STATUS OF POLICING IN INDIA REPORT

2020–2021

Volume II

Policing in the Covid-19 Pandemic

Status of Policing in India Report (SPIR) 2020-21
Volume II: Policing in the Covid-19 Pandemic

Executive Summary

The *Status of Policing in India Report (SPIR) 2020-2021, Volume II: Policing in the Covid-19 Pandemic* covers a range of citizen-police interactions during the lockdown, the handling of the crisis, and the emergence of new challenges for the law enforcement apparatus. SPIR 2020-21 Volume-I, released in April 2021, covered policing in regions affected by conflict, extremism, or insurgency. The two SPIR volumes study policing during unusual and extraordinary circumstances.

This Volume of SPIR 2020-21 analyses data from a survey of common people and police personnel from Tier 1 and Tier II/III cities of 10 states and Union Territories. The report also looks at the media coverage of the nature of policing during the initial phases of the national lockdown. Some of the key findings of a separate, rapid survey with migrant workers and relief workers from Delhi-NCR, Rajasthan and Gujarat have also been presented in this report.

It may be noted that all the findings of the report pertain to the first wave of the Covid-19 crisis in India in 2020, since the data collection was done in the months of October and November 2020.
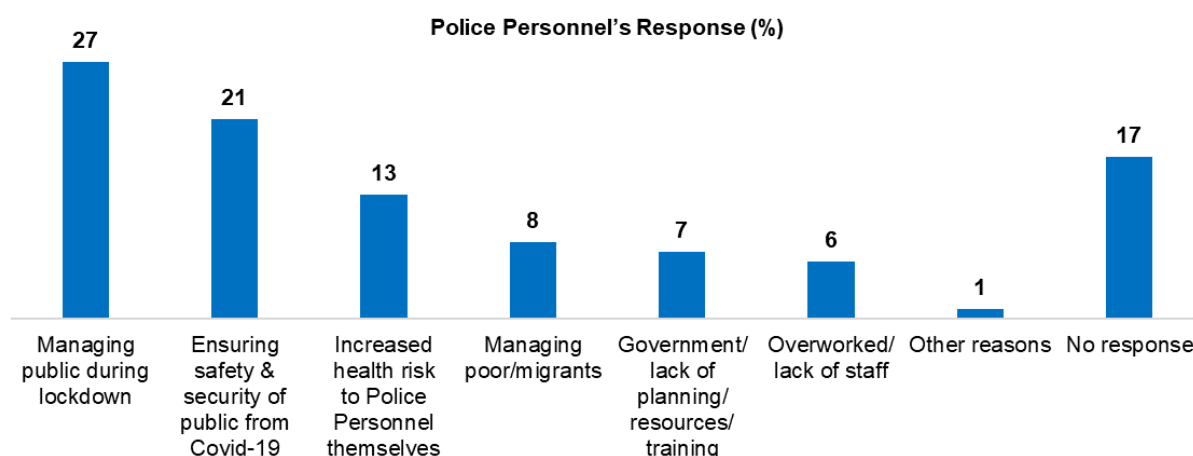
Below are some of the key takeaways from the report:

ADHERENCE TO RULE OF LAW BY THE POLICE

One of the central features of a democracy is adherence to the rule of law. However, while this may exist as a governing principle on paper, the reality on the ground may be entirely different. This was also the case in the functioning of the police during the first wave of the pandemic, as is evident from the findings of the survey.

- Only one out of three police personnel reported being able to follow legal procedures completely while maintaining law and order and investigating crimes during the lockdown.

- The biggest challenge for the police during the lockdown was managing the people, as reported by more than a quarter (27%) of the police personnel. Personnel from Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra reported that managing the poor and migrant workers was the second biggest challenge for them during the lockdown.

Managing the public during the lockdown was the biggest challenge for the police
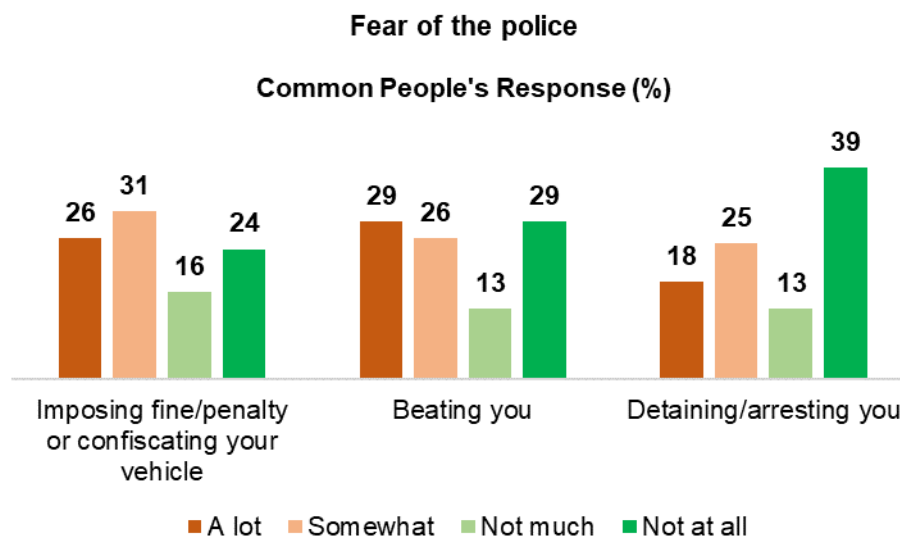
Police Personnel's Response (%)

Category	Value
Managing public during lockdown	27
Ensuring safety & security of public from Covid-19	21
Increased health risk to Police Personnel themselves	13
Managing poor/migrants	8
Government/ lack of planning/ resources/ training	7
Overworked/ lack of staff	6
Other reasons	1
No response	17

Note: All figures are rounded off. This is the opinion of the police personnel.

Question asked: According to you, what was the biggest hurdle/difficulty for the police while handling the coronavirus pandemic during the lockdown?

POLICE EXCESSES, USE OF FORCE AND CONFRONTATIONS BETWEEN POLICE AND THE PEOPLE

During the lockdown, use of force by the police and police brutality were commonly reported, even in cases of minor infringement of the strict lockdown rules. This inevitably led to confrontations between the police and the people. Additionally, there was an increased level of fear of the police among the common people:

- One out of three (33%) common people reported frequent confrontations between the civilians and the police during the lockdown.

- A majority of the common people (55%) reported fearing the police during the lockdown. Nearly three in five feared impositions of fine (57%) and being beaten by the police (55%).

Fear of the police

Common People's Response (%)

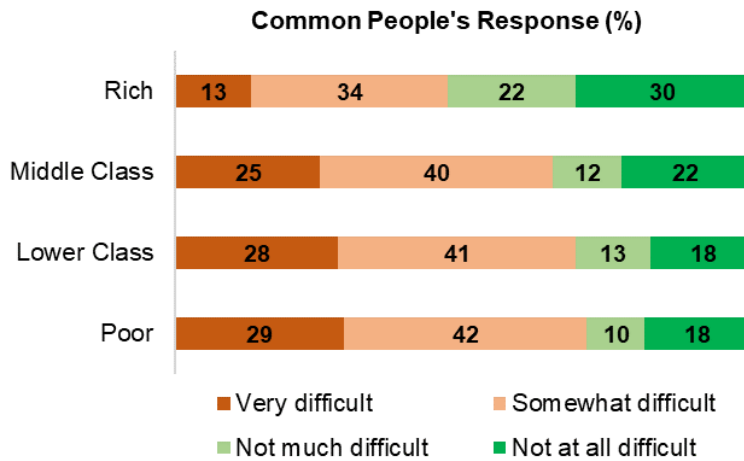*Note: Rest of the respondents did not answer. All figures are rounded off.*
Questions asked: During lockdown, whenever you went out of your home to buy essentials or for work, how much fear did you have of the following – a lot, somewhat, not much or not at all? a. Fear of police imposing fine/penalty or confiscating your vehicle? b. Fear of police beating you? c. Fear of police detaining/arresting you?

ADVERSE IMPACT ON ECONOMICALLY AND SOCIALLY DISADVANTAGED SECTIONS

The lockdown and the police action in its wake was invariably harsher on the already disadvantaged groups such as the poor, Dalits, tribals and Muslims. Firstly, these communities faced greater disadvantage generally due to the lockdown, having difficulty accessing essentials such as food or ration. Secondly, they were also more likely to be evicted as tenants. Worsening their woes was the discrimination they faced by the police during this period, as is evident from the findings:

- The poorest and lower classes were more than twice as likely as the rich to face a lot of difficulties in accessing basic needs during the lockdown.

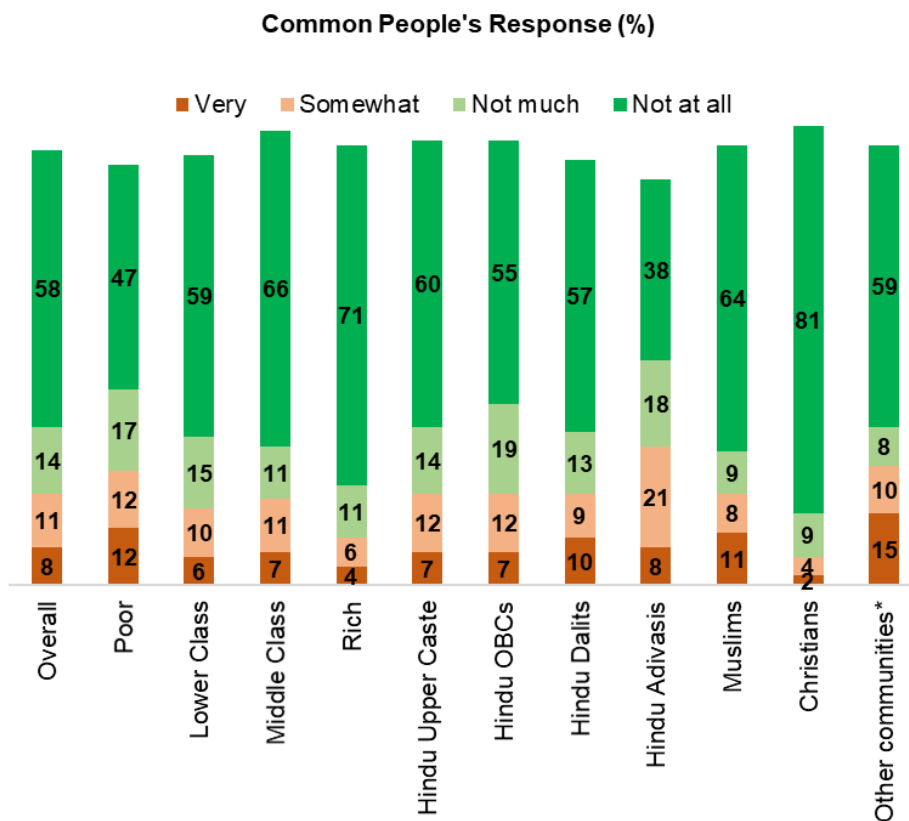## Accessing basic essentials during lockdown was most difficult for the poor

Common People's Response (%)

	Very difficult	Somewhat difficult	Not much difficult	Not at all difficult
Rich	13	34	22	30
Middle Class	25	40	12	22
Lower Class	28	41	13	18
Poor	29	42	10	18

Note: Rest of the respondents did not answer. All figures are rounded off.
Questions asked: In many regions, local people found it difficult to get access to basic essentials like food or medicines, during lockdown. How difficult was it for you and your family to get access to the basic essentials – very, somewhat, not much, or not at all?

- The poorest were also thrice as likely to report 'many' cases of forceful eviction of tenants during the lockdown, as compared to the rich. Amongst socio-religious groups, Dalits, Muslims and other minorities were most likely to be forcefully evicted during the lockdown.

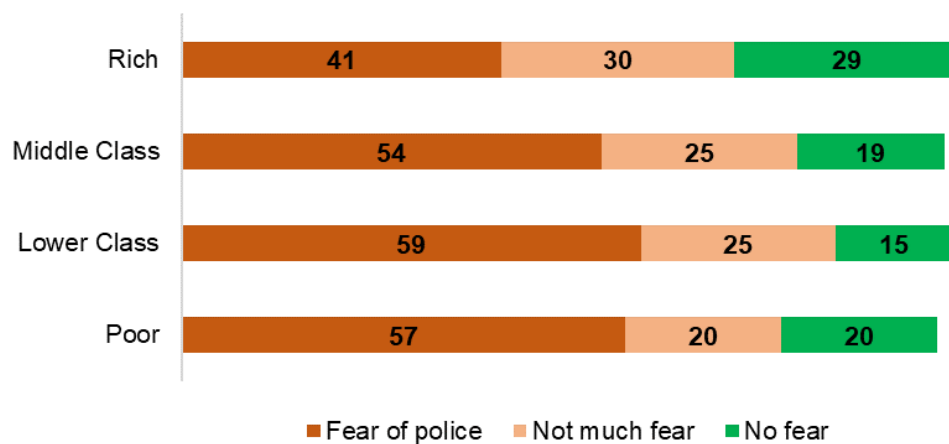### Forceful eviction of tenants during the lockdown

Common People's Response (%)

	Very	Somewhat	Not much	Not at all
Overall	8	11	14	58
Poor	12	12	17	47
Lower Class	6	10	15	59
Middle Class	7	11	11	66
Rich	4	6	11	71
Hindu Upper Caste	7	12	14	60
Hindu OBCs	7	12	19	55
Hindu Dalits	10	9	13	57
Hindu Adivasis	8	21	18	38
Muslims	11	8	9	64
Christians	2	4	9	81
Other communities*	15	10	8	59

Note: Rest of the respondents did not answer. All figures are rounded off.

- There was a clear class divide in the perceptions of the police during the lockdown. The poor and those belonging to lower class, were more fearful of the police during the lockdown. In particular, they were fearful of physical violence by the police. They were also more likely to see the police's instructions during this period as threatening. The police personnel, on the other hand, were also more likely to report the poor localities as being least compliant with the lockdown rules.
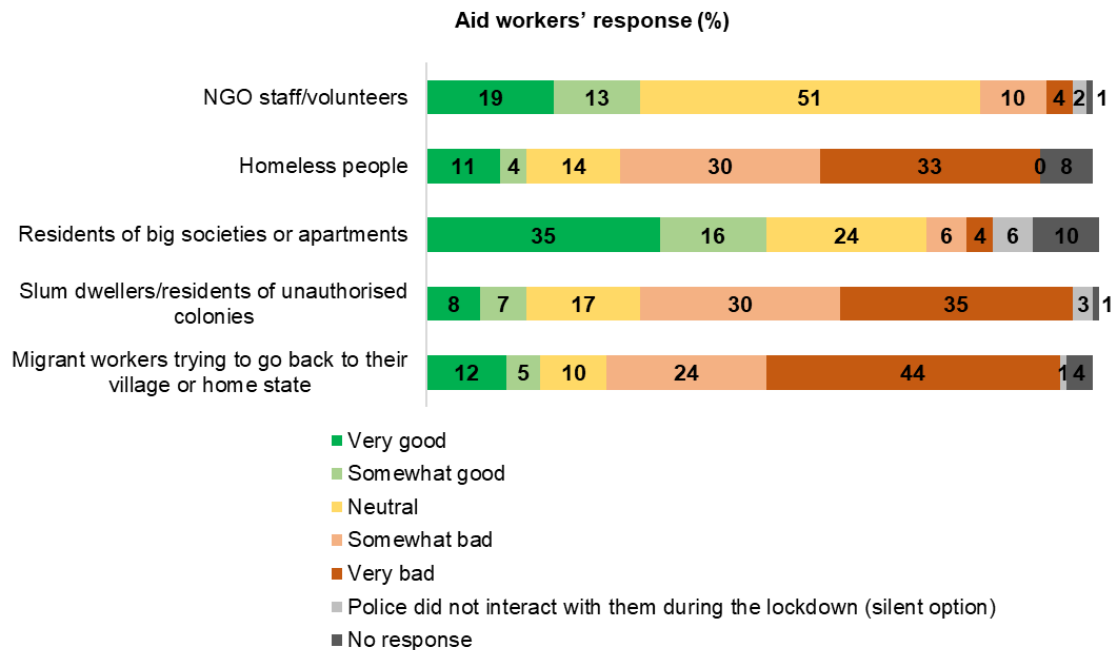
Lower-income groups feared the police the most

Common People's Response (%)

	Fear of police	Not much fear	No fear
Rich	41	30	29
Middle Class	54	25	19
Lower Class	59	25	15
Poor	57	20	20

Note: Rest of the respondents did not answer. All figures are rounded off. The categories of 'some fear' and 'a lot of fear' have been merged to form 'Fear of police'.

- An overwhelming majority of common people (62%) and police personnel (71%) believed that the restrictions imposed during the lockdown applied equally to everyone. However, a significant proportion (29% people; 26% police personnel) felt that some people got away more easily. Poorer people are more likely to believe that curbs were not imposed equally for everyone.

- With a higher visibility of the police at public spaces, nearly three in four (71%) people reported feeling secure. However, about one in five (18%) felt threatened. It was the poor and economically vulnerable who felt more threatened, indicating that they were disproportionately affected by increased policing.

- According to a separate, rapid study of relief workers, more than one-third of the aid workers believe that police behaved very badly with the homeless people, slum dwellers and migrant workers during the lockdown. One out of two aid workers also say that the police discriminated against Muslims during the lockdown, with 50 percent reporting high or medium levels of discrimination.

Behaviour of the police towards various sections of the society during the lockdown

Aid workers' response (%)

Group	Very good	Somewhat good	Neutral	Somewhat bad	Very bad	Silent option	No response
NGO staff/volunteers	19	13	51	10	4	2	1
Homeless people	11	4	14	30	33	0	8
Residents of big societies or apartments	35	16	24	6	4	6	10
Slum dwellers/residents of unauthorised colonies	8	7	17	30	35	3	1
Migrant workers trying to go back to their village or home state	12	5	10	24	44	1	4

Legend:
- Very good
- Somewhat good
- Neutral
- Somewhat bad
- Very bad
- Police did not interact with them during the lockdown (silent option)
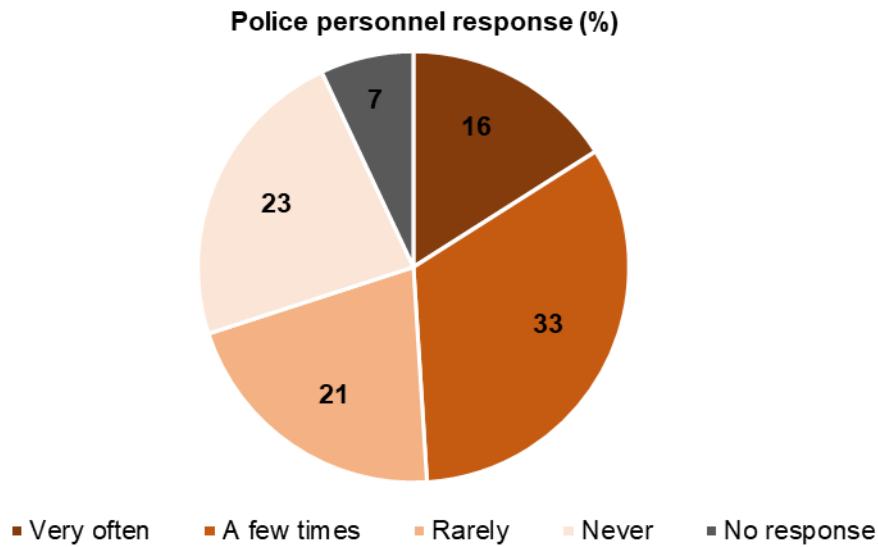- No response

Note: All figures are rounded off.

Question asked: "In your experience, during the lockdown, how was the behaviour of the police with the following groups of people—very good, somewhat good, neutral, somewhat bad, very bad or the police did not interact with them during the lockdown (silent option): a. NGO staff/ volunteers; b. Homeless people; c. Residents of big societies or appartements; d. Slum dwellers/ residents of unauthorised colonies; e. Migrant workers trying to go back to their village or home state."

PLIGHT OF MIGRANT WORKERS

The migrant workers were arguably the worst hit during the first wave of the pandemic, and were left to grapple with the multiple challenges of economic insecurity, lack of support systems and absence of essential services. Their trauma was compounded by being away from homes and families. Thus, the surveys with the common people and police personnel also included some questions on the plight of migrant workers. This apart, some of the findings of a separate rapid survey of migrants and relief workers also point to greater levels of police brutality and excesses towards the migrants.

- Nearly one out of two police personnel (49%) reported having frequently used force against migrant workers travelling back home. Further, one in three police personnel (33%) frequently encountered situations where the migrants were trying to enter shelters, but police used force to prevent them from doing so.
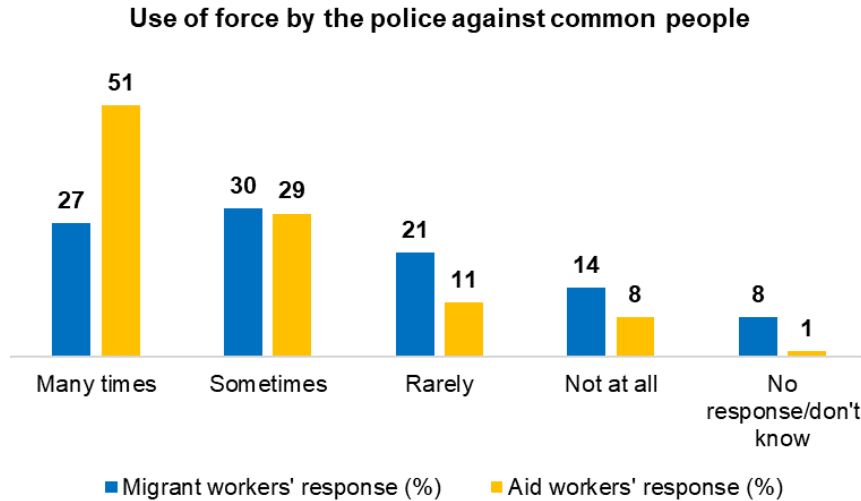
Use of force to control the migrants walking towards their homes

Police personnel response (%)

Pie chart segments:
- 16 — Very often
- 33 — A few times
- 21 — Rarely
- 23 — Never
- 7 — No response

■ Very often ■ A few times ■ Rarely ■ Never ■ No response

Note: All figures are rounded off.
Question asked: How often did the police resort to the use of force to control the migrants walking towards their homes-- very often, a few times, rarely or never?

- Nearly one out of four personnel (23%) reported being confused as to who would shelter the migrant workers while another 22 percent noted a lack of coordination with the district police.

- According to a separate rapid survey of migrant workers, the abrupt lockdown was not viewed favourably by the most severely affected people or those providing relief to them. Four out of five migrant workers and nearly an equal proportion of aid workers believe that if people were informed of the lockdown earlier, they would have faced lesser difficulties.

- The rapid study found that providing aid and distributing food, rations or essential provisions were the biggest form of support provided by the police in the time of crisis, according to both migrant and aid workers. Nearly sixty percent aid workers feel that police were highly or somewhat helpful in distributing food/ration.

- Nearly half of the migrant workers contacted for the separate rapid study faced assault by the police during the lockdown. Further, one in 10 migrant workers faced assault by the police while going back to their home states/villages. Like the migrant workers, the aid workers also reported assault to be the most common form of cruelty by the police during the lockdown. Eighty percent say police used force against common people many times or sometimes.

Use of force by the police against common people

Legend: ■ Migrant workers' response (%) ■ Aid workers' response (%)

	Many times	Sometimes	Rarely	Not at all	No response/don't know
Migrant workers' response (%)	27	30	21	14	8
Aid workers' response (%)	51	29	11	8	1

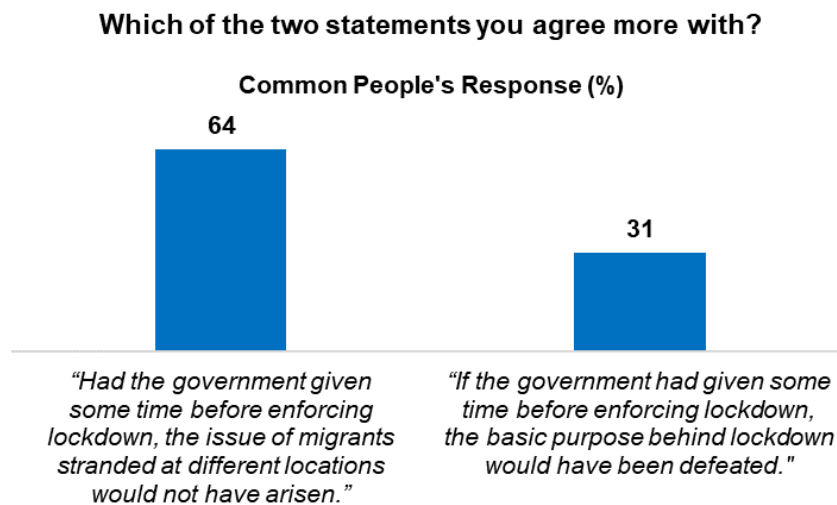*Note: All figures are rounded off.*
Question asked: "In your experience, during the lockdown, how frequently did the police use force against the common people—many times, sometimes, rarely or not at all?"

- According to the separate rapid study, overall, three out of five migrant workers (59%) and aid workers (61%) were satisfied with the work of the police during the lockdown. However, both groups were also of the opinion that there was excessive use of force by the police during this time. Nearly three out of five migrant workers (57%) and four out of five aid workers (80%) reported frequent use of force by the police against the common people during the lockdown.

MANAGEMENT OF THE LOCKDOWN: OPINIONS OF THE COMMON PEOPLE AND POLICE

Even though the police enforced the lockdown rules and ensured compliance with the Disaster Management Act, 2005, the decisions on exact rules to be enforced did not fall within the purview of their work. The nature of the lockdown and the decision of enforcement timing were taken without consultation with state police forces. Some of the findings of the report show dissatisfaction with the rules and the manner in which they were enforced.

- More than three out of five people (64%) believe that a longer notice before the lockdown could have prevented the migrant crisis.

Which of the two statements you agree more with?

Common People's Response (%)

"Had the government given some time before enforcing lockdown, the issue of migrants stranded at different locations would not have arisen."	"If the government had given some time before enforcing lockdown, the basic purpose behind lockdown would have been defeated."
64	31

Note: Rest of the respondents did not answer. All figures are rounded off.
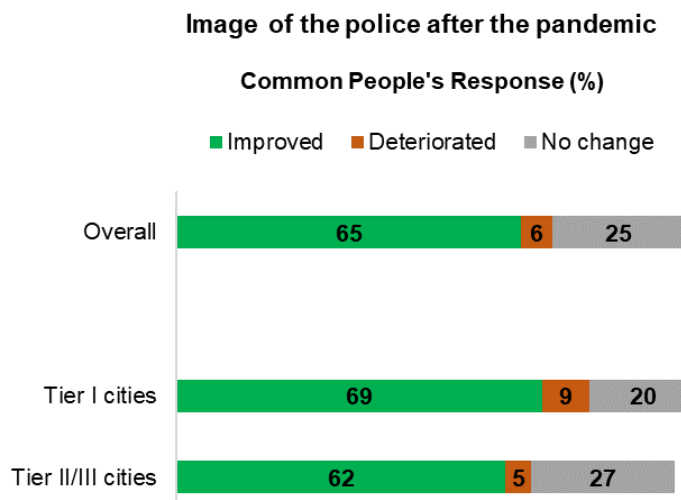
Question asked: I will read out two statements, tell me which of the two you agree more with?

- Two out of five migrant workers (38%) believed that the strictness of lockdown rule enforcement by the police was inappropriate and harsh. Forty seven percent, however, believed that strictness was required for the safety and the police were doing their job. A significant proportion of aid workers (40%) also strongly felt that the unnecessarily strict lockdown rules were a big hindrance in the proper functioning of the police during this period.

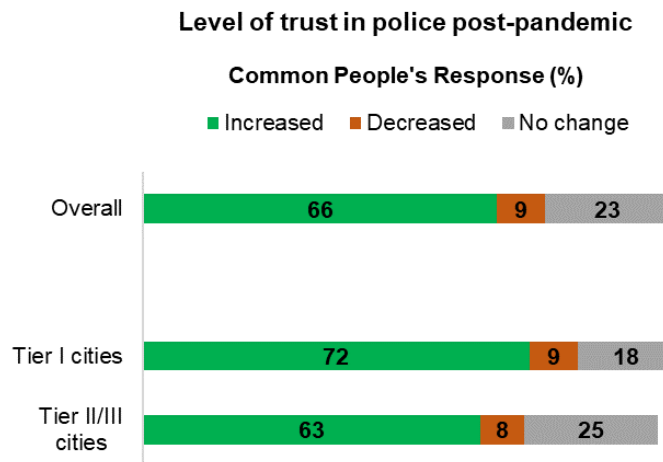## PEOPLE'S APPRAISAL OF POLICE WORK DURING THE PANDEMIC

To gauge the level of satisfaction with the work done by the police and their overall assessment of policing during the lockdown, questions pertaining to people's satisfaction, trust, experiences ad perceptions about policing during the lockdown were asked:

- Overall, nearly nine in 10 common people (86%) rated the behaviour of the police during the lockdown positively. Out of this, a quarter (25%) said that the behaviour was very good and three out of five (61%) reported it to be good.

- Three out of four police personnel feel that surveillance increased a lot during the lockdown. A similar proportion of common people also reported an increase in police presence in their locality.

- The survey captures a broadly positive public perception of policing during the pandemic. Two in every five people (40%) considered the police to be highly efficient and 46% somewhat efficient in controlling the outbreak. However, the poor people were less likely to believe that the police were efficient.

- Overall, the pandemic seems to have improved the relationship between the police and citizens. Two in three people (66%) reported an improvement in the level of trust and around the same number (65%) reported an improvement in the image of the police following the lockdown. Around half of the common people surveyed felt that the police handled the situation efficiently despite the sudden nation-wide lockdown.

Image of the police after the pandemic

Common People's Response (%)

■ Improved ■ Deteriorated ■ No change

	Improved	Deteriorated	No change
Overall	65	6	25
Tier I cities	69	9	20
Tier II/III cities	62	5	27

Note: Rest of the respondents did not answer. All figures are rounded off.

Questions asked: After the coronavirus pandemic, in your mind, has the image of the police improved, deteriorated or remained the same?

Level of trust in police post-pandemic

Common People's Response (%)

■ Increased ■ Decreased ■ No change

	Increased	Decreased	No change
Overall	66	9	23
Tier I cities	72	9	18
Tier II/III cities	63	8	25

Note: Rest of the respondents did not answer. All figures are rounded off.
Question asked: Considering how they performed during the coronavirus outbreak, has your trust in the police increased or decreased?
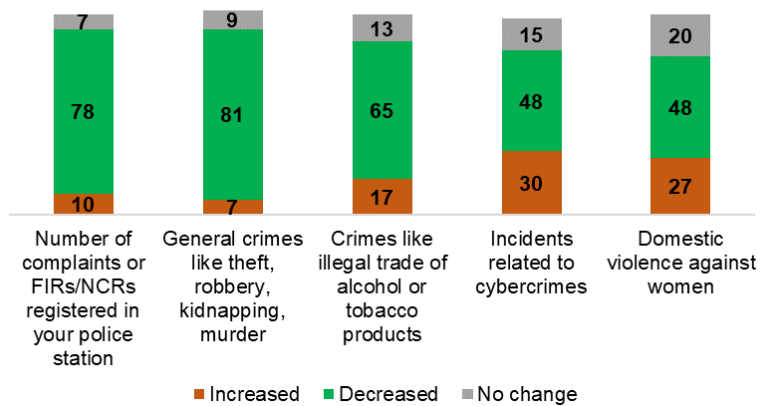
- Largely, people in Tier II/III cities had a better perception of the police during the lockdown, compared to Tier I cities. More people in smaller towns felt that the police were efficient in controlling the situation and that they were secure with their increased presence during the lockdown.

CRIME DURING THE LOCKDOWN

With the imposition of the lockdown, it was seen that general crimes such as robbery, theft, murder, violent crimes, etc. went down drastically across the globe. However, the lockdown caused an increase in different categories of crimes such as cybercrimes and domestic violence, as is clear from the survey findings. However, it needs to be noted that these findings are restricted to the perceptions of the people and the police, regarding the rates of crimes and are official statistics about the actual reported crime rate.

- Overall, the data shows that with fewer people venturing out, there was reportedly a substantial decrease in the crime rate of the country. Four in five police personnel reported a drop in the overall crime rate. A similar proportion of common people also reported a decrease in crime during the lockdown.

- While police personnel reported that crimes such as theft, robbery, kidnapping and murder reduced to a great extent, offences committed in private settings, such as domestic violence against women and cybercrimes, increased during the lockdown. One out of four police personnel reported an increase in domestic violence during the lockdown.

Police personnel's perception of the number of complaints/FIRs etc and the change in the rate of specific crimes during lockdown (%)

	Number of complaints or FIRs/NCRs registered in your police station	General crimes like theft, robbery, kidnapping, murder	Crimes like illegal trade of alcohol or tobacco products	Incidents related to cybercrimes	Domestic violence against women
No change	7	9	13	15	20
Decreased	78	81	65	48	48
Increased	10	7	17	30	27

■ Increased ■ Decreased ■ No change

Note: Rest of the respondents did not answer. All figures are rounded off.
Question asked: Compared to earlier times, did the following things increase or decrease during the lockdown?
a. Number of complaints or FIR/NCRs registered in your police station b. General crimes like theft, robbery, kidnapping, murder? c. Crimes like illegal trade of alcohol or tobacco products? d. Incidents related to cybercrimes? e. Incidents of domestic violence against women?
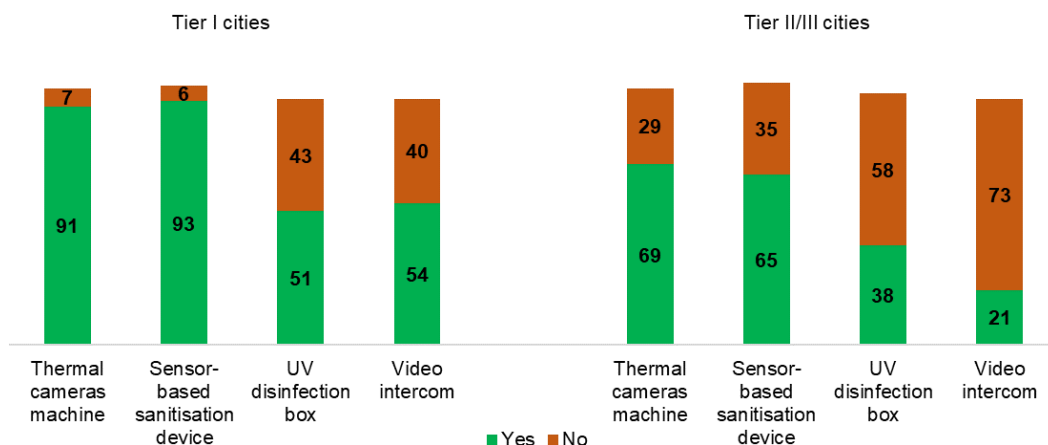
POLICE PREPAREDNESS AND WORKING CONDITIONS DURING THE LOCKDOWN

The sudden lockdown took a toll not only on the common people across the country, but also on the police personnel tasked with enforcing the lockdown. With low levels of preparedness through training, lack of resources, shortage of staff, etc., the personnel were generally ill-equipped to handle the mammoth task they were assigned. This is evident from the survey findings:

- Police personnel in Tier I cities were provided with better facilities during the lockdown compared to those in Tier II/III cities. Police in Tier I cities had higher provision of equipment for duty during the pandemic, better hygiene conditions, more insurance covers, safety arrangements such as special accommodation, higher proportion of personnel receiving special training and more departmentally arranged health check-ups during the lockdown. Personnel with co-morbidities in these cities were also less likely to be posted in high-risk zones.
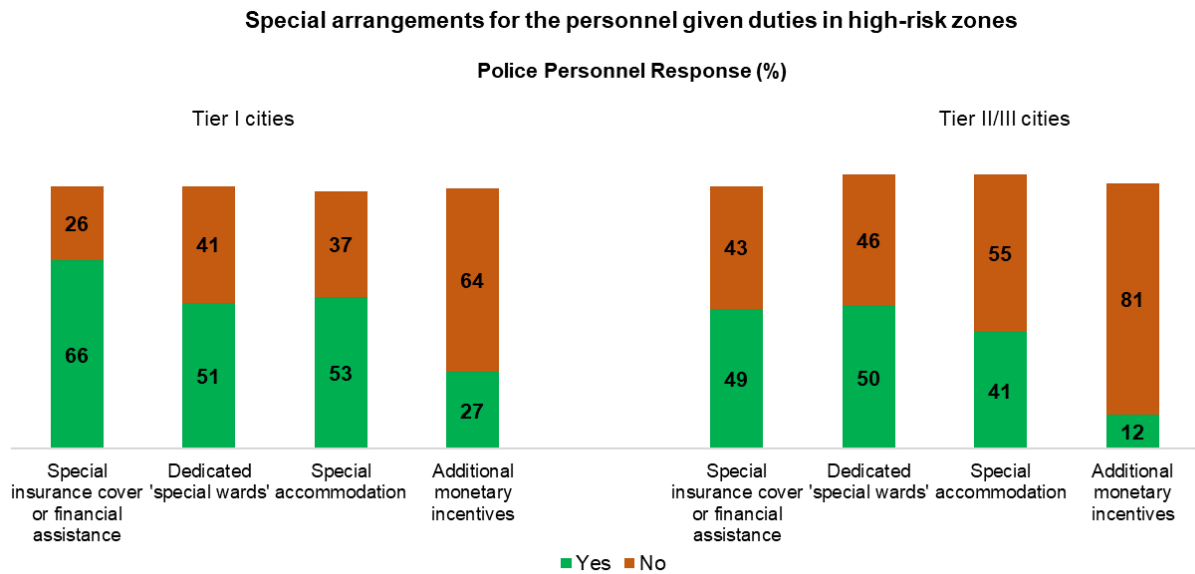
Contactless methods to protect the police force

Police Personnel Response (%)

Tier I cities

	Thermal cameras machine	Sensor-based sanitisation device	UV disinfection box	Video intercom
No	7	6	43	40
Yes	91	93	51	54

Tier II/III cities

	Thermal cameras machine	Sensor-based sanitisation device	UV disinfection box	Video intercom
No	29	35	58	73
Yes	69	65	38	21

■ Yes ■ No

Note: Rest of the respondents did not answer. All figures are rounded off.

Question asked: During coronavirus outbreak, police adopted many contactless methods to protect its force from the virus. Was any of the following installed in your police Station- a. Sensor-based sanitisation machine; b. Thermal cameras; c. Video-intercom device; d. UV disinfection box?
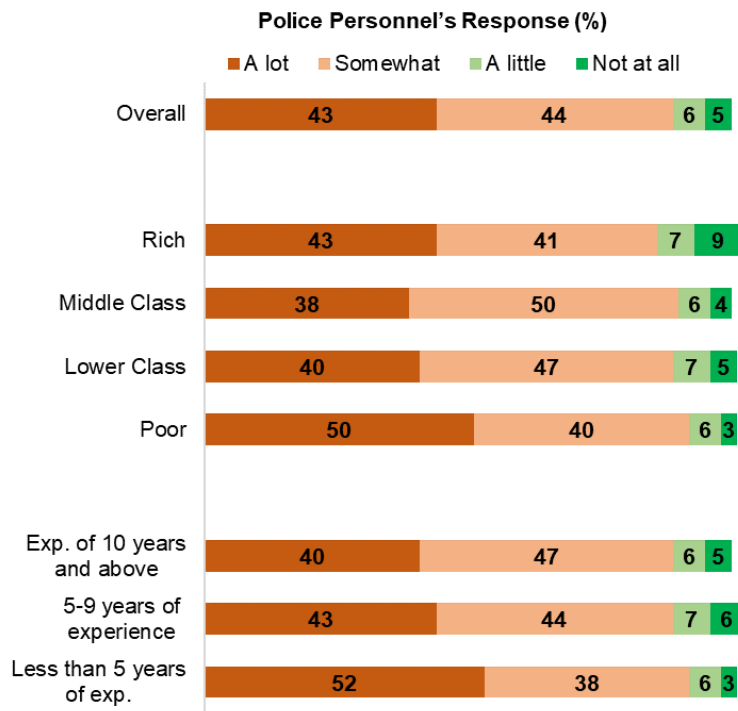
Special arrangements for the personnel given duties in high-risk zones

Police Personnel Response (%)

Note: Rest of the respondents did not answer. All figures are rounded off.

Question asked: During the coronavirus outbreak, some states had special arrangement for police personnel with duties in high-risk zones. Did the government arrange for any of the following in your region- a. Special accommodation for the police personnel, so that they don't have to go back to their families every day; b. Dedicated Corona/Covid Health Centres or 'special wards' in hospitals for police; c. Special insurance cover or financial assistance to family, in case of police personnel dying due to coronavirus; d. Additional monetary incentives for those deployed in high-risk zones?

- A majority (56%) reported that the vulnerable police personnel were shifted to low-risk zones or given complete rest, while two in five (37%) denied the same, indicating the lack of a uniform policy. However, more than four out of five (84%) agreed that police personnel with visible symptoms of Covid-19 were granted leave.

- Half of the police personnel (56%) claimed to have received a special training to deal with the public during the outbreak, while more than two in five (43%) disagreed.

- Covid-19 duty took a toll on the mental health of most of the police force, as nine in every 10 said that they were greatly or somewhat impacted by this.

Impact of Covid-19 outbreak on mental health

Police Personnel's Response (%)

Legend: ■ A lot ■ Somewhat ■ A little ■ Not at all

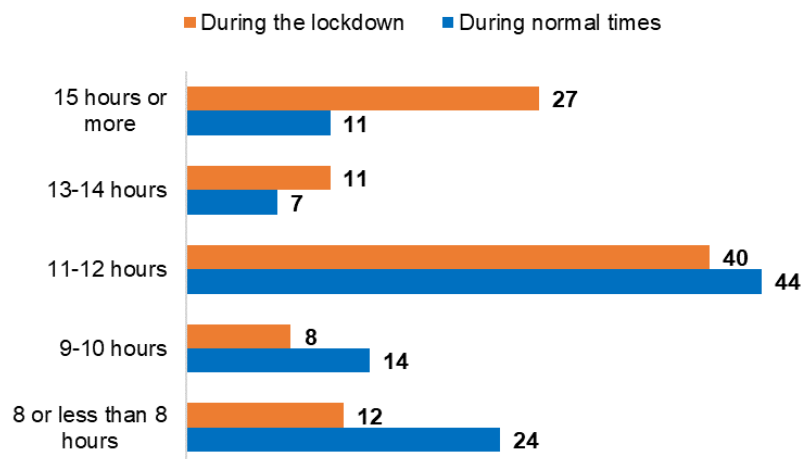| Category	A lot	Somewhat	A little	Not at all
Overall	43	44	6	5
Rich	43	41	7	9
Middle Class	38	50	6	4
Lower Class	40	47	7	5
Poor	50	40	6	3
Exp. of 10 years and above	40	47	6	5
5-9 years of experience	43	44	7	6
Less than 5 years of exp.	52	38	6	3

Note: Rest of the respondents did not answer. All figures are rounded off.
Questions asked: How much do you think being on regular duty during the coronavirus outbreak has impacted the mental health of police personnel like you – a lot, somewhat, not much or not at all?

- In general, southern states such as Kerala and Tamil Nadu were more proactive in providing special training to personnel during the pandemic. These states also ensured better availability of safety equipment such as PPE kits, etc. while states such as Bihar and West Bengal were least prepared under these parameters. Highlighting the challenges, half of the police personnel (52%) identified shortage of staff as a major hurdle. Consequently, the police force appeared to be overburdened, with four in five (78%) reporting to be working for at least 11 hours a day during the lockdown. More than a quarter (27%) reportedly worked for at least 15 hours a day during the lockdown.

Number of working hours for the police personnel deployed

Legend: ■ During the lockdown ■ During normal times

Hours	During the lockdown	During normal times
15 hours or more	27	11
13-14 hours	11	7
11-12 hours	40	44
9-10 hours	8	14
8 or less than 8 hours	12	24

Note: Rest of the respondents did not answer. All figures are rounded off.
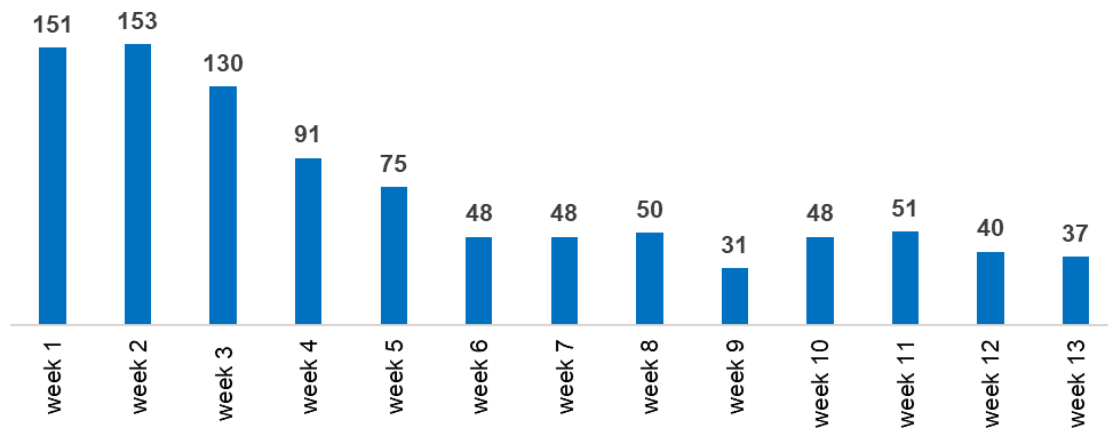
Question asked: How many hours did you work daily, when the lockdown was in place? And what used to be your daily working hours in normal times, i.e., before the lockdown?

MEDIA COVERAGE OF POLICING DURING THE PANDEMIC

The media played an important role as the disseminator of information during a period when access to many other sources of information were stopped. Therefore, the study included an analysis of the news coverage of policing during the pandemic. Key findings of this analysis are given below:

- A good amount of media coverage on policing during the lockdown --- one out of four news stories --- was about incidents of lockdown violation and the consequent action taken by the police. More than half of these news stories were reported within a month of the lockdown.
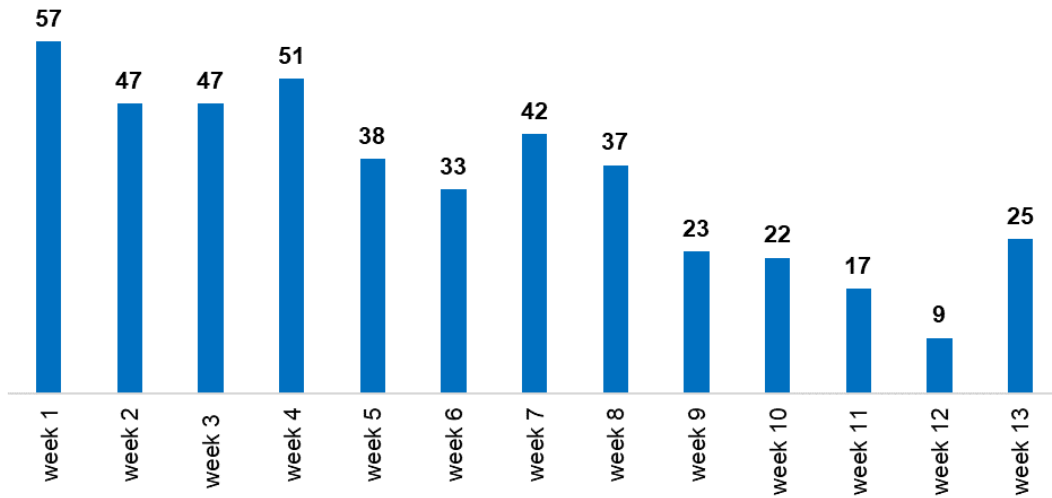
Number of news reports on lockdown violation and police action

(April 1, 2020 - June 30, 2020)

Week	Count
week 1	151
week 2	153
week 3	130
week 4	91
week 5	75
week 6	48
week 7	48
week 8	50
week 9	31
week 10	48
week 11	51
week 12	40
week 13	37

- News reports suggest significant governmental pressure on the police for very strict imposition of the lockdown norms using whatever means deemed necessary.

- Media stories strongly reflect the expanded role of the police during the lockdown. The police in almost all the states were involved in distributing food and essential supplies during the initial weeks. Also widely covered were reports of innovative policing, i.e., cops singing, dancing, running creative health awareness campaigns; distributing masks, medicines, etc. to the needy; paying surprise visits to citizens' houses and celebrating their birthdays etc.

- Nearly one out of 10 news stories from the sample reports the police excesses and negligence during the lockdown. It is evident from media reports that migrant workers were most likely to be at the receiving end of police brutality during this period.

Number of news reports on police excesses and negligence

(April 1, 2020 - June 30, 2020)

Week	Number
week 1	57
week 2	47
week 3	47
week 4	51
week 5	38
week 6	33
week 7	42
week 8	37
week 9	23
week 10	22
week 11	17
week 12	9
week 13	25

- Media also reported that the police extensively used advance surveillance tools like drone cameras, face detection technology, GPS enabled systems like geofencing, etc. to enforce the lockdown. The growing reliance on advanced technology for policing received high praise from the media but few questions were raised pertaining to their legality, adherence to regulations, and data protection methods during this time.

- The analysis of media reports showed little to no critical assessment of government policies or police behaviour during the lockdown. While content analysis of the slant of media stories was not done in this study, the general analysis revealed few critical reports, except in cases of extreme police brutality such as custodial deaths.