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Statutory Time Limits and Undertrial Detention under India's Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita Reforms

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Abstract

This study examines the first complete national statistical cycle following the entry into force of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita on 1 July 2024. Drawing on the full Prison Statistics India 2024 package released by the National Crime Records Bureau, it analyses changes in prison population, occupancy, undertrial numbers, duration of confinement, and the early operation of the time-based release provisions under Section 479. The analysis is descriptive and comparative, relying on aggregate stock and flow figures recorded as of 31 December. The 2024 data show a decline in the total prisoner population, a reduction in undertrial numbers, and an improvement in national occupancy from 120.8 per cent to 112.7 per cent. Undertrials continued to constitute 72.6 per cent of all prisoners. Section 479 generated 627 documented releases from a pool of 968 undertrials identified as eligible, with implementation heavily concentrated in a small number of jurisdictions. Ordinary bail remained the dominant pathway out of pretrial custody. These patterns indicate that a statutory time-based release mechanism is operational and that modest capacity expansion combined with a reduction in the undertrial stock can lower aggregate occupancy, even while the undertrial share remains high. At the same time, the early absolute contribution of Section 479 was limited relative to the size of the undertrial population. The findings offer real-world evidence on both the feasibility and the limits of automatic time-based release rules. Sustained monitoring of subsequent National Crime Records Bureau cycles will be essential to assess whether the observed trends persist and whether implementation becomes more uniform. The results hold relevance for comparative discussions of pretrial design.

INTRODUCTION

Undertrial detention remains a structural feature of the Indian criminal justice system. Studies have consistently pointed out that undertrial prisoners constituted the vast majority of the prisoner population, exceeding seventy per cent in many series of data (Raj, 2026; Kumar, 2026; Rathore, 2026). Persons presumed innocent under the Constitution have frequently remained in custody for periods that approach or exceed the maximum sentence prescribed for the charged offence. The constitutional safeguards under Articles 21 and 22, as well as earlier legal provisions on detention, did not alter this trend (Chitkara, 2025; Kaur, 2025).

The Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, which took effect on 1 July 2024, introduced statutory limits on the duration of pretrial detention. Specifically, Section 479 provided time-based release criteria, i.e., one-third of the maximum sentence prescribed in case of first-time offenders and one-half for others, provided that the offences did not carry a death sentence or life imprisonment. In addition, the provision put an obligation on jail superintendents to identify the eligible undertrial prisoners and initiate their release proceedings (Tewari, 2024). Thus, the legal design was based on the passage of time and not risk prediction or cash bail.

The Indian approach of adopting categorical time-based provisions is different from the cash bail and actuarial risk assessment systems that still dominate in most American pretrial detention systems. This

study examines the first nationwide statistical cycle compiled after the new law came into force (Scheadler et al., 2025).

The research questions are three. Firstly, what changes occurred in the prison population, occupancy, undertrial numbers, and duration of confinement during 2024? Secondly, what amount of releases happened in accordance with Section 479, and how was implementation distributed across States? Thirdly, what can be said about the implications of these initial findings for the comparative analysis of time-based release policies? The contribution of the study lies in the analysis of the complete NCRB Prison Statistics India 2024 package, its comparison with the existing doctrinal and empirical literature on undertrial detention, and the importance of the baseline for comparative pre-trial policy.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Studies related to undertrial detention in India have largely focused on the conditions that result in temporary detention turning into prolonged imprisonment. Common reasons for this phenomenon are delay in investigations and trials, lack of legal support, strict bail provisions, and unequal administrative capabilities (Raj, 2026; Kumar, 2026; Rathore, 2026). Such problems affect younger individuals and individuals with little formal education the most (Rathee & Kulshrestha, 2025; Kaur, 2025). This means that in such a system, the right to be presumed innocent gets subordinated to delays and a lack of resources.

Section 479 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita is a distinct statutory response. This section has replaced the former half-sentence rule provided in Section 436A of the Code of Criminal Procedure with clear-cut time limits of one-third of the maximum punishment for first-time offenders and one-half for other eligible undertrial prisoners, but offences punishable by death or life imprisonment have been excluded from the scope of this provision (Tewari, 2024). Moreover, it also places an affirmative duty on jail superintendents to identify eligible prisoners and to file applications for their release (Chitkara, 2025; Tewari, 2024). The Supreme Court has directed that the provision apply retrospectively to pending cases, and therefore to matters registered before 1 July 2024 (NUALS Law Journal, 2024). Doctrinal writings in this respect applaud the introduction of time-based criteria but caution about the ability of the administration and courts (Varghese Anto, 2026).

Comparative studies of pretrial systems provide a concise external reference. Most United States jurisdictions continue to rely on cash bail or actuarial risk assessment. The empirical literature suggests that cash bail classifies offenders along economic lines and leads to persistent racial and economic disparities, whereas the risk assessment tools incorporate a biased history and bring marginal prediction power (Scheadler et al., 2025; Dobbie & Yang, 2021). In light of the above observations, these findings make a time-based alternative of comparative interest. They do not imply that such a design can be transferred intact.

The analysis below is based on two linked principles. Firstly, the principle of presumption of innocence does not merely refer to evidence rules during the trial, but to substantive limitations on the length and conditions of pretrial detention (Ambasta, 2025; Agrawal, 2023). Secondly, procedural justice entails predictability, openness, and evenhandedness of any coercive decision-making. Thresholds of time prescribed by the statute are the means to operationalise those principles in terms of knowable temporal limits rather than discretion or prediction.

Existing research identifies structural determinants of undertrial detention, explains the content and initial reception of Section 479, and suggests reasons for studying time-based release rules. What remains missing is a systematic account of the first complete national statistical cycle after the new statute took effect. The current research fills this gap through the analysis of *Prison Statistics India 2024*.

DATA AND METHODS

This study is based on the entire official statistical publication released by the National Crime Records Bureau for the year 2024. Three publications have been used as the empirical foundation of the study: Prison Statistics India 2024, Official Executive Summary, and Methodology for Data Collection and Publication (National Crime Records Bureau, 2026a, 2026b, 2026c). These three publications make up the first-ever compilation of a comprehensive national record post enactment of Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, which came into effect from 1 July 2024. No primary data collection has been carried out for the purpose of this study.

The reference period is the calendar year from 1 January to 31 December 2024. Data collection started in the month of January 2025, after the reference period had ended. All thirty-six Prison Departments of States and Union Territories provided information through the application developed by the Bureau by filling out the prescribed forms. Training was provided to dealing officers regarding their obligations to report and maintain the quality of data and use the application (National Crime Records Bureau, 2026c). First consolidation is done by the States and Union Territories. The Bureau thereafter produces the all-India tables.

The validation process is conducted in three levels. First, software verification is carried out at the prison level, wherever computer systems and other required facilities are present. Second, the State/Union Territory Prison Department performs the review of the consolidated file through the same application. Finally, the Bureau reviews the submitted data and seeks clarifications of any inconsistencies. After making the required changes, the national totals are prepared and verified. In addition to the tables appearing in the report, additional tables are presented on the Bureau's website (National Crime Records Bureau, 2026c). All stock totals in the series refer to 31 December of the respective year unless noted otherwise.

There are two constraints stated in the source documents that affect the interpretation of all national totals given below. First, West Bengal failed to submit information for 2024. Data submitted by that State for 2023 are therefore used in the computation of all India totals (National Crime Records Bureau, 2026a,

2026c). All other States and UTs submitted full information for the year under consideration. Second, the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita came into force only on 1 July 2024. The 2024 cycle, therefore, captures at most six months of full statutory operation.

Further constraints arise due to the construction of the published figures. he published tables are aggregate counts and do not include individual-level records that would allow detention periods to be checked against the one-third or one-half thresholds in Section 479, or that would show subsequent court appearance or re-arrest. There is a distinct recording of stock and annual flows. Therefore, it is not possible to find out the number of people who were released under the new rule and would still be in the stock in their absence. Such limitations constrain the study to be only descriptive and comparative.

National aggregates were extracted for the number of prisons, sanctioned capacity, year-end prisoner population, occupancy rate, and principal categories of inmates (convicts, undertrials, detenues, and others) for 2022, 2023, and 2024. Year-to-year changes were calculated in absolute and percentage terms. Occupancy was examined at the national level and by type of jail (Central, District, Sub, and Women's Jails). State-level variation was mapped by ranking jurisdictions according to undertrial numbers, occupancy rates, and the share of undertrials in the total prison population. The gender composition of the year-end stock was taken from the same source.

As regards the statutory release mechanism, the analysis makes use of the specific Section 479 returns given in Chap. 7 of the report, verified by the narrative in the Executive Summary (National Crime Records Bureau, 2026a, 2026b). The variables used include the number of undertrials declared eligible for release, the number of applications filed by jail superintendents, and the number of individuals who have been actually released, including the numbers disaggregated for males and females, wherever applicable. These data are used to derive basic eligible-to-released ratios at the national level and to determine the states that form the major share of such recorded releases. The duration of stay in custody among undertrials is shown through the standard range given in the report: less than three months, three to six months, six to twelve months, one to two years, two to three years, three to five years and over five years. The offence category is given separately among undertrials under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita/Indian Penal Code and Special and Local Laws.

The three officially published sources are employed because they represent the only nationally consistent, publicly validated series that covers the prison population, occupancy rate, length of stay, and the new Section 479 process in the year under examination. These sources will also allow comparison against previous cycles of the same report. In addition, other administrative databases, where available, do not offer a comparable geographic scope, definitions, or the multi-level validation mentioned in the Methodology document. Using this set is thus a way of ensuring maximum comparability, but it is still subject to the constraints imposed by the Bureau itself on the record.

FINDINGS – PRISON POPULATION AND OCCUPANCY

National aggregates from the *Prison Statistics India 2024* package show an expansion of sanctioned capacity and a contraction in the year-end prison population. All figures are stock measures as on 31 December of the relevant year and incorporate the substitution of West Bengal 2023 data in the 2024 national totals (National Crime Records Bureau, 2026a, 2026b).

Table 1 presents the principal indicators for 2022, 2023 and 2024.

Table 1
National Prison Indicators, 2022–2024

Indicator	2022	2023	2024	Change 2023 to 2024
Number of prisons	1,330	1,332	1,333	+ 0.1%
Actual capacity	436,266	439,119	453,769	+ 3.3%
Prisoners at year's end	573,220	530,333	511,542	–3.5%
Occupancy rate	131.4%	120.8%	112.7%	–8.1 percentage points
Undertrial prisoners	434,302	389,910	371,440	–4.7%
Share of undertrials	75.8%	73.5%	72.6%	–0.9 percentage points

Source

National Crime Records Bureau (2026a, 2026b). Figures as on 31 December; West Bengal 2023 data substituted for 2024 national totals.

The total number of prisons rose marginally from 1,332 in 2023 to 1,333 in 2024. The institutional composition remained stable: 551 Sub Jails, 436 District Jails, 152 Central Jails, 103 Open Jails, 47 Special Jails, 34 Women Jails, 8 Borstal Schools and 2 other institutions. Six States accounted for 53.0 per cent of all jails—Rajasthan (156), Tamil Nadu (142), Madhya Pradesh (133), Andhra Pradesh (106), Odisha (92) and Uttar Pradesh (77) (National Crime Records Bureau, 2026a).

Sanctioned capacity increased from 439,119 in 2023 to 453,769 in 2024, a rise of 3.3 per cent. Central Jails held the largest share of capacity (2,00,133 places), followed by District Jails (183,170) and Sub Jails (44,364). Women's jails provided 7,061 places. Uttar Pradesh reported the highest absolute capacity at 76,162 places (16.8 per cent of the national total), followed by Bihar at 49,090 places (10.8 per cent) and Madhya Pradesh at 30,644 places (6.8 per cent) (National Crime Records Bureau, 2026a).

The number of prisoners confined at year's end fell from 530,333 in 2023 to 511,542 in 2024, a reduction of 3.5 per cent. Of these 511,542 prisoners, 4,90,237 were male, 21,183 were female, and 122 were transgender (National Crime Records Bureau, 2026a).

The combined effect of rising capacity and falling population produced a decline in the national occupancy rate from 120.8 per cent in 2023 to 112.7 per cent in 2024, an absolute reduction of 8.1

percentage points. District Jails recorded the highest occupancy among jail types at 120.3 per cent, followed by Central Jails at 118.3 per cent. Women's jails operated at 60.5 per cent of capacity (National Crime Records Bureau, 2026a).

Undertrial prisoners declined in both absolute and relative terms. The undertrial stock fell from 389,910 in 2023 to 371,440 in 2024, a reduction of 4.7 per cent. Their share of the total prison population moved from 73.5 per cent to 72.6 per cent. Convict numbers rose slightly from 1,35,536 to 1,36,138, while the number of detainees fell from 3,916 to 3,048 (National Crime Records Bureau, 2026a).

State-level concentration remained pronounced. Six States together held approximately 54.6 per cent of all prisoners: Uttar Pradesh (86,762), Bihar (51,990), Madhya Pradesh (45,092), Maharashtra (39,003), Punjab (30,663) and West Bengal (25,774). Delhi recorded the highest occupancy rate at 194.6 per cent, followed by Meghalaya (163.5 per cent), Jammu and Kashmir (148.3 per cent), Madhya Pradesh (147.1 per cent), Maharashtra (143.9 per cent) and Uttarakhand (141.5 per cent). The largest absolute numbers of female prisoners were concentrated in Uttar Pradesh (3,439), Bihar (2,064) and Madhya Pradesh (1,918) (National Crime Records Bureau, 2026a).

The 34 dedicated women's jails held 4,273 inmates against a capacity of 7,061, an occupancy rate of 60.5 per cent. Women confined in other types of jails numbered 16,923 against a capacity of 24,207, producing an occupancy rate of 69.9 per cent (National Crime Records Bureau, 2026a).

Although absolute undertrial numbers and the national occupancy rate both declined, the undertrial share remained above 72 per cent. This persistence of a high undertrial proportion directs attention to the duration of confinement and to the operation of the new statutory release mechanism examined in the following sections.

Duration of Confinement

Table 2 presents the distribution of the 371,440 undertrial prisoners by length of continuous confinement as of 31 December 2024.

Table 2
Duration of Confinement of Undertrial Prisoners, 31 December 2024

Duration band	Number of undertrials	Percentage
Up to 3 months	125,894	33.9%
3 to 6 months	72,452	19.5%
6 to 12 months	61,262	16.5%
1 to 2 years	51,702	13.9%
2 to 3 years	30,194	8.1%
3 to 5 years	20,908	5.6%
Above 5 years	9,028	2.4%
Total	**371,440**	**100%**

Source

National Crime Records Bureau (2026a, 2026b).

One-year or less detained prisoners constituted 69.9 per cent of undertrials (125,894 + 72,452 + 61,262 = 259,608). Of these, the greatest number belonged to the shortest duration group, where 33.9 per cent had been detained for less than three months. In contrast, there were 60,130 (16.1 per cent) undertrials who had already been detained for more than two years. Within this category, 9,028 (2.4 per cent) had been in detention for more than five years (National Crime Records Bureau, 2026a, 2026b).

Synthesis of Patterns

About seven in ten undertrials had been confined for one year or less, yet more than 60,000 had already spent over two years in custody, and more than 9,000 had spent over five years. The demographic profile is marked by a large younger-adult cohort, limited formal education, and strong local domicile. Undertrial women accompanied by children numbered 933, with 1,096 children living with them in prison. Offence composition is dominated by offences against the human body and property under the general code, and by liquor and narcotics offences under special laws.

These duration patterns raise a direct question about how the new time-based thresholds under Section 479 operated in practice.

FINDINGS – RELEASES AND SECTION 479 BNSS IMPLEMENTATION

The volume and composition of undertrial releases during 2024 provide the first quantitative record of how Section 479 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita operated in its initial partial year. All figures are taken from Chap. 7 of the full report, including Table 7.4, and are cross-checked against the Executive Summary (National Crime Records Bureau, 2026a, 2026b).

Overall Undertrial Releases

A total of 15,93,234 undertrial prisoners were released during the calendar year 2024, an increase of 3.8 per cent over 2023. Of these releases, 95.1 per cent occurred through the grant of bail (Prayas, 2023). The remainder took place through other legal channels, including acquittal, discharge, or completion of the maximum period of detention under earlier provisions (National Crime Records Bureau, 2026b).

Operation of Section 479

Section 479, read together with residual applications of the former Section 436A of the Code of Criminal Procedure, generated a separately recorded stream of releases. Table 3 summarises the administrative and outcome figures as of 31 December 2024.

Table 3
Section 479 BNSS and Residual Section 436A Releases, 2024

Category	Number	Male	Female
Undertrials identified as eligible	968	943	25
Applications moved by Jail Superintendents	467	—	—
Undertrials actually released	627	614	13

Source

National Crime Records Bureau (2026b), Table 7.4 and accompanying narrative.

Of these 968 undertrials who are considered eligible for release based on the time-based criteria, 467 applications have been made through Jail Superintendents. The total number of people released is 627, which includes 614 males and 13 females who are undertrials. The higher number of releases compared to the number of applications made indicates that there were some people who were released either through judicial action or through other means, but which fell under the ambit of Section 479.

State Level Concentration

The implementation showed high levels of geographic clustering. Four States accounted for the largest number of recorded releases: Uttar Pradesh (287), Rajasthan (78), Chhattisgarh (53) and Delhi (41). These four jurisdictions together accounted for 459 of the 627 releases, or 73.2 per cent of the national total under Section 479. The remaining States and Union Territories together accounted for the other 168 releases (National Crime Records Bureau, 2026b).

Scale Relative to the Undertrial Stock

As of 31 December 2024, the total number of undertrials at the national level was 371,440. Out of these, 627 undertrials who were released through Section 479 made up only 0.17 per cent of the total undertrial population. Even when all 968 potential undertrials are taken into consideration, the percentage stays below 0.3 per cent (National Crime Records Bureau, 2026a, 2026b).

Gender Dimensions

The category of female undertrials comprised an exceedingly small percentage of both the eligible and released groups. Only 25 women were found to be eligible, and 13 were actually released (National Crime Records Bureau, 2026b).

Administrative and Temporal Context

The Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita became effective from 1 July 2024. This means that the data presented captures at best only six months of its full implementation period, along with any remaining application of the previous Section 436A regime. The determination of eligible prisoners and filing of applications rests on administrative procedures carried out by Jail Superintendents. The disparity between the number of prisoners determined as eligible, which is 968, and the applications filed, which is 467, implies that this obligation was not fulfilled in an equal manner. There were also some prisoners released without any formal applications being made, signifying the continuing practice of direct orders issued by judges (National Crime Records Bureau, 2026b).

DISCUSSION: INDIAN PATTERNS AND COMPARATIVE LESSONS

The 2024 data show a decline in national occupancy alongside a still-high undertrial share. Capacity rose by 3.3 per cent while the prisoner population fell by 3.5 per cent, and occupancy declined from 120.8 per cent to 112.7 per cent. Undertrial numbers fell by 4.7 per cent, yet undertrials still accounted for 72.6 per cent of prisoners at year's end (National Crime Records Bureau, 2026a). Section 479 recorded 627 releases from a pool of 968 undertrials identified as eligible, with implementation concentrated in a small number of States (National Crime Records Bureau, 2026b). Releases on ordinary bail accounted for the majority of the 15,93,234 undertrial releases that occurred in the year. A statutory time-based mechanism is therefore operational. Growth in capacity and a decline in the number of undertrial inmates can decrease overall occupancy levels even when the percentage of undertrial inmates is high. The initial absolute effect of the new provision has been modest.

The decision of the Bureau to include a separate table regarding Section 479 eligibility, applications, and releases, in addition to the distribution of time in confinement, is significant from an institutional perspective. The creation of the standardised series of measures nationwide at the very start of the new calendar year presents a clear baseline from which future performance could be measured.

This pattern is indicative of the specific nature of the pretrial release process. In contrast with risk assessment and payments, Section 479 makes use of temporal categories. Eligibility is determined on the basis of time served with respect to the maximum penalty for the offence being committed. The responsibility to determine eligibility and make applications lies with jail superintendents. In this regard, the scheme is an embodiment of the theoretical perspective on the pretrial detention outlined above since the presumption of innocence sets limits on the duration of pretrial detention in that any additional time spent in pretrial detention becomes subject to justification (Ambasta, 2025; Agrawal, 2023).

The system of time criteria differs from cash bail and risk assessment, which still govern the great majority of pretrial systems in the USA (Harvard Law Review, 2002). There are studies showing that cash bail discriminates against defendants depending mainly on their financial condition and has biased effects, and the risk assessment is based on historic biases and lacks predictive capacity (Dobbie & Yang, 2021). The Indian numbers do not prove the superiority of time-based criteria. However, they show that this criterion could be applied and result in tangible releases within the next few months. They also show that scale and uniformity depend mainly on the quality of administration and judiciary. Statutory language is insufficient for guaranteeing uniform application.

The same point applies to reporting. Fragmented local data makes it difficult to track early reform in a consistent way. Requiring identification of eligible undertrials and publishing the results in a uniform national format supports accountability even when absolute release volumes remain small.

Limitations

These numbers from 2024 represent, at best, six months of complete application of the law and also include substitution with West Bengal data from 2023, along with administrative numbers, which do not contain any individual-level information that could confirm the thresholds or impact of post-release. This is therefore a purely descriptive analysis, with no causality asserted.

Further monitoring of the NCRB 2025 and 2026 cycles will be required to determine if the early reduction in the number of undertrials and occupancy rates is sustainable, if the number of Section 479 releases increases with the maturity of the administrative process, and if the geographic concentration of implementation fades.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study examined the first complete national statistical cycle after the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita came into force on 1 July 2024. Utilising the entire Prison Statistics India 2024 dataset, it was able to measure changes in the prisoner population, occupancy, undertrial numbers, duration of confinement, and initial workings of Section 479. The intent here is not to identify one statutory explanation for these changes, but rather to identify an empirical baseline of the first phase of the new system.

The 2024 data reveal a drop in total prisoner population, a decrease in undertrial numbers, and improved national occupancy rates from 120.8% to 112.7%. Undertrials decreased in number, but still represented 72.6% of the prisoner population. Roughly seven out of ten undertrials were confined for one year or less, but over 60,000 undertrials had already been confined for two or more years and over 9,000 for five or more years. Section 479 produced 627 documented release cases out of a possible 968 undertrial inmates that were eligible. Implementation was restricted to a few jurisdictions. Ordinary bail continued to be the main route out of pretrial incarceration, responsible for 95.1% of the 15,93,234 undertrial releases (Prayas, 2023).

These findings lend support only to limited conclusions. There exists a functioning statutory time-based release system that could be producing releases within months of the passage of the law. An increase in capacity, in addition to the decrease in the number of undertrials, would lead to a reduction in overall occupancy despite the prevalence of undertrials in the population. On the other hand, the contribution from section 479 has been minor in comparison with the total number of undertrials (371,440) in the last quarter of the year, and the duty of jail superintendents has not been fulfilled equally.

The importance of the findings lies in the baseline established. This is the first time that there is a national survey of prison-population dynamics and the new release system due to the new legislation.

Two conclusions can be drawn from this. One, the NCRB cycles of 2025 and 2026 will need to be watched for the continuation of these declines, the rise in Section 479 discharges, and the reduction in geographic concentration. Two, the Indian experience provides some information about both the potential and the limitations of automatic time-based release. This was successful, but only to a degree and with significant State differences. This information is useful for comparison in the design of pretrial systems. It does not prove that time-based systems are better than either cash bail or risk assessment. It proves what such a system can and cannot accomplish.

The constraints of the 2024 data are set out in the Data and Methods section and in the Limitations paragraph of the Discussion. The analysis remains descriptive. No causal claim is made that the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita produced the observed reductions.

Subsequent annual releases of *Prison Statistics India* will show whether the early patterns deepen or fade. Until those data appear, the findings reported here offer a bounded account of the initial phase of the new statutory regime and a concrete reference point for comparative pretrial policy.

Declarations

Ethics approval and consent to participate

This paper does not involve studies with human participants or animals that would require formal ethical approval. Not applicable, no human participants were involved, and no informed consent was required.

Consent for publication

The author has reviewed the final manuscript and consents to its publication.

Competing interests

The author declares no competing interests.

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Author Contribution

All the work is completed and reviewed by the author.

Data Availability

The data analysed in this study are secondary data obtained from publicly available official publications of the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India. No new datasets were generated by the authors. The following sources were used:1. National Crime Records Bureau. (2026). Prison Statistics India 2024 (full report). Available at: https://www.ncrb.gov.in/uploads/files/PSI-2024ason26022026.pdf2. National Crime Records Bureau. (2026). Prison Statistics India 2024: Executive Summary. Available at: https://www.ncrb.gov.in/uploads/files/ExecutiveSummary2024.pdf3. National Crime Records Bureau. (2026). Methodology for Data Collection and Publication – Prison Statistics India 2024 (included in the full report and related NCRB documentation). Portal: https://ncrb.gov.in/prison-statistics-india.htmlAll datasets are freely accessible without accession numbers. Further details on data collection, validation, and the West Bengal 2023 substitution are provided in the Data and Methods section of this article.

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