



How to cite this article:

Saber Aman, H., Ashrafi, A., & Darvishpour, H. (2027). Evaluation of the Policymaking System and Institutions for Combating Administrative Corruption in Afghanistan during the Republican Period (2004–2021). *Journal of Historical Research, Law and Policy*, 5(6), 1-17. <https://doi.org/10.61838/jhrp.383>



Article history:
Original Research

Dates:

Submission Date: 08 April 2026
Revision Date: 07 July 2026
Acceptance Date: 14 July 2026
First Publication Date: 30 July 2026
Final Publication Date: 01 November 2027

Evaluation of the Policymaking System and Institutions for Combating Administrative Corruption in Afghanistan during the Republican Period (2004–2021)

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ABSTRACT

Administrative corruption was one of the most significant governance challenges in Afghanistan during the Republican period (2004–2021), with far-reaching effects on political legitimacy, state efficiency, and public trust. In response to this challenge, the Afghan government, with the support of the international community, established a set of laws, strategies, and specialized anti-corruption institutions. The present study was conducted with the aim of evaluating the policies and institutions for combating administrative corruption during the Republican period. The research method was descriptive-analytical, and the data were collected through the review of legal documents, national strategies, official reports, and scholarly sources. The theoretical framework of the study is based on the integration of institutionalism, good governance theory, public choice theory, the public policy cycle, and a justice-oriented approach. The findings indicate that although the Afghan government made considerable progress in the areas of legislation, the establishment of specialized institutions, and the acceptance of international commitments, these measures failed to lead to a sustainable reduction in corruption. Examination of the policy cycle shows that the most significant weakness emerged at the stages of policy implementation and oversight. Furthermore, the weakness of formal institutions, the influence of informal power networks, conflicts of interest and rent-seeking, limited transparency and accountability, dependence on foreign aid, and the gap between policymaking and implementation were among the most important factors contributing to the relative failure of anti-corruption policies. The results of the study indicate that the success of anti-corruption policies depends, more than on the enactment of new laws, on strengthening institutional capacity, ensuring the independence of oversight and judicial institutions, reducing the influence of informal power networks, and establishing effective mechanisms of accountability and transparency.

Keywords: administrative corruption, anti-corruption, public policymaking, anti-corruption institutions, good governance, Afghanistan, Republican period.

Introduction

Administrative corruption is considered one of the most important obstacles to the realization of good governance, political development, and state efficiency in developing countries. This phenomenon not only leads to the waste of public resources and a decline in the quality of public services, but also weakens citizens' trust in governmental institutions, political legitimacy, and the capacity of the state to implement public policies. Therefore,



combating corruption has become one of the main priorities of governments and international organizations in recent decades, and many countries have attempted to reduce the scope and effects of this phenomenon through legal reforms, the establishment of specialized institutions, and the formulation of national strategies (1).

After the fall of the Taliban regime and the formation of the Islamic Republic system in 2004, Afghanistan also made the fight against administrative corruption one of the main pillars of state-building programs and administrative reforms. Within the framework of the Constitution, national development documents, and international commitments, the Afghan government formulated and implemented a set of policies and programs to combat corruption. The enactment of laws related to corruption offenses, the establishment of specialized institutions such as the High Office of Oversight and Anti-Corruption and the Supreme Audit Office, the formulation of the National Anti-Corruption Strategy, and accession to the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) were among the most important measures taken by the government in this field (2).

Despite these efforts, administrative corruption remained one of the most important structural challenges of the Afghan state during the Republican period. Reports by national and international institutions indicate that there was a significant gap between the declared objectives of anti-corruption policies and their practical outcomes. Although many reform programs produced progress at the level of laws and policy documents, they faced numerous obstacles at the stages of implementation and institutionalization and failed to lead to a sustainable reduction in corruption (3). This situation indicates that the main problem was not merely the absence of anti-corruption laws or institutions; rather, the manner in which these policies and institutions were designed, implemented, and performed was of fundamental importance.

The study of anti-corruption policies in Afghanistan is important because, during the two decades of the Republican period, the country experienced one of the most extensive programs of institutional and governance reform with the support of the international community. During this period, considerable financial resources were allocated to reforming the administrative system, enhancing transparency, strengthening accountability, and establishing oversight institutions; however, the achievements resulting from these measures were not commensurate with the level of investment and existing expectations. Therefore, examining the causes of the relative failure of anti-corruption policies can have theoretical and practical significance for understanding the challenges of state-building, governance, and institutional reform in Afghanistan and other fragile states (3).

In the scholarly literature, combating corruption is not limited merely to the enactment of criminal laws or the establishment of oversight institutions; rather, it is regarded as a public policymaking process that includes the stages of formulation, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. The success of this process depends on several factors, including institutional capacity, quality of governance, incentive structures, the independence of oversight institutions, and the degree of governmental accountability. Therefore, the analysis of anti-corruption policies requires a multidimensional approach capable of explaining both institutional dimensions and political and executive factors.

Accordingly, the present study, using an integrated theoretical framework consisting of institutionalism, good governance theory, public choice theory, the public policy cycle model, and a justice-oriented approach, evaluates the policymaking system and institutions for combating administrative corruption in Afghanistan during the Republican period (2004–2021). Institutionalism emphasizes the role of formal and informal institutions in the success or failure of anti-corruption policies; good governance theory focuses on indicators such as transparency, accountability, and the rule of law; public choice theory explains the behavior of political and administrative actors

within the framework of individual interests and conflicts of interest; and the public policy cycle model makes it possible to analyze the different stages of policymaking from formulation to evaluation. The justice-oriented approach also considers the consequences of anti-corruption policies from the perspective of equality, public trust, and political legitimacy.

The main research question is: To what extent were the policies and institutions for combating administrative corruption in Afghanistan successful during the Republican period, and what were the most important factors limiting their effectiveness? In response to this question, the present article first explains the theoretical framework of the study, then examines the legal and policy framework for combating corruption and the institutions responsible in this field, and subsequently analyzes the causes of the relative failure of anti-corruption policies by evaluating the different stages of policymaking. The findings of the study show that the weakness of formal institutions, the influence of informal power networks, political conflicts of interest, limited accountability, and the gap between policy and implementation were the most important factors affecting the relative failure of the anti-corruption system in Afghanistan.

The Theoretical Framework of the Study

Examining the policies and institutions for combating administrative corruption in Afghanistan requires the use of a theoretical framework capable of explaining the different dimensions of this phenomenon. Since corruption and the fight against it are not merely legal or administrative issues, but rather take shape through the interaction of institutional structures, the quality of governance, the behavior of political actors, and the policymaking process, this study employs an integrated theoretical framework consisting of institutionalism, good governance theory, public choice theory, the public policy cycle model, and a justice-oriented approach. This framework makes it possible to analyze formal structures, actors' behavior, the quality of policy implementation, and their social consequences simultaneously.

Institutionalism

Institutionalism is one of the most important approaches for explaining state performance and public policies. According to this perspective, the behavior of individuals and organizations is influenced by the formal and informal rules governing society, and the effectiveness of public policies depends on the quality of existing institutions (4). Within this framework, corruption expands when formal institutions are weak and informal rules dominate administrative and political processes (4).

The application of this theory to Afghanistan shows that despite the enactment of numerous laws and the establishment of various anti-corruption institutions, weak executive capacity, the political dependence of institutions, and the influence of informal power networks caused formal rules to lack the necessary effectiveness. As a result, many anti-corruption institutions were unable to play an effective role in changing corruption-generating behaviors, and the gap between law and implementation persisted (2).

Based on this theory, the success of anti-corruption policies depends on strengthening institutional independence, increasing executive capacity, and institutionalizing formal rules within the country's administrative structure.

Good Governance Theory

Good governance theory is one of the most important analytical frameworks for evaluating anti-corruption policies. According to this approach, good governance is based on principles such as the rule of law, transparency, accountability, public participation, effectiveness, and responsibility (1). From this perspective, corruption is not merely an individual violation, but rather a symptom of weakness in governance mechanisms.

In Afghanistan, after 2004, numerous reforms were carried out with the aim of strengthening good governance, and various institutions were established to enhance transparency and accountability. However, weak oversight, lack of transparency in many government contracts, selective enforcement of laws, and limited accountability of officials prevented governance indicators from achieving sustainable improvement (5).

From the perspective of this theory, the success of anti-corruption policies can be measured by evaluating the extent to which the principles of transparency, accountability, and the rule of law are realized in the performance of governmental institutions.

Public Choice Theory

Public choice theory uses economic logic to analyze the behavior of political and administrative actors. This theory assumes that government agents, like other individuals, seek to maximize their own interests and, in the absence of effective oversight and accountability, may use administrative positions to obtain personal benefits (6).

According to this perspective, corruption expands when the benefits derived from corrupt behavior exceed its potential costs. In Afghanistan, the concentration of power, weak effective oversight, the limited probability of punishment, and extensive opportunities for rent-seeking strengthened the incentives necessary for the emergence of corruption (7).

This theory shows in the analysis of anti-corruption policies that the mere creation of new laws and institutions is not sufficient; rather, the incentive structure must be designed in such a way that the cost of committing corruption increases and the benefits of law-abiding behavior are strengthened.

The Public Policy Cycle

The public policy cycle model is one of the best-known models for analyzing public policies, examining the policymaking process in the stages of problem identification, policy formulation, decision-making, implementation, and evaluation (8). This model makes it possible to identify the strengths and weaknesses of policies at each stage of the policymaking process.

The application of this model in the present study is particularly important because a major part of the challenges of combating corruption in Afghanistan became evident not at the stage of policy formulation, but at the stages of implementation and evaluation. Although numerous documents, laws, and strategies were formulated to combat corruption, weak institutional coordination, limited executive capacity, and ineffective oversight mechanisms prevented the full realization of policy objectives (3).

Therefore, the public policy cycle model is an appropriate tool for evaluating the performance of anti-corruption institutions and identifying the factors behind the failure or success of adopted policies.

The Justice-Oriented Approach

The justice-oriented approach, especially inspired by John Rawls's theory of justice, emphasizes the social and ethical effects of public policies. According to this perspective, political and administrative institutions possess legitimacy when they make opportunities, resources, and public services available to citizens fairly and prevent discrimination (9).

Administrative corruption weakens social justice by creating inequality in access to resources, opportunities, and public services, and it leads to a decline in public trust in the state. In Afghanistan, too, one of the important consequences of corruption was citizens' sense of discrimination, deprivation, and distrust toward governmental institutions (2).

Based on this approach, the success of anti-corruption policies is not measured only by the reduction of corruption, but also by their impact on the realization of justice, equality of opportunity, and the enhancement of public trust.

The Integrated Model of the Study

By integrating the five approaches discussed above, this study presents an analytical model for evaluating anti-corruption policies and institutions in Afghanistan. In this model, institutionalism examines the capacity and independence of institutions; good governance evaluates the quality of governance; public choice analyzes the incentives and interests of actors; the public policy cycle evaluates the different stages of policymaking; and the justice-oriented approach examines the social and legitimacy-related consequences of policies. The combination of these dimensions makes it possible to provide a comprehensive analysis of the extent of success or failure of anti-corruption policies and institutions during Afghanistan's Republican period.

The Legal and Policy Framework for Combating Corruption

After the formation of the new political system in Afghanistan in 2004, combating administrative corruption became one of the main priorities of the government, civil society, and international institutions. The spread of corruption in government agencies and its impact on political legitimacy, economic development, and public trust pushed the government toward formulating a set of laws, strategies, and anti-corruption programs. In this regard, the legal and policy framework for combating corruption was based on three main pillars: national laws, national anti-corruption strategies, and international commitments. Examination of this framework shows that although considerable progress was made in legislation and policymaking, there was a significant gap between the formulation of regulations and their effective implementation (2).

National Anti-Corruption Laws

During the Republican period, the Afghan government formulated and enacted a set of laws and regulations for the prevention, detection, and punishment of administrative corruption. The Anti-Corruption Law, the Law on the Supreme Audit Office, the Law on the Declaration and Registration of Assets of Government Officials, the Procurement Law, and some related provisions in Afghanistan's Penal Code were among the most important legal instruments in this field (2).

The main objective of these laws was to create legal mechanisms for enhancing transparency, strengthening accountability, preventing the abuse of administrative authority, and increasing oversight of the performance of government institutions. Within the theoretical framework of institutionalism, the enactment of these laws represented the government's effort to strengthen formal rules and limit the influence of informal relations in the administrative system. However, weak executive capacity, limited resources, and political interventions prevented many of these regulations from being fully implemented, and some of the anticipated objectives were not achieved (5).

From the perspective of good governance as well, although the enacted laws paid attention to principles such as transparency, accountability, and the rule of law, weakness in law enforcement and selective handling of corruption cases reduced the effectiveness of this legal framework. For this reason, the gap between law and practice remained one of the most important challenges of Afghanistan's anti-corruption system.

The National Anti-Corruption Strategy

Alongside laws, the Afghan government formulated the National Anti-Corruption Strategy to coordinate anti-corruption measures and determine executive objectives and priorities. This strategy was designed to create a coherent approach to combating corruption, improve coordination among responsible institutions, increase transparency, and strengthen public trust (3).

This document emphasized reforming the administrative system, strengthening the rule of law, increasing the accountability of governmental institutions, expanding public oversight, and enhancing the capacity of anti-corruption institutions. From the perspective of the public policy cycle, the National Strategy was the government's most important policy document at the stage of formulating and directing anti-corruption programs.

Nevertheless, evaluation of the strategy's performance shows that many of the defined objectives faced serious obstacles at the implementation stage. Overlapping responsibilities among the responsible institutions, insufficient executive capacity, weakness in the performance evaluation system, and resistance from some influential groups caused a considerable portion of the anticipated programs to fail to achieve the expected outcomes (3).

From the perspective of public choice theory as well, part of the failure of this strategy can be attributed to conflicts of interest between reform objectives and the interests of some political actors. Under such conditions, the implementation of some programs encountered resistance, and anti-corruption reforms were unable to generate the expected structural changes.

Afghanistan's International Commitments

Combating corruption in Afghanistan was not only a domestic issue, but also part of the state's commitments to the international community. After 2004, Afghanistan joined a set of agreements, cooperation programs, and international anti-corruption initiatives and committed itself to aligning its laws and institutions with global standards (3).

These commitments played an important role in shaping legal and administrative reforms and provided the basis for the establishment of new anti-corruption institutions and the formulation of national policies. In addition, many financial aid packages and development programs of the international community were tied to the government's progress in the field of anti-corruption.

Nevertheless, from the perspective of institutionalism, the transfer of international rules and standards into domestic structures was not always successful. Weak executive institutions, limited administrative capacity, and the persistence of informal power networks prevented many international commitments from being fully institutionalized. As a result, some of the measures taken became largely symbolic and had a limited effect on the real reduction of corruption (3).

From the perspective of good governance as well, although international commitments helped develop legal and policy frameworks, weak domestic accountability and limited public oversight caused the practical results of these commitments to fall below expectations.

The United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC)

The United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) is the most important international instrument for combating corruption, and Afghanistan acceded to it. This convention obliges states to take necessary measures in the areas of corruption prevention, criminalization of corrupt conduct, international cooperation, extradition of offenders, and recovery of assets derived from corruption (2).

Afghanistan's accession to this convention was a turning point in the development of the legal framework for combating corruption, and many subsequent legal and institutional reforms were inspired by UNCAC requirements. The establishment of specialized anti-corruption institutions, the formulation of national strategies, and the reform of some criminal laws were among the measures influenced by this convention.

However, the examination of Afghanistan's experience shows that the effective implementation of UNCAC requirements faced numerous challenges. From the perspective of institutionalism, the weak capacity of executive and judicial institutions prevented the full realization of the convention's objectives. From the perspective of public choice theory as well, resistance by some influential groups against structural reforms caused some commitments to be implemented in a limited and selective manner. Furthermore, weak accountability mechanisms and limited public oversight caused the convention's practical effects on reducing corruption to be less than anticipated.

Anti-Corruption Institutions in Afghanistan

One of the most important components of the anti-corruption system during Afghanistan's Republican period was the establishment and development of specialized institutions responsible for preventing, detecting, prosecuting, and adjudicating administrative corruption offenses. To implement domestic and international commitments and respond to public demands, the Afghan government created a set of executive, oversight, and judicial institutions within the anti-corruption governance structure. Despite the quantitative expansion of these institutions, evaluation of their performance shows that institutional weakness, overlapping mandates, limited resources, and political interventions seriously challenged their effectiveness (5).

From the perspective of institutionalism, the mere creation of new institutions is not sufficient for the success of anti-corruption policies; rather, institutional independence, legal authority, and executive capacity are decisive. Afghanistan's experience showed that although many anti-corruption institutions enjoyed legal backing, in practice they faced structural and political limitations and were unable to fully achieve the anticipated objectives.

The High Office of Oversight and Anti-Corruption

The High Office of Oversight and Anti-Corruption was one of the most important specialized anti-corruption institutions during the Republican period. It was established with the aim of coordinating anti-corruption activities, preventing administrative corruption, monitoring the implementation of related policies, and following up on national and international commitments. This institution played a central role in formulating national anti-corruption strategies and preparing performance evaluation reports on government agencies (2).

From the perspective of institutionalism, the establishment of this office was an attempt to strengthen formal rules and institutionalize anti-corruption efforts within the country's administrative structure. However, limited executive authority, administrative dependence on the power structure, and the absence of effective enforcement guarantees caused this institution to function more as a coordinating and advisory body than as an independent and powerful anti-corruption institution.

Within the framework of good governance, this office was expected to provide the basis for improving administrative integrity by increasing transparency, oversight, and accountability; however, limited access to information, weak cooperation by some executive agencies, and the absence of binding mechanisms reduced its effectiveness. Furthermore, from the perspective of public choice theory, political pressures and conflicts of interest in some cases made the pursuit of cases related to grand corruption difficult.

Overall, the performance of the High Office of Oversight and Anti-Corruption showed that the success of anti-corruption institutions requires institutional independence, sufficient executive authority, and sustained political support.

The Supreme Audit Office

The Supreme Audit Office, as the highest financial oversight institution of the Afghan government, was responsible for auditing, examining the use of the public budget, evaluating the financial performance of government agencies, and identifying financial violations. The new Law on the Supreme Audit Office emphasized financial transparency, administrative accountability, and the protection of public resources (3).

From the perspective of institutionalism, this office was one of the most important formal mechanisms for monitoring the government's financial performance and played an important role in detecting violations and issuing audit reports. However, limited access to some information, insufficient cooperation by executive institutions, and the dependence of the implementation of audit findings on other institutions limited its effectiveness (3).

Within the framework of good governance, the Supreme Audit Office was one of the main instruments for realizing financial transparency and accountability. Despite the publication of numerous audit reports, the absence of necessary enforcement guarantees for implementing audit findings and weak follow-up on violations reduced the deterrent role of this institution.

From the perspective of public choice theory as well, when audit findings conflicted with the interests of some political and administrative actors, the implementation of this office's recommendations faced challenges. Therefore, although the Supreme Audit Office achieved some success in detecting and reporting violations, its impact on the sustainable reduction of corruption remained limited.

The Attorney General's Office

The Attorney General's Office of Afghanistan, as the most important prosecutorial institution, was responsible for reviewing, investigating, and prosecuting cases related to administrative corruption. Within the framework of criminal laws and anti-corruption regulations, this institution played a key role in transferring cases from the detection stage to judicial proceedings (2).

From the perspective of institutionalism, the effectiveness of the Attorney General's Office depended on judicial independence, specialized capacity, and immunity from political interference. However, various reports show that weak institutional independence and insufficient expertise in some areas of financial crimes reduced the efficiency of this institution (3).

Within the framework of good governance, the Attorney General's Office was expected to guarantee impartial enforcement of the law and accountability for administrative violations. Despite the establishment of special anti-corruption units, the handling of some major cases faced delays or political obstacles, which reduced public trust in the criminal justice system.

From the perspective of public choice theory as well, the political cost of pursuing cases involving influential individuals caused anti-corruption enforcement in some cases to be selective. This situation was one of the factors weakening the deterrent effect of the judicial system against administrative corruption.

Specialized Anti-Corruption Courts

In order to increase the speed and specialization of adjudicating corruption crimes, the Afghan government established specialized anti-corruption courts. The main objective of these courts was specialized adjudication of corruption cases, reduction of delays in judicial proceedings, and improvement of the efficiency of the judicial system (3).

From the perspective of institutionalism, the establishment of specialized courts reflected the government's effort to strengthen the institutional capacity of the judiciary in combating corruption. In some cases, these courts were able to accelerate the adjudication process and increase judges' specialization in the area of financial crimes.

However, limited resources, a shortage of specialized judges, weak coordination with investigative institutions, and political interventions were among the factors that affected the performance of these courts. From the perspective of good governance, judicial independence and equal enforcement of the law were among the most important indicators of the success of these institutions; however, in practice, unequal treatment of some cases reduced public trust in the anti-corruption justice system.

Within the framework of the justice-oriented approach as well, when citizens felt that the law was not applied equally to all individuals, the legitimacy of judicial institutions and the effectiveness of anti-corruption policies declined.

Other Oversight Institutions

In addition to the specialized institutions mentioned above, a set of governmental and nongovernmental institutions also played a role in the process of combating corruption. The Civil Service and Administrative Reform Commission, the Ministry of Finance, the National Procurement Commission, civil society institutions, the media, and some international organizations were among the influential actors in this field (2).

The Civil Service and Administrative Reform Commission worked to promote meritocracy and reform the recruitment system, attempting to reduce the grounds for corruption in government human resources. The Ministry of Finance and the National Procurement Commission also played important roles in financial control, oversight of government contracts, and increasing financial transparency.

Alongside formal institutions, the media and civil society organizations also played a complementary role in the anti-corruption system by exposing corruption cases, demanding accountability, and increasing public awareness. However, limited access to information, political pressures, and weak coordination among different institutions prevented the full use of these actors' capacities.

Evaluation of the Implementation of Anti-Corruption Policies

The evaluation of policies for combating administrative corruption in Afghanistan shows that although the government took significant measures during the Republican period in the areas of legislation, establishment of specialized institutions, and formulation of national strategies, the practical results of these measures remained significantly distant from the anticipated objectives. Analysis of this situation based on the public policy cycle model shows that the relative failure of anti-corruption policies was not limited only to the implementation stage, but was also accompanied by numerous challenges at the stages of formulation, monitoring, and evaluation. Moreover, institutional, political, and executive factors were intertwined in influencing the effectiveness of anti-corruption policies and prevented the full realization of reform objectives (3).

The Policy Formulation Stage

The policy formulation stage can be considered one of the relatively successful points of Afghanistan's anti-corruption system. With the cooperation of international institutions, the government formulated a set of laws, strategies, and executive programs to combat corruption. The National Anti-Corruption Strategy, reform of criminal laws, enactment of regulations related to financial transparency, and establishment of specialized anti-corruption institutions were among the most important measures at this stage (3).

From the perspective of good governance, many of the formulated policies emphasized principles such as transparency, accountability, the rule of law, and public participation. In addition, Afghanistan's accession to international conventions caused a significant portion of global anti-corruption standards to be reflected in the country's policy documents.

Nevertheless, from the perspective of institutionalism, one of the weaknesses of the formulation stage was the extensive dependence of policies on external models and limited attention to Afghanistan's institutional and social realities. Many policy documents were prepared with the support of international institutions, and in some cases, the country's executive capacity and structural limitations were not sufficiently considered in their design (2).

Within the framework of public choice theory as well, some of the formulated policies conflicted with the interests of certain political and administrative actors. This issue created the grounds for resistance to the implementation of some reforms from the design stage itself and reduced their likelihood of success.

The Implementation Stage

The implementation stage was the most important weakness of Afghanistan's anti-corruption system. Although relatively appropriate laws and strategies had been formulated, transferring these policies into practice was

accompanied by numerous difficulties. The institutions responsible for implementation, including the High Office of Oversight and Anti-Corruption, the Supreme Audit Office, the Attorney General's Office, and specialized courts, faced limited resources, weak coordination, and political interventions (3).

From the perspective of institutionalism, the gap between formal rules and informal rules was the most important obstacle to the effective implementation of anti-corruption policies. While laws emphasized transparency and accountability, informal power networks, ethnic relations, political considerations, and personal ties often dominated executive processes. As a result, the uniform and impartial enforcement of laws was not possible.

Within the framework of public choice theory, the incentive structure of the administrative system also made policy implementation difficult. Under conditions in which the probability of detecting and punishing corruption was limited and some officials enjoyed political protection, the necessary incentive to change corrupt behavior did not emerge. On the other hand, the political cost of dealing with some grand corruption cases caused the enforcement of laws in certain cases to be selective (7).

From the perspective of good governance as well, weak administrative transparency, limited access to information, the inefficiency of the oversight system, and the lack of accountability of some institutions caused many anticipated programs at the implementation stage not to be fully successful.

The Monitoring and Evaluation Stage

Monitoring and evaluation are fundamental pillars of the success of public policies. In Afghanistan, several mechanisms had been envisaged for monitoring the implementation of anti-corruption policies. The Supreme Audit Office, the High Office of Oversight and Anti-Corruption, international institutions, and some civil society organizations played roles in this field (3).

Nevertheless, the evaluation of anti-corruption policy performance faced serious limitations. Many evaluations were descriptive in nature and focused less on the actual measurement of policy results and consequences. In addition, the absence of precise performance evaluation indicators, weak databases, and limited access to reliable data reduced the quality of the evaluation process (3).

From the perspective of good governance, effective accountability requires an independent and transparent evaluation system. In Afghanistan, however, a major part of evaluations was conducted by external institutions, and domestic accountability mechanisms did not possess sufficient efficiency. This situation caused evaluation findings to lead less often to policy reform and improvement in institutional performance.

Within the framework of the public policy cycle, the weak connection between evaluation results and policy reform was one of the most important weaknesses of the anti-corruption system, such that many problems identified in different periods continued to recur.

Institutional Challenges

Institutional challenges were among the most important factors limiting the success of anti-corruption policies in Afghanistan. According to institutionalism, the effectiveness of policies depends on the efficiency of formal institutions. In Afghanistan, weak administrative capacity, shortage of specialized human resources, limited financial resources, and the dependence of some institutions on political structures reduced their executive capacity (5).

In addition, overlapping responsibilities and conflicting mandates among different anti-corruption institutions created coordination problems. In some cases, several institutions had similar responsibilities, but there was no

clear mechanism for dividing tasks and exchanging information among them. This issue led to the waste of resources and reduced the effectiveness of anti-corruption measures.

Another important factor was the gap between formal institutions and informal power networks. Many important decisions were made outside formal mechanisms, and this limited the capacity of legal institutions to exercise authority and implement policies.

Political Challenges

Political factors played a decisive role in the success or failure of anti-corruption policies. Within the framework of public choice theory, political actors usually act according to their own interests, and if anti-corruption reforms threaten their interests, the likelihood of resistance to these reforms increases (6).

In Afghanistan, part of the power structure was formed on the basis of political and ethnic coalitions and informal networks. Under such conditions, some government positions had become instruments for distributing political privileges, and confronting corruption at high levels of power was accompanied by political considerations (10).

Moreover, the government's severe dependence on foreign aid produced a form of dual accountability; in many cases, accountability to international institutions became more important than accountability to citizens. This situation weakened the necessary incentive for deep and sustainable reforms.

From a justice-oriented perspective as well, unequal handling of corruption cases and selective enforcement of laws spread a sense of discrimination and injustice in society and reduced public trust in anti-corruption policies.

Executive Challenges

In addition to institutional and political problems, a set of executive challenges also prevented the success of anti-corruption policies. Shortage of financial resources, weakness of administrative infrastructure, limited oversight technologies, and shortage of specialized human resources were among the most important executive problems (2).

Another important challenge was the absence of a comprehensive anti-corruption information and data management system. Many institutions lacked integrated databases, and information exchange among them took place slowly. This issue made the detection, pursuit, and adjudication of corruption cases difficult.

Furthermore, inadequate staff training, frequent managerial changes, and the absence of long-term planning reduced the executive capacity of responsible agencies. In some cases, the implementation of anti-corruption programs depended on particular individuals or managers, and with their replacement, the process of implementing policies was disrupted.

Analysis of the Causes of the Relative Failure of Anti-Corruption Policies

An examination of the performance of the anti-corruption system during the Republican period shows that despite the enactment of numerous laws, the establishment of specialized institutions, and the formulation of national strategies, the success of anti-corruption policies was below the expected level. International indicators, reports by oversight institutions, and evaluations of government agencies' performance show that administrative corruption remained one of the most important governance challenges in Afghanistan. Analysis of this situation within the integrated theoretical framework of the study shows that the relative failure of anti-corruption policies resulted from

a set of institutional, political, and executive factors that simultaneously affected the policymaking process and policy implementation.

Weakness of Formal Institutions

From the perspective of institutionalism, the most important obstacle to the success of anti-corruption policies in Afghanistan was the weakness of formal institutions. Although the government created numerous institutions to combat corruption during the Republican years, many of these institutions lacked the necessary independence, organizational stability, and executive capacity. Limited financial resources, shortage of specialized human resources, frequent managerial changes, and structural dependence on political power centers reduced the operational capacity of these institutions (5).

The weakness of formal institutions caused anti-corruption laws and regulations not to be fully implemented, and many oversight mechanisms lacked the necessary effectiveness. In addition, overlapping responsibilities among some institutions and the absence of a clear division of labor reduced coordination and increased administrative inefficiency. Under such conditions, the institutional capacity required for the effective implementation of anti-corruption policies did not take shape, and a major part of reform programs remained at the level of documents and regulations.

The Influence of Informal Power Networks

Another important factor in the failure of anti-corruption policies was the extensive influence of informal power networks within the state structure. Within the framework of institutionalism, when informal rules dominate formal rules, the effectiveness of legal institutions declines. In Afghanistan, ethnic relations, political ties, personal networks, and traditional power structures often had a decisive effect on administrative processes and formal decision-making (11).

The influence of these networks caused some decisions to be made outside formal mechanisms and the enforcement of laws to be accompanied by political and group considerations. As a result, the institutions responsible for combating corruption faced limitations in handling some cases, and the principle of equal enforcement of the law was weakened.

From the perspective of good governance, the rule of law is realized when all individuals and groups are subject to legal rules without exception. However, the existence of informal power networks caused personal and political relations in many cases to take priority over legal standards, thereby reducing the effectiveness of anti-corruption policies.

Conflicts of Interest and Rent-Seeking

Public choice theory is one of the most appropriate frameworks for explaining the failure of anti-corruption policies in Afghanistan. According to this theory, political and administrative actors, like other individuals, seek to maximize their own interests and, in the absence of effective oversight mechanisms, may use administrative positions to obtain personal benefits (6).

During the Republican period, part of the country's political and administrative structure was based on the distribution of privileges and political coalitions. Under such conditions, some government positions became

instruments for distributing resources and rents, and anti-corruption reforms encountered resistance from groups whose interests lay in the continuation of the status quo (10).

Conflicts of interest in decision-making, selective enforcement of laws, and support for some influential individuals or groups were among the most important manifestations of this situation. This issue not only reduced the effectiveness of anti-corruption policies, but also kept the cost of committing corruption low and weakened the incentive required to reform corrupt behaviors.

Weak Accountability and Transparency

One of the fundamental principles of good governance is the existence of an effective system of accountability and transparency. Examination of the performance of government institutions in Afghanistan shows that the weakness of these two components played an important role in the failure of anti-corruption policies. Although numerous laws were enacted during the Republican years in the fields of financial transparency, access to information, and administrative oversight, the practical implementation of these regulations faced serious challenges (2).

In many cases, information related to government contracts, recruitment, and the allocation of public resources was not fully accessible to citizens and oversight institutions. In addition, accountability mechanisms for administrative violations lacked sufficient effectiveness, and the pursuit of many cases faced delays or various obstacles.

From the perspective of good governance, the absence of transparency and accountability creates the conditions for the expansion of corruption and the decline of public trust. In Afghanistan, too, the weakness of these indicators caused citizens to doubt the effectiveness of anti-corruption policies and reduced the legitimacy of the institutions responsible for combating corruption.

Dependence on Foreign Aid

The extensive dependence of the Afghan government on international aid was another factor affecting the relative failure of anti-corruption policies. A significant portion of reform programs, the budgets of anti-corruption institutions, and even some oversight mechanisms were funded with the direct support of the international community (3).

This dependence had several consequences. First, some anti-corruption policies and strategies were designed to respond to the requirements and expectations of international institutions, and not necessarily on the basis of domestic needs and capacities. Second, the continuation of many programs depended on the continuation of external support, and if such support decreased, the executive capacity of the relevant institutions also declined.

From the perspective of institutionalism, sustainable reforms are successful when they become institutionalized within domestic structures. In Afghanistan, however, excessive dependence on external resources prevented the formation of sustainable domestic capacities and turned some reforms into projects dependent on international aid.

Moreover, the multiplicity of financial channels and weak oversight of some foreign-funded projects themselves created new opportunities for corruption and affected the effectiveness of anti-corruption policies (3).

The Gap between Policy and Implementation

The most important cause of the failure of anti-corruption policies can be observed in the gap between policy formulation and implementation. According to the public policy cycle model, the success of a policy does not depend only on the quality of its design; rather, the manner of implementation and evaluation is also of fundamental importance (8).

In Afghanistan, many anti-corruption laws, strategies, and programs were relatively comprehensive in content and aligned with international standards, but at the implementation stage they faced numerous obstacles. Weak administrative capacity, limited resources, resistance from power networks, lack of institutional coordination, and weak oversight prevented the anticipated objectives from being achieved in many cases (3).

This gap between policy and implementation caused policy achievements to remain mostly at the level of documents and reports, with limited effects on the actual performance of government agencies. In other words, the main problem of Afghanistan's anti-corruption system was not the shortage of laws or institutions, but the inability to implement existing policies effectively.

Conclusion

The present study was conducted with the aim of evaluating the policymaking system and institutions for combating administrative corruption in Afghanistan during the Republican period (2004–2021). The findings of the study showed that during this period, the Afghan government made extensive efforts to establish a legal and institutional framework for combating corruption. The enactment of laws related to administrative corruption offenses, the formulation of the National Anti-Corruption Strategy, the establishment of specialized institutions such as the High Office of Oversight and Anti-Corruption and the Supreme Audit Office, the formation of specialized anti-corruption courts, and accession to the United Nations Convention against Corruption reflected the government's official determination to confront this phenomenon.

However, examination of the performance of anti-corruption policies and institutions shows that these measures were unable to lead to a sustainable and structural reduction in administrative corruption. Analysis of the issue within the integrated theoretical framework of the study showed that the most important problem of Afghanistan's anti-corruption system was not the shortage of laws and institutions, but rather weakness in the effective implementation of policies and the institutionalization of reforms.

From the perspective of institutionalism, the weakness of formal institutions, limited administrative capacity, shortage of specialized human resources, insufficient independence of oversight and judicial institutions, and overlapping mandates reduced the executive capacity of anti-corruption policies. In contrast, the extensive influence of informal power networks and the dominance of political, ethnic, and personal relations over formal rules caused many institutional reforms to fail to achieve the expected results.

Within the framework of good governance theory, the findings show that weak transparency, limited accountability, selective enforcement of the law, and inefficient oversight mechanisms were among the most important obstacles to the success of anti-corruption policies. Although the principles of good governance were emphasized in official documents and reform programs, the gap between formal commitments and the practical performance of institutions prevented these principles from being fully realized.

Based on public choice theory as well, conflicts of interest, rent-seeking, and resistance by some political and administrative actors to reforms were among the important factors in the failure of anti-corruption policies. In many cases, anti-corruption reforms conflicted with the interests of influential groups, and this issue led to incomplete or selective implementation of some programs.

Analysis of the issue within the framework of the public policy cycle also showed that although the stage of policy formulation was relatively successful, weakness in the stages of implementation, monitoring, and evaluation reduced the effectiveness of enacted policies. In other words, the gap between policymaking and implementation was the most important factor limiting the success of the anti-corruption system in Afghanistan.

Overall, it can be concluded that the relative failure of anti-corruption policies in Afghanistan resulted from the interaction of a set of institutional, political, and executive factors. These factors operated in an intertwined manner and prevented the legal and institutional frameworks that had been created from leading to sustainable changes in the country's administrative and governance structure.

Recommendations

In light of the findings of the study, the following recommendations are offered to enhance the effectiveness of anti-corruption policies in Afghanistan and other countries with similar conditions:

1. Strengthening the independence of oversight and judicial institutions: Institutions responsible for combating corruption must enjoy sufficient administrative, financial, and operational independence so that they can perform their duties without political considerations.
2. Increasing institutional and specialized capacity: Training human resources, developing information systems, improving specialized skills, and providing the necessary resources for anti-corruption institutions are essential requirements for the success of reforms.
3. Reforming accountability and transparency mechanisms: Expanding public access to information, regularly publishing performance reports, making government contracts transparent, and strengthening citizen oversight can increase the cost of committing corruption.
4. Reducing the influence of informal power networks: Establishing a merit-based system, reforming recruitment processes, and strengthening the rule of law can reduce the role of personal, ethnic, and political relations in administrative decision-making.
5. Strengthening coordination among anti-corruption institutions: Creating joint mechanisms for information exchange, clearly defining mandates, and preventing overlapping responsibilities can increase the efficiency of the anti-corruption system.
6. Establishing an effective link between policymaking and implementation: Policies must be formulated in accordance with the country's actual capacities, and for each anti-corruption program, clear executive, monitoring, and evaluation mechanisms must be envisaged.
7. Strengthening domestic accountability alongside international commitments: Anti-corruption reforms will be sustainable when, in addition to international support, they are based on domestic needs, priorities, and capacities.
8. Paying attention to justice and public trust: Equal handling of all corruption cases, regardless of individuals' political or social status, can strengthen citizens' trust in governance institutions and increase the legitimacy of anti-corruption policies.

Acknowledgments

We would like to express our appreciation and gratitude to all those who helped us carrying out this study.

Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

All ethical principles were adhered in conducting and writing this article.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

Funding

This research was carried out independently with personal funding and without the financial support of any governmental or private institution or organization.

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