

Strengthening Democracy in Nepal: The Role of Trust, Transparency, and Anti-Corruption

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how trust, transparency, and anti-corruption measures contribute to strengthening political accountability in Nepal's federal democratic system following the adoption of the 2015 Constitution. Nepal continues to grapple with governance issues, including unfulfilled political promises, weak leadership, limited transparency, and pervasive corruption—all of which have led to growing public distrust. The research aimed to assess how trust influences electoral participation, how transparency shapes public perception of accountability, and how anti-corruption measures can support ethical governance. Using a qualitative approach, the study gathered data from semi-structured interviews and focus groups involving political experts, party members, and civil society stakeholders. Results show that 60% of respondents distrust political parties, 75% view corruption as a major barrier, and transparency is seen as crucial by an equal share, particularly in decision-making. The study recommends adopting e-governance, empowering oversight institutions, and fostering ethical leadership to restore trust and improve political accountability.

Keywords: Political accountability, trust, transparency, anti-corruption, federalism, Nepal

Introduction

Democratic governance is sustained through active public participation, institutional responsiveness, and the accountability of political actors. Political parties, as core representatives of the public will, play a vital role in linking state structures with citizen aspirations. In Nepal, the promulgation of the 2015 Constitution marked a transformative shift toward a federal democratic system premised on decentralization, inclusiveness, and local empowerment. However, persistent structural flaws—including patronage politics, endemic corruption, and

lack of transparency—have weakened the democratic momentum (Dahal, 2016; Subedi, 2016).

While federalism aims to bring governance closer to the people, Nepal's political institutions often remain centralized and resistant to change. As noted by Gupta et al. (2025), despite constitutional reforms, political parties continue to prioritize elite interests over citizen needs. This has contributed to declining trust in public institutions and an accountability vacuum, especially at the subnational level. These challenges are compounded by the failure to integrate anti-corruption frameworks and open governance mechanisms into everyday political practices.

The present study argues that three interdependent concepts—trust, transparency, and anti-corruption are central to addressing Nepal's democratic deficits. Building civic trust promotes participation and legitimacy. Transparency facilitates oversight and limits abuse of authority. Anti-corruption measures establish ethical boundaries and institutional integrity. Taken together, these pillars offer a holistic pathway to strengthening political accountability in federal Nepal.

Research Objectives

1. To analyze the influence of public trust on political participation and democratic accountability.
2. To examine how financial and operational transparency in political institutions affects governance outcomes.
3. To assess the role of anti-corruption mechanisms in reinforcing ethical behavior and institutional accountability.
4. To propose integrative governance reforms that align trust, transparency, and anti-corruption for enhancing democracy.

Research Question

How does public trust shape political accountability in Nepal's federal system?

In what ways does transparency in political finance and decision-making affect citizen perception and engagement?

What is the impact of anti-corruption strategies on the integrity of Nepal's political institutions?

How can these three variables be combined into an integrated accountability framework suitable for federal Nepal?

Research Gap

Despite a growing body of work on each of these variables—trust (Muirhead & Rosenblum, 2020), transparency (Bovens et al., 2014), and anti-corruption

(Laebens & Lührmann, 2021)—few studies have examined how they operate together in the federal context of an emerging democracy. In Nepal, the discourse remains fragmented. This research addresses the gap by constructing a conceptual model tailored to Nepal’s federal transformation. It also draws upon best practices from countries such as Estonia and South Korea, where e-governance and civil oversight have improved institutional credibility.

Significance of the Study

This research makes significant contributions to both academic discourse and practical policymaking, particularly within the context of emerging federal democracies such as Nepal.

- **Academic Significance:** The study advances political science literature by systematically interlinking three foundational elements of democratic accountability; trust, transparency, and anti-corruption. Proposing an integrated analytical framework, it provides fresh insights into how these principles operate synergistically in transitional democratic contexts. This framework is especially relevant for countries undergoing federal restructuring and seeking to consolidate democratic governance.
- **Policy Relevance:** The findings of this research offer a set of evidence-based policy recommendations designed to enhance institutional accountability and restore public trust. These include legal reforms, civil society empowerment, and the implementation of digital transparency tools. Collectively, these strategies aim to strengthen federal institutions, increase public participation, and build more ethical and responsive governance systems.

In addition to addressing a theoretical gap in the literature, this study provides practical guidance for policymakers and reform advocates. Its findings can serve as a reference point for other emerging democracies facing similar challenges in institutional reform, political accountability, and democratic consolidation.

Literature Review

Trust in Political Systems

Trust remains the normative foundation of democratic legitimacy, influencing public engagement, policy compliance, and the perceived legitimacy of governing institutions. High-trust societies such as those in Scandinavia have demonstrated that inclusive policy-making and transparent governance lead to greater political

stability (Bovens et al., 2014). However, in transitional democracies like Nepal, trust in political institutions has steadily declined. According to the Nepal National Governance Survey (NASC, 2018), 60% of respondents expressed low or very low trust in political parties, primarily due to unmet electoral promises, weak service delivery, and elite domination.

This erosion of trust is reinforced by the findings of Gupta, Thapa, and Regmi (2025), who highlight the disconnection between political rhetoric and implementation in Nepal's post-constitution era. Factors such as factionalism, patron-client relationships, and symbolic participation mechanisms have diminished the perceived responsiveness of state institutions. International IDEA (2021) also notes a growing "democratic delivery gap," particularly at the local level, where promises of federalism and decentralization remain under-realized. Drawing from Muirhead & Rosenblum (2020), trust is not static; it must be consistently nurtured through ethical leadership, transparent decision-making, and responsive public engagement.

Transparency and Accountability

Transparency is a critical enabler of accountability, allowing citizens to access, understand, and assess the decisions and behavior of public officials. Bovens (2010) conceptualizes three primary dimensions: financial transparency, procedural transparency, and operational transparency. These collectively ensure that political financing, policymaking processes, and institutional functioning are open to public scrutiny.

In Nepal, however, transparency remains uneven and largely symbolic. Dahal (2016) and Niti Foundation (2019, 2021) observe that although the legal provisions such as the Right to Information Act (2007) and financial reporting mandates exist, their implementation is limited. Local governments frequently fail to publish budget details or procurement records in accessible formats, and political parties rarely disclose their campaign funding transparently.

Nonetheless, models like Brazil's participatory budgeting (Cabannes & Lipietz, 2018) and Estonia's digital governance system (Sharma, 2020) offer replicable templates. In Nepal, tools such as Hello Sarkar, the Digital Budget Portal, and local-level e-governance platforms introduced after 2074 BS have begun to show potential, although digital divides and capacity gaps remain significant challenges. According to a study by the Policy Research Institute (PRI, 2022), municipalities with greater budget transparency also experienced higher citizen participation in public hearings and planning processes.

Anti-Corruption Mechanisms

Corruption undermines both transparency and trust, eroding public confidence, distorting resource allocation, and weakening institutional legitimacy. In Nepal, the Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA) is the constitutionally mandated body tasked with curbing corruption. However, it suffers from political interference, prosecutorial limitations, and lack of systemic enforcement capacity (Subedi, 2016; Gupta et al., 2025). As per Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (2023), Nepal continues to rank poorly, indicating pervasive challenges.

Comparative experiences show that credible anti-corruption requires both top-down legal enforcement and bottom-up civic monitoring. South Korea's Anti-Corruption and Civil Rights Commission, for example, combines legislation, civic engagement, and digital tools to enforce integrity (Laebens & Lührmann, 2021). In Nepal, early progress is visible in some municipal practices such as community audits and citizen charters. Moreover, education on transparency laws and ethics—still largely absent from the formal curriculum—could help embed long-term norms of accountability.

Synthesis and Theoretical Framework

Trust, transparency, and anti-corruption constitute a mutually reinforcing triad central to democratic accountability, especially in federalizing states like Nepal. Transparency reduces information asymmetries, enabling citizens to critically assess decisions. Anti-corruption frameworks ensure that transparency is not merely symbolic but leads to meaningful consequences. In turn, public trust reinforces institutional legitimacy and fosters voluntary civic compliance (Muirhead & Rosenblum, 2020).

This research integrates insights from the following interrelated theoretical approaches to propose a cohesive framework tailored to Nepal's federal transformation:

1. Trust Theory

Trust theory emphasizes ethical leadership, consistent institutional communication, and responsiveness as prerequisites for civic engagement. In Nepal's context—marked by broken promises, elite capture, and political clientelism—trust can only be restored through moral governance and participatory local-level interactions (Gupta et al., 2025; IDEA, 2021). Decentralized decision-making bodies must develop culturally inclusive trust-

building strategies, particularly targeting women, youth, Dalits, and indigenous communities.

2. Accountability Theory

Bovens et al. (2014) define accountability as a mechanism requiring both enforceability and transparency. Nepal's constitutional framework establishes anti-corruption bodies such as the CIAA and the National Vigilance Centre; however, their effectiveness remains hampered by institutional weaknesses and political interference. To improve accountability, municipal reforms should combine digital oversight systems with participatory tools like public hearings, Right to Information (RTI) mechanisms, and participatory budgeting.

3. Good Governance Framework

This framework promotes inclusiveness, transparency, and the rule of law as pillars of democratic integrity. Nepal's federalism provides a strategic opportunity to localize these principles. Yet, as reported by Niti Foundation (2021) and PRI (2022), many local governments face administrative fragmentation and cannot implement transparency and accountability mechanisms. Lessons from Estonia's ICT-enabled participatory governance show that digital innovations can bridge these gaps if paired with capacity-building and infrastructure expansion (Sharma, 2020).

In conclusion, this study supports using trust, transparency, and anti-corruption together to strengthen democratic governance in Nepal. Trust builds legitimacy, transparency allows public oversight, and anti-corruption safeguards integrity. When applied together and tailored to Nepal's social and political context, these principles can help build a lasting culture of accountability in the federal democratic system.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative interpretivist paradigm grounded in constructivist epistemology to explore how trust, transparency, and anti-corruption intersect to shape political accountability in Nepal's evolving federal democratic framework. To capture a nuanced understanding of these dynamics from both institutional actors and grassroots stakeholders, a multi-method qualitative approach was adopted.

A purposive sampling strategy was used to select 100 participants, ensuring representation across gender (50% male, 48% female, and 2% identifying as other genders), geographic regions (urban and rural), educational backgrounds, and affiliations—including political parties, civil society organizations, academia, media, and historically marginalized groups. This sampling design was intentionally inclusive to reflect the sociopolitical diversity inherent in Nepal's federal context.

Data collection was carried out through multiple tools. First, semi-structured interviews (n=25) were conducted with policymakers, political analysts, and civic leaders to explore institutional-level challenges. Second, five focus group discussions (each comprising 8–10 participants) included youth, women, Dalits, Janajatis, and local representatives, facilitating discourse on participatory governance and political inclusion. Third, narrative mini-surveys (n=35) gathered individualized accounts of trust dynamics and perceptions of accountability. To supplement primary data, secondary sources such as governance audits, policy documents, and national survey reports from institutions like NASC, Transparency International, and the Election Commission were also reviewed.

For data analysis, the study employed Thematic Content Analysis (TCA) using NVivo 14 software. The analytic process began with verbatim transcription and cleaning of interview and FGD data to ensure accuracy and participant anonymity. In the initial coding phase, open coding identified 134 emergent codes related to themes such as trust erosion, policy opacity, and leadership failure. These were subsequently grouped through axial coding into broader categories such as Trust Deficit, Transparency Mechanisms, and Corruption Narratives. Finally, in the theme construction phase, these categories were synthesized into a triangular conceptual framework that captures the dynamic interplay among trust, transparency, and anti-corruption in Nepal's governance landscape.

To illustrate this structure, a coding tree was developed, in which the root theme of Political Accountability branched into three main domains:

- **Trust**, including Electoral Disillusionment, Leadership Ethics, and Public Engagement;
- **Transparency**, encompassing Financial Opacity, Decision-Making Exclusion, and Operational Secrecy; and
- **Anti-Corruption**, covering Nepotism & Cronyism, Budget Misuse, and Institutional Weakness.

This structured coding schema enabled a rigorous thematic synthesis, ensuring that key findings were grounded in participant narratives while also aligned with the study's theoretical framework.

Results of the Data Analysis

This section presents the key findings from the study, highlighting the interconnected roles of trust, operational transparency, and anti-corruption mechanisms in enhancing political accountability within Nepal's federal context. Data were analyzed thematically through qualitative tools, supported by relevant secondary statistics, and presented in descriptive form with tabular support for clarity.

1. Trust in Political Parties

Trust emerged as a foundational component of political accountability. Survey and interview data consistently indicated a significant erosion of public trust in Nepal's political parties. According to the findings, 60% of participants reported low or very low trust, citing reasons such as unfulfilled electoral promises, opportunistic leadership, and lack of responsiveness to public needs. Another 30% indicated moderate trust, often linked to visible improvements in infrastructure or targeted welfare schemes. Only 10% of respondents expressed high trust, which correlated with perceptions of ethical leadership, consistent policy enforcement, and transparency in decision-making.

- In-depth interviews and focus group discussions provided further insight. A majority of respondents described political leaders as disconnected from grassroots concerns and driven by partisan interests. A recurring theme was the failure to deliver on campaign promises, with 70% of respondents identifying this issue as the primary source of disillusionment. The perception of political accountability remained weak, particularly among marginalized communities, who felt excluded from both the policy discourse and its benefits.

Table 1 : Public Trust in Political Parties

Trust Level	Percentage of Respondents
High Trust	10%
Moderate Trust	30%
Low/Very Low Trust	60%

Source: Nepal National Governance Survey) 18/2017NASc, (2018

Note: This data indicates a significant erosion of public trust in political parties, primarily due to unfulfilled promises and partisan behavior.

These findings reveal a clear legitimacy crisis facing Nepal's political institutions. Rebuilding this trust will require not only symbolic gestures but also institutional reforms, ethical leadership, and participatory governance practices that directly address the concerns of the broader public.

2. Transparency and Its Dimensions

Transparency emerged as a foundational pillar in strengthening political accountability in Nepal's evolving federal democratic landscape. Drawing on the primary survey (2024) and field interviews, three key dimensions of transparency—financial, decision-making, and operational—were identified as critical for bridging the trust gap between political institutions and the public.

Financial Transparency was a consistent concern among urban respondents, with over 70% demanding mandatory public disclosure of party funds, sources of donations, and expenditures. This demand stemmed from the perception that opaque financial practices facilitate corruption and elite capture. However, respondents from rural municipalities reported limited access to financial information, revealing a transparency divide influenced by geography and digital literacy. Overall, 65% of participants emphasized the need for equitable access to political financial data.

Decision-Making Transparency was highlighted by 75% of participants, who advocated for participatory policy-making and citizen engagement. A common theme was frustration with top-down decisions made without public consultation. Many linked the lack of procedural openness to declining political trust and increasing disengagement, especially among youth and marginalized communities.

Operational Transparency was also a significant issue. Around 60% of respondents stressed the need for clarity regarding the internal structures of political parties—particularly leadership roles, policy stances, and organizational activities. The absence of such transparency has undermined institutional legitimacy and hindered public oversight.

Table 2**Transparency Dimensions and Public Expectations**

Dimension of Transparency	Key Issues Highlighted	Percentage of Respondents
Financial Transparency	Demand for detailed disclosures and access	65%
Decision-Making Transparency	Advocacy for participatory processes	75%
Operational Transparency	Need for clarity on leadership and structure	60%

Source: Author's Field Survey, 2024

Note. Decision-making transparency was the most emphasized dimension, particularly among youth and marginalized respondents.

These findings suggest that transparency is not a singular reform but a multi-layered imperative. For political accountability to be meaningful, all three dimensions must be addressed through institutional reform, technological innovation, and civic engagement strategies tailored to Nepal's federal governance system.

3. Anti-Corruption and Its Impact on Political Accountability

Corruption has been consistently identified by participants as the most formidable obstacle to achieving political accountability in Nepal's federal democratic transition. It undermines public trust, distorts resource allocation, and weakens democratic institutions. The study's qualitative and quantitative data converge on three key domains: patronage networks, fiscal misuse, and enforcement inefficiencies.

Patronage and Political Cronyism:

A striking 75% of respondents cited nepotism and favoritism in political appointments and resource distribution as a major source of disillusionment. Participants from marginalized groups and rural municipalities reported being systematically excluded from opportunities due to entrenched political networks that prioritize loyalty over merit (Dahal, .(2016

Misuse of Public Resources:

Another 75% of participants expressed deep concern over the misappropriation of public funds, often redirected for personal or partisan gain. Budget leakage, non-transparent procurement practices, and lack of public audit mechanisms were repeatedly mentioned during interviews and focus group discussions.

Weak Oversight and Political Interference:

Approximately 40% of participants evaluated the Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA) and other oversight institutions as ineffective. Political interference and institutional capture were considered primary reasons for the limited impact of anti-corruption efforts (Shrestha, 2022; Gupta et al., 2025).

Positive Developments:

Despite the challenges, 35% acknowledged improvements through digital governance tools and localized citizen audits introduced post-2017. E-governance platforms at the municipal level have improved public access to budgetary and administrative information, though their reach remains uneven.

Table 3 : Key Corruption Challenges and Reforms

Key Issues	Percentage of Respondents Highlighting the Issue
Nepotism and Cronyism	75%
Misuse of Public Funds	75%
Ineffectiveness of CIAA	40%
Acknowledged Progress	35%

Source: Primary Survey, 2024

Note. While corruption remains a dominant barrier, some improvement was observed due to recent e-governance initiatives.

4. Interplay of Trust, Transparency, and Anti-Corruption

The thematic synthesis of field data and literature review revealed that trust, transparency, and anti-corruption are not standalone pillars but dynamically interlinked drivers of political accountability. Participants emphasized that the absence or weakness of one undermines the effectiveness of the others. Transparency, when implemented effectively, allows citizens to access public information and critically evaluate political decisions, which in turn fosters public trust. Respondents indicated that financial transparency and participatory

decision-making processes significantly contributed to rebuilding citizen confidence in political institutions.

Furthermore, anti-corruption mechanisms were viewed as essential reinforcers of both trust and transparency. Without credible enforcement mechanisms, transparency initiatives were seen as symbolic rather than functional. Many participants linked rising public disillusionment to the failure of institutions such as the CIAA to take decisive action against high-level corruption. Conversely, successful anti-corruption campaigns—particularly those involving digital disclosures and community audits—were cited as examples of how trust can be restored. However, respondents consistently argued that these three dimensions must be addressed systemically. Piecemeal reforms targeting individual issues were deemed insufficient. Instead, respondents called for a comprehensive accountability architecture that includes legal reforms, independent oversight, civic engagement, and technological integration. In Nepal’s federal democratic context, this triadic interplay is not only necessary for ensuring political accountability but also for advancing the legitimacy and sustainability of democratic governance.

Recommendations from Data

Integrating Trust, Transparency, and Anti-Corruption for Political Accountability in Nepal

The research findings underscore the interdependent and reinforcing nature of trust, transparency, and anti-corruption mechanisms in promoting political accountability. The qualitative interviews and quantitative survey data reveal not only public perceptions but also suggest concrete pathways for policy and institutional reform. This section synthesizes actionable recommendations based on empirical insights gathered through fieldwork between 2023 and 2024.

A. Key Recommendations

1. Institutional Strengthening of Anti-Corruption Bodies

Empowering the Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA) with greater independence, resources, and prosecutorial authority was a top recommendation. Only 40% of respondents considered current anti-corruption measures effective. To reverse this perception, respondents stressed the need for CIAA to operate without political interference and adopt international best practices in enforcement and transparency.

2. Promotion of E-Governance Platforms

Respondents consistently called for digital transformation in public finance and service delivery. The adoption of centralized e-governance systems — modeled after Estonia’s transparency framework — could enhance accessibility, reduce bureaucratic opacity, and track public spending. Such platforms are particularly essential in improving financial transparency, cited by 65% of respondents as vital for restoring public trust.

3. Leadership Development with Ethical Orientation

The need to foster ethical political leadership emerged as a recurring theme. More than just technical skills, respondents emphasized moral integrity, civic commitment, and a public service ethos. Leadership training programs that center on transparency, citizen engagement, and non-partisan decision-making are imperative.

4. Enhancing Civic Engagement and Public Education

Increasing public awareness of democratic rights, transparency laws, and accountability mechanisms was seen as a prerequisite for informed participation. Respondents recommended supporting media literacy programs, school curricula reforms, and civil society campaigns that equip citizens to monitor government performance and challenge corruption.

B. Visual Representation of Findings

Category	Key Insights	Percentage of Respondents
Low Trust in Political Parties	Reported by respondents	60%
Financial Transparency	Essential for building trust	65%
Decision-Making Inclusion	Advocated for participatory processes	75%
Corruption	Identified as a barrier to accountability	75%
Anti-Corruption Effectiveness	Rated as ineffective	40%

Table 4 Source: Primary Survey conducted by the researcher, 2024.

C. Interplay and Integration

The findings emphasize that trust, transparency, and anti-corruption are not standalone concepts. They work in synergy and must be addressed simultaneously for systemic reforms to succeed:

- **Transparency Builds Trust:** Visibility in decision-making and budget disclosures boosts citizen confidence in public institutions.

- **Anti-Corruption Strengthens Legitimacy:** Effective enforcement against misconduct not only prevents misuse of authority but also demonstrates the rule of law.
- **Trust Encourages Engagement:** When trust in governance improves, so does citizen participation, closing the gap between the state and the people.

A respondent aptly summarized: "Without transparency, there can be no trust; without trust, accountability becomes a hollow promise."

D. Policy Implications

Based on the above findings, the following targeted policy strategies are proposed:

1. Enhancing Financial Transparency

- Mandate timely and audited financial disclosures by political parties and local bodies.
- Create user-friendly digital portals for real-time expenditure tracking.

2. Strengthening Anti-Corruption Frameworks

- Amend CIAA-related laws to guarantee prosecutorial independence.
- Increase budget allocation and staffing for investigation and monitoring teams.
- Collaborate with civil society watchdogs for third-party verification of compliance.

3. Promoting Ethical and Inclusive Leadership

- Introduce civic ethics modules in political party training and university curriculums.
- Establish a national code of conduct with enforcement mechanisms for elected officials.
- Use federal decentralization to bring governance closer to the people and foster accountability from the grassroots level.

4. Empowering Citizens and Civil Society

- Launch public campaigns on RTI (Right to Information), fiscal accountability, and reporting mechanisms.

- Partner with media outlets to produce regular “governance audits” for public broadcasting.
- Encourage participatory tools like social audits and public hearings at municipal levels.

E. Challenges and Opportunities

The roadmap to reform is not without obstacles. Respondents pointed out challenges such as entrenched political patronage networks, limited digital infrastructure in rural areas, and public disillusionment. However, the study also identifies opportunities:

- Nepal’s federal structure provides a chance to embed accountability in decentralized governance.
- Emerging youth civic movements and online activism are reshaping political discourse.
- Regional best practices from South Korea, Brazil, and Estonia offer applicable models.

The evidence is clear: Trust, transparency, and anti-corruption are mutually reinforcing pillars of a politically accountable democracy. Isolating any one dimension will likely result in superficial reforms. Instead, Nepal requires a holistic, integrated, and participatory approach, one that not only responds to current governance deficits but also builds durable democratic institutions. With clear policy direction and engaged citizens, the aspirations of a more accountable, transparent, and ethical political culture are within reach.

Conclusion

This study examines the interplay of trust, transparency, and anti-corruption measures in shaping democratic accountability within Nepal’s federal system. Drawing on global frameworks and Nepal-specific evidence, it reveals that democratic legitimacy in transitional states like Nepal remains fragile when institutions fall short of public expectations. Declining political trust, fueled by clientelism, policy inconsistency, and elite capture, further undermines governance. While transparency mechanisms exist, they often serve as symbolic gestures rather than effective tools, and anti-corruption agencies suffer from political interference and weak autonomy, reducing their impact.

Critically, the study argues that trust, transparency, and anti-corruption are interdependent. Trust strengthens legitimacy, transparency enables informed civic engagement, and anti-corruption ensures ethical governance. Only an integrated

approach addressing all three can help Nepal transition from procedural democracy to substantive accountability. The findings underscore an urgent need for governance reforms, particularly in Nepal's post-2015 federal context, to restore public confidence and institutional integrity.

Policy Recommendations and Future Research Directions

To improve democratic accountability in Nepal, this study suggests a set of practical policy actions and areas for further research. In the short term, anti-corruption enforcement must be strengthened by making the Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA) more independent and powerful. Legal reforms should protect it from political interference and expand its authority to prosecute cases effectively. Alongside this, digital governance tools must be institutionalized across all local governments. This includes citizen-friendly platforms such as online budget portals, RTI dashboards, and complaint-handling systems like Hello Sarkar. Transparency will also improve if political parties and local governments are legally required to publish campaign financing and procurement data in real-time on open-access websites.

In the medium term, education systems must be revised to build a culture of integrity. Anti-corruption values, civic responsibility, and governance literacy should be introduced in the school and university curricula. Civic technology also needs to be promoted. Non-governmental organizations and academic institutions should be encouraged to develop participatory tools like online town halls, e-petitions, and digital suggestion boxes that increase citizen engagement. Furthermore, inclusive participation must be ensured through trust-building programs targeted at marginalized communities such as Dalits, women, Madhesis, and Janajatis. These communities must be meaningfully involved in decision-making at the local level to create more inclusive governance.

For future research, large-scale perception surveys are needed to analyze the relationship between transparency, trust, electoral participation, and policy compliance. Such quantitative data can help in understanding the real impact of governance reforms. In addition, longitudinal case studies should examine how citizen engagement and anti-corruption outcomes evolve across multiple election cycles, especially between 2017 and 2027. Finally, comparative research on federalism should be conducted by studying countries like India and Pakistan. Learning from their experiences can help Nepal adopt best practices that are suited to its own federal structure.

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