

Mitigating White-Collar Crime in Emerging Economies: A Case Study of Law Enforcement Agencies in Pakistan

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Received: 11/01/2024
Accepted: 10/04/2024

Online Published: 20/04/2024

Abstract

White-collar crime encompasses a variety of dishonest business practices, including commercial fraud, customer deception, slander, insider trading, and corruption. These crimes, continuously evolving to deceive the public and government, result in significant financial losses. Despite their historical persistence, white-collar crimes such as fraudulent accounts, large-scale governmental corruption, Ponzi schemes, and misappropriation of public funds continue to cause substantial harm. Corruption and deception have been embedded in societies since their inception, and Pakistan inherited and perpetuated these issues since its establishment. This research paper examines the prevalence and handling of white-collar crimes by law enforcement agencies in Pakistan, including the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA), Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF), Police, Federal Board of Revenue (FBR), and the National Accountability Bureau (NAB). The study focuses on prominent cases such as tax evasion scandals, the Pakistan Steel Mills scam, fraudulent accounts, and anti-money laundering cases, and assesses their legal enforcement. The findings reveal systemic misuse of authority, with scams and fraud often orchestrated by individuals in positions of power. Furthermore, institutional mechanisms are frequently exploited to suppress and victimize political opponents. The study concludes that white-collar crimes, while uniformly serious, vary significantly in nature, necessitating tailored approaches for each case.

Keywords: White-collar crimes, financial fraud, corruption, criminal justice system, law enforcement

JEL Classification: D73; K14, K42, H83

1. Introduction

This study delves into the intricate web of causes and consequences surrounding white-collar crime in Pakistan, while also examining the efforts of law enforcement agencies to combat this pervasive issue. White-collar crime encompasses a broad spectrum of nonviolent offenses committed in commercial settings for financial gain, including fraud, embezzlement, forgery, and bribery (Felson et al., 2010). Perpetrators of white-collar crime are typically professionals in office or corporate environments, leveraging their positions for illicit gains. Unlike violent crime, white-collar crime does not involve physical assault but can have equally devastating effects on society (Khan & Mahmood, 2016). In recent years, Pakistan has faced a surge in white-collar crimes, including tax evasion scandals, large-scale governmental corruption, and fraudulent financial schemes. Despite efforts by law enforcement agencies such as the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA), Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF), and Police, combating white-collar crime remains a daunting challenge. The National Accountability Bureau (NAB), established as Pakistan's highest anti-corruption organization, plays a crucial role in addressing white-collar crimes such as tax evasion scandals, Pakistan Steel Mills scam, and anti-money laundering cases.

The primary objective of this study is to uncover the underlying causes of white-collar crime in Pakistan, focusing on the socio-economic, institutional, and cultural factors contributing to its prevalence. Additionally, this paper aims to explore the specific challenges faced by law enforcement agencies, particularly the NAB, in investigating and prosecuting white-collar crime cases. By shedding light on these factors, the study seeks to provide comprehensive insights into the complexities of combating white-collar crime in Pakistan's dynamic socio-economic context.

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Research Objectives:

- To analyze the legal framework and institutional mechanisms of entities in Pakistan responsible for addressing white-collar crime.
- To examine the prosecution process of white-collar crime in Pakistan, identifying shortcomings within the criminal justice system that hinder effective combat against this type of crime.
- To identify and analyze the challenges faced by law enforcement agencies, with a specific focus on the National Accountability Bureau (NAB), in investigating and prosecuting white-collar crime cases.
- To provide recommendations aimed at enhancing the investigation process and mitigating white-collar crime based on the identified difficulties and obstacles encountered by law enforcement agencies.

Rationale and Significance

This paper aims to extend the existing body of knowledge on white-collar crime from the perspective of an emerging economy. While there has been some research conducted in Pakistan, particularly following the post-military regime of Pervez Musharraf, a comprehensive understanding of the local dynamics remains limited. The period after Musharraf saw the rise of local governments and the establishment of the National Accountability Bureau (NAB). This study is particularly significant as it examines the functioning of NAB within a democratic framework, providing insights into its efficacy and challenges.

Previous research has primarily focused on white-collar crimes in established democracies, such as those in the Western world, where the emphasis has been on legal structures and regulatory frameworks. This study, however, broadens the scope by incorporating the institutional mechanisms in Pakistan designed to combat such crimes. It investigates whether these mechanisms serve their intended purpose of curbing white-collar crime or are misused as tools to suppress political opposition and victimize opponents.

The significance of this paper lies in its dual approach: it not only delves into the systemic issues within the legal and institutional frameworks but also explores the socio-political context that influences these mechanisms. By examining the challenges faced by law enforcement agencies, particularly NAB; in conducting transparent investigations against powerful individuals, this research highlights the complexities involved in tackling white-collar crime in Pakistan. This study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the effectiveness of current anti-corruption strategies and suggest improvements for more robust enforcement.

The findings of this research are expected to contribute to policy-making and strategic planning for law enforcement agencies. By identifying gaps and proposing recommendations, this paper seeks to enhance the capability of Pakistani institutions to address white-collar crime more effectively, thereby promoting greater accountability and transparency in both public and private sectors.

2. Literature Review

This literature review presents a corpus of relevant papers, assessments, themes, and theories for the current study on white-collar crime. According to Holtfreter (2005), white-collar crime is a type of non-violent crime where the primary motivation is typically financial. White-collar criminals usually hold professional positions of authority or prestige and enjoy above-average pay (Jovanov, 2011). Sagar (2019) posits that many white-collar criminals possess a mindset that drives them to pursue personal and business enrichment by any means necessary. Studies have also highlighted that white-collar criminals often use language to justify their actions, employing

neutralization strategies to deny victimhood, blame, and damage (Zafar, 2020; Wall-Parker, 2019). Ullah et al. (2018) note that the psychological makeup of white-collar offenders is frequently obscured by their tendency to rationalize and excuse their misdeeds.

Cohen (2005) defines white-collar offenses as financial crimes, providing a diverse range of options for perpetrators, including fraud, theft, manipulation, and corruption, each with multiple subcategories (Brush, 2007). The opportunity for such violations arises from changes in social, economic, legal, and regulatory conditions, influencing the likelihood of white-collar crime (Benson, 2013). The decision to engage in white-collar crime becomes convenient as opportunities grow or shrink. These criminals often commit offenses within their professional environments, where illegal activities are concealed under legitimate organizational work. They wield power and influence, form protective networks, and benefit from the trust of others in privileged circles (Kempa, 2010). Brightman (2009) adds that white-collar criminals typically commit crimes without resorting to violence. However, does it create any type of stress among the employees of the same department is not clear. According to Kaur (2023), “in contemporary organizations, effective management is crucial for addressing occupational stress and enhancing employee performance” (p. 19). In addition to that, Haque (2024) argued that knowledge hiding could also hinder the performance of department. Jose and Kaur (2023) stated that “stress is a pervasive phenomenon, not new and manifesting at various life stages” (p.35).

The motivations behind white-collar crime include a desire for social control, fear of losing social status, lack of social consciousness and integrity, weak internal controls within organizations, greed, and ineffective corporate cultures (Bucy et al., 2008). One approach to preventing white-collar crime is to reduce the opportunity for criminality by restructuring organizations. Preventive techniques include regularly reviewing regulations, reducing opportunities for crime, adhering to ethical standards, and enforcing existing laws (Bashir, 2011).

The ramifications of white-collar crime extend to both individuals and societies. Ilyas (2018) notes that the financial and physical harm caused by white-collar crimes can surpass the impact of street crimes over time. Consequences include individual economic losses, societal economic losses, emotional implications, and physical harm (Rosoff et al., 2002).

Lord and Wingerde (2019) investigate the role of law enforcement in preventing and intervening in white-collar crime. They argue that law enforcement can benefit from preventative approaches informed by knowledge of white-collar crime scripts, associated social and criminal networks, and the nature of opportunities. Their study underscores the importance of collecting more comprehensive data on preventative and compliance measures and making this data available to law enforcement and academic researchers. This would enhance the understanding of prevention approaches and compliance over time, providing more definitive answers regarding the effectiveness of intervention measures.

The current study extends the body of knowledge from the perspective of an emerging economy. Limited work has been carried out in Pakistan, especially after the post-military regime of Pervez Musharraf, during which local governments became more prominent and the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) was established. It is intriguing to examine how NAB operates within a democratic setup. Previous studies have focused on white-collar crimes in established democracies, primarily emphasizing legal structures. This study, however, extends the knowledge by exploring institutional mechanisms in Pakistan designed to combat such crimes. It also investigates whether these mechanisms serve to curb white-collar crime or are misused as tools to victimize political opponents. By delving into the systemic issues within legal and institutional frameworks and examining the socio-political context, this research aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the challenges faced by law enforcement agencies in tackling white-collar crime in Pakistan.

3. Research Methodology

The methodology encompasses the tools and strategies employed by researchers to investigate, examine, and explore variables in various organizational settings (Kothari, 2004). According to Sekaran and Bougie (2012), the techniques utilized to initiate research are crucial in determining the research methodology. This study adopts a positivist research paradigm, rooted in the positivist realism philosophy. The study's pragmatic strategy emphasizes achieving both quantitative and qualitative insights through inductive and deductive methodologies. To ensure a comprehensive analysis, a mixed-methods approach is employed. Quantitative data is collected using a semi-structured matrix-based Likert scale, which facilitates numerical expression of the findings. Concurrently, qualitative data is obtained through in-depth semi-structured interviews to capture the complexities of the research phenomenon. This dual approach ensures that the study maintains an objective position by leveraging both qualitative and quantitative perspectives (Faizan & Haque, 2015; Faizan & Haque, 2016; Faizan & Haque, 2019; Faizan et al., 2018; Faizan et al., 2019; Gusev et al., 2020; Haque, 2012; Haque & Aston, 2016; Haque et al., 2016; Haque et al., 2018; Haque et al., 2020; Haque, Aydin & Uysal, 2017; Haque et al., 2017; Haque et al., 2015; Haque, Kot & Imran, 2019; Haque, Nair & Kucukaltan, 2019; Haque & Oino, 2019; Haque, Sher & Urbanski, 2020; Haque & Yamoah, 2014; Imran et al., 2018; Imran, Hameed & Haque, 2018; Imran, Haque & Rebilas, 2018; Javed et al., 2018a; Javed et al., 2018b; Kot et al., 2019a; Kot et al., 2019b; Kot et al., 2020; Ślusarczyk et al., 2019; Ślusarczyk et al., 2020; U-Hameed et al., 2018; Urbański & Haque, 2020; Urbański, Haque & Oino, 2018).

According to Hulley et al. (2013), inclusion criteria are “the main characteristics of the target population that qualify someone to participate in a study.” These criteria help to ensure that the study sample is representative of the population being studied and that the study results are applicable to that population. Creswell (2014) highlights that exclusion criteria help to eliminate variables that could introduce bias or variability in the study results.

Table 1: Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Sector	Public offices in Karachi, Lahore, Islamabad	Private sector organizations
Role	Managerial or supervisory positions	Non-managerial roles
Experience	Minimum of five years	Less than five years
Location	Specified cities (i.e., Karachi, Lahore, and Islamabad)	Other cities (Rawalpindi, Hyderabad, Mianwali, and so on)

Source: *Own illustration*

Data collection methods are systematically employed to gather information necessary for analysis (Creswell, 2014). This study utilizes both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods.

Table 2: Data collection methods

Methods	Description
Quantitative Data	Likert scale questionnaires measuring perceptions and experiences
Qualitative Data	Semi-structured interviews exploring personal experiences and insights

Reliability refers to the consistency and stability of the measurement process (Field, 2018). In this study, reliability was ensured through the following methods:

Table 3: Reliability

Reliability Test	Description
Test-Retest Reliability	The questionnaire was administered to a small pilot group, and responses were re-collected after two weeks to ensure stability over time.
Internal Consistency	Cronbach's Alpha was used to measure the internal consistency of the Likert scale items, with a threshold value of 0.7 considered acceptable (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

Validity refers to the accuracy and appropriateness of the measurement process (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The study ensured validity through:

Table 4: Validity

Validity Test	Description
Content Validity	The questionnaire and interview guide were reviewed by experts in the field to ensure they adequately cover the research topics.
Construct Validity	Factor analysis was performed to confirm that the questionnaire items accurately measure the constructs of interest.
Criterion Validity	The findings were compared with established benchmarks and previous research to validate the results.

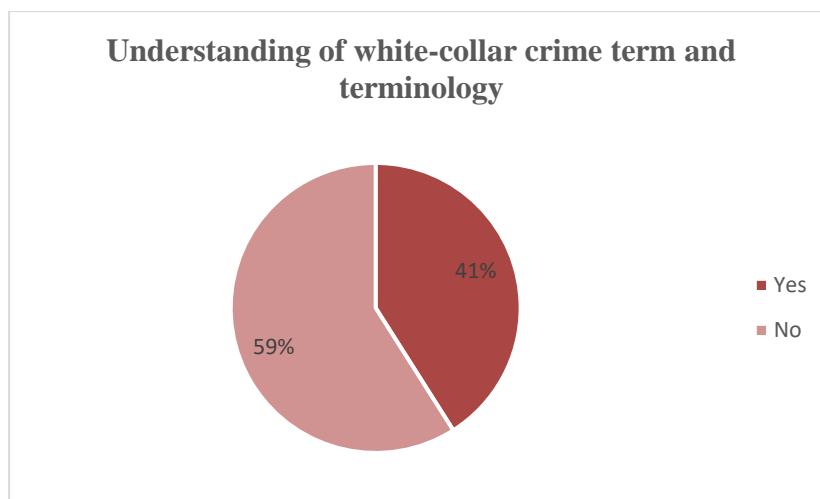
Ethical considerations are crucial to ensure the integrity and ethical standards of the research process (Orb, Eisenhauer, & Wynaden, 2001). Participants were fully informed about the purpose, procedures, and potential risks of the study. Written consent was obtained from all participants. Moreover, the confidentiality of participants was maintained by anonymizing data and securely storing all research materials. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and participants were free to withdraw at any time without any negative consequences. The study ensured that no physical or psychological harm would come to the participants as a result of their participation.

4. Finding and Discussion

The study's findings and interpretation of data were gathered through a survey questionnaire and semi-structured interviews to investigate the process of investigating and prosecuting white-collar crime in Pakistan, as well as flaws in the criminal justice system that impede the fight against this threat. The study's findings and interpretation of data were derived from a comprehensive survey questionnaire and semi-structured interviews, aimed at investigating the processes of investigating and prosecuting white-collar crime in Pakistan. Additionally, the study identified flaws within the criminal justice system that hinder efforts to combat this type of crime.

Understanding of White-Collar Crime

The data collected indicates a significant gap in public understanding of white-collar crime. Only 41% of respondents demonstrated a positive understanding of the term, while the majority lacked basic awareness (Figure 1). This suggests a need for increased public education on the nature and implications of white-collar crime (Zafar, 2020; Wall-Parker, 2019). Efforts to address this gap include the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) partnering with the Higher Education Commission to spread awareness among students. Over 50,000 Character Building Societies (CBS) have been established in universities and colleges nationwide. Additionally, the NAB has implemented stringent measures to ensure transparency and meritocracy at all levels of enforcement.



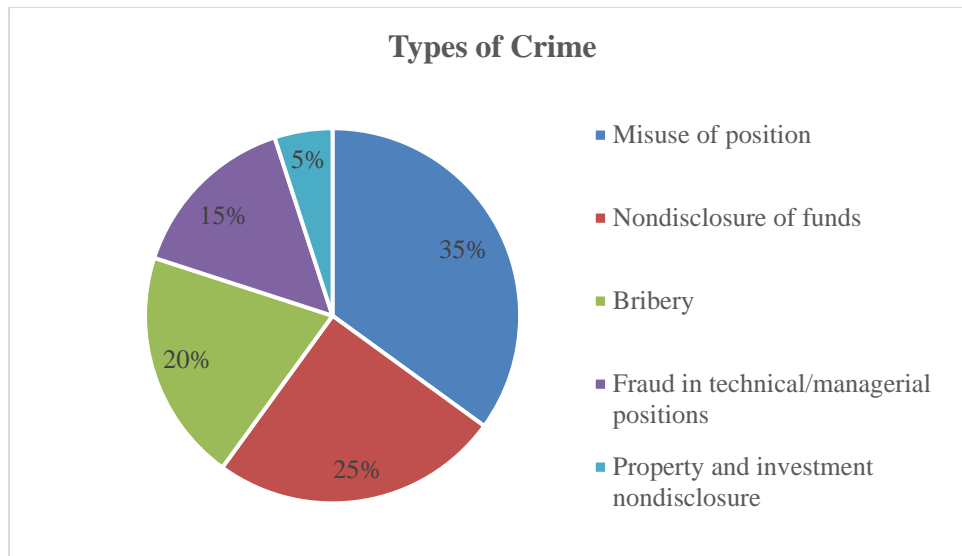
Theme	Frequency
Positive understanding of white-collar crime	41%
Lack of basic awareness	59%

Preventative Measures in Organizations

To curb white-collar crime, organizations must implement multi-level verification and checks-and-balances systems. This includes rigorous vetting of employee credentials, monitoring for red flags such as fake certifications or false information, and conducting thorough personnel screenings, including recent bank statements, credit checks, and lifestyle assessments. These measures can help prevent white-collar crime within organizations (Bashir, 2011; Kempa, 2010).

Prevalence and Types of White-Collar Crimes

White-collar crimes are motivated by personal financial gain and are often committed through cybercrime, money laundering, and bribery. The study found that these crimes are more costly than other types of crime, posing significant risks to employees, consumers, and communities. Sociologists argue that these crimes are particularly harmful as they are committed by individuals in positions of authority who are expected to act responsibly. The survey results indicate the types of white-collar crimes prevalent in Pakistan, with misuse of position being the most common (35%), followed by nondisclosure of funds (25%), bribery (20%), fraud in technical/managerial positions (15%), and property and investment nondisclosure (5%). The data shows that misuse of position and nondisclosure of actual funds are prevalent issues, with numerous scams occurring at both regional and national levels. (Figure 2). Bribery and fraud, particularly in technical and managerial positions, are common. Many cases involve government officials failing to disclose property and investments, highlighting the misuse of positions for personal gain (Benson, 2013; Brightman, 2009).



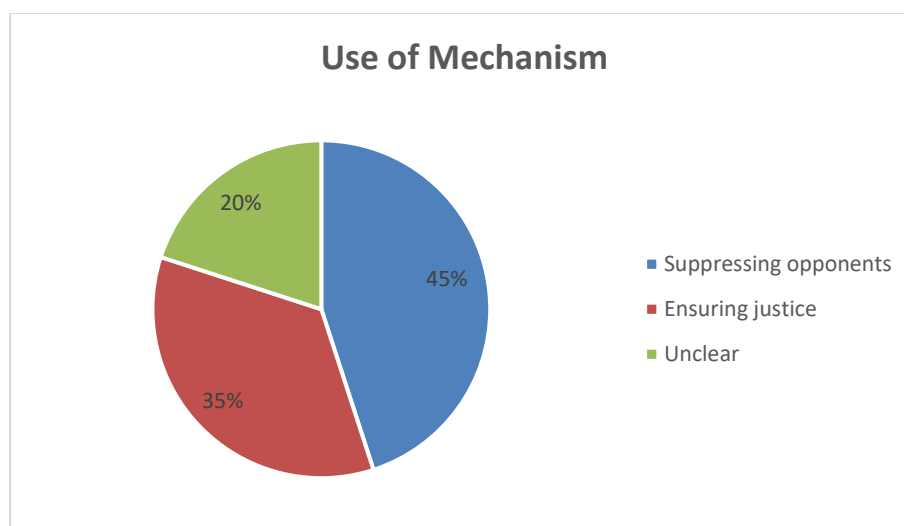
Type of Crime	Prevalence (%)
Misuse of position	35%
Nondisclosure of funds	25%
Bribery	20%
Fraud in technical/managerial positions	15%
Property and investment nondisclosure	5%

Profile of White-Collar Criminals

Experience alone is not a determinant of white-collar criminality. The study emphasizes that white-collar criminals are often individuals of respectability and high social status who commit non-violent offenses for personal financial gain. A willingness to risk personal financial gain, rather than years of experience, is a key factor in committing such crimes (Holtfreter, 2005; Ullah et al., 2018).

Institutional Mechanisms and Misuse

Institutional mechanisms are sometimes misused by those in power to suppress and victimize opponents. Each case of white-collar crime differs in intensity and should be treated separately. The survey results show the use of institutional mechanisms, with 45% indicating suppression of opponents, 35% ensuring justice, and 20% unclear (Figure 3). The study underscores that institutional mechanisms should not be employed to suppress opposition but rather to ensure justice and fairness (Figure 3).



Use of Mechanism	Frequency (%)
Suppressing opponents	45%
Ensuring justice	35%
Unclear	20%

Role of Law Enforcement Agencies

The study highlights that no single entity can combat white-collar crime alone. Effective enforcement of laws and public support are crucial. Stringent laws and regulations, along with their timely and effective implementation, are necessary to make a perceptible impact. Agencies such as NAB, FIA, and ACE need to ensure they have the expertise to manage technology-based crimes and regularly update their knowledge.

5. Conclusion, Research Limitations, Recommendations, and Future Research Directions

White-collar crimes are serious offenses that can have far-reaching consequences, often without the use of physical force or violence. The purpose of these crimes is typically to obtain or avoid the loss of money, property, or services, resulting in personal or business profit. Such crimes can lead to the collapse of companies, financial ruin for individuals, and significant losses for investors. Despite the sophistication of fraud schemes, Pakistani law enforcement officials are working diligently to track down offenders and curb these scams. Pakistan has long grappled with corruption, which underlies many societal problems. The establishment of the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) through the National Accountability Ordinance was a significant step in combating corruption and providing effective remedies. However, law enforcement agencies, including NAB, lack the necessary tools and capacity to effectively combat white-collar crimes. There is an urgent need for significant steps to enhance the capabilities of NAB officers in dealing with these crimes.

Despite the insights gained from this study, there are some limitations that should be acknowledged. The study focused primarily on perceptions and practices within Pakistan and may not fully capture international perspectives on white-collar crime. Moreover, the sample size and geographical scope of the study were limited, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. In addition to that, there may be inherent biases in self-reported data collected through surveys and interviews. Lastly, the study did not explore the perspectives of white-collar criminals themselves, which could provide valuable insights into their motives and behaviors.

Enhanced Collaboration: NAB investigators should collaborate closely with other law enforcement and regulatory authorities in multi-layered fraud cases that harm the economy. Special

attention should be given to cases involving accounting fraud, corporate officer self-dealing, and obstruction of justice. Field experts should be incorporated into law enforcement groups to enhance investigative capabilities.

Training and Education: Law enforcement personnel, especially those handling white-collar crime cases, require specialized training and education. They should receive training in trade policy, accounting practices, and the complexities of white-collar crime investigations. Senior officers should encourage and facilitate their learning in these areas.

Proactive Intelligence Techniques: White-collar crime investigations are often reactive, initiated by victim complaints. However, there should be a shift towards proactive intelligence techniques to identify and prevent such crimes before they cause significant harm. Intelligence-led operations can reduce investigative and prosecutorial time while maintaining efficacy.

International Collaboration: Pakistan should seek international training, professional advice, and technological support to bolster its capacity to combat white-collar crimes effectively. Collaboration with international partners can provide valuable insights and resources for improving enforcement strategies.

The future researchers shall consider these suggestions to improve the future work. Future studies shall consider conducting comparative studies to explore white-collar crime perceptions, practices, and enforcement strategies in Pakistan compared to other countries with similar or different socio-economic contexts. This would provide insights into global variations and best practices. Moreover, increase the sample size and geographical coverage of the study to include a more diverse range of participants from different regions of Pakistan. This would improve the generalizability of the findings and provide a more comprehensive understanding of white-collar crime across the country. In addition to that, longitudinal studies track changes in white-collar crime patterns, enforcement strategies, and public perceptions over time. Long-term data collection can reveal trends, emerging issues, and the effectiveness of policy interventions. Moreover, qualitative studies with offenders should be considered. Explore the perspectives of white-collar criminals themselves through qualitative interviews or case studies. Understanding their motives, decision-making processes, and experiences can provide valuable insights for prevention and enforcement efforts. Future researchers shall investigate the impact of legislative changes and policy interventions on white-collar crime rates and enforcement effectiveness. This could include analyzing the implementation and outcomes of new laws and regulations. Researchers shall examine the role of technology in facilitating or combating white-collar crime, including cybercrime, digital forensics, and financial technologies. Explore how technological advancements impact crime patterns and enforcement strategies. They should encourage cross-disciplinary research involving criminology, law, economics, psychology, and sociology to gain a comprehensive understanding of white-collar crime from multiple perspectives. Furthermore, researchers should evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of enforcement agencies such as NAB, FIA, and ACE in handling white-collar crime cases. Assess their capacity, resources, and training needs. Lastly, the researchers should investigate the impact of public awareness campaigns and educational initiatives on reducing white-collar crime and increasing reporting rates. Evaluate the effectiveness of programs aimed at educating the public about the risks and consequences of white-collar crime.

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