[**Costs of corruption**](https://www.dawn.com/news/1663452/costs-of-corruption)

[Huma Yusuf](https://www.dawn.com/authors/252/huma-yusuf)Published December 13, 2021 - Updated a day ago

The writer is a political and integrity risk analyst.

WE were promised Riyasat-i-Madina. Instead, Transparency International’s National Corruption Perception Survey, conducted this year across all four provinces, reiterates how rampant corruption is in Pakistan. The report’s findings have already warranted economic and political analysis. But it’s time we also focused on the social consequences of endemic corruption.

TI’s survey found that 85.9 per cent of respondents consider the government’s self-accountability to be lacking. More tellingly, a majority (66.8pc) believe the government’s accountability drive is biased. The drivers of corruption are perceived to be weak accountability (according to 51.9pc of respondents) and the insatiable greed of the powerful (29.3pc). And almost 73pc of surveyed Pakistanis believe that the lack of local government structures has spurred public-sector corruption at the grassroots level.

The economic costs of rampant corruption are well known. Almost a decade ago, then NAB chairman Fasih Bokhari estimated that Pakistan loses around Rs7 billion per day to corruption. One can only imagine what that figure is today. Studies have also shown that corruption stunts economic growth (while making it less inclusive), limits tax revenues and deters both domestic and foreign investment. Corruption doesn’t just skew income distribution, it makes us all poorer.

The political costs are also apparent. The government maligned the opposition with charges of corruption, and now it faces the same allegations. Writing in The Friday Times, Najam Sethi last week described the perception statistics in TI’s report as a “damning indictment of the PTI regime”. He also implied that political corruption breeds corruption, arguing that the prime minister’s current attempts to undermine and browbeat the ECP are likely in anticipation of indictment in the foreign funding case. That long-running drama, which is now nearing conclusion, may reveal some PTI members to have diverted and benefited from foreign financial flows.

Corruption doesn’t just skew income distribution, it makes us all poorer.

The findings of the foreign funding case and the ECP showdown will lead to more political instability, and the revolving door of corrupt Pakistani leaders will continue to turn. And that’s why we must instead prioritise the social implications of rampant corruption.

TI’s report shows that the police (41.4pc), judiciary (17.4pc) and public procurement (10.3pc) are considered the most corrupt sectors. And sadly, in the year after a pandemic, the health sector has climbed to fourth place (the auditor general’s report last month claiming irregularities of up to Rs40bn in finances meant for the country’s coronavirus response may have caused this ranking to climb even higher). Respondents also emphasise the burden of paying a bribe to receive public services (such as water and sanitation). And the judicial backlog looms large, with more than 46,000 cases pending at the Supreme Court, and more than 1.7 million at district courts.

The institutions perceived as the most corrupt are those citizens turn to for security, justice, well-being and basic service provision. That most Pakistanis believe the state’s most fundamental offerings to be corrupt explains why there’s such little public trust in the Pakistani state. If daily interactions — basic expectations, and the only hope for recourse — are marred by venality, then how can there be trust in the state? Why shouldn’t it be reconceived as an extractive and exploitative service provider to protect and enhance the interests of the few at the expense of the many?

Here’s the rub. When you don’t trust the state, you turn elsewhere. To religious movements or violent extremist groups that offer alternative narratives of righteousness and restore your sense of empowerment. It may seem like a stretch to link perceptions of corruption with Priyantha Diyawadana’s brutal lynching, but it’s not.

Studies coming out of the US show that perceptions of corruption are higher among marginalised or discriminated against groups that are less likely to have access to power, political representation or justice. The widespread experience of corruption in Pakistan also likely drives feelings of marginalisation, which, when not routed through healthy channels (local government, civil society activism, student politics) increase susceptibility to radical thought and extremist movements. Enter the TLP. Other studies have established links between corruption and ethnopolitical violence.

The first formal response to the TI report has been the acceptance in a Gujranwala court of a petition against TI’s chairperson for targeting the judiciary. Rather than trying to silence the messenger, our state institutions need to heed the message. Corruption must be meaningfully tackled not just to drive prosperity and ensure political stability, but to prevent Pakistan’s social fabric from fraying any further.

*The writer is a political and integrity risk analyst.*

**Twitter:** [**@humayusuf**](https://twitter.com/humayusuf)

*Published in Dawn, December 13th, 2021*