

**Title: Debiasing Law Enforcement Officers: Evidence from an Expressive Arts Intervention in India**

**Speaker: Prof. Nishith Prakash, Northeastern University**

**Area: Public Policy**

**Date: 23.02.2026, Venue: P21 @ 2.30PM**

**Abstract:**

Biases among state agents can undermine the quality of public service delivery and restrict access to justice, particularly for marginalized groups. We study whether reshaping police officers' attitudes toward gender-based violence (GBV) improves real-world policing performance. We partner with the Government of Bihar, India, to implement a clustered randomized controlled trial covering 419 police stations and approximately 2,500 senior officers serving 42 million citizens. The intervention is a three-day expressive arts-based training that uses role play, perspective-taking, and experiential learning to address gender norms, empathy, and technical skills related to GBV cases. Six months after the intervention, treated officers exhibit significant improvements in attitudes toward GBV, reduced victim-blaming, higher empathy, and greater legal knowledge. These improvements translate into meaningful changes in workplace environment and behavior. Eight months after the intervention, junior female officers in treated stations report significantly lower levels of workplace harassment and anxiety. One year later, standardized victim audits reveal substantial improvements in officers' responses to women seeking help, including lower rates of case dismissal and more appropriate guidance. Exploring the random allocation of officer transfers, we show that even when treated officers move, individual soft skills improve relative to their control peers. We also find evidence of positive spillovers among officers who are only exposed to the treatment via interaction with treated officers. Together, these findings demonstrate that implicit biases among frontline state agents are malleable and that immersive behavioral training can generate persistent improvements in institutional performance and workplace culture.

**Speaker Profile:**



Nishith Prakash is a Professor of Public Policy and Economics at Northeastern University, with a joint appointment in the School of Public Policy and Urban Affairs and the Department of Economics, and Co-Director of the Global Action for Policy Initiative.

His research sits at the forefront of development economics, focusing on human capital, gender, and institutional reform in low- and middle-income countries. Using large-scale field experiments, surveys, and administrative data, his work generates rigorous, policy-relevant evidence on how governments and institutions can drive inclusive development. He has partnered extensively with governments and organizations such as the World Bank to design and evaluate interventions that inform policy at scale.

Professor Prakash serves as Co-Editor of *Economics of Education Review* and Associate Editor of the *Journal of Development Economics*, and is affiliated with leading international research networks including BREAD, CESifo, and IZA. He is also co-founder of the Association for Mentoring and Inclusion in Economics (AMIE), reflecting a broader commitment to expanding access and strengthening the academic pipeline in the field.

He received his PhD in Economics from the University of Houston and has held faculty and visiting positions at the University of Connecticut, Cornell University, Dartmouth College, Yale University, Columbia University, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Boston University, and the Harvard Kennedy School.

**Webpage Link:** <https://www.nishithprakash.com/>