

# Corruption and its Implications for Politics in South Asian Countries

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## Abstract

This study measures corruption using survey data, newspaper reports, court records, anti-corruption agency records, and other sources. Corruption and problems with the government have been significant problems in South Asia since the early 1980s. The Corruption Perception Index (CPI) from Transparency International is recommended because it is a "robust" indicator that looks at many different ways to measure political corruption in each country. The root causes of corruption in South Asian countries, however, are a monopoly of government-controlled institutions, excessive regulations, convoluted tax and licencing systems, numerous government departments with opaque bureaucracies and discretionary powers, and a lack of transparency in laws and procedures. Tax evasion, which helps black money accumulate and lowers public morale, has a substantial negative impact on the economies and politics of South Asian nations. Since the 1980s, Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, and Bangladesh have all been officially charged with corruption. In addition, political rivals and the media frequently accuse the prime ministers of Sri Lanka and Nepal of corruption. In Bangladesh, Pakistan, and other South Asian countries, political bribery is widespread. In 2002, General Pervez Musharraf passed stringent election laws that forbade politicians convicted of a crime from seeking office. The rule's detractors believe that applying it would prevent the civilian community's two most influential political figures from challenging the military administration in elections later this year.

**Keywords:** *Corruption, Democracy, Governance, International bodies, Political Leader, Political Parties, Property rights*

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## Introduction:

There are many different ways to define corruption, but the most common is when public officials break the law for personal gain. Examples of violations include

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providing services that violate the law or subverting government policy on behalf of bribe-payers. In general, all forms of corruption are harmful. For example, paying bribes, identifying public officials to take bribes, and determining how much to pay to consume time and resources that could be productive investments (Khatri et al., 2013).

In addition, unlike taxes, corruption is not guaranteed to be paid, and public officials who accept corruption cannot be held accountable in court for failing to provide services or make the promised decisions. Corruption can also have a significant indirect impact on investor confidence in businesses. In addition, bribery can cause abrupt policy shifts or the reallocation of property rights, adversely affecting investment conditions and raising corruption's overall costs. The type of intervention or policy subversion achieved through corruption determines its net economic impact, but sin always harms society. (Transparency International, 2018)

The focus of this study is on the issue of corruption in South Asian nations and the role that politicians play. The general objective of this study is to investigate the effects that corruption and politicians' involvement in corruption have had on South Asian nations. Therefore, this research aims to evaluate the corruption problem in South Asian countries and how its effects disproportionately affect society's most vulnerable members. Corruption on a large scale discourages investment, slows economic expansion, and undermines the rule of law. The purpose of this paper is to present a nonconformist perspective on corruption and a strategy for its "cure." It aims to explain the state of affairs in South Asian nations, characterised by widespread corruption and failing institutions.

## Literature Review

Saha found in 2016 that corruption in politics is common in South Asia, from the top to the bottom of the political system. Prime ministers in democratic countries like Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and Bangladesh and ministers in dictatorships or militaries were frequently found guilty of crimes and accused of corruption. However, sin has remained the same in the last few countries with governments. Despite recognising crime and corruption, voters continue to back corrupt politicians, often at the expense of "clean" activists who oppose them.

Pepinsky (2022) estimated that 700 representatives of state legislatures and 40 members of the Indian parliament had been found guilty of or had committed serious crimes like racketeering or murder in 1997. Up to 20% of participants in some state races held in 2002 were convicted or charged with misconduct. More lawmakers

have been convicted of crimes or are in court now than these numbers show. In Bangladesh, Pakistan, and other South Asian countries, it is common knowledge and easy to find proof that powerful politicians have been corrupt. South Asian countries usually do not have enough money to do these things well because their central budgets are not big enough. It causes resource disputes.

Callahan (2006) argues that "intermediate-class" groups often organise around ethnic, religious, or caste-based factional symbols, leading to the rise of factional politics and the criminal predicament in South Asian politics. Moreover, because it is against the law to give preferential benefits to some people but not others, a responsible politician cannot organise support from these important groups.

In South Asia, democracy has an extraordinary impact on corruption as less ruthless politicians sideline credible politicians with much to offer factions looking for sponsors. This policy pattern may shift over time until economic growth is sufficient and the central budget allocates enough resources to keep honest politicians in power. However, politicians still use their political power to benefit themselves and their close allies, resources, jobs, and economies. It explains why all major political parties frequently make accusations of corruption and recruit criminals to provide help and garner the support of influential groups. It also explains why ordinary people complain about politicians' involvement in corruption and elect corrupt leaders.

### **Research Methods:**

There are two kinds of data: primary and secondary. The various research methods used to gather data on corruption focus on a diverse range of research "objects." Some data can come from "the population," while others can come from businesses, organisations, and other sources. As a result, the next iceberg, which includes data and methods (objects), gives a first impression of a fundamental feature of the methods used in corruption research. Scholars have suggested relying on the reported extent of corruption because it is impossible to measure the actual duration of the problem in a country. Instead, the Corruption Perception Index (CPI) from Transparency International is recommended because it is a "robust" index that "combines several measures of political corruption for each country" and "captures more than a single indicator." This paper uses survey data, press reports, court records, anti-corruption agency records, and other sources to measure corruption. However, these instruments need help.

## Results and Discussion

The adverse effects of corruption can be minimised if a government employs an impartial and effective anti-corruption strategy. More specifically, the more effective anti-corruption measures are, the greater the likelihood of corruption reduction. This level of effectiveness requires two things: 1) whether the actions taken are sufficient; and (2) how committed political leaders are to reducing corruption. To put it another way, for anti-corruption initiatives to be successful, political leaders must sincerely sponsor and support them. Additionally, anti-corruption initiatives must be adequately designed to address corruption's underlying causes. In other words, if anti-corruption measures are not followed, even the most elaborate and well-thought-out ones will not work. Constant pressure from civil society is required to eradicate corruption. For ordinary citizens to eliminate corruption, actors in civil society must be vigilant and committed to anti-corruption messaging that resonates with their concerns. For this to happen, voters must be able to approve politicians at the polls. While corruption is one of the most challenging issues affecting public policy, civil society participation is required for any democratic strategy to combat it. Numerous mechanisms have contributed to the persistence of corruption and the governance problems accompanying it in South Asian countries.

The most notable is political corruption, which has a long history and has spread over time. It is strongly linked to the growing political fragmentation in South Asia. Political corruption will likely take a long time to eradicate because it is ingrained in the democratic process.

The state can legally redistribute more resources and raise taxes to keep the government stable if the economy grows. It will likely have a significant effect on future progress. In addition to making political corruption less of a problem, ending political corruption would also make it possible to end various bureaucratic crimes. Because bureaucratic corruption is so essential to the survival of the political elite, it continues to do well. The significance of multiple forms of bureaucratic corruption in South Asia demonstrates the strange effects of privatisation and liberalisation on decomposition. Economic developments contribute to increased crime, at least in the short term. Even in the more democratic nations of South Asia, public concern about corruption and the roles played by the media and NGOs have not significantly reduced corruption to this point. For various reasons, South Asia's most common forms of crime negatively impact economic performance.

First, political fragmentation in these nations has always existed and seems to worsen. With more fragmentation, political corruption and the central states' ability

to control competing factions' predatory tendencies will likely decline. Second, bureaucratic corruption has been particularly prevalent in South Asia because the state's capabilities have not been strong enough to stop the subversion of essential state functions and interventions.

Every South Asian nation recognises the significance of enhancing state capabilities across the entire spectrum of state functions. Even though it is implausible that increasing the state's capacity will immediately decrease all levels of corruption, it will probably improve governance by ensuring that economic growth and political stability are achieved to a greater extent. Last but not least, despite military factionalism being more common in Afghanistan, the milder form of mafia-dominated politics in all of the major South Asian nations has made it clear how important it is to improve the capabilities of the central state.

### **General Concept of Corruption in South Asian Countries:**

Corruption and issues with governance have afflicted every nation in South Asia since the early 1980s. In addition to the pressure from international organisations like the World Bank and the IMF and bilateral organisations concerned about the misuse of aid funds, public concern about corruption is growing. The functioning of the judicial system, property rights stability, and democratic principles are all impacted by corruption. Corruption is the most prominent of these issues because it is widely believed that corruption is not only a problem in and of itself but also a sign of other issues with governance. In response to internal and external pressure, typically in the form of populist slogans or attacks on opponents, political parties in South Asia have implemented anti-corruption programmes. At the World Bank, other international organisations, civil society, and local and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs), anti-corruption policies have been in place for a long time. There is evidence of widespread corruption in South Asia from the ferocious public debates and media coverage, the persistent concern of investors and international organisations, and the poor performance of these nations in the Global Corruption Index compiled by Transparency International and other organisations. It shows that the problem still exists (Khan, 2016).

### **The Role of Politicians in Corruption:**

A monopoly of government-controlled institutions on the delivery of specific goods and services, excessive regulations, complicated tax and licencing systems, numerous government departments with opaque bureaucracies and discretionary powers, and a lack of transparency in laws and procedures are the root causes of

corruption in South Asian countries. The government's efforts to eradicate corruption and the extent of it vary significantly across South Asian countries. South Asian countries have the highest rates of political corruption. The impact of corruption on the political system and the paramount significance of society's laws are the primary causes of concern. Politics is currently reserved for criminals. Numerous criminal acts are linked to elections in multiple countries and regions. Threats to voting for a particular candidate or physical obstructions are common in many parts of the country against weaker social groups like tribals, Dalits, and rural women. One of the most prevalent forms of corruption is tax evasion. Most politicians and government employees engage in this behaviour, contributing to the accumulation of black money and lowering public morale.

### **The economic impact of corruption on South Asian countries**

There is much corruption in South Asia, and it is clear that breaking good laws hurts the economy. In these circumstances, corruption is unquestionably bad for the economy; good laws hurt the economy. In these circumstances, corruption is undoubtedly bad for the economy. Emerging capitalists, for instance, might be compelled to defy politically necessary but prohibitive laws. They may also have to deal with essential interventions not approved by law or critical to economic growth or political stability. However, they cannot obtain legal approval for political reasons. In these cases, corruption has a ridiculous effect on the economy. Corruption can therefore be associated with both expansion and stagnation. Unfortunately, South Asian countries also have a lot of this kind of corruption. To comprehend the economic and political effects of corruption and the suitability of various strategies to combat it, we must understand the distinctions between multiple forms of corruption. At least four distinct types of corruption exist in South Asia, based on whether the underlying intervention is legal and necessary for political or economic reasons (Corporate Research & Investigations, 2019).

### **Corruption in Bangladesh:**

Since the beginning of the 1980s, Indian, Bangladeshi, and Pakistani presidents and prime ministers have been charged in court with corruption. Additionally, the media and political opponents of Sri Lanka's and Nepal's prime ministers frequently accuse them of corruption. Corruption has been alleged in equal measure in India's provincial, state, and local governments. Many flamboyant chief ministers have earned a worldwide reputation for involvement in the corrupt system. Democracies and dictatorships have similar levels of corruption, indicating that the form of

government appears to have little effect on it. In India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan, serious illegalities in government procurement, mainly weapons, have recently been publicly exposed (Transparency International, 2019). Industries in the public sector have been accused of clientelism, and nepotism has received the most attention.

Schoeberlein (2020) mentioned that political bribery of a similar nature is common in Bangladesh, Pakistan, and other South Asian nations. General Pervez Musharraf, the president of Pakistan, enacted strict electoral regulations in 2002 that prohibited politicians convicted of a crime from running for office. Critics, however, argue that enforcing the rule is intended to prevent the two most potent civilian political leaders from opposing the military government in elections later this year. Given the above pressures, whether future administrations will enforce such rules is questionable. Since ruling parties in countries like Bangladesh have a history of filing corruption lawsuits against opponents and dropping corruption cases against supporters after taking office, attempting to keep politics out is also problematic. It was made possible because the Anti-Corruption Department of Bangladesh was part of the Prime Minister's Office. Establishing a genuinely independent anti-corruption commission to identify and prosecute corrupt politicians would be beneficial. Outside organisations are undoubtedly providing advice on this, and Bangladesh and Pakistan have made some progress in establishing such organisations. In November 2004, Bangladesh simultaneously abolished the Bangladesh Anti-Corruption Authority and its three-member Independent Anti-Corruption Commission (IACC).

Unlike before, the IACC can now look into allegations of corruption against public officials without getting permission from the government. As a result, however, the commission's credibility has been questioned. Its ability to investigate, prosecute, and, most importantly, impose sanctions heavily relies on the political support of the sources most likely to be explored.

### **Corruption in Pakistan:**

Per Quah (2003), Pakistan's National Accountability Board (NAB), which successfully rehabilitated officers and recovered stolen funds, is regarded as a fortified forces association rather than an independent organisation. The fact that the military and judiciary are not included in its powers is significant. Likewise, though considered autonomous in India, the Central Vigilance Commission only monitors state officials, not politicians. Most importantly, a substantial portion of the political corruption in these countries is rooted, and acknowledging that it is "society driven" makes it difficult for the Anti-Corruption Commission to advocate for its impartiality successfully.

## **Corruption in Nepal:**

Since at least a decade ago, corruption has been a major political issue in Nepal, and its prominence has increased in recent years. It is acknowledged that this is a significant factor in Nepal's lack of progress. It is practised at all social levels, manifests in various ways, and occurs frequently. Corruption profoundly impacts Nepal's political system, business community, and bureaucracy, all inextricably linked to one another. Upadhaya (2003) states that this is a significant issue for the contemporary Nepali campaign. After the restoration of democracy in 1990, the involvement of political leadership in many corruptions like the Dhamija scandal, Lauda Air and Wide Body was seen. However, no investigation was done, and no one was found guilty. Such cases of corruption continued. A few days ago, a case of corruption of crores of rupees came to light following the plan to send Nepalis as fake Bhutanese refugees to America. After the investigation revealed the involvement of 30 people, including former Deputy Prime Minister Top Bahadur Rayamaji, former Home Minister Balkrishna Khand, and Indrajit Rai, the district court ordered them to send to prison for preliminary investigation (The Kathmandu Post, 2023). It was also suspected that other high-ranking people were involved in the case. 100 kg gold smuggling case came out after the fake Bhutanese refugee case was not resolved. Although ten people were arrested for gold smuggling, high political officials seemed involved.

Along with this, the investigation started regarding the decision to give the name of government land to a person in the Council of Ministers. Jasma saw the involvement of the former Prime Minister, the former minister and most government employees. Similarly, former government secretary and CIAA commissioner Deep Bahadur Basnet and former government secretary Dinesh Hari Adhikari have also been sued. Shobhakanta Dhakal and Min Bahadur Gurung, known as the mastermind behind the scam, have also been sued by the CIAA at the Special Court (Himalayan Tribune, 2023). In that case, named Lalita Niwas, the purchase of land attached to the decision was only arrested and proceeded further. Attempts have been made to give immunity to former Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai and Madhav Kumar, who were directly involved in the case. These and other types of corruption and smuggling are taking place under the protection of the political leaders of Nepal.

## **Recent Scandals in Corruption:**

However, recent scandals and crises have focused on corruption in privatisation deals and financial market regulation. Corruption is rampant among all types of



low-level government officials. In the media, officials from the police, customs, land registry, and irrigation are frequently portrayed negatively. According to polls, the Indian police are often the most corrupt, not necessarily because they accept the most bribes. Instead, most people find their corruption most evident and irritating daily. This qualitative and journalistic substantiation of vast corruption in South Asia is supported by a check of public comprehension of corruption conducted by the World Bank to give an index of "managing corruption" in colourful nations. These indicators are constructed so that the normal of all country indicators is 0 and ranges from -2.5. It indicates the position of corruption at its loftiest, compared to 2.5, which shows the status of corruption at its smallest. The confidence calculated from the variation of available indicators for each country is located below the standard error of each indicator (UNODC, 2017).

#### South Asia anti-corruption index:

COUNTRY	2014	2016	2018	2020	2022
India	-0.31 (0.17)	-0.17 (0.13)	-0.25 (0.15)	-0.36 (0.13)	-0.31 (0.12)
Bangladesh	-0.47 (0.24)	-0.40 (0.21)	-0.60 (0.16)	-0.95 (0.14)	-1.09 (0.14)
Afghanistan	<b>n.a</b>	<b>n.a</b>	-1.56 (0.44)	-1.32 (0.27)	-1.33 (0.21)
Nepal	-0.28 (0.47)	-0.59 (0.27)	-0.56 (0.20)	-0.37 (0.18)	-0.61 (0.16)
Maldives	<b>n.a</b>	-0.55 (0.37)	-0.45 (0.24)	-0.05 (0.22)	0.12 (0.24)
Sri Lanka	-0.23 (0.24)	-0.24 (0.21)	-0.09 (0.15)	-0.13 (0.14)	-0.16 (0.14)
Pakistan	-0.98 (0.23)	-0.76 (0.18)	-0.80 (0.16)	-0.81 (0.15)	0.87 (0.14)

Source: Daniel et al., 2022.

These metrics should be interpreted with care. However, it claims that NGOs' and civil society's pressure and government policies before 2014 had little effect on reducing corruption. These indicators indicate that corruption in India remained virtually unchanged from 2014 to 2022. Despite the long-term success of the military and the current civilian government in combating corruption, perceptions of corruption in Bangladesh are worsening, with more corruption than in any other country surveyed in 2014. There is much debate about this in Bangladesh. The

significant declines in these subjective indicators over the past few years speak more to shifts in the survey respondents' sensitivity than they do to changes in the degree of corruption (The Global Economy, 2014).

Even if they do not accurately show changes in corruption levels, the subjective perception indicators show that people are getting more upset with how long it takes to solve the problem. The corruption index is also lower since the GDP per capita is two- to three times higher than in neighbouring nations. Even in Sri Lanka, allegations and counterarguments by the government and opposition increasingly focus on corruption. Nepal scored the same as India when it was first included in Transparency International's Corruption Index in 2014. The only country in South Asia where the 2014 corruption index was positive was the Maldives, a small tourist destination. It demonstrates that the level of corruption in the Maldives is higher than the global average. In addition, the lowest corruption rate in the Indian subcontinent can be found there.

Conversely, Afghanistan has the highest rate of corruption in South Asia, pointing to a warlord- and criminal-dominated economy. Because there are no nation-states in the area, corruption is very different from what it is in other countries. However, underlying patterns may be similar to those of other South Asian nations (MCC, 2016).



Source: TNPSC, 2018.

## **Causes of Corruption in South Asian Countries:**

Corruption in South Asia has contributed to the country's poor economic performance, persistent poverty, subversion of democracy, and inability to attract sufficient foreign investment, raising concerns about poor governance. However, when judging South Asia, it is essential to remember that corruption is common in all developing countries, no matter how much their economies grow. A country's development is strongly correlated with its level of corruption. Corruption tends to be more prevalent in less developed nations. Even developing nations with high growth rates, like South Korea in the 1960s and the People's Republic of China in the early 2000s, fall into this category. Because even fast-growing economies have relatively high levels of corruption in their early stages, this cross-country evidence is likely to need to be more accurate when looking at the overall evidence of corruption. Nevertheless, it suggests numerous types of corruption; therefore, it is essential to comprehend why the most severe forms are more prevalent in less dynamic economies, such as South Asia. In addition, it helps determine the likelihood that a particular anti-corruption strategy will be successful (Tanzi, 1998).

## **Conclusion**

When procedures are followed, resources are well-spent, and public offices are bought and sold, corruption makes it harder for the government to do its job. Corruption undermines the government's legitimacy and democratic principles like trust and tolerance. The root causes of the corruption epidemic in South Asia are widespread government and political party interference in the work of anti-corruption watchdogs, opaque public institutions, and a lack of protection for anti-corruption actors. A Transparency International report that examined the susceptibility to corruption of 70 significant institutions in six South Asian nations came to the following conclusions: Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, India, the Maldives, and Bangladesh.

Even though South Asian democracies have many opportunities, reducing corruption is still a big problem. When they use public money to reward their supporters, politicians elected through a democratic process often give the impression that the public cannot criticise them. Administrators and bureaucrats who are appointed rather than elected may benefit from political favouritism. Worst of all, anti-corruption organisations can also be harmed by politics by being staffed by political appointees with personal agendas or rendered ineffective by legislative or executive action. These and other corruption issues impact the brand-new and unreliable

democracies in Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, India, the Maldives, and Bangladesh. The democratic governments of these countries are working to reduce corruption and fulfil the democratic promises made to their citizens.

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