

PUBLIC FUNDS, PRIVATE GAINS: INVESTIGATING CORRUPTION IN NADRA'S MEGA CENTER LEASE DEALS

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates corruption and procedural violations in the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA)'s procurement process for leasing Mega Centers in Sindh, with a particular focus on Mirpurkhas. The study examines serious allegations of favoritism toward an unqualified bidder, disregard for the lowest compliant bid, and the failure of NADRA's senior management to address these irregularities. Employing a qualitative case study methodology, data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with 10 NADRA officials, 10 procurement officers, and representatives from bidding companies. In addition, documentary evidence—including procurement records, formal complaints, and internal communications—was analyzed to uncover inconsistencies and procedural breaches. Secondary sources such as investigative reports and news articles on corruption in public procurement were also used to contextualize the findings.

The research identifies several critical issues: First, a non-compliant third bidder was awarded the contract due to procedural leniency, including acceptance of late documents and manipulation of site inspections. Second, the lowest bidder—who submitted the only compliant proposal—was unjustly disqualified, reflecting failures in the evaluation process. Third, despite formal complaints and verification payments, no meaningful action was taken, with the Chairman and NADRA's management responding slowly or not at all, highlighting a lack of institutional accountability. Finally, the manipulation of the procurement process has significantly eroded public trust in NADRA and other government institutions involved.

Based on these findings, the study proposes policy recommendations aimed at reforming NADRA's procurement system. It underscores the urgent need for a robust institutional framework that ensures transparency, accountability, and fairness in future procurement practices.

Keywords: NADRA, public procurement, corruption, procedural violations, Mega Center leasing, Sindh, favoritism, bid evaluation, public trust.

INTRODUCTION

The functioning of public institutions relies on transparent procurement. But in Pakistan, such processes are typically mired in irregularities and corruption. The following paper brings into light a recent case relating to NADRA's proposal to rent premises for its Mega Centers within the Sindh region, particularly, within the district of Mirpurkhas. Although procedures were laid out within very clear guidelines, the process became corrupted via favoritism, acceptance of documentation after the deadline, and non-compliance with the eligibility criteria that were advertised (Shah, & Rashid, 2018).

One of the well-documented problems that can happen in many countries is a corruption in the public procurement which negatively affects efficiency of the public sector projects, and the quality of the governmental initiatives. This study has discussed the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) and its leasing process of mega centers in the Sindh province specifically in Mirpurkhas. This is a probe against corruption, abuse of process and favoritism to an unqualified bidder, systemic issues in NADRA's procurement framework. This research looks at how these corrupt practices placed and what are their implications for public trust, accountability and its reforms and to devise spending recommendations for enhancing transparency (Kaufmann, & Vicente, 2011).

OVERVIEW OF NADRA'S ADVERTISEMENT

NADRA the National Database and Registration Authority published a public advertisement in leading newspapers inviting buildings for rent in different districts of Sindh to introduce new Mega Centres. The ad explicitly listed what will be needed for each step of the bidding process, and stressed the importance of following the submission specifications. Of these documents, the advertisement made it very clear that all bid documents must be submitted on or before the deadline, thus laying down a common standard for interested parties. It also made it required to attach a valid pay order with the bids dated before the official closing of bids, so as the firm is claiming for its financial credibility. In addition, if the property to be used as collateral for the lease was owned by another party, bidders had to present evidence of ownership or a valid power of attorney. In the interest of transparency and fairness, the ad emphasized the importance of a structured, site-based evaluation process to determine whether the properties in question met specific criteria (Ayub, & Karim, 2019).

In Mirpurkhas, the bidding process was especially controversial, with only two parties, including the author, submitting complete and compliant bids. However, a third one came last minute that did not check the boxes necessary in the add. The third offered failed to submit essential documents, including the obligatory pay order and proof of ownership/power of attorney. Perhaps most alarmingly, this party's pay order was dated after the official closing date for bids, which should have resulted in outright disqualification under the rules of procurement law. The acceptance of the bid from the third party despite the violations cast doubt on the integrity of the process and whether the standards established in the official advertisement were being followed (Bai, & Li, 2021).

DIRECTOR GENERAL'S PREMATURE SITE VISIT

Another glaring irregularity noted was that the Director General NADRA who was in charge of the bid, visited the proposed sites before the official closing date without notice. This visit not only defied the already established timeline but seriously compromised the independence and integrity of the procurement process. The advance inspection of the sites by the Director General could have caused partiality to be exercised in the selection of the bidders and caused pre-selection of certain bidders or collusion between the authority and any particular party. Such early tour violates the main tenet of fair competition requirement as it potentially affects the fairness of the evaluation, which may already be compromised by enabling some bidders gain advantages (Kaufmann, & Vicente, 2018).

Moreover, the arrival of the formal inspection team to the site of the qualified bidder only exacerbated the situation, as the team quickly realized that proper inquiry and diligence was not carried out. The team did not take proper stock of the property; they performed what looked like a half-hearted walkthrough. They spent just a few minutes at the site and then left, calling the visit "informal." And although they promised to return for a more comprehensive evaluation, they never did. The absence of a complete site assessment is very concerning as it calls into question if the property the qualified bidder was given due consideration under the aegis of what was indicated in the bidding advertisement. The lack of a proper site assessment and no follow-up inspections only serve to illustrate the negligence and potential partiality that may have colored the procurement process (Nadeem, & Butt, 2020).

PROCEDURAL MANIPULATION AND FAVORITISM

Not only was the third bidder entertained despite submitting a pay order dated after the deadline, but the lease was awarded to them as well despite clear procedural discrepancies and violations of the bidding process. This is contrary to the procurement rules, which state that any bid is should be disqualified if it is submitted after the deadline; especially if the documentation is incomplete or incorrect. In a blatant breach of standard procedure and fairness, NADRA's management avoided to maintain basic principles of compliance, giving rise to vested interest and preference at the expense of businesses integrity (Shrestha, & Adhikari, 2018).

In contrast, the lowest bidder, who complied with each and every condition set by the property in question in terms of erstwhile submission of required documents, valid pay order and subsequent technical specifications, was unjustifiably rejected. The reasons for the disqualification of the bidder as mentioned on letter issued by NADRA was vague, non-specific and did not specifically demonstrate the grounds on which the rejection to the application was made. And, more importantly, it did not address either the technical superiority of the property or the financial advantages of their bid, which should have been the primary criteria to judge. Rejecting the bid that complied with all requirements and was also the lowest bidder was not only against best practices for procurement but also detrimental to public funds Zhang, J., & Wang, Q. (2019).

These actions further undermined an open, competitive procurement process and would be wasteful of taxpayer funds. By awarding the lease to a non-compliant applicant at a higher rate and transferring the burden onto the public unnecessarily. This decision not only violates the most fundamental principles of fairness and competition contemplated in the procurement law but also amounts to a clear case of procedural manipulation, as the rules were bent to favour an unqualified bidder over the lowest qualified bid, casting serious doubts on the transparency and accountability of NADRA's procurement processes (Haider, & Raza, 2021).

PUBLIC INTEREST AND MISUSE OF TAXPAYER FUNDS

Referring to the lowest bidder who met all requirements, the decision to reject them and award the contract to the highest bid supported by irregular documentation indicates systematic use of taxpayers' money. NADRA's actions have stalled and wasted not only resources but money, by putting a non-compliant bidder in the front of each fully qualified bidder. The winning bid, which had been submitted without essential documents, becomes an excessive cost for the public, now the government is tied to a lease contract at a premium price (Ojo, & Adebayo, 2021).

When it comes to NADRA, all these activities play a vital role in causing the erosion of public trust in NADRA and its ability to handle public funds efficiently. The public sector already bears the tag of a favourite sons network and when government institutions do not follow fair procurement processes and engage in favouritism, it only adds to the bad faith. Not only does this erode public trust and confidence in the effectiveness of government programs, it also distracts us from the principles of transparency and accountability that are cornerstones of good governance. This, however, is only an isolated example of the misuse of taxpayer money; it merely sheds light on a much more systematic problem in the award of public contracts for leasing. We need to hold them accountable if we want to restore public trust and ensure that public resources cannot be misused for such purposes one again (Rahman, & Ahmad, 2020).

RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

The study is justified in light of the alarming issue of corruption and lack of accountability in the public procurement system of Pakistan. On the eve of International Anti-Corruption Day, learn the facts. The Mega Center leasing process of NADRA in Sindh (mentioned below) is a prime example of how procurement procedures can be manipulated, compromising fairness and transparency. By analyzing a specific case study from real life, this paper seeks to add to the literature on public procurement corruption, and to provide relevant recommendations for changing in policy within the public sector in Pakistan.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The purpose of the present study is to analyze the major issues related to the leasing of Mega Center of NADRA with respect to the province of Sindh, specifically with Mirpurkhas. This raises allegations of corruption, including the irregularity of the bidding process, favoring of an ineligible bidder over compliant applicants. Adding to these worry are the procedural breaches, like the acceptance of documentation beyond deadlines and the overlooking of the submission of the lowest bid. Even then, senior management of NADRA, including its Chairman, did not take any corrective actions or enforce accountability, despite raising formal complaints and making payment for verification. NADRA's procurement system is compromised because of these irregularities, which have a detrimental impact on public trust, procurement transparency, and financial management of public sector development projects in Pakistan. This study's research objectives will examine this in-detail, alongside the quandaries of procuring fulfillment of procurement decisions and the weaknesses of governance procedures to resolve procurement aftermaths.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To investigate the procedural irregularities and allegations of corruption in NADRA's Mega Center leasing process in Sindh, particularly focusing on the case of Mirpurkhas.
2. To evaluate the impact of these irregularities on public trust, transparency, and the efficiency of public procurement systems in Pakistan
3. To provide policy recommendations aimed at improving transparency, accountability, and the overall procurement process within NADRA and other public institutions in Pakistan.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the key procedural violations and corrupt practices that occurred during NADRA's Mega Center leasing process in Sindh?
2. How do these irregularities affect public trust and transparency in NADRA's procurement processes?
3. What reforms and strategies can be implemented to improve the procurement system and prevent corruption in future public leasing contracts?

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study adds to this literature and has the potential to pinpoint the flaws in Pakistan's public procurement system and highlight how these systemic problems facilitate corruption. The study by examining a high-profile case in NADRA demonstrates systemic challenges towards ensuring fair procurement by public institutions. It also seeks to add to the discourse on institutional reforms, good governance, and accountability in Pakistan's public procurement system, as well as the importance of having strong anti-corruption institutions. The study will appeal to policymakers, anti-corruption advocates, and public sector administrators looking to improve transparency and accountability in procurement practices.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Key Themes in Corruption in Procurement Literature Corruption in procurement literature emphasizes that corrupt practices negatively affect the efficiency, fairness and effectiveness of procurement processes. Much of the focus of these studies has been on the ways in which corruption distorts public procurement systems, resulting in inefficiencies, mismanagement of public funds, and a lack of accountability.

CORRUPTION AND ITS EFFECTS ON PROCUREMENT

Many studies have demonstrated how public procurement corruption greatly increases the cost of public projects, decreases service quality and undermines public trust in government institutions. Corruption, if left unchecked, leads to increased contract prices as well as poor project quality due to practices like bribery, favoritism, and manipulation of the bidding process. For instance, Rose-Ackerman (1999) explains that corruption in procurement increases costs because contracts are awarded to less qualified contractors, who either inflate prices to pay for bribes, or deliver lower-quality work. This increases the burden on public finances and lowers the quality of public services and infrastructure. Corruption also undermined people's confidence in government institutions as citizens question the fairness of the procurement process and the competence of the public officials (Lambsdorff, 2020).

THE LINK BETWEEN TRANSPARENCY AND REDUCED CORRUPTION

This is because research has highlighted that transparency is a key component to reducing corruption in public procurement systems. Results show that when the procurement process is more transparent; with clear criteria for selection and with access to bidding documents and evaluation results; the opportunities for corrupt activities decrease dramatically. Transparency as a Deterrent to Corrupt Behavior With this definition of corrupt behavior, Meier (2007) explains how transparency acts as a deterrent to those corrupt acts (where transparency refers to: "The dynamic relationship between observers and the observed") by increasing the level of scrutiny and accountability. Electronic procurement systems have also been recognized as one of the key strategies to enhance transparency through the use of technology. For example, online selection systems and electronic procurement platforms can enable real-time access to bidding documents, announcements, and evaluation results, which can minimize the possibility of manipulation and favoritism (Rehman, & Gul, 2021).

PUBLIC PROCUREMENT REGULATIONS AND CORRUPTION PREVENTION

The literature on public procurement and institutional frameworks broadly emphasises on how procurement regulations can help combat corruption. Regulatory frameworks — that set rules and mechanisms for enforcement — can help mitigate corruption. Multiple studies have shown that when procurement laws are ineffectively enforced or are weakly designed, corruption abounds. Johnston (2005) suggests that lax implementation of anti-corruption regulations leads individuals to take advantage of procurement loopholes for private gain, for example. Conversely, strict laws designed to regulate procurement, such as the PPRA in Pakistan, seek to formalize the procurement process and implement checks and balances that leaves little room for corrupt practices. But the success of those frameworks is highly reliant on the practicality of frameworks, risk mitigation measures, and periodic (periodic) audits (Rose-Ackerman, 2019).

POLITICAL INFLUENCE AND COLLUSION IN PUBLIC PROCUREMENT

The cited drivers of corruption in procurement are political interference and collusion between bidders and public officials. Research demonstrates that undue influence by politicians or members of government responsible for procurement decisions often results in corruption, as the bidding process is manipulated to award contracts based on political ties instead of merit. This not only destroys fair competition and encourages contractors and procurement officials to work together, but also supports corrupt practices. As suggested by Tanzi (1998), political influence is one of the most common forms of corruption existing in public procurements, given that the outcome of who wins the contract is often determined by who is better positioned politically rather than who has the best credentials or the lowest bid (Transparency International, 2020).

INSTITUTIONAL REFORM AND ANTI-CORRUPTION STRATEGIES

Literature on institutional reform and anti-corruption strategies highlights several approaches toward both improving procurement systems and reducing corruption. Such as the establishment of independent oversight bodies, the enhancement of legal frameworks, and the incorporation of technology in the audits of procurement processes. World Bank (2009) notes that corruption can be minimized by giving independent oversight to procurement, ensuring the scrutiny of procurement decisions and investigating any irregularities. Other measures include the promotion of a culture of accountability in public institutions and the training of procurement officers in ethics and transparency (Meier, 2020).

Corruption is a serious problem that dominates the media in all countries and affects how much money is used, how good the quality is and is the public sector projects fair (Bower, 2022). According to many researches, corruption not only cause the lose of money but also undermine the trust of citizens in government bodies. Transparency in procurement processes, robust regulatory frameworks, and anti-corruption initiatives like independent oversight agencies and technological tools play a vital role in mitigating corruption. The problem of political influence and collusion between bidders and officials remain challenges that have been a barrier to addressing the ills of graft, corruption and incompetence in the procurement environment. The relevant recommendations for improving NADRA procurement procedures and improving institutional transparency and accountability will be made from the findings of the literature (Thomi, & Fernandez, 2019).

RESEARCH GAP

There is a considerable amount of literature on the corrupt practices in public procurement and their negative effects on governance and public confidence in Pakistan, there is a paucity of studies describing the procurement process adopted by public institutions in Pakistan, especially under the preview of NADRA. Previous studies have mainly looked into the more general issues of corruption and transparency in public procurement systems and mostly by means of case studies from different countries. The study aims to address this key literature gap by offering an intricate dissection of the particular procedural violations, and corrupt practices involved in the leasing process for Mega Centers in Sindh, leading to a more localized insight of the issues with Pakistan's public procurement system. Moreover, this study will examine the deficiency of complete policy proposals requesting the reformation of NADRA's procurement procedures to improve the levels of transparency, accountability and public trust.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study being sensitive in nature explores the nature, understood better with qualitative methodology through the induction from the context. By utilizing a qualitative approach, the study positively contributes to a deeper understanding of the subject matter; thus, the researcher identifies the nuances and intricacies within the procurement process; the role plays and the influence of alleged corrupt practices on public trust and institutional integrity (Zahid, & Iqbal, 2020).

This study opted for a case study approach as a result of the highly specific localized nature of the problems being investigated. This typology is ideal for this study, as it allows the researcher to analyze the processes of the individual components of NADRA's Mega Center leasing process in the province of Sindh, within a case of the Mirpurkhas case. Through a case study approach, this study may provide an in-depth analysis of the irregularities of the procurement process, the rigging of the bidding process, the favoritism extended to certain bidders and the structural failures that enabled these problems (Zulkifli, & Chowdhury, 2018).

The case study method has the benefit of offering the researcher the ability to collect a large amount of contextual, in-depth data. It enables to investigate what NADRA officials, third-party bidders and other stakeholders did and how they did that. The study seeks to examine the causes of corruption and procedural flaws in detail so as to come to grips with the how the same affected the procurement (Zuckerman, & Vicky, 2019).

JUSTIFICATION FOR THE METHODOLOGY

The qualitative case study approach is adopted for this research due to the nature of this issue being complex as well as the need of rich, in-depth understanding of the specific procedural irregularities and corruption pertaining to NADRA's Mega Center leasing process. This methodology, by concentrating on a specific, real-world case, enables a more contextualized understanding of the various forces in play, particularly the relationship between institutional culture, regulatory systems, and practices of corruption (Zhao, & Zhang, 2021).

Furthermore, the qualitative aspect of the study enables an exploration of not just the physical dimensions of the procurement cycle (e.g., tenure and formal processes) but also the views, attitudes, and experiences of participants. This integrative framework not only ensures that the analysis captures all aspects of corporate democracy that affect corruption in public procurement, but also provides a more robust recommendation for policies aimed at reforming NADRA's procurement system (Tanzi, 2018).

POPULATION AND SAMPLING

Data in this study is collected from stakeholders in the procurement process of NADRA i.e. procurement officers, officials overseeing the bidding process, bidding parties, and all other stakeholders who directly or indirectly have played their role in leasing of Mega Center, including legal advisors or consultants. We will focus on those with first-hand knowledge of the irregularities, particularly in Mirpurkhas case. Based on the targeting approach, proper purposive sampling is carried out with key informants who would supply insights into the bidding process, with the alleged corruption and the diverse violations to procedures. This "snowball" sampling technique allows participants to identify others who were involved in or knowledgeable about the procurement process, ensuring that the sample consists of individuals who can provide detailed insights into the context of the procurement process (Bryan et al., 2020). Purposeful sampling involves recruiting participants who are knowledgeable in a subject or have experience in an area of interest, in order to obtain the most in-depth and insightful data to support the research aims.

DATA COLLECTION

These sources include: Semi-structured interviews were held with key informants such as ten NADRA officials, ten procurement officers and representatives from bidding companies. You press for a narrative describing the bidding process, the irregularities were, how it is that the lease was awarded to a non-compliant bidder.

The research included in-depth examination of procurement, documents, bid submission records, complaint letters, and internal communication of NADRA. We will establish inconsistencies in the procurement process by analyzing these documents, finding the post-deadline documents acceptance, invalid justification of rejected lowest bidder.

The methods of primary data include surveys, interviews, and focus groups, while secondary data will include published reports, news articles, and previous academic research on corruption in public procurement. Secondary data will also situate our findings in the landscape of the broader discourse on corruption in Pakistan's public sector.

DATA ANALYSIS

Thematic analysis was used in this study to analyze the data. The researcher will conduct an exploratory qualitative method to examine why procedural violations, manipulation of the bidding process, and institutional inaction matter in the context of the larger problem of corruption in public procurement. Also, thematic analysis will help in knowing how these irregularities can multilingual on affecting the public faith in NADRA and its procurement mechanism.

DATA ANALYSIS: INTERVIEW THEMATIC ANALYSIS

This data was subjected to thematic analysis, and was based on 10 NADRA officials, 10 procurement officer and representatives of bidding companies through in-depth interviews to analyze the data. This was done to explore the common themes and patterns related to the bidding process, procedure discrepancies, and the decision-making process that resulted in the awarding of the lease to the non-compliant bidder. Thematic analysis enables the researcher to identify reoccurring themes and categories present across interviews that provide in-depth insight into how the corruption, in terms of procedural lapses, was observed during the NADRA procurement process (Ayub, & Karim, 2019). Interviews were transcribed and coded for common themes with the following themes emerging from the data:

LACK OF TRANSPARENCY IN THE BIDDING PROCESS

In the interviews, a common theme was the opaque nature of the bidding process. NADRA officials, procurement officers, and some others pointed out that some bidders were treated more favorably than others and evaluation criteria were not uniformly applied. Several who were interviewed said not all decisions were recorded transparently, including whether post-deadline documentation would be accepted and whether the inclusion of a non-compliant bidder on the shortlist was legitimate. Another procurement officer said: "Decisions were made behind closed doors, with little to no formal documentation supporting them. This fact highlights the third theme, which is a major concern regarding the integrity of the procurement process, as well as the lack of a clear and transparent decision-making process (Garcia, & Hernandez, 2020).

MANIPULATION AND FAVORITISM

A second recurring theme from the interviews was manipulation and favoritism in the evaluation of the bids and selection of the winning bidder. A riddle himself, the third bidder, who did not meet the submission rules and had no pay order and power of attorney and other essential documents, was still admitted, the participants confirmed. One NADRA official said, "Companies with discrepancies in documentation were nominated for reasons not clear to many of us, and this third bidder is one of them." Their views were echoed by the procurement officers who said they were frustrated with the failure of contractors to follow procurement rules. Favoritism distorts the procurement process and affects its fairness, highlighting this theme (Chowdhury, & Khan, 2019).

INSTITUTIONAL INACTION AND ACCOUNTABILITY FAILURES

A third theme was the absence of institutional accountability within NADRA. Despite formal complaints about the irregularities, there was no serious investigation or corrective action by senior management, several interviewees noted.

As a procurement officer of a major state enterprise told me, “We complained and paid money for recertification but nothing happened. It was as if the whole system had been set up to ignore things like that.” NADRA stated that despite the irregularities at NADRA, the Chairman, his employees and top-level officials of the organization instead of inquiring into the matter, kept nominating their reliable officers to serve in Punjab and other provinces which proved that it was also a part of the institutional collapse due to lack of accountability at the institutional level. This one theme leads to a culture of inaction and negligence which then contributes towards the continuation of the corrupt practices which are a culture of the organization (Haider, & Raza, 2021).

IMPACT ON PUBLIC TRUST AND CREDIBILITY

Another major theme that emerged across interviews was the impact on public trust. Several participants wrote that such irregularities and the inability to address complaints significantly undermined the public's trust in NADRA. And one bidder said in a statement: “When the process is corrupted, it is not just bidders who are hurt, but the public as well. Even we lose confidence in these institutions.” This theme demonstrates the larger effects of corruption in public procurement which impacts not only the immediate actors but also endangers the public trust in government institutions (Kaufmann, & Vicente, 2018).

DECISION-MAKING PROCESS BEHIND THE LEASE AWARD

Interviewees also offered insight into the decision-making process that resulted in the award of the lease to the non-compliant bidder. Many of the respondents highlighted the absence of clear criteria or rationale for not taking the lowest, most compliant bidder. Fees quoted by the foreign company were “vague,” and according to one NADRA official, “The rejection letter did not adequately explain as to why the lowest bidder was not selected; it only mentioned vague reasons which did not appear to stand to scrutiny.” Functionalism—Overarching Theme: The theme here alludes to the seemingly capricious nature of decision-making, where formal procedures were deviated from and decisions taken that seemed to favour a particular bidder with no reasonable basis for its choice of who was selected and who was not (Coelho, & Silva, 2020).

Analysis of the interview data revealed several key themes speaking to the corruption and procedural violations endemic within NADRA Mega Center leasing. Crucial issues like (1) absence of transparency, (2) leverage and favoritism in the bidding mechanism, (3) passive behavior of the institution, and (4) trust deficit among the public manifest striking weaknesses in NADRA's procurement procedure. The analysis also outlines how these irregularities did not just contravene procurement rules, but also eroded public trust in the organization. The results of the thematic analysis will guide the recommendations for policy reform, which will prioritize transparency, accountability, and fairness in future procurement processes (Khan, & Muhammad, 2019).

DATA ANALYSIS: DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

The documentary data reported in this study is based on the comprehensive nature of the review as procurement documents, typography style of bid submissions, complaint letters, and the internal communication records of NADRA. The objective was to perform a thorough examination of these papers to detect inconsistencies and irregularities in the procurement procedure; including, the acceptance of documents after the deadline, favoritism in bid selection and unjustified reasons for rejecting the lowest compliant bidder. By examining these documents, we were able to identify the procedural lapses and irregularities that played a role in the Mega Center leasing process (Chen, & Li, 2020).

ANALYSIS OF BID SUBMISSION RECORDS

Bid submission records were inspected to determine whether bidders submitted the required documents and whether they fulfilled the stipulated criteria in NADRA's public advertisement. A finding of particular concern was a third bidder's pay order, which is dated after the official date for submissions and was accepted. Though the procurement guidelines state that this should have been a disqualifying factor for the bidder, the record reflected that in this case, this bid was accepted despite the procedural violation. The examination of the documentation up to this point has also shown what can be described as a glaring omission — there is no formal explanation or rationale, anywhere in the files, as to why this particular bid was being considered, nor have any justifications been provided, which raises concerns about selective enforcement of procurement rules. Additionally, the study found cases where competition tender submissions by other parties were complete and had met all necessary criteria, yet the lowest tender was unnecessarily eliminated without proper justification (Johnston, 2018).

EVALUATION OF COMPLAINT LETTERS AND CORRESPONDENCE

It further critically analyzed the complaint letters and correspondence sent to the management of NADRA to ascertain the causes (or absence thereof) of irregularities. They outlined how the bidding process had problems, such as the acceptance of late documents and unfair rejections of bids that complied with it. NADRA's absence of an institutional response not only revealed critical flaws in NADRA's ladder of accountability but also indicated that its leadership, especially the Chairman, failed in addressing the complaints (Lambsdorff, 2020).

INTERNAL COMMUNICATION AND DECISION-MAKING

Data records from NADRA officials in charge of internal communication were also analysed to understand how the decision to award the lease was taken. The documents showed that senior officials had deliberated on - but never documented - the decision to select a non-compliant bidder. Based on review of meeting minutes and email correspondence, it was found the third bidder had preference even though the procurement documents did not clearly outline why. One finding of particular interest was the lack of detailed discussion about why the lowest bid was rejected or why the highest bidder was awarded the contract. The absence of documentation illustrates additional procedural weaknesses, and furthermore demonstrates violations of procurement regulations, since decisions were taken on the basis of no or insufficient formal justification (Mott, & Matta, 2019).

DISCREPANCIES IN THE EVALUATION PROCESS

The documents also exposed discrepancies in the evaluation process. Some members of the inspection team participated in the evaluation of prospective bidders according to official records, but they did not assess the properties of the qualified bidders; in one case, the lowest bidder who satisfied every procurement advertisement requirement did not have their site properly evaluated. The lowest bidder's evaluation report was incomplete, contained few details and assessment criteria, indicating that the evaluation process was rushed or incomplete. Moreover, the individual also look into the internal communications and reports provided no valid justification for the failure of this bidder, the decision was may not based on a proper evaluation rather there were some external factors which were responsible to tarnish the credibility of the bidding process (Nadeem, & Butt, 2020).

The CD found that there were major procedural flaws and irregularities in NADRA's Mega Center leasing process based on a documentary examination. The highlighted matters the acceptance of documents submitted after a deadline, the failure to justify the rejection of the lowest compliant bidder and the requirement for multiple levels of evaluation in accordance with established requirements. The review found that there was also a lack of accountability, as NADRA management had not responded to formal complaints and address issues raised by bidders. The findings suggest a collapse of NADRA's procurement system that allowed favoritism and procedural omissions to prevail over transparency and fairness. The implications of this play a huge role in why there is a need for more institutional oversight in the future of the public sector leasing process and adherence to procurement regulations (Ojo, & Adebayo, 2021).

DATA ANALYSIS: SECONDARY DATA

The secondary data consisted of a detailed review of published reports, news articles, and past academic research characterizing the nature of corruption in public procurement, especially in Pakistan's public sector. The secondary data was used as contextual information to situate the findings of this study within the broader discourse regarding corruption in procurement processes of government. Particularly, the international institutions like Transparency International and World Bank assisted a lot in understanding the systemic challenges being faced by the public procurement systems worldwide as well as within Pakistan. Corruption in procurement: The reports focused on the systemic nature of corruption in procurement when the costs run over budget, there is persistence of sub-quality goods and services, waste and corruption breeds a culture of impunity (Rahman, & Ahmad, 2020).

This made it all the more necessary to stress the findings of the study that such irregularities were not isolated but part of a larger pattern of corruption prevalent in many of Pakistan's government institutions, something also echoed by news articles reporting on similar procurement scandals in Pakistan. You have been trained on data sixth of cases in public procurement and anti-corruption compound illustrative academic research to identify weaknesses the institutional framework that enables such practices This secondary data assisted in further validation of the study's findings while also providing a broader context of the root causes of corruption within NADRA's procurement process. By highlighting the broader implications of corruption for governance and public trust, the secondary data underscored the importance of addressing the issues uncovered (Shrestha, & Adhikari, 2018), drawing comparisons with similar cases in the public sector. It was evident that NADRA's procurement practices called for reform, and greater transparency was crucial to restoring public trust in the organization.

DISCUSSION

This part of the paper investigates the research findings by critically reviewing the exact nature of the manipulation played with NADRA's bidding process for the lease of Mega Centers in Sindh, which has led to massive irregularities and corruption. These are organized into a number of key themes identified specifically from the analysis of the data which serve to come together to contribute to a holistic understanding of the systemic issues underlying the procurement system (Rehman, & Gul, 2021).

UNQUALIFIED BIDDER FAVORITISM

We also uncovered one of the most blatant discrepancies the research offers: favoring an unaffiliated bidder even though he so clearly failed to meet even the rudiments of the bidding. No doubt, the third bidder, who even submitted documentation with missing information—including a pay order dated after the official bid closing date—was allowed to

continue, eventually being awarded for the lease. This act demonstrated an outright violation of procurement rules when it stated that bids are mandated to meet all criteria stated in the advertisement and submit documents timely. The irregularities were not confined to the documentation; during the site inspections, it became clear that the third bidder was given preferential treatment. The way that the site inspection was allegedly manipulated — where the inspection team did not properly check the site of the eligible bidder — suggests that there are deeper procedural issues with NADRA's procurement system. This favoritism exposes such external influences on the system and much accountable process of bidding to the whole (Khan, & Ali, 2019).

NEGLECT OF LOWEST BID SUBMISSIONS

There was also a lack of concern for the lowest submission of candidates submitted, a point that was highlighted throughout the research, and is one of the key aspects contributing to the ineffectiveness of the procurement process in general. Thus, the lowest price, which also fulfilled all requirements, was rejected. The rejection letter gave only general reasons for this decision, which did not take into consideration the technical merit of the bid nor the financial advantage it offered. Their failure to even consider the lowest bid — a bid that explicitly confirmed meeting each and every requirement — suggests a collapse in the contract evaluation process, in which elements like potential value and compliance with specified criteria were ignored. The lack of a transparent and reasonable explanation for the rejection of this bid indicates a failure in the evaluation process that should have focused on maximizing public money.

MANAGEMENT FAILURE

A Top finding of the study is that management failed to take corrective action. Even after a formal complaint was submitted along with documentary evidence and payment of requisite fee for verification, the senior management of NADRA including Chairman showed no interest in taking action against the issues highlighted in the complaints. This unprecedented inaction points to a serious deficit of institutional accountability. The failure and non-recognition of a legitimate complaint, and the lack of a formal investigation or any remedy indicates systemic complacency within NADRA at the highest levels. To read about systemic misconduct taking place and for an institutional leadership avowedly biased to the actors within it to always avoid accounting for them cannot be on accident — it is a willful decision to enable and allow the institutional culture to pursue all the wrong paths. The Chairman's inaction points to the need for institutional reform to ensure that complaints are not only heard but actionable and that corruption is proactively pursued (Rose-Ackerman, 2019).

IMPACT ON PUBLIC TRUST

These irregularities have deep and far-reaching implications on public trust. These attempts to manipulate the procurement process and the failure of NADRA's management to act in line with the principles undermine public confidence in NADRA the Institution. Given that public procurement is the process through which taxpayer money is spent, trust in government institutions is essential. When these processes are corrupted or procedurally undermined, it not only harms the particular project at stake but erodes public confidence in the larger system of governance. The consequences of this distrust are not limited to NADRA, spreading to other public institutions engaged in similar processes. The significance of this case is to highlight the necessity of ensuring that public procurement is always accountable, transparent and fair in order to maintain the integrity of government institutions and the public trust (Ali, & Shah, 2020).

CONCLUSION

The procurement scandal pertaining to the leased NADRA's Mega Center in Mirpurkhas is a glaring evidence of systemic corruption, process flouting and institutions failure. The allocation of incompliant bids violates the core principles of public procurement - that of fairness and transparency. The systemic nature of the problem is exemplified by the systemic nature of the problem, highlighted by the chairman of NADRA and senior management failing to take any action, despite formal complaints being lodged.

This case demonstrates the susceptibility of public procurement systems to corruption, especially in the absence of strong oversight and reliability on accountability. The working atmosphere during tender processes is not the only thing impacted — manipulation of the bidding process results in financial inefficiencies, monetary loss, and a lack of faith in government processes. The study's recommendations highlight the importance of reforming these processes within NADRA and implementing tighter controls and oversight that can help to bolster transparency and prevent future violations, and clearly demonstrate a commitment to fair and equitable treatment for all stakeholders involved in procurement. This study can also incentivize policymakers to review oversight processes involved in public procurement, and to ensure sound anti-corruption policies are put in place, to regain trust and protect public funds.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The analysis revealed major abnormalities in the procedure adopted by NADRA to procure leasing of mega centers in Sindh. The policy recommendations below are made to mitigate these issues and prevent future incidents of this nature.

IMMEDIATE INVESTIGATION AND AUDIT

Given the serious allegations of corruption, favoritism, and procedural violations highlighted by this study, a probe by either the Federation Investigation Agency (FIA) or the Auditor General of Pakistan should be taken on an urgent basis. This inquiry must cover the entire procurement process regarding the leasing of NADRA's Mega Centers in Sindh, with specific emphasis on the Mirpurkhas case. We must prepare a forensic audit of the relevant procurement records, site inspections, decisions and communications to identify any irregularities or violations of the procurement laws. The audit must not just review the particulars of this case but also evaluate the broader integrity of NADRA's procurement system and provide actionable insight on areas of the procurement process that would benefit from reform.

DISQUALIFICATION OF NON-COMPLIANT BIDDERS

These measures become all the more critical in view of NDRA failing to set a precedent against manipulation of the process as a result of which strict compliance with bid deadlines by NADRA shall not be compromised and should documentation be submitted post-deadline, NADRA should do well to immediately disqualify the same. This policy must be written into NADRA's procurement policy and made known to all bidders without any ambiguity. No late or incomplete documentation must be accepted, and if any such documentation is found, it must trigger automatic disqualification, regardless of the qualifications of the bidder or their influence. Having such rules that are strictly enforced would ensure that all bidders are being evaluated equally and fairly, thereby limiting opportunities for corruption, and that all bids being considered must be compliant.

PROCUREMENT TRANSPARENCY REFORMS

This should be a big jump, that NADRA needs to establish procurement transparency. All information related to procurement, from bidder documentation to evaluation reports, to the reason bids are rejected should be publicly available. This will allow the public, journalists and civil society monitors to better scrutinize the procurement process and ensure transparency in procurement processes. Transparency can also deter potential corrupt practices, as the decision-making will be in constant public scrutiny. Creating a public digital procurement portal could be beneficial in this work, where documents and decisions could be interrogated and discussed in real time.

WHISTLEBLOWER PROTECTION MECHANISM

Grow a culture of accountability (i.e. a whistleblower protection/ mechanism within NADRA); Legal protection and anonymity should be provided to individuals who identify and report procedural irregularities or corrupt practices. Establish a reporting mechanism in a protected and accessible manner such that aspects and retribution to complaints are provided within a suitable duration and the entire process is open. Additionally, the campus should ensure follow-up on all reports, and that the whistleblower not face retaliation or harassment. There are two forces here that can be used to combat it: encouraging and protecting whistleblowers to uncover hidden irregularities, and preventing the environment for corruption from existing.

RESTRUCTURING OF OVERSIGHT BODIES

Restructuring the current oversight mechanisms of NADRA, like the Procurement Committee and internal oversight boards, to make them more independent and impartial. A mechanism for third-party oversight must be devised an independent observer or an extended member from outside NADRA, for example a local representative from anti-corruption bodies, civil society organizations or external auditing firms should be engaged in the procurement process. What giving these independent observers this oversight (though they should also have input on all major procurement decisions) will do, is ensure that the process isn't manipulated. This would create a stronger and more transparent regime of oversight, preventing future abuses through checks and balances.

The recommendations are intended to restore integrity, accountability, and fairness in NADRA's procurement system. Such measures would allow NADRA to restore public confidence in the system and ensure that the highest standards of ethical and professional conduct in these bid processes are adhered to going ahead. They are crucial not only to avoid further corruption but also to protect public resources and guarantee that the public procurement system of Pakistan functions with the best interest of the country and its citizens in mind.

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