
CRIME, CORRUPTION AND A COLLAPSE OF CLEAN POLITICS IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

This essay critically examines the deepening nexus between crime, corruption and politics in India and its corrosive impact on our democratic governance. It relies on empirical data, judicial pronouncements, statutory framework and the Vohra Committee report 1993 in particular to analyse the structural factors that have normalised presence of criminal elements in Indian politics. The essay evaluates how loopholes in country's electoral laws, politicisation of investigative agencies, identity-based politics and a sluggish criminal justice collectively hollow out the democratic institutions from within. It further touches upon the subject of crony-capitalism and explores how mounting election costs lead to opaque political funding, thereby inviting rich underworlds in the game of politics. It uses illustrative case studies to highlight how societies with rampant criminal activity usually have lower ease of doing business, hindering the region's growth and development as a result. Giving power in hands of criminals weakens ethical governance and also erodes public trust in the government. The essay further reviews various judicial and institutional responses and demonstrates why these measures have yielded only limited success. Ultimately, it argues that the crises does not stem from a lack of legal provisions but from systemic failures in its implementation. The essay concludes by advocating reforms that are focussed on strengthening institutions, ensuring swift justice, enhancing transparency in political funding and fostering informed and responsible voter participation as an indispensable step towards restoring integrity in Indian politics.

Introduction

Politics in India was meant to serve people and uphold democratic values. But with time, this purpose seems to have changed, thanks to the political mafias who have infiltrated the system. The unholy alliance between crime and politics has not only deepened manifolds but emerged as one of the gravest threats to our “democratic republic”, as we proudly call it; but for how long we will know soon. The same can be concluded by the revelations made by the Vohra Committee report¹ that investigated the Bombay blasts of 1993. It highlighted a chilling nexus between country’s most-wanted criminals like Dawood Ibrahim and complicit politicians. There is seen a ‘quid pro quo’ relationship between criminals and politicians, creating a win-win situation for both. Power is the main goal of politicians but defeating rivals by winning voter trust, however, is not easy. They therefore find ways to get their path cleared while still maintaining a clean image in public eye. Here comes the role of law defiant individuals who are ready to do the ‘dirty work’ for power hungry politicians. Once their position is secured, their men are rewarded with public deals, contracts and most importantly, protection from the law enforcement agencies. Take the case of BJP politician Himanta Biswa Sarma. After he left Congress and joined BJP, the cases against him in the Saradha scam and an Assam water project quietly faded away². Today, he sits as the 15th Chief Minister of Assam, not because a court found him innocent but because politics gave him a clean image. Similarly, Arun Gawli who was once a close aide of Dawood and was being hunted by the police, joined the Shiv Sena to shield himself. At one point, he admitted that politicians come to the underworld during elections to “fix voters, get funds and fix the police”³.

Ironically, the ones who require “fixing” by the law, that is, criminals themselves, plot to “fix” the administration. That is what India’s State’s machinery has become.

In case there is still a contention, recent trends and data put an authentication stamp on the reality of criminalisation of India’s politics. As per the 2025 report by the Association of Democratic Reforms (ADR), nearly half of the MLAs have criminal cases against them, and

¹ Vohra Committee Report, Ministry of Home Affairs, Govt. of India (1993).

² Deeptiman Tiwary, Since 2014, 25 Opposition Leaders facing corruption probe crossed over to BJP, 23 of them got reprieve, THE INDIAN EXPRESS, (Apr. 4, 2024), <https://indianexpress.com/article/expressexclusive/since-2014-25-opposition-leaders-facing-corruption-probe-crossed-over-to-bjp-23-of-them-gotreprieve-9247737/>.

³ Ajith Pillai, Byculla Bhai, OUTLOOK (Feb. 7, 2024, 7:35 PM), <https://www.outlookindia.com/national/byculla-bhai-news-202806>.

around 29% face serious charges⁴. The same report showed that among the 240 BJP MPs elected in 2024, about 39% had criminal backgrounds, and 26% were linked to serious crimes like murder, extortion, and forgery⁵. These figures are a stain to the world's largest democracy. From *The Times of India* to *The New York Times*, headlines like “In India's Politics, Jail Time Is a Badge of Honor,” “India's Jailbirds Win Elections,” and “Criminals Flourish in Indian Elections” are now common. They not only risk India's global reputation but also strike a dent on its progress. Criminal activity is directly related to the ease of doing business and no business wishes to invest in an unstable society with rampant criminal activity. Uttar Pradesh is a testamentary example of such a correlation. It was only because of the decisive government crackdown on mafias in the state once known for its ‘Mafia Raj’, that it progressed from 12th rank in 2018 to 2nd rank in 2019 in the Ease of doing Business index⁶. As a result, the Uttar Pradesh Global Investors Summit attracted over rupees 35 lakh crore investment proposals, including big players like Adani Group, Microsoft, and Amazon Web Services⁷. In addition to this, safer regions enabled smoother execution of large-scale infrastructure projects like the Purvanchal Expressway and Defence Industrial Corridor, thereby, improving logistics and boosting the local businesses.

The Vohra Committee in 1993 looked deep into the symbiotic relationship between crime and politics only to find that criminal groups have not only amassed wealth but infiltrated almost every level of governance⁸. Such strong influence makes investigation of underworld crime syndicate and prosecution for crimes nearly impossible. However, the UP model serves as a living example that if government decides to eliminate vices from its system and boost development, it can surely achieve it. But when the government is corrupt, investigating agencies are bribed and the justice system is in shambles, ‘We, the people of India’ act as a sliver of hope. It is up to us, the electorate, to demand accountability from the government and even reject them when none is provided. But to act, we must first understand. This essay will

⁴ Tejeswar Patnaik, The presence of politicians who have committed serious offences seriously affects governance measures as they often place personal interests above the public good, weakening institutions and policy-making, ASSOCIATION OF DEMOCRATIC REFORMS, (Oct. 5, 2025, 12:00 PM), <https://adrindia.org/content/criminalization-of-politics-in-india-undermining-spirit-of-democracy>.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Infrastructure & Industrial Development Department, Government of Uttar Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh achieves 2nd Position in the ‘Ease of Doing Business’ ranking in India, (Sept. 5, 2020).

⁷ Umesh Raghuvanshi, UP Global Investors Summit: Uttar Pradesh capable, ready to play role of India's growth engine, says President Droupadi Murmu, HINDUSTAN TIMES, (Feb. 13, 2023) <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/up-global-investors-summit-uttar-pradesh-capable-ready-to-play-role-of-india-s-growth-engine-says-president-droupadi-murmu-101676227016307.html>.

⁸ Vohra Committee Report. *supra* note 1, at 3.

examine the roots of the criminal-politician nexus in India, trace its evolution and assess why past reforms failed. Lastly, it will suggest few concrete steps that might help restore the integrity in Indian politics.

The hollowing of Indian democracy from within and collapse of ethical governance

It is an irrefutable truth that India's political system is being hollowed from within due to legal loopholes, lethargic judiciary, voter apathy and a deep-rooted socio-economic divide. All these factors have created a fertile ground for criminal elements to infiltrate the 'Temple of democracy'. Talking about law, Section 8 of the Representation of the People Act, 1951⁹ disqualifies only convicted criminals from contesting elections. Although the law is ethically correct, it is toothless because in a country where investigative agencies are mere puppets in the hands of political masters, justice is neither swift nor impartial. For instance, the BJP is often mocked by being called "the best washing machine," as ED and CBI cases against opposition leaders suddenly vanish in thin air as soon as they join the party. The reports that since 2014, 95% high profile cases registered by the ED and CBI have been against non- BJP leaders best illustrates how investigative agencies are misused by parties for personal gains¹⁰. This has not only been instrumental in shielding criminals but also in circumventing the Anti-Defection law which discourages opportunistic party switching. Meanwhile, the courts are struggling with a huge backlog of nearly five crore pending cases. Overburdening of cases is possibly not the only reason for such huge backlog. The sinister convergence of crime and politics leads fear to clouds the minds of judges while they declare judgements. One such example is gangster-turned-politician Atiq Ahmad. In the Allahabad courts, judges hesitated to hear his cases because of the dreadful crime syndicate he had built. Finally, Justice R. N. Mishra took up his case in 2017, only to grant him bail, a move that was widely criticised. Such fear and influence over the 'protectors of law' is good for a criminal, but an utter sham for the country and its people.

In India, politics is shaped by regional identities like different histories, cultures and practices. Politicians use these divisions to create rifts among the populace and garner votes. For example, in Maharashtra they milk the Hindi-Marathi language issue. In Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, they

⁹ The Representation of the People Act, 1951, § 8, No. 43, Acts of Parliament, 1951, (India).

¹⁰ Deeptiman Tiwary, Since 2014, 25 Opposition Leaders facing corruption probe crossed over to BJP, 23 of them got reprieve, THE INDIAN EXPRESS, (Apr. 4, 2024) <https://indianexpress.com/article/express-exclusive/since-2014-25-opposition-leaders-facing-corruption-probe-crossed-over-to-bjp-23-of-them-got-reprieve-9247737/>.

focus on Dalit-Muslim-Yadav groups while in Karnataka, they play north-south divisional politics. Criminals with sentiments attached to any one of these classes act as Robin Hood figures for their community. In India's dysfunctional governance plagued with excessive red tape, they act as strongmen who pretend to empathise with common man and resolve their problems. In return, people reward these goons with their loyalty and help them in winning elections. Opportunist political parties look for such 'muscle men' with a hawk's eye and seize the opportunity of consolidating more votes in their favour. A clear example of this is the case of Abdul Latif, a gangster who was allegedly shielded from legal action by the then ruling Congress government of Gujarat in exchange for political support from the local Muslim community¹¹. Since India follows a party-based democratic system where governments may change every five years, criminals connected to a particular party often face the risk of losing political favours when a new party comes to power. To secure immunity and influence amidst this uncertainty, the smartest move was to become politicians themselves. However, the data from 1962 general elections reflect that independent candidates won only about 11% of the total votes. Their share fell below 6% by 2014 despite them accounting for almost 40% of all the candidates¹². Therefore, criminals still require party association because the chances of winning elections as an independent candidate are often bleak.

Even though provoking and creating conflicts between communities is a punishable offence under Section 8 of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, political parties still do it and get away smoothly without facing any real consequences. Such tactics often galvanise communal pride, with voters rallying behind leaders who strike back at the rival community with equal venom. While the growth of a community may not always be certain, but their substantial representation in the Parliament instils a strong sense of pride and confidence in them. Despite this, the harsh truth remains that a divided society seldom has a common aim. When communal gains cloud the aspiration of masses, no practical decisions can be reached for the collective development of the nation. Therefore, social and cultural divides act like open wounds that make it easier for criminal-minded politicians to enter the sacred space of the democracy, just like harmful germs entering a weak body.

¹¹ Satish Jha, Once Upon a Time in Ahmedabad, THE INDIAN EXPRESS, (Jan. 15, 2017, 9:04 AM) <https://indianexpress.com/article/lifestyle/life-style/raees-movie-shah-rukh-khan-don-abdul-latif-onceupon-a-time-in-ahmedabad-4473046/>.

¹² Harsh Shah et al., Political parties dominate India's national elections, not candidates, THE PRINT, (Mar. 25, 2019) <https://theprint.in/opinion/political-parties-dominate-indias-national-elections-notcandidates/210932/>.

The mounting costs of elections and its consequences

Long ago, Kautilya had observed that just like a person cannot prevent tasting honey at the tip of their tongue, the same way a government worker cannot resist dipping into the King's coffers. Centuries later, late former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi reverberated the same when he said that out of every 100 rupees meant for the poor, only 15 rupees reach them while the rest gets lost along the way¹³. One of the reasons for corruption in governance may be attributed to the rising cost of elections. Today, the number of voters required to be pleased have increased, the number of political parties in the game have increased and so as a direct consequence of both, the election costs have also increased. The 2019 general elections that cost between rupees 55,000 crore to 60,000 crore were the most expensive election ever held in any democracy¹⁴. As a result, the financial burden compels parties to favour candidates who are rich in resources. They can self-finance their campaigns and help the party monetarily, thereby, reducing party's financial load. It was brought to light by the Centre for Media Studies (CMS) reports that in the 2019 general elections, the individual party candidates spent about 40% of the total election expenditure¹⁵. After spending so much, it is but natural for them to try to recover money and earn even more during their five-year tenure. For example, Madhu Koda, the former Chief Minister of Jharkhand built an international mining empire through kickbacks and hawala transactions that were made during his tenure. He and his aides granted licenses to the mining companies based on the size of bribes they promised. By the time his scam was exposed, Koda had duped the state of nearly one-fifth of the its annual revenue¹⁶. That one-fifth of state's revenue could have transformed public health, education, and infrastructure had it been in honest hands. But the Indian political system makes it very difficult for a truly honest and clean individual to rise to the top. Often the only way a genuine nationalist can reach that position is by reluctantly engaging in corrupt practices.

Money is rightly called the mother's milk of politics. Therefore, in India's muddled electoral landscape, the nexus between politics and business is symbiotic. The former is about power but

¹³ Press Trust of India, Rajiv Gandhi's popular 15 paise remark finds mention in Supreme Court verdict, THE INDIAN EXPRESS, (June 9, 2017) <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/rajiv-gandhis-popular15paise-remark-finds-mention-in-sc-verdict-4696740/>.

¹⁴ Centre for Media Studies, Poll Expenditure: The 2019 Elections 7 (2019).

¹⁵ Ibid. at 8.

¹⁶ Ashok K Mishra, Koda showed undue haste in issuing licences, THE ECONOMIC TIMES, (Nov. 12, 2009), <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/koda-showed-undue-haste-inissuing-licences/articleshow/5224449.cms>

needs money to realise it and the latter is about wealth but needs power to create and sustain it. This is the perfect breeding ground for crony capitalism. The Finance Act of 2017 scrapped the 7.5% cap on corporate donations and eliminated disclosure requirement, thereby, opening the floodgates for opaque, backdoor funding¹⁷. As a result, dubious businesses found a legitimate way to fund the very political parties that could influence government contracts, policy decisions and investigations. However, in 2024, the Supreme Court smelt the rat and urged the Election Commission to reveal the electoral bond data. Unsurprisingly, the ruling BJP government received the lion's share of all the donations. It came to light that Future Gaming & Hotel Services Pvt. Ltd., a legal lottery business which had also faced multiple ED and IT department raids in the past, was the largest individual contributor with donations adding up to rupees 1,368 crore¹⁸. No matter where the donations come from, citizens of a democracy have right to know everything about the parties they vote for. This fact was recognised by the apex court in 2024 when it struck down the electoral bond scheme in *Association of Democratic Reforms vs. Union of India*¹⁹. Such system as the electoral bond scheme does not merely fuel corruption, but it also rigs the game for small businesses and throttles fair competition. It discourages local start-ups which feel inferior compared to big national and international businesses giants with deep coffers. This gamble that entwines crime, money, corruption and politics costs us our democratic integrity and national progress.

While big businesses and powerful criminals benefit from this nexus between money and politics, it comes as a bane for whistle blowers, journalists, activists, police officers and all those people who have the courage and conscience to hustle for truth. They are the keepers of democracy who deserve protection but end up facing threats and violence instead. The murder of journalist Mukesh Chandrakar in Chhattisgarh, as a consequence of exposing a ₹120 crore scam is one of many grim reminders of the cost of telling the truth²⁰. But once the truth is actually revealed, it becomes hard for the government to breathe. This is because that while criminal politicians may manipulate the system, bribe officials, and even create fear in the judiciary, they cannot avoid being held accountable by citizens with whom the ultimate

¹⁷ Finance Act, No. 7 of 2017, § 154, Gazette of India, Part II, Sec. 1 56 (Mar. 31, 2017).

¹⁸ THE ELECTION COMMISSION OF INDIA, <https://www.eci.gov.in/disclosure-of-electoral-bonds> (last visited July 20, 2025).

¹⁹ *Association of Democratic Reforms v. Union of India*, (2024) 1 SCC 1.

²⁰ Jayprakash S Naidu, Journalist Mukesh Chandrakar murder: Chargesheet reveals accused called him days before killing, was afraid his empire would crumble, THE INDIAN EXPRESS, (July 21, 2025), <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/journalist-mukesh-chandrakar-murder-chargesheet-accused-called9892684/>.

sovereignty of the country lies. In 1987, the Bofors scandal revealed that bribes were paid to Indian officials in a defence deal with the Swedish arms company Bofors²¹. This led to a sharp decline in public trust which played a major role in Congress party's defeat in the 1989 elections. This one incident illustrates that right to vote is one of the most potent weapons entrusted in the hands of citizens by the Constitution of India. If used rightly, it acts both as a sword and a shield that keeps tyranny by the ruling elite in check.

The problem of electoral malpractices and the need for reform

The fact that criminalisation in Indian politics is a serious issue did not go unrealised by important institutions like the Election Commission of India, the courts, and civil society groups. Many steps have been taken to keep in check the entry of history sheeters into politics. The most laudable reform came in 2013 with the Supreme Court judgement in the case of Lily Thomas v. Union of India²². The apex court struck down Section 8(4) of the Representation of People Act, 1951 that enabled sitting MPs and MLAs to remain in office even after conviction. To this effect, the Supreme Court in 2017 had directed the setting up of special fast-track courts to prosecute MPs and MLAs against whom serious criminal charges were lodged²³. However, despite all these efforts by the apex court, the ADR report brought to the fore that there was still a backlog of approximately 4,474 cases pending as of January 1, 2024²⁴. This illustrates how deep the problem with our justice dispensation system runs. In order to bypass the conviction criteria, the Law Commission in its 1999 and 2014 reports, along with the Election Commission, has repeatedly advocated for the disqualification of candidates at the stage of charge-framing rather than post-conviction. But like a hen would never give its head to a butcher, the legislature would never enact such a law that would topple its own government. The Election Commission did make serious attempts to prevent rigging of elections, such as switching from ballot paper to EVMs and maintaining strict polling booth protocols. Despite this, politicians still successfully indulge in electoral malpractices like voter intimidation, cash

²¹ Express Web Desk, What is the Bofors scam case?, THE INDIAN EXPRESS, (Feb. 3, 2018)

<https://indianexpress.com/article/india/what-is-the-bofors-scandal-case-why-is-it-being-opened-now4823576/>

²² Lily Thomas v. Union of India, (2013) 7 S.C.C. 653.

²³ Ananthakrishnan G, Supreme Court: Set up 12 special courts to hear cases against legislators by March 1, THE INDIAN EXPRESS, (Dec. 15, 2017), <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/supreme-court-set-up12-special-courts-to-hear-cases-against-legislators-by-march-1-4983437/>.

²⁴ Vijay Hansaria, The affidavit said 1,746 fresh criminal cases were filed in 2023 against the MPs/MLAs and therefore total of 4,474 cases remain pending as on January 1, 2024, ASSOCIATION OF DEMOCRATIC REFORMS, (Apr. 22, 2024), <https://adrindia.org/content/more-2000-criminal-casesagainst-mps-mlas-decided-2023-sc-told-0>.

distribution or merely striking voter names off the list. The incidents of booth capturing or polling booth violence during elections have made headlines since the birth of our democracy and still do. In the recent Lok Sabha elections in 2024, multiple polls across the Imphal Valley in Manipur were marred by serious disturbances like armed booth capturing, EVM vandalism and gunfire²⁵. Such antics not only spoil all the efforts to fix the system but also undermine the dignity of the largest festival of democracy—the elections.

With institutions failing to break the status quo, citizens are the last hope. Courts and civil society groups now work to educate voters about candidates' criminal backgrounds. This not only helps people make informed choices, but strengthens democracy by ensuring transparency, accountability, and people's right to know before electing their representatives. In *Union of India v. Association for Democratic Reforms* (2002), the Supreme Court directed the Election Commission to mandate candidates to disclose their criminal, financial, and educational details²⁶. A 2020 order further required political parties to justify fielding tainted candidates instead of choosing clean people²⁷. In addition to this, ADR, a reputed civil society group, publishes detailed reports on such disclosures periodically. However, these directions and efforts hold no value if they fail to reach the voters. Supreme Court Senior Advocate Ashwini Kumar Upadhyay rightly pointed out that the Election Commission had not specified the newspapers or channels where the information has to be published. As a result, parties cleverly share details in unknown papers and at odd TV hours to avoid public attention. This marks another instance when the criminal-politician nexus outsmarted the system. The legislature and judiciary seriously need to introspect whether the efforts made by them to break this nexus are actually enough.

Sometimes, voters know that a candidate is a history sheeter but still vote for them. This happens when people overlook their local party candidate for a charismatic leader at the centre, like in the case of Narendra Modi; or when their loyalty lies with a particular party, like the Congress which is still cherished for its role in the freedom struggle. This comes as a boon for local candidates who hide behind big names and get elected, despite serious charges against

²⁵ The Hindu Bureau, Election Commission orders re-polling in 11 Manipur booths on April 22, THE HINDU, (Apr. 21, 2024), <https://www.thehindu.com/elections/lok-sabha/manipur-ceo-recommends-repoll-in-six-valley-polling-booths-citing-mob-violence-riots/article68088384.ece>

²⁶ *Union of India v. Association for Democratic Reforms*, (2002) 5 S.C.C. 294.

²⁷ Shruti Kakkar, Political Parties Must Publish Criminal Antecedents Of Candidates Within 48 Hours Of Their Selection: Supreme Court Modifies Earlier Direction, LIVE LAW, (Aug. 10, 2021) <https://www.livelaw.in/top-stories/why-ed-being-used-for-political-battles-supreme-court-rejects-pleaagainst-karnataka-cms-wife-minister-in-muda-case-298218>

them. Another truth is that in fractured societies, voters often support local strongmen who, despite criminal backgrounds, deliver services that the state fails to provide. For example, gangster Arun Gawli solved local problems when the government could not and as a result, amassed local clout. The Vohra Committee Report also warned of these parallel power centres that flourish when the state abandons its own citizens²⁸. The Portuguese saying “rouba, mas faz” meaning “He robs, but he gets things done” fits this situation perfectly.

Structural reforms— the only road ahead for building a just India

A careful analysis of the elections held in 2004, 2009, and 2014 revealed that candidates with criminal cases were nearly three times more likely to win elections than those who did not have such cases against them²⁹. A key reason is voter intimidation through booth violence by criminals, which prevents free and fair voting. To curb this, the Election Commission and state authorities took effective steps like booth-level mapping, deploying central forces at polling stations and installing CCTV cameras. It is a double win for our democracy as it not only reduces booth violence but also boosts voter turnout. Another key reason people support criminals in politics is our lethargic justice system. It is no hidden fact that our courts maintain a huge backlog of cases due to which the conviction rates have went downhill. When lawful remedies are so painfully slow, people inevitably turn to the unlawful ones for quick fixes. For this reason, Uttar Pradesh CM Yogi Adityanath’s ‘bulldozer model’ of instant justice, however controversial, has garnered public administration in recent times. Nevertheless, the undeniable fact remains that in a country governed by law, timely justice must be provided but through legal means. It is ironical and also quite laughable that the fast-track courts set up to try politicians now itself face a backlog of nearly 4,500 cases. To dodge the conviction rate criteria for disqualifying candidates, the suggestion that often do rounds is to disqualify them based on registered cases against them, irrespective of the fact whether they are declared convict by the court or not. But suspending candidates from contesting solely on the basis of accusations is contentious amid India’s political vendetta. The only practical solution to this problem lies in figuring out a way for timely disposal of cases by the courts and reducing the backlog. This requires strong and collective efforts by the legislature and the judiciary towards fixing the justice system.

²⁸ Vohra Committee Report. *supra* note 1, at 5.

²⁹ MILAN VAISHNAV, WHEN CRIME PAYS: MONEY AND MUSCLE IN INDIAN POLITICS 10 (Yale University Press 2017).

Over time, political leaders have become disconnected from public hardships. Heavy red tape in governance delays services, thereby creating opportunities for corruption and allowing criminals to exploit the system. If the ‘people’s representatives’ genuinely supported its people and responded in times of crisis, voters would not have to resort to accepting favours from tainted figures. Therefore, these structural failures must be corrected to restore trust in democratic institutions. The ‘Digital India Mission’ is a laudable initiative that created a direct connection between the government and the governed, thereby, eliminating middlemen by making government services available online. The Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) Scheme which was launched in 2013 to transfer subsidies like LPG, MNREGA wages and scholarships directly to bank accounts of beneficiaries helped in saving about rupees 2.73 lakh crore of the tax payers’ money over the last nine years³⁰. This not only reduced excessive reliance on bureaucrats and middlemen but also saved money that could now be used in other important programmes. Despite the proven effectiveness of these schemes, low digital literacy in rural areas still keep the middlemen in business. To resolve this, village level digital service hubs can be set up. But strict monitoring and oversight shall be maintained in order to prevent the local monopoly agents from becoming the new middlemen.

After careful analysis of this issue of criminalisation in Indian politics, we come to the conclusion that the problem does not lie with the laws governing elections but with its enforcement that remains a serious issue. Investigative and enforcement agencies play a key role in turning legal provisions into action. In 1993, the Director of Intelligence Bureau (DIB) in Vohra Committee report recommended forming a secret cell in the Intelligence Bureau to gather inputs from various security and revenue agencies about the politician-bureaucrat underworld nexus³¹. Information should be shared in writing, and regular meetings chaired by the Home Secretary were suggested to resolve issues and ensure coordinated action. Unfortunately, this recommendation did not materialise into action. Lastly, the people sitting in the Parliament and Legislative Assemblies represent us, the people of India. When people deliberately vote for history sheeters, that criminal actually represent the rest of the criminals of his constituency. It is a universal truth that ethics and values cannot flourish in a society lead by a person who has blood on his hands. It is, however, ironical that even when voters choose “bad” candidates, the act of choosing still reflects democratic principles like accountability and

³⁰ Nikesh Singh, DBT helps govt. save Rs 2.73 trillion since 2014: FM Nirmala Sitharaman, BUSINESS STANDARD, (Aug. 14, 2023) https://www.business-standard.com/economy/news/dbt-has-helped-govtsave-rs-2-73-trillion-since-2014-fm-nirmala-sitharaman-123081400886_1.html

³¹ Vohra Committee Report. *supra* note 1, at 10.

the consent of the governed. But in the end, such reckless voting choices that are fuelled by fear, identity, and short term gains may feed individual ego but discourage investment in collective national development. Because “We, the people of India” have our Fundamental Duties enshrined in the Constitution of India, one among which is to transcend all the differences to protect sovereignty, unity and integrity of India and help our nation rise to higher levels of endeavour and achievement.