

# CORRUPTION IN NEPAL: INVESTIGATING THE GAP BETWEEN MEDIA PORTRAYAL AND ACTUAL EVIDENCE

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## **Abstract**

*This study aims to analyze the corruption in Nepal from the perspective of media Portrayal against the Actual Evidences in the empirical context. Ideally, the media are supposed to act as a watchdog and expose wrongdoings in addition to awaking the citizens. However, this paper indicates a critical gap between what has been reported in the news and the findings of corruption navigating the analysis of the content published in two popular newspapers in Nepal, i.e. Gorakhapatra and Kantipur take the methodological cut-off point between 2065 mansir (November-December, 2007) and 2081 Mansir (November-December, 2024). Based on media coverage and governmental publications, Nepali journalism seems to be under political and financial pressure. The constraints also restrict the ability of journalists to fairly investigate and report on such matters and hence biased, partial or incomplete reporting. These misrepresentations hide the real magnitude of corruption and undermine the consciousness of the masses. The results indicate that the media has not only been unsuccessful in its democratic obligation, but also in living up to its democratic ideals. The remedy to these weaknesses would be to ensure more press freedom, independence against unnecessary interference, and enhanced investigative journalism.*

**Keywords:** *Corruption, media, power, elites, money, watchdog, Nepal*

## **Introduction**

In general, cases of corruption in the media houses are not limited to financial bribes. It can take the form of selective advertising, personal influence, or even being coerced by political forces that undermine journalistic autonomy. By purchasing media outlets using illicit funds, political forces tend to gain control of the media. In that case, the media no longer presents a challenge to the corruption but helps to reproduce it (Berti et al., 2020). This suggests a strong correlation between the level of media freedom and the prevalence of corruption. Dolzhenkova et al. (2021) believe that media independence is an excellent tool for reducing social misconduct, but political elites determine the scope of its effectiveness. Therefore, the accountability depends on constitutional and institutional guarantees of freedom of expression.

The interdependence between the political and media systems has been well established. Mancini (2019) emphasizes that corruption in one aspect cannot help but influence the other, and that its

role in the media, particularly in questioning politics, makes it a crucial part of the political sphere. Political power is legally authorized, and hence, corruption in politics is a newsworthy issue. Publicity on such cases increases the social capital of media organizations. Indeed, media influence is often magnified by publicizing corruption, leading to the resignation of large officeholders (Allern & Pollack, 2012). However, as Lengauer et al. (2014) note, the power of the media is less evident than political power and is often carried out in pursuit of profit. Corruption scandals can therefore be viewed as business opportunities rather than civic duties (Suphachalasai, 2005).

Regardless of these restrictions, the principle according to which the corruption could no longer be hidden offers a compensatory factor. Even attempts that are strong enough to suppress information often prove ineffective, as malfeasance is disclosed by the masses, as well as through investigative reporting, as Somiddinovich (2024) suggests. Still, the press is not exempt, and it cannot be entirely objective, as it serves the interests of its audience and thus compromises objectivity (Prat & Stromberg, 2013). Theoretically, the media serves as a watchdog, but in reality, this is not the case, as it is often undermined. News can be constructed in a manner that paces the actors in the government, instead of questioning their acts of misconduct, leading to the safeguarding of corruption rather than its revelation (Tella & Franceschelli, 2011).

These general trends are depicted in the Nepali context. In the case of Gorkhapatra, the first newspaper in the country, Prime Minister Dev Shamsher established clear rules on what should and should not be printed, including a prohibition on praising the Rana regime (Devkota, 2059 BS). Ironically, the modern Nepali media often indulges in blatant flattery of the powerful. The freedom of the press was enshrined in the 1990 Constitution of Nepal. Although it was a fundamental right (Government of Nepal, 2047 BS), the development of the newspapers did not always contribute to the reinforcement of democracy (Onta, 2001). Instead, a model of clientelism emerged: journalists and media houses became increasingly favored by political patronage, government advertisements, and preferential appointments (Dahal, 2023). These practices transformed the role of the media from questioning corruption to maintaining it, a significant transformation that has shaped the current media landscape in Nepal. In this context, the study aims to analyze the corruption in Nepal from the perspective of media Portrayal against the actual evidence in the empirical context.

## **Methods and Materials**

In this study, I analyze the materials from the first page, editorial, and those published on the opinion page of two national newspapers, Gorakhapatra and Kantipur, quantitatively for the months of Mangsir in 2064 and 2081. It takes methodological cut-off point between FY 2005/06 (2008/09) and 2080/81 (2024/25). December 9 (which falls in Mangsir in the BS calendar) is the day of International Anti-Corruption Day, so this the month is selected as longitudinal point of reference. For the nature of the investigation, I have chosen two newspapers: one government-owned and another private. The year 2064 is not just a random choice, but a significant one. It marks the year of the first constitution assembly election in Nepal, during which professionals had the opportunity to enter parliament through the proportional electoral system. The active participation of business professionals, bureaucrats, and political parties in the policy-making process marks the beginning of policy-level corruption. This is why the year 2064 BS has been taken as the base year for our analysis, underlining its historical importance.

On the other hand, I have meticulously conducted a linear regression analysis to investigate the relationship between the applications of two organizations established for reliable journalism, the National Information Commission and the Nepal Press Council, and corruption. For this, I followed comprehensive data on complaints to the Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority, complaints made regarding the demand for information to the National Information Commission, and complaints made against published news in the Press Council. This rigorous analysis ensures the reliability and validity of our findings.

## **Result and Discussion**

### **Conceptualizing the Relation between Media and Oligarchy**

The emergence of the elite class has posed significant challenges not only for politics but also for broader institutional development. Aristocracy refers to a system in which a small group, endowed with special rights, governs for its own narrow and often corrupt interests. These elites are not only wealthy but also utilize their property as a medium of power. Aristotle's description of this form of rule as *oligarchia*, a condition in which a few corrupt actors monopolize governance, and Plato's emphasis on the elite class arising only when private property is recognized as sacred and protected, provide us with profound historical perspectives. Adam Smith viewed property as central to the establishment of government, whose main task is to safeguard the rich from the poor. John Locke, however, rejected Hobbes's view that assets depend on individual will, insisting instead that the earth belongs to all, and every person has the right to use its resources freely (Mack, 2013).

The elite class, in practice, does not simply protect property rights. They often misuse their political power to restrict others from entering the productive sphere, violating these very rights (Acemoglu, 2003). Their influence also extends to the selection of political leaders, where they tend to favor weak dictators who can be manipulated or strong ones who will defend elite interests, although such arrangements are always precarious. Guriev and Sonin (2009) argue that the primary function of such governments becomes the protection of elite property, often from rival elites themselves. Karl Marx interpreted private property as the foundation of exploitation, asserting that the ownership of productive assets grants the capitalist class the right to exploit labor (Brenkert, 1979). From this perspective, the aristocracy entrenches systemic inequality by prioritizing property rights over social welfare.

While democracy is expected to protect public resources for collective benefit, aristocracy prioritizes elite assets and disregards broader public interests. Historically, aristocracy is among the oldest forms of governance, dating back to the fifth century BCE. This long-standing tradition, despite the gradual weakening of its legitimacy due to modernization and social transformation, remains embedded in political thought and continues to shape power relations in subtle ways (Kalyvas, 2019). In this context, corruption is increasingly recognized as a component of the contemporary governance paradigm (Sapkota, 2023a) as well as a subject of political philosophy (Sapkota, 2025). Sapkota (2023b) further argues that development studies should incorporate corruption within the broader context of service delivery research, rather than confining it solely to the political domain.

## Theorizing the Relation between Media and Oligarchy

Corruption within such systems can be categorized into two primary forms: political and economic. Political corruption entails the misuse of power to accumulate wealth, whereas economic corruption involves the misuse of wealth to acquire power. This misuse of wealth perpetuates the aristocratic order by allowing elites to expand their influence. Wealth obtained through illicit means is often reinvested in various ways, such as funding political campaigns or buying influence, which in turn helps these elites maintain and increase their power. In corrupt states, elites seek constant protection of both themselves and their assets, fostering an aristocratic order. This tendency enables oligarchic groups to circumvent principles and legal norms when rulers lack strong ethical foundations (Brown, 2025). Such practices cultivate a culture of selfishness that normalizes corruption within society (Khanal, 2025).

The role of media within this dynamic is especially complex. Theoretically, mass media provide a voice to the voiceless and hold governments accountable (Norris, 2001). However, elites increasingly dominate media institutions to manage financial pressures, protect their interests, and influence public opinion (Pravdova, 2019). Investment in media offers them twofold advantages: safeguarding assets and participating directly in power struggles. Ownership of media outlets enables elites to not only influence electoral outcomes in favor of high-status political figures (Pleines, 2016), but also to shape public opinion, thereby influencing policymaking and directing governments toward decisions that favor oligarchic interests over those of the public (Winters & Page, 2009).

Elite investment in media further strengthens their alliance with political parties, particularly in weak democracies where institutional safeguards are fragile (Markus & Charnysh, 2017). The age of aristocracy, historically tied to political struggle, has thus reappeared in modern guise: elites pursue power not to serve citizens but to consolidate wealth and influence. In this process, they manipulate all three branches of government, exploit institutions, and exacerbate inequality. Economic disparities are transformed into political inequalities, allowing elites to reduce ideological diversity and suppress civil society through corruption (Marandici, 2021). When media are captured in this manner, judicial and law enforcement bodies also compromise their independence, thereby multiplying corruption across various sectors (Vaidya & Gupta, 2016).

Philp (2001) describes this phenomenon as “state control of corruption,” where the benefits of policy-level corruption are shared between political elites, bureaucrats, and the private sector. In such arrangements, elites finance bribery and secure favorable policies, while the media serve to normalize these decisions in the eyes of the public. In Nepal, for instance, powerful elites and politicians are rarely challenged by the press. Instead, Nepali media often focus on minor issues or surface-level reporting rather than conducting in-depth analytical investigations. This trend, interpreted by Timalisina (2024) as “crony capitalism,” urgently calls for a reevaluation of the media's role, as it allows elites to capture the media and silence critical coverage, perpetuating corruption.

The persistence of clientelism in this context has blurred professional boundaries. Journalists frequently rely on political networks for financial survival, undermining their independence and

eroding their watchdog role. As a result, the media—rather than confronting corruption—becomes complicit in its protection, thereby sustaining the aristocratic order. Adhikari (2015) highlights the nexus among politicians, bureaucrats, military elites, media proprietors, and business groups, which collectively safeguard mutual interests. This underscores the urgent need for independent media to advocate for the public's interests. These alliances resist fair competition and normalize corrupt exchanges. In this light, the media's position in the struggle against corruption appears deeply ambivalent: while theoretically indispensable for accountability, its practical role is contingent upon structural independence and professional integrity.

### **Empirical Cases and Statistical Measurements**

Theories and studies on mass media demonstrate the significant interest the media displays and the considerable focus it gives to issues of crime and corruption, highlighting the sensitivity of these topics. Social media often focuses on minor types of corruption, conveying the message that corruption has increased in society. In contrast, the mass media are not focusing on this type of corruption. The news of corruption remains a matter of rumor and discourse unless the money and relationships function to set the agenda inside the newsroom. In this situation, the media sidelines public opinion that there is corruption and changes it. People begin to think that there is no corruption. Therefore, there is a high potential for corrupt individuals to use the media as a tool to escape or conceal corruption through the exploitation of political power and business interests. This underscores the need to be aware of the underlying factors shaping the narrative. In Nepal, the corporate sector and political interests are affecting the news and opinion (Pandey, 2024). By analyzing Nepali media, the coverage of the corruption issue is examined.

### **Media Coverage and Subject Matter Analysis**

In 2064 Mangsir, the Gorkhapatra, Nepal's national daily, published 289 news items, including both major and minor stories in first pages. Among the news, there were only three items related to corruption. Among 168 articles, only one is related to corruption, and among 29 editorials, no editorial is related to corruption. In 2081 Mangsir, Gorkhapatra published 152 news items, of which only three related to corruption. Among these, two were based on court verdicts. The speech of Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli, aimed at making the country prosperous through good governance, has made headlines twice, while news about the Rabi Lamichhane case was published on the front page three times. During this period, not a single article was published about corruption among the 92 articles. In 24th Mangsir, the article on "Journalism in the Practice of Good Governance" focused on journalism rather than corruption. This article has not focused much on corruption. During this period, Gorkhapatra National Daily had not published a single editorial on corruption.

Kantipur National Daily has published 146 news items in the month of Mangsir in 2064 in first pages. Among them, only two news items are related to corruption. During this period, only one article out of 132 is related to corruption, whereas among the 24 editorials, not a single one is on corruption. The article entitled "Judge under the Investigation", published on 12th Mangsir, reported news of corruption, but this news seemed to have been prepared only after the decision of the Judicial Council. In 2081 Mangsir, among the 82 news items published on the front page

of Kantipur National Daily, only two news items were on corruption. Among the 71 published articles and 24 editorials, during this period, no articles or editorials about corruption were published. In this duration, the headlines seem centered on the news about Rabi Lamichhane, Ms. Anjala Koirala, wife of Rishikesh Pokharel, Chairperson of the Public Account Committee of the Parliament, involved in cooperative fraud, Mr. Lilaballav Adhikari, the minister of Internal Affairs and Law of Koshi Province, involved in human trafficking in Japan, and the corruption in Tribhuvan University.

### Testing the Relation between Media and Corruption

The study examines and analyzes cases registered with the Commission for the Investigation of the Abuse of Authority, taxes collected by the federal government, various requests and appeals for information from individuals, and cases before the Press Council to interpret the close relationship between the media and corruption. The data from FY 2005/06 (2008/09) to 2080/81 (2024/25) were analyzed using R2 analysis by linear regression, providing crucial insights into the contemporary issues of governance, corruption, and media studies.

**Table 1:**

*CIAA Complains, PCN Complain register and NIC Complains*

Fiscal Year	CIAA-Complains Register	PCN Complain register	NIC Complains
2080/081	36186	340	1265
2079/080	28067	221	1068
2078/079	24331	203	1083
2077/078	22625	192	753
2076/077	25152	162	1013
2075/076	24085	44	1144
2074/075	19488	65	1176
2073/074	19580	55	672
2072/073	24691	74	678
2071/072	31213	51	777
2070/071	22602	33	470
2069/070	11298	39	260
2068/069	8839	78	136
2067/068	6145	37	47
2066/067	4295	28	29
2065/066	4149	29	12

Source: CIAA annual reports, PCN annual reports and NIC annual reports

### Relation between Corruption and Violation of Journalist Code of Conduct

The study uncovers a significant relationship **between corruption and the violation of the**



**journalist's code of conduct (Table 2).** This examination, based on a robust methodology that assumes the news of corruption increases with the rise in the number of cases in the Commission for the Investigation of the Abuse of Authority, has been conducted with utmost care. In this context, the increasing complaints by individuals who feel that the code of conduct is being breached in the news they read, further validates our research process.

**Table 2:**

*Statistical result on relationship between corruption and the violation of the journalist's code of conduct*

Best-fit values	
Slope	0.006092 ± 0.001917
Y-intercept	-15.89 ± 41.65
X-intercept	2608
1/Slope	164.2
95% Confidence Intervals	
Slope	0.001980 to 0.01020
Y-intercept	-105.2 to 73.44
X-intercept	-3.429e+4 to 1.115e+4
Goodness of Fit	
R Square	0.4190
Sy.x	72.70
Is slope significantly non-zero?	
F	10.10
DFn,DFd	1,14
P Value	0.0067
Deviation from zero?	Significant
Equation	$Y = 0.006092 * X - 15.89$
Data	
Number of X values	16
Maximum number of Y replicates	1
Total number of values	16
Number of missing values	0

### Relation between Corruption and the Demand of Information

Similarly, as the result presented in Table 3 reveals, there is another critical remark on the relationship between corruption and the demand for information. If information on corruption is made public by whatever source, the journalist plans to cover it. The National Information Commission is legally able to access confidential information. Data analysis reveals the connections between

requests for information and allegations of wrongdoing. It's important to note that, according to the law, an authority can legally obtain secret information by filing a Right to Information appeal under the relevant laws, ensuring the audience feels secure and aware of their rights. This is a crucial tool for journalists working in investigative journalism.

**Table 3:**

*Statistical result on relationship between corruption and the demand for information*

Best-fit values	
Slope	0.04006 ± 0.005964
Y-intercept	-121.7 ± 129.6
X-intercept	3037
1/Slope	24.96
95% Confidence Intervals	
Slope	0.02727 to 0.05286
Y-intercept	-399.6 to 156.2
X-intercept	-5519 to 7845
Goodness of Fit	
R Square	0.7632
Sy.x	226.2
Is slope significantly non-zero?	
F	45.12
DFn,DFd	1,14
P Value	< 0.0001
Deviation from zero?	Significant
Equation	$Y = 0.04006 * X - 121.7$
Data	
Number of X values	16
Maximum number of Y replicates	1
Total number of values	16
Number of missing values	0

## Analysis of the Results

The empirical study, with a particular focus on the R2 analysis, unveils a significant finding. The increasing number of corruptions is found to correlate with a rise in incidents of violating the journalist code of conduct. Among the 350,673 complaints registered by the Commission for the Investigation of the Abuse of Authority over the past 34 years, since the fiscal year 2047/2048, 312,402 cases were registered in the 17 years following FY 2065/2066. There have been complaints registered in the past 16 years, which accounts for 89%, while in the recent four years, from fiscal



years 2077/2078 to 2081/2082, the rate was 32%. During this period, the number of cases of code of conduct violations in the Press Council Nepal (PCN) has increased gradually. A regression study shows a statistically significant but lesser correlation between violations of the journalistic code of conduct and corruption complaints (CIAA). Although the effect is less and the model only accounts for half of the variation, violations of the journalism code of conduct also tend to increase when corruption complaints do. Violations of the journalistic code of conduct are not determined by news reports on corruption or incidents involving corruption. R2 testing reveals that only 41.90% of the variance in the relationship between the two variables is explained, a significant finding in our research.

The CIAA's corruption charges and the National Information Commission's (NIC) Right to Information appeals have a strong, favorable, and comparatively high correlation. The results indicate that more reports of corruption and appeals regarding information rights are lodged. R2 reports that 76.32% of complaints about appeals to the right to information are related to corruption coverage. This line excludes practical considerations; however, the results of the R2 analysis demonstrate that the media's portrayal of corruption warrants criticism. The R2 analysis reveals a strong correlation between appeals for information and corruption. The lack of a concept that concealed information should be published in the news has led to a decrease in appeals to the National Information Commission. While the number of corruption cases in the CIAA is rising, the topic of corruption does not appear to be receiving much attention in the mainstream media. The circumstances in 2064 and 2081 are identical, according to a review of news articles and editorials published in Gorkhapatra National Daily and Kantipur National Daily. The result indicates that demanding more information leads to reporting corruption more frequently. This illustrates a pattern of accountability-seeking activity that works in concert: RTI use and corruption complaints support one another.

This analysis reveals that the issue of corruption is being overlooked by the media in Nepal. Among the seven cases registered in the special court in the month of Mangsir 2081, no news has made it to the front page of the mainstream news. Among the seven cases, three involved corruption in the local government. This study reveals that the media trail exceeds the academic investigation in the subject of corruption, which is gradually becoming multidimensional in Nepal. However, even the media trail is growing weaker. The media seems unable to incorporate the social opinion that corruption has increased. This opinion has been institutionalized due to the widespread use of social media. For instance, the limitations of traditional mass media, such as lack of resources for in-depth investigations and the influence of political affiliations, hinder their ability to cover all corruption issues and influence public opinion. Overall, this study highlights the disparity between the actual state of corruption and its media coverage. R2 examination shows that increasing corruption also increases the number of cases of the violation of the journalist code of conduct. The result of this study shows that investigative journalism is also being weakened.

On the other hand, the task of collecting required information to conclude an investigative journalism investigation is also not very effective. Where media institutions are captured, they cease to be instruments of accountability and become vehicles for the reproduction of corruption.

This underscores the urgent need for press freedom and reduced clientelistic dependence. These conditions are not just desirable, but essential preconditions for the media to fulfill its democratic mandate. The audience should feel the necessity for these conditions to ensure the media's effectiveness in combating corruption.

## **Conclusion and Remarks**

In conclusion, the media remain central to the contest against corruption; yet, the extent of their political and financial autonomy shapes their effectiveness. The disparity between improper media coverage and public opinion, as well as the level of gossip and discussion in any society, has created a significant gap. There is a difference between various social issues, corruption, and how they are portrayed in the media. In Nepal, individuals spend their money to gain power, whereas political leaders misuse their power and position to accumulate wealth. This situation compels the media to be the worshiper of power rather than highlighting the issues of corruption. The tendency to misuse power to accumulate money makes the media dependent and puts it under the control of the elite class.

Undoubtedly, the media serves as a crucial bridge between citizens and the state in a democracy. It not only amplifies the voice of the people to the government but also promptly informs the public about the government's policy-making weaknesses and behavior. The essence of democracy lies in the media's duty to inform the public about various forms of corruption, nepotism, discrimination, and prejudices. However, studies reveal that the Nepali media has not fully lived up to its democratic responsibilities. The media's inability to act as a watchdog in controlling corruption can be attributed to the lack of complete press freedom, non-democratic media practices, political and professional interests, and increasing economic dependency.

This study has concluded that only legal and policy transformation is not adequate to control corruption. The urgency lies in making the media fully independent, unbiased, research-based, and free. Journalism, free from the influence of business interests, political interference, and internal bias, can only amplify the voices of the voiceless and convey information about the misuse of power and authority to the public. This type of journalism can only be effective in controlling the misuse of power. The media can be transparent and accountable to the public only when it is free, based on research and investigation, free from political and economic pressure, independent, and free from the influence of the elite and the corporate sector. The role of the media can be made effective only by strengthening the mass media. Besides this, the protection of the source of information is equally important. However, it is not easy to strengthen the media in Nepal, a country where corruption is deeply ingrained in the culture. To ascertain the nature of Nepali media coverage of social issues, such as corruption, further research is required.

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