



The Reciprocal Relationship Between Government Inefficiency and Corruption

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Abstract

A significant relationship exists between weak governments and corruption. The weakness of governments leads to the spread of corruption, and corruption, in turn, contributes to the collapse and incapacity of governments. Both inefficient governments and corruption are detrimental. Why do weak governments contribute to the spread of corruption? And how does corruption pave the way for the collapse of the government? Weak governments are unable to provide security for their citizens, are incapable of delivering essential services and economic opportunities, and cannot gain sufficient legitimacy to maintain the trust and confidence of their citizens. The citizens, with a history of distrust, dissatisfaction, and ongoing ethnic, religious, or class conflicts, become polarized. Thus, they lack the capacity for cooperation, compromise, and trust. As a result, they move towards crisis, failure, and collapse. Corruption also causes social, political, and economic damage, undermines people's belief and trust in the government's capabilities, and ultimately leads to the people's hopelessness towards the government.

Keywords: *Failed States (Weak, Fragile; Collapsed); Predatory State; Corruption; Political Corruption; Administrative Corruption*

Introduction

Political scholars define the state with four primary characteristics: geographical territory, population, government, and sovereignty. Therefore, the establishment of powerful and effective institutions to control and defend specific territories; having a stable, loyal, and cohesive population; exercising independent and legitimate power within its territory; possessing resources to ensure the welfare of citizens; and finally being recognized and respected by other states as a legitimate member of the international community are expectations from a state. The image of the state as a powerful and inclusive institution that effectively controls a geopolitical domain has highlighted its essential role.

Various perspectives have been proposed regarding the elements constituting the state. For instance, Lawson argues that a state has five main elements: defined territory, determined population, sovereignty, formal independence or the right of sovereignty, and a sense of national identity (Mohammadi Far, Kazem: 2023: 23). Other scholars argue that a state should not only possess an independent territory but also have internal and legal legitimacy (ibid.: 25). The level of state power is assessed by its ability in the following four areas:

- a) Resource mobilization,
- b) Monopolizing military power,
- c) Expanding its power base by attracting elites and masses into the political system,
- d) Efficient implementation of policies and enforcement of laws (Khali, 1383: 34)

When the state is considered as the main foundation of political, economic, and social order, its representative role becomes significant. Efficient states perform numerous activities that their citizens take more or less for granted, including ensuring citizens' security against internal and external threats, establishing order and justice through effective rule of law, and maintaining personal freedoms, including basic civil and political rights (Nourian, 2014: 124).

Inefficient Governments

The issue is that certain governments are either always unable or unwilling to play the roles expected of them. Due to various social, political, economic reasons and the structural nature of the state, they lack the necessary capacities for effectiveness or fundamentally show little political will in this regard. Capacity is the strength or ability of individuals and organizations to execute functions in an effective, efficient, and sustainable manner. So, capacity building is a process through which capacities are developed. Capacity deals with the talents, resources, relationships, and facilitating conditions necessary to effectively achieve the desired goal. Capacity can be discussed at a wide range of levels, from individuals to entire nations. A common set of levels used include individuals, organizations, and institutions. Sometimes this level is referred to as the "enabling environment." A low level of authority, capacity, and legitimacy in a government indicates a high degree of fragility and a correspondingly low degree of systematic functioning of that government. Authority generally means legitimate power and the degree to which a government's coercive force can ensure security and justice within its territorial jurisdiction. Similarly, capacity refers to the government's ability to manage and distribute resources, and legitimacy means the nature of citizens' support for the government and the recognition of that government in the international community (Danayi Far, 1384:5).

Discussing weak and inefficient governments became a precise topic after the Cold War. It refers to new security threats that emerged mainly as a result of conflicts, economic collapses, and failed government policies at social levels in countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Since the 1990s, governments that lack the ability to perform natural functions and drive their society towards development have been recognized as fragile states, a concept more associated with developing countries (Randall: 2002:168). Inefficient governments are also known by various titles: weak, sick, illegitimate, poor, rogue, rootless, disorderly, collapsed, fragile, corrupt, and so on. Despite the different titles, all agree that the inefficiency of these governments is due to a lack of capacity. Inefficient governments cannot ensure the security of their citizens, are unable to provide essential services and economic opportunities, and fail to gain sufficient legitimacy to maintain the trust and confidence of their citizens. Citizens, with a history of mistrust, dissatisfaction, and continuous ethnic, religious, or class violence and

conflict, become polarized. Therefore, they lack the capacity for cooperation, compromise, and trust. Consequently, they move towards crisis, failure, and collapse (Yazdanfam: 2009:42).

In recent years, international attention to weak, inefficient, and decaying states has increased to the extent that these states are recognized as dangerous areas of turmoil, chaos, and instability in international relations. Various criminal and violent behaviors, from terrorism to drug production and arms trafficking, human trafficking, and illegal goods, occur there. Conceptually, a weak state is one that is prone to crisis in one or more of its subsets. In other words, such a state is vulnerable to internal and external shocks or internal or international crises. In a weak and inefficient state, institutional arrangements entail conditions of crisis. This means that the official institutions of the state lose their place and usefulness as a center of resource and wealth allocation and the exercise of legitimate power (Hassan Pour, 202)

In political literature, the collapse and downfall of a state are referred to by various terms and phrases. Sometimes this collapse and downfall are presented as the extinction or dissolution of the state, and at other times it is referred to as the collapse or fall of the state. In this context, there are also discussions about the destruction or disappearance of states, which is mainly brought up in communist and anarchist schools of thought, each with different foundations and arguments. Additionally, in recent writings, the term "pseudo-state" has been used to refer to the situation of inefficiency and severe weakness of some states (Niaquie and Peyrahmad, 1399: 225).

Ghani and Lockhart (2019) highlight the governance gap in their examination of inefficient governments, which refers to the discrepancy between a state's ability to rule by law and its capacity to meet the needs of its people. In practice, they argue that, in weak states, the process of connecting the citizens' voices to the government and the accountability of the government towards its citizens for its decisions is lost (Mohammadifar; Kazemi: previous: 253). Inefficient states are those that cannot provide security for their people, lack control over resources, or most importantly, the people do not perceive their government as beneficial and suitable for the society and do not support its demands in the face of competitors. When political rivals in a society are unable to gain public support and thus seize all levers of power through elections or other mechanisms, the weak state becomes evident and emerges; governmental institutions collapse, and people find no central authority for expressing loyalty, providing services, and producing and distributing wealth and power. The reference point for applying legitimate force disappears, and the competition among different groups in society to gain this supreme right intensifies. The use of power and force to compel opponents to comply increases, and armed groups in society expand without any one of them having the power to defeat rivals entirely and take control of all power levers and fulfill the inherent duties of states towards their people. In such circumstances, people become victims of the precarious political situation in society and the government's inefficiency in performing its duties (Afzali: 1390: 25).

"Weak states are those that cannot ensure minimum civil conditions such as peace, order, and internal security. A collapsed state can be defined based on the destruction of governmental functions that are internationally recognized as those attributes of a state. Olsen suggests that the list of failed states can include states facing serious internal problems whose continuous cohesion is trapped in a vicious cycle of conflict and poverty; some other countries suffer from the curse of natural resources, where resource rents only benefit a few who control them, creating a form of a patronage system where agents and government officials claim more than their designated share of government revenues and use this share to benefit their supporters, associates, and close ones. Some other countries are also faced with a legacy of weak governance and cannot provide even the most basic services to their citizens. In these countries, most ordinary people suffer, and the state does not have a coherent plan to enhance development capacities or shows no inclination towards development and poverty reduction."

Another study, Collier (2008) emphasizes the cycle of failed states, persistent poverty, and civil war, arguing that the real challenge of development encompasses a group of fragile states that are frequently on the brink of collapse. These states, and the millions of people living in them, are trapped in one of four traps: the conflict trap, the natural resource trap, the landlocked with bad neighbors trap, and the small country with bad governance trap. Moreover, globalization has worsened their situation (Hemati: 1399:34).

Indicators of Weak Governments

Indicators of weak governments can be studied in social, economic, and political dimensions, which fall under three key concepts: authority, legitimacy, and efficiency. In summary, ineffective governments lack the functional authority to ensure the security of their citizens and national borders. They have not acquired the organizational capabilities necessary to meet the material and spiritual needs of their citizens, and due to these incapacities and some other factors, they do not possess the legitimacy required to represent their people (Yazdanfam, 1388:51). The uneven economic development of groups, rapid and severe economic decline, criminal perceptions of the government and delegitimization, rapid decline in the provision of public services, suspension of the application of law, spread of violence, continuous violation of human rights, emergence of elites to create division, foreign government intervention, increased population pressures, widespread flow of refugees or displacement of people within the country, presence of fear and terror-inducing groups, and continuous and sustainable escape of individuals are key indicators of these governments (Yazdanfam: same: 58). According to an estimate in 2008, a total of 35 countries were identified as having ineffective governments. Their features mainly include a long presence of colonialism in the past, ineffective institutions, a weak economy, and an unresponsive political system. Some statistics show that about 14% of the world's population resides in these countries, and the infant mortality rate reaches 41%. The Peace Fund published a list of indicators in 2005 to rank fragile governments. In total, there are 12 Cohesion (security apparatus, factionalized elites, group grievances)

Economic Decline (uneven economic development, migration, and brain drain)

Political (government legitimacy, public services, human rights, and rule of law)

Social (population pressures, internal displacement, refugees, and foreign intervention)

In 2021, the Peace Fund ranked Finland as the most stable government and Yemen as the weakest among 179 countries reviewed. Today, weak governments are assessed as security issues and a fundamental challenge for global peace, security, and development. Since the end of the Cold War, the international community has increasingly been grappling with the phenomenon commonly referred to as "state failure," which creates a wide range of humanitarian, legal, and security problems (Popescu: 2007:113). According to a recent report by the High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges, and Change of the United Nations Secretary-General, failed states are among the top six threatening issues worldwide that the international community must address (Hemati: previous).

The instability of weak states and the pressure they exert through the flow of refugees and the increase of small armed groups to neighboring countries and the international community have turned them into a threat to global peace, security, and welfare (Chua: 2003:65). Two factors strengthen the threat of weak states: The first is that with increasing global economic inequalities, the number of states assessed as fragile by the World Bank has almost doubled (World Bank: 2006). The other factor is the international community's neglect of the situation of poor states. The failure of the United Nations and other key global actors to respond quickly to civil wars in Rwanda, Liberia, Chad, Ivory Coast, Somalia,

and Sudan has largely contributed to state collapse and the pressure of fragility imposed on neighboring countries.

Reasons for Government Inefficiency

In a systemic perspective, since the government is assumed to be an independent system, it can be argued that the collapse and destruction of any of the components that constitute the government will lead to the collapse and demise of the entire government. For example, the population of a country could be wiped out by a natural disaster or the spread of diseases, leading to the disintegration of the government itself. Similarly, the loss of the entire territory of a country due to climate change, such as the sinking of an island nation into the sea, or its disappearance due to a devastating volcano or landslide, or its conquest by other states, results in the collapse and annihilation of the government and its existence.

Politically, the fragility of a government means that the official institutions of the state lose their position and role as the center for the allocation of resources, wealth, and the exercise of legitimate power. Weak governments are those that are unable to provide security for the people, have no control over resources, or, most importantly, the people do not consider their government beneficial and appropriate for the society and do not support its demands against competitors (Koulaei, 2017: 159).

Karl Deutsch, in his systemic analysis and regarding the ability of systems to withstand environmental pressures and their resilience, distinguishes four types of systems:

Reliable Systems: They can withstand environmental pressures.

Self-Empowering Systems: They continually increase their chances of survival.

Unreliable Systems: They are destroyed by ordinary environmental pressures.

Self-Destructive Systems: They may be destroyed even under favorable conditions (Ghavami, 2009:44).

Based on Deutsch's classification of systems, governments can also be categorized in the same manner:

Governments with a high degree of authority, legitimacy, and sufficient capacity in various political, economic, military, and other aspects are capable of coping with pressures and responding to demands from the internal and international environment, and as a result, they have a very high level of stability.

The second category includes governmental systems that do not have very high capabilities compared to the first category and face many challenges in their environment. However, the main distinction of these governments is that they, as a system, have a high capacity for adaptation and interaction in facing these challenges and responding to them. As a result, they ensure their survival and prevent their collapse.

The third category includes governments that, due to internal weakness and an unsuitable and turbulent surrounding environment, collapse under ordinary environmental pressures. They do not have the ability to meet internal and external needs and demands. Fragile and weak states can be placed in this group.

Governments that Deutsch refers to as self-destructive: This means that these governments, as a system, may not face any internal or external pressures but are affected by factors such as political

instability resulting from ruling class divisions, widespread corruption at the governance level, wrong policies, mismanagement, etc., leading to their own downfall (Ghavami: same). In summary, in a systemic analysis approach, governments, including fragile and weak states, can be ranked and examined based on their resilience against various environmental and internal pressures.

An ineffective government is a system prone to crises in one or more of its subsystems and is very vulnerable to internal and external shocks. In fact, the government, as an overall system, has various functions and responsibilities that are executed through five different subsystems: security subsystem, administrative and executive subsystem, legal subsystem, political subsystem, and economic management subsystem. The quality of these subsystems has a major impact on key outcomes in the domain of a government's objectives (security, growth, and welfare) (Dehghan: 2019:7). According to many analysts, the ultimate fate of an ineffective government is its collapse. The collapse of a government means the collapse of basic social services, economic bankruptcy, and the inability of the government to control its territory (Filatova: 2000:15).

The concept of an ineffective government refers to weak states that are not democratic, where the military plays a powerful role in governance, opponents are suppressed, the media is controlled, significant groups of people are excluded from power, and political and civil freedoms are destroyed through arbitrary arrests and the elimination of freedom of speech. A collapsed state is an exclusive and autocratic state with weak executive structures, strong internal opposition, and a bankrupt economy (Clapham: 1996:64). Goldstone also defines state collapse as a crisis in government authority, elite dissent, popular rebellion, widespread violence, and urban warfare (Goldstone: 1991:12). In reality, state collapse is the inability of a government to exercise necessary political control; thus, the breakdown of order, law, and governance in a territory is called state collapse.

According to the author, just as collapsed states play an important role in spreading and propagating corruption, corruption also has a significant impact on the collapse of these states. In the following, the role of corruption in the weakness and fragility of states will be discussed.

Corruption

Corruption is a common problem worldwide that has existed for centuries across various cultures. One of the important factors leading to the collapse of governments is widespread corruption. Webster's dictionary defines corruption as an illegitimate reward to induce someone to violate their duty (Rabiei: 2009:29). The World Bank defines corruption as the misuse of public resources for personal gain, such as bribery, embezzlement, collusion, abuse of administrative or political position, facilities, or information, illegal receipt and payments from public resources, diversion of these resources towards illegal allocations, forgery, destruction, or concealment of administrative and financial documents and records (Seydi and Rahbar: 2018:65).

Corruption is a phenomenon that every country's administrative system suffers from to some extent. The greater concern arises when corruption becomes a culture, and no one thinks about the wrongness of their actions anymore, because on one hand, they see everyone acting the same way, and on the other hand, they are expected to behave that way too (Taghizadeh and Soltani: 2019:124). In Western literature, corruption comes from the Latin word "Rumpere," meaning to break or destroy. Thus, in corruption, something is broken or destroyed. This might be a moral or legal behavior or often administrative regulations (Shafiee, Hematinezhad, and Parvaz).

Corruption undermines justice in society, jeopardizes democratic and moral values, and slows down economic progress (Ghaemi Asl: 2018:121). Corruption is one of the obstacles to the development of emerging countries and the improvement of living standards. A corrupt administrative system, by

consuming the financial resources dedicated to society's development, acts like a swamp that absorbs resources (Mousavi Doost: 2019:96).

Causes of Corruption

Numerous factors play a direct and indirect role in creating corruption, including:

- The presence of an ineffective government
- Lack of oversight on rulers' behavior
- Monopoly of power
- Abuse of power by officials
- Tax evasion
- Unequal distribution of wealth and income
- Lack of transparency and accountability in the governance system
- Lack of transparency in resource identification
- Ambiguity in the budgeting and planning system
- Lack of clear laws and regulations
- Weak governance of meritocracy
- Absence of specialized personnel in various sectors
- Laziness
- Weak work ethics
- Social disorder
- Lack of adherence to ethical and religious principles

Consequences of Corruption

Corruption leads to poverty, greed, unemployment, weak institutions, and lack of law enforcement (Salman). It damages free market competition and distorts political and commercial relations. Corruption affects government policies and the performance of executive bodies, depleting national resources, increasing costs, and disrupting decision-making processes. Generally, corruption causes social, political, and economic harm, weakens people's belief and trust in the government's capabilities, and ultimately leads to loss of hope in the government (Afshar and Ghahreman: 2009:126).

Systemic corruption is often seen as the main obstacle to economic and political development in any country where it prevails. This is because corruption reduces economic incentives for investment, weakens public institutions, distributes wealth and power disproportionately, leads to the illegal export of

resources, and creates distrust in society. Moreover, corruption increases poverty and social inequality, weakens the government's ability to address poverty and sustain key public services, thus reducing the government's legitimacy and authority and making it vulnerable to internal conflicts and violence.

For those living in poverty in developing countries, the prevalence of corruption means that basic services, such as healthcare, education, water, and sanitation, are either non-existent or of poor quality. Prospects for decent work and security also diminish. Corruption often results from illicit collusion between members of the private or public sectors, indicating deviant bureaucratic behaviors. A positive relationship exists between anti-corruption indices, transparency, professional standards, fairness in punishment, and procedural compliance.

Mauro's study of 106 countries found that high levels of corruption are associated with reduced investment, decreased gross national product, and slower per capita GDP growth (Afzali: previous:22). Additionally, Kaufmann's study of 173 countries identified corruption control as one of the key indicators of good governance (Moradi: 2013:148). Corruption severely damages relationships between the people and the government, and threatens the political system with collapse.

Instances of Political Corruption

Instances of corruption can be studied in authoritarian, totalitarian, patrimonial, and rentier states. In this writing, we will refer to one example of political, administrative, and governmental corruption in prebendal states. Extensive examples of corruption can be found in prebendal systems. Based on the literal meaning of "prebend" (private and personal property), the adjective "prebendal" describes a pattern of political behavior in which political positions are competed for and used for the personal benefit of the officeholders and their supporting groups. Therefore, what is central and prioritized in the prebendal model is personal benefit, and public goals and interests are of secondary importance (Joseph 1987:8).

Historically, prebend referred to governmental offices in the feudal era of Europe and China, where an individual would acquire a position as a reward due to kinship with the king or ruler (Yazdanfam: previous). In a prebendal state, officials and government agents believe that due to their political-historical role, they have a right to a share of government revenues beyond their allocated portion and use this share for the benefit of their supporters and close associates (Hemati: previous). In this context, officials in their political positions support contracts and projects that allow them to transfer extensive government resources to those at lower levels who look forward to such grants and allocations. This method helps the power holders to maintain and extend their power (Joseph: same:10).

The prebendal system, by increasing wealth for groups close to the upper echelons of the political pyramid, creates wealth and power, but for the majority of the society, it yields nothing but poverty and misery. In a broader analysis, the prebendal state, with its model of constant conflict within and between different levels of the political system, politicizes class, ethnic, regional, and linguistic differences. Therefore, it turns the political system into an arena of unresolved tensions that continuously need solutions to prevent collapse (Mohammadi F, Kazemi: previous:256).

Joseph's Components of a Prebendal State

A combination of various authority patterns including personal authority, legal-rational authority, corporatist-military authority, and other traditional authorities with national sub-branches.

Government positions as prebends (or private personal property) acquired through appointment by higher officials or through sham elections.

Exploitation of economic privileges of positions and governmental offices while pretending to perform public duties.

Patronage responsibilities to legitimize increased use of positions in the political system.

In a prebendal system, the government is internally divided and often accompanied by instability and internal conflicts (Joseph: same: 21).

According to Joseph, the most important characteristics of the prebendal system are:

Weak leadership.

Extensive floating of large capital into the government through the sale and export of oil resources.

Advancing government infrastructure projects by granting contracts to local and foreign investors.

Limited accountability of the government system, especially in its military sector.

Minimal obligation of political power elites to adhere to the law.

Arbitrary distribution of resources and income.

Lack of a suitable governmental ideology (Joseph: same: 32).

Conclusion

In transitioning countries, state fragility is usually higher. Rapid changes can lead to instability. Significant changes, such as sudden movements named reforms in countries with weak cohesion, fragile institutions, and a history of intergroup hostility, can be highly explosive. Thus, there should be an emphasis on gradual reforms and greater government accountability, prioritizing unity and security to avoid threatening the status quo. Actions like increasing transparency and implementing budgeting methods, strengthening non-governmental organizations, creating a strong civil society, enhancing cohesion and public trust, increasing income and reducing unemployment, improving the rule of law, and the government's capacity for judgment and enforcement can improve relations between governments and people and pave the way for other measures.

Fighting corruption is essential today in many countries around the world because corruption is inherently anti-developmental. For countries taking steps toward development, it is crucial to move in a corruption-free path. There has always been an inverse relationship between the proper use of power and the spread of corruption; whenever power has been used appropriately, corruption has decreased.

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