

Article type:
Original Research

Article history:
Received 09 June 2026
Revised 28 July 2026
Accepted 28 September 2026
Initial Publish 27 October 2026
Published online 01 May 2027

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How to cite this article:
Danishjo, W., Houshmandyar, N., & Dehgan, M.
(2027). Design and Validation of an Indigenous
Model for Transparency and Anti-Corruption
Policymaking in Afghanistan's Government
Organizations. *Future of Work and Digital
Management Journal*, 5(5), 1-18.
<https://doi.org/10.61838/fwdmj.464>



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Design and Validation of an Indigenous Model for Transparency and Anti-Corruption Policymaking in Afghanistan's Government Organizations

ABSTRACT

The present study aimed to design and validate an indigenous model for transparency and anti-corruption policymaking in Afghanistan's government organizations. In terms of purpose, the study was applied-developmental, and in terms of approach, it employed a mixed-methods design integrating qualitative and quantitative analyses. The study covered the period from 2004 to 2021. The required data were collected through the analysis of 64 documents, including laws and regulations, decrees and resolutions, strategies and policy documents, executive programs, and domestic and international reports; semi-structured interviews with 20 experts; and the examination of secondary quantitative data. In the qualitative phase, data analysis resulted in the extraction of 348 initial codes, 86 concepts, 26 subcategories, and 10 main categories, which were ultimately organized into five dimensions: political; institutional and structural; legal and implementation-related; social and cultural; and indigenization and contextual fit. The quantitative findings indicated that 45 major legal, policy, strategic, and institutional measures concerning transparency and anti-corruption were undertaken during the study period, with the concentration of formal measures increasing toward the final years of the period. Nevertheless, this increase was not accompanied by sustained improvement in corruption and governance indicators. Integration of the quantitative and qualitative findings revealed that the policy-implementation gap, limited institutional independence and capacity, weak interorganizational coordination, selective enforcement of laws, the influence of informal networks, limited accountability, and the incompatibility of some policies with local conditions were among the most significant challenges in anti-corruption policymaking. The final model emphasizes the interaction among political commitment, institutional independence and capacity, legal coherence, implementation coordination, non-selective enforcement, transparency, accountability, social participation, monitoring, and policy learning, while indigenization was incorporated as a cross-cutting consideration across all components. Validation of the model by 12 experts also confirmed the appropriateness of the proposed structure. Overall, the findings demonstrated that sustainable anti-corruption efforts require a transition from fragmented measures toward a coherent, coordinated, implementation-oriented policymaking system adapted to Afghanistan's contextual conditions.

Keywords: Transparency, administrative corruption, public policymaking, anti-corruption, governance, indigenous model, Afghanistan.

Introduction

Corruption constitutes one of the most persistent and multidimensional challenges confronting public administration, governance systems, and institutional development across countries. Although corruption is frequently conceptualized as the misuse of entrusted authority for private benefit, its manifestations extend far beyond direct bribery and may include favoritism, patronage, embezzlement, abuse of administrative discretion, conflicts of interest, illicit influence, manipulation of public procurement, selective enforcement of regulations, and the diversion of public resources. In organizational and

public-sector contexts, administrative corruption can distort decision-making processes, weaken merit-based management, reduce the efficiency of public expenditure, undermine institutional legitimacy, and erode citizens' confidence in government institutions. Accordingly, corruption should not be treated solely as an individual ethical deviation; rather, it is also a systemic phenomenon shaped by institutional arrangements, administrative structures, accountability mechanisms, organizational incentives, political conditions, and prevailing social norms [1, 2]. This multidimensionality has made the formulation of effective anti-corruption policies particularly complex, because interventions that focus exclusively on sanctions or legal prohibitions may fail to address the structural and contextual conditions through which corrupt practices are generated, reproduced, and normalized.

The significance of corruption is particularly pronounced in government organizations because public institutions exercise regulatory authority, allocate scarce resources, implement public policies, deliver public services, and manage relationships between the state and citizens. When corruption penetrates these functions, its consequences extend from organizational inefficiency to broader problems of governance, economic development, social justice, and political legitimacy. Empirical and comparative research has repeatedly demonstrated that corruption is associated with adverse organizational and economic consequences. For example, corruption can increase uncertainty, transaction costs, information asymmetry, and managerial risk, while simultaneously weakening the credibility of organizational controls and financial reporting. Recent studies have shown that corruption risks are shaped not only by the formal institutional environment but also by managerial behavior, secrecy, governance quality, and organizational accountability structures [3, 4]. Evidence from the banking sector has similarly indicated that corruption may affect institutional profitability and broader economic performance by altering operational efficiency, investment confidence, regulatory predictability, and the quality of institutional environments [5, 6]. Therefore, the costs of corruption are not confined to illegality itself but also encompass the long-term deterioration of institutional effectiveness and public-sector performance.

Transparency is widely recognized as a central component of contemporary anti-corruption governance. By increasing access to information, reducing opacity in administrative procedures, and making decision-making processes more observable, transparency can enhance the capacity of citizens, oversight institutions, the media, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders to identify irregularities and demand explanations from public authorities. Nevertheless, transparency should not be equated with the mere publication of information. Disclosure mechanisms are effective only when information is relevant, accessible, timely, understandable, and linked to meaningful accountability procedures. Research on anti-corruption disclosure has emphasized the close relationship between transparency practices, corporate governance, institutional accountability, and the broader regulatory environment [4, 7]. Likewise, developments in auditing and emerging technologies indicate that artificial intelligence, network analysis, digital monitoring, and integrated audit systems can potentially strengthen financial transparency and the detection of irregular transactions, provided that such technologies are embedded within appropriate institutional and governance arrangements [8]. Thus, transparency can contribute to corruption control when it functions as part of a broader system involving oversight, answerability, enforceability, and institutional learning.

Accountability represents another essential pillar of effective anti-corruption policy. Accountability requires public officials and institutions not only to disclose information but also to explain their actions, accept responsibility, and face appropriate consequences when legal or ethical standards are violated. Institutional research has shown that the relationship between

accountability and corruption is dynamic and closely related to the forms of institutional work through which organizational actors reproduce or transform rules and practices [9]. Where accountability mechanisms are fragmented, politically constrained, or weakly enforced, formal anti-corruption arrangements may coexist with persistent corruption. Conversely, accountability structures may become more effective when mandates are clearly defined, oversight bodies possess sufficient independence, responsibilities are traceable, and sanctions are implemented consistently. This suggests that effective anti-corruption policymaking depends less on the symbolic existence of control institutions and more on how institutional rules, resources, authority, and incentives interact in practice.

The persistence of corruption despite the expansion of laws, institutions, and policy frameworks in many countries further illustrates the distinction between formal policy adoption and effective policy implementation. Systematic evidence from public-sector anti-corruption policies indicates that extensive regulatory frameworks do not automatically produce effective corruption control where implementation capacity, monitoring systems, institutional independence, and enforcement remain weak [10]. Similarly, organizational studies have emphasized that corruption prevention requires integrated interventions addressing employee behavior, organizational structures, managerial controls, supervision, ethical climate, incentives, and performance systems rather than isolated disciplinary measures [11]. In this respect, the policy–implementation gap represents a fundamental issue in anti-corruption governance. Governments may adopt sophisticated laws, establish specialized agencies, and formulate national strategies, yet the actual impact of these measures depends on administrative capacity, political commitment, institutional coordination, and the degree to which policies are consistently implemented across organizations.

Political commitment is especially important because anti-corruption policy frequently affects powerful interests and established networks of influence. The implementation of transparency and accountability mechanisms may redistribute access to resources, constrain discretionary authority, or expose previously protected relationships. Consequently, anti-corruption institutions may be vulnerable to political interference, selective enforcement, or changes in governmental priorities. The effectiveness of anti-corruption policy therefore depends not simply on declarations of political support but on observable commitments such as protecting institutional independence, providing adequate resources, permitting impartial investigation, respecting oversight findings, and ensuring that enforcement is not restricted to politically convenient cases. The moral and political interpretation of corruption itself may also be shaped by public discourse and media framing. Research on political scandals has demonstrated that understandings of fraud and corruption may be influenced by media bias, moral ambiguity, political identification, and competing narratives about responsibility [12]. Such findings reinforce the importance of designing anti-corruption systems in which enforcement and accountability are institutionalized rather than dependent on fluctuating political narratives.

At the same time, anti-corruption policy must balance enforcement with proportionality and procedural legitimacy. Excessively punitive approaches may generate unintended consequences if they disregard degrees of responsibility, institutional context, or the distinction between deliberate corruption and lesser administrative wrongdoing. Recent legal scholarship has therefore examined non-litigation paradigms and the principle of proportionality in corruption cases, emphasizing that the legitimacy of enforcement depends partly on the proportional relationship between misconduct and institutional response [13]. This perspective is particularly relevant for public-sector policy because an effective anti-corruption framework requires not only strong sanctions but also fair procedures, differentiated responses, preventive

mechanisms, internal controls, and corrective institutional reforms. Sustainable corruption control therefore requires a combination of prevention, detection, enforcement, accountability, and organizational improvement.

Public participation constitutes another important element in the institutional control of corruption. Anti-corruption policymaking becomes more resilient when citizens and stakeholders are provided with meaningful opportunities to influence public decision-making and scrutinize government performance. Research examining public participation in constitution-making has suggested that participatory institutional arrangements may contribute to corruption control by increasing political inclusiveness, public ownership, and accountability [14]. More broadly, citizen participation, investigative journalism, civil society monitoring, complaint mechanisms, access-to-information systems, and participatory oversight can help reduce information asymmetry between public institutions and society. However, participation is effective only when citizens trust that reporting corruption or demanding accountability can generate meaningful institutional responses. Where public trust is low, citizens may become reluctant to cooperate with oversight mechanisms, while corrupt practices may increasingly be viewed as unavoidable features of administrative life.

The relationship between corruption and institutional context is also evident across different sectors. Research in the Norwegian construction industry has demonstrated that corruption risks may exist even in countries generally characterized by strong governance, although their forms, perceived causes, and institutional responses vary according to sectoral and organizational conditions [15]. Studies of primary healthcare institutions in Nigeria have similarly shown that corruption may become embedded in informal markets, organizational survival strategies, and routine service-delivery practices, indicating that corruption cannot always be adequately explained through individual greed or weak morality alone [16]. Such evidence is significant because it highlights the need to analyze the political economy and organizational environment in which corruption occurs. Policies imported from other institutional settings may fail where they do not account for local administrative capacity, informal relations, resource constraints, and the incentives facing organizational actors.

Cross-national evidence further indicates considerable variation in both perceived corruption and the effectiveness of corruption-control measures. Analyses of corruption perceptions in Sub-Saharan African countries have demonstrated substantial temporal and cross-country variability, emphasizing that corruption indicators should be interpreted in relation to institutional changes, governance conditions, and national trajectories rather than as isolated numerical scores [17]. The Corruption Perceptions Index similarly provides a comparative representation of perceived public-sector corruption and continues to show significant differences in corruption-control outcomes among countries [18]. Although perception-based indicators cannot capture every dimension of corruption, they remain important for identifying long-term patterns, comparing institutional environments, and evaluating whether formal reforms are accompanied by broader improvements in governance. Their analytical value is particularly strong when combined with documentary, institutional, and qualitative evidence rather than interpreted independently.

The preceding evidence points to an important methodological and policy implication: anti-corruption effectiveness should be evaluated through multiple forms of evidence. Counting the number of enacted laws, established institutions, or adopted strategies provides information about formal policy activity but does not by itself demonstrate effectiveness. A country may experience an expansion of anti-corruption legislation while enforcement remains selective, coordination remains weak, and corruption indicators show little sustained improvement. Similarly, an increase in investigations or institutional activity may not translate into accountability if cases fail to progress through the complete chain of detection,

investigation, referral, adjudication, and final enforcement. For this reason, the analysis of transparency and anti-corruption policymaking should integrate documentary evidence, expert knowledge, organizational performance data, and broader governance indicators.

This multidimensional perspective is particularly relevant to Afghanistan. Between 2004 and 2021, Afghanistan underwent extensive state-building, administrative restructuring, legal reform, international assistance, and institutional development. During this period, numerous policies, legal instruments, specialized bodies, reform programs, and oversight arrangements were introduced with the stated objective of strengthening governance and combating corruption. Nevertheless, the coexistence of formal reform with continuing corruption concerns suggests that the effectiveness of policy cannot be understood solely by examining the number or formal sophistication of anti-corruption measures. The institutional environment was characterized by complex interactions among political authority, administrative capacity, donor-supported reform initiatives, informal networks, judicial and oversight structures, and social relations. Under such conditions, the central analytical issue is not simply whether anti-corruption policies existed, but how effectively their institutional, legal, political, and social components were aligned.

A major challenge in such contexts is the transfer of international anti-corruption models without sufficient attention to institutional fit. International standards provide important normative principles such as transparency, accountability, rule of law, institutional independence, participation, and integrity. However, the organizational mechanisms through which these principles are implemented cannot always be replicated uniformly across countries. The effectiveness of imported institutional arrangements depends on administrative competence, organizational resources, political incentives, enforcement capacity, institutional history, and prevailing informal structures. Anti-corruption policy therefore requires a balance between adherence to universal governance principles and sensitivity to local conditions. This is consistent with research showing that the determinants and consequences of corruption vary according to institutional, organizational, economic, and sectoral conditions [3, 15, 16].

An indigenous policymaking model does not imply rejecting international experience; rather, it requires translating general anti-corruption principles into mechanisms compatible with local institutional realities. Such a model should identify the specific political, institutional, legal, organizational, social, and cultural factors that shape policy implementation and determine how these dimensions interact. It should also recognize that corruption prevention cannot be separated from broader questions of governance quality, institutional accountability, organizational performance, and public trust. Research on anti-corruption disclosure, organizational corruption prevention, public-sector regulation, and institutional accountability collectively supports the need for integrated models that combine transparency, effective oversight, enforcement capability, institutional independence, managerial responsibility, and stakeholder participation [7, 9-11]. Furthermore, technological advancements in auditing and monitoring may strengthen such models when they are integrated into coherent governance structures rather than introduced as isolated technical solutions [8].

Accordingly, a substantial research gap remains regarding the development of an integrated, context-sensitive framework capable of explaining why formal anti-corruption measures in Afghanistan did not always generate corresponding improvements in corruption control and governance outcomes. Existing studies provide valuable insights into administrative corruption, employee misconduct, disclosure practices, accountability, institutional regulation, public participation, economic consequences, enforcement approaches, and technological mechanisms, yet these strands of research are often examined

separately. A comprehensive framework for Afghanistan requires these dimensions to be analyzed simultaneously and linked to historical evidence concerning actual policies, institutional performance, and governance indicators. Such an approach can clarify the distinction between formal policymaking capacity and effective implementation capacity and can identify the institutional conditions necessary for converting policy commitments into sustainable outcomes.

The present study therefore seeks to move beyond fragmented explanations of corruption by conceptualizing transparency and anti-corruption policymaking as a systemic process involving political commitment, institutional capacity and independence, legal coherence, implementation capability, coordination, transparency, accountability, societal participation, monitoring, policy learning, and contextual adaptation. By integrating documentary analysis, expert perspectives, and secondary quantitative evidence from the 2004–2021 period, the study is positioned to identify both the formal architecture of anti-corruption policy and the underlying factors that facilitated or constrained its implementation. Such an integrated perspective is essential for developing a model that is theoretically coherent, empirically grounded, administratively applicable, and responsive to Afghanistan's political, institutional, and social environment.

Therefore, the aim of the present study was to design and validate an indigenous model for transparency and anti-corruption policymaking in Afghanistan's government organizations.

Methodology

The present study was conducted with the aim of designing and validating an indigenous model for transparency and anti-corruption policymaking in Afghanistan's government organizations. In terms of purpose, the research was developmental-applied, and in terms of nature, it was analytical-critical. Given the multidimensional nature of the problem and the need to simultaneously employ documentary evidence, expert perspectives, and quantitative data, a mixed quantitative–qualitative approach was adopted. The qualitative component focused on identifying the dimensions and components of anti-corruption policymaking, analyzing political, institutional, structural, legal, and implementation barriers, and extracting the elements of an indigenous model. The quantitative component was used to examine trends in corruption and governance indicators, the performance of responsible institutions, and the orientation of policy documents.

The study covered the period from 2004 to 2021, and the required data were collected from three main sources: official documents and policies related to transparency and anti-corruption, expert interviews, and secondary quantitative data. In the documentary component, laws, regulations, decrees, strategies, policy documents, official reports, and documents related to institutions responsible for combating corruption were reviewed. Documents were selected purposively and according to predefined criteria. The principal inclusion criteria were the document's direct relevance to transparency and anti-corruption policies, its correspondence with the study period, and its credibility and suitability for citation.

In the qualitative component, the participant population consisted of scholars and experts familiar with public policymaking, the administrative system, transparency, anti-corruption, and Afghanistan's governance structures. Purposive sampling was used, and where necessary, snowball sampling was employed to identify individuals possessing relevant professional experience and specialized knowledge. Participant recruitment continued until saturation was reached, and ultimately 20 experts participated in the study. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, which enabled an in-depth examination of experts' experiences and perspectives regarding the causes of policy failure, institutional and implementation barriers, and the requirements for developing a model suited to Afghanistan's conditions.

The qualitative data obtained from documents and interviews were prepared, organized, subjected to content analysis, and coded. Similar concepts were organized into related categories and components, and the principal dimensions of the model were extracted through constant comparison between documentary evidence and expert perspectives. At this stage, particular attention was given to political; institutional and structural; legal and implementation-related; social and cultural factors; as well as the need for indigenization and alignment of policies with the Afghan context. The results of the qualitative analysis, integrated with the quantitative evidence, formed the basis for developing the initial structure of the research model.

In the quantitative component, credible secondary data corresponding to the study period were collected and analyzed. These data were selected according to four criteria: source credibility, relevance to the research questions, alignment with the study period, and comparability. Where data for a particular indicator were unavailable for all years, only valid and comparable observations were included in the analysis, and no unsupported estimation or substitution of missing data was undertaken. Accordingly, the quantitative component served a complementary role to the qualitative analysis and was employed to reveal trends and provide performance-related evidence concerning the policies under investigation.

Quantitative analysis was conducted at several levels. First, descriptive statistics were used to calculate the frequency and distribution of laws, policies, strategies, and other formal measures. Second, trends in corruption and governance indicators over the study period were examined. Third, data related to the performance of anti-corruption institutions, including the number of cases reviewed, referred, and adjudicated, were analyzed. Fourth, quantitative content analysis of policy documents was used to determine the extent to which policies focused on areas such as prevention, enforcement and punishment, transparency, accountability, monitoring, and institutional reform.

Following completion of the qualitative and quantitative analyses, findings from the two components were integrated. The purpose of this stage was not merely to juxtapose the results; rather, quantitative evidence was used to complement and assess patterns observed in the qualitative analysis. Accordingly, components extracted from the interviews and documents were compared with evidence concerning trends in corruption and governance indicators, the performance of responsible institutions, and the orientation of official policies. This process provided the basis for developing the initial transparency and anti-corruption policymaking model.

At the final stage, the proposed model was submitted for expert evaluation. Validation was not limited to the superficial assessment of the model; rather, content relevance, structural coherence, comprehensiveness, applicability, and the extent of alignment with Afghanistan's indigenous conditions were evaluated. Experts' comments and recommendations for revision were synthesized; similar suggestions were merged, certain labels and conceptual definitions were revised, and the relationships among model components were clarified. Following these revisions, the final version of the indigenous model for transparency and anti-corruption policymaking in Afghanistan's government organizations was developed.

To enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, data-source triangulation was also employed by integrating official documents, semi-structured interviews, and secondary statistical data. This integration enabled comparison and cross-validation of the findings and prevented the results from relying on a single source. Furthermore, research ethics were observed throughout all stages of the study, including obtaining participants' informed consent, maintaining data confidentiality, protecting interviewees' identities, using data for scientific purposes, ensuring integrity in data analysis and reporting, and accurately citing documents and sources.

Findings and Results

The research findings were derived from the integration of three categories of data: documents related to transparency and anti-corruption policies, semi-structured interviews with experts, and secondary statistical data. In the documentary component, 64 documents pertaining to the study period were reviewed. Laws and regulations represented the most frequent category, with 14 documents accounting for 21.9% of the total, followed by strategies and policy documents at 18.8% and international reports at 17.2%.

Table 1

Distribution of Reviewed Documents

Document Type	Frequency	Percentage
Laws and regulations	14	21.9
Decrees and resolutions	9	14.1
Strategies and policy documents	12	18.8
Executive documents and programs	10	15.6
Domestic official reports	8	12.5
International reports	11	17.2
Total	64	100.0

In the interview component, 20 experts from relevant fields participated. In terms of educational attainment, 65% held doctoral degrees and 35% held master's degrees. Furthermore, 55% of the participants had more than 15 years of professional experience. The disciplinary composition of the sample was designed to cover public policymaking, public administration, governance, administrative reform, law, judicial affairs, transparency, and anti-corruption.

Table 2

Characteristics of Participating Experts

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Education	Master's degree	7	35.0
	Doctoral degree	13	65.0
Professional experience	Less than 10 years	3	15.0
	10–15 years	6	30.0
	16–20 years	7	35.0
	More than 20 years	4	20.0
Area of expertise	Public policymaking and public administration	6	30.0
	Governance and administrative reform	5	25.0
	Law and judicial affairs	4	20.0
	Transparency and anti-corruption	5	25.0

Qualitative data analysis began by segmenting the text of the documents and interviews into meaning units. At the initial stage, 348 codes were extracted. Following the elimination of redundancies and the integration of overlapping codes, 86 concepts were identified. These concepts were subsequently organized into 26 subcategories and 10 main categories, ultimately resulting in the extraction of five principal dimensions of the indigenous model.

Table 3

Qualitative Coding and Data-Reduction Process

Stage of Analysis	Number	Outcome
Initial codes	348	Extracted from meaning units in documents and interviews
Concepts	86	Refinement and integration of similar codes
Subcategories	26	Grouping of semantically related concepts
Main categories	10	Abstraction and consolidation of subcategories
Final dimensions	5	Final structure of the indigenous model

The final analysis resulted in the identification of five dimensions: political; institutional and structural; legal and implementation-related; social and cultural; and indigenization and contextual fit. Each dimension consisted of two main categories, which collectively constituted the conceptual structure of the indigenous model. The findings indicated that these dimensions did not operate independently; rather, reciprocal relationships existed among them.

Table 4

Dimensions, Main Categories, and Core Components of the Indigenous Model

Dimension	Main Category	Core Components
Political	Political will and support	Continuity of political will, high-level support, prioritization of anti-corruption
Political	Political influence and instability	Intervention by power holders, politicization of anti-corruption, policy instability
Institutional and structural	Institutional capacity and independence	Professional capacity, human resources, executive authority, organizational independence
Institutional and structural	Institutional coordination and accountability	Division of responsibilities, reduction of duplication, interorganizational coordination, responsibility
Legal and implementation-related	Quality of the legal framework	Legal coherence, clarity of mandates, regulatory stability, enforcement mechanisms
Legal and implementation-related	Policy–implementation gap	Incomplete implementation, selective enforcement, weak monitoring and follow-up
Social and cultural	Informal power structures	Influence networks, personal and group relationships, traditional relations
Social and cultural	Trust and culture of accountability	Public trust, social participation, public demand for accountability
Indigenization and contextual fit	Policy misalignment	Institutional imitation, inadequate attention to domestic capacity, design–context gap
Indigenization and contextual fit	Requirements of an indigenous model	Institutional realism, stakeholder participation, alignment with political economy and social conditions

Findings relating to the political dimension demonstrated that the existence of laws and institutions, in the absence of sustained political support, was insufficient to generate lasting change. Political will acquires practical significance when it is translated into support for institutional independence, resource allocation, follow-up of outcomes, and non-selective enforcement of rules. By contrast, intervention by power holders, politicization of the anti-corruption process, and shifts in political priorities can constrain the independence of responsible institutions and the continuity of reforms.

Within the institutional and structural dimension, the findings demonstrated that the principal problem was not merely a shortage of specialized institutions. A proliferation of institutions, in the absence of a clear division of responsibilities, may generate duplication, jurisdictional conflict, and avoidance of responsibility. Similarly, legal independence without specialized capacity, executive authority, adequate resources, and access to information cannot guarantee effective performance by anti-corruption institutions.

The legal and implementation-related dimension also revealed a gap between “law” and “law enforcement.” The existence of numerous laws did not necessarily indicate the quality of the legal framework; rather, coherence, stability, clarity of mandates, and effective enforcement mechanisms were of greater importance. Selective enforcement, weak monitoring, and discontinuity between the detection of misconduct, adjudication, and final outcomes were among the principal factors contributing to the policy–implementation gap.

Within the social and cultural dimension, informal power networks, personal and group relationships, public trust, and social participation emerged as significant factors. The findings demonstrated that the formal administrative structure interacts with informal relationships and that policymaking which disregards these relations may create a gap between the formal decision-making structure and the actual structure of influence. Public trust and the participation of citizens, the media, and civil society were also identified as components of society’s capacity to control corruption.

Finally, indigenization emerged as a cross-cutting prerequisite of the model. The findings indicated that the main problem was not the utilization of international experiences and standards per se, but rather the transfer of mechanisms without adequate adaptation to Afghanistan's institutional capacity and political, administrative, and social characteristics. Accordingly, principles such as transparency, accountability, regulatory independence, and the rule of law should be preserved, while the mechanisms used to realize these principles should be adapted to the implementation environment.

Table 5

Identified Problems and Corresponding Requirements of the Indigenous Model

Identified Problem	Consequence	Requirement of the Indigenous Model
Instability of political will	Disruption of reform continuity	Sustained political commitment and support
Intervention by power holders	Reduced decision-making independence	Protection of operational independence
Institutional proliferation and duplication	Ambiguity of responsibility	Clear division of responsibilities and institutional architecture
Weak coordination	Disruption of the implementation chain	Interorganizational coordination
Limited professional capacity	Reduced implementation quality	Institutional capacity development
Fragmentation of laws	Ambiguity in implementation	Coherence of the legal framework
Weak enforcement mechanisms	Reduced deterrence	Stronger enforcement and accountability mechanisms
Selective enforcement	Reduced legitimacy and trust	Equal and non-selective enforcement
Weak monitoring and follow-up	Persistence of deviations	Continuous monitoring and evaluation system
Informal influence networks	Weakening of formal rules	Management of the effects of power networks
Declining public trust	Reduced citizen cooperation	Strengthening transparency and accountability
Limited social participation	Weak public oversight	Strengthening civil society and public accountability
Institutional imitation without adaptation	Design–implementation gap	Indigenization and institutional realism

An examination of formal policymaking trends from 2004 to 2021 identified 45 major legal, policy, strategic, and institutional measures during this period. To analyze changes over time, the 18-year period was divided into three six-year periods. The findings demonstrated an increasing concentration of formal measures over time, with the 2016–2021 period accounting for the greatest concentration of policy and institutional actions.

Table 6

Distribution of Formal Anti-Corruption Measures

Indicator	2004–2009	2010–2015	2016–2021	Total
Number of measures	10	14	21	45
Share of total measures	22.2%	31.1%	46.7%	100%
Annual average	1.67	2.33	3.50	2.50

The increase in the number of formal measures reflected growing policy and institutional attention to corruption. However, comparison with performance evidence demonstrated that an increase in policymaking intensity alone was not accompanied by sustained improvement in corruption and governance indicators. Thus, a distinction emerged between increased “formal policymaking capacity” and “policy implementation capacity.”

Table 7

Selected Trends in Corruption Indicators During the Study Period

Gregorian Year	Corruption Perceptions Index	Control of Corruption Indicator
2012	8	-1.43
2014	12	-1.36
2016	15	-1.54
2018	16	-1.50
2020	19	-1.49
2021	16	-1.15

Analysis of the performance of specialized institutions likewise demonstrated that the capacity to process corruption cases increased during part of the study period, although the gap among potential cases, referred cases, and final outcomes remained important. For example, by late 2017, of 386 potential cases reviewed, 53 had been referred. In March 2018, 73 of 416 cases reviewed were referred. The referral rate therefore increased from approximately 13.7% to 17.5%.

Table 8

Integration of Quantitative Evidence and Qualitative Findings

Quantitative Finding	Corresponding Qualitative Finding	Integrated Conclusion
Increase in the number of policies and formal measures	Existence of a policy–implementation gap	Increasing the number of policies alone is insufficient
Limited and unstable improvement in some indicators	Weak institutional capacity and independence	Implementation quality is more important than the number of policies
Increased activity of specialized institutions	Weak coordination and accountability chain	Institutional activity must be connected to implementation outcomes
Policy documents emphasized prevention and transparency	Weak practical realization of some requirements	A gap exists between policy content and implementation capacity
Allocation of resources to governance and reform programs	Limited absorptive and implementation capacity	Financial resources are necessary but not sufficient
Fluctuation in governance indicators	Political intervention and influence networks	Anti-corruption policy is linked to the broader governance structure
Expansion of the legal framework	Selective enforcement and weak enforcement mechanisms	Quality of law enforcement takes precedence over the number of laws

The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings demonstrated that anti-corruption policymaking cannot be explained solely in terms of the number of laws produced, the establishment of new institutions, or the volume of allocated resources. The findings instead emphasized the importance of interaction among political will, institutional independence and capacity, legal coherence, non-selective enforcement, accountability, and policy alignment with actual contextual conditions.

Based on the integrated findings, the final model assumed a multidimensional, systemic, interactive, and indigenous character. Transparency and anti-corruption policymaking in Afghanistan’s government organizations was positioned at the center of the model. The four dimensions of political; institutional and structural; legal and implementation-related; and social and cultural factors constituted the principal structural components, while “indigenization and contextual fit” functioned as a cross-cutting logic governing policy design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation.

Table 9

Final Structure and Functional Logic of the Proposed Model

Stage/Dimension	Key Elements	Function Within the Model
Political	Political will, sustained support, control of interference	Providing the necessary foundation for implementing reforms
Institutional and structural	Independence, capacity, division of responsibilities, and coordination	Creating implementation and organizational capability
Legal and implementation-related	Legal coherence, enforcement mechanisms, non-selective enforcement	Converting policy decisions into concrete action
Transparency and accountability	Access to information, answerability, and responsibility	Increasing the capacity for control and oversight
Social and cultural	Trust, participation, civil society, and public oversight	Strengthening the social support base of policy
Monitoring and evaluation	Monitoring outcomes and identifying deviations	Correcting performance
Policy learning	Feedback and review	Ensuring policy continuity and self-correction
Indigenization	Alignment with institutional capacity, political economy, and social structure	Cross-cutting requirement across all stages

Following development of the initial model, validation was conducted by 12 experts familiar with public policymaking, governance, transparency, anti-corruption, and Afghanistan’s administrative structure. The model’s dimensions and

components, comprehensiveness, coherence, contextual appropriateness, and applicability were assessed using a five-point scale. A mean score above 4.00 was regarded as favorable, while a score above 4.50 was regarded as highly favorable.

Table 10

Selected Results of the Validation of the Proposed Model

Evaluation Criterion	Mean	Standard Deviation	Agreement (%)	Evaluation
Political dimension	4.75	0.45	91.7	Highly favorable
Institutional and structural dimension	4.67	0.49	91.7	Highly favorable
Comprehensiveness of model dimensions	4.58	0.51	91.7	Highly favorable
Coverage of major factors affecting anti-corruption policy	4.67	0.49	91.7	Highly favorable
Fit with Afghanistan's political structure	4.67	0.49	91.7	Highly favorable

The results demonstrated that none of the model's principal dimensions received an unfavorable evaluation and that the five-dimensional structure achieved a favorable level of expert acceptance. In terms of comprehensiveness, a mean score of 4.58 was obtained for the comprehensiveness of the dimensions, while a mean score of 4.67 was obtained for coverage of the principal factors.

In addition to evaluating the model's structure, the validation process also led to its refinement. The general concept of "political will" was decomposed into more observable components, including support for institutional independence, prevention of interference in cases, resource allocation, acceptance of accountability, and continued support for reforms. Furthermore, "institutional independence" and "institutional coordination" were established as two distinct but complementary components, and the accountability chain was further developed by placing greater emphasis on the linkages among detection, investigation, referral, adjudication, and final outcomes.

Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aimed to design and validate an indigenous model for transparency and anti-corruption policymaking in Afghanistan's government organizations. The findings showed that anti-corruption policymaking in Afghanistan cannot be adequately explained through a single legal, administrative, or organizational dimension. Instead, the results revealed a multidimensional structure consisting of political; institutional and structural; legal and implementation-related; social and cultural; and indigenization and contextual-fit dimensions. The qualitative analysis yielded 348 initial codes, 86 concepts, 26 subcategories, and 10 main categories, which were subsequently organized into five overarching dimensions. Quantitative evidence complemented this structure by showing that although 45 major legal, policy, strategic, and institutional measures were introduced between 2004 and 2021, the growing intensity of formal anti-corruption activity did not produce a corresponding and sustained improvement in corruption and governance indicators. The integrated findings therefore demonstrated that the central challenge was not the absence of policies, laws, or institutions, but rather the weakness of the mechanisms through which these formal arrangements were translated into implementation, accountability, and measurable outcomes.

One of the most important findings concerned the political dimension, particularly the role of sustained political will and high-level support. The results indicated that political commitment becomes meaningful only when it is converted into institutional protection, resource allocation, support for impartial implementation, continuity of reform, and resistance to interference in anti-corruption processes. This finding is consistent with studies that conceptualize corruption as an institutional rather than merely individual phenomenon. Institutional arrangements shape whether anti-corruption rules

become embedded in organizational practice or remain symbolic. Azim et al. emphasized that accountability and corruption are closely intertwined with institutional work and with the ways organizational actors reproduce, defend, or transform existing arrangements [9]. The present findings support this argument by showing that formal anti-corruption structures are unlikely to function effectively when political actors can influence mandates, priorities, investigations, or organizational independence.

The finding concerning the destabilizing effect of political interference also aligns with research emphasizing the political and interpretive dimensions of corruption. Quayle and West showed that corruption and fraud may be framed differently depending on political narratives, media bias, and moral ambiguity [12]. In the Afghan context examined in the present study, politicization was not merely discursive; it could also weaken the legitimacy and continuity of enforcement by creating perceptions of selectivity or political instrumentalization. This helps explain why the existence of formal anti-corruption institutions did not necessarily guarantee public confidence in their impartiality. The implication is that sustained political commitment must be institutionalized through procedural safeguards so that anti-corruption agencies can operate beyond short-term political priorities.

The institutional and structural dimension was another major component of the proposed model. The findings demonstrated that the proliferation of institutions does not necessarily strengthen anti-corruption governance and may, under conditions of unclear mandates, generate duplication, jurisdictional conflict, fragmented responsibility, and coordination failures. This result is consistent with Vorster and Nwosu, who concluded that the effectiveness of public-sector anti-corruption regulation depends not only on the existence of policy instruments but also on implementation quality, institutional accountability, and the capacity of responsible actors [10]. Similarly, Ranjbar and Ebrami emphasized that reducing employee corruption requires an integrated organizational approach in which structures, management practices, ethical mechanisms, supervision, and performance systems operate coherently [11]. The present results extend this logic to the interorganizational level by showing that institutional architecture itself must be sufficiently clear to prevent responsibility from becoming dispersed across multiple agencies.

The study further showed that institutional independence should not be considered in isolation from institutional capacity. Legal autonomy without specialized personnel, financial resources, access to information, investigative authority, and implementation capability is insufficient. This result is theoretically important because anti-corruption discourse often treats independence as a formal legal characteristic, whereas the findings suggest that operational independence is a composite condition involving authority, resources, competence, and protection from external interference. This interpretation is compatible with the broader literature on governance and accountability, in which institutional effectiveness depends on the interaction between formal mandates and practical capabilities [9, 10]. Accordingly, a formally independent institution may remain ineffective if it lacks the organizational infrastructure required to act upon its mandate.

The legal and implementation-related dimension revealed a pronounced policy–implementation gap. The study found that the number of laws and regulations did not necessarily reflect the quality of the anti-corruption legal framework. Instead, coherence, clarity of mandates, stability of rules, enforceability, and consistency of application were more decisive. The quantitative findings reinforced this point: the number of formal anti-corruption measures increased across the three six-year periods, reaching its highest concentration during 2016–2021, yet this expansion did not produce a sustained improvement in the selected corruption and governance indicators. This pattern supports the argument that formal

regulatory activity cannot be treated as equivalent to effective corruption control. Vorster and Nwosu similarly showed that regulatory frameworks may remain ineffective when monitoring, implementation, and enforcement are weak [10]. The present study therefore confirms that the effectiveness of anti-corruption policy is determined less by the volume of legislation than by the quality and credibility of its implementation.

Selective enforcement emerged as one of the most significant manifestations of the policy–implementation gap. The findings indicated that unequal or politically conditioned application of rules undermines both deterrence and public confidence. In this regard, Tungga et al. argued that anti-corruption enforcement should be guided not only by severity but also by principles of proportionality and procedural legitimacy [13]. Although their analysis concerned proportional responses in corruption cases, the relevance to the present study lies in the broader principle that enforcement must be credible, consistent, and institutionally legitimate. Selective implementation produces the opposite effect by transforming legal rules into contingent instruments rather than stable standards. Thus, an indigenous anti-corruption model for Afghanistan requires both non-selective enforcement and proportionate institutional responses.

The quantitative findings regarding case processing further support the importance of examining the entire accountability chain. The referral rate among reviewed corruption cases increased from approximately 13.7% in late 2017 to 17.5% in March 2018. However, the findings also emphasized the continuing importance of gaps between potential cases, referrals, adjudication, and final outcomes. Institutional activity therefore cannot be evaluated simply by counting reviewed or referred cases. What matters is whether the complete chain from detection through investigation, referral, adjudication, and enforcement functions coherently. This interpretation is compatible with research on transparency and disclosure, which emphasizes that information becomes institutionally meaningful only when it leads to answerability and consequences [4, 7]. The current findings similarly suggest that detection without effective follow-through has limited anti-corruption value.

The social and cultural dimension of the model was also strongly supported by the findings. Informal influence networks, personal and group relations, public trust, and citizen participation emerged as central elements shaping the effectiveness of formal anti-corruption policy. This finding is consistent with research demonstrating that corruption is often embedded in organizational and social relationships rather than occurring solely as isolated misconduct. Odii et al., for example, showed how corruption in Nigerian primary healthcare facilities can become embedded in informal market relations and organizational survival strategies, thereby requiring a broader interpretation of drivers and solutions [16]. Similarly, Breili et al. demonstrated that corruption risk must be understood in relation to sector-specific organizational and relational conditions, even in comparatively high-governance environments [15]. The present findings support these observations by showing that formal institutional arrangements in Afghanistan interacted continuously with informal structures of influence.

This interaction between formal and informal structures has major implications for policy design. If formal organizational charts, legal mandates, and reporting systems do not correspond to the actual distribution of influence and decision-making power, then the implementation of anti-corruption policy may be distorted at the operational level. The study therefore found that realistic policymaking requires recognition of informal networks rather than assuming that formal authority structures alone determine behavior. This interpretation also helps explain why policies based on international institutional templates may have limited effectiveness when transferred without adequate contextual adaptation. The problem is not necessarily the normative principles embedded in such policies, but rather the assumption that organizational mechanisms will function identically across different political and social environments.

Public trust and social participation were also identified as essential components of corruption control. The findings indicated that citizen cooperation, civil society oversight, media participation, and public demand for accountability can strengthen the social foundations of anti-corruption governance. This result is aligned with Pavlik and Young, who found that public participation in institutional processes may contribute to corruption control by increasing inclusiveness, ownership, and accountability [14]. Likewise, transparency-oriented research has highlighted the importance of disclosure systems that enable external stakeholders to scrutinize organizational behavior [4, 7]. However, the present study adds that participation requires institutional responsiveness. Where reporting corruption does not lead to visible follow-up, public participation may decline and mistrust may intensify.

The importance of transparency was also reinforced by the model's emphasis on access to information, answerability, and oversight. Transparency, however, emerged not as an isolated value but as part of an integrated accountability system. This interpretation corresponds with emerging technological research showing that advanced auditing mechanisms, artificial intelligence, and network analysis may enhance financial transparency and corruption control only when they are embedded within appropriate institutional arrangements [8]. Thus, technological transparency mechanisms should not be viewed as substitutes for institutional reform. Their contribution depends on data quality, enforcement capacity, professional competence, and the willingness of organizations to act upon detected anomalies.

The findings regarding the limited and unstable improvement in corruption indicators also correspond with comparative evidence showing that corruption trends are neither linear nor determined by a single factor. Paul and Adams demonstrated considerable variability in corruption perceptions across Sub-Saharan African countries, indicating that institutional context and temporal dynamics substantially influence corruption outcomes [17]. Transparency International's comparative data similarly show significant differences among countries and over time in perceived public-sector corruption [18]. In the present study, changes in corruption and governance indicators were interpreted alongside legal and institutional developments rather than as standalone measures. This is important because perception indicators may signal broader institutional trajectories, but they cannot independently explain the mechanisms through which improvement or deterioration occurs.

The study also found that corruption has broader organizational and economic implications. Weak corruption control may undermine efficiency, investment confidence, and the performance of both public and private institutions. Evidence from banking research has shown that corruption can affect profitability and institutional performance across different economic contexts [5, 6]. Marzouki and Ben Amar also demonstrated the importance of managerial behavior and secrecy in shaping corruption risk [3]. These findings support the present study's emphasis on accountability and information access because opacity and discretionary behavior can create conditions in which corrupt practices are harder to detect and sanction. From a management perspective, anti-corruption policymaking should therefore be understood not simply as a legal compliance issue but as a central component of organizational governance and performance.

A further important result concerned indigenization and contextual fit. The findings showed that indigenization should not be treated as a separate peripheral component but as a cross-cutting principle governing the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of anti-corruption policy. International norms such as transparency, accountability, rule of law, institutional independence, and public participation remain relevant, but their operationalization must be aligned with domestic institutional capacity, political economy, administrative traditions, and social conditions. The comparative literature supports this conclusion because corruption takes different organizational forms across contexts. Evidence from healthcare,

construction, banking, and public administration demonstrates that corruption drivers are context-dependent and interact with sector-specific incentives and institutional arrangements [5, 10, 15, 16]. Therefore, policy transfer without adaptation may create institutional structures that appear appropriate formally but remain weakly embedded in practice.

The validation results further strengthened confidence in the proposed model. Expert evaluation yielded mean scores above 4.50 for key dimensions, comprehensiveness, coverage of principal factors, and alignment with Afghanistan's political structure. These results indicate that the model was perceived as both conceptually comprehensive and contextually appropriate. Importantly, the validation process also improved the model by transforming broad concepts such as political will into more operationally observable components, including protection of institutional independence, prevention of interference, resource provision, acceptance of accountability, and continuity of reform support. This refinement increases the practical utility of the model because broad normative concepts become more amenable to organizational assessment and policy evaluation.

Overall, the findings indicate that sustainable anti-corruption policymaking in Afghanistan requires a transition from fragmented, institution-centered, and legislation-centered responses toward a systemic governance approach. Effective policy depends on the interaction of political commitment, institutional independence, organizational capacity, legal coherence, non-selective enforcement, coordination, transparency, accountability, social participation, continuous monitoring, and policy learning. The study therefore supports a systems perspective in which corruption is not treated as a discrete administrative failure but as an outcome generated through interactions among institutions, actors, rules, incentives, and informal structures. In this framework, policy effectiveness depends on whether the overall system can transform formal commitments into sustained, credible, and contextually appropriate implementation.

The study has several limitations. First, the analysis covered the period from 2004 to 2021 and therefore does not address institutional and governance developments occurring after this period. Second, the quantitative component relied on secondary data, and some indicators were not consistently available for all years, which limited the possibility of constructing uninterrupted time series. Third, although 20 experts provided substantial qualitative insight and saturation was reached, expert perspectives may still reflect professional and institutional experiences that are not fully representative of all relevant stakeholders. Fourth, the study focused on the national public-sector policymaking environment and did not separately analyze sector-specific differences among ministries, judicial institutions, security agencies, provincial administrations, or service-delivery organizations. Finally, the proposed model was validated through expert judgment rather than longitudinal implementation testing, and its practical effects therefore remain to be examined in real organizational settings.

Future research should test the proposed model empirically across different categories of government organizations and examine whether the relative importance of its dimensions varies by sector, administrative level, organizational size, or institutional mandate. Longitudinal studies could investigate how changes in political commitment, institutional independence, enforcement capacity, and public trust affect corruption-control outcomes over time. Comparative research involving Afghanistan and other countries with similar governance challenges could also help distinguish context-specific mechanisms from more general anti-corruption principles. Future studies may additionally operationalize each component of the model into measurable indicators and use structural equation modeling, multilevel analysis, or longitudinal panel methods to assess the causal relationships among political, institutional, legal, social, and contextual variables. Further

qualitative research could examine the role of informal networks, implementation discretion, and interorganizational coordination in greater depth.

From a practical perspective, government authorities should prioritize the quality and implementation of anti-corruption policy rather than the numerical expansion of laws, strategies, and institutions. Clear institutional mandates should be established to reduce duplication and jurisdictional conflict, while anti-corruption bodies should be provided with sufficient operational independence, specialized human resources, information access, and financial capacity. Monitoring systems should track cases across the entire accountability chain from detection to final outcome, and enforcement should be consistent and non-selective. Transparency mechanisms should be linked to meaningful answerability and public access to usable information. Civil society, media, and citizen participation should be incorporated into monitoring processes, while policy design should be adapted to the realities of Afghanistan's political economy, administrative capacity, and informal institutional environment. Continuous evaluation and policy learning should also be institutionalized so that anti-corruption arrangements can be revised in response to implementation failures and changing conditions.

Acknowledgments

We would like to express our appreciation and gratitude to all those who cooperated in carrying out this study.

Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants. Written consent was obtained from all participants in the study.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

Funding

This research was carried out independently with personal funding and without the financial support of any governmental or private institution or organization.

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