CORRUPTION: AN INTRINSIC ELEMENT OF POWER

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to provide readers with a new perspective on corruption, arguing that it is an opponent to be fought, not a component to be accepted. It is a fundamental element that has had a presence in India from ancient times (Mauryan Empire) to appearing in various forms across different dynasties and continuing into the modern era. The article examines the nature and scale of corruption, which have evolved with changes in political and administrative systems. As its core element, the abuse of entrusted power for private gain has persisted. Through this article, the question arises whether corruption can be eliminated from the system through integrity. The answer is dependent on the perception of people, but the only message the author wants to convey is that there should be a free thinker perspective that needs to be inculcated in the citizens of a country, just like Helen Hamilton Gardner.

Keywords: Mauryan Empire, Helen Hamilton Gardener, Corruption.

HISTORY OF CORRUPTION

The history of corruption is as old as civilization as it portrays that it has no borders and no nation-state is free from corruption. Ancient and medieval history has many incidents that shows about the corruption starting from the judiciary of the first dynasty to the early modern period. Corruption has never been eliminated in any earlier historical period and it likely never will be entirely till present but the only changed thing was the forms of corruption according to the increase in population like in ancient era the society size exists in the form of city-states and there corruption type could be local bribery, medieval era society size exist was kingdoms and there the corruption type could be in form of selling church offices, colonial era the society sizes exists was empires where the corruption type could be governor's looting colonies and last but not least the modern era here the society size was nations where the corruption exists

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in the form of billion-dollar embezzlement. This shows that corruption has always increased with an increase in population. Here, the question arises that Is increase in population leads to corruption or whether discrimination based on caste, religion, sex, etc., leads to corruption in a region?

INTRODUCTION

Corruption basically means the abuse of entrusted power for private gain, encompassing acts such as bribery, embezzlement, nepotism, extortion and fraud. The term originates from the Latin corruptio, meaning "to break" or "spoil," and was first used in ancient Rome to describe falsified documents in exchange for payment.

Some bases on which the corruption can be classified are as follows:

Common sectors such as the education sector, health sector, police and law enforcement, judiciary, public works and infrastructure, etc., could be one of the broader branches of corruption. In these sectors, corruption exists in the form of bribery, favouritism, misuse of power or funds, etc., which could lead to inequality, loss of faith or anything else which can cause rebellion, resistance, protests, etc., among the citizens of a country.

Scale means that till which extent to which corruption exists in a society. For example, grand corruption includes high-level corruption by top officials, petty corruption includes small or can be said to be everyday bribes by low-level officials, and systemic corruption includes a kind which is baked into the entire system.

Methods of corruption include bribery, which means offering money or gifts for favours, embezzlement, which means stealing of public funds directly, extortion, which means forcing payment under threat, nepotism and cronyism, which means favouring family and friends, kickback, which means return payment for awarding contracts, etc.

IMPACT OF CORRUPTION ON A DEMOCRACY

Corruption exerts a corrosive and often irreversible impact on democracy, systematically dismantling its foundational elements—fair representation, accountability, the rule of law, and citizen trust—while fostering inequality, authoritarian tendencies, and social fragmentation. Far from being a mere administrative flaw, corruption transforms democratic institutions into tools for elite capture, where power serves private interests rather than the public good. This

erosion is not hypothetical; it is evidenced across global case studies, from established democracies like the United States to fragile ones in Latin America and Africa, ultimately threatening the very survival of self-governance.

At its core, corruption distorts electoral processes, the lifeblood of democracy. Vote-buying, where politicians distribute cash, goods, or jobs in exchange for ballots, undermines the principle of one person, one vote. In Brazil's 2018 elections, for instance, widespread reports of candidates handing out money during campaigns led to invalidated votes and eroded faith in outcomes. Similarly, media capture—through bribes or ownership by oligarchs—stifles diverse information, as seen in Hungary under Viktor Orbán, where aligned tycoons control over 80 per cent of outlets, enabling propaganda that sways public opinion. The result is elections that reflect financial clout rather than collective will, turning democracy into a facade of participation.

Representation suffers profoundly as corruption enables state capture and cronyism. Lobbyists and special interests bribe legislators to enact policies favouring the wealthy, sidelining the needs of ordinary citizens. In the U.S., the National Rifle Association's $50 million-plus spending has demonstrably influenced gun legislation, while in South Africa during Jacob Zuma's tenure, the Gupta family's alleged "capture" of state contracts diverted billions from public services to private pockets. Nepotism further entrenches this, with appointments based on family ties rather than merit, as exemplified by Ferdinand Marcos's regime in the Philippines, where allies received lucrative monopolies. Over time, this skews policy toward the elite, exacerbating economic inequality and alienating the masses, who perceive democracy as a rigged game.

The rule of law, democracy's guardian, crumbles under judicial and police corruption. Bribed judges deliver biased verdicts, protecting the powerful while punishing the vulnerable; Guatemala's 2019 investigations revealed that 70 per cent of judges were susceptible to influence. Police extortion, such as "protection" rackets or fabricated charges, deters civic engagement and breeds impunity. In Russia, opposition figures like Alexei Navalny exposed oligarchic networks but faced poisoned reprisals, illustrating how corruption shields authoritarian drift. Without impartial justice, laws become selective tools, eroding the equality before the law that democracy demands.

Civic space contracts as corruption induces fear and disillusionment. Citizens, wary of reprisal from corrupt enforcers, hesitate to protest or vote, leading to voter turnout drops of 10–15 per cent in high-corruption nations, according to World Bank data. This apathy fuels polarisation: stolen public funds widen wealth gaps, sparking unrest, as in the 2011 Arab Spring, where graft-fueled inequality ignited revolutions. In Venezuela, corruption in oil revenues propelled the country from a functioning democracy in the 1990s to authoritarianism, with hyperinflation and repression as hallmarks.

Public trust in institutions evaporates, creating a vicious cycle. Parliaments viewed as "for sale," police as predators, and media as mouthpieces result in trust levels below 20 per cent in corrupt states, per the Edelman Trust Barometer. This breeds populism and extremism, as disillusioned voters turn to strongmen promising anti-corruption crusades—often ironic, as figures like Orbán or Brazil's Jair Bolsonaro weaponised such rhetoric while entrenching their own networks.

In nations with low corruption, like Denmark or New Zealand, robust democracies flourish with high trust (over 60 per cent) and stable governance. Conversely, high-corruption environments, such as India or Nigeria, grapple with fragile systems prone to backsliding. The correlation is stark: higher Corruption Perceptions Index scores align with stronger democratic indices, underscoring corruption's role in democratic decay.

Ultimately, corruption does not merely impair democracy—it precipitates its death spiral: manipulated elections lead to captured laws, lost trust prompts withdrawal, and disengagement invites authoritarianism. Countering this requires synchronised reforms—independent watchdogs, transparent financing, digital oversight, and cultural shifts toward integrity. As Lord Acton warned, "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." Democracy's resilience hinges on vigilance; unchecked corruption ensures its downfall.

Steps taken by countries to curb corruption are as follows:

Phase 1: Political Will & Shock Therapy (Year 1)

Create fear in the corrupt, hope in the public.

1. Declare a National Anti-Corruption Emergency
   - The head of state publicly commits: "Corruption is treason."

- Example: Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew (1959) made it a personal mission.

2. Arrest 10–20 High-Profile "Big Fish" in 90 Days

- Target ministers, generals, CEOs—no sacred cows.
- Hong Kong (1974): Arrested police chief → public cheered.
- Georgia (2004): Fired 30,000 corrupt traffic police in one day.

3. Create an Independent Anti-Corruption Agency (ACA)

- Reports only to parliament or the public, not the president.
- Full powers: wiretap, seize assets, prosecute.
- Hong Kong ICAC: Budget = 0.5% of GDP; 1,200 staff.

Phase 2: Institutional Overhaul (Years 1–3)

Rebuild systems so corruption can't hide.

4. Digitize 100% of Government Services.

- Permits, taxes, licenses, pensions → online only.
- Estonia: 99% digital → petty bribery vanished.
- India (Aadhaar): Linked 1.3B people to biometric ID → stopped $12B in ghost payments.

5. Switch to E-Procurement & Open Budgets

- All contracts via public e-auctions (no secret deals).
- Georgia: Kickbacks fell 90% in 3 years.
- Ukraine (ProZorro): Saved $3B+ since 2016.

6. Fire & Rehire the Civil Service on Merit

- Mass layoffs of corrupt units → rehire via blind exams.
- Rwanda: Fired 76% of customs staff → revenue tripled.

Phase 3: Economic Deterrence (Years 1–5)

Make honesty pay, corruption cost

7. Triple Salaries of Judges, Police, Ministers

- But tie to performance + asset checks.
- Singapore: Ministers earn $1M+/year → zero tolerance works.

8. Mandate Annual Wealth Declarations + Lifestyle Audits

- Random checks: "How did you buy a $2M house on $50K salary?"
- Rwanda: 98% compliance; 400+ officials sacked.

9. Pay Whistleblowers 10–30% of Recovered Funds

- U.S. False Claims Act: $70B+ returned since 1986.

Phase 4: Legal Hammer (Ongoing)

Punish fast, punish hard, punish equally

10. Pass "Zero Immunity" Laws

- Presidents, MPs, and generals can be jailed in office.
- South Korea: Ex-President Park jailed for 24 years (2018).

11. Impose 7–20 Year Jail + Full Asset Seizure

- China (2012–): 1.5M officials punished → bribery down 60%.

12. Sign Global Asset Recovery Treaties

- Freeze stolen money in Swiss, UK, and U.S. banks.
- Malaysia 1MDB: $1B+ returned via UN StAR.

Phase 5: Cultural Shift (Years 2–10)

Make corruption socially unacceptable

13. Teach Anti-Corruption in Schools (Age 6+)

- "Integrity" as a core subject.
- Singapore: Every child learns "corruption = betrayal."

14. Launch Citizen Reporting Apps

- Anonymous: "I Paid a Bribe" → instant investigation.
- Uganda: 10,000+ reports → 300+ officials fired.

15. Protect Journalists & NGOs

- Fund investigative media; jail attackers.
- India (2011): Anna Hazare's movement forced the Lokpal law.

Phase 6: Technology Lock (Years 3–10)

Use AI & blockchain to block loopholes

16. Deploy AI Fraud Detection

- Flags odd payments in real time.
- Brazil: Caught $1B+ in ghost pensions.

17. Put Land, Contracts, Payments on Blockchain

- Immutable records → no fake titles or double payments.
- Dubai: Land registry 100% blockchain.

CONCLUSION

Corruption was never eliminated in earlier times because it is rooted in human incentives, power dynamics, and the limits of oversight. Societies that reduced it used extreme transparency, high salaries, and ruthless punishment—but even they admit: "Corruption is controlled, not cured." One and the only best solution for corruption is integrity, as corruption is not an inevitable curse of human society; it is a choice—one that collapses the moment integrity becomes the default setting of individuals, institutions, and nations. From ancient Egypt's bribe-ridden courts to modern offshore scandals, history confirms that corruption thrives in darkness—fed by secrecy, greed, and weak accountability. Yet the same history delivers a clear verdict: where integrity is enforced, corruption dies.

The world's cleanest societies—Singapore, Denmark, Hong Kong—did not eliminate temptation. They eliminated opportunity and impunity. They paid officials well so they *didn't need* bribes, punished the corrupt so they *couldn't dare* take them, and digitised systems so they *couldn't hide* them. They taught children that honesty is non-negotiable, protected whistleblowers who exposed rot, and built independent watchdogs with teeth sharp enough to bite the highest office. Integrity is not a moral slogan—it is a system. It is high salaries tied to performance. It is blockchain contracts that cannot be forged. It is a judge who fears the law more than the bribe-giver. It is a citizen who refuses to pay "tea money" and reports it instead. It is a leader who declares, *"If I fall, let justice fall with me."*

The data is undeniable: nations that score above 80 on Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index are not lucky—they are engineered for integrity. Their democracy's function, their economies grow, and their people trust. The rest—trapped in grand theft, petty extortion, and stolen futures—pay the price in poverty, unrest, and lost dignity. Corruption will never vanish entirely; human nature ensures that. But it can be caged. The antidote is not more laws—it is lived integrity, day after day, from the president to the passport clerk. When integrity becomes the path of least resistance, corruption becomes the path of ruin.

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