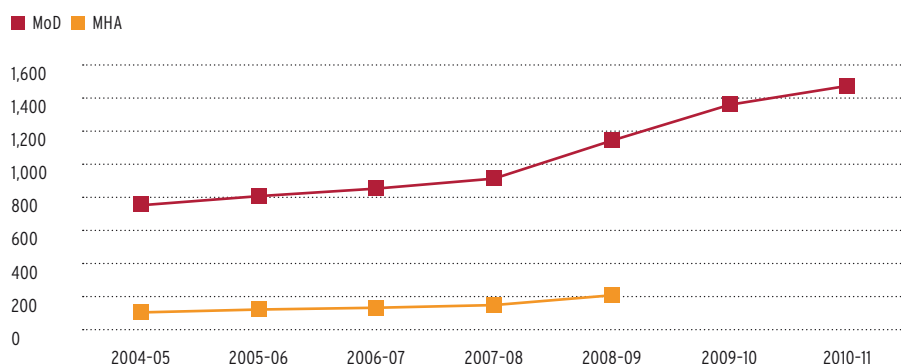
Figure 8 Reports of crime against women



Source: NCRB 2011a



Figure 9 Central-government defence and police/paramilitary budgets (INR billions)



Sources: MHA, 2009, p. 116; MHA, 2010b, p. 173; MoD annual reports

violence in different ways, including direct and indirect conflict violence, and by lethal and non-lethal non-conflict violence' (GD, 2008, p. 106). The World Bank's authoritative *World Development Report 2011* concludes that the direct impact of violence falls primarily on young men, those most likely to be directly involved in crime, gangs, and conflict. Women suffer disproportionately from the indirect effects of violence, especially from the destruction of their families. While they are less likely to die from violent attack, women and their children are more likely to suffer subsequent emotional trauma, impoverishment, and homelessness (World Bank, 2011, p. 6).

To its credit, the NCRB does stress several kinds of violent crime specifically directed at women, especially rape, dowry death, *sati*, and sexual harassment (NCRB, 2011a, chapter 5). Most data collected by the NCRB, however, still does not disaggregate crime and violence by gender, and despite the grievous impact on women, official statistics still do not emphasize gendered aspects of broader aspects of crime and violence, or the indirect effects that affect women most.

Civil-society organizations have been especially instrumental in raising awareness of the problem. But India still lacks crucial instruments to guide policy, especially mechanisms to measure violence by husbands (intimate-partner violence) and relatives, widely regarded as the most common forms

of violence against women. Careful tracking of vulnerable groups, starting with women, is an essential step for Indian violence monitoring.

## Budgets and national priorities

Government spending continues to emphasize international threats more than threats to human security. In 2008–09, the most recent year for which accurate data is available, the budget for policing and paramilitaries was INR 206 billion (USD 4.5 billion), about one-fifth as much as the sum spent on national defence that year: INR 1,056 billion (USD 23 billion) (see Figure 9).

There are limits to such comparisons, however. The budgets of both the MoD and the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) have grown in recent years, often rising at different rates; but defence spending averages five to seven times the outlays for policing and paramilitaries. The MHA policing and paramilitary budget is not comprehensive, since other ministries and state governments control much law-enforcement spending. And the MoD contributes to counterterrorism operations. These limitations notwithstanding, the differing budgetary emphases are a clear sign of the difference in national priorities.

Following the Mumbai attacks in November 2008, the agencies responsible for homeland security—primarily the paramilitary forces, state and cen-

tral police forces, and the intelligence agencies—received 25 per cent increases in their budgets (Homeland Security Research, 2009). Combined revenue and capital expenditures (operations and equipment) for the police and paramilitary forces of the MHA increased dramatically from INR 106 (USD 2.4 billion) to INR 206 billion (USD 4.5 billion) between 2004 and 2009, a trend that seems likely to continue (PTI, 2009).

Most of the money spent on defence supports conventional high-intensity combat forces and nuclear military capabilities. MoD capital spending—procurement of equipment—is dominated by investment in major weapon systems for international security (Behera, 2010). But while most of the increase is aimed at responses to foreign-state threats, some will go towards domestic counterterrorism, especially since the November 2008 attacks. It is difficult to fully distinguish spending on the military from spending on internal security, since much of the Army is deployed domestically for internal security (*India Today*, 2010). Cross-border terrorist threats, and the possibility of a terrorist attack triggering a conventional war between India and Pakistan, further blur the distinction between spending on internal security and spending on external security.

## Implications

The three faces of armed violence reviewed here differ enormously in scale and effects. Terrorism and insurgency have effects which go far beyond the direct deaths and injuries that they cause, since they undermine state security and economic development. But in terms of the sheer numbers of lives destroyed, criminal violence and suicide deserve more attention. It is clear that better data on armed violence is needed in order to clarify national priorities and develop more effective policy. Public survey research



Salwa Judam militia stand guard against a possible Maoist attack during re-polling in the village of Pandewar, November 2008.  
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could help to clarify the severity and nature of armed violence, and overcome persistent doubts about the reliability of existing data.

High crime rates, suicides by farmers, gender inequality leading to domestic violence and dowry deaths, communal violence, and sectarian violence are all symptomatic of India's failure to develop evenly in either social or economic terms. Terrorism, insurgency, and secessionist movements are rooted in extreme poverty, social inequality, and ethnic tensions that are neither adequately recognized nor managed effectively. Since terrorism, insurgency, and violent crimes share underlying causes, it makes sense to tackle the problems together.

How India faces its challenges from armed violence remains unclear. Although some problems discussed here are unique or exceptionally severe

in India—such as caste violence and dowry crime—others resemble problems faced by other countries. The Indian government's awkward or limited engagement in international dialogues on armed violence and even disarmament has prevented the country from benefitting fully from experiences and lessons learned elsewhere.

A problem that appears repeatedly in this review is the lack of official coordination. Official responses to armed violence tend to be fragmented among bureaucracies and the central and state governments, with limited collaboration among institutions, or between government and non-government actors. The government appears willing to increase spending on armed violence, but much slower to develop a coherent policy to deal with the problem, addressing the full spectrum of armed violence and embracing the

principles of whole-government responsibility and cooperation between the state and civil society—principles that are winning ever greater acceptance elsewhere.

A comprehensive and holistic approach to the problem needs to address not only immediate dangers posed by armed men, but also infrastructure needs and economic development, provision of basic services, more effective democratic representation, and the quality of governance (Christensen and Læg Reid, 2007). The same ideas should underpin counter-insurgency responses to sub-state violence, violence by youth gangs, and neighbourhood violence (Kilcullen, 2010). Tackling armed violence also requires systematic intervention by NGOs, an area in which India excels.

That India needs to spend more on addressing armed violence is obvious,

but it also needs to consider *how* it spends in response to these problems. Interventions must be based on sound evidence and judicious use of cost–benefit analysis to measure and assess the benefits associated with the prevention and reduction of armed violence. The central government is the most natural leader of such integrated responses. But coordinated institutional cooperation—among ministries, between the central and state governments, and between government and private organizations—is only now beginning to occur. ■

## Notes

*This Issue Brief was written by Arabinda Acharya and Aaron Karp. Sonal Marwah updated data and prepared the tables on international homicide rankings. Anjali Krishnan, National University of Singapore, assisted with research.*

- 1 For a detailed discussion of data sources and armed violence monitoring systems see Gilgen and Tracey, 2011.
- 2 ‘Encounter deaths’ are killings by the police forces, whereas ‘extrajudicial killings’ tend to mean paramilitary actions.
- 3 Based on discussions with Akanksha Mehta, Research Analyst, International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research, Singapore, on the basis of her interview with surrendered militants in Kashmir, 26–29 April 2010.

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## About the India Armed Violence Assessment

The India Armed Violence Assessment (IAVA) promotes research and supports Indian social-science research communities dedicated to studying the causes and consequences of armed violence. Developed in coordination with Indian partners, it explores wide-ranging issues related to the instruments, actors, and enabling institutions that shape security. The IAVA intends to catalyse evidence-based debate in India and facilitate Indian contributions to global policy and programming on related issues. The project is supported by the Small Arms Survey.

IAVA *Issue Briefs* review the state of knowledge on key themes associated with armed violence. Commissioned by the Small Arms Survey, *Issue Briefs* summarize major findings and insights on issues related to conflict and crime-related violence, perpetrators and victims, prevention and reduction, and strategies to contain violence. They stress data-based research findings on the scale, forms, and severity of armed conflict, contributing elements, and the impact of policy responses.

All IAVA *Issue Briefs* are available in English and Hindi. They can be downloaded at [www.india-ava.org](http://www.india-ava.org). Print copies are available from the Small Arms Survey.

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