



RESEARCH PAPER

Corruption and Political Stability in Pakistan: An Analysis of Institutional Challenges and Governance Crisis

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ABSTRACT

In Pakistan, corruption often defined as the misuse of public authority for private gain has grown to be a chronic and systemic problem that is ingrained in both political and administrative systems. This study explores the relationship between corruption and political stability in Pakistan, examines the ways how corruption affects political stability in Pakistan. Identifying the impact of corruption on democratic institutions and public trust in government and analyzes the current anticorruption measures such as judicial reforms, government policies, and civil society campaigns are to reducing corruption and promoting political stability. For this purpose, qualitative method was used. The research was conducted almost exclusively from secondary sources and primary sources. The results indicate that corruption brings about extensive and complex effects which disrupt political stability throughout Pakistan. The research shows that corruption serves as a major factor which decreases public confidence in political institutions. The study recommends an independence and effectiveness enhancement for accountability institutions, electoral reforms and transparency.

KEYWORDS Corruption, Political Stability, NAB, Judiciary, Pakistan, World Bank (WB)

Introduction

In Pakistan, corruption often defined as the misuse of public authority for private gain has grown to be a chronic and systemic problem that is ingrained in both political and administrative systems. Although several governments have made promises to fight corruption throughout the years, the issue is still pervasive and influences all levels of government and decision. The signs of corruption are numerous and widespread, ranging from widespread embezzlement and abuse of power to bribery and nepotism. The rule of law, the effectiveness of public institutions, and public confidence in the democratic system have all been damaged by these actions. Since Pakistan is routinely ranked poorly on corruption perceptions by Transparency International and other international indices, the problem necessitates not only quantitative research but also a more thorough qualitative investigation of its root causes and wider sociopolitical ramifications (Noor, 2009).

A nation's developmental trajectory is significantly influenced by political stability, which is defined as the continuity, predictability, and institutional robustness of a political system. Political stability has frequently eluded Pakistan, as seen by the country's frequent cycles of major uprisings, military interventions, judicial activism, and democratic revolutions. Because it encourages political patronage, undermines the legitimacy of election procedures, and prevents citizens from actively engaging in governance, corruption is a major contributor to this instability. Institutions lose credibility, opposition groups organize on anti-corruption rhetoric, and government becomes more fractured when public officials and political leaders act corruptly and go unpunished. In addition to undermining democratic standards, the outcome fosters authoritarian tendencies and civil unrest. Therefore, encouraging long-term governance reform and institutional development

requires a knowledge of how corruption causes political instability (Muzaffar, et al., 2017; Ismail et al., 2025)

In order to better understand how corruption affects political stability in Pakistan, this study uses a qualitative research methodology, concentrating on the viewpoints of important players such as political analysts, representatives of civil society, bureaucrats, and policy experts. The study intends to identify the ways in which corruption exacerbates political unpredictability and undermines government systems using semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis of pertinent documents and conversation. This study aims to comprehend how corruption is experienced, understood, and dealt with within Pakistan's complicated political climate rather than just measuring levels of corruption. By examining these relationships, the study adds to the larger conversation about institutional accountability, democratization, and governance while providing information that could guide future reforms and policy suggestions meant to improve the integrity and stability of Pakistan's political system (Muzaffar, et al., 2023; Ullah et al., 2022).

Literature Review

Institutionalization fortifies the political system, and political stability expands the likelihood of civilian rule. Pakistan's political history illustrates how the political system is rarely institutionalized for democratic stability, and the country's political experiences are merely a pretext for comprehending the issues surrounding political institutionalization. In addition to highlighting the opinions of various social scientists in an explanation of these words, this research investigates the intimate connection between institutionalization, political progress, and political stability. Since 2008–2016 is a unique period for political stability and institutionalization in Pakistani political history, the goal of this study is to assess the democratic process and significant political changes during this time as a case study (Khan & Azhar, 2019).

This study demonstrates that the impact of corruption on a political system's internal stability depends on the proportional size of the youth bulge. Using panel data from over 100 countries from 1984 to 2012, we discover that the impact of corruption on political stability is influenced by the youth bulge. When the proportion of young people in the adult population rises above a critical threshold of about 20%, corruption becomes a destabilizing issue for democratic institutions. When country and year fixed effects, a set of control variables that could impact internal political stability, an alternative operationalization of the youth bulge, corruption, and a dynamic panel estimation method are taken into account, the moderating effect of the youth bulge in the stability corruption nexus is robust (Farzanegan & Witthuhn, 2017).

The theoretical model with micro-foundations presented in this study reflects some of the key aspects of Pakistan's economy that have developed over the country's 64-year history. When comparing Pakistan's economic performance across various regimes, it can be seen that macroeconomic fundamentals generally better under authoritarian regimes as opposed to those that prevailed under democratic ones. Particularly, because of improved governance, authoritarian governments are generally characterized by strong growth, low inflation, and a low degree of bureaucratic corruption. On the other hand, poor administration, high levels of corruption, high inflation brought on in part by the use of seigniorage to fund public spending, and lackluster growth have all been seen to affect economic performance under democratic regimes. Computational modeling is done using maximum-likelihood techniques and the Markov-Regime switching methodology, using annual data from 1950 to 2011. These stylized facts are supported by the estimation results based on empirical modeling setup, which also validate the theoretical model's implications (Muzaffar, et al., 2024; Zeeshan et al., 2022).

In addition to examining whether or not the conditional relationship between political stability and corruption matters, this research sheds light on the importance of political stability in examining the two opposing hypotheses in Developing Eight Muslim nations. The empirical results show that political stability, population increase, and investment all contribute favorably to economic expansion. In addition to having an effect on growth, corruption also affects a country's institutional quality. In countries with higher levels of political stability, corruption functions as sand in the wheels, while in less politically stable nations like Nigeria and Pakistan, it greases the wheels. As a result, political stability promotes economic growth by lowering political turbulence and societal unrest and by encouraging investment (Shabbir et al., 2016).

Numerous studies on corruption have been conducted in the last few decades. These studies have mostly concentrated on particular facets of corruption, including national development, economic policy, legal concerns, social issues, and economic issues. This paper develops a model of corruption based on systems thinking, which aids in comprehending corruption and serves as a basis for future corruption policymaking. 198 interviews, including 43 in-depth interviews, were performed in Pakistan to gather data for the qualitative analysis. When taking into account views of corruption in Pakistan, the study's primary contribution is the improved knowledge and insights on issues of values, social elements, inflation, government size, and political norms. The impact of inflation, the size of the government, the transparency of international talks, and the comparison between corruption and religious values are some of our main results that have not received much attention in the literature (Ullah et al., 2022).

over a panel of 28 developing economies and a disaggregated sample of lower-middle and upper-middle income economies, the study empirically examined the relationship between political instability, corruption, and sustainable development over the years 2000–2014. According to the three stage least square (3SLS) calculation, political instability and sustainable development are adversely impacted by corruption. Corruption and sustainable development are hampered by political instability. Corruption and political instability are lessened by sustainable development. It illustrates how political stability breeds corruption and corruption breeds political stability. Political instability has a statistically negligible impact on sustainable development in upper-middle-income economies, but the disaggregated estimates of developing economies are nearly identical to the aggregate estimates. The eradication of corruption is essential to the advancement of sustainable development (Khan & Farooq, 2019).

Political instability and significant levels of corruption are traits of low-income economies. The performance of businesses may be hampered by the weak, corrupt financial systems of low-income countries with unstable political systems. Estimating the impact of political unrest and corruption on business performance in low-income economies was the aim of the current study. The current study measured the firm's performance using exports and human capital investment as a stand-in. To determine the likelihood that businesses will invest in human capital, we used logistic regression on the World Enterprise Survey dataset. According to the study's findings, political unrest and corruption make it less likely for businesses to invest in human capital. Firm-specific attributes raise the likelihood that a firm will export. Reducing corruption is necessary from a policy standpoint in order to encourage businesses to invest in human capital (Kazmi et al., 2022).

With a population of nearly 200 million, Pakistan is sadly corrupt. With weak state institutions and administrative collapse, the author observes that the trauma that precipitated Partition in 1947 has virtually persisted to the present. The author first describes the extent of the nation's corruption before outlining how it affects government income from taxes and the pitiful portion of the budget allocated to social and welfare initiatives. Another factor contributing to the crisis is the remittances sent home by Pakistanis employed overseas. Despite, or maybe because of, tens of billions of dollars in US

aid, corruption has thrived. Remittances and foreign aid do, in fact, function as a manifestation of the well-known "resource curse." Military dictatorships, notably Pakistan's Anti-Corruption Agency, ignore the issue, making efforts to combat corruption futile. As a result, there is civil instability and a profoundly dysfunctional state, which makes it easy for terrorist networks to thrive (Khan, 2018).

The growth of Islamic militancy is the most often cited reason for the "failure," and Pakistan is typically included in discussions of "failing states" that present the greatest threat to international security. But far from being the cause of imminent state breakdown, Islamic militancy is a reaction to it. This article contends that the delegitimization of the state and its incapacity to uphold law and order in the cities and quell Islamist insurgents in the rest of the nation are due to the state's incapacity to deliver any meaningful degree of public goods or services, broadly defined, as a result of decades of systemic corruption (Khan, 2007).

This article investigates how governance systems which include corruption control and political stability measures, affect agricultural land expansion which leads to deforestation. We measure short-term and long-term impacts of corruption control and political stability on deforestation in South American and Asian countries using data from 1990 to 2003 which shows a major issue of converting forest land into agricultural land. The short-term impact of political stability on forest cover shows a positive effect which becomes non-significant after that period. The short-term and long-term effects of corruption control show a negative impact on forest cover, which becomes more severe during the initial period. Corruption control establishes a link between increased technological productivity and agricultural land expansion, since technology and land use functions as complementary elements (Malik, et al. 2023; Batool, et al. 2023; Galinato, & Galinato, 2013).

The concept of political stability has received only a small number of in-depth studies because most research focuses on studying its underlying causes. The article presents an overview of stability research while it evaluates two recent theories developed by Ake and Sanders. The author presents a new definition as a replacement for both existing definitions which he considers unsatisfactory. The study investigates how political entities maintain their identity during periods of transformation while establishing criteria for their survival. A stable political object exists if it can maintain its existence through its own power to defend itself against destruction activities. The author proposes that stability exists beyond measurement because different types of stability do not exist (Dowding, & Kimber, 1983).

Results and Discussion

Corruption

Corruption consists of behaviors which people demonstrate when they break established social standards and legal regulations. The person uses their authority to achieve personal benefits. Corruption represents a broad category which includes all unlawful activities that people conduct to obtain personal benefits from their official duties in all types of organizations which exist beyond government and public institutions (Luo, 2002).

Concept of Political Stability

Political stability exists when a government system maintains its authority while enforcing laws and handling public matters without experiencing major interruptions. The system demonstrates a stable political environment which enables successful policy enforcement and institutional operations while citizens and businesses maintain trust in

government functions.

A country achieves political stability when its government can rule for an adequate time period while making decisions and executing them without experiencing ongoing emergencies and violent conflicts and sudden changes in power.

Link between corruption control and political stability

The political stability of a nation depends on its ability to control corruption because corrupt practices undermine both the legitimacy and operational capacity of political systems, yet reduced corruption levels create conditions which lead to trust and social order and permanent governmental stability. Corruption leads to government misconduct which causes citizens to think that their leaders act for personal benefit, which results in public unrest and institutional distrust that leads to protests and violent conflicts. Governments face challenges in executing policies and managing emergencies because corruption undermines both their legal authority and administrative capabilities. The ability to control corruption establishes political stability through its impact on institutional performance and public trust, which establishes the framework for citizens to acknowledge and participate in government activities. Countries that actively curb corruption experience more predictable decision making and higher levels of international and domestic investment and improved social unity, which all contribute to reducing political unrest. Political stability and anticorruption work together in a positive cycle because stable governments have more capacity to conduct anti-corruption work while decreased corruption strengthens government power and political system stability. The process of controlling corruption needs to happen before political stability can become established as corruption control exists as a fundamental element that maintains political stability.

Patterns of Corruption

Civilian political regimes

Civilian political regimes are systems of governance in which political authority is held by elected officials and civilian institutions rather than military or authoritarian rulers. The political systems of these regimes operate through established governmental frameworks which include legislative bodies and political organizations and their electoral processes. Civilian rule emphasizes institutionalized political participation, the transfer of power through elections, and the rule of law (Kohn, 1997).

Military and Hybrid Regimes

Military regimes function as political systems through which armed forces maintain government control by either establishing a junta or maintaining hidden control over crucial political functions. Military elites control power in these regimes while military leaders make decisions without using civilian institutions or democratic systems. Military regimes use their governance to claim that their rule is essential for both stability and national security and development but these regimes exhibit centralized decision-making, political opposition suppression, and restricted accountability which generates opportunities for corrupt practices and elite groups to take control. Military regimes experience corruption through resource misappropriation, opaque procurement, and preferential treatment for loyal officers while the existing systems of oversight and public legitimacy remain underdeveloped (Pyman, 2017).

Hybrid regimes function as political systems which combine elements of civilian democratic institutions with authoritarian control, and these systems are known as semi-authoritarian or competitive authoritarian systems. These regimes maintain formal electoral processes and political parties but manipulate elections, weaken opposition, and control media and civil society to consolidate power. Hybrid regimes exhibit corruption

through patronage networks, clientelism, and selective enforcement of laws which combine elements from both civilian and military systems. The security of hybrid regimes depends on their use of forceful methods and co-optation tactics, which results in a situation where some governance capacity exists officially but actual governance is weakened through chosen accountability methods and diminished governmental trustworthiness.

Impact on Political Stability

Weakening Democratic Institutions

The process of weakening democratic institutions in Pakistan has created political instability because it breaks constitutional order and decreases citizen confidence and creates conflicts between governmental bodies. The military coups and the removal of elected officials from their positions have prevented Pakistan from developing democratic institutions since its independence which has resulted in diminished power of its parliament and created unstable political systems. The military and civilian leaders develop tense relationships which create governmental instability while the Supreme Court of Pakistan and the Election Commission of Pakistan face disputes that have political implications through prime minister disqualifications and electoral fraud accusations. Political conflicts emerge as institutions lose public confidence which leads to street protests that create governmental disruptions and inconsistent policy implementation. The weak institutional structure prevents international capital because it creates obstacles to economic development and results in governmental crises. The decline of democratic institutions in Pakistan has created obstacles for effective governance which has resulted in persistent political instability that hinders democratic development (Ismail et al., 2025).

Governance crisis and policy paralysis

Pakistan faces two persistent challenges which create governance crises that result in policy failures which disrupt political stability and cause economic setbacks. A governance crisis occurs when governmental bodies of a state fail to execute their duties, work together, or provide essential services to the population. The political landscape of Pakistan experiences multiple institutional crises because the government frequently changes, civil leaders compete with military authority, political groups become more divided, and government institutions lose their ability to function. Policy paralysis occurs when governments become unable to execute necessary actions which address fundamental problems in economic development, taxation systems, energy supply, inflation management, and structural transformation initiatives. Policymaking processes face delays because political authorities fear backlash from their opponents, judicial systems, and their coalition partners. The institutional gridlock leads to decreased investor confidence which causes project delays while organizations need to seek more financial support from international sources like IMF programs. The system leads to public dissatisfaction which creates deeper public distrust and results in protests against the government. When governments focus more on survival than governance, long-term planning suffers, and reforms remain incomplete. The two governance crises and policy failures which exist in Pakistan create administrative inefficiencies which results in repeated political instability, which hinders the country from achieving democracy and economic stability (Rashid, & Rashid, 2024).

Erosion of legitimacy and public trust

Political instability in Pakistan has been primarily caused by the deterioration of both legitimacy and public trust. Legitimacy exists when the public believes that a government possesses the rightful power to govern which emerges from both free and fair elections and constitutional governance together with its ability to deliver services effectively. The repeated allegations of electoral rigging and political engineering and

judicial disqualifications of elected leaders together with the rising tensions among state institutions have created a situation where citizens no longer trust Pakistan's democratic processes. Public trust decreases when people perceive bias or influence over institutions such as parliament and courts and electoral bodies. Opposition parties reject election results because political disputes shift from parliamentary debate to street protests which creates a hostile environment for governance instead of a cooperative atmosphere.

The erosion of trust leads to decreased voter turnout and civic participation and lessened public compliance with government policies. Citizens who lose faith in leadership may turn to populist narratives, protest movements, or non-democratic alternatives. Governments appear weak and contested when their legitimacy decreases which leads to a breakdown of the social contract that exists between the state and its citizens. The restoration of public trust through transparent elections and the establishment of the rule of law and accountability and institutional neutrality will create the necessary foundation for long-term political stability in Pakistan (Shabbir, 2025).

Judicialization of politics

Judicialization of politics describes how political conflicts and governmental decisions now get settled through judicial courts instead of established democratic systems which include Parliament. The practice has increased in Pakistan through time because both the Supreme Court of Pakistan and other judicial bodies actively handle cases about prime minister disqualifications and electoral conflicts and political party matters. While judicial authority serves as an essential mechanism for constitutional protection, excessive judicial participation in political matters operates to diminish parliamentary power while creating confusion about which governmental branch should operate between executive and legislative domains (Qamar, & Roofi, 2025).

When political actors rely on courts to settle disputes, policymaking becomes reactive and unstable because judicial rulings have the power to reverse or postpone decisions. This behavior leads politicians to treat the judicial system as a weapon against their rivals instead of using parliamentary discussions to reach agreements which results in increased political division and military conflict between institutions. Judicialization of politics functions as a mechanism which creates political instability in Pakistan because it diminishes public confidence in elected officials while governance shifts from democratic agreement to legal disputes.

Institutionalization of Corruption in Pakistan

Corruption becomes institutionalized when political and bureaucratic systems adopt corrupt practices as their standard operating procedures instead of treating them as exceptional offenses committed by individual wrongdoers. In Pakistan, public offices serve as starting points for corrupt practices which involve awarding contracts to loyalists and embezzling public funds and accepting bribes for regulatory approvals. The practices of an organization become permanent parts of its operational methods because civil servants expect kickbacks and politicians depend on patronage networks for power and officials use their authority to assist friends (Ali, 2020).

Systematic corruption has transformed into an expected function of power because it now constitutes a required element in running governmental operations. Loyalty-based promotion systems have replaced merit-based hiring practices which permit organizations to treat financial oversight processes as optional while anticorruption agencies and auditing bodies face crippling defection from their original purpose. The process of normalization leads to two consequences when people lose trust in public institutions while government operations become less effective which enables officials to commit more abuses. Corruption which has become institutionalized in Pakistan leads to political instability and policy

deadlocks and economic inefficiency which create severe obstacles for both governance and democratic development (Rehman et al., 2025).

Conclusion

Corruption remains a major threat to Pakistan's political stability because it damages democratic institutions and makes government systems less effective. The qualitative research demonstrates that ongoing corruption in political and administrative structures leads citizens to lose faith in governmental institutions and their leaders. Government officials who take bribes and misuse their power and steal public funds create a system that fails to maintain transparent and responsible governmental operations. The political system demonstrates its decline through citizen disillusionment which leads to political unrest and public protests and decreases voter turnout. The described conditions create negative results which disrupt political system stability and hinder democratic processes in the country.

Pakistan needs to implement full institutional reform systems which will effectively eliminate corruption from its government operations. The first step requires creating independent accountability bodies which will verify public procurement systems while establishing clear legal rules to punish corrupt activities. Civil society organizations together with media outlets and judiciary systems play a vital role through which they hold political leaders responsible while they establish a system of integrity for government operations. Public awareness campaigns together with civic education programs enable citizens to demand transparency while they actively participate in democratic processes. The existence of informed citizens protects political systems from corruption because their awareness makes it harder for corrupt practices to exist.

Recommendations

Strengthening Accountability Institutions

The study recommends an independence and effectiveness enhancement for accountability institutions. Corruption investigation bodies require complete political independence so they can maintain both their unbiased status and their investigative credibility. The timing of corruption case resolutions will benefit from better coordination with the Supreme Court of Pakistan. The political system will recover public trust through accountable processes which maintain fairness and transparency, which create the base for political stability throughout time.

Electoral Reforms and Transparency

The democratic process needs electoral reforms to decrease corruption while improving its legitimate status. The Election Commission of Pakistan should receive additional powers to conduct campaign finance monitoring which will stop vote buying and enable them to enforce electoral laws with full authority. Transparent and credible elections will strengthen democratic institutions and reduce political instability caused by disputed results and allegations of rigging.

Judicial Efficiency and Rule of Law

Judicial efficiency needs improvement because it serves as the main method for fighting corruption. The judicial system experiences operational delays which help corrupt activities to continue without punishment. The reform process must establish special courts for corruption cases, reduce case backlogs, and implement uniform law enforcement. The judicial system establishes law enforcement through its existence which helps to maintain political order in the country.

Institutional and Bureaucratic Reforms

Corruption emerges from weak administrative systems which allow officials to conduct their activities without proper oversight. The bureaucratic system needs complete reform through three essential changes which include merit-based recruitment and performance evaluation systems and decreased political involvement. Digital governance systems should be implemented because they will decrease human decision-making power while making government operations more transparent. Improved institutional frameworks will produce better governance results while decreasing corruption levels.

Political Party Reforms

Political parties function as the main entities which control how governments operate so they need to establish internal systems which will combat corruption. The Pakistan Muslim League (N) and Pakistan People's Party and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf must establish internal democracy systems which control their funding sources and hold their leaders answerable for their actions. Political parties should decrease patronage systems while promoting merit-based systems because this will enhance democratic values and lead to better political stability.

Promoting Transparency through E-Governance

E-governance implementation will decrease corruption rates because it boosts transparency levels within public administration systems. The development of digital systems which handle taxation and procurement and service delivery will create barriers against bribery and unauthorized power usage. The government will achieve better accountability through open data access and transparent budgeting processes which will also boost public trust in governance systems.

Civil-Military Balance and Constitutional Supremacy

A stable political system needs to establish a definite division of power which separates civilian functions from military operations. The Pakistan Army must operate within constitutional limits which the Constitution of Pakistan has established. Political stability will improve through stronger civilian institutions which will maintain constitutional authority throughout political life.

Public Awareness and Civic Engagement

Public knowledge about how corruption harms society must increase because it serves as the foundation for permanent societal transformation. Citizens can use civic education programs and media freedom and civil society organization support to hold their government accountable. When people stay informed and take action, they become a strong force which stops corrupt activities while building up democratic systems.

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