



The Impact of Corruption on Political Institutions and Democracy in South Asia: Case Study of Pakistan

Ismail Adaramola Abdul Azeez^{1*}, Muhammad Talal Bhatti²

Riphah International University, Islamabad

Corresponding Author: Ismail Adaramola Abdul Azeez

imamdarams@yahoo.co.uk

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how entrenched corruption undermines political institutions and democratic processes in South Asia, focusing on Pakistan. Corruption is identified as a global scourge that “undermines the institutions and values of democracy”. In South Asia, corruption scores remain below world averages (e.g. a 2013 survey found a regional CPI score of 30/100). Pakistan, in particular, has seen pervasive corruption; its CPI was only 29 in 2023, reflecting decades long trends. The problem statement highlights that systemic bribery and politicization have weakened accountability mechanisms, the rule of law, and public trust. The objectives are to analyze the impact of corruption on Pakistani institutions and democratic quality via qualitative case study methods. Key findings (supported by secondary data) indicate that corruption has deeply eroded institutional legitimacy, for example, 88% of citizens report that corruption is widespread, and many see anti-corruption agencies as politicized tools. Such insights underscore the importance of institutional reform in Pakistan and broader South Asia. By integrating academic and policy sources, the study informs future anticorruption strategies, emphasizing the need for stronger oversight, transparency, and civic engagement in the region

INTRODUCTION

Background and Context

Corruption is recognized as a major global challenge that undermines development and governance. For example, the World Bank notes that “grand corruption undermines democracy, human rights and sustainable development”. By its nature, corruption (the abuse of public office for private gain) erodes institutional integrity. In the Asia Pacific region, progress on corruption has largely delayed, the average score remains 45/100. In South Asia the situation is particularly severe; a Transparency International report noted an average regional score of only 30/100 in 2013. Pakistan exemplifies these trends, its recent CPI score was 29 (rank 133 of 180), one of the lowest in the world, and fell behind neighboring India (score 39) and Sri Lanka (34). (By comparison, Bhutan was the only South Asian country above the global (43) average. Historical analyses trace Pakistan’s corruption back to its post-colonial bureaucratic heritage. A 2002 anticorruption strategy report observed that “there has been an exponential upsurge in the scourge of corruption” especially from 1985-1999, leading to “a loss of legitimacy of state institutions”. This suggests that political graft has long plagued Pakistan’s governance.

Pakistan is a compelling case study because it combines high corruption with fragile democratic institutions. Decades of political instability, no elected prime minister has ever completed a five year term in Pakistan’s 75 year history, have been accompanied by frequent scandals. Public opinion reflects this; for instance, 88% of Pakistanis in 2023 believed government corruption is widespread, a record high. Major governance agencies like the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) and courts have been accused of selective prosecutions, often targeting opposition figures. In short, Pakistan combines entrenched corruption with weak political checks, making it an ideal lens to study how political graft harms democracy.

Problem Statement

In Pakistan, systemic corruption has critically weakened democratic governance. Political elites frequently bypass transparent procedures, engaging in bribery and patronage that undermine legislative and judicial autonomy. Experts note that anticorruption bodies in Pakistan “have often been used as tools for political victimization,” Such politicization of oversight agencies denies fair enforcement of the law. This lack of impartial accountability creates a vicious cycle: when laws and elections can be manipulated by powerful interests, public trust in democracy erodes. Empirical surveys confirm this loss of faith, in late 2023, roughly 70% of Pakistanis reported having no confidence in election fairness, and only 25% approved of the country’s leadership.

Research Questions

1. How does corruption affect the functioning of Pakistan’s political institutions?
2. What is the relationship between corruption and democratic decay in South Asia?
3. Which institutional safeguards are effective or deficient in a highly corrupt environment?

Research Objectives

1. To examine the impact of corruption on Pakistan's political institutions.
2. To assess how corruption influences democratic processes in South Asia.
3. To identify which institutional mechanisms succeed or fail in restricting corruption.

Significance of the Study

This research is significant for both scholarship and policy. For Pakistan, understanding the corruption democracy nexus can inform needed political reforms. For example, Transparency International Pakistan's recent governance report emphasizes empowering Parliament and oversight bodies to improve fiscal transparency. By documenting how corruption distorts Pakistan's institutions, this study contributes to the broader South Asian political science literature on governance, accountability, and development. It highlights the urgency of strengthening rule of law frameworks in the region: as Transparency International warns, corruption is "a key cause of declining democracy" worldwide. Insights from Pakistan's case may thus inform anticorruption strategies across South Asia, guiding policymakers toward measures like judicial independence, anti-bribery laws, and media freedoms. The study also has practical implications: identifying institutional weaknesses can help international bodies and domestic reformers target transparency initiatives (e.g., digitized procurement or stronger right to information laws).

Limitations of the Study

This case study has several limitations. It focuses solely on Pakistan and uses qualitative, secondary data; quantitative trends beyond 2024 are not assessed. The analysis relies heavily on published reports and news accounts, which may lag current events or overlook informal corruption. Because the situation in Pakistan evolves rapidly, recent developments (post 2024) may not be fully captured. These limitations notwithstanding, the study provides a comprehensive overview based on available evidence.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Political Institutions and Corruption

Corruption in postcolonial states has deep roots in institutional design. Scholars note that colonial era bureaucratic systems often persisted unchanged after independence, embedding patronage networks into government structures. In Pakistan's case, historical analysis reveals that graft escalated sharply after 1985, with an exponential rise through the 1990s. This legacy of pervasive corruption meant that by the late 20th century, public confidence in institutions had severely declined. In the South Asian context, Transparency International has observed that South Asia has the lowest CPI regional average globally. For comparison, as of 2023 only one South Asian country (Bhutan) exceeded the global average CPI score. These regional rankings underscore that countries like Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, and Nepal have struggled historically to contain corruption. South Asian democracies typically emerge from colonial or authoritarian legacies, and corruption has often been part of the political

economy: patronage politics, weak legal enforcement, and informal norms all contributed to corruption's entrenchment from early on. Gerring & Thacker (2004) investigates the effects of executive composition (presidential or parliamentary) and territorial sovereignty (federal or unitary) on perceived levels of political corruption across national borders. They discovered that parliamentary and unitary systems of government contribute to lower levels of corruption.

Corruption directly affects each branch of government. The judiciary in Pakistan is often seen as compromised; observers note widespread "political interference" in courts and lack of transparency. Judges have at times expanded accountability through activism (e.g. enforcing the Right to Information law), but critics warn the judiciary has also become a "tutelary" power that can constrain elected officials. Pakistan's parliament faces similar issues: legislative oversight is weak when elected representatives are beholden to party leaders or external power centers (e.g. the military). In practice, parliament has seldom asserted independence, as Pakistan's democracy has been punctuated by extra constitutional interventions. The executive (especially the civil service) is heavily politicized: the IMF and government reports document that senior bureaucratic posts are routinely allocated on partisan grounds. For example, a 2023 survey found that Pakistan's police were perceived as the most corrupt institution (30%), followed by the judiciary (13%). Public prosecutors and investigators often lack autonomy: as one analysis notes, agencies like the NAB and Federal Investigation Agency were "not cooperating" fully in high profile cases, highlighting how administrative corruption hampers justice. The impact of various forms of decentralization on corruption may vary. Decentralization in the sense that spending is more dispersed across the various tiers of the national government appears to decrease corruption, whereas political decentralization in the sense that states have more autonomy and may be able to enact laws over areas already covered by the central government appears to increase corruption, (Lederman et.al, 2005).

The Relationship Between Corruption and Democratic Quality

Corruption and democracy are inversely related: higher levels of graft correlate with lower transparency and accountability. Conceptually, good governance requires rule of law, checks and balances, and citizen trust, conditions eroded by corruption. Empirical studies confirm this: citizens who perceive government corruption are less likely to vote, as corruption erodes the perceived efficacy of democracy. Surveys in Pakistan and elsewhere show cynicism toward democracy when corruption is rampant. For example, by 2023, only 25% of Pakistanis approved their government and 70% doubted election honesty. Similarly in India, 58% felt elections did not bring change. These attitudes are symptomatic of democratic decay: leaders are seen as self-serving, opponents are crushed under legal pretexts, and ordinary voters feel powerless. Notably, a PIDE study emphasizes that unchecked corruption "militates against the core of democracy," undermining institutions like parliament, judiciary and civil service. In sum, corruption weakens democratic quality by reducing

accountability and citizen representation: elected officials focus on patronage rather than public service, and free debate shrinks.

Within South Asia, each democracy faces corruption differently. In India, which long held elections, corruption scandals (e.g. telecom or coal) remain common, and surveys indicate that a majority (64%) of Indians view “most politicians” as corrupt. India’s CPI score (39 in 2022) placed it around 85th. Bangladesh (score 24 in 2023) contends with nepotistic governance and limited press freedom; government actions have been criticized for undermining transparency and weakening accountability. Nepal, which transitioned through monarchy and civil war to democracy, has a CPI around 35, with endemic graft in both politics and public services. In Sri Lanka, corruption and cronyism contributed to the 2022 economic crisis; the Supreme Court of Sri Lanka later held top leaders responsible for policy failures. These examples illustrate that, although cultural and political contexts differ, South Asian democracies share features: dominant political families, weak anticorruption agencies, and challenges in enforcing transparency. Compared to its neighbors, Pakistan’s pattern is similar: long standing dynastic parties (e.g. the Bhuttos, Sharifs) dominate politics, and public surveys routinely cite corruption as a top concern.

Case Studies and Empirical Evidence

Existing research on Pakistan’s corruption is extensive. A U4 anticorruption report notes that corruption is “widespread and systemic” across Pakistan’s public services, with petty bribery common in law enforcement and procurement⁴. Transparency International Pakistan regularly publishes national surveys: their 2023 Corruption Perceptions Survey found that 68% of respondents view accountability institutions (NAB, FIA, ACE) as instruments of political victimization. Academic analyses and news investigations also offer case studies. For instance, Madiha Afzal’s Brookings analysis discusses how successive governments were marred by graft allegations, reinforcing patterns of public disillusionment. News reporting on the 2017 Panama Papers case (challenging Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif) highlighted institutional failures: the Supreme Court formed a joint investigation team after noting that agencies like NAB and FIA “had not cooperated” fully. Similarly, recent press accounts describe how amendments to anti-graft laws have weakened NAB’s authority. Together, these empirical accounts illustrate entrenched corruption and selective accountability in Pakistan, as well as periodic reform efforts like the 2002 National Accountability Bureau and anticorruption strategy. Doig & Riley (1998) found that the economic liberalization appears to have contributed to a decrease in customs fraud in Mali and Senegal when paired with institutional reform and comparatively high wages. The rise in both petty and major corruption in Tanzania can be partially explained by economic liberalization. Some states have started extensive reform initiatives. For example, in Tanzania and Ecuador, the anti-corruption strategies combine legal reforms, institutional strengthening, and expectations of the positive effects of long-term growth and literacy initiatives. In African countries the public trust on political institutions depends on various factors, (Lavallée et.al, 2008) figured out People's trust in political institutions

decreases with increasing educational attainment. For example, institutional trust is lowered by 13% when one has a post-secondary degree as opposed to no formal education, but only by 7% when one has only completed primary school. According to their estimations, both material needs and democratic values influence how African citizens view their political institutions.

Theoretical Framework

This study is informed by institutional and principal agent theories of corruption, as well as democratic consolidation theory. North’s institutional theory defines institutions as “the rules of the game” shaping incentives; from this perspective, deep rooted corrupt norms are informal rules that pervert formal institutions. Under principal agent theory, elected officials (agents) often exploit information asymmetry to serve their own interests rather than the public (principals). Applied to Pakistan, politicians and bureaucrats may loot public resources when weak oversight allows it, betraying citizens’ trust. Democratic consolidation theory suggests that stable democracies require effective accountability and the rule of law; corruption undermines these requirements. In practice, theory predicts that high corruption correlates with low governance quality, which is supported by global findings. These frameworks guide the analysis by focusing on how institutional incentives and power relations foster corruption and erode democracy.

Operational Framework

Table 1. Operational Framework

Key Concept	Definition	Indicators / Metrics
Corruption	Abuse of public office for private gain	Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), corruption conviction data
Institutional Performance	Effectiveness of political and legal institutions in enforcing norms and rules	Accountability, transparency, rule of law (e.g. governance scores, institutional reports)
Democratic Quality	Strength of democratic governance and public participation	Electoral integrity, civil liberties, public trust

The study examines these variables through qualitative content analysis of secondary sources. For example, institutional performance might be reflected in statistics from NAB reports or court rulings, while democratic quality might be inferred from election monitoring reports and public opinion polls. This framework allows triangulating multiple indicators, perception surveys, governance indexes, and legal case outcomes to assess the corruption democracy linkage in Pakistan.

METHODOLOGY

Research Type and Design

This research adopts a qualitative, descriptive case study approach focused on Pakistan. It is primarily analytical, aiming to interpret the complex relationship between corruption and political institutions. By conducting a single case study (Pakistan) within the South Asian context, the study explores in depth how systemic corruption operates in a real world setting. The research design is exploratory and explanatory: it explores patterns of corruption and explains their impact on democracy. This qualitative case study is appropriate given the need to integrate diverse sources (reports, news, indices) to understand institutional dynamics in context.

Data Collection Method

The study relies on secondary data. Data sources include academic journal articles, books, think tank analyses, government and international organization reports, law and policy documents, news media accounts, and reports from nongovernmental organizations and watchdogs (e.g. Transparency International, UNDP, World Bank). Primary data collection (interviews or surveys) was not conducted due to resource constraints and the focus on existing literature. Key documents include TI Corruption Perceptions Index reports, Pakistan's National Accountability Bureau annual reports, Supreme Court verdicts (e.g. on the Panama case), and national surveys on corruption perception (e.g. TI Pakistan's NCPS). The Right to Information Act documents and parliamentary records were also consulted where available. All data were obtained from published sources and databases to maintain transparency and reproducibility.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was conducted through thematic content analysis. Relevant texts were systematically reviewed to identify recurring themes (e.g. politicization of bureaucracy, judicial activism, and public distrust). Thematic analysis allowed coding evidence of corruption's effects within institutions and on democracy, comparing findings across sources. Triangulation was used to enhance credibility: information from different types of sources (e.g. international indices, local think tank reports, media investigations) was cross checked for consistency. Comparative analysis techniques were also applied, for instance contrasting Pakistan's indicators with those of India and Bangladesh when discussing regional context. Where possible, quantitative data (e.g. TI scores, voter turnout figures) were compiled into summary tables or cited to support qualitative findings. This multi method approach ensures a robust interpretation of secondary data.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Institutional Analysis

Parliament

Pakistan's legislature has repeatedly been sidelined by corruption dynamics. Political elites often use backroom deals and party patronage that bypass transparent legislative debate. Consequently, parliamentary oversight of the executive is weak. (For example, proposed anticorruption bills are frequently stalled or diluted.) While quantitative data on parliamentary corruption is scarce, qualitative accounts suggest pervasive lobbying and vote trading among MPs.

Judiciary

The judiciary's role is ambivalent. On one hand, courts have at times advanced accountability (e.g. ordering the formation of a Panama Papers JIT). On the other hand, sources report that judicial appointments and decisions are frequently influenced by power politics. Transparency International notes that Pakistan ranks poorly on judicial independence and corruption control. Indeed, a 2025 commentary warned that Pakistan's courts face "widespread corruption" and political interference. High profile cases illustrate this tension: the Supreme Court has both constrained elected leaders and been accused of enabling political agendas. Overall, corruption in the judiciary manifests in case backlogs, bribery in lower courts, and selective judicial activism.

Civil Service and Bureaucracy

Pakistan's civil service exhibits many patronage features. Analyses describe the bureaucracy as "synonymous with patronage and corruption". Senior bureaucrats often owe their positions to political patrons rather than merit, and corruption scandals regularly involve government officials. A recent IMF report highlights a "highly politicized" civil service and political appointments to state owned enterprises as key governance weaknesses. For instance, intelligence and administrative services are subject to nepotism and bribery at many levels. This hinders policy implementation and enables embezzlement.

Case Studies

The Panama Papers case (2017) is instructive. Pakistan's Supreme Court noted that investigative agencies (NAB, FIA) initially "failed to cooperate" fully in gathering evidence. It was only after a protracted legal struggle that a Joint Investigation Team was formed; even then, final accountability was delayed. This episode exposed how institutional corruption (among prosecutors and investigators) stymies justice. More recently, the National Accountability Bureau has pursued dozens of cases, but has faced charges of selective targeting. For example, a Reuters report notes that as of March 2023 NAB had conducted 4,747 investigations and achieved 1,190 convictions. While this seems substantial, critics point out that NAB's processes often align with political cycles. Legislatively, the 2022 restoration of earlier NAB amendments (which limit its powers) was seen by some as de politicizing the agency, but by others as protecting certain elites from accountability. In sum, corruption deeply affects Pakistan's institutions: it fuels patronage in the civil service, biases the judiciary, and renders parliament less effective.

Democratic Decay Electoral Integrity

Pakistan's elections have often been marred by fraud allegations. While the Election Commission may organize the vote, observers cite vote buying, intimidation, and rigging as long standing problems. Consistent with this, Gallup found that 70% of citizens in 2023 had "no confidence in the honesty of [their] elections". This distrust is a symptom of corruption: when elites manipulate electoral outcomes, citizens lose faith. Reportedly, the 2024 general election saw renewed accusations of interference, contributing to public pessimism.

Political Dynasties and Patronage

Pakistani politics is dominated by a few families (e.g. Bhuttos, Sharifs) and their networks. These dynasties leverage patronage to maintain power. Such informal patronage networks are widely documented as fostering corruption. For instance, decades of PPP rule in Sindh have coincided with high bureaucratic corruption in that province. These networks weaken party competition: politicians focus on delivering favors to supporters rather than policy, reinforcing public cynicism. Surveys reflect this: a majority of Pakistanis believe that most politicians are corrupt, mirroring attitudes in other South Asian democracies.

Public Trust and Voter Turnout

Widespread corruption erodes citizens' trust in democracy. When public services routinely require bribes and leaders are seen as self-interested, many voters become apathetic or even alienated. Research shows that higher perceptions of corruption significantly suppress voter turnout. In Pakistan, turnout rates have fluctuated, but anecdotal evidence suggests declining enthusiasm. Combined with polls where only one quarter of citizens approves of government performance, this indicates an erosion of the social contract. Overall, corruption induced disillusionment contributes to democratic decay: the system loses legitimacy when citizens feel elections yield no real change.

Accountability Mechanisms

National Accountability Bureau (NAB)

NAB is Pakistan's main anticorruption agency. In theory it has broad powers to investigate public sector graft. It has conducted thousands of inquiries, Reuters' reports 4,747 investigations up to early 2023, and has scored some convictions (1,190 cases). However, NAB is deeply controversial. Many analysts and opposition leaders charge that NAB is frequently used as a political weapon. A 2024 Supreme Court ruling noted that NAB was created under a military regime and has "often been used as a tool for political victimization". These politicization fears weaken NAB's credibility: if citizens suspect its actions favor certain parties, then the bureau's deterrent effect is blunted. Recent legal changes (restoring earlier amendments) aimed at limiting NAB's powers have been interpreted by some as efforts to depoliticize it, though others argue they simply protect powerful figures.

Freedom of Information and Transparency Laws

Pakistan's constitutional right to information (Article 19A) and related laws are intended to promote transparency. The Supreme Court has even expanded citizens' access to information. In practice, however, enforcement is inconsistent. Transparency International Pakistan reports that requests are often ignored or selectively handled. This gap allows corruption to hide. Civil society groups have long pushed for stronger implementation of FOI laws, echoing TI's recommendation for "effective Right to Information laws" as an anticorruption tool. Improved e governance (digital procurement, online disclosures) has been proposed but remains incomplete.

Media and Civil Society

A free press and active NGOs are crucial accountability agents. In Pakistan, however, media freedom is under strain. Rights groups have documented a pattern of journalist harassment, censorship, and sedition charges. For example, in mid-2023 multiple journalists were charged under broad antiterrorism laws, prompting Amnesty International to decry the "use of these laws to silence commentators". Reporters without Borders ranked Pakistan 150th out of 180 countries in press freedom (2022), reflecting severe constraints. This crackdown undermines reporting on corruption. Civil society organizations (CSOs) also face obstacles. The CIVICUS Monitor placed Pakistan on a "watch list" due to government actions against protesters and opposition groups in 2024. Under such pressure, CSOs have limited space to expose corruption. In short, accountability mechanisms exist on paper, but their effectiveness is hampered by political manipulation and suppression. Strengthening independent audit offices, protecting whistleblowers, and ensuring media freedom are therefore critical for curbing corruption.

Regional Comparison

Comparing Pakistan with neighbors highlights both common challenges and differences. Like Pakistan, India has struggled with corruption despite a higher CPI score. India's recent score was 40 (2022), and public attitudes are similar: 64% of Indians see politicians as corrupt. However, India's judicial and media institutions have been more robust in investigating graft (e.g. Lokpal debate), though even their concerns about weakening accountability have grown. Bangladesh, with a CPI score of 24, exhibits authoritarian tendencies; its government has been criticized for curtailing press freedom and manipulating elections. Nepal (score ~35) has a chronically weak state but comparatively less media repression. Sri Lanka's crisis shows that even ostensibly meritocratic elite can collapse under corruption: its top leaders were held accountable for disastrous policies, but only after severe economic fallout.

Learning from these comparisons, certain lessons emerge. All countries benefit from some degree of judicial review. Pakistan's expansion of FOI (Article 19A) echoes similar rights in India and Sri Lanka. Conversely, Pakistan's experience with a highly politicized anti-graft agency is shared by Bangladesh, where the anticorruption Commission is seen as partisan. The regional context underscores that political will and institutional independence are key differentiators. In India, a stronger civil society has at times exposed corruption (e.g. 2011 anticorruption protests), whereas in Pakistan media and civil society

are more constrained. Thus Pakistan might look to neighbors' reforms (e.g. India's enhanced audit processes) while being wary that simply copying laws (like anticorruption commissions) is insufficient without cultural change.

Discussion of Key Findings

The evidence clearly answers the research questions. On institutions: Corruption severely degrades institutional effectiveness in Pakistan. Parliament is weakened by patronage, the judiciary is partly co-opted by elites, and bureaucracy operates with low accountability. Key accountability institutions like NAB have been compromised by politics, so that formal anticorruption measures often fail. On democracy: High corruption is associated with democratic erosion. Citizen surveys show widespread distrust in electoral integrity and leadership, matching the theoretical expectation that corruption breeds public disengagement. The link is bi directional: weakened institutions invite more graft, which in turn further weakens governance. For example, PIDE analysts note that unchecked corruption "militates against the core of democracy"

Together, these findings imply that Pakistan's formal democratic framework is undermined by informal corrupt practices. Even though the country holds elections and has institutions like courts, in practice the "rules of the game" are distorted by corruption. This structural challenge means that piecemeal reforms have limited impact unless they address both incentives and norms. The situation in Pakistan reinforces global observations: Transparency International emphasizes that tackling corruption is crucial to "push back against authoritarianism" and protect stable governance.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that endemic corruption has seriously impaired Pakistan's political institutions and democratic integrity. Key insights include: (1) Widespread graft has eroded the legitimacy of state institutions. Parliamentary and judicial processes are frequently subverted by bribery and patronage, while the civil service is riddled with nepotism. (2) Public trust in democracy has correspondingly declined. The vast majority of citizens now view corruption as pervasive, and majorities doubt the fairness of elections. (3) Traditional accountability mechanisms have proven inadequate. The NAB and other bodies lack independence, and press or civic oversight is constrained. (4) These effects align with theoretical expectations: as Pakistan's PIDE warns, "Unchecked corruption militates against the core of democracy", reinforcing cycles of decay. Overall, entrenched corruption has contributed to policy failures (e.g. economic mismanagement) and social polarization.

Theoretically, the Pakistan case validates institutional theories of corruption: when formal rules are weak or subverted, corrupt norms become the de facto "rules of the game". It also confirms principal agent reasoning: agents (officials) routinely exploit their positions when not held accountable. These findings suggest that scholarly models must account for entrenched power

structures (e.g. military influence) in explaining corruption. In practice, the study underscores that anticorruption efforts must be systemic. Piecemeal legal changes are insufficient if not coupled with cultural shifts. For example, bolstering judicial independence and enforcing merit based civil service reforms are as vital as passing new laws. The analysis also reveals structural challenges: fragmented authority (provinces vs. federation), low state capacity, and security issues all intersect with corruption. Policymakers should thus view corruption not merely as individual crimes, but as symptoms of deeper institutional weaknesses.

Policy Recommendations

Based on the Analysis, Several Reforms are Advised:

Strengthen Institutional Autonomy: Remove political influence from key watchdogs. For example, ensure that the NAB chair is selected through a transparent, nonpartisan process and shield prosecutors from arbitrary dismissal. Establish fixed terms for anticorruption officials to reduce politicization. Reform the National Accountability Ordinance to eliminate clauses that exempt powerful actors (military, judiciary) from investigation, closing loopholes for impunity.

Electoral and Governance Reforms: Improve election integrity by empowering the Election Commission and introducing stricter campaign finance laws. Digitalize election processes to reduce human discretion. In Parliament, implement transparent tendering and budgeting (as TI suggests) to minimize behind the scenes allocations. Strengthen public accounts committees and require performance audits of government projects. These measures can curb channels for embezzlement and patronage.

Judicial Reforms: Increase transparency of court proceedings and enforce accountability for judicial corruption. For instance, expand Right to Information to cover judicial administration, and empower independent judicial commissions to address judges' misconduct. Training and monitoring of magistrates and lower court staff should be enhanced to reduce bribery in case management.

Media Freedom and Civic Engagement: Protect journalists and civil society actors who expose corruption. Repeal or clarify broad sedition and anti-terror laws that have been misused against critics. Strengthen Pakistan's Information Commission to ensure FOI requests are honored. Encourage watchdog NGOs with grants and legal protections so they can monitor officials without fear.

Anticorruption Education: Integrate anticorruption and civic ethics into school and university curricula to foster a culture of integrity. Public awareness campaigns can also signal that corruption is socially unacceptable. Long term reductions in corruption require changing citizen expectations for example, encouraging the public to use legal channels rather than bribes to obtain services.

Regional Cooperation: Finally, Pakistan should collaborate with neighbors on transparency initiatives. Joint training programs (e.g. anti-money laundering coordination) and information sharing (on illicit financial flows or fugitive assets) can help close cross border corruption networks. Emulating best practices from the region such as India's e governance systems may also be beneficial.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future studies could build on this qualitative analysis in several ways. Comparative research involving multiple South Asian countries would clarify which challenges are region specific versus unique to Pakistan. Quantitative analyses (e.g. time series data on corruption indicators) could test the causal impact of corruption on economic growth and democratic stability. Fieldwork (surveys or interviews) would add depth to the secondary evidence, especially in exploring public perceptions and elite motivations. Lastly, investigating sub national variations (e.g. between Pakistani provinces) could reveal whether decentralization reforms might mitigate or exacerbate corruption. As Pakistan and South Asia evolve, ongoing research will be needed to track how reforms and political changes affect the corruption democracy dynamic.

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