

Corruption Norms, Public Awareness, and the Fight Against Corruption in Bangladesh

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Abstract: Corruption and anti-corruption norms have received global attention from academics and policymakers. Many formal and informal anti-corruption strategies have been adopted to fight corruption. All those initiatives have not yet succeeded in eradicating corruption, though. This study examines how the efforts to promote strong anti-corruption norms and civic awareness in Bangladesh are influenced by international anti-corruption standards. Evidence from studies suggests that strong anti-corruption norms can be established by energizing public awareness through government effectiveness, widespread awareness, activism, and the rule of law. The study suggests that effective anti-corruption norms, such as moral or ethical considerations and consciousness among its citizens, can strengthen anti-corruption movements. The anti-corruption efforts could be achieved by the public involvement and awareness about its malpractice.

1. Introduction

Corruption is a complicated phenomenon. It is deeply ingrained in governmental and administrative systems, as well as in specific national circumstances. It affects development in a variety of ways. Every area of government continues to struggle with the problem of corruption on a global scale. Lohaus (2019) claims that corruption has long been acknowledged as a problem in governance. However, given the rapid adoption of anti-corruption treaties, it would seem that there is a global and regional consensus against corruption. A closer look reveals that a standard or social corruption norm and behavior change can be the anti-corruption movement's driving force. International cooperation can reduce or mitigate corruption in many ways. To combat corruption, no international organization had, however, adopted a binding agreement prior to the middle of the 1990s (Lohaus, 2019). International organisations influenced nations to negotiate and draft anti-corruption laws after the 1990s and to create a global anti-corruption norm. Anti-corruption norms strongly emphasise the need for domestic corruption laws when international organisations draft and adopt agreements to combat corruption. The United Nations agreements against corruption created broader scope and more or less obligation to the country depending on the issue. In terms of overall legalization, anti-corruption agreements paint an ambiguous picture. The campaign against corruption and building strong norms against the acceptance of corruption has received academic attention. The development of national laws and corruption are both impacted directly by corruption norms and practices (Lohaus, 2019). Corrupt conduct undermines moral obligations. When dealing with public officials, corruption is thought to be inevitable. According to a comparative survey, terrorism, unemployment, and poverty have all been outperformed by corruption in terms of severity (Holmes, 2015). Since the 1990s, many initiatives against corruption have taken place at global, regional, and national levels. Since its

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adoption in 2003, the United Nations Convention against Corruption has been ratified by more than 170 nations. In an effort to increase public awareness of corruption, the UN Assembly also named December 9 as World Anti-Corruption Day.

Bangladesh has made incredible progress in income, growth, and other aspects of human development. The income per person increased by \$2,824 in 2021–2022. It was \$2,591 in 2020–21. Despite these successes, corruption is one of the most significant challenges in Bangladesh that impedes economic and social development. Bangladesh has battled corruption for 50 years since gaining independence and has worked to instil a culture of anti-corruption among its citizens. Bangladesh has introduced several anti-corruption measures, laws, and policies, yet corruption is still prevalent. International treaties, obligations, and global anti-corruption norms have influenced Bangladesh's anti-corruption campaign. Maintaining good governance is always a top priority for global actors and development partners. International involvement and norms have shaped Bangladesh's institutional and social responses to corruption. Bangladeshi citizens offer bribes and gifts to obtain even a small government or private service. Bangladeshis are expected to pay bribes for every service, including doctor's appointments, school admission, birth certificates, passport issuance and renewals, land registration, and the issuance of driving licenses. Studies (Biswas & Rahman, 2018; Aminuzzaman & Khair, 2014; Anup, 2013) have found that the lack of strong anti-corruption norms among the populace, the lack of political and administrative accountability, abuse of power and position, and embezzlement of public funds are sad realities of Bangladesh. According to Transparency International's 2021 Corruption Perceptions Index report, Bangladesh is the 147th least corrupt country out of 180 (TI, 2021). Corruption also prevents resources from being appropriately allocated. According to Aminuzzaman and Khair (2014) and Iftekharuzzaman (2017), a lack of political will and a culture of denial are two significant obstacles to an accountable government.

The evolution of corruption norms and how they have aided in the fight against corruption are the topics of this article. This study first discusses the adoption, implementation, and anti-corruption campaign of Bangladesh's anti-corruption laws. It looks at Bangladesh's institutional and legal efforts to combat corruption to determine if a nation could create common anti-corruption standards. If people realize that corruption is unacceptable, the battle against it might become more effective. It is crucial to understand how corruption norms affect authorities and citizens and provide insight into the fight against corruption.

2. Define the Terms "Corruption" and "Corruption Norm."

Corruption

The Latin word "corrupt" (from which the English word "corruption" is derived) means to destroy, spoil, or contaminate (Nicholls et al., 2006). Corruption is seen as immoral, evil, theft, or abuse of power in Western democracies. Corruption has no universally recognized definition. According to many sources (including Lambsdorff, Taube, & Schramm, 2004; Rose Ackerman, 1999), corruption is the abuse of public authority for personal gain. Corruption can take many different forms. Corrupt practices include bribery, extortion, rent-seeking behaviour, cronyism, patronage, nepotism, embezzlement, graft, and participation in illegal businesses. Identifying the various

corruption manifestations and exposing this criminal activity is challenging (Ryvkin, & Serra, 2012). Bribery, gifts, and token payments are at the centre of public perceptions of corruption. However, corruption may cover a range of actions connected to criminal activity and other types of misconduct. Bribery and the exchange of gifts are considered illegal business practices by the international anti-corruption standards (Kim & Sharman, 2014). Researchers have noted that corruption can be social, cultural, or political (Olivier, 1999).

Corruption is more than just breaking the law or engaging in immoral behaviour. Many societies are affected by corruption on a cultural level. However, many Asian cultures frequently view gift-giving, patronage, and nepotism as acceptable behaviours (Singh, 2021). They view giving gifts as customary practice and cultural norms rather than as evidence of corruption (Zhang, 2018). Additionally, lavish gifts or tips are given in return for debt or a promised favour (Singh, 2021). By giving gifts, the giver creates an obligation for the recipient to act in the recipient's best interests and fulfill their obligations to the public or private official (Olivier, 1999). In Bangladesh, corruption has ingrained itself into everyday life. To obtain routine services, citizens must pay bribes, gifts, or tips. Public education regarding corruption is essential to promote the idea that it is a crime (Wibowo, 2017).

According to Funaki and Glencorse (2014), corruption is a deviation from the norm that hinders development. The conflicting interests, standards, and values that give corruption its significance make it a contentious and unresolved concept (Johnston, 2012). Therefore, it is believed that corruption contributes to the breakdown of the norm. Blundo and Olivier (2006) argue that corruption is a moral concept that varies in conception across cultures. Corruption can be classified as both public and private. Public corruption is defined as the direct or indirect promise of or provision of an unfair advantage to a public official. Private corruption is the act of promising or giving a private-sector individual an improper advantage. A global focus on corruption began to emerge after it was previously seen as a national or country-specific problem (Galtung, 2000). According to Windsor and Getz (1999), corruption is a problem that affects everyone, not just those in developed nations.

Corruption norms

Norms are accepted notions of what behaviour is necessary, acceptable, or unacceptable in particular societies (Ostrom, 2000). Norms combine the macro and micro perspectives in corruption research. Society as a whole has norms, and these norms frequently shape how people behave both individually and in groups. Researchers claim that public officials' corrupt behaviour deviates from what is typically seen. The relationship between corruption and norm is ambiguous. According to Fisman and Miguel (2007) and Rose-Ackerman (1999), social norms affect corruption. However, some researchers contend that there are complications in the relationship between corruption and norms (Kapoor & Ravi, 2012). Norms and corruption are linked in game theory. According to game theory, each individual weighs the advantages and disadvantages of any circumstance before taking any action to maximize utility and minimize disadvantages. A public official, therefore, weighs the likelihood of getting caught against the enjoyment of the money offered to him and acts accordingly. Rose-Ackerman (1978), who contends

that public officials commit corruption because they think the benefits outweigh the costs, supports this theory.

Norms are usually uncoded and are not always clear-cut or internally consistent. Norms are essential for consideration in any attempt to change social behaviour (Ocheje, 2017). A norm is a pattern of behaviour that people conform to on the condition that they believe most people in their reference network conform to it (Bicchieri, 2017). Social norms dictate how individuals engage and expect others to engage in corruption. Therefore, norms constitute the social environment of corruption. There are many ways of changing norms. However, legislative intervention appears to be the most preferred method among the countries of the developing world. The norm against corruption in global politics is relatively new. This new global norm arose in the mid-1990s when the problem of corruption became entangled in post-Cold War international policy debates surrounding economic and political globalization (Kubbe & Engelbert, 2018). Norms can be defined as behavior patterns that are self-enforcing. When considering the interaction between social norms and minor crimes such as theft, bribery, and gifting, one should understand how the patterns of behavior arise and function, which agents are conforming, and how this norm is sustained (Douhou, Magnus, Soest, 2012).

Bendor and Swistak (2001) state social norms are behavioural guidelines that are supported by penalties. They argue that norms are developed through repetitive games. Better social norms endure while worse ones disappear. Corruption can take the place of unfair laws and government officials who do not ensure that all citizens have access to services equally. For instance, in developing nations, corruption may benefit everyone because it can improve how well the economy runs (Flatters & Macleod, 1995). At first, refusing to give or take a bribe was a deviation, but as more and more people adopted it, it slowly started to become the standard (Huntington, 1968). It becomes normal or more rational to become corrupted and give bribes. Due to the scarcity of resources, people believed that stealing from the state was normal.

3. Corruption norms: The Theoretical Foundation

Corruption norm refers to an understanding in which citizens' internal governance encourages them to oppose corrupt practices and illegal deals and enforce covert codes, norms, and reciprocity rules. Bangladeshi society is surrounded by deep-rooted patriarchal, cultural, and religious norms. Traditional public behaviour tends to be influenced by the clash between morality and legality. Corruption finds space where traditional values prevent its citizens from confronting corrupt officials and practices. Corruption is a normal and traditional practice in many societies. Due to cultural differences or deficiencies, the impact of corruption affects people differently. In all cultures, corrupt practices are literally unacceptable. (Lang, 2021). According to Rosenbaum, Billinger, and Stieglitz (2013), social normlessness has long contributed to corruption. One of the main factors holding back global development is corruption. Recent studies have shown that the issue is in an unfavourable equilibrium and depends significantly on how other people see the situation for it to persist (Mishra, 2006; Fisman & Golden, 2017). However, despite global legal and policy initiatives, corruption levels remain high and pervasive. Strong anti-corruption norms among its citizens can have a positive impact. Citizens' awareness and anti-corruption norms influence many countries to confront corruption by reporting suspected cases (Gong & Xiao, 2017). Gong and Xiao

(2017) contend that a good indicator of a population's tolerance for corruption is how they react when they witness suspected corrupt behaviour. The creation of anti-corruption among its citizens can influence combating corruption. If corruption is unacceptable to citizens, they would be more likely to report suspected corruption cases. People's willingness to confront corruption is also affected by the extent they are satisfied with and confident in the government's anti-corruption endeavours (Gong & Xiao, 2017).

According to the prevailing theory in the literature on corruption, the presence of corruption is a sign that there are no moral standards, social norms, or trust (Rose-Ackerman, 1999). Numerous studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of priming such norms in influencing people's behavior and attitudes in ways consistent with the perceived prevailing norms (Cialdini et al., 1990). Researchers and policymakers focused on bottom-up reforms intended to strengthen social norms for combating corruption because of the relationship between social norms and values and corruption (Barr & Serra, 2010). Effective anti-corruption information campaigns have been launched by developing nations to educate the public about the problem of corruption (Peiffer, 2020). However, these initiatives have also been met with very little success. These studies demonstrate the potential of social norms as tools for fighting corruption. In high-corruption environments, it can be difficult to use descriptive norms to change attitudes and behavior because people are already aware of how pervasive corruption is (Eurobarometer, 2017). Many people generally condemn corrupt behavior, according to studies (Agerberg, 2021; Fisman & Golden, 2017) that looked at how corruption norms may influence perceptions of others' corrupt attitudes. Instead of making people believe that "they have to pay bribes to get everyday service," corruption norms can lead them to believe that a corrupt system is unjust.

According to Hoffman and Patel (2017), it makes a big difference whether people believe that corruption persists because other people accept and justify it, or whether they believe that other people are sincere potential allies who are caught up in a corrupt system. If perceptions are at the core of corruption's persistence, it is crucial to consider how much they can be influenced. Anti-corruption information campaigns frequently aim to change attitudes and beliefs by bringing attention to the negative consequences of corruption. In many developing countries, anti-corruption billboards, leaflets, posters, art, news articles, and web campaigns convey the message that bribery, nepotism, and fraud are destroying society from within (Agerberg, 2021). However, the outcomes of these campaigns have been inconsistent or even shown to be counterproductive (Denisova-Schmidt et al., 2016; Peiffer, 2020; Peiffer & Alvarez, 2016).

Anti-corruption laws are fundamental to the anti-corruption system. In the case of long-lasting disruptions of legislative measures, the anti-corruption system needs to be people-oriented and supportive. The framing of corruption influences the initiation, resolution, and approval of legislative anti-corruption measures. In the process, the research has revealed that personal and moral framing of corruption results in lower levels of engagement with anti-corruption legislation. Politics should benefit from these insights. A strong framework can establish a connection to core societal values. Legislative changes can be achieved through anti-corruption measures and people's participation in anti-corruption norms.

Strong anti-corruption movements are not just a matter of combating specific forms of irregularities but also require a systematic political transformation (Johnston, 2012). In the mid-1990s, Transparency International played a crucial role in sparking a global anti-corruption norm (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998). Global advocacy networks raise voices for global civil society on anti-corruption matters. International donor agencies also provide support for the localization of anti-corruption movements. Bangladesh has focused on legislative and structural actions against its anti-corruption policies. Research data reveals that isolated legislation-based anti-corruption policies have failed from country to country (Zmolnig, 2017). Therefore, this paper aims to frame anti-corruption policies that should be intensified, particularly the involvement of political decisions and public awareness against all forms of bottom-up to top-level corruption. Individual or grassroots level acceptance of corruption could seed more significant public corruption.

4. Corruption Norms, Public Perception and Behavioural Change in Bangladesh

Bangladeshi culture has a higher prevalence of corruption than Western culture. People in society were significantly influenced by corrupt culture, whether intentionally or unintentionally. Due to socio-cultural practices and norms, corruption can become a part of a country's culture. Paying bribes, gifts, or tips to influence someone in a position of power or in a government office is not necessarily illegal in Bangladeshi culture. Eradicating the culture of corruption in Bangladesh requires much more than what is currently being done (Anup, 2013). While corruption is a serious problem in Bangladesh, citizens strongly condemn any corrupt practices of politicians and government and non-government officials. According to a study report, 94% of respondents believe that accepting a bribe can never be justified (Agerberg, 2021).

The anti-corruption laws have gone through significant shifts in recent times. Several pieces of legislation have been enacted and implemented. The existent legislations are corruption against public officials. In addition to that, significant amendments have been made to the existing legislation. By ratifying international conventions, the government has shown a great level of commitment to fighting corruption and a keenness to join hands with counterparts from other jurisdictions to tackle issues of corruption.

Bangladesh has signed and ratified the United Nations Convention against Corruption in 2007 and the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime in 2011. Bangladesh introduces Vision 2021 and Goal 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals is to combat corruption. In the last decade, a number of other laws have been formulated to tackle particular forms of corruption.

The Anti-Corruption Commission Act 2004 was enacted to establish an independent Anti-corruption Commission. The primary objectives of the ACC are to prevent corruption and other corrupt practices, as well as to research and look into other particular offenses (UNEP, 2022). The Commission has the power to request any information from the government or from any other government authority in order to facilitate the investigation. There was widespread public criticism about the way the ACC body started functioning. The ACC is empowered to conduct inquiries and investigations into crimes involving corruption.

Anti-corruption has emerged as a global agenda, and more than 180 states have signed at least one international anti-corruption treaty (Lohaus, 2016). These treaties and

conventions require state parties to adopt consistent territorial policies. Long-lasting discussions about numerous sub-elements put forth by various actors resulted in the clusters of anti-corruption norms that the UN eventually adopted. Since the topic of anti-corruption first appeared on the international agenda, it has changed and developed. Numerous anti-corruption norms, such as those against money laundering, human rights violations, bribery, and poor governance, have emerged in international and regional politics (Kurer, 2015).

Since corrupt behavior is considered bad or evil, it is against the rules for anyone to defend it (Bukovansky, 2002) publicly. One recent instance of Sri Lanka's widespread public protests resulted in the expulsion of high-level corrupt politicians who were found to be corrupt. The President of Sri Lanka was forced to resign and leave the country after protesters gathered outside his home (The Daily Star, 2022). Another example is after a series of scandals in Brazil that forced politicians to resign. Protests during the Arab Spring were significantly motivated by corruption, too (Baumann, 2016).

Numerous informational campaigns against corruption are already being carried out in Bangladesh. The international convention against corruption has been signed and ratified by the nation. The nation also passed a number of laws, but they have not been effectively implemented or enforced (Aminuzzaman & Khair 2014). Studies have shown that, despite the existence of a legal framework, laws are not consistently implemented and enforced, and a culture of noncompliance is frequently present (Aminuzzaman and Khair 2014). Khan (2017) notes that Bangladesh has made good progress on different indicators of economic and social growth since the 1980s. However, governance and anti-corruption scores are the worst (Khan, 2017). Bangladesh has taken systematic anti-corruption strategies with a primary focus on intervention through the promotion of transparency (Khan, 2017). Research scholarship suggests alternative anti-corruption strategies should be implemented to raise awareness against corruption among citizens (Khan, 2017). In that case, accelerating citizen accountability through socio-cultural norms and behaviour change may work.

Agerberg (2021) shows that by influencing corruption norms, people's attitudes toward corruption can change significantly. Corruption is seen as a basic part of Mexican culture. People used to pay bribes for everyday services. While the existent formal legal framework failed to eradicate corruption, people's behaviour changed through influencing corruption norms. After controlled behavior research on social norms, people refuse to give bribes for the same services and show a lower willingness to bribe (Agerberg, 2021). This research outcome provides insights into constructing corruption norms as a social phenomenon and positively raising public awareness against corruption. Legal provisions alone cannot fight corruption. Mass awareness is essential in some cases.

Khan (2017) stated that Bangladesh already has the vast majority of formal complaint laws in place. The main problem, according to Khan (2017), is the informal processes and power relationships that prevent these laws from being applied. 2021 saw the 50th anniversary of Bangladesh's independence. The country has prioritized fighting corruption in all of these strategic policy processes, which include Vision 2021, the 7th Five Year Plan, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). For instance, goal 5 of Vision 2021, a political manifesto from the Awami League, states that the government aspires to fight corruption for sustainable development (Palash 2018).

According to Business Anti-Corruption Portal (2018) attempted corruption, extortion, bribery, money laundering, and the use of public resources or secret government information for personal gain are all crimes. All of these crimes are subject to punishment under the Penal Code, the Prevention of Corruption Act, the Code of Criminal Procedure, and the Money Laundering Prevention Act (Hosain, 2018).

The development of anti-corruption interventions based on social norms and behavioral change strategies can be guided by corruption norms (Basaran et al., 2019). Social norms that can both prevent people from acting corruptly and normalize or accept corruption (Basaran et al., 2019). According to research, social norms have contributed to bribery (the giving of gifts, money, or tips) in many nations, and interventions to alter citizens' behavior have prevented them from exchanging gifts (Basaran et al., 2019). Normative-based research has found that norms are significant in behavioural intentions and behaviour. By intervening on behavioral intentions, it is possible to change the propensity to accept corruption in everyday life and corrupt behavior. People can protest allegedly deeply ingrained corrupt practices in every area of their lives if they are aware of them and motivated to alter their behavior. For instance, it is now difficult to obtain birth certificates from city corporations without paying bribes. If a number of citizens from various parts of the nation decide to come forward as whistle blowers and alter their accepting mindset, the fight against corruption will advance significantly.

This essay argues that anti-corruption standards have a significant impact on political decision-making. In this situation, conscious perception against corrupt behaviour requires political decisions and actions. Singer (2011) contends that policymakers won't see much justification for changing the law if corruption is framed personally. According to him, if corruption is framed structurally, political actors will have the opportunity to learn about the specific mechanisms that underlie corruption (Singer, 2011). Lack of transparency and regulations can risk the entire legislative measures (Zmolnig, 2017). In Bangladesh, those who are liable to control corruption, for instance, the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC), are ineffective and politically influenced (Iftekharuzzaman, 2020). Iftekharuzzaman (2020) claims that some ACC officials are corrupt and that the organization lacks the courage to carry out the institutional and legal authority placed in its hands. If Bangladesh had been able to achieve higher standards of governance and successfully combat corruption, which is estimated to cost at least two to three per cent of GDP, both its commendable performance in growth and its socioeconomic transformation would have been much better.

5. Conclusion

A unified front must be used to combat corruption, according to international anti-corruption norms. Many international treaties and conventions have been ratified and signed, obliging states to take action in accordance with domestic laws. Despite the existence of anti-corruption policies and strategies, many countries have had little success in the fight against corruption. According to academic research, emphasizing injunctive anti-corruption norms may be a workable strategy for influencing public opinion against the acceptance of corruption. The findings of this study are consistent with the idea that anti-corruption norms have an impact on people's perceptions and behavior. In the event that corruption is a social or cultural norm, policymakers should be aware of the elements that influence social dynamics against corruption. It is crucial to take corruption as a

critical problem and a crime rather than an inevitable one. If most people reject corruption morally, they can create scope to convict corrupted politicians or administrators. When someone blows the whistle on corruption, most people become pessimistic. Any type of corruption could be located with success if people were aware and positive in their actions. Worldwide observers are being alerted by the numerous anti-corrupt politician demonstrations in Sri Lanka.

The public's participation and awareness are essential in order to address the corruption problem; individual institutional or legislative initiatives alone will not be sufficient. The social dimension of corruption must be considered by researchers and practitioners when developing anti-corruption initiatives and messaging strategies. Bangladesh has launched a number of anti-corruption campaigns to inform its people and anti-corruption authorities. More emphasis should be placed on increasing target group awareness, taking into account current social norms, and relying on motivating factors in anti-corruption initiatives.

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