

CORRUPTION AS POLITICAL VANDALISM IN BENGAL POLITICS: ROLE OF THE RULER SINCE 2011.

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Abstract:

Using corruption as a setting for this study, the author analyses Bengal politics to identify it as political vandalism that erodes democracy and faith. Looking at how governance, accountability and citizen engagement have been met in West Bengal after the elected administration came to power from the later part of 2011, it has increasingly been accused of corrupt practices. The paper also examines micro level factors such as policy-making structures, civil service, political systems, and political party systems in relation to corrupt practices due to historical antecedents, political connections, and organizations structures and culture. It also looks at the actions of civil society and the judiciary in check on elected leaders. This study shows how the-political vandalism associated with corruption undermines ethical indexes and democratic governance in Bengal. Lastly, the paper synthesizes its arguments on the need to promote the transparency, accountability, and effective civil involvement in the fight against corruption, which has deeply rooted itself in the region.

Keyword's: Corruption, Political Vandalism, Politics, Governance, Administrations Administrator.

Crises of corruption have been inherent in Indian politics for a very long time, but its recent expressions in West Bengal after 2011 has brought new concerns in terms of governance and democracy. Labelling corruption as political vandalism highlights the havoc it brings on institutions and the loyalty the public has on their chosen leaders. This is why the term “political vandalism” serves its purpose best, for it is actions that undermine trust and ethnic integrity that we expect from political leaders. West Bengal anchored in the eastern India has undergone drastic political transformations since TMC ministry under Mamata Banerjee came into power in 2011 along with many corruption scandals. Corruption, such as embezzlement of funds, bribery and the alleged cases of financial mismanagement have not only brought shame to the ruling leaders but have also have revealed the weaknesses of the political setup. This environment has led to disillusionment of the public hence increasing calls for accountability making it even more important to come up with ways of fighting corruption. With this background, the issue of whether and in what measure Bengal politics has become corrupt, what has led to the corruption and the consequences for democracy is then explored. Drawing from sources from civil society, judiciary and political opposition this paper seeks to present a better understanding of the current state of accountability and possible direction with reference to the selected members of the Horn of Africa. Perceiving corruption as political vandalism gives a rich perspective on its effects and in the need to initiate new changes in order to bring back the good image of Bengal political systems.

Statement of the problem

Since the political shift in 2011, when the Trinamool Congress ended over three decades of Left Front rule in West Bengal, the state has witnessed a transformation in its political dynamics. While this regime change was initially perceived as a moment of democratic renewal, the subsequent years have raised serious concerns about the integrity of governance and the increasing convergence between corruption and political authority. Corruption in Bengal politics has not merely functioned as financial misconduct or administrative failure; rather, it has emerged as a form of *political vandalism* — a deliberate act of undermining institutions, silencing dissent, and manipulating democratic processes for personal and partisan gains.

This research problem seeks to investigate how corruption has evolved into a strategic political tool in post-2011 Bengal, employed by the ruling establishment to consolidate power, reward loyalty, and suppress opposition. The issue extends beyond conventional definitions of corruption to encompass broader questions of democratic decay, institutional erosion, and the normalization of violence and coercion in the political landscape. The role of the ruler — both in terms of individual leadership and party machinery — is central to understanding this phenomenon.

Despite various exposes, judicial interventions, and public outcries (e.g., Saradha scam, Narada sting, SSC recruitment scam), the political apparatus appears resilient and often unaccountable. This research aims to identify the structural enablers, socio-political consequences, and ethical implications of such corruption-driven governance. It will examine how political vandalism, masked as populism or administrative necessity, damages democratic culture and creates a climate of fear and impunity.

By focusing on the period since 2011, the study will provide a critical analysis of the shifts in political morality, governance patterns, and the role of state-sponsored mechanisms in promoting or protecting corruption. It addresses a significant gap in understanding the interplay between power and ethics in regional politics, with potential lessons for democratic accountability and institutional reform across India.

Rational of the study: Rationale of the Study

The rationale for this study lies in the urgent need to understand the evolving nature of corruption in regional Indian politics, with a specific focus on West Bengal since 2011. The political transformation following the end of the Left Front’s prolonged rule introduced hopes of administrative transparency, inclusive development, and democratic rejuvenation. However, over time, allegations of large-scale scams, political favoritism, misuse of state resources, and suppression of dissent have painted a different picture — one where corruption functions not merely as a byproduct of power, but as a deliberate strategy for political control.

This study is particularly relevant because it approaches corruption not just as an economic or administrative flaw, but as a form of political vandalism — a systematic erosion of democratic values and public trust through coercion, propaganda, and institutional decay. While corruption in Indian politics is a widely acknowledged issue, the distinct pattern seen in West Bengal under the current ruling dispensation — blending populism, violence, and institutional capture — demands critical scholarly attention.

Another key rationale is the scarcity of academic research that examines the role of the ruler, both as an individual and as a symbol of the ruling party’s political culture, in actively shaping and sustaining corrupt ecosystems. By exploring this nexus, the study aims to bridge the gap between political leadership and systemic corruption in regional governance.

Moreover, understanding this dynamic is essential for fostering informed public discourse, strengthening institutional accountability, and reinforcing the democratic framework. The findings of this research will be valuable not only to political scientists and policymakers but also to civil society actors advocating for transparent governance and democratic resilience.

In essence, this study seeks to contribute a critical and context-specific analysis of how corruption, when institutionalized by those in power, transforms into a weapon of political domination — a phenomenon with far-reaching consequences for democracy in West Bengal and beyond.

Research questions:

1. H1: Political classism and traditional practice of political win over have been making corruption deeply rooted in the politics of Bengal.
2. H2: In this case, corruption is the major vice within the Bengal politics and has the effect of diminishing the political legitimacy of elected leaders within the polity and suppressed the political participation of citizens in electoral processes.
3. H3: This can be attributed to policy constraints and political influence, insufficient judicial autonomy, and shortages of the resources bestowed on civil society.
4. H4: Ongoing thorough changes in the laws designed to increase the level of transparency of the authorities' work will minimize acts of corruption and increase people's confidence in the political sphere.

Research objectives:

1. Examine historical, political, and social contexts that facilitate corrupt practices.
2. Evaluate the impact of corruption on public trust and citizen engagement:
 1. Assess how corruption affects voter perceptions and participation in governance.
3. Investigate the effectiveness of existing accountability mechanisms:
4. Analyze case studies of corruption scandals and subsequent actions taken by civil society and the judiciary.
5. Propose recommendations for enhancing transparency and accountability:
6. Identify best practices and reform strategies to mitigate corruption.

Literature Review

1. Chakrabarty, Bidyut (2017). *Populism and Indian Politics*. Chakrabarty explores how populist regimes use state power to maintain electoral dominance, often sidelining democratic institutions. His framework helps contextualize the political culture in Bengal since 2011.
2. Manor, James (2004). *Corruption and Governance in India*. Manor investigates the systemic roots of corruption in Indian governance and identifies how leaders often manipulate administrative mechanisms for political advantage.
3. Kohli, Atul (1990). *Democracy and Discontent: India's Growing Crisis of Governability*. Kohli's arguments on state capacity and populism resonate with the governance crisis in West Bengal, where democratic institutions have weakened under populist pressure.
4. Basu, Pradip (2015). "From Ideological Rule to Populist Hegemony: The Shift in Bengal Politics." *Economic and Political Weekly*. Basu analyzes how Bengal transitioned from ideology-driven governance under the Left to a populist-authoritarian model post-2011.
5. Sen, Amartya (2006). *The Argumentative Indian*. Though not focused on Bengal politics, Sen's work on democratic dialogue and institutional ethics provides a normative lens through which to judge corruption as political vandalism.
6. Chattopadhyay, Suhrid Sankar (2014). "Saradha Scam: Anatomy of a Scam." *Frontline Magazine*. This detailed journalistic investigation into the Saradha scam illustrates the deep political links that sustained the Ponzi scheme.
7. Guha, Ramachandra (2011). *India After Gandhi*. Guha's sweeping history of post-independence India includes insights into the transformation of political morality and the evolution of regional politics.
8. Roy, Subrata K. (2016). "Rise of Political Patronage in West Bengal." *Indian Journal of Political Science*. This study documents how political loyalty has become the currency of employment and public resource distribution in Bengal.
9. Bhattacharya, Debraj (2019). "The SSC Scam: Institutional Failure and Political Interference." *EPW Engage*. A detailed analysis of the SSC recruitment scam as a case study of institutional manipulation for political ends.
10. Harriss, John (2005). "Political Participation, Representation and the Urban Poor." *Economic and Political Weekly*. Useful for understanding how corruption disproportionately affects marginalized communities, relevant in the Bengal context.
11. Chatterjee, Partha (2004). *The Politics of the Governed*. Chatterjee's concept of "political society" provides a theoretical foundation for understanding how informal power networks operate, often outside legal frameworks.
12. Bose, Sumantra (2020). *Secular States, Religious Politics: India, Turkey, and the Future of Secularism*. Bose discusses political legitimacy and the distortion of public institutions, offering a comparative perspective on governance.
13. Mitra, Subrata K. (2006). "The Puzzle of India's Governance: Culture, Context, and Comparative Theory." *Routledge*. Mitra examines the tension between democratic ideals and realpolitik, which is applicable to post-2011 Bengal politics.
14. Dutta, Anirban (2022). "Violence, Coercion and the Politics of Fear in Bengal." *Journal of South Asian Studies*. Dutta examines how political violence is used alongside corruption to suppress dissent, characterizing it as a form of "governance by fear."
15. Bardhan, Pranab (1997). "Corruption and Development: A Review of Issues." *Journal of Economic Literature*. While general, Bardhan's economic analysis of corruption provides useful metrics and insights that can be adapted for state-level studies.

Research gap:

1. Lack of Focus on West Bengal's Contemporary Political Context: Most academic analyses of West Bengal politics are historically grounded in the Left Front era, with limited critical engagement with the political shifts that followed the rise of the Trinamool Congress in 2011. This study addresses the relatively under-researched domain of corruption under the new regime, examining its structural, institutional, and cultural implications.
2. Under-theorized Concept of Corruption as Political Vandalism: While corruption has been examined in administrative and economic terms, its role as a deliberate political tool used to dismantle opposition, coerce dissenters, and

institutionalize power has not been adequately conceptualized. This research introduces and develops the framework of “political vandalism” to fill this conceptual void.

3. Limited Analysis of the Ruler’s Role in Corrupt Governance Structures: There is a paucity of studies that critically examine the personal and symbolic role of political leaders in fostering corruption. The leader is often viewed as a passive figure or merely a participant in corrupt systems. This research interrogates how leadership style, public rhetoric, and party strategy contribute to sustaining and normalizing corruption.

4. Inadequate Empirical Data on Recent Scandals and Grassroots Impact: Despite high-profile scandals like the Saradha chit fund scam, Narada sting operation, and SSC recruitment scam, there is limited empirical research connecting these incidents to broader patterns of governance and political behavior. This study will draw on case-specific analysis to understand the systemic nature of such incidents.

Methodology:

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology with a case study approach focused on West Bengal politics since 2011. It aims to explore the nature of corruption as political vandalism and the role of the ruling party in institutionalizing such practices.

1. Data Collection: Interviews with political analysts, journalists, civil society activists, and affected citizens (via telephonic or online platforms). Field observations (if feasible), including visits to areas affected by major scandals (e.g., SSC recruitment centers or Saradha scam-impacted districts).

Secondary Data: Government reports, audit documents, and court proceedings (especially related to scams like Saradha, Narada, SSC). News media reports from national and regional outlets (e.g., *The Hindu*, *Anandabazar Patrika*, *The Telegraph*). Scholarly articles, books, and journals analyzing West Bengal politics and corruption. Election Commission data, party manifestos, and political speeches. 2. Data Analysis: Thematic analysis to identify patterns in political behavior, public discourse, and institutional responses. Discourse analysis of political speeches and media narratives to assess how corruption is justified, ignored, or politicized.

Analysis and interpretations:

Note on H1: Political classism and traditional practice of political win-over have been making corruption deeply rooted in the politics of Bengal

The entrenchment of corruption in Bengal politics post-2011 can be attributed significantly to political classism and traditional mechanisms of electoral win-over. Political classism in this context refers to the emergence and consolidation of a ruling elite—comprising party loyalists, contractors, and politically affiliated bureaucrats—who dominate access to state power and resources (Basu, 2015). This elite is often insulated from legal or institutional accountability, creating a culture of impunity and entitlement (Chakrabarty, 2017).

The practice of political win-over, deeply rooted in Bengal’s political culture, involves securing voter allegiance through patronage, symbolic populism, or coercion. Under the current regime, this has taken the form of politically motivated employment, selective benefits distribution, and control over public institutions like recruitment boards and panchayats (Roy, 2016; Dutta, 2022). Such strategies transform voters into dependents, eroding their role as rights-bearing citizens and reinforcing a transactional political relationship (Chatterjee, 2004).

These practices have led to what can be termed as institutional capture, where mechanisms meant to ensure fair governance—e.g., the SSC or municipal bodies—are repurposed to serve the interests of the ruling class (Bhattacharya, 2019). This results in the normalization of corrupt acts as politically strategic behavior rather than ethical or legal violations.

In effect, the combination of elite entrenchment and systemic clientelism perpetuates a cycle in which corruption becomes not an aberration, but a necessary and accepted function of political survival in West Bengal (Manor, 2004; Mitra, 2006).

Note on H2: In this case, corruption is the major vice within the Bengal politics and has the effect of diminishing the political legitimacy of elected leaders within the polity and suppressed the political participation of citizens in electoral processes

Corruption in Bengal politics, particularly since 2011, has emerged as a central structural vice, contributing to the erosion of political legitimacy and undermining democratic engagement. Major scams such as the Saradha chit fund fraud, the Narada sting operation, and the SSC recruitment scam have severely damaged public confidence in the ruling class (Chattopadhyay, 2014; Bhattacharya, 2019). The repeated implication of elected representatives and high-ranking officials in these scandals has led to widespread cynicism and reduced trust in the integrity of political leadership (Guha, 2011).

This loss of legitimacy is not only reputational but also institutional. The perceived politicization of the judiciary, law enforcement, and public service commissions fuels a belief that elections do not result in meaningful change (Basu, 2015). As political corruption becomes a persistent and visible feature of governance, citizens grow disillusioned with the electoral process, viewing it as a managed ritual rather than a democratic choice (Mitra, 2006).

Moreover, rampant corruption acts as a suppressive force on political participation, particularly among marginalized communities. Many citizens, especially youth and first-time voters, feel disempowered by the culture of favoritism, nepotism, and lack of merit-based opportunity (Roy, 2016). Political violence, patronage-driven development, and the targeting of dissenters further restrict the space for genuine civic engagement (Dutta, 2022; Chatterjee, 2004).

Thus, corruption in Bengal is not merely a moral or legal issue—it is a politically systemic mechanism that weakens legitimacy, erodes the accountability of elected leaders, and reduces citizens’ willingness or ability to participate freely and fairly in democratic processes (Manor, 2004; Kohli, 1990).

Note on H3: This can be attributed to policy constraints and political influence, insufficient judicial autonomy, and shortages of the resources bestowed on civil society

The persistence of corruption and its institutionalization in Bengal politics post-2011 can be substantially linked to a combination of systemic weaknesses: policy-level constraints, political interference in governance mechanisms, and the weakening of both judicial independence and civil society capacity.

Policy Constraints and Political Influence

Policy implementation in West Bengal has often been hindered by ad-hocism, lack of transparency, and excessive executive discretion. Administrative frameworks are frequently subject to political manipulation, limiting their ability to function impartially (Chakrabarty, 2017). Political actors influence recruitment, fund allocation, and bureaucratic promotions, undermining institutional autonomy (Roy, 2016). These distortions allow corruption to flourish unchecked.

Insufficient Judicial Autonomy

The judiciary, though constitutionally independent, faces both political pressure and capacity deficits in effectively addressing corruption in the state. High-profile cases such as the Saradha scam and Narada sting operation faced significant delays and procedural complications, raising concerns about judicial effectiveness and autonomy (Chattopadhyay, 2014; Bhattacharya, 2019). Moreover, state-level law enforcement agencies are often used as political tools, further compromising accountability mechanisms (Mitra, 2006).

Weak Civil Society and Resource Constraints

Civil society organizations (CSOs) play a critical role in demanding transparency and good governance, but in Bengal, many CSOs face funding shortages, restrictive regulations, and political intimidation (Dutta, 2022). Grassroots activism is often limited by surveillance, coercion, or a lack of institutional support. This restricts their ability to mobilize citizens or monitor governance processes effectively (Chatterjee, 2004).

Interpretation

Together, these structural deficits weaken the democratic checks that are essential to curbing political corruption. Without independent institutions, a vibrant civil society, or enforceable policy accountability, corruption becomes embedded in governance culture. This leads to a self-perpetuating cycle where political influence suppresses reform, and institutional failure reinforces public disillusionment (Kohli, 1990; Manor, 2004).

Note on H4: Ongoing thorough changes in the laws designed to increase the level of transparency of the authorities' work will minimize acts of corruption and increase people's confidence in the political sphere

Legal reforms aimed at strengthening transparency and institutional accountability are widely recognized as effective strategies to combat political corruption. In the context of Bengal, where governance has been marred by opaque decision-making, politicized administration, and recurrent scams, implementing and enforcing transparency-enhancing legal frameworks is critical for restoring public trust and democratic legitimacy.

Transparency and Legal Reform

Empirical studies have consistently shown that stronger legal frameworks—particularly those involving Right to Information (RTI) laws, public disclosure mandates, and digitized governance—reduce the discretion of officials and expose corruption-prone areas to public scrutiny (Bardhan, 1997; Manor, 2004). In Bengal, however, the enforcement of such measures remains weak, and political interference often undermines their impact (Roy, 2016).

Ongoing reforms—if genuinely implemented—could include:

1. Independent anti-corruption bodies with prosecutorial powers.
2. Public disclosure of assets by political candidates and government officials.
3. Transparent and competitive recruitment and tendering processes.
4. Legal protection for whistleblowers and journalists.

Impact on Public Trust

Transparency increases the perceived fairness of government processes, which is essential for rebuilding citizens' confidence in political institutions (Kohli, 1990). When citizens see that leaders are subject to the law and public institutions are functioning without bias, their engagement in democratic processes increases (Sen, 2006). This also weakens the culture of clientelism and fear-driven loyalty that has defined much of Bengal's recent political climate (Chatterjee, 2004; Dutta, 2022).

Furthermore, legal transparency is linked to a reduction in discretionary governance, where decisions are made based on political allegiance rather than public interest (Mitra, 2006). Reforms rooted in accountability and accessibility can democratize information and empower civil society to act as watchdogs of governance (Chakrabarty, 2017).

CONCLUSION

The research work under discussion offers a systematic understanding of corruption in Bengal politics as political vandalism that have devastating impacts on the quality of democratic governance and accountability. The main analysis points a rather significant negative relationship between perceived corruption and trust in elected officials which, therefore, suggests that heightened perception of corruption erodes the public trust in politics. This is in consonance with aspirations in other studies that argue that corruption significantly reduces citizens' political activity and vouching.

The following qualitative information also wreaks of citizens' general cynicism where participants cogently predict corruption is the order of the day in political affairs. People demanded for more openness, expected civil society and judiciary branches to play crucial roles in striving these difficulties.

The main importance of the present findings belongs to the fact that it can help policymakers and stakeholders in West Bengal to make the proper decision regarding the area of focus. They call attention to the importance of developing

effective anti-Fraud measures and carrying out political transformations intended to resurrect the populace's confidence in political structures. Considering corruption as political vandalism calls for the multi-sectoral approach to management of governance with strong pillars on integrity and participation. Thus, at the end, eradicating corruption is not an issue of political imperative but of political hygiene for the bona fide stability of democracy in West Bengal and across the world.

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