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Transformation from "Soft State" to "Strong State" in Uttar Pradesh: A Critical Evaluation of Crime Control Policies

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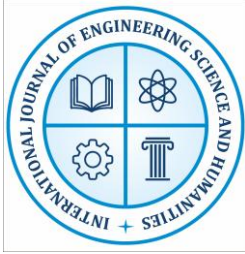
Abstract

The “Soft State”, as suggested by Gunnar Myrdal, is a political system that lacks the ability to act, has weak law enforcement, is inefficient in administration and policy making and implementation. Uttar Pradesh has been a “Soft State” for long because of the prevalence of crime, mafia and communal violence which affected the general population and the investment climate in the State. In the past decade, the government has implemented several measures to address the situation, including increasing the number of security guards and implementing stricter regulations for social media. Over the past decade, the government has made a series of measures to enhance the situation, such as the deployment of more security guards and imposing more stringent laws on social media. Meanwhile, a shift in the perception of the nature of the Uttar Pradesh governance has been observed as the state has been growing in strength and efficiency. The objective of this paper is an analysis of the question from these angles to conclude if the transition from “Soft State” to “Strong State” is really taking place in Uttar Pradesh. The research will be done through qualitative and analytical approach and will be based on scholarly articles, government reports, statistics, court decisions, books, and newspaper articles. It will review the latest change of the police force, organized crime and technology and will examine the effects of these changes on the capacity of institutions and rule of law in the state.

Keywords: Soft State, Strong State, State Capacity, Crime Control, Rule of Law, Uttar Pradesh, Democratic Governance.

1. Introduction

State capacity and its relationship to law enforcement have been at the centre of political science and public administration studies for ages. One of the key elements of governance is the ability to ensure law and order, the efficiency of the State is largely dependent on it. A democracy is a government by law, which respects the rights and freedoms of the people and in which the rule of law is fundamental to governance. Accordingly, the literature and research literature is increasing on this topic of crime control policies and the effects of crime control on state



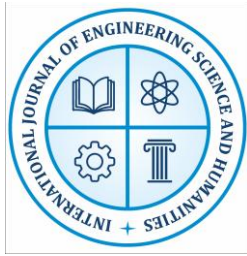
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capacity and democratic governance. Nobel Prize winning economist and social scientist, Gunnar Myrdal, coined the term Soft State in 1958, in his study of the deficiencies of the law enforcement system in Asia. It is a situation of low or weak capacity of laws and rules in a country or region, due to their being poorly implemented, corrupted, or weak. Myrdal recommended that if the laws are to have a real effect, they have to be administered effectively and efficiently. He pointed out the lack of political will and administrative capacity as the major reasons for the state's inability to enforce legally established rules and regulations. Myrdal's concept of the 'Soft State' was used to understand the inefficiency of the Indian government, but his theory has been taken up by contemporary discussions of state capacity and governance. For a long time, Uttar Pradesh was viewed as a 'Soft State' as the government was unable to provide any security services to the citizens, even in the face of widespread crimes, communal tension and corruption. The political patronage and poor law enforcement made the public unsafe and cut down the state's authority. Throughout the years the ability of the state government to establish control and maintain order within the state has been a concern of researchers. Uttar Pradesh, however, has seen major reforms in various aspects of the administration, policing, and public order in the past ten years. New plans have been developed to counter organized crime, enhance the professionalism of policing, increase police responsiveness to emergencies and augment the administration of public safety and crime control in general. Therefore, there has been a public debate, in the media and academic circles, whether Uttar Pradesh is experiencing a transition from the current weak governance to better organized, efficient and effective governance. Significant reforms being undertaken and rapid growth across various fields indicates a possible paradigm shift in the state's governance. Meanwhile, experts warn that improved efficiency could also have implications for democracy and the rule of law, as tougher, more intrusive policies could infringe on constitutional rights, fail to adhere to due process and establish new forms of oppression. Politicians and the general populace have been discussing the topic, as the government tries to assert itself and its control over the region. The purpose of this paper is that this paper will review and analyse the changes occurred over the past 10 years and the impact of these changes on the capacity of Uttar Pradesh government to govern and maintain law and order in the state. The paper will examine the 'Strong State' concept and its implications for democracy and law enforcement by a careful examination of the reforms in policing and institutional capacity development.

2. Review of Literature

Research on the relationship between state capacity, law enforcement, and democracy has proliferated across multiple disciplinary perspectives, including political science, public administration, criminology, and law. While the literature on "Strong" and "Soft State" has



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mushroomed, this phenomenon has gained limited traction within scholarly circles focused on changes in governance in Uttar Pradesh; moreover, there have been relatively few empirical studies on the specific reforms and their effect on both rule of law and democratic governance, with most scholarly treatments reviewing policy reform or focusing on a theoretical elucidation of the concept of the strong or soft state. The literature tracing the conceptual origins of the notion of a "Soft State" dates back to Gunnar Myrdal's seminal work, *Asian Drama: An Inquiry into the Poverty of Nations* (1968). Using a case study approach to examine failed administrative efforts in India and, among other measures, propose reforms to enhance governance and the rule of law, Myrdal concluded that poor law enforcement and lack of control over various areas was the root cause of India's governance problems.

Subsequent analysis built upon Myrdal's fundamental tenets by suggesting that failure in state efficiency also derived from inadequate administrative capacity in addition to weak law enforcement; for example, Charles Tilly (1992) points out that in many modern states, a strong bureaucracy is a key factor enabling a governing capacity and the maintenance of order, whilst Francis Fukuyama (2013) lists the key attributes of a strong state including effective law enforcement, competent administration, and rule of law, while many subsequent scholars emphasize how importance rule of law constitutes the core characteristic of state capacity. According to the tenets of Weberian modernity, "the State is a social institution which has the legitimate claim to possess a monopoly in the enforcement of law and order in a given territory," which in contemporary terms reflects not merely effectiveness of police or military power but also the strength of democratically sanctioned authority. In sum, the bulk of the research highlights the indispensable requirement of institutional strength and good law enforcement as key elements of the capacity of the state to effectively govern. In India, the concept and reform of crime and policing has continued to be a prominent area of academic interest, largely driven by academic discussions of its inefficiencies and corruption, as well as the ongoing policy-making debate surrounding police reforms.

Numerous studies, reports and documents, from various sources of authority and expertise have been released over the past few decades, including National Police Commission reports (1977-1981), Ribeiro Committee report (1998), Police Reorganization Committee Report (2000), and Malimath Committee Report (2003) have investigated the state of the criminal justice system in detail and called for institutional reform of the police organization. A recent Supreme Court ruling has reaffirmed this need in a significant manner; the judgment delivered in *Prakash Singh v. Union of India* (2006) identified police administration as a core area in need of serious reforms aimed at better performance. Issues surrounding the political governance of the state, reforms of



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the policing institution, and aspects of institutional reorganization of administrative services has indeed begun to be addressed by academicians such as A.

Prakash (2022), S. Yadav (2021), and Anil Swarup (2019) among others; yet, most of such research has failed to make any holistic analysis of reform outcomes on the state capacity as a whole. Of late, various news articles and opinion pieces have critically assessed crime and policing reforms in India with special attention on the anti-mafia operations and recent reforms implemented by current administration in Uttar Pradesh. The commentary tends to focus on recent advancements in police operations like modernization, use of technology, women's safety, prompt disaster management in addition to a generalized assessment of governance and law enforcement. Since most commentary stems from particular political standpoints, it might be necessary to be circumspect while analyzing such writing. All in all, literature review underscores the importance and necessity of in depth study of changes in crime control, policing reforms in Uttar Pradesh during past decade and impact it has had on state strength, governance and the rule of law.

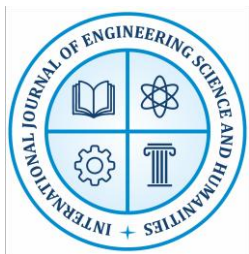
2. Research Gap

The academic discussion, reports and government policy document related with the changes in policing, policing regime, crime control mechanism and governance system have increased to a large extent. So the current research is going to assess whether the changes taking in policing reflects a 'soft' towards a 'strong' state. This is, perhaps due to reasons most scholars do focus either on the changes taking place in governance and policing regime or state structure, democratic regime and rule of law. In this paper, efforts are made to examine the recent changes in policing of the states of Uttar Pradesh and analyse their impact in the rule of law and governance.

Original Contribution of the study The originality in the study would be in using the concepts for assessing the pragmatic changes with a broader survey on the available literature from various sources; and that can be explained as most scholars have predominantly chosen either from a criminal justice sources or the commentaries on the state structures or on democratic rule.

3. Research Methodology

This paper aims to study the shifts in Policing, Administration and Governance in Uttar Pradesh during the last 10 years through qualitative, descriptive and analytical approaches. The study is based upon primary and secondary data. However, as far as the trends in crime control and policing are concerned, the study will also be based on the quantitative (crime data). The study will draw upon government documents, published reports of National Crime Records Bureau, parliament discussions and judgments of various courts, policy documents, journal articles, published books, reports of studies, information in newspapers and other published materials.



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The methodology to analyse and study these sources will be content analysis and policy analysis. Since the data will be collected through secondary sources, its validity is dependent on the reliability of the sources used.

4. From Soft State to Strong State: Crime Control Policies in Uttar Pradesh

The notion of a 'soft state', a concept introduced by Gunnar Myrdal, characterizes a situation where laws are in place but not uniformly implemented due to weak administrative capacity, excessive political intervention, and poor enforcement. For decades, Uttar Pradesh was almost synonymous with this situation. The dominance of organised crime, the influx of criminals into politics, a demoralised police force, and the erosion of faith in the criminal justice system had a devastating effect on governability and the efficacy of institutions of the state. Eventually, as part of various reforms over the years, crime control began to occupy a dominant position in governance in Uttar Pradesh.

Efforts were made to build better criminal justice institutions, strengthen law-enforcing agencies, and re-establish the supremacy of the state. The government increasingly began to equate effective crime control with development, economic investment, and good governance rather than treating it as exclusively a police function.

4.1 Police Modernisation and Institutional Reforms

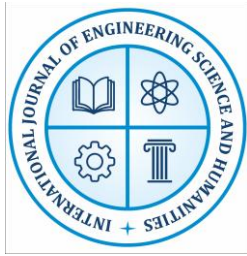
One of the important reform measures undertaken has been with regard to 'modernisation of policing'. A greater focus has been laid on technology-enabled policing involving technology platforms, integrated emergency response systems, forensic capabilities, surveillance infrastructure, and data-supported decisions. Measures such as the Emergency Response Support System (Dial 112), extension of Police Commissionerate system, cybercrime special wings and technologically assisted surveillance have contributed to more effective operations and rapid response time. All this is part of institutional upgradation rather than expansion of physical capacity alone.

4.2 Organised Crime and Anti-Mafia Measures

Apart from targeting those involved in illicit liquor trade, another key priority of the state government was to tackle organised crimes and deep-rooted mafia networks extending across various regions of the state. Laws already in place, especially the UP Gangsters and Anti-Social Activities (Prevention) Act, were applied more liberally besides fiscal probe, attaching assets of those engaged in unlawful activities and conducting a crackdown.

4.3 Digital Governance and Public Safety

The crime control reforms also went in tandem with broader administrative reforms focused around digital governance. Use of online grievance redressal systems, CCTV surveillance, crime mapping, cyber policing and data analytics enhanced inter-agency cooperation and effective



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delivery of services. Initiatives such as the Mission Shakti, women help desks in every police station and dedicated emergency response services are indicative of attempts towards creating more technology-enabled, accessible, and citizen-centric policing services.

4.4 Institutional Outcomes

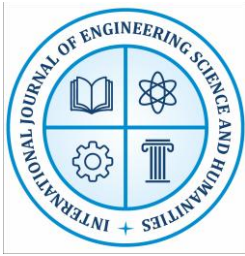
These policies have also generated new ideas about a more efficacious and responsive state. Official sources and statistics from the NCRB claim improvements in policing, emergency services, and the efficiency of investigations across categories, although these improvements have not been uniform. In addition to these tangible results, this process of policy change has strengthened both bureaucratic coordination, administrative efficacy, and the application of the rule of law; meanwhile, the increased reach of state power remains subject to ongoing controversies about due process, proportionality and accountability, and so make an Uttar Pradesh a crucial case of analysis of effective law enforcement alongside constitutionalism.

5. Critical Evaluation

Uttar Pradesh's change from a 'soft' to a 'strong' state has captivated the imagination of policymakers, politicians, scholars, and administrators alike. Supporters laud recent crime control measures as a sign of better governance and stronger state capacity. However, this is not the 'whole story'. As critics argue, this shift should not only be measured in terms of administrative output; a government or state can be efficient, but is it just? Or is the new regime consistent with the country's constitutional order and democratic principles? Thus, a balanced assessment is necessary to capture the achievements and the limitations of this shift. The Most prominent effect of new crime control policy measures has been strengthening of the institutional capacity of the State through 'police modernization' programme.

Various programmes for expansion of technology based policing, deployment of anti-mafia units, emergency response system and surveillance networks have enhanced the capacity of State's security organs. For example, government statistics as well as NCRB reports suggest improvement in response time, policing system, crime investigation process and crackdown on organised criminal groups in the last few years that restored public faith in rule of law in the state. 'Anti-mafia' strategy is another aspect of strengthening the state. Instead of prosecuting crime through the conventional legal channels, this government relied on targeting the financial and resource base of organised criminal activities and applied existing legal measures to curb organised crime networks by confiscating their illegal properties.

Supporters claim this strategy undermined criminal groups that had historically enjoyed immense influence and exerted considerable control over local administration and political process and it established a strong relationship between law and order and greater economic development and administrative stability. However, there are certain legal and constitutional challenges that the U.



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P. Model of state building has faced. While the state has all responsibility to ensure safety and security of people, the use of coercive apparatus needs to remain subject to constitutional constraints, judicial scrutiny and procedural fairness. The human rights organisations and a section of civil society in India have criticised aspects of the U. P. Administration such as encounter killings, demolitions, use of preventive detention laws and increasing executive role in crime fighting.

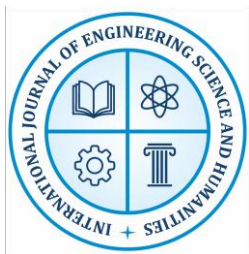
The supporters of state strength concept often disregard that, the legitimacy of a strong state lies not just in its punitive power, but in its adherence to the constitutional framework and the rule of law. In theoretical terms, there is an important distinction between 'strong state' and 'strong government'. Scholars like Max Weber, Charles Tilly and Francis Fukuyama have highlighted that 'strength of a state is a measure of its success in penetrating society and its ability to deploy administrative machinery and coercion'. Therefore, a truly strong state should possess strong institutions that are not merely effective in delivering services but are also democratic, accountable, transparent in their decision making, and legitimized by the support of their population.

If the above definition is applied, crime control alone cannot be the yardstick for judging the strength of a state and this requires us to consider the whole institutional complex that constitute the state structure. Another issue that deserves consideration is the reliability of crime statistics. 'A change in crime registration policy, increased reporting, changes in legal definition of crime or administrative priorities may affect recorded crime figures. Therefore, crime statistics should be examined in the context of non-criminal measures like public trust in police, conviction rates, quality of justice delivery system, police professionalism etc.

In order to come to a holistic understanding of governance and the performance of institutions. In conclusion, there has been a clear shift in building of institutional capacity and of the law enforcement institutions in Uttar Pradesh. However, the transition from a 'soft' to a 'strong' state is a process and not a destination. A really effective and strong state relies not on strong crime control alone, but on constitutional governance, independence of the judiciary, protection of human rights, accountability to the people, and on a strong and responsive set of institutions. In the long run, the success of U.P 's governance experiment hinges on the equilibrium between strong enforcement and accountable rule of law.

6. Conclusion

The shift in Uttar Pradesh from a "Soft State" to a "Strong State" is among the most significant governance debates in contemporary India today. This research explores the transformation under three lenses: state capacity, crime control policies, and democratic governance. Drawing on the literature on statehood, government reports, crime statistics, and policy discussions, I



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establish that law enforcement institutions and administrative capacity have been significantly strengthened as a result of recent reforms. I argue that measures taken to modernise the police, to curb mafia culture, to use technology in Policing, to leverage digital governance and improve inter-institutional coordination have all contributed to strengthening the state capacity to impose law.

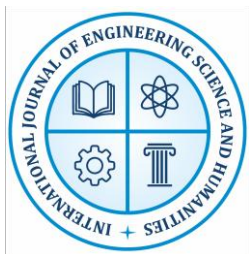
These measures have lent strength to administrative capacity, improve emergency responses and made state presence visible. Consequently, crime control has become an effective area of governance and it has further bolstered positive sentiments on security, investment and administrative competence. Nevertheless, the research concludes that enhanced law enforcement cannot be regarded as adequate justification for a claim of having successfully established a "Strong State". Sustaining state capacity is equally contingent on constitutional governance, independent judiciary, accountability, transparency and adherence to civil liberties.

Debates about encounter killings, demolition drives, due process and human rights make evident that effective governance always operates under the normative constraints of constitutional democratic accountability. Theoretically, the Uttar Pradesh experience offers an insight to argue that the definition of a "Strong State" must not only entail coercive capacity or stricter policing but the aggregate efficacy of institutions, legitimacy of legal processes, professional capacity of the administration and public confidence in governance. A strong state is effective in upholding its laws, albeit judiciously, without abrogating constitutional rights of its citizens and ensuring a fair administration of justice to all. To conclude, evidence indicates that Uttar Pradesh has achieved success in bolstering institutional capacity and building capacity for crime control and that it has indeed become stronger.

However, the transition from "Soft" to "Strong" remains ongoing than completed. The future impact of reforms would need to be appraised as an ongoing process through comparative analyses of other Indian states, impact assessment of governance outcomes, institutional trust and criminal justice performance.

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