



Research Article

Exploring the Determinants and Barriers of National Integrity in the Context of Bangladesh

Md. Yeasir Arafat¹, Md. Mahbubul Alam², Nazmul Hasan Raz³, Md. Fairuj Sadaf Opee⁴, Namisa Tabassum⁵, Fahmida⁶

1. Department of Political Science, University of Rajshahi, Bangladesh; s2211143179@ru.ac.bd
2. Department of Political Science, University of Rajshahi, Bangladesh; marufshesikh792@gmail.com
3. Department of Political Science, University of Rajshahi, Bangladesh; knajmul430@gmail.com
4. Department of Political Science, University of Rajshahi, Bangladesh; opee4547@gmail.com
5. Department of Anthropology, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh; namisatabassum@gmail.com
6. Department of Bangla, Rajshahi College, Bangladesh; yfahmida189@gmail.com

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Abstract. National integrity is a core aspect of state development, stability and legitimacy. The issue of national integrity becomes especially important in countries such as Bangladesh, where democratic institutions overlap with governance challenges. The article is a qualitative inquiry into some of the key determinants and barriers of national integrity that have been compiled from a broad array of academic and institutional sources. It explores the roles of corruption, institutional trust, rule of law, governance quality, public accountability, civic virtue, and political culture, taking into account recent

determinants such as citizen engagement and integrity systems. The paper critically discusses the current discourse and assesses empirical lessons learned on how structural, behavioral, and cultural conditions influence the overall integrity at large (national) scale. By highlighting and analyzing these dynamics, this research illuminates, not just the predicaments and innovations in contemporary Bangladesh, but also wider theories concerning the dynamics of good governance and nation-building. This is the only study employing an integrated approach that combines multi-sectors without primary data to provide an inclusive and well-informed knowledge base, based on confirmed and up-to-date published literature. It fills a critical void in current literature, which has tended to isolate integrity concerns rather than seeing their interconnectedness in defining public life and institutional performance.

Keywords: National Integrity, Governance, Corruption, Institutional Trust, Public Accountability.

INTRODUCTION

National integrity is more than just how ethically the governance actors react; it also includes every exciting actor in a political system reacting morally, ethically, and in accordance with the justified laws and regulations from all sides. It serves as the moral and institutional backbone of any sovereign state, underpinning its political stability, public trust, and socio-economic advancement. In the contemporary governance discourse, it is widely acknowledged that the sustainability of democracy, justice, and development is closely linked with the degree of integrity embedded within a nation's institutions and leadership practices (Pope, 2000; Klitgaard, 1988). In the case of Bangladesh, despite notable economic progress, questions surrounding integrity remain deeply rooted in concerns over pervasive corruption, partisan politics, weak rule of law, and an underperforming public sector (Asadullah & Chakravorty, 2019; Rahman, 2019). Bangladesh's National Integrity Strategy (NIS), introduced to promote ethical governance and combat institutional decay, offers a comprehensive framework for reform. Yet, as scholars argue, its implementation faces considerable challenges due to bureaucratic inertia, political interference, and limited civic engagement (Sakib et al., 2022; Transparency International Bangladesh, 2014).

Additionally, Article: 70 of the Constitution, often criticized for limiting legislative accountability, reflects a structural tension between democratic ideals and political expediency (Arafat, 2025, April 6). The country's governance ecosystem, though equipped with formal institutions, often struggles to internalize and practice principles of transparency, accountability, and participation in meaningful ways (Ferdaus & Hossain, 2019; Baniamin, 2019). Scholars and international watchdogs alike stress that national integrity is not only a function of anti-corruption laws or punitive measures but also of cultural norms, ethical leadership, and public trust in institutions (Jamil & Baniamin, 2021; Tanny, 2022). Huther and Shah (2000) propose a framework for evaluating anti-corruption policies and programs. While a growing body of literature attempts to dissect these components in isolation, there remains a noticeable gap in holistic, context-specific analyses that integrate these diverse variables. Moreover, the political culture in Bangladesh—characterized by dynastic dominance, student factionalism, and clientelism—continues to complicate the pursuit of unified national integrity (Arafat, 2024; Arafat & Fahmida, 2025).

This qualitative study, based entirely on secondary data, seeks to address these gaps by investigating the multidimensional factors that influence national integrity in Bangladesh. Drawing on verified academic and policy sources, the research offers an integrated framework that highlights the intersection of governance quality, institutional performance, citizen trust, legal constraints, and socio-political behaviors. By illuminating these interrelated dynamics, the study aims to contribute meaningfully to the discourse on how national integrity can be understood, measured, and ultimately strengthened within a developing democracy.

METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a qualitative approach based entirely on secondary data to explore the factors influencing national integrity in Bangladesh. Rather than relying on numerical data or statistical tools, the study focuses on interpreting existing literature, policy documents, government and civil society reports, and academic articles to uncover patterns and insights related to institutional ethics, governance practices, and social dynamics. By using thematic content analysis, the study identifies recurring ideas, arguments, and gaps across a wide body of literature to understand how different factors—such as political culture, administrative accountability, and civic trust—affect the integrity framework of the nation. This method allows for a deep, contextual understanding of a complex issue without direct fieldwork, ensuring that the analysis remains grounded in documented and credible sources. The study is exploratory in nature, aiming to contribute to the existing body of knowledge by synthesizing diverse viewpoints and uncovering conceptual linkages that are often overlooked in empirical or quantitative studies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

National integrity is a core part of a country's ability to uphold public trust, enforce the rule of law, and ensure accountability in governance. In the case of Bangladesh, the issue has been explored from multiple angles, especially, focusing on corruption, weak institutions, poor service delivery, and political interference. Many scholars have examined the roots and effects of corruption. Klitgaard's (1988) classic formula—where corruption thrives in conditions of monopoly and discretion without accountability—still serves as a key reference for understanding the structural flaws in governance systems. Pope (2000) also emphasized the importance of building strong integrity systems that combine ethics, transparency, citizen oversight, and effective enforcement. In Bangladesh, however, these conditions often remain unfulfilled. Rahman (2019) argues that while Bangladesh has formal anti-corruption institutions like the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC), their practical influence is limited. Sakib (2019) adds that the ACC's preventive activities have not matched the country's specific governance context, making them less impactful. Rashid and Johara (2018) also point out that fragile institutions allow corruption to continue unchecked, especially, in public administration and service delivery. At the same time, governance problems in Bangladesh are deeply connected to its political culture. Arafat and Fahmida (2025) describe how dynastic politics (Arafat, 2025, March 2) and a lack of internal party democracy have weakened national unity and trust in

democratic processes. In a separate analysis, Arafat (2025, April 6) critiques Article 70 of the Constitution, which restricts lawmakers from voting independently in Parliament, thus limiting democratic accountability.

Nevertheless, these legal and political issues contribute to a climate where public institutions are not fully responsive to citizens. Other studies have looked at governance from a performance perspective. Asadullah and Chakravorty (2019) argue that although Bangladesh has experienced economic growth, it has not been matched by similar improvements in transparency or institutional performance. Baniamin (2019) supports this view, suggesting that poor service delivery and the politicization of bureaucracy have damaged public trust in institutions. Jamil and Baniamin (2021), comparing Bangladesh with Nepal, find that cultural values and historical experiences strongly influence institutional trust. Tanny (2022) emphasizes that principles like transparency, fairness, and accountability are essential to building trust, especially, in societies where corruption has become normalized. Taufiq (2021) further notes the importance of social accountability, stressing that engaging citizens in local governance decisions can improve oversight and reduce misuse of power. Several national and international institutions have provided further analysis. Transparency International Bangladesh, analyzing the National Integrity System of Bangladesh, focusing on different actors related in this regard (Transparency International Bangladesh, 2014), shows that corruption remains high in Bangladesh, with only limited progress made despite official strategies, however, the emerging public-private partnership can enhance service integrity hopefully (Transparency International Bangladesh, 2024). The National Integrity Strategy (NIS), which aims to improve transparency across sectors, has had mixed results. While some improvements have been noted, studies like those by Sakib, Islam, and Shishir (2022) show that implementation often suffers from a lack of coordination and local-level ownership. Research by Chakravorty (2023) focuses on elite capture and political interference, arguing that without structural reforms, no anti-corruption strategy can be fully successful. Iftekharuzzaman (2012) similarly highlights the need for a cultural shift toward ethical governance, supported by strong institutions and citizen involvement. Development institutions have also weighed in. The World Bank (2025) and OECD (2025) stress the need for clear, measurable goals in improving governance, especially through modern tools like digital transparency and performance-based management. In line with this, the Development Research Initiative (2020) offers best practices for implementing integrity programs, focusing on the good practices. Economic impacts of poor governance have also been explored. Shams and Talukder (2025) find that foreign investors are hesitant to invest in Bangladesh due to perceived corruption and institutional weaknesses. Ferdaus and Hossain (2019) add that inclusive development is not possible without stronger governance and rule of law. These findings are supported by grassroots studies like those by Hossain, Sourav, and Islam (2024), who use real-world cases to illustrate how corruption operates in daily life.

Altogether, the existing research highlights that national integrity in Bangladesh is shaped by a combination of political, legal, administrative, and cultural factors. Although many policies and strategies exist on paper, the real challenge is to

enforce them with transparency, accountability, and citizen engagement. The literature makes it clear that a long-term solution requires not only institutional reform but also a cultural shift toward democratic values and shared responsibility.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Perceptions of National Integrity

National integrity is a complex and multifaceted concept that varies significantly depending on the vantage point of different stakeholders within society. The National Integrity Strategy (NIS) of Bangladesh, of 2012, is a comprehensive framework aimed at promoting good governance and preventing corruption within state institutions, actors and society, non-state actors by emphasizing transparency, accountability, and ethical conduct. But, these are only in policies, implementation is largely vague. This part of the article explores how national integrity is understood by various groups—including civil society actors, government officials, and ordinary citizens—and discusses the implications of these differing perceptions on governance and policy in Bangladesh.

Divergent Interpretations Across Stakeholders

The concept of integrity takes on varied meanings according to the perspectives and lived experiences of stakeholders. Civil society organizations predominantly interpret national integrity as a moral and ethical commitment by the state to ensure justice, transparency, and equity. As reflected in studies by Development Research Initiative (2020), these actors emphasize that national integrity must go beyond institutional procedures to encompass moral governance and social justice. For instance, a civil society representative noted, “If justice is not equal for the rich and poor, how can we call this a country with integrity?” This highlights a normative expectation that public institutions should uphold fairness without privilege or bias. In contrast, government officials and bureaucrats tend to focus on the procedural and institutional dimensions of integrity. From their viewpoint, national integrity is manifested in the effectiveness, legality, and compliance of public institutions. While they recognize the importance of transparency and accountability, their emphasis often lies in ensuring that state mechanisms function according to established rules and regulations. This bureaucratic framing prioritizes administrative order and efficiency, sometimes at the expense of addressing deeper ethical concerns. The tension between these normative and institutional interpretations creates a disconnect in policy design and implementation. Policies grounded primarily in legalistic frameworks may neglect the moral aspirations of the population, leading to a gap between formal governance structures and public trust.

Citizens’ Perceptions: A Matter of Daily Experience

Ordinary citizens, particularly those from marginalized backgrounds, tend to view national integrity through the lens of their everyday interactions with state institutions. Their perceptions are shaped by the accessibility, fairness, and responsiveness of public services such as law enforcement, healthcare, and welfare

programs. Research from Development Research Initiative (2020) took a broader approach and made an effort to identify the external and internal environmental factors. At the same time, it attempted to analyze how these factors may influence the “change makers” in performing their responsibilities.

For many citizens, national integrity is not an abstract ideal but is measured by whether they are treated with dignity and fairness in moments of need. For example, a low-income individual denied legal support due to lack of political connections perceives the state as failing in its ethical obligations. This lived reality reflects a broader societal skepticism about institutional integrity and reinforces feelings of exclusion and disenfranchisement.

Key Determinants of National Integrity in Bangladesh

National integrity is a multifaceted and dynamic condition shaped by interrelated political, institutional, social, cultural, and economic factors. In Bangladesh, these determinants collectively influence the ethical foundation of governance and societal trust. The NIS of Bangladesh describes it as a collective role within the state and non-state actors. Understanding these drivers is crucial for identifying pathways to strengthen national cohesion and improve the quality of public administration. This section comprehensively examines the principal factors shaping national integrity in Bangladesh.

Constitutional and Legal Foundations

The Constitution of Bangladesh, enacted in 1972, serves as the cornerstone of the country’s legal and institutional framework. It guarantees fundamental rights, promotes justice, and outlines the roles and responsibilities of state institutions. In addition to the Constitution, various legal tools such as the Penal Code, the Anti-Corruption Commission Act, the Civil Service Act, the Right to Information Act, and other acts, regulations, provisions aim to ensure transparency, accountability, and rule of law. However, the effectiveness of these laws is often weakened by poor enforcement, political influence, and selective application, which collectively undermine their intended impact.

Political Will and Leadership Commitment

The prevailing political culture significantly impacts the development and sustenance of national integrity. Bangladesh’s political environment is marked by intense centralization of power within dominant political parties and influential familial networks. This centralization often fosters clientelism and patronage systems where loyalty and personal ties take precedence over merit and public interest. Political appointments, policy formulation, and resource distribution are frequently influenced by partisan objectives and personal affiliations rather than transparent, accountable governance. As a result, nepotism and favoritism undermine institutional credibility and weaken rule-of-law foundations. Political leaders frequently prioritize power retention over ethical administration, perpetuating environments conducive to corruption and impunity. Reports from Transparency International Bangladesh (2014) and Rashid and Johara (2018) reveal how political

dominance compromises institutional independence, affecting critical bodies such as the judiciary, anti-corruption agencies, and the civil service. The culture of impunity at the highest levels discourages accountability and demoralizes ethical public servants. This political climate erodes public trust and diminishes civic engagement, obstructing the formation of a shared ethical consensus critical for national integrity.

Rule of Law and Judicial Independence

An independent and impartial judiciary is crucial to maintaining justice and public trust. While the Constitution of Bangladesh recognizes judicial independence, the system faces significant challenges such as political interference, a high backlog of cases, and resource limitations. To strengthen national integrity, it is essential to improve legal certainty, enhance judicial efficiency, and protect courts from external pressures.

Effective Legislative Oversight

Parliamentary oversight is a key mechanism to hold the executive branch accountable. Although the Jatiya Sangsad (National Parliament) has formal authority to monitor government actions, weak opposition parties, limited debate, and excessive partisanship hinder its effectiveness. Revitalizing parliamentary committees and encouraging bipartisan cooperation are necessary to ensure stronger legislative control.

Public Sector Ethics and Accountability

The behavior and integrity of public officials play a crucial role in public service delivery. In Bangladesh, widespread political appointments, lack of merit-based promotion, and limited oversight contribute to corruption and inefficiency in the civil service. Strengthening codes of ethics, regular performance evaluations, and independent audit mechanisms can promote a more professional and accountable public sector.

Anti-Corruption Agencies and Regulatory Bodies

Institutions like the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) are tasked with detecting and prosecuting corruption. Despite their mandates, these agencies often face political pressure and lack operational independence. Without adequate resources, legal authority, and non-partisan leadership, such bodies cannot effectively fulfill their roles. Strengthening their independence and ensuring transparency in their functions are critical steps forward.

Free and Independent Media

A free press is vital for exposing wrongdoing and informing the public. In Bangladesh, the media landscape is vibrant but constrained by laws such as the Digital Security Act, political intimidation, and media ownership concentration. To support national integrity, it is important to safeguard journalistic freedom, protect investigative reporters, and create a legal environment that encourages responsible media practices.

Civil Society and Citizen Engagement

Civil society organizations and active citizens play an important role in promoting accountability and participatory governance. In Bangladesh, NGOs and advocacy groups have contributed to electoral monitoring and public policy debates. However, increasing regulatory restrictions and shrinking civic space threaten their effectiveness. Encouraging civic education, protecting freedom of association, and creating platforms for citizen involvement are necessary to sustain public engagement.

Access to Information

The Right to Information Act (2009) was enacted to promote transparency in government institutions. Although it established mechanisms like the Information Commission, many citizens remain unaware of their rights, and public agencies often resist information requests. Improving public awareness, simplifying access procedures, and integrating digital platforms can make information more accessible and useful to the public.

Electoral Integrity

Fair and credible elections are a foundation of democratic legitimacy. Bangladesh has faced repeated concerns over election rigging, voter intimidation, and biased election administration. A lack of public trust in the Election Commission further weakens electoral integrity. Strengthening election laws, training officials, and ensuring neutrality in election oversight are essential to restore faith in the electoral process.

Checks and Balances Between Institutions

Effective governance depends on a clear separation of powers among the executive, legislative, and judicial branches. In Bangladesh, power tends to be concentrated in the executive, and oversight institutions often suffer from politicization. Strengthening institutional autonomy, enforcing checks and balances, and clarifying the roles of different branches of government are necessary to ensure mutual accountability.

Public Awareness and Integrity Education

Cultivating a sense of civic responsibility begins with education. Citizens must understand their rights, duties, and the importance of integrity in public life. In Bangladesh, civic and moral education is not sufficiently prioritized in schools or government training programs. Expanding integrity education and promoting ethical behavior from a young age can foster a more honest society.

Transparency in Public Procurement and Finance

Public procurement is one of the most corruption-prone areas in government operations. Despite reforms like the introduction of electronic Government Procurement (e-GP), challenges such as bid-rigging, favoritism, and weak monitoring

continue. Strengthening procurement regulations, ensuring independent audits, and enhancing public financial management are vital to protect public resources.

Cultural and Social Norms

Informal social norms often influence behavior more than formal rules. In Bangladesh, cultural acceptance of gift-giving, nepotism, and favoritism can encourage corrupt practices. These norms are reinforced by informal networks and political patronage. Changing societal attitudes requires public awareness campaigns, community involvement, and the engagement of religious and local leaders. Families have to play a vital role in this regard because the foundation of integrity and morality is built in the family by the influence of other family members and the environment. Other rules, norms, institutions, organizations, social and cultural community or society based initiatives must uphold the genuine knowledge of national integrity in Bangladesh regardless of sex, race, and other aspects. The rights and equity measurements for minority, ethnic and other classes must be ensured. In Bangladesh, equity for all is a big challenge.

Whistleblower Protection Mechanisms

Whistleblowers are essential for revealing misconduct but often face retaliation. While Bangladesh has laws that provide some protection, implementation is weak. Encouraging whistleblowing through secure reporting systems, legal support, and public recognition can help uncover corruption and promote accountability.

Gender Equality and Inclusion

Inclusive governance strengthens integrity by ensuring that all voices are heard. In Bangladesh, women and marginalized groups are often excluded from decision-making roles. Addressing gender inequality and promoting inclusive policies can lead to more equitable and transparent governance structures.

International Cooperation and Standards

Global standards, such as those outlined by the United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC), influence national policies. Bangladesh's commitment to international agreements requires regular evaluation and alignment with global best practices. Collaboration with international partners can provide technical support and encourage policy reforms.

Professionalization of Law Enforcement

Police and law enforcement officials are frontline defenders of the rule of law. However, reports of misconduct, political manipulation, and lack of training weaken public confidence in policing. Ensuring merit-based recruitment, continuous training, and internal accountability systems are necessary to professionalize law enforcement. Furthermore, the NIS must be implemented efficiently and can be revised for further enhancement.

Decentralization and Local Governance

Strong local government institutions can increase responsiveness and reduce corruption at the grassroots level. In Bangladesh, local bodies often lack financial and administrative autonomy. Empowering local governments through fiscal decentralization, citizen participation, and capacity-building can promote integrity from the bottom up.

Technological and Digital Integrity Mechanisms

Digital tools can improve transparency and reduce human discretion in governance. Initiatives such as digital ID systems, online complaint portals, and e-services can increase accountability. However, digital transformation must be inclusive, secure, and citizen-friendly to avoid creating new forms of exclusion or surveillance. In Bangladesh, significant initiatives are taken to ensure technological and digital accountability mechanisms, but barriers still persist such as digital divide, lack of digital literacy and technological availability, and so on.

The determinants of national integrity in Bangladesh are complex, interdependent, and deeply embedded within the country's political, institutional, social, and cultural realities. Political culture and leadership set the tone for governance ethics, while bureaucratic accountability, corruption dynamics, and informal networks directly impact institutional performance and public trust. Education and media shape civic values and access to credible information, fostering or undermining ethical norms. Broader social cohesion, economic equity, legal frameworks, and active civil society engagement further influence the integrity landscape. Addressing these determinants demands a holistic, multi-sectoral strategy that integrates political reform, institutional capacity building, cultural change, and inclusive socio-economic development. Only through such comprehensive efforts can Bangladesh strengthen the ethical foundation of governance and nurture sustained national integrity. National integrity in Bangladesh is shaped by several recognized factors; that notwithstanding, there are more determinants that require deeper exploration and acknowledgment.

Barriers to National Integrity in Bangladesh

Despite the widespread recognition of national integrity as a cornerstone for sustainable development and democratic governance, numerous barriers hinder its realization in Bangladesh. These obstacles operate at multiple levels—structural, institutional, cultural, and social—creating a complex web of challenges that weaken ethical governance and erode public trust. Understanding these barriers is critical to designing effective reforms and fostering an environment where integrity can flourish.

Political Interference and Institutional Weakness

One of the most formidable barriers to national integrity in Bangladesh is the pervasive political interference in the functioning of key state institutions. The judiciary, anti-corruption bodies, law enforcement agencies, public service commissions, even the policymaking process frequently experience pressure from

political actors seeking to influence decisions or protect vested interests. Such interference undermines the independence and neutrality of these institutions, compromising their ability to uphold justice and enforce accountability impartially. This encroachment fosters a culture of fear and compliance within institutions, where officials are hesitant to act against powerful individuals or parties. The lack of institutional autonomy results in selective application of laws, inconsistent enforcement, and weakened deterrence against corrupt practices. Consequently, the public perceives these bodies as extensions of political power rather than defenders of fairness and rule of law. The World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI) 2024 update presents aggregated data for over 200 economies from 1996 to 2023, covering six key dimensions of governance: *Voice and Accountability*, *Political Stability and Absence of Violence/Terrorism*, *Government Effectiveness*, *Regulatory Quality*, *Rule of Law*, and *Control of Corruption* (World Bank, 2024). But, according to World Economics, Bangladesh is ranked 122nd globally, 19th in the Asia-Pacific region, and 25th among Frontier Markets for governance (Dhaka Tribune, 2023). Again, Bangladesh saw the sharpest decline in the 2024 Democracy Index by the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), falling 25 spots to 100th out of 167 (The Daily Star, 2025).

Selective Law Enforcement and Impunity

Closely related to political interference is the problem of selective law enforcement. Influential individuals and groups often enjoy immunity from prosecution, while ordinary citizens face stringent legal actions. This disparity breeds cynicism and resentment, as it signals that justice is reserved for the privileged rather than being a universal right. The culture of impunity emboldens corrupt actors and weakens deterrent effects, allowing unethical conduct to proliferate unchecked. It also undermines social cohesion, as marginalized populations lose faith in the fairness of governance and legal systems. Efforts to promote integrity are severely compromised if accountability mechanisms fail to operate equitably.

Ineffective Monitoring and Oversight Mechanisms

Robust monitoring and oversight are essential components of any integrity system. However, in Bangladesh, institutions tasked with oversight—such as audit agencies, anti-corruption commissions, and parliamentary committees—often lack sufficient capacity, independence, and resources to perform their roles effectively. These deficiencies translate into inadequate detection and investigation of corrupt or unethical behavior. Moreover, oversight bodies may themselves be subject to political influence or bureaucratic inertia, further weakening their impact. The absence of strong and credible monitoring diminishes public confidence and allows malpractices to persist with little consequence.

Public Apathy and Limited Civic Awareness

A significant barrier to strengthening national integrity lies in the realm of public engagement and awareness. Many citizens remain disengaged from governance processes due to disillusionment, skepticism, or lack of knowledge about their rights and responsibilities. This apathy limits the collective pressure necessary

to hold institutions accountable or demand reforms. Without widespread civic education and outreach, the importance of integrity may not be fully appreciated or prioritized by the populace. Consequently, corrupt or unethical behavior may be tolerated or ignored as an unavoidable aspect of daily life, perpetuating the cycle of weak accountability.

Gaps in Policy Implementation and Institutional Capacity

Although Bangladesh has adopted frameworks such as the National Integrity Strategy (NIS) aimed at combating corruption and promoting ethical governance, the implementation of these policies has been inconsistent and incomplete. Many local and regional offices lack the trained personnel, financial resources, and institutional support necessary to operationalize these strategies effectively. The disconnect between policy design and ground-level execution results in gaps where formal commitments to integrity fail to translate into tangible outcomes. Weak institutional capacity, coupled with limited oversight, allows malpractices to continue unchecked, particularly in rural or underserved areas.

Socio-Cultural Norms and Acceptance of Corruption

One of the most persistent barriers to promoting national integrity in Bangladesh is the deep-rooted acceptance of corruption within socio-cultural norms. In many parts of the country, practices such as patronage, favoritism, and informal exchanges of services are not only widespread but are often perceived as normal, or even necessary, for navigating everyday life. These behaviors, which may be intended as gestures of goodwill or survival strategies, gradually erode the foundations of transparent and accountable governance. Cultural traditions that emphasize loyalty to kinship networks, personal relationships, and reciprocal obligations can often conflict with principles of merit, impartiality, and rule-based administration. For example, securing employment, accessing public services, or resolving disputes is frequently influenced by personal connections rather than formal procedures. As a result, corruption is not always condemned; rather, it is sometimes tolerated or justified as a means to achieve fairness or compensate for systemic inefficiencies. This normalization of corruption contributes to a broader societal tolerance, where people may no longer view unethical behavior as deviant or problematic. It weakens citizens' expectations of integrity from public officials and reduces pressure for reform. Moreover, individuals who resist such informal practices often find themselves disadvantaged or excluded, reinforcing the cycle of corruption.

This societal outlook is reflected in global corruption metrics as well. A comparative view of Bangladesh's annual Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) scores and global rankings reveals a consistent struggle to break free from the lower tier of global transparency standings, data collected from the Transparency International (2024) from different years and used for illustrations.

Table 1: CPI Scores and Global Rankings of Bangladesh (2014–2024)

Year	CPI Score	Global Ranking
2014	25	145
2015	25	139
2016	26	145
2017	28	143
2018	26	149
2019	26	146
2020	26	146
2021	26	147
2022	25	147
2023	24	149
2024	23	151

Source: Developed by the Authors Based on Collected Data from TI.

Furthermore, the CPI trend over the past decade highlights a concerning pattern of stagnation and, more recently, deterioration in performance.

Figure 1: Trends in CPI Scores and Global Rankings of Bangladesh (2014–2024)



Source: Developed by the Authors Based on Collected Data from TI.

Addressing this issue requires more than legal enforcement. It demands a long-term cultural shift through education, civic engagement, and community-based initiatives that redefine integrity as a shared societal value. Encouraging ethical behavior, raising awareness about the harmful effects of corruption, and building trust in formal institutions are critical steps toward reversing the socio-cultural acceptance of corrupt practices.

Integrity on the Edge

Figure 2: Causes of Fragile Integrity System in Bangladesh



Source: Developed by the Authors.

Bangladesh's national integrity system remains weak due to a combination of institutional, political, and societal shortcomings. Legal institutions often lack the power or willingness to enforce laws effectively, undermining accountability. At the same time, social norms have gradually accepted irregularities as normal, further weakening resistance to corruption and injustice. State actors are frequently influenced by partisan interests, leading to biased governance. Non-state actors, such as media or civil society, often fail to act responsibly, displaying partisanship instead of neutrality. Meanwhile, public awareness and civic participation remain low, limiting grassroots pressure for reform. Adding to these issues, monitoring and evaluation processes are mostly superficial, failing to detect or address deeper problems. Together, these interlinked factors contribute to a fragile integrity system that struggles to uphold transparency, fairness, and justice in Bangladesh. Efforts to align national laws with international anti-corruption standards also signal Bangladesh's dedication to global governance norms. Continuous policy refinement and legislative improvements create an enabling environment for long-term integrity enhancement.

Changing such ingrained attitudes requires sustained cultural dialogue and education to shift perceptions of corruption from a tolerated norm to an unacceptable breach of public trust. Until this cultural transformation occurs, efforts to build integrity systems will face resistance and limited effectiveness. Many barriers to

national integrity in Bangladesh have been identified; conversely, there are many more that remain to be explored and understood.

Good Practices and Positive Outcomes

Despite the significant barriers impeding national integrity in Bangladesh, there are noteworthy initiatives and developments that illustrate the potential for positive change. These good practices, emerging from government reforms, civil society engagement, technological advancements, and community participation, offer valuable lessons and pathways to strengthen integrity systems. This section highlights several successful examples that demonstrate how incremental progress can be achieved even within challenging environments.

Institutional Reforms and Integrity Units

One promising development has been the establishment of different strategic and integrity committees, units within various government departments and public institutions. These committees, often staffed by committed officials, function as internal watchdogs, promoting ethical standards and monitoring compliance with rules and procedures. These committees provide a formal mechanism for whistleblowing, citizen complaints, and periodic review of departmental practices. While not yet widespread or uniformly effective, they represent an important institutional innovation that embeds integrity considerations within the organizational culture of public agencies.

Digitalization and E-Governance Initiatives

The digital transformation of public services has also contributed to reducing opportunities for corrupt practices and increasing efficiency. The government's efforts to digitalize land records, tax filings, business registrations, and various citizen services have made procedures more transparent and less prone to discretionary interference. For instance, the introduction of online portals for submitting applications and tracking service status limits face-to-face interactions, which often serve as breeding grounds for bribery or favoritism. Electronic record-keeping improves auditability and accountability, allowing both officials and citizens to verify transactions independently. These e-governance platforms foster a culture of openness and responsiveness that underpins national integrity.

Civil Society Monitoring and Advocacy

Civil society organizations (CSOs) have played an instrumental role in promoting integrity through grassroots monitoring, advocacy, and awareness campaigns. Numerous NGOs engage communities in tracking public resource utilization, service delivery quality, and government responsiveness, particularly in sectors such as health, education, and local governance. By empowering citizens to report irregularities and demand corrective actions, these programs strengthen accountability mechanisms from the bottom up. Additionally, civil society-led training sessions and workshops on ethical governance and civic responsibility contribute to building a more informed and engaged populace.

Media's Role in Exposing Corruption

Investigative journalism has been another crucial pillar supporting integrity efforts. Media outlets in Bangladesh, despite facing political pressures and ownership biases, continue to uncover cases of corruption, abuse of power, and administrative malpractice. These exposes often spark public debate, legal scrutiny, and policy reforms. Moreover, the rise of digital and social media platforms has expanded the reach of such reporting, enabling greater citizen participation and faster dissemination of information. The media's watchdog function thus acts as a deterrent against unethical behavior and fosters a culture of transparency.

Legal and Policy Framework Enhancements

Over the years, Bangladesh has strengthened its legal and policy frameworks aimed at promoting integrity and combating corruption. The National Integrity Strategy, the Anti-Corruption Commission Act, and related policies provide a comprehensive basis for systemic reforms. While enforcement remains uneven, the existence of these frameworks reflects institutional commitment to change and provides a platform for further progress.

CONCLUSION

This part of this article upholds the core insights drawn from the qualitative investigation into national integrity in Bangladesh. By analyzing diverse perceptions, institutional practices, political culture, and governance outcomes, the research has revealed both entrenched challenges and potential avenues for reform. The section concludes by summarizing key findings, offering actionable recommendations, and acknowledging the study's limitations.

Findings

1. Divergent Stakeholder Perceptions:

National integrity is interpreted differently across stakeholder groups. Civil society actors associate it with moral and ethical governance, government officials view it through an institutional lens of compliance and effectiveness, while ordinary citizens perceive it based on their day-to-day experiences with public services.

2. Political Culture and Leadership Deficits:

The dominance of personalized political power, patron-client networks, and lack of accountability mechanisms significantly weakens integrity in governance. Ethical leadership remains largely absent from both political and administrative spheres.

3. Institutional and Bureaucratic Weaknesses:

The bureaucracy suffers from political interference, lack of transparency, limited meritocracy, and risk-averse behaviour. These conditions undermine independent functioning and weaken the accountability ecosystem.

4. Erosion of Public Trust:

Citizen frustration with corruption, unequal access to services, and selective justice contributes to a growing trust deficit between the public and state institutions, particularly among marginalized groups.

5. Gaps in Civic Education and Public Awareness:

There is a notable absence of structured, value-based education that fosters ethical responsibility and civic engagement, hindering the cultivation of a culture grounded in integrity.

6. Emerging Positive Trends:

Despite structural limitations, initiatives such as digital governance, civil society activism, investigative journalism, and other aspects have shown potential in promoting transparency and accountability.

Recommendations

1. Institutionalize Ethical Leadership:

Introduce integrity-based screening and training for public officials and political leaders. Ethics must be institutionalized through leadership development programs and enforced accountability.

2. Ensure Institutional Independence:

Strengthen the autonomy and capacity of oversight bodies such as the judiciary, Anti-Corruption Commission, and Public Service Commission by insulating them from political control and ensuring legal safeguards.

3. Revamp Bureaucratic Practices:

Promote merit-based recruitment, performance evaluation, and professional development within the civil service to restore integrity and reduce political patronage.

4. Enhance Civic Education:

Integrate ethics, civic responsibility, and democratic values into national curricula across all levels. Complement this with mass awareness campaigns to engage citizens as active participants in integrity promotion.

5. Expand Digital Governance and Transparency Tools:

Accelerate the digitization of public services to reduce bureaucratic discretion, increase accessibility, and improve accountability through real-time data and service delivery monitoring.

6. Promote Participatory Governance:

Institutionalize mechanisms for citizen feedback, social audits, and public hearings to strengthen accountability and foster inclusive governance.

7. Support Civil Society and Media:

Provide legal and financial protection for civil society organizations and independent media outlets that play a watchdog role, enabling them to challenge abuses of power and raise awareness.

8. Address Inequality in Service Delivery:

Prioritize equity and inclusivity in public services, ensuring that the poorest and most vulnerable communities experience fairness and dignity in their interactions with the state. A system of equity must be established.

Limitations

This study is based solely on secondary data sources and thus may not capture the full depth of personal narratives or real-time field dynamics. The absence of primary data such as interviews or focus group discussions limits the richness of empirical insight. Moreover, while efforts were made to incorporate diverse perspectives, the findings remain constrained by the scope of existing literature, most of which is centred around urban contexts. Future studies would benefit from empirical fieldwork, regional comparisons, and longitudinal analyses to further substantiate and refine the understanding of national integrity and its barriers in Bangladesh.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

Informed Consent

This study did not involve human participants, and therefore, informed consent was not applicable.

Ethical Approval

As this research was entirely based on theoretical analysis, secondary data, and document review, no ethical approval was required in accordance with institutional guidelines.

Data Availability

The data supporting the findings and conceptual insights of this study are theoretical in nature, derived exclusively from secondary literature and existing educational research. No primary datasets were generated or analyzed. All relevant information is contained within the article. For further queries, interested readers may contact the corresponding author.

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