

Corruption as a Criminal Offense in Bangladesh: Comparative Analysis with South Asian Jurisdictions

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Abstract: This study has examined corruption in Bangladesh as a criminal offense by comparing legal and institutional enforcement with South Asian countries. The purpose is to evaluate whether existing laws and actions by the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) influence the public's perception of corruption, as reflected in the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI). Its aim is also to develop a model that links enforcement outcomes with perception indicators. The study used a secondary data-based quantitative method including time-series data from 2020 to 2024. The CPI score is the dependent variable, while ACC conviction rate, number of cases filed and number of charge sheets submitted are the independent variables. A multiple linear regression analysis was conducted using SPSS. Findings reveal that conviction rate does not significantly impact on the CPI score. However, the number of cases filed and charge sheets submitted both are showing a significant negative relationship with CPI score. This means that increased legal activity by the ACC did not improve the corruption perception. On the contrary, these indicators are associated with a declining CPI score. This could mean that more filings without effective prosecution lower public trust. The regression model had a perfect R-square value by showing strong internal fit. But the negative coefficients suggest that legal quantity does not equal legal quality. Filing many cases may raise expectations and when results are not delivered, public perception worsens. The study recommends that Bangladesh is moving beyond activity-based enforcement. Instead, it should focus on increasing successful convictions by ensuring independence of the ACC, and protecting anti-corruption institutions from political influence. A revised legal strategy based on a Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA) is advised in the study. In conclusion, corruption in Bangladesh is not just a legal issue but a crisis of weak enforcement and political capture. Comparisons with India are showing that consistent conviction rates and independent institutions can contribute to better CPI scores. So, Bangladesh must adopt reforms that link with enforcement quality with public trust.

Keywords: Corruption, CPI Score, Bangladesh, Anti-Corruption Commission, South Asia, Conviction Rate, Regression Model, Public Trust, Enforcement Effectiveness.

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INTRODUCTION

Corruption remains one of the biggest governance problems in Bangladesh. Though several laws have been enacted since independence to criminalize corrupt behavior, including the Prevention of Corruption Act

[1, 5] and Anti-Corruption Commission Act (2004), enforcement has consistently been weak here.

The Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) is the key institution which is responsible for investigating and



prosecuting corruption in Bangladesh [2]. Despite its legal mandate, its success is limited. The Commission's leadership is often selected through politically influenced processes [2].

This weakness is reflected in global indices like the 2024 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) ranks Bangladesh 151 out of 180 countries, with a low score of 23 [6]. In comparison, India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka have higher CPI scores than Bangladesh [33]. While corruption is a common issue across South Asia, Bangladesh's position is particularly concerning due to its declining trend in both perception and enforcement success.

So, this research has explored whether legal actions such as conviction rate, case filings and charge sheets have a measurable impact on the CPI score [6]. These variables are critical because they are reflecting the ACC's enforcement capacity.

Through a comparative approach, this study has analyzed Bangladesh's enforcement trend from 2020 to 2024 and compares it with other South Asian jurisdictions. The aim is not only to assess the efficiency of anti-corruption laws but also to find the gaps in their implementation.

By using statistical methods, especially regression analysis, the study has presented a model to understand how enforcement indicators affect CPI scores. This can help to explain why increased legal actions do not necessarily lead to improved public perception. The findings could support future reforms which is aimed to ensure the real accountability.

Problem Statement

Bangladesh has made several efforts to criminalize corruption through laws such as the Prevention of Corruption Act of 1947 and the Anti-Corruption Commission Act of 2004 [1,5]. These laws have created by the institutions like the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) with a legal mandate to investigate and prosecute corruption cases. However, the enforcement of these laws remains weak [3].

One major issue is the lack of real operational independence of anti-corruption agencies. The ACC is often seen as being under the control of bureaucratic and political forces [4]. This has limited its ability to take strong action against high-level corruption. The Commission's top officials are usually appointed through processes influenced by the executive branch [2]. Many of its officers are also deputed from government ministries, which creates a clear conflict of interest.

Although Bangladesh has strict laws, they are often not implemented effectively. In Bangladesh, investigation process is slow, conviction rates are falling and the number of pending cases is growing every year. In many cases, investigations into powerful individuals are dropped when political situations change [4].

The situation becomes clearer when we see the international data. Transparency International's 2024 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) shows that Bangladesh ranks 151 out of 180 countries, with a very low score of 23 [6]. This indicates that corruption is seen as widespread and deeply rooted in public institutions.

Table 1: Corruption Perceptions Index (2024)

Country	CPI Score	Rank (out of 180)	Public Bribery in Last 12 Months
Bangladesh	23	151	24%
India	38	96	39%
Pakistan	27	135	25%
Sri Lanka	32	121	16%

Source: (*Corruption Perceptions Index 2024 - Transparency.Org*, n.d.), (*Corruption Index | India | 2013 - 2023 | Data, Charts and Analysis*, n.d.) [6]

This data shows that corruption is not only a legal problem but also a major social and political challenge in Bangladesh. Public bribery is higher here and people have a little confidence in the government's commitment to punish corrupt officials.

Rationale of the Study

Corruption continues to harm governance and development in Bangladesh. The government has created laws and formed the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) to fight corruption. But the impact of these actions is still unclear. The Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) shows a declining trend despite

these legal efforts. This raises a question: Are the ACC's legal actions really effective in reducing corruption?

Many studies discuss laws and institutions, but they do not test the link between enforcement activities and public perception. So, this study has filled that gap. It uses secondary data from 2020 to 2024 to test if conviction rate, number of cases filed and charge sheets submitted by the ACC actually influence the CPI score. So, by this way, the study is important because it provides an evidence-based answer to a critical policy question.



Also, Bangladesh's position in global corruption rankings is worsening. So, it is urgent to know whether the current approach is helping or failing. Additionally, this study offers a data-driven view of the ACC's performance and how it is linked to public trust. It also compares Bangladesh with South Asian neighbors to show if better enforcement leads to better perception or not.

Objectives

- To explore Bangladesh's legal and institutional framework against corruption.
- To compare enforcement mechanisms in South Asian countries.
- To analyze statistical trends and enforcement outcomes.
- To suggest models and reforms for effective anti-corruption governance.

Research Questions

1. How effective are Bangladesh's anti-corruption laws and institutions?
2. What structural weaknesses reduce their effectiveness?
3. How does Bangladesh compare with India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka?
4. What reforms could improve operational independence?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Definition and Impact of Corruption

Corruption is generally defined as the abuse of entrusted power for personal gain [7]. But in reality, it often goes beyond that. In many countries, especially those with weak institutions, corruption is involved with the large-scale theft of public resources by state actors but these actors rarely face punishment. This kind of impunity is not only damaging the economy but also violating the basic human rights [8]. Again, it is affecting public services, reduces the quality of life and deepens inequality.

Global studies show that corruption is slowing down the economic growth. It discourages foreign investment, increases the cost of doing business and distorts public spending [9]. In governance, corruption reduces public confidence in state institutions so, people begin to believe that rules are nothing here and only money or influence can get things done.

Historical Context of Corruption in Bangladesh

Corruption has been a major issue in Bangladesh since its independence in 1971. From the beginning, political instability and frequent changes in government weakened the foundation of public institutions. Military rule and caretaker governments interrupted democratic progress. So, it was hard to build systems based on transparency and accountability. One such example is the military-backed caretaker government of 2007–

2008 [10]. It launched a large-scale anti-corruption drive. However, this move had been ended up harming democratic processes rather than strengthening institutions [11]. The government arrested many high-profile political leaders and businessmen. But these actions were seen as politically motivated and did not result in lasting reforms.

In the years that followed, various governments have made promises to reduce corruption [12]. They created laws and formed institutions, yet implementation is remained weak. The public continued to see corruption as a normal part of everyday life. Bribery and favoritism were common for any service delivery. Citizens are often feeling powerless to meet the demand of justice or accountability.

Legal Framework and Enforcement Challenges

Bangladesh has several laws to prevent and punish corruption. Some of them are back-dated to the British colonial period, such as the Penal Code of 1860 and the Prevention of Corruption Act of 1947 [13]. These laws are criminalizing the corrupt activities and allowing the government to prosecute offenders. However, enforcement has always been a major challenge. The Bureau of Anti-Corruption (BAC), which operated before 2004, was criticized for being politically biased and ineffective [14].

In 2004, the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) was formed to replace the BAC. The goal was to make it an independent and powerful body. But in practice, the ACC is still facing many barriers. It is often described as a "toothless tiger" [4]. Political interference, lack of skilled staff and limited resources prevent the ACC from taking strong action against high-profile offenders. The leadership of the ACC is also influenced by political decisions. Many of its members are appointed by the executive branch so this is weakening its independence and damaging the public trust [4].

The court system is another layer of difficulty. Long delays, lack of trained judges and corruption within the judiciary have been slowing down the legal process [15]. Even when the ACC completes an investigation, the chances of securing a conviction are low. The commission is also depended on temporary legal teams and has not yet built a permanent prosecution unit [16].

Corruption in a South Asian Context

Corruption is not only a problem in Bangladesh but also it is widespread across South Asia. Countries like India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka are also facing similar challenges. In all these countries, political patronage has been playing a key role in public administration. Leaders often reward their supporters with government jobs or contracts. So, a system is created here where loyalty is more important than merit. As a result, corruption is becoming a tool for maintaining power rather than an issue to be solved [17].



Even though most South Asian countries have anti-corruption laws and agencies but the enforcement is weak. Political interference, low public trust and weak institutions are common issues [11] here. Bangladesh is not alone in this struggle.

Trends of Corruption in Bangladesh and South Asia

South Asia is known as one of the most corrupted regions in the world (NDTV, 2014). Several factors has contributed to this situation including excessive government control, complicated regulations and lack of openness in public decision-making [18]. In Bangladesh, political leaders are often accused of using their positions for personal gain [19]. The use of state resources for political purposes is common in this sub-continent.

Everyday corruption is also affecting ordinary people. In a 2017, a survey by Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) showed that 89% of citizens who sought public services had to pay bribes [20]. Sectors like law enforcement, health and education are among the most affected in these. People feel that without paying extra, it is almost impossible to get services on time [21] Bangladesh. Bangladesh's poor performance in international rankings, such as the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) is reflecting this ground's reality [22].

Root Causes of Corruption

There are several root causes behind corruption in Bangladesh. First, low public sector's salaries and bureaucratic hurdles have been creating incentives for bribery [23]. Government officials try to make up for their low income by accepting unofficial payments. Second, the chances of getting caught are low in Bangladesh. Even if someone is caught, the punishment is usually light so the corrupted officials are being encouraged to like do the wrong [24,25].

Another major issue is the presence of patrimonialism and clientelism. Politicians have been using the state power to serve their own networks rather than the public's trust [26]. By that, it undermines fair recruitment, project approval and budget allocation. The politicization of the administration and judiciary are also weakening their ability to act independently [4].

Anti-Corruption Measures in Bangladesh

Bangladesh has taken many steps to fight against corruption, but results are mixed. The Penal Code of 1860 and Prevention of Corruption Act of 1947 are still providing the legal basis [1]. The Anti-Corruption Commission Act of 2004 has created the ACC to lead the fight against corruption [2]. However, the ACC have some lacking in true independence. It is often criticized for avoiding high-level cases and focusing on low-level officials [27].

The ACC also has been facing some practical issues. It has limited funding and not enough skilled staff so complex crimes like money laundering and tax evasion are remained unsolved due to want of high-level expertise [16]. The slow pace of the court system is also making matters worse. Many cases take years to resolve. During this time, witnesses may be disappeared or losing evidence is very common.

One major weakness is the absence of a permanent prosecution team. The ACC uses temporary lawyers who often don't have the required skill and commitment that are needed for major cases [16]. So, without the reformation, the ACC will continue to struggle.

Need for Asymmetric Bribery Laws

Most anti-bribery laws treat both bribe-givers and bribe-takers as criminals. So, it is discouraging the victims from reporting the crime. Many researchers have showed that asymmetric punishment—where only the bribe-taker is punished more severely—can improve reporting [28]. If people know they will not be punished for confessing, they are more likely to come forward. Some studies support this approach and suggest that it can help to reduce petty corruption [21,29].

Problems with Delayed Justice

The International Crimes Tribunal of Bangladesh (ICT-BD) offers a lesson about delayed justice. Over time, it is very difficult to verify the evidence and witnesses may no longer be available. Again, the tribunal has also faced international criticism for lacking of fairness and transparency [30].

A Human Rights-Based Approach to Anti-Corruption

More recently, experts have proposed a human rights-based approach to fight against corruption. This idea considers corruption not only as a criminal issue but also as a violation of basic rights [8,31]. It is focusing on protecting victims by ensuring access to justice and holding wrongdoers accountable. The core principles of this approach are:

Accountability: Governments must investigate and punish corruption in a fair and timely manner.

Transparency: Public institutions must be open in their decision-making processes.

People-centered focus: Citizens must have tools to demand their justice and participate in reformation efforts [31].

Research Gap

- ✓ There is limited quantitative research connecting to ACC's performance indicators with Bangladesh's CPI score.
- ✓ Most studies focus on corruption perception but ignore measurable institutional actions like conviction rates or case outcomes.



- ✓ No study has empirically tested how ACC's legal actions (e.g., filed cases or submitted charge sheets) relate to national corruption indicators.
- ✓ The causal relationship between institutional output (ACC activities) and public perception (CPI score) is underexplored.
- ✓ Existing literature did not show any statistical models to test the impact of enforcement efforts on corruption perception in South Asian contexts.

Objectives

- ✓ To examine the impact of ACC conviction rate on the CPI score in Bangladesh.
- ✓ To assess how the number of ACC cases filed affects the CPI score.
- ✓ To analyze the role of charge sheets submitted by ACC in shaping corruption perception.
- ✓ To develop a regression model explaining CPI score trends using ACC activity variables.

- ✓ To offer policy suggestions based on the strength of associations among the variables.

Hypotheses

H₀₁: ACC conviction rate has no significant effect on CPI score.

H₁₁: ACC conviction rate has a significant positive effect on CPI score.

H₀₂: Number of ACC cases filed has no significant effect on CPI score.

H₁₂: Number of ACC cases filed has a significant positive effect on CPI score.

H₀₃: Number of charge sheets submitted has no significant effect on CPI score.

H₁₃: Number of charge sheets submitted has a significant positive effect on CPI score.

Conceptual Framework

The following figure is showing the conceptual framework of the study.

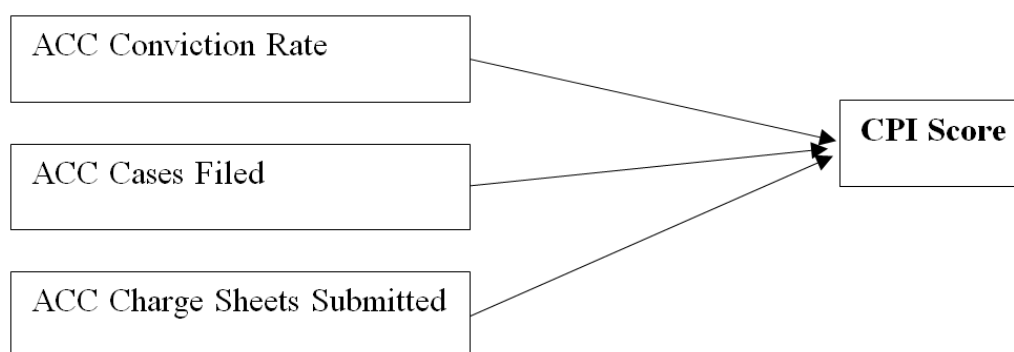


Fig 1: Conceptual Framework

METHODOLOGY

This study applied a secondary data based quantitative research design using secondary time-series data from 2020 to 2024. The dependent variable was the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) score for Bangladesh. The independent variables were the ACC conviction rate (X_1), number of ACC cases filed (X_2), and number of ACC charge sheets submitted (X_3). Data were collected from Transparency International

Bangladesh and official ACC reports. A multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between the CPI score and the three ACC performance indicators. The regression model has helped to identify how each enforcement factor contributes to changes in perceived corruption over time. Statistical significance was evaluated using R^2 , ANOVA and p-values to test the hypotheses. All of the analysis was performed by using SPSS.

Data Analysis

Table 2: Trends in CPI Score and ACC Enforcement Indicators in Bangladesh (2020–2024)

Year	CPI Score(Y)	ACC Conviction Rate (%) (X_1)	ACC Cases Filed (X_2)	ACC Charge Sheets Submitted (X_3)
2020	26	72.0%	348	228
2021	26	60.0%	347	260
2022	25	64.2%	406	224
2023	24	67.1%	404	363
2024	23	48.2%	451	403

Source: TI-Bangladesh (n.d.); ACC Breaks Records in 2024, but Conviction Rates, Politics Cloud Progress (n.d.)



Regression Analysis

Table 3: Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	1.000 ^a	1.000	.999	.037

a. Predictors: (Constant), Charge Sheets X3, ACC Conviction Rate (%) X1, ACC Cases Filed X2

The model summary shows that the R value is 1.000 and the R Square is also 1.000, which means the model is explaining 100% of the variation in the CPI score. The adjusted R Square is 0.999 and the standard error of estimate is very low (0.037) which again shows a high level of fit.

Table 4: ANOVA ^a						
	Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	6.799	3	2.266	1685.550	.018 ^b
	Residual	.001	1	.001		
	Total	6.800	4			

a. Dependent Variable: CPI Score Y

b. Predictors: (Constant), Charge Sheets X3, ACC Conviction Rate (%) X1, ACC Cases Filed X2

The ANOVA table confirms that the regression model is statistically significant. The F-value is extremely high (1685.550), and the p-value is 0.018, which is less than 0.05. This indicates that the combined effect of the ACC's conviction rate, cases filed and charge sheets submitted has a statistically significant relationship with the CPI score.

Table 5: Coefficients ^a					
	Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta	
1	(Constant)	35.752	.359		.006
	ACC Conviction Rate (%) X1	-.014	.003	-.099	.127
	ACC Cases Filed X2	-.020	.001	-.686	.021
	Charge Sheets X3	-.007	.000	-.455	.030

a. Dependent Variable: CPI Score Y

In the coefficients table, the constant value is 35.752. This is the predicted CPI score when all other variables are zero. Among the independent variables, all three have negative coefficients. The conviction rate (X_1) has a coefficient of -0.014, which means when the conviction rate is increased by 1%, the CPI score is decreased by 0.014, though the p-value (0.127) shows it is not statistically significant. The number of cases filed (X_2) has a stronger negative effect, with a coefficient of -0.020 and a p-value of 0.021 so it is indicating a significance relationship. Similarly, the charge sheets submitted (X_3) also has a negative impact on the CPI score with a coefficient of -0.007 and a p-value of 0.030 which is statistically significant.

Decision

H_{01} is accepted, and H_{11} is rejected.

H_{02} is rejected, and H_{12} is accepted.

H_{03} is rejected, and H_{13} is accepted.

So, it can be said that,

- ✓ **Conviction rate** has no significant effect on CPI score.
- ✓ **Cases filed** and **charge sheets submitted** both have significant negative effects on CPI score.

DISCUSSION

From 2020 to 2024, Bangladesh's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) score showed a steady decline

which was dropping from 26 in 2020 to 23 in 2024 [32]. During this same period, the ACC's conviction rate has been fluctuated significantly. It was 72.0% in 2020 but dropped to 60.0% in 2021. In 2022 and 2023, it is seen slightly improved to 64.2% and 67.1%, respectively. However, by 2024, the conviction rate had sharply been declined to 48.2% [3].

At the same time, the number of corruption cases filed by the ACC has been risen. It filed 348 cases in 2020 and 347 in 2021. The numbers were increased to 406 in 2022 and remained high in 2023 with 404 cases and reached 451 in 2024 [3]. Similarly, the number of charge sheets submitted also showed an upward trend. The ACC had submitted 228 charge sheets in 2020, 260 in 2021 and 224 in 2022. In 2023, this number was risen to 363 and further been increased to 403 in 2024 [3].

When comparing with India, the situation is taking on added meaning. India has been maintaining a higher CPI score by keeping around 40 from 2020 to 2022 and slightly declining to 38 in 2024 [33]. India's Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has reported relatively stable conviction rates: 69.8% in 2020, 67.6% in 2021 and 74.6% in 2022 [34]. Though data for 2023 and 2024 are uncompleted, India's higher and more stable



conviction rates are likely contributed to its better CPI standing. In addition, India's charge sheeting rate under the Indian Penal Code has been stood at 72.3% in 2021, which is notably higher than Bangladesh's charge sheet submissions rate in the same year.

In contrast, Pakistan and Sri Lanka are showing slightly better CPI scores than Bangladesh but they do not publish reliable figures on conviction rates or enforcement activities. Pakistan's CPI score stayed around 27 in 2022 and 2024, while Sri Lanka maintained a score of approximately 32 during the same years [35,36].

Recommendation with Suggested Model

- ✓ Ensure operational independence of the ACC.
- ✓ Appoint top officials through a neutral and transparent process.
- ✓ Strengthen the prosecution wing with permanent, well-trained legal teams.
- ✓ Reduce political control over investigations.
- ✓ Establish a performance audit system based on successful convictions, not case numbers.
- ✓ Adopt a Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA) to protect whistleblowers and victims.
- ✓ Integrate asymmetric punishment to encourage reporting and deter bribery.
- ✓ Use the regression model ($\text{CPI Score} = 35.752 - 0.014 \times \text{Conviction Rate} - 0.020 \times \text{Cases Filed} - 0.007 \times \text{Charge Sheets}$)

Benefit of the Model

This model can help the policymakers in several ways:

- ✓ It explains how each legal action impacts on the perception of corruption.
- ✓ It helps to focus on quality (convictions) rather than just quantity (filing more cases).
- ✓ It can be used to track and evaluate the real impact of anti-corruption efforts each year.
- ✓ It provides a tool for reform planning by showing what needs more attention.
- ✓ It makes anti-corruption work more transparent and accountable.

CONCLUSION

Corruption is a serious challenge in Bangladesh, especially due to weak enforcement and political influence. Even though laws exist and the ACC has been active in filing cases and submitting charge sheets, the overall perception of corruption has been worsening. From 2020 to 2024, the CPI score has been dropped from 26 to 23 which means that more enforcement activity did not improve the public trust.

The regression analysis has proved that two of the three ACC performance indicators—cases filed and charge sheets submitted—have a significant negative effect on the CPI score. Conviction rate had no statistically significant effect. So, simply filing more cases can not

create public confidence and without meaningful outcomes, such as convictions, public perception of corruption are being declined continuously.

Comparative analysis with South Asian countries shows that India is maintaining a higher CPI scores and stable conviction rates which are supporting the idea that consistency and independence in enforcement can make a difference in how people view corruption.

In Bangladesh, the ACC's dependency on political leadership has been weakening its credibility. Court delays, poor quality investigations and lack of skilled prosecutors are further reducing its effectiveness so these structural problems must be addressed urgently.

The findings suggest that real reform should be focused on quality, not quantity. Bangladesh must promote independence in investigations and enhance the professional skills of legal teams. However, it should protect whistleblowers and reduce delays in the justice system.

Finally, the study is offering a model to measure how ACC activities influence CPI score. This can be a valuable tool for future policy decisions. The goal should be to make anti-corruption efforts transparent, fair and more focused on results. Only then can public trust be restored and corruption will be reduced in a meaningful way.

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