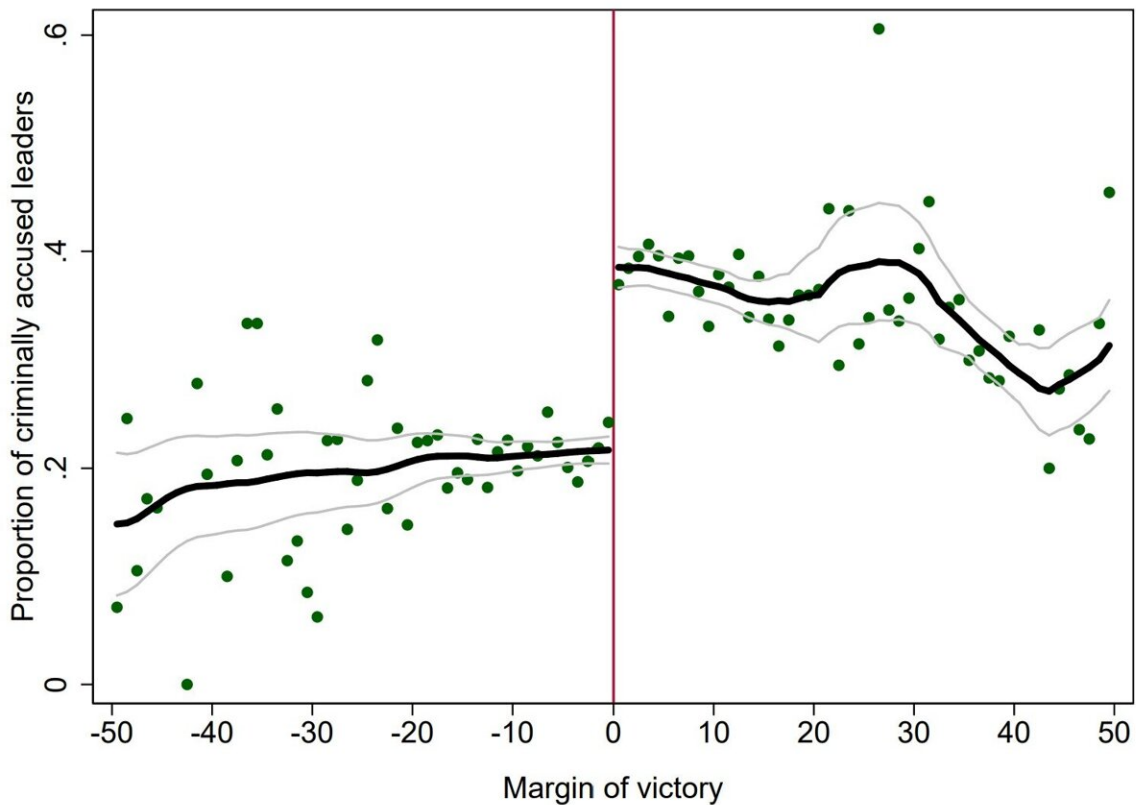


In India, criminal politicians increase crime, including crime against women, researcher finds

September 10 2024, by Cody Mello-Klein



First Stage Illustration for Seriously Accused: All States. Credit: *When Criminality Begets Crime: The Role of Elected Politicians in India* (2024)

Pappu Yadav has served in India's Lok Sabha, the lower house of the country's Parliament for close to 25 years. He's faced serious criminal accusations for almost as long.

Yadav, who represents a constituency in the state of Bihar, has 41 pending cases against him. He was convicted of murder in 2008 and received a life sentence, only to be acquitted in 2013. And in 2021, he was arrested in connection with a 32-year-old kidnapping case.

Yadav is not alone.

Nishith Prakash, a professor of public policy and economics at Northeastern University, says the long-serving politician is one of many politicians in India who have managed to bend or break the law for their own gain. Another politician, Anant Singh, a four-time elected member of the legislative assembly from Bihar, faces upwards of 38 criminal cases, including seven murders, 11 attempts to murder and four kidnappings.

"They are getting elected, and over time the number has only been going up," Prakash says. "In some states, it could be as high as almost 40% of people who are representing the state have some kind of a criminal accusation."

This is not unique to India, Prakash notes, but in a 2022 paper [published](#) in the *Journal of Law Economics and Organization*, Prakash and his co-authors found that states with more politicians accused of crimes also had higher [crime](#) rates. Criminality breeds crime, Prakash says.

"When you look at states that have weaker institutions, that's where you get the full picture," Prakash says. "In states with weaker institutions, these politicians have actually increased crime, and if you classify these cases as serious accusations, those who face kidnapping and murder

accusations, then there's a larger effect on crime."

This trend happens more frequently in states like Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Odisha and Uttar Pradesh, that are historically considered to have weaker institutions, Prakash adds.

An increase in the number of criminal politicians in those states was associated with a 4.3% increase in total crime per year. That number jumps to 5.8% when considering an increase in politicians who have been accused of serious crimes, like murder or kidnapping.

Based on a concept known as weak rule of law, Prakash says criminally accused politicians can either directly or indirectly benefit from, contribute to and exacerbate deteriorating law and order in states that already have weakened institutions.

Lalu Prasad Yadav, president of the Rashtriya Janata Dal political party, is one of the most notorious examples of this trend. Yadav's regime in Bihar frequently made headlines for their involvement in high-profile kidnapping cases, earning the name "jungle raj" in the 1980s and 1990s as kidnapping for ransom became big business.

"These kidnapers were indirectly, or in some cases directly, supported by the state or the person who was in power," Prakash says. "In the late 1990s, the situation became extremely grim, with several doctors migrating due to extortion. The crisis further deteriorated when even school children began to be targeted for kidnappings."

Prakash notes that India has made it easier to track criminally accused politicians because of a landmark 2003 ruling by the Supreme Court. The court established that anyone who runs for political office must disclose any and all criminal cases they have been involved in. This includes accusations and indictments but not convictions. Anyone

convicted of a crime is unable to run for office in India.

The researchers also looked at a more specific way that criminally accused politicians affect crime: They found that an increase in criminal politicians also resulted in a 12.6% increase in crimes against women.

There was also a corresponding effect on how many women participated in the [labor force](#).

"Exactly in places where you see increases in crime you find lower female labor force participation," Prakash says. "It should mirror because if you have high crime, women would not feel safe and they would not go out to work."

Prakash says that India historically has lower female labor participation, especially in [urban areas](#). But in areas with more criminally accused politicians, the number of women taking part in the labor force dropped by 10% to 11%.

Previously, Prakash had found that the quality of elected politicians also had another [economic impact](#): Areas of India with more criminally accused politicians had between 2.3% and 6.5% less economic growth per year.

Change is slow, if it comes at all, Prakash says, but there has been a push to reform the Indian political system in recent years, thanks in part to this research, which has caught the interest of the courts and Election Commission in India.

"The quality of [politicians](#) matters," Prakash says. "Who you elect has implications on outcomes that we care about. It could be economic growth, it could be crime against women, it could be labor force participation. These are very important outcomes for society and the

economy."

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Provided by Northeastern University

Citation: In India, criminal politicians increase crime, including crime against women, researcher finds (2024, September 10) retrieved 10 September 2024 from
<https://phys.org/news/2024-09-india-criminal-politicians-crime-women.html>

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