

Review Article

Structural Challenges to Political Development in Developing Countries: An Integrative Review

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Abstract

The key challenges that hinder political development in contemporary states, with a focus on structural, institutional, and socio-cultural constraints. Political development is often understood as the process through which political systems become more inclusive, accountable, and effective in governance. However, many countries face persistent obstacles such as weak institutions, corruption, limited rule of law, and lack of political participation. Additionally, economic inequality, ethnic and sectarian divisions, and external influences further complicate the development process. The paper argues that these challenges are interconnected and mutually reinforcing, creating cycles of instability and underdevelopment. By analyzing relevant theoretical literature and established scholarly perspectives, this research highlights the importance of institutional reform, civic engagement, and good governance for strengthening political development. It concludes that sustainable political development requires a comprehensive approach that addresses not only political structures but also the broader social and economic context in which they operate. Today, many developing countries continue to face persistent challenges to political development, including weak institutions, corruption, political instability, and limited civic participation. This study provides a conceptual analysis of these structural challenges and discusses possible governance-oriented approaches for addressing them. This study is importance to all the states of the world, especially

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to third world states that has been suffering the challenge of political development since ages.

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1. Introduction

Political development discusses the process through which political institutions, structures, and practices evolve to advance governance, improve public participation, strengthen democratic values, and improve political stability within a society (Heywood & Chin, 2023). It encompasses the conversion of political systems from traditional or less organized forms toward more modern, efficient, effective, and accountable arrangements capable of responding to the requirements and aspirations of inhabitants (Huntington, 2006). Political development is closely associated with the establishment of strong institutions, the rule of law, political legitimacy, administrative effectiveness, and the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms of citizens (Fukuyama, 2014). It involves the expansion of political participation through elections, political parties, civil society organizations, and other mechanisms that qualify citizens to influence the process of decision-making (Carothers, 2002). Furthermore, political development helps transparency, accountability, and responsiveness in government, ensuring that public officials act in the attentiveness and benefits of society and are held responsible for their actions (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2013). The concept also contains the capacity of the state to maintain order, manage conflicts peacefully, deliver public services effectively, and adapt to social, economic, and environmental changes (Almond & Verba, 2015). Political development is related to modernization and nation-building, as developing political institutions take part to national unity, social integration, and sustainable development (Ferguson, 2020). This paper focuses primarily on the structural challenges affecting political development in developing countries. Particular attention is given to weak institutions, corruption, political instability, economic inequality, and limited civic participation as interconnected barriers to effective governance and sustainable political development.

The importance of this topic lies in its connection to national stability, democracy, economic progress, and social welfare. Political development creates effective institutions, strengthens the rule of law, promotes citizen participation, and ensures accountability within government systems. Without political development, societies often experience instability, corruption, injustice, and conflict. This topic is also important because many developing countries continue to struggle with political problems that limit growth and modernization. Understanding these challenges can help policymakers, researchers, and citizens work toward creating stronger political institutions and more stable societies. Furthermore, this research contributes to academic discussions about governance, democracy, and sustainable political reform.

This research seeks to answer the following questions:

- 1) How do weak political institutions and corruption interact to constrain political development in developing countries?
- 2) Why do political instability, economic inequality, and limited civic participation undermine effective governance and democratic consolidation?
- 3) What institutional reforms are most essential for promoting sustainable political development in developing countries?

Many countries, especially developing nations, face serious obstacles in achieving political development. Weak political institutions, corruption, lack of transparency, ethnic conflicts, insecurity, and limited public participation create barriers to effective governance and democratic progress. These issues often lead to political instability, economic problems, and social dissatisfaction. The main research problem addressed in this study is the existence of multiple challenges that slow or prevent political development and the lack of effective strategies to overcome them. This research therefore aims to analyze these challenges and examine their impact on governance, democracy, and national progress.

2. Literature Review

Political development refers to the process through which political institutions become more effective, accountable, stable, and capable of responding to citizens' needs (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2013). Scholars have associated political development with democratization, institutionalization, political participation, rule of law, and good governance (Adel & Anoraga, 2023). Despite significant progress in many regions, numerous challenges continue to hinder political development, particularly in developing countries (Ferrari, 2022). Existing literature identifies corruption, weak institutions, political instability, ethnic divisions, economic inequality, external interference, and limited civic participation as major obstacles. This review examines these challenges and their implications for political development.

The understanding of political development by emphasizing institutional resilience, governance quality, democratic accountability, and state capacity in addressing contemporary political challenges has expanded. Studies published over the past decade highlight that effective political development depends not only on formal democratic institutions but also on inclusive governance, institutional trust, anti-corruption reforms, and meaningful civic engagement. Contemporary research also emphasizes the interaction between political institutions, economic inequality, digital governance, and public participation as central factors influencing political stability and sustainable development in developing countries (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2019; Akhtar, 2023; Echeverri-Gent, 2023).

Overall, the existing literature demonstrates broad agreement that political development depends on effective institutions, the rule of law, political accountability, and inclusive governance. While Huntington (2006) emphasizes institutionalization as

the foundation of political order, Ferrari (2022) highlights the importance of socio-economic development for democratic stability, and Fukuyama (2014) focuses on state capacity and political institutions. Although these perspectives explain the major determinants of political development, they generally examine these factors separately. This study builds upon these theoretical contributions by synthesizing the existing literature and examining how weak institutions, corruption, political instability, economic inequality, and limited civic participation collectively interact as interconnected structural challenges affecting political development in developing countries.

2.1 Introduction to Development

Development constitutes a multidimensional and dynamic process that encompasses economic growth, social transformation, political modernization, and institutional consolidation within a given state (Ferrari, 2022). In contemporary academic discourse, development is no longer confined to mere economic indicators such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP), but rather extends to broader dimensions including human development, governance, rule of law, and sustainable institutional capacity (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2013). From a political and legal perspective, development is intrinsically linked with the evolution of effective governance structures, the establishment of democratic institutions, and the promotion of accountability and transparency (Adel & Anoraga, 2023). The concept of development also implies the enhancement of state legitimacy, whereby governing authorities derive their power from the consent of the governed, consistent with constitutional frameworks and international legal norms (Almond & Verba, 2015).

Furthermore, development is often examined through the lens of modernization theory, dependency theory, and institutionalism, each providing distinct analytical frameworks for understanding the trajectories and disparities of development among states (Sears & Brown, 2023). While modernization theorists emphasize linear progress and Western models of governance, dependency theorists critique the structural inequalities embedded in the global political economy (Revers, 2025). Institutionalists, on the other hand, underscore the critical role of formal and informal institutions in shaping developmental outcomes (Oatley, 2022).

In addition, the role of international organizations such as the United Nations and the World Bank has been pivotal in redefining development paradigms, particularly through the promotion of sustainable development goals (SDGs), good governance, and legal reforms in developing countries (O'Brien & Williams, 2025). Despite these advancements, numerous challenges continue to impede the realization of comprehensive development, including political instability, weak legal systems, corruption, and external dependency (Naseemullah, 2023). These obstacles highlight the necessity for a holistic and integrated approach to development, one that harmonizes economic policies with political reforms and legal frameworks (Morrison, 2026). In conclusion, development remains a complex and evolving concept that

requires interdisciplinary analysis, particularly within the fields of political science and international law (Mamanovich, 2021). Understanding its theoretical foundations and practical implications is essential for addressing the structural challenges faced by developing states in the contemporary global order (Kelsall et al., 2022).

Political development represents one dimension of the broader concept of development (Kavanagh, 2024). While economic and social development contribute to overall national progress, this study focuses specifically on political development because effective political institutions, accountable governance, and the rule of law provide the institutional foundation upon which other dimensions of development depend (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2013). Accordingly, the following discussion examines political development and its principal structural challenges.

2.2 Introduction to political development

Political development refers to the process through which political institutions become more effective, accountable, legitimate, and responsive to the needs of society (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2013). It encompasses institutional strengthening, democratic governance, and rule of law, political participation, and state capacity (Binder, 2021). Understanding the concept of political development provides the necessary foundation for examining the structural challenges that hinder its realization (Ferguson, 2020). One of the most significant of these challenges is political instability, discussed below. Political instability refers to a condition in which a state's political system experiences persistent uncertainty, frequent disruptions, and a lack of continuity in governance structures (Fukuyama, 2014). It is generally characterized by the erosion of institutional legitimacy, recurrent changes in government, constitutional breakdowns, and the inability of political authorities to maintain public order and effective control (Han & Kim, 2020).

From a legal and constitutional perspective, political instability emerges when the fundamental principles of the rule of law, separation of powers, and constitutional supremacy are either weakened or systematically violated (Berthod, 2023). In such contexts, governance becomes arbitrary, and state institutions fail to function in accordance with established legal frameworks. Moreover, political instability undermines the process of political development by obstructing democratic consolidation, weakening public trust, and limiting citizen participation in political processes (Ferrari, 2022). It also disrupts policy continuity, thereby negatively affecting long-term development planning and institutional capacity-building.

2.3 Political Instability

Political instability is a multifaceted phenomenon, rooted in a combination of internal and external factors (Imranullah & Hakimuddin, 2024). The following are the primary causes: First, Fragile and underdeveloped institutions lack the capacity to enforce laws, regulate political competition, and ensure accountability. Institutional

weakness often leads to power struggles and governance inefficiencies (Fukuyama, 2014). Second, the absence or selective application of legal norms creates an environment of impunity, where political actors operate beyond constitutional constraints. This erodes legitimacy and fuels instability (Huntington, 2006). Third, deep societal divisions based on ethnicity, religion, or identity can lead to political polarization and conflict, especially when state institutions fail to manage diversity inclusively (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2013). Fourth, socio-economic disparities often translate into political grievances. Marginalized groups may resort to protests, uprisings, or insurgencies, thereby destabilizing the political system (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2019). Fifth, systemic corruption weakens governance structures, reduces public trust, and delegitimizes political authority, creating fertile ground for instability (Almond & Verba, 2015). Sixth, foreign intervention—whether political, economic, or military—can disrupt domestic political processes and undermine sovereignty, contributing to instability (Adel & Anoraga, 2023). Seventh, the absence of democratic norms, such as tolerance, political pluralism, and peaceful transfer of power, often leads to authoritarian tendencies and political crises (Han & Kim, 2020).

2.4 Weak Political Institutions and Political Development

Political instability does not occur in isolation. It is closely associated with several structural factors that collectively hinder political development. The following sections examine these major challenges individually. One of the most widely discussed challenges to political development is the weakness of political institutions. According to Samuel Huntington (2006), political development depends on the institutionalization of political organizations and procedures. Weak institutions often lack the capacity to enforce laws, deliver public services, and maintain political stability. When institutions are fragile, governments become vulnerable to corruption, inefficiency, and political manipulation. Fukuyama (2014) argues that effective state institutions are essential for maintaining political order and fostering democratic governance.

Corruption remains a major impediment to political development. Transparency and accountability are essential elements of a developed political system, yet corruption undermines public trust and weakens government legitimacy (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2013). Corruption distorts policy implementation, reduces government effectiveness, and discourages citizen participation. In many developing countries, political leaders use public resources for personal gain, which limits institutional growth and democratic consolidation (Fukuyama, 2014). Political instability, including coups, civil wars, and violent conflicts, significantly obstructs political development. Conflict weakens state institutions, disrupts governance, and diverts resources away from development initiatives (Han & Kim, 2020). Fukuyama (2014) argue that countries experiencing prolonged conflict face substantial challenges in building stable political systems. Political instability often creates an environment

where democratic processes cannot function effectively, leading to authoritarian tendencies and weakened governance structures (Heywood & Chin, 2023).

Ethnic, religious, and social divisions can create barriers to political development when political competition becomes centered on identity rather than policy issues (Almond & Verba, 2015). Horowitz (1985) explains that ethnic polarization may lead to political exclusion, discrimination, and conflict. In divided societies, governments may struggle to create inclusive institutions capable of representing diverse groups. Such divisions can weaken national unity and reduce the effectiveness of democratic governance (Delovarova & Jan, 2026). Economic factors play a critical role in political development (Fukuyama, 2014). Huntington (2006) argues that higher levels of economic development contribute to democratic stability. Conversely, poverty and inequality often limit citizens' political participation and increase dependence on patronage networks (Akhtar, 2023). Unequal distribution of resources can generate social tensions, reduce trust in government institutions, and create obstacles to democratic accountability (Almond & Verba, 2015). Acemoglu and Robinson (2013) emphasize that inclusive economic institutions are closely linked to successful political development.

Political development depends fundamentally on the strength, effectiveness, and legitimacy of a country's institutions (Echeverri-Gent, 2023). Institutions, such as legislatures, courts, public administration, electoral bodies, and regulatory agencies—are the structures through which authority is exercised, laws are implemented, and public services are delivered (Ferguson, 2020). When these institutions are weak, fragile, or ineffective, they become a central obstacle to political development (Ferrari, 2022). Weak institutions undermine governance, reduce public trust, and create conditions that foster instability, corruption, and inequality (Sears & Brown, 2023). At its core, the concept of institutional strength is closely linked to the idea of the Rule of Law, which requires that laws are applied equally, fairly, and consistently (Revers, 2025). In politically developed systems, institutions operate independently, are guided by established rules, and are accountable to the public (Putnam, 2001). In contrast, weak institutions are often characterized by poor enforcement of laws, lack of transparency, limited capacity, and vulnerability to political interference.

Weak institutions typically exhibit several defining features. First, they often lack autonomy and are heavily influenced by political leaders or powerful groups. This undermines their ability to function impartially. For example, when the judiciary is subject to executive control, it cannot effectively check abuses of power (Oatley, 2022). Second, weak institutions suffer from limited administrative and technical capacity. This includes inadequate funding, lack of trained personnel, and outdated systems, which hinder their ability to implement policies or deliver services efficiently (O'Brien & Williams, 2025). Third, corruption is often deeply embedded in weak institutional frameworks. Public officials may prioritize personal or political interests over public welfare, leading to misuse of resources and erosion of trust (Naseemullah, 2023). Finally, weak institutions tend to lack accountability mechanisms. Without

proper oversight, transparency, and checks and balances, institutions cannot be held responsible for their actions, which further perpetuates inefficiency and abuse.

2.5 Impact on Governance and Political Stability

Weak institutions significantly affect governance by reducing the effectiveness of decision-making and policy implementation (Mamanovich, 2021). Policies may be poorly designed or inconsistently applied, resulting in limited impact on development outcomes (Kelsall et al., 2022). This weakens the state's ability to respond to citizens' needs and challenges. Moreover, weak institutions contribute to political instability. When institutions fail to manage conflicts, ensure fair elections, or uphold justice, tensions can escalate into unrest or violence (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2013). Electoral bodies that lack independence, for instance, may produce disputed election results, leading to political crises. In such environments, citizens often lose confidence in the state. This lack of trust discourages political participation and can lead to apathy or, alternatively, to protests and resistance movements (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2019). Over time, this erodes the legitimacy of the government and undermines the foundations of political development.

2.6 Relationship with Corruption and Lack of Accountability

Weak institutions and corruption are closely interconnected. When institutions lack strong oversight and enforcement mechanisms, opportunities for corruption increase (Adel & Anoraga, 2023). Officials may engage in bribery, nepotism, and embezzlement without fear of punishment. Corruption further weakens institutions by diverting resources away from public services and development projects (Almond & Verba, 2015). It also distorts decision-making processes, as policies may be shaped by private interests rather than public needs. Accountability is a key element in addressing this issue (Berthod, 2023). Strong institutions incorporate mechanisms such as independent audits, transparent procedures, and active civil society oversight. In weak institutional contexts, however, these mechanisms are either absent or ineffective, allowing corruption to persist and spread (Binder, 2021).

2.7 Effects on Economic and Social Development

The consequences of weak institutions extend beyond politics into economic and social spheres. Economically, weak institutions discourage investment and hinder business development (Delovarova & Jan, 2026). Investors are less likely to commit resources in environments where laws are not enforced, contracts are unreliable, and corruption is prevalent (Echeverri-Gent, 2023). Socially, weak institutions lead to unequal access to services such as education, healthcare, and justice. Marginalized groups are often disproportionately affected, as they lack the means to navigate or influence institutional processes (Ferguson, 2020). Furthermore, weak institutions fail

to provide adequate public goods, including infrastructure, security, and welfare programs. This exacerbates poverty and inequality, creating a cycle in which underdevelopment reinforces institutional weakness (Ferrari, 2022).

2.8 Barriers to Democratic Consolidation

Strong institutions are essential for the functioning of democracy. They ensure free and fair elections, protect citizens' rights, and maintain checks and balances among branches of government (Freudlsperger & Schimmelfennig, 2022). Weak institutions, however, pose significant barriers to democratic consolidation. In many cases, political leaders exploit institutional weaknesses to concentrate power and suppress opposition (Fukuyama, 2014). This may involve manipulating electoral systems, undermining judicial independence, or restricting media freedom. As a result, democratic processes become superficial, and governance becomes increasingly authoritarian (Han & Kim, 2020). Additionally, weak political parties and civil society organizations further limit democratic development. Without effective representation and participation, citizens have little influence over political decisions, weakening the overall democratic system (Heidenheimer et al., 2024).

2.9 External Influences and Institutional Fragility

In some contexts, weak institutions are exacerbated by external factors such as foreign intervention, dependency on external aid, or global economic pressures. External actors may influence domestic policies or support certain political groups, undermining institutional independence (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2013). While international assistance can help strengthen institutions, it may also create dependency if not managed properly. Sustainable political development requires building internal capacity and ensuring that institutions are rooted in local contexts and needs (Fukuyama, 2014).

2.10 Pathways to Strengthening Institutions

Addressing the challenge of weak institutions requires comprehensive and long-term strategies. One key approach is institutional reform, which involves improving legal frameworks, enhancing transparency, and strengthening accountability mechanisms. Capacity building is also essential (Han & Kim, 2020). This includes training public officials, investing in technology, and ensuring adequate resources for institutional functioning. Strengthening education and professional development can improve the overall quality of governance (Heidenheimer et al., 2024). Promoting civic engagement is another important factor. When citizens actively participate in political processes and hold leaders accountable, institutions become more responsive and effective. Finally, reinforcing the principles of the Separation of Powers helps

ensure that no single branch of government dominates others (Huntington, 2006). This balance is crucial for maintaining institutional integrity and preventing abuse of power.

2.11 Administrative Corruption and Political Development

Administrative corruption refers to the misuse of public office by government officials, bureaucrats, and civil servants for personal or political gain. It typically occurs within the day-to-day functioning of public administration, where officials exploit their authority in the implementation of laws, policies, and public services (Kavanagh, 2024). This form of corruption includes practices such as bribery, favoritism, nepotism, embezzlement, and deliberate delays in service delivery to extract benefits. Unlike high-level political corruption, administrative corruption is often experienced directly by ordinary citizens in their interactions with government institutions (Kelsall et al., 2022). At the heart of this issue is the weakening of the Rule of Law, as administrative corruption creates a system where rules are applied selectively rather than fairly. When laws and procedures are manipulated for personal gain, public trust in governance declines, and institutional credibility is undermined (Mamanovich, 2021).

Administrative corruption can take many forms. One of the most common is petty corruption, where low- or mid-level officials demand small bribes in exchange for routine services such as issuing licenses, processing documents, or providing access to utilities (Naseemullah, 2023). While each instance may seem minor, the cumulative effect is significant and deeply harmful. Another form is bureaucratic favoritism, where officials give preferential treatment to relatives, friends, or influential individuals (North, 1990). This undermines merit-based systems and leads to inefficiency and injustice. Embezzlement and misappropriation of public funds also fall under administrative corruption. Public resources intended for development projects or social services may be diverted for personal use, resulting in poor service delivery and stalled development (O'Brien & Williams, 2025). Moreover, red tape corruption occurs when officials intentionally create delays or complications in administrative procedures to pressure citizens into paying bribes to speed up processes (Oatley, 2022).

Several factors contribute to the persistence of administrative corruption. Weak institutional frameworks and lack of accountability mechanisms create an environment where corrupt practices can flourish without consequences (Penney, 2022). Poor monitoring and ineffective enforcement of laws allow officials to act with impunity. Low salaries and lack of incentives for public servants can also encourage corruption, as individuals seek alternative means of income (Revers, 2025). However, this alone does not justify corruption; rather, it highlights structural weaknesses in governance systems. Cultural norms and social acceptance of corruption in some contexts may further reinforce the problem (Sears & Brown, 2023). When corruption becomes normalized, it is more difficult to challenge and eliminate. Another major cause is excessive bureaucracy and complex administrative procedures. When systems are

overly complicated, they create opportunities for officials to exploit loopholes and demand informal payments (Van Bijlert, 2025).

Administrative corruption poses a serious threat to political development in several ways. First, it undermines good governance by reducing the efficiency and effectiveness of public administration. Policies and programs fail to achieve their intended outcomes because resources are misused or diverted (Tarahkil & Akhtar, 2025). Second, it erodes public trust in government institutions. When citizens repeatedly encounter corruption in basic services, they lose confidence in the state and may become disengaged from political processes. This weakens democratic participation and accountability (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2013). Third, administrative corruption exacerbates inequality. Wealthier individuals can afford to pay bribes to access services more quickly, while poorer citizens are excluded or forced to endure delays and substandard services. This deepens social and economic disparities (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2019). Furthermore, corruption discourages both domestic and foreign investment. Businesses are less likely to operate in environments where they must navigate corrupt systems, leading to slower economic growth and fewer employment opportunities (Adel & Anoraga, 2023). Administrative corruption also weakens the implementation of laws and policies, making it difficult to uphold justice and maintain order. In extreme cases, it can contribute to political instability and conflict, as grievances against the state accumulate (Ferguson, 2020).

2.12 Political Corruption and Political Development

Political corruption refers to the misuse of political power by elected leaders, policymakers, and high-level officials for personal, party, or group benefit (Ferrari, 2022). Unlike administrative corruption, which occurs in day-to-day bureaucratic processes, political corruption takes place at the highest levels of government and directly affects decision-making, lawmaking, and the allocation of national resources. It distorts the core purpose of governance, which is to serve the public interest (Freudlsperger & Schimmelfennig, 2022). At its foundation, political corruption undermines the principle of the Rule of Law, as leaders manipulate laws and institutions to protect their own interests rather than uphold justice and equality. This weakens the legitimacy of the political system and obstructs genuine political development (Fukuyama, 2014).

Political corruption manifests in several forms. One common form is grand corruption, where senior officials engage in large-scale embezzlement of public funds or manipulate major government contracts for personal gain (Han & Kim, 2020). This often involves huge financial losses for the state. Another form is electoral corruption, which includes vote-buying, manipulation of election results, misuse of state resources during campaigns, and intimidation of voters or opposition parties (Heidenheimer et al., 2024). Such practices undermine free and fair elections. Policy manipulation is also a significant form, where laws and policies are shaped to benefit specific individuals, corporations, or political allies rather than the general population

(Heywood & Chin, 2023). This is often linked to lobbying abuses or hidden financial influence. Patronage and nepotism are additional forms, where political leaders distribute positions, contracts, or benefits to supporters, friends, or family members instead of following merit-based systems (Huntington, 2006).

Political corruption is often rooted in weak institutional frameworks, where checks and balances are ineffective or absent. When oversight institutions such as courts, parliaments, or anti-corruption bodies lack independence, political leaders can act without accountability (Kavanagh, 2024). Another major cause is the concentration of power. When authority is centralized in the hands of a few individuals or groups, opportunities for abuse increase significantly. Lack of transparency in government operations also contributes to corruption (Huntington, 2006). When decisions are made behind closed doors without public scrutiny, it becomes easier to conceal corrupt activities. Additionally, weak political culture and low levels of civic awareness can allow corruption to persist. If citizens are unable or unwilling to hold leaders accountable, corrupt practices may continue unchecked (Kelsall et al., 2022).

Political corruption poses a serious obstacle to political development. First, it undermines democratic institutions by weakening electoral processes and reducing the fairness of political competition. Elections lose credibility when they are influenced by money, manipulation, or coercion (Mamanovich, 2021). Second, it erodes public trust in government. When citizens perceive leaders as corrupt, they become disillusioned and disengaged from political participation. This weakens democracy and reduces accountability (Naseemullah, 2023). Third, political corruption leads to poor policy outcomes. Decisions driven by personal or political interests often ignore the needs of the population, resulting in ineffective or harmful policies. It also increases inequality, as resources are diverted toward elites and powerful groups, leaving ordinary citizens with limited access to opportunities and services (O'Brien & Williams, 2025). Furthermore, political corruption can create instability. Public frustration with corrupt leadership may lead to protests, unrest, or even conflict, especially when grievances are not addressed (Oatley, 2022).

2.13 Economic Inequality and Political Development

Economic inequality refers to the unequal distribution of income, wealth, and economic opportunities among individuals and groups within a society (Sears & Brown, 2023). It is a major obstacle to political development because it creates imbalances in power, limits equal participation, and weakens the foundations of democratic governance (Oatley, 2022). When a large gap exists between the rich and the poor, the political system often reflects and reinforces these inequalities rather than addressing them. At a fundamental level, economic inequality contradicts the ideals of fairness and equal opportunity that are central to political development (O'Brien & Williams, 2025). It can undermine the principle of the Rule of Law, as wealthier individuals or groups may have greater influence over legal systems and policy decisions, leading to unequal treatment and biased outcomes (Naseemullah, 2023).

Economic inequality arises from multiple interconnected factors. One major cause is unequal access to education and skills, which limits opportunities for higher-paying jobs among disadvantaged groups (Mamanovich, 2021). Without quality education, individuals are often trapped in low-income cycles. Another factor is uneven distribution of resources such as land, capital, and technology (Kelsall et al., 2022). In many societies, wealth is concentrated in the hands of a small elite, leaving the majority with limited economic opportunities. Globalization and economic policies can also contribute to inequality (Kavanagh, 2024). While globalization can create growth, its benefits are not always distributed equally, often favoring skilled workers and large corporations over low-income populations (Imranullah & Hakimuddin, 2024). Weak government policies, corruption, and lack of social protection systems further exacerbate inequality by failing to redistribute resources or provide support for vulnerable groups (Huntington, 2006).

Economic inequality has profound effects on political development. First, it limits political participation. Poorer citizens often lack the resources, education, or time to engage in political processes such as voting, campaigning, or advocacy. This leads to unequal representation in decision-making (Horowitz, 1985). Second, inequality increases the influence of wealthy elites in politics. Those with financial resources can fund political campaigns, influence policies, and shape public opinion, often in ways that serve their own interests rather than the public good (Heywood & Chin, 2023). Third, economic inequality weakens social cohesion. Large disparities between rich and poor can lead to frustration, resentment, and social tensions. These divisions may result in protests, instability, or even conflict, which hinder political development (Huntington, 2006). It also reduces trust in government. When people perceive the system as unfair or biased toward the wealthy, they lose confidence in political institutions and become disengaged from governance (Heidenheimer et al., 2024).

Economic inequality often leads to policy distortions. Governments may prioritize the interests of powerful economic groups, neglecting essential services such as healthcare, education, and social welfare for the broader population (Han & Kim, 2020). In highly unequal societies, public policies may fail to address poverty and development challenges effectively. This results in a cycle where inequality persists and political systems become less responsive and accountable (Fukuyama, 2014). Furthermore, inequality can weaken the effectiveness of democratic institutions. When wealth translates into political power, the principle of equal representation is compromised, undermining democratic values (Ferguson, 2020).

3. Results

The analysis demonstrates that the challenges to political development should not be understood as isolated problems but as interconnected structural constraints that reinforce one another. Weak political institutions emerge as the central challenge because they reduce the state's capacity to enforce the rule of law, ensure

accountability, and deliver effective public services. Institutional weakness simultaneously creates favorable conditions for corruption, weakens democratic governance, and undermines citizens' confidence in public institutions.

The findings further indicate that corruption functions not merely as an independent challenge but as a consequence of institutional weakness while simultaneously intensifying political instability and weakening governance effectiveness. Similarly, economic inequality and limited civic participation reduce political legitimacy by restricting inclusive political processes and weakening public accountability. Based on the synthesis of the reviewed literature, this study proposes a structural governance framework in which political development depends on strengthening institutional capacity as the primary foundation, followed by improving accountability mechanisms, combating corruption, promoting inclusive civic participation, and reducing socio-economic inequalities. These factors should therefore be addressed simultaneously rather than through isolated policy interventions.

The analysis suggests that sustainable political development in developing countries requires integrated governance reforms that combine institutional strengthening with anti-corruption measures, greater political inclusion, and long-term improvements in administrative capacity. Addressing only one challenge without reforming the broader institutional environment is unlikely to produce sustainable political development. The study proposes that political development in developing countries is best understood as a governance-centered process in which institutional capacity serves as the foundation for accountability, effective public administration, corruption control, and meaningful civic participation. Sustainable political development can therefore only be achieved when these structural components function as an integrated governance system rather than as isolated reform initiatives. Across the reviewed literature, a consistent pattern emerges: countries experiencing persistent political instability generally exhibit weak institutional capacity, limited accountability, widespread corruption, and low levels of civic participation. Rather than functioning independently, these challenges reinforce one another in a cumulative cycle that weakens governance effectiveness and slows political development. The literature therefore suggests that institutional reform should be treated as the primary entry point for broader political development strategies, since improvements in institutional capacity positively influence accountability, corruption control, political participation, and long-term governance stability.

4. Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that political development in developing countries should not be understood as a linear process driven by a single reform intervention; rather, it represents a complex and interconnected governance process shaped by institutional capacity, accountability mechanisms, corruption control, political inclusion, and socio-economic conditions. The results indicate that weak

political institutions constitute the fundamental challenge underlying many other obstacles to political development. This finding is consistent with classical political development theories, particularly Huntington's (2006) argument that institutionalization is a central requirement for political stability and effective governance. Similarly, institutional scholars have emphasized that strong and effective institutions create predictable political environments, enhance state capacity, and provide the foundation for sustainable development.

However, the findings of this study extend previous institutional arguments by suggesting that institutional weakness should not be viewed merely as an administrative problem but as a structural condition that influences multiple dimensions of political development. Weak institutions reduce the ability of the state to enforce laws, regulate political competition, provide public services, and maintain citizens' trust. This interpretation is consistent with Fukuyama (2014) and Ferrari (2022) which argues that political development depends not only on the existence of formal institutions but also on their effectiveness, legitimacy, and capacity to respond to societal demands.

The study's findings regarding corruption also support previous research that identifies corruption as a major barrier to political development. The findings also highlight the importance of political participation and socio-economic equality in strengthening political legitimacy. This supports Acemoglu and Robinson (2013) argument that social and economic conditions influence political stability and democratic development. Nevertheless, the present study contributes to this discussion by emphasizing that economic inequality affects political development not only through material deprivation but also through perceptions of exclusion and unequal access to political opportunities. When citizens perceive political systems as inaccessible or unfair, their trust in institutions declines, which can weaken political legitimacy and increase social tensions.

Furthermore, the findings challenge the assumption that political development can be achieved through single-sector reforms. Compared with Acemoglu and Robinson (2019) studies, this research provides a more integrated perspective by viewing political development as a governance ecosystem rather than a collection of independent challenges. While classical theories focused primarily on modernization, institutionalization, and economic development, recent scholarship has expanded the discussion toward issues such as state fragility, democratic resilience, citizen trust, and governance capacity. The findings of this study contribute to Huntington (2006) and Fukuyama (2014) by emphasizing the interconnected nature of political challenges and the need for comprehensive reform strategies.

Overall, the discussion confirms that sustainable political development requires more than the establishment of formal democratic structures. It depends on building capable institutions, ensuring accountability, reducing corruption, promoting inclusive political participation, and addressing socio-economic inequalities. The study therefore argues that political development should be approached as an integrated

governance process in which institutional strength functions as the foundation for long-term political stability and effective governance.

5. Conclusion

This study concludes that political development in developing countries is constrained primarily by interconnected structural challenges rather than isolated governance problems. Weak political institutions constitute the central obstacle because they reduce administrative effectiveness, weaken the rule of law, encourage corruption, and limit meaningful political participation. These structural weaknesses collectively undermine political legitimacy and sustainable governance. Based on the reviewed literature, institutional reform should be regarded as the highest priority for promoting political development. Strengthening the independence and capacity of public institutions provides the necessary foundation for improving accountability, enforcing the rule of law, and reducing opportunities for corruption. A second priority involves establishing effective anti-corruption mechanisms supported by transparent public administration and independent oversight institutions. Third, governments should expand opportunities for inclusive civic participation through stronger civil society engagement, transparent electoral processes, and broader public accountability. Finally, reducing socio-economic inequalities through equitable public policies can strengthen political legitimacy and contribute to long-term political stability. Sustainable political development therefore requires an integrated governance approach in which institutional strengthening, accountability, anti-corruption reforms, and civic participation are implemented as mutually reinforcing components rather than as separate policy initiatives.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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