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ANTI-CORRUPTION LAWS IN INDIA: STRENGTHENING TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN INDIA

~Princy S Das

“The worst disease in the world today is corruption. And there is a cure: transparency.”

-Bono

INTRODUCTION

Corruption, the abuse of entrusted power or authority for private or personal gain, is one of the major challenges faced by governments and societies across the world. It undermines public trust, weakens democracy, hampers development and further exacerbates inequality, poverty, social divisions, environment, etc.¹ Corruption has been a persistent problem in India since before the independence. It mired almost every facet of governance and public life for years. As such, India has seen a number of legislative efforts toward increasing transparency, accountability, and integrity within its enormous public sector.

India's legal framework for combating corruption has developed over several decades and includes laws dealing specifically with bribery and misconduct, as well as legislation promoting institutional accountability, financial transparency and whistleblower protection. India's anti-corruption framework is therefore not contained in a single statute. Instead, it consists of several laws and institutions that work together to prevent, investigate and punish corrupt practices.²

HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND EVOLUTION

India laid the framework for anti-corruption in the years immediately after independence. The makers of the Constitution visioned India as a just and equitable society in the future. As such the government accepted that corruption needed to be addressed as part that vision. These first steps included many administrative reforms and constituting a number of regulatory bodies. It is only at the end of the 20th century that more comprehensive legislative measures on corruption were taken.

¹ What is corruption? - transparency.org. Available at: <https://www.transparency.org/en/what-is-corruption> accessed 14 September 2026.

² (3) India's anti-corruption legislation - Delhi. Available at: <https://www.pahujalawacademy.com/indias-anti-corruption-legislation> accessed 14 September 2026

However, as the economy and administration developed over time, the opportunities and incentives for corrupt practices expanded. Thus, the rapid deterioration of the extent of corruption in public offices and its impact on economic development and the loss of public trust created enormous demand for further stringent legal provisions. This led to introduction of major anti-corruption legislation to tackle both the symptoms and root causes of corruption.⁽³⁾

COMBATING CORRUPTION PART-1: ANTI-CORRUPTION FRAMEWORK IN INDIA

- *Indian Penal Code, 1860*: The Indian Penal Code (IPC), 1860 defined “public officials” and addressed corruption-related misconduct mainly through provisions dealing with bribery, dishonest conduct, abuse of official position, and offences involving public servants. Although it was not a comprehensive anti-corruption law, it provided criminal penalties for certain acts by public officials and others involving unlawful gratification or misuse of authority. The IPC was ultimately replaced by the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023, which came into force on July 1, 2024.³
- *The Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988*: The provisions of the IPC were complemented by the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988, which is India’s principal law for combating corruption among public servants. It criminalizes offences such as accepting or offering undue advantages, bribery, and certain forms of criminal misconduct by public servants. The Act also provides for investigation, prosecution and trial into corruption offences, with penalties including imprisonment and fines. Its 2018 amendments further strengthened the framework by addressing bribery involving public servants and commercial organisations, promoting integrity and accountability in public administration.⁽⁴⁾
- *The Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013*: Another major pillar of India’s anti-corruption framework, this Act establishes Lokpal at the Union level and Lokayuktas at the State level to investigate allegations of corruption against public officials. It aims to ensure greater transparency, accountability, and integrity in public administration by providing an independent mechanism for handling corruption complaints.⁴
- *The Central Vigilance Commission Act, 2003*: The Central Vigilance Commission Act, 2003, another important component of India’s institutional framework for anti-corruption, gives statutory status to the Central Vigilance Commission (CVC). It is India’s central body for preventing corruption in public administration. It empowers the CVC to oversee vigilance matters, advise government organizations, and supervise corruption-related investigations by the CBI, thereby promoting transparency, integrity, and accountability.⁽⁶⁾

³ (4) ⁽⁵⁾ *Corruption laws in India*. Available at:

https://prsindia.org/files/parliament/discussionpapers/1302844978_PRS%20Note%20on%20corruption%20laws.pdf accessed 14 September 2026.

⁴ (6) *What is corruption?* - [transparency.org](https://www.transparency.org/en/what-is-corruption). Available at: <https://www.transparency.org/en/what-is-corruption> accessed 14 September 2026.

- *The Prevention of Money-Laundering Act (PMLA), 2002*: Although this act is not exclusively an anti-corruption statute, it becomes relevant where proceeds connected with criminal activity are disguised or converted into apparently legitimate assets. This act aims to prevent money laundering and enable the confiscation of property derived from criminal activities. It empowers authorities to investigate, attach, and seize proceeds of crime and imposes penalties for money-laundering offences, strengthening India's efforts against financial crime and corruption. The law therefore complements the Prevention of Corruption Act by addressing the financial consequences and movement of illicit proceeds.⁽⁵⁾
- *Corporate Accountability and the Companies Act, 2013*: Anti-Corruption efforts also extend beyond government departments. The Companies Act, 2013 promotes corporate accountability by establishing standards for governance, transparency, and ethical business practices. It requires companies to maintain proper records, disclose financial information, and comply with auditing and reporting requirements, helping prevent fraud, corruption, and corporate misconduct.⁵
- *The Whistleblower's Protection Act, 2014*: Whistleblowers can play a crucial role in exposing corruption because employees and insiders may have access to information that would otherwise remain hidden. As such, the Parliament enacted the Whistle Blowers Protection Act, 2014, aimed to protect individuals who report corruption, misuse of power, or wrongdoing by public officials. It provides a mechanism for making complaints and seeks to safeguard whistleblowers from victimization, supporting transparency, accountability, and integrity in public administration.⁶
- *Right to Information Act, 2005*: The Right to Information Act, 2005 empowers citizens to obtain information from public authorities, promoting transparency and accountability in government. By allowing access to official records and decisions, it helps reduce secrecy, expose corruption, and strengthen public participation in administration.⁽⁷⁾

COMBATING CORRUPTION PART-2: ENFORCING ANTI-CORRUPTION LAWS IN INDIA

Having comprehensive laws is only one part of combating corruption. Despite India's comprehensive laws on anti-corruption, it still ranks as the 91st least corrupt country out of 180 countries in the year 2025.⁷ According to public perception, corruption is still a major governance issue in India despite comprehensive laws. This shows enforcement is just as necessary as making laws. Delays in investigation and prosecution, limited awareness of legal remedies, difficulties in tracing illicit assets and concerns surrounding reporting of corruption can affect the effectiveness of anti-corruption measures.

⁵ (7) *What is corruption?* - transparency.org. Available at: <https://www.transparency.org/en/what-is-corruption> accessed 14 September 2026

⁶ (8) *Corruption in India (2025)* Kohn, Kohn & Colapinto LLP. Available at: <https://kkc.com/corruption-index/corruption-in-india/> accessed 14 September 2026.

⁷ *India corruption rank*. Available at: <https://tradingeconomics.com/india/corruption-rank> accessed 14 September 2026.

There is therefore a need for efficient investigative agencies, independent oversight, transparent government processes and timely judicial proceedings. Citizens themselves also have an important role to play by demanding accountability and using lawful mechanisms such as the RTI framework to gain transparency. ⁽⁸⁾

CONCLUSION

India has developed a broad framework of laws (both regulatory and institutional) to combat corruption. The Prevention of Corruption Act addresses bribery and corruption offences; the Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act provides institutional mechanisms for examining corruption complaints; the RTI Act promotes transparency; the PMLA targets illicit financial proceeds; and the Company act goes beyond government into corporate accountability.

Ultimately, however, laws can succeed only when they are effectively implemented. Combating corruption requires not only stringent legislation but also transparent institutions, accountable public officials, informed citizens and timely enforcement. A strong culture of integrity, supported by effective legal and institutional mechanisms, is essential for building public trust and ensuring that public resources are used for the benefit of society.