

## ETHICS, POLITICS, AND QUALITY OF POLITICAL GOVERNANCE

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### ABSTRACT

*This research explores the intricate relationship between ethics, politics, and the quality of political governance. It examines how ethical principles intersect with political actions and governance, shaping the moral landscape of decision-making processes. This study highlights both positive and negative relationships between politics and ethics, and the research emphasizes the need for both good governance and ethical governance to coexist for a democratic system to function justly. Furthermore, the paper addresses the key challenges faced by Indian politics, such as corruption and unethical practices, and provides suggestions for reform. Ultimately, this research underscores the importance of ethical leadership in fostering sustainable and inclusive political governance.*

**Keywords:** Ethics, Politics, Good Governance, Corruption, Transparency, Political Decision-Making.

### RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To examine the relationship between ethics and politics in shaping the quality of political governance in India.
- To investigate various cases where the conflict between political governance and ethics has proven to exist.
- To provide some suggestions to be followed to remove unethical practices in the political governance of the country.

### RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- How do ethics and political actions interact to influence the quality of governance in India?

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- In what ways do real-life cases highlight the conflict between politics and ethics?
- What strategies and reforms can be implemented to enhance ethical standards in political governance, ensuring fair and just political systems?

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

1. "Ethics in Governance by Copyright©2024 Author Published by: APF Command and Staff College, Kathmandu, Nepal ISSN 2616-0242

This research paper examined the need for moral leadership and governance in Nepal, highlighting the relationship between the two. The study comes to the conclusion that Nepal must deeply integrate ethical governance into its political and administrative frameworks, led by devoted ethical leadership if it is to achieve sustainable development and true prosperity.

2. Jha, R. S., Tyagi, N., Jain, V., Chaudhary, A., & Sourabh, B. (2020). Role of Ethics in Indian Politics. *Waffen-Und Kostumkunde Journal*, 9(8), 88-97.

The author of this paper has attempted to provide an explanation of ethics for politicians, along with ethical guidelines and the actual situation. In this essay, the author explains how ethics are vanishing from the lives of regular people as well as from those of politicians. Additionally, solutions to this issue have been proposed.

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3. Debnath, K., & Chatterjee, S. (2021). Introspecting the Relation between Ethics and Politics: Key Concerns and Future Ahead. *Ebong Prantik*, 8(17), 710-719.

In this research paper, the author attempts to address the central question of whether political ethics are a myth or a reality. It will also examine the ways in which the moral precepts that guide moral behaviour in general and politics in particular differ. In summary, this research supports the idea that politics and ethics are not mutually exclusive because of disparities in goals or methods; rather, their differences stem from the moral principles that underpin both.

4. Xhemajli, H. (2021). The Role of Ethics and Morality in Law: Similarities and Differences. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4011265>

This research paper discusses differences in ethics and morality while morality deals with

standards and guidelines for proper behaviour in society, ethics as a discipline focuses on what is morally good and bad as well as right and wrong. Law, as a cognitive process, governs social life through the rules that are established by a legitimate authority. This essay also discusses legal ethics and how important it is for lawyers to follow certain rules regarding behaviour and professional conduct since they are part of the legal as well as social communities.

5. Valentine, S., & Godkin, L. (2019). Moral intensity, ethical decision-making, and whistleblowing intention. *Journal of Business Research*, 98, 277-288.

This study investigates the link between moral intensity, ethical decision-making, and whistleblowing intentions among employees. It discovers that characteristics of moral intensity, particularly the seriousness of consequences and social consensus, have a major impact on ethical decision-making processes. Recognizing ethical difficulties and using ethical judgment are critical components of whistle-blower goals. The study implies that building an ethical work environment and increasing ethical sensitivity can inspire whistleblowing.

## INTRODUCTION

India is a culturally varied country. Numerous civilizations have been built upon its well-known rich legacy, high ideals, and traditions. Among all these attributes, Indian civilization's ethics are among its most significant and valuable aspects. It is the foundation of Indian society and the foundation of Indian culture.

However, ethics have degraded to the lowest level in every aspect of life today, including politics, the executive, and the judiciary, because self-interest is paramount. Morality and ethics are now seen as myths, and an ethical person is currently only a hypothetical concept. Nowadays, it is assumed that there is only one morality or ethic, which is to maximize profits through both legal and illegal means. It's widely believed that corrupt and unethical people created this world and that successful people are these people's puppets.

The root of corruption is unethical practice. It is an inescapable evil that has become more prevalent in politics. Equipped with financial might and physical strength, they engage in actions that are not only against the law but also immoral and unethical. These individuals gain respect, status, and other benefits as a result, which encourages crime and corruption. India's reputation for combating corruption has not improved as a result of these unethical actions;

according to Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index (CPI)<sup>1</sup>, the country ranks 93rd out of 180 countries in 2023, down from 94th in 2022. Corruption in politics and bureaucracy are both included. And the corruption of politicians is responsible for 75% of them. We are impoverished despite living in a wealthy nation as a result of this. This study is expected to investigate both positive and negative relationships between politics and examine the need for good governance and ethical governance in a democratic system.

### **ETHICS: MEANING**

Ethics is both the study of morality and the code of behaviour. Ethics not only establishes the guidelines for right and wrong behaviour, but it also studies how people behave. It addresses the importance of life. The focus of ethics is on the principles that influence human behaviour and establish what is considered right and wrong. They have existed to control people's behaviour since the dawn of human civilization and derive from customs. Since ethics are merely a set of customs and rules that members of society are expected to voluntarily abide by, they are not subject to legal punishment or enforcement. To put it briefly, ethics are the derivatives of decent human behaviour in society. The field of philosophy known as ethics, studies the moral principles that govern human behavior, including what constitutes good and evil intentions and deeds.

### **ETHICS IN POLITICS**

Political action and ethical considerations are usually kept apart by politics, which is a basic psychological activity. Politics is a tool for resolving social conflicts and is closely linked to power. It is a process which places a strong emphasis on preserving social cohesiveness and integration, but politicians and leaders frequently take part in actions that are inconsistent with the general moral norm of the community.

However, ethics is a field of absolute principles governed by moral imperatives. The goal of collective ethics is to determine how society should develop morally. Therefore, at first glance, the relationship between politics and ethics may appear to be contradictory and diametrically opposed.

The definition and character of politics have evolved over time. From the Ancient era, when politics was associated with maintaining a good life within a political framework, to the modern

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2023>

era, when politics is associated with the exercise of power and the ability to resist the use of that power.

There are two or more definitions for the word politics. Politics is associated with government and "what governments do" in a more limited sense. Second, politics is more broadly associated with power: despite the opposition of others, one person or a group of people can exert power over them. The second sense has been a component of social relationships such as caste, class, occupation, religion, and culture.

Despite the wide range of definitions, there is another meaning for politics, which is the authoritative decisions made to resolve conflicts between people over various social issues. Ethics and these three senses are related. The people give governments legitimacy precisely because they require the government to carry out its duties in an ethical manner. It can be challenging to decide between opposing human behaviours to determine which is right or whose moral or ethical position has a compelling case for acceptance by the majority. When it comes to ethics, everyone is correct. However, it is still unclear how one can justify using their power over another.

## **POLITICAL ETHICS**

Political Ethics is the study and practice of making moral judgments about political actions, which can be divided into two primary branches: the political ethics of process and the political ethics of policy. Both branches explore how ethical principles apply to political decisions, drawing from moral philosophy, democratic theory, and political science.

### **1. Political Ethics of Process**

This branch focuses on the methods and behaviour of public officials. Political Ethics ensures the representational and organizational roles of officials, dealing with issues like conflicts of interest, public transparency, and the ascription of responsibility in complex government organizations. Thus India's vast and complex political system often confronts ethical dilemmas related to corruption, transparency, and public accountability.

### **2. Political Ethics of Policy**

This branch often tackles the tension between different ethical values, such as partial versus impartial obligations in areas like global justice or immigration. It also addresses conflicts between different principles of justice, such as equality and liberty, and how policy decisions affect various groups, including future generations or other species (e.g., in environmental or animal rights policies). Political ethics of policy seek to balance these conflicting values while considering the unique challenges of democratic governance, where diverse views must be respected in policy-making.

## QUALITY OF GOVERNANCE

Since ancient times, the word "governance" has existed in some forms and changed to suit the needs of the times (Mahanti, 2021). People had difficulties in the beginning because there was no government and no legislation. In order to solve this, they decided to establish a society in which people lived in harmony, respected one another, and ceded some of their freedom to a higher authority, leading to the evolution of governance.

Many scholars and philosophers have attempted to define what governance means. Kautilya, in his book *Arthashastra* (321–296 BC), provided a definition of governance that includes the function of government. He defined governance as a method by which the government accomplishes its objective. The government's objectives are also to safeguard citizens' welfare, law justice, and their right to life and liberty within the state (Joshi, 2018). The exercise of power and authority to maintain accountability and advance transparency is the idea of governance. The process of making decisions and deciding whether or not to carry them out is referred to as governance. It includes the rapidly shifting political, social, and economic landscape in addition to the global setting and operational governance circumstances (Mehraj, 2020).

In modern democracies, Political governance is expected not only to deliver effective services and maintain order but also to ensure that these processes are transparent, accountable, and just. The two key frameworks that define the quality of political governance are good political governance and ethical political governance. Each brings a unique focus—one on operational efficiency and the other on moral responsibility—both of which are critical to understanding and improving the quality of political governance. These are especially relevant in the analysis of political systems like India's, where governance plays a pivotal role in balancing diverse interests, upholding democratic values, and promoting social justice.

1. Good Political Governance refers to the effective, efficient, and responsible management of a country's public affairs and resources. It is typically characterized by principles such as accountability, transparency, responsiveness, rule of law, equity and inclusiveness, participation, and consensus orientation. Good governance ensures that the needs of all citizens are met, especially the marginalized, while public institutions operate in an accountable and transparent manner, with minimal corruption. Key principles of Good Governance include:

- **Transparency:** Open decision-making processes.
- **Accountability:** Leaders and institutions are responsible for their actions.
- **Participation:** Involvement of citizens in governance.
- **Rule of Law:** Equal application of laws.
- **Effectiveness and Efficiency:** Optimal use of resources.

2. Ethical Political Governance, on the other hand, focuses on the moral and ethical dimensions of governance. It emphasizes the role of values, principles, and ethical conduct in public administration. Ethical governance requires that public officials and institutions not only follow the law but also adhere to high ethical standards such as honesty, integrity, fairness, and respect for human dignity. It goes beyond technical efficiency to consider whether actions and policies are morally right and just. Key principles of Ethical Governance include:

- **Integrity:** Upholding honesty and moral principles.
- **Fairness:** Ensuring equity in decision-making and policy enforcement.
- **Responsibility:** Acting in the public's interest and avoiding harm.
- **Respect for Human Rights:** Ensuring policies uphold individual rights and dignity.

In a diverse and populous democracy like India, the integration of good and ethical governance is crucial. India faces challenges like corruption, unequal access to justice, and the misuse of political power. Good governance mechanisms, like transparency and accountability, are needed to address these issues efficiently. At the same time, ethical governance ensures that

the needs of vulnerable communities are addressed with fairness and justice and that policies reflect the nation's ethical commitments to human rights and equality. The quality of political governance depends on both good and ethical governance. Both are necessary to create a governance system that is not only efficient and transparent but also morally sound, fostering a fair and just society. Together, they create the foundation for a political system that works for all citizens and upholds democratic values.

In politics, good and ethical governance must work in tandem to ensure quality political governance. Here's how their relationship unfolds within the political framework:

**1. Political Accountability:**

Good governance provides mechanisms to hold political leaders accountable through transparent decision-making, checks and balances, and democratic processes. Ethical governance deepens this by ensuring that political decisions are not only effective but also morally responsible. Together, they prevent corruption, cronyism, and abuses of power, contributing to a higher standard of political governance.

**2. Public Trust in Politics:**

Good governance enhances public trust through efficient service delivery and transparency. Ethical governance solidifies this trust by ensuring that political actors act with integrity, fairness, and respect for the rights of all citizens. In democracies like India, where political decisions affect diverse communities, this combined approach fosters long-term trust between citizens and political institutions.

**3. Decision-Making in Political Institutions:**

In politics, decision-making is often a balance between competing interests and limited resources. Good governance ensures that decisions are made transparently, with public input and efficient resource management. Ethical governance ensures that these decisions are morally sound, respecting the rights of all stakeholders and prioritizing justice and equality.



#### 4. **Policy Implementation and Moral Responsibility:**

Policies developed under good governance are aimed at achieving development goals, economic growth, and social stability. However, without ethical governance, policies might serve only the powerful, neglecting marginalized communities. Ethical governance ensures that policies reflect fairness, inclusivity, and respect for human rights, guiding political governance towards greater equity and social justice.

### **INSTANCES OF CONFLICT**

“In India, there are numerous real-life situations and cases that highlight the complex relationship and occasional conflict between **politics** and **ethics**. These examples showcase both positive and negative instances where ethical considerations in governance either align with or contradict political actions.

#### 1. The 2G Spectrum Scam (Negative Relationship)

Case Summary: The 2G Spectrum scam (2008) involved the allocation of telecommunications bandwidth at underpriced rates, causing a massive loss to the public exchequer. The scam led to the resignation of then-telecom minister A. Raja and triggered widespread public outrage.<sup>2</sup>

Conflict between Politics and Ethics: This case exemplifies how political corruption undermined ethical governance. Instead of ensuring transparency, fairness, and public accountability in the allocation of national resources, political actors pursued personal gain at the cost of the public good. The political motivations for favouritism conflicted directly with the ethical principle of acting in the nation's interest.

#### 2. Use of Sedition Law and UAPA (Negative Relationship)

Case Summary: The sedition law (Section 124A of the IPC) and the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) have often been used against activists, journalists, and political dissenters. Many cases involve arrests under these laws for individuals critical of the government.

Conflict: Politics and ethics have a negative relationship as a result of these laws' frequent application to quell dissent. Though these actions politically seek to uphold law and order or

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<sup>2</sup> AIR 2012 SC 3 336

quell opposition, they frequently run counter to ethical governance principles such as human rights and freedom of speech. The abuse of these laws exposes a breakdown in the moral and political obligations to uphold individual liberty in a democracy.

### 3. Aadhar and Confidentiality Concerns (Conflict):

**Summary of Case:** Launched in 2009, the Aadhar project seeks to assign a unique identification number to each and every Indian citizen. Although it makes government services easier to access, privacy rights have been raised as a possible concern.

**Conflict:** The debate centres around the conflict between political expediency (implementing Aadhar to improve welfare delivery) and ethical governance (ensuring privacy and protecting citizens' personal data). In 2018, the Supreme Court of India upheld Aadhaar's constitutionality but also mandated stricter privacy safeguards. This case demonstrates a situation where political objectives (efficiency in governance) clashed with ethical principles (citizen privacy).

### 4. The Environmental vs. Development Debate (Conflict)

**Case Summary:** Projects like the Narmada Dam or more recently, coal mining in forests (Hasdeo Arand) have sparked debates over the balance between economic development and environmental protection.

**Conflict:** This reflects a recurring ethical dilemma in politics — how to balance developmental needs with environmental sustainability and tribal rights. Political decisions often prioritize infrastructure and economic growth (to attract investment or boost GDP), but ethically, such decisions may harm ecosystems and marginalized communities. This presents a clear conflict between the pursuit of political objectives and ethical obligations to future generations and vulnerable populations.

### 5. Welfare Schemes like MGNREGA (Positive Relationship):-

**Case Summary:** The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), launched in 2005, guarantees rural households up to 100 days of wage employment. It aims to alleviate rural poverty while providing a safety net.

**Positive Relationship:** This scheme demonstrates how politics and ethics can align to serve public welfare. Politically, it responds to demands for employment in rural areas, but it also

reflects ethical governance by focusing on social justice, poverty alleviation, and dignity of labour for marginalized sections of society.

These cases illustrate how political actions in India often intersect with ethical principles, either reinforcing or challenging them. Understanding these relationships is crucial for analyzing the quality of political governance in the context of ethics and politics.”

#### **ELEMENTS CONTRIBUTING TO A RISE IN UNETHICAL POLITICS:**

- “Public ignorance is another factor that encourages political corruption. They don't come forward to provide evidence against these politicians or notify the police when they become aware of any corrupt activity. They are afraid to speak up because of their fear of political power.
- Because of the current coalition government system, the government lacks the willpower to take strong action against these politicians for fear that if it does, they will either withdraw their support or refuse to support the coalition government altogether.
- Politicians' eager desire for wealth influences them to act unethically, which promotes corruption.
- Because of all its flaws, the Indian legal system is referred to as "Lawyer's Heaven." Politicians profit from these weaknesses in the current Indian legal system and, as a result, are fearless when it comes to punishment.
- The expense of running for office is very high. Typically, it requires 2.5 to 3.0 crore, which is the result of corruption and scams. Politicians are often accused of crimes like robberies and ransomware.”

#### **SOLUTIONS TO PREVENT AND RESPOND TO UNETHICAL POLITICS:**

It is not exclusively the government's job to implement and introduce changes. Because we elected them to be our representatives, it is also our moral and ethical obligation. So, if they are mistaken, we are also mistaken in some way. Therefore, it is our duty to uphold moral principles and encourage moral behaviour. Here, the author offers some recommended actions that should be taken to get rid of corruption and unethical behaviour:

- Students need to learn ethics in the classroom from an early age. Nearly all crimes in the world are the result of normless, unethical behaviour.
- People need to learn the advantages of having the right to information. They must be aware of a candidate's criminal history before supporting them with their vote.
- Voting for the best candidate is required, and voters must understand the significance of one vote.
- The public should continue to trust the institutions of law and order, but they should also report any wrongdoing by politicians to the authorities without holding back.
- Passing of the Jan Lokpall bill is necessary to reduce corruption.”

## CONCLUSION

To conclude, a fair, open, and sustainable society must be established via ethical governance. Sustainable decision-making requires moral leadership. Leaders who put ethics first are required to be in the political system, as they balance the interests of the country and its people in the long run with short-term gains. They consider how their choices may affect a wider range of affected factors, such as the environment and local communities. Achieving sustainability and social responsibility goals—which are becoming more and more significant in the current global political environment—requires a comprehensive approach. Sustainable development and true prosperity depend on ethical governance. Therefore to ensure that governance is not only efficient but also moral, open, and reliable, ethical political leaders are essential in bridging the gap between ideal governance frameworks and their actual implementation.

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