

## Vigilantism

Vigilantism is defined as an act of enforcing a law and instigating others to do the same without any legal authority.

It is derived from the Spanish/Portuguese word “vigilante” that means “watcher”. A person involved in vigilantism is called the same as well.

In India, vigilantism takes many forms and shapes but the most well-known variant is related violence regarding cow protection and to some extent moral policing

This article will give details about vigilantism in general within the context of the IAS Exam.

### Overview of Vigilantism

Vigilantism has been recorded in early history all the way upto the modern era. It is usually undertaken when perpetrators feel that the existing judiciary mechanism is insufficient to bring wrongdoers to justice or simply if it doesn't exist at all.

How vigilantism is perceived usually depends on the society itself. While vigilantism is a large punishable offence under the laws of many nations, in some they are almost respectable. For example in the USA, certain provisions of the law make vigilantism acceptable in the eyes of the law.

Citizen Arrester“(Vigilantee) enjoys legal status and his/her actions are protected by law. Laws in the USA permit an individual to pursue and arrest a person accused of breaking the law.

It is carried from the legal convention of 12th century Common Law, which was prevalent in England. This law allowed a Citizen arrester to physically arrest a person who has been accused of breaking a law. There are procedures to be followed, safeguards and risks involved for wrongful arrest. Given its potential for abuse, there are debates regarding the need to reduce its scope.

To know more in detail about the UPSC Syllabus, visit the linked article.

### Vigilantism in India

In India, vigilantism comes in various forms, some taking the form of moral policing. Most widespread is the practice of attacking couples by groups claiming to be “custodians of Indian culture” on Valentines day. Other than this it is cow vigilante violence that is making the headlines.

Since cows are considered holy and sacred in Hinduism, physical violence has been carried out on those who smuggle cows illegally but even licensed traders have also been victims of these attacks. Since cattle slaughter is banned in most states of India, most of these cow protection vigilantes claim they are upholding the laws of their respective states. In their ensuing quest to uphold such laws, violence has resulted in deaths

According to a Reuters report, a total of 63 cow vigilante attacks had occurred in India between 2010 and mid 2017. In these attacks between 2010 and June 2017, "28 Indians – 24 of them Muslims – were killed and 124 injured", states the Reuter's report.

As of 2016, cow protection vigilante groups were estimated to have sprung up in "hundreds, perhaps thousands" of towns and villages in northern India. There were an estimated 200 such groups in the Delhi-National Capital Region alone. Some of the larger groups claim to have up to 5,000 members.

One kind of cow protection groups are gangs who patrol highways and roads at night, looking for trucks that might be "smuggling" cows across the state borders. These gangs are sometimes armed; they justify this by claiming that cow smugglers themselves are also often armed. The gangs have been described as "unorganized", and gang leaders admit that their members can be hard to control.

## Frequently Asked Question about Vigilantism

### **What is an example of vigilantism?**

The definition of a vigilante is a person who takes the law into his or her own hands. An example of a vigilante is a person who makes it his mission to kill murderers.

### **Is vigilantism illegal in the US?**

In the United States, being a vigilante is not illegal, however, certain things that vigilantes do are. For example, if a vigilante breaks the law, even if they are doing it with good intentions, they can still be charged with the crime

### **Are there modern day vigilantes?**

Some real-life vigilantes serve a light sentence for their actions, largely hailed as heroes in the public eye. Others are thrown in prison for a longer period of time than the criminals whom they were originally trying to punish. Yet others pay the ultimate price during their quests for revenge.