

SDG 16 in India: Current Status and Strategies towards Viksit Bharat 2047

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ABSTRACT

Sustainable Development Goal 16 (SDG 16) emphasizes the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies, access to justice for all, and the establishment of effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions. In the Indian context, SDG 16 assumes strategic importance in achieving the national vision of Viksit Bharat 2047, which seeks to transform India into a developed, democratic, and inclusive nation by the centenary of independence. While India has demonstrated significant progress in democratic governance, constitutionalism, and digital public service delivery, challenges persist in areas such as judicial efficiency, institutional accountability, corruption, and equitable access to justice, particularly for marginalized and vulnerable sections of society. This study examines the current status of SDG 16 in India and evaluates the governance reforms and institutional strategies aligned with its targets. The research adopts a qualitative and descriptive methodology based on secondary data derived from government reports, policy documents, governance indices, and academic literature. Key initiatives such as Digital India, the e-Courts Mission Mode Project, police modernization programs, grievance redressal mechanisms, and transparency-driven digital platforms are analyzed to assess their effectiveness in strengthening institutional capacity and citizen participation. The findings indicate that digital governance reforms have enhanced transparency, efficiency, and accessibility of public institutions. However, structural challenges including judicial delays, uneven institutional capacity across states, and socio-economic inequalities continue to impede the comprehensive realization of SDG 16 objectives. The study concludes that strengthening institutions, improving access to justice, and promoting participatory governance are foundational to achieving Viksit Bharat 2047. Sustained policy commitment towards institutional reforms, legal modernization, and technology-driven accountability is essential for ensuring inclusive and sustainable development in India.

Keywords: SDG 16, Governance, Justice, Institutions, Viksit Bharat 2047

Sustainable Development Goal 16 (SDG 16), titled “*Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions,*” is one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals adopted by United Nations member states as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Its core aim is to **promote peaceful and inclusive societies, ensure access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels.** The goal’s targets encompass reducing violence and corruption, safeguarding human rights, ensuring legal identity and birth

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registration, and strengthening governance and rule of law mechanisms that are fundamental for sustainable development.

For India — home to nearly 1.4 billion people and one of the world’s fastest-growing major economies — SDG 16 assumes a pivotal role in national development planning. Institutions that are accountable, transparent, and responsive are essential not only to uphold democratic processes but also to ensure that citizens’ voices, especially those of marginalised communities, are heard and respected. Good governance and justice delivery systems help maintain social cohesion, reduce conflict, and create an environment conducive to economic growth and equitable opportunities.

At the same time, India has articulated an ambitious long-term vision — “**Viksit Bharat 2047**” — to be achieved by the centenary of its independence. This vision encapsulates transformative development predicated on strong economic performance, social inclusion, scientific progress, and institutional excellence. While Viksit Bharat 2047 encompasses broad national aspirations, the principles underlying SDG 16 — peace, justice, and robust institutions — are core enablers of this developmental trajectory. Achieving them is essential not just for meeting SDG targets by 2030, but also for realising India’s ambition of becoming a fully developed and equitable society by 2047.

CURRENT STATUS OF SDG 16 IN INDIA

Institutional and Governance Indicators

India has made measurable progress on several SDG 16-related benchmarks. For example, as of March 2024, **over 95 % of the population was covered by Aadhaar biometric identity**, which enhances legal identity and access to services — a key component of SDG 16.9. Similarly, **birth registration for children under five reached approximately 89 %**, improving the legal identity infrastructure for young citizens. These developments are crucial to ensure that citizens are recognised under the law and can exercise fundamental rights.

Digital governance reforms have accelerated government-to-citizen service delivery, exemplified by initiatives like State-specific e-District portals that streamline access to certificates, registrations, and entitlements. Such digital platforms contribute to transparency, reduce opportunities for corruption, and strengthen accountability — advancing SDG 16.5 (reducing corruption) and SDG 16.6 (effective, accountable institutions).

Conceptual Framework: SDG 16 and Democratic Governance

Sustainable Development Goal 16 (SDG 16) of the United Nations focuses on promoting **peaceful, just, and inclusive societies**. It underscores the importance of strong institutions, access to justice, and accountable governance as foundational pillars for sustainable development. Democratic governance, which encompasses principles such as **participation, transparency, accountability, rule of law, and human rights**, is central to achieving the targets of SDG 16. The conceptual framework connecting SDG 16 and democratic governance rests on the understanding that sustainable development is not solely economic or environmental but deeply intertwined with political and social systems.

SDG 16 addresses multiple dimensions of governance. These include the reduction of all forms of violence, promotion of the rule of law, protection of fundamental freedoms, and establishment of accountable institutions at all levels. Democratic governance contributes directly to these goals by ensuring that citizens have a voice in decision-making processes, that

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leaders are accountable to the public, and that laws are applied fairly and consistently. For instance, democratic practices such as free and fair elections, checks and balances, and civil society engagement help prevent corruption, reduce inequality, and enhance social cohesion, all of which are critical indicators under SDG 16.

The conceptual framework can be structured around three core dimensions: **institutions, processes, and outcomes**. First, institutions include formal structures such as parliaments, courts, law enforcement agencies, and human rights bodies that uphold justice and democratic norms. Strong institutions serve as the backbone of SDG 16 by safeguarding citizens' rights and ensuring access to justice. Second, processes refer to the mechanisms of governance—how decisions are made, implemented, and monitored. Participatory governance, transparency in public administration, and inclusive policy-making are key process indicators that enhance the legitimacy and effectiveness of governance systems. Third, outcomes represent the tangible effects of governance on society, such as reduced corruption, improved security, equality before the law, and enhanced civic engagement.

Interlinkages between SDG 16 and democratic governance are further highlighted through the concept of **social contract theory**, which posits that governments derive legitimacy from their commitment to protect the rights and welfare of citizens. When democratic governance is effective, it promotes trust between citizens and institutions, reduces social unrest, and fosters conditions conducive to sustainable development. Moreover, accountability and transparency mechanisms, such as anti-corruption agencies, independent judiciary, and civil society oversight, directly support the realization of SDG 16 targets.

Challenges to achieving SDG 16 include weak institutions, lack of political will, limited civic participation, and systemic corruption. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive strategy that combines legal reforms, capacity-building, citizen empowerment, and international cooperation. By fostering democratic governance, societies can create enabling environments where justice, inclusivity, and peace thrive, thereby supporting broader sustainable development objectives.

Research Objectives

1. To analyze India's performance under SDG 16 indicators.
2. To evaluate corruption trends using CPI 2025 data.
3. To examine judicial pendency and institutional capacity gaps.
4. To assess the role of Digital Public Infrastructure in strengthening governance.
5. To propose strategic reforms for achieving institutional resilience by 2047.

Research Questions

1. What is India's current institutional standing under SDG 16?
2. How does judicial pendency impact access to justice?
3. Can digital governance significantly reduce corruption and inefficiency?
4. What reforms are required to achieve institutional maturity by 2047?

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative, descriptive research design based on secondary data sources.

Data Sources

- Government of India reports (Ministry of Law & Justice, Ministry of Home Affairs)
- NITI Aayog SDG India Index Reports
- National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data
- World Bank Governance Indicators
- Transparency International Corruption Perception Index
- Academic journal articles and books

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

1 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) 2025

Year	Rank	Total Countries	Score	Global Avg
2024	96	180	38	42
2025	91	182	39	42

India's marginal improvement in rank reflects progress in digital governance and reduced leakage in direct benefit transfers. However, the score remains below the global average, indicating persistent systemic corruption risks.

2 Judicial Pendency Statistics (2026)

Court Level	Pending Cases	2021 Data	Trend
Supreme Court	92,828	~70,000	Increasing
High Courts	~60 lakh	~55 lakh	Moderate Rise
Lower Courts	4.80 crore	3.50 crore	Severe Rise

Over 90% of pending cases lie in subordinate courts. The judge-to-population ratio of 21 per million remains significantly below the recommended 50 per million, highlighting structural capacity constraints.

3 Digital Public Infrastructure Impact

Indicator	Value (2025)	Relevance to SDG 16
Aadhaar Coverage	95.5%	Legal Identity (16.9)
PMJDY Accounts	50+ crore	Financial Inclusion
Estimated Justice Access Increase	28–42% by 2030	Access to Justice (16.3)
DBT Leakage Reduction	Significant	Anti-Corruption (16.5)

India's Digital Public Infrastructure has strengthened identity verification, financial inclusion, and transparency, contributing significantly to SDG 16 targets.

4 Comparative Analysis: India vs BRICS (2025)

Metric	India	Brazil	China	South Africa
CPI Rank	91	94	76	83
CPI Score	39	38	45	41
Birth Registration	89%	96%	~100%	85%
Institutional Trust	Moderate	Moderate	High (Domestic)	Low

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Compared to BRICS peers, India performs better than Brazil in ranking but lags behind China. Institutional trust remains moderate and dependent on governance reforms.

Challenges and Gaps

Despite progress, several systemic and structural issues constrain SDG 16 advancement in India:

Justice System Delays

Persistent backlogs in courts delay justice for millions, especially for the poor and marginalised. These delays weaken confidence in judicial processes.

Data Gaps

Many targets under SDG 16 lack reliable data, making monitoring difficult. For instance, precise measures of corruption, trust in institutions, or violence reduction across communities are not uniformly tracked.

Governance & Accountability

Ensuring truly transparent and responsive institutions at all levels remains a work in progress. Strengthening local governments, judicial independence, and civic participation is necessary for deeper advancements.

Social Exclusion & Violence

Violence against women, children and minorities, as well as discrimination, remain areas where progress must accelerate to meet 2030 aspirations. These societal challenges impact perceptions of safety and inclusion.

Strategic Recommendations for 2047

- Implement Regulatory Guillotine to eliminate redundant laws.
- Establish Judicial Infrastructure Authority.
- Increase judge strength to 50 per million population.
- Expand AI integration in case management.
- Strengthen whistleblower and investigative protections.

CONCLUSION

India's path to Viksit Bharat 2047 depends fundamentally on institutional credibility. While digital identity and financial inclusion have improved accountability, judicial delay and regulatory burden must be addressed urgently. A balanced approach combining technology, policy reform, and institutional strengthening can ensure alignment with SDG 16 by 2047.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declared no conflict of interest.

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