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Elite Capture and Misgovernance in South Asia: A Critical Analysis

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Abstract

This paper critically examines governance failures and inadequate accountability in South Asia, drawing on a historical-critical analysis of state-society relations and a political economy of knowledge. It argues that the region suffers from a significant deficit in developmental leadership and a severe breakdown of trust in democratic processes and institutions.

The research employs a historical-critical analysis and a political economy of knowledge framework, with case studies from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka illustrating instances of failed leadership. Significant findings indicate widespread corruption across all societal levels, pervasive political instability, and social inequality exacerbated by elite capture of welfare programs, leading to persistent poverty. Public trust in institutions remains notably low, especially towards political parties, further undermining governance.

The conclusion emphasizes the urgent need for transformational leadership and robust accountability mechanisms to address the systemic misgovernance and improve the welfare of South Asian populations.

Keywords: *Accountability, Corruption, Governance, Leadership, Political Instability, South Asia, Trust*

1. Introduction

Governance failures have led to widespread corruption, totalitarianism, anti-competitiveness, environmental degradation, and the perverse privatization of public goods and services in South Asia (SA). These failures have resulted in a spectacular rise in urban poverty, deprivation, exclusion, marginalization, and inequality across the subcontinent. This paper scrutinizes the shortcomings in governance and political systems by drawing on two key lenses: a historical-critical analysis of state-society relations and their social configuration, and a political economy of knowledge. It aims to demonstrate how South Asia experiences a failure of developmental leadership, marked by a significant negative akrasia in the Post-Cold War political historical epoch, and a catastrophic collapse of "trust" in democratic processes, the state-story, national leaders, media institutions, and civil society. Ultimately, based on this exploration, the article calls for transformational leadership and outlines what that entails.

1.1 Significance of the Paper

The concept of failed leadership is defined and operationalized through a phenomenological-interpretative approach by unpacking South Asian governance failures and scrutinizing their historical interface. Various narratives and discourses are deployed and interrogated to reveal how and why sound governance systems, such as society-surveillance, accountability, transparency, predictability, and inclusion, have failed to be enacted on a massive scale. This failure has led to the destabilization of the State's architecture, resulting in dire societal ramifications, including direct brutalities, systemic inequalities, perversions, exclusion, and even silent genocides. This situation is traced to the nature of the post-Cold War historical epoch as a decisionist-truth crisis, where failures of solidarity in developmental leadership and a catastrophic crisis of "trust" led to a collapse of largely affective linkages between society and the State. The scrutiny accounts for the layers of space-time in which leadership, as intentionality and form, is contingent on its site. This paper's significance lies in its

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comprehensive analysis of these interconnected factors, offering a critical perspective on the deep-rooted issues hindering effective governance in South Asia.

1.2. Research Questions

This paper seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What historical and contextual factors contribute to South Asian governance failures?
2. How do theoretical frameworks, particularly political economy under welfare antagonism, explain the rise of poor governance and lack of accountability in the region?
3. What are the specific manifestations of failed leadership and their impact on political outcomes, economic conditions, social inequality, and public trust in institutions within South Asian case studies?
4. How do international influences, including foreign aid and geopolitical interests, shape governance dynamics in South Asia?
5. What future directions and reforms are necessary to enhance good governance, reform political institutions, and foster civic engagement in South Asia?

1.3. Research Methodology

This article employs a historical-critical analysis of state-society relations and their social configuration to understand the complexities of governance in South Asia. It also utilizes a political economy of knowledge framework to scrutinize failures in governance and political systems. The research methodology involves an in-depth examination of various governance aspects, including governance comparisons, early history, institutional frameworks, local governance systems, economic policies, development impacts, welfare strategies, political policies, and the influence of international relations on internal dynamics. Case studies from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka illustrate specific instances of failed leadership and their consequences. The paper critically analyzes existing narratives and discourses to explain the systemic failures of good governance mechanisms such as accountability, transparency, and inclusion.

2. Findings and Discussions

2.1. Historical Context of Governance in South Asia

The governance history in South Asia parallels its rich and complex history, reflecting a blend of diverse civilizations and cultures. From the beginning, societies formed various political units. Analyzing South Asian governance is particularly engaging due to its complexity, with Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Maldives, Nepal, Bhutan, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka spanning over 5 million sq km and housing over 1.6 billion people. This region features homogeneous and multicultural nation-states and is rich in natural resources. However, the intricate inter-state relations, socio-economic disparities, and political instability present significant challenges for governance analysis (Hossen & Anwar, 2011, pp. 8-21).

This proposal explores South Asian governance using the historical context of national formation and socio-political dynamics. The focus is on seven countries: India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, and the Maldives, which share a common history, culture, language, and religion affecting their governance structures. The examination includes various governance aspects such as governance comparisons, the early history of South Asian governance, institutional frameworks, local governance systems, economic policies, development impacts, welfare strategies, political policies, and the influence of international relations on internal dynamics, among others.

3. Theoretical Framework

Given the rise of poor governance and lack of accountability in South Asia's development planning, it is essential to outline the region's political economy, highlighting social injustice, shifting power dynamics, and network interactions. The political economy framework extends beyond mere actor and institution analysis, investigating the systems of interaction and the rationale behind their development at various levels. It examines how the power structures shape the social order of societal traits and their evolution due to external shocks. This concept is known as political economy under welfare antagonism, characterized by universal, multi-dimensional disparities and variations (Sharma, 2014).

The dominant elite script, characterized by its regenerative capacity and strong market model that fosters oligopolistic capitalism, shapes the local capital market. It influences the formal market, which regulates service delivery and accountability, thus hindering justice in social aggregation. Despite being weak, this script has evolved within social aggregations over the past thirty years, marked by adaptation and co-evolving actors across various levels. The political economy perspective highlights the development of blind hierarchies alongside the growth of strong oligopolistic power structures and networked interactions.

3.1. Definitions of Leadership and Governance

This section examines the functions of leadership and governance and the issues of governance and accountability in South Asia. It also explains the failures of leadership regarding governance and accountability and the growing nexus between political violence, organized crime, and political corruption in South Asia.

Leadership involves following influential individuals and fosters aspirations and productivity in organizations, building their identity and image. It pertains to influencing and directing others to achieve targets. Governance is broader, encompassing the institutions, processes, policies, and rules that determine objectives and outcomes through resource allocation. It involves structures and rules shaping decision-making and accountability. Environmental factors influence leadership and governance, affecting their styles and modes of exercise. Leadership through command and co-optation at all levels shapes governance structures that implement public interests. Essentially, governance organizes the government and its relationship with citizens (Wilkins & Gobby, 2021).

Governance has long been a concern for thinkers; however, organizational governance is a recent development, grounded in the foundations laid by general systems theorists. Governance is

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defined as the organization's processes and rules that determine policy objectives through allocating collective resources. Organizational governance refers to the policies that regulate organizations internally and externally. This section focuses on excellent organizational governance (Adagbabiri, 2015, pp. 1-5).

3.2. Accountability Mechanisms

Experienced and knowledgeable practitioners and authorities of the audited entities primarily populate the formal accountability institutions. As a result, it is common for them to live in cultures of complicity and emphasize niceties rather than the substance of accountability. Moreover, when committees, inspections, and oversight commissions entertain a complaint, a bureaucratic nature prevails, discouraging civilians and reinforcing the status quo.

Ascendant antipathies towards external governance continue to provoke holds at regional and national levels that quieten civil society groups and obscure contestations, combined with rapid economic growth and a development race that evokes societal compliance and opportunism. In South Asia, accountability mechanisms have, therefore, been weakened when local stakeholders turned to different mandates either for economic opt-in or due to direct proxy issues such as education and healthcare. Failure and/or abstinence to use accountability cities most often results in kick-backs at an upper level and harassment from local authorities for interference, relegating citizens' grievances or issues to silence.

Although there are notable practices of accountability integration over disciplinary domains at the global scale, it remains unrealized mainly in South Asia, despite a fair ethico-bureaucratic proclivity and conceptual organizations to do so. Instead, accountability mechanisms have often been dumbed down to produce poor interfaces with civil society, achieving grievances or compliance submissions. Audit protocols in the Line Ministries remain left to bureaucracy and not integrated into core data decision-making processes. The hard road ahead is mistrustful. Without implicated sustainability, unencumbered transitions of different currencies, principal agents, or mechanisms present risks of past issues' or new ones' re-manifestation.

4. Case Studies of Failed Leadership

Lalu Prasad Yadav was the Chief Minister of Bihar, India, from 1990 to 1997. This article describes his exceptional personal and political capabilities and the widespread perception that they were almost entirely devoted to securing the means for corrupt private enrichment and the systematic destruction of the state's authority. Yadav is seen not just as an example of the enormous obstacles to creating an effective state in some parts of the world, but as a formulation of hypotheses and propositions about exercising authority or leadership anywhere, at a given time, and in a given way. Many people in the world have Lalu Prasad Yadav's ambitions and abilities. Yadav was a competent and ultimately self-destructive leader of a kind that is now common across politics globally. However, his story is not seen as interesting; it is idiosyncratic. Instead, it is considered centrally relevant to state-building, capacity development, institution-building, or public sector reform (Mathew & Moore, 2011, pp. 1-31).

Bihar was chosen because it is a case of a vicious cycle of governance failure that has lasted sixteen years. There is no doubt that Bihar has socio-political problems and a deeply rooted history. However, it is argued that it was short-term political strategy and choices that tipped Bihar into a particularly perverse pattern of governance between 1990 and 2005—a case of conscious undermining of the state and government from within, as a compact leading to coercive politics and predatory governance was struck among power holders. Bihar was not just a failed state in the sense that the government was not effective or accountable, but a case where governance norms collapsed.

While some would argue that politics in modern democracies cannot be expected to be pristine (and Bihar should not necessarily be held to a higher accountability standard than the West), this was a deeply dysfunctional situation. Having survived the C.P.I. mono-hegemony and the pro-poor rhetoric of the L. behs, there was hope initially and later despair, as the state collapsed into chaos with much evidence of capricious embezzlement and malfeasance. However, these obituaries are informed by nostalgia, and the analysis misses some more far-reaching and deeper points.

4.1. Pakistan: Political Instability and Corruption

Since its independence, Pakistan has faced persistent political instability. The country has been divided politically, primarily between East and West Pakistan. Following the rejection of a post-redle constitution by ineffective leaders, martial law was imposed for 10 years. A brief civilian government of 21 months sparked hopes for democracy but was soon dissolved in favor of another 11-year martial law period.

The Awami League's success led to Pakistan's partition, followed by another martial law regime. General Ziaul-Haq's lengthy rule, lasting 11 years, profoundly impacted the constitution and institutions, committing errors that still affect the country. His regime's misuse of religion for political ends and a shift away from ideological foundations marked the decline of Pakistan's political landscape. After Zia's exit, political conflicts among previously insignificant figures ensued, leading to the rapid replacement of five Prime Ministers and the failure of newly formed institutions to stabilize politics, ultimately resulting in a forceful subversion of the political process (Khan, 2018, pp. 46-18).

A slow and smooth democratic transition was anticipated after 17 years of martial law and a decade of democracy. However, this new hope went unfulfilled because of rampant corruption by the political personalities. All political leaders, who exploited the public, the public sector, and national institutions, came from the privileged class and elite stock. The army not only benefited but was also involved in money laundering, drug trafficking, and smuggling. The bureaucrats from humble families also became wealthy overnight, and the politicians whose assets were mere houses in posh areas became billionaires (in rupees) within days. Pakistani politicians, who were bequeathed, poor, and the intellectual elite, became buccaneers and struck financial deals

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with foreign companies and firms that funded political parties in foreign countries.

4.2. India: Challenges of Democratic Governance

India's democracy faces serious challenges impacting its future. Governance is evaluated according to international, social, and ethical standards, yet these are disappointingly superficial and not supportive of people with low incomes. Trust in democracy is waning due to significant social inequalities, which pose a threat to social cohesion, while absolute poverty persists. Growth inequalities and citizen grievances are largely overlooked. Democracy cannot be salvaged through technical fixes; it requires more profound ideational changes. Governance must address substantial failures and a lack of vision (Singh, 2008).

There is widespread anxiety about governance in India's democracy, which is linked to its capabilities and failures. Governance issues have historically followed the spread of democracy in India, with illiteracy, poverty, and social inequalities still prevalent. Despite a rising economy offering some optimism, it is deeply connected to these governance failures. Economic growth began recently and stems from stronger civil society activism and a shift towards a recalibrated state rule that resists neoliberal policies. Serious engagement with fundamental issues remains absent, making the situation concerning (Mahama, 2013, pp. 137-144).

A transaction-centered or rich-poor governance trap is created when the state is reduced in size and grossly misses opportunities concerning public goods investment. Indifference to backstave up horizons such as social rights, social cohesion, and possibility for public redress is an inevitable cost of the bargain. National losses are explored in these terms when governance mechanisms are prioritized over good governance. The abysmally low standing of fee-based vertically and horizontally accountable governance thus offers needed rulers scope for political ingenuity, and governance desperate bidders too are numerous.

4.3. Bangladesh: The Role of Political Dynasties

The political system in Bangladesh, called the People's Republic of Bangladesh, is a parliamentary democracy with a multi-party system, established in 1991 after previous, unsuccessful attempts due to political instability and insecurity that limited investment. Since gaining independence in 1971, Bangladesh has experienced various government forms: parliamentary, presidential, and a mix, ultimately reverting to parliamentary governance, which still faces criticism (Hossen & Anwar, 2011, pp. 8-21).

The political elite's power nexus determines and drives the political culture in Bangladesh; therefore, political visibility is limited to creation and resistance to the government. Bangladesh's rich tradition of dynastic politics expanded its roots in the para-communal space during independence; opposition against the hypocritical and untrustworthy political parties to maintain the political balance gave rise to the establishment of dynastic politics in the port city of Narayanganj and its encriminating entanglements with distributive allowances and patronage politics.

Narayanganj's dynastic politics replicate themselves in Bangladesh's larger political arena. Many people in Narayanganj have repetitive surnames, predominantly based on their profession, trade, or association; perceptions of the political elite in this port city are deeply entrenched in bloodline. Consequently, various service-seeking efforts become family-centric, including investment schemes, welfare hopes, and assistance-sought initiatives.

4.4. Sri Lanka: Ethnic Conflict and Leadership Failures

Sri Lanka is a South Asian nation where ethnic conflict has resulted in tyranny, oppressive governance, and regime failure. The Tamil Tigers (LTTE) fought a conventional war for over three decades against a government that initially sought political accommodation. The government resorted to various military strategies to crush the LTTE.

The LTTE adapted their tactics to counter GoSL attempts, such as banning the group and bribing defectors, which failed. They invested in education and technology, enhancing their strategies with advanced weaponry and public diplomacy. However, after Mahinda Rajapakse's election in 2005, the GoSL shifted to a hardline policy, rejecting negotiations and escalating military action, backed by global support. The LTTE responded with a more reclusive approach. The war concluded on May 19, 2009, with the GoSL declaring a military victory over the LTTE (Harris, 2012, pp. 68-78).

Sri Lanka, where beleaguered Tamil nationalism and separatism peaked and was militarily defeated by a hard-nosed, singularly focused government, is relevant. Subsequently, various atrocities were reported against the ethnic Tamils, who were slaughtered and bombarded for months on end by heavy artillery and aerial bombardment, even after peace had prevailed. Many black box-covered actions were claimed to have been perpetrated by the government combatants. Various investigations revealed horrifying details, but the GoSL took no corrective measures. The military faced the Tamils as an 'enemy' to be annihilated, and the military victory was to serve as a vindication for past grievances against the Maoist insurgents. The adoption of elite-based politics saw the sharing of war-would-be profits among the leadership, and the leadership milieu would decide how to pick a scapegoat to cleanse.

5. Impact of Governance on Political Outcomes

Good governance is essential, comparable to clean air, food, education, and security, and is vital for political stability. However, until the mid-1990s, rights and the rule of law were ignored mainly globally. Leaders must consistently democratize and reform governance. Continuous reforms are necessary to enhance representation, rights, and accountability (Kaufmann, 2003).

Governance development exhibits fundamental asymmetry with significant implications. At low-income levels, development expectations from states are minimal. However, with rising income, expectations change, yet some countries still face inadequate governance despite increased wealth. The situation

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raises concerns about effective governance and social contracts. This text examines the determinants influencing governance and its effects on political outcomes and per capita income.

Four aspects of governance are explored: selection, checks, capabilities, and a freer press, focusing on electoral accountability and participatory governance. Elections often result in personalistic and party-centered politics, leading to fewer pro-poor economic policies. Countries with biased selection systems are less likely to improve party accountability. The distribution of capabilities like education and wealth aligns with expectations, and media ownership does not significantly affect political accountability changes. In participatory governance, bureaucratic corruption decreases only when 16% of public expenditures are at stake. Effective participation requires three preconditions: a systems guide, improved accounting of allocations, and equal representation.

5.1. Economic Consequences

Since 1947, South Asia has had a general sense of resilience regarding governance, societal problems, and, more controversially, identity. The socio-political milieu of the national boundaries and regions now known as South Asia has seen the birth of many resilient nations. Over the years, the primary function of those nations has been the welfare of the citizenry residing there. After the initial struggle for self-determination, some states stabilised quickly, while in many states, the problems of failures of governance and accountability have become endemic.

While these issues vary in intensity across countries, their fundamental nature is similar. Militaristic regimes dominate in Bangladesh and Pakistan, while feudalistic politicians hinder governance in Sri Lanka, India, and Nepal. Major human tragedies impacting millions stem from ineffective governance, deliberate obfuscation by those in power, and opportunistic politics (Akhtar, 2015, pp. 1-7).

Failures in governance and accountability have severely impacted the economic conditions in South Asia, resulting in extreme poverty, famine, and widespread corruption. Despite diverse historical and cultural contexts, a common cause of underdevelopment is tied to these failures. Public administration is crucial for effective governance, encompassing planning and institutional arrangements to improve citizens' lives. However, political opportunists often undermine public administration, fostering bureaucratic inefficiency to serve personal ambitions. Ironically, these same individuals criticize governance failures to maintain their power.

5.2. Social Inequality

Both political accountability and social inequality impact welfare state coverage. Formal social protection programs often outperform informal ones across social groups, yet they still exclude many poor individuals. Political accountability ensures these sensitive programs reach more impoverished individuals, while social inequality hinders formalized programs from effectively serving the poorest (Javed & Mumtaz, 2024).

Increases in poverty levels and food prices since 2008 pose significant challenges to food security in both developing and developed nations. Recognizing the need for social protection to help manage risks, South Asian governments have implemented various programs, including cash transfers like Mukhiya Mantrir Gramin Yuva Unnayan Yojana and the Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme, food distribution through the Targeted Public Distribution System and Food-for-Work Scheme, skill-building initiatives under the National Rural Livelihood Mission, and entitlement monitoring via the e-Shakti Mission. However, socio-economic inequality hampers the effectiveness of these programs, limiting their design, implementation, and accessibility (Singh, 2005).

In South Asia, elite capture occurs as a small elite maintains power, hindering programs designed for the poorest. Their control over land, wealth, and social networks allows manipulation of interventions to assist people experiencing poverty. They dominate rural local bodies and community groups, blocking aid from reaching its intended recipients and leading to biased programs favoring the non-poor. This capture is seen in two primary forms: traditional corruption, where non-poor individuals exploit welfare programs for people with low incomes. For example, 47% of households registered in India's Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana were non-poor, and elite groups in Nepal and Bangladesh seized subsidized grains aimed at food-insecure individuals.

5.3. Public Trust in Institutions

Public trust is essential for institutional governance, especially in fragile nations. Beliefs in the legitimacy of institutions influence their effectiveness. Trust is necessary for policy influence, while accountability and transparency enhance credibility and integrity. Conversely, a lack of accountability leads to mistrust. Historical context shapes entitlement regarding resources. Unaccountable institutions create feelings of injustice, potentially leading to political violence from distrust in effectiveness. Trust is maintained when institutions are competent, moral, and proactive in checks and balances (Kikuchi, 2014, pp. 183-203).

Public trust in South Asian institutions remains low, with many believing they fail in governance, especially in SAARC nations. Political parties are the most distrusted, perceived as greedy and dishonest, while bureaucrats and police are seen as corrupt. Higher distrust among educated, younger, wealthier, and urban populations is noted. This discontent leads to political violence, riots, and protests. A lack of confidence in governments and low guidance levels boost trust in opposition parties, further deteriorating trust in elections and political systems in the region (Bowornwathana, 2014, pp. 64-77).

6. Lesson for Nepalese Leaders

Nepal is in a transitional phase, and the new federal constitution is hoped to set it on the path to democratic control over the state and provide opportunities for better leadership. Nonetheless, the problem of state capacity remains. Negative feedback will prevail unless addressed through a proactive and practical approach to governance.

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The problem is not the state as an abstract entity but concrete policies and actions. Collective action on the dominant issues is not occurring due to the failure of the first agency of governance—the leadership class. A class of people and institutions collectively exercises political authority over the means of governance. State strategies and capacities are created through the dynamism and choices made by the leadership class.

In Nepal, the leadership class is preoccupied with petty politics, making governance appear anarchic. Political leaders across major parties are focused narrowly on maintaining power and economic gains, while bureaucratic leadership struggles to perform essential governance tasks. Major issues like the lack of capacity and legitimacy, ethnic division, and obstacles to growth and public services remain unaddressed, dragging the country towards a pre-modern state.

Failure to address the critical questions of how to unify people at lower levels, initiate and sustain local collective action through self-governing institutions, and bring local institutions under the broader framework of polycentric governance rooted in democratic principles portends even bigger consequences for nations in the future.

Three key individuals in Nepalese society, one from business, politics, and bureaucracy, can initiate collective action to address governance issues. They will engage in discussions to clarify the nature of the governance problem, establish a baseline of knowledge, and highlight the urgency for action. Through these dialogues, they will explore various solutions, recognize preventive measures, and build confidence that their efforts can improve government effectiveness. The current crisis of capability and legitimacy makes the situation precarious (Mathew & Moore, 2011, pp. 1-31).

7. International Influence on Governance

The importance of better governance is now well recognized by all countries, but it is more urgently needed in South Asia. Improving governance is not just a desirable goal; it is vital for the success of social and economic development. In addition to impoverishing them, poor governance and institutional failure have contributed to policy and institutional 'band-aiding' rather than fundamental cultural change. This situation has created a vicious cycle between national governance, regional development, and global integration. In South Asia, international experts formulating compensation programs have tended to overlook concerns about governance and consistency with other governance measures. The question is whether multilateral agencies have played a purely passive role or have also taken the initiative (Kaufmann, 2003).

In this context, the governance challenge in South Asia is to illuminate the causes of failures in governance and accountability concerning specific issues. It is unnecessary to demonstrate general failures in governance and accountability work by international organizations, although this has received more attention in various countries. The contrast between the 'success' of formulators and the 'failure' of implementers has been commented upon, with the perspective being policy-focused. However, not all policies are enforced. This asymmetry must also vanish for better governance and accountability (Naher et al., 2020, pp. 76-96).

7.1. Foreign Aid and Conditionality

Conditionality traditionally refers to policy conditionality, but recent years have focused on process conditionality. This approach links lending to the involvement of various stakeholders, especially people experiencing poverty, in designing and delivering aid. Process conditionality aims to reduce corruption, uphold human rights, and boost governmental accountability. However, it poses challenges, requiring donors to assess the quality and inclusiveness of democracy in recipient nations, particularly regarding the representation of low-income people. Furthermore, it may weaken local accountability institutions, like local governments and civil society organizations, by favoring internationally recognized NGOs (Quibria & Islam, 2014).

Evidence from Bangladesh illustrates the change in practice over time. There, aid is widely perceived as ineffective, owing primarily to governance problems. The government has instituted several important policy changes in response to donor pressure. While reforms have been particularly pronounced in the accountability-litigation and decentralized local government arenas, substantial gains are mostly unobserved in the corruption-litigation and administrative arenas.

The reasons for foreign aid differences vary by country. A personal account from a top civil servant highlights the coordination of Bangladesh's foreign aid. It describes how government officials collaborated with donors on programs across diverse sectors like jute, energy, and education, although their roles varied significantly. Despite general agreement on the need for reforms, donors often prevailed on specifics. Government participation can enhance the likelihood of successful reform, but it does not guarantee it. The World Bank's Independent Evaluation Group outlined four criteria for country ownership: initiative must come from the government, key policy makers must be convinced, political leadership must show public support, and there must be evident stakeholder participation.

7.2. Geopolitical Interests

As a significant part of interstate politics, geopolitics involves the analysis of geographically organised world politics from a science-based perspective. Geopolitics as a concept varies in definitions due to its inherent complexities. Similarly, its exponents and schools of thought are numerous. Geopolitical analysis of global politics requires an in-depth understanding of geography, history, cultures, economics, and the psychology of nations. It is not an easy task. However, only geopoliticians and regions that can accomplish such analysis successfully and accurately have a good time in politics. The concept of periphery and hinterland is rarely discussed in South Asia (Syed, 1970).

The outside perception of South Asia contrasts sharply with its realities, primarily influenced by Talibanism, jihadism, poverty, corruption, and widespread illiteracy. The region blatantly disregards democratic values, accountability, the rule of law, and

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human rights, driven by corrupt and combative elites. The concept of executive privilege undermines accountability issues, while credibility suffers from misunderstandings between the public and elites. Despite possessing an institutional framework for governance, South Asia lacks a cohesive constitutional structure that fosters political competition. Conflicts among regional politicians are rampant, influenced by factors like Islamism, regionalism, sub-nationalism, and caste antagonism, presenting a precarious landscape marked by ongoing tensions.

South Asia's geopolitical image is flattering yet troubling for its governments and institutions. Blockaded and strained since 1990 by Afghanistan and Pakistan's realities, the region faces rampant illegal arms imports, drug smuggling, and factionalism. Cooperation with Afghanistan on non-state policing or information sharing is implausible (Malik, 2005).

8. Future Directions for Governance in South Asia

The perception of weak governance in South Asian nations suggests limited opportunities for improving economic well-being and political transparency. However, active public engagement and middle-class alternatives present potential for progress without undermining the state. This conclusion arises from analyzing governance indices and institutional settings across South Asia, considering the bribery and political compliance shifts over time (Hossen & Anwar, 2011, pp. 8-21).

Developing nations of South Asia must learn hard lessons from the determination and utility shown by public action against the lack of representation and accountability, enacted across various regions and arenas within limited means to voice against the ruling syndicates, to unfold against them when adequate capacities are gained. Developing nations should also learn how to legislate representation, institutions, and policies congruous with their changing context (Singh, 2005).

Governance issues in South Asia warrant significant focus, especially given the diverse human development landscape. Many individuals, particularly those in poverty, women, and the infirm, face limited choices. Good governance entails essential socio-political and managerial frameworks that must be established to address emerging inferior indicators. With an average life expectancy of just 40 years, institutions must prevent the deprivation caused by disability, or developing nations will face severe repercussions. States must navigate scientific, economic, socio-political, and technological challenges as opportunities and resources rise. When communities share a common fate and seek to influence domestic and international affairs, good governance becomes critical, requiring commitment and reforms in representation to meet the populace's needs.

8.1. Reforming Political Institutions

A nation's greatness depends on its citizens' and leaders' intelligence and ability. Successful governments require active citizenship; however, without strong laws and institutions, such involvement can lead to terrorism and violence. South Asia has long struggled with governance, facing social violence, a lack of civil liberties, assassinations, and failures in elections and accountability (Panday, 2005, pp. 1-15).

Governance transcends the public sector; excessive government in totalitarian states can lead to delegitimization and violence. Conversely, unchecked free markets foster non-accountable conglomerates. Leaders today must act as guardians of governance, facing staggering enforcement challenges. The South Asian region is grappling with complex crises stemming from a crisis of legitimacy and accountability, resulting in widespread moral corruption of governance. Military conflicts and insurgencies arise from grievances over the unfair distribution of resources and identity issues. Wealth disparities continue to grow, resulting in political exclusion, transforming South Indian states into terrains of hope and horror. While integral to human rights discussions, accountability remains poorly defined, with its theoretical foundations in various perspectives. This diversity produces differing expectations and normative outcomes regarding accountability.

8.2. Enhancing Civic Engagement

Despite growth in government institutions in South Asia since independence, their accountability and capacity for governance have often declined. Weak regulatory frameworks fail to protect stakeholder interests, leading citizens to disengage from the democratic process and view rulers as adversaries, undermining development partnerships (Naher et al., 2020, pp. 76-96).

The ICT system may have been poorly developed and utilized. It is more likely that heartless governance structures prevailed, failing to accommodate even fundamental stakeholder interests or account for collective interests. Consequently, these structures could not provide basic services or protect stakeholder interests.

Aggressive developmental states often face opposition from civil society, aiming to establish accountability mechanisms for public goods. Civil society advocates for good governance have shifted their focus from personal grievances to initiatives promoting transparency and accountability in public sector actions affecting livelihood rights. With increased public investment, civil actions to secure fundamental civil, political, and social rights have also grown. Advocacy now addresses bureaucratic corruption and a range of unlawful actions in the broader political landscape.

9. Conclusion

Leadership styles vary geographically, and governance is a more pressing issue in South Asian states compared to others. Nations like Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives have experienced military coups. India, Nepal, Bhutan, and Afghanistan, despite attempts at good governance, also face turbulence, domestic terrorism, and political instability. Corruption is rampant across all levels of society, bureaucratic, political, and social, in almost all South Asian states, regardless of their democratic or monarchical systems. This pervasive corruption has led to a systemic vacuum in human needs and individual poverty, which shows no signs of diminishing.

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Accountability remains elusive, even in democracies where party rule or majority changes have failed to curb corruption. Politicians and bureaucrats often align with parties based on the likelihood of gaining power to safeguard ill-gotten gains, rather than ideology. This prioritization of personal benefit over public interest has resulted in a loss of legitimacy, with honest governance often deemed incompetent. The South Asian states grapple with various forms of misgovernance, hindering efforts to alleviate poverty. Therefore, finding urgent solutions for good governance and accountability is critical for the fate of the people in South Asia.

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