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A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF STAKEHOLDER POWER DYNAMICS IN PUBLIC SECTOR PROJECTS: A CROSS-SECTOR EXAMINATION OF INFRASTRUCTURE, HEALTHCARE, AND RENEWABLE ENERGY PROJECTS IN PAKISTAN AND CANADA

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Abstract

Increasing project complexity and the growing reliance on cross-sector collaboration have intensified the importance of understanding stakeholder power dynamics in public sector projects. Despite extensive research on stakeholder management, limited qualitative evidence exists regarding how stakeholder influence evolves across different sectors and institutional environments. This study comparatively explores stakeholder power dynamics in infrastructure, healthcare, and renewable energy projects in Pakistan and Canada. Guided by Stakeholder Theory and Collaborative Governance Theory, the research employed a qualitative comparative multiple-case study design. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 16 senior professionals, including government officials, project managers, healthcare administrators, engineers, renewable energy specialists, and policy advisors. The interview data were analysed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and contextual insights. The findings reveal five major themes: unequal distribution of stakeholder power, collaborative governance as a driver of institutional coordination, institutional capacity as a determinant of stakeholder influence, trust and transparency as foundations of long-term collaboration, and adaptive governance for sustainable project implementation. The comparative analysis demonstrates that while governments remain central actors, stakeholder influence increasingly depends on expertise, legitimacy, collaboration, and institutional capacity rather than formal authority alone. The study proposes a conceptual framework that advances the understanding of stakeholder governance across diverse public sector contexts and provides practical guidance for policymakers and project managers seeking to strengthen collaborative governance and improve sustainable project outcomes.

Keywords: Stakeholder Power Dynamics; Collaborative Governance; Public Sector Projects; Infrastructure Projects; Renewable Energy Governance

1. Introduction

Background of the Research

Public sector projects have become increasingly complex due to the growing diversity of stakeholders, evolving governance structures, and heightened expectations for sustainable development. Governments are increasingly relying on collaborative governance arrangements involving public agencies, private organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), local communities, and international development

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partners to address complex societal challenges that cannot be solved by a single institution alone. Consequently, stakeholder power dynamics have emerged as one of the most influential determinants of project planning, implementation, and long-term success. Rather than operating within hierarchical governance structures, contemporary public projects require continuous negotiation, coordination, and resource sharing among multiple actors possessing varying degrees of authority, legitimacy, and influence (Gray & Purdy, 2018; Hipsher, 2021).

Cross-sector collaboration has become particularly important in infrastructure development, healthcare service delivery, and renewable energy initiatives, where project outcomes depend heavily upon effective stakeholder engagement. Infrastructure projects require coordination among government agencies, engineering firms, investors, and affected communities. Similarly, healthcare initiatives involve public health authorities, hospitals, NGOs, healthcare professionals, and international organizations working collectively to improve service delivery. Renewable energy projects further expand stakeholder networks by incorporating environmental agencies, private energy developers, financial institutions, regulatory bodies, and local communities pursuing sustainable development goals (Owoola et al., 2024; Gao et al., 2025).

The increasing adoption of collaborative governance models reflects a broader transition from government-centered decision making toward network-based governance. Such arrangements encourage shared responsibility, transparency, and collective problem solving while simultaneously introducing challenges associated with conflicting interests, unequal power distribution, and institutional complexity. Gray and Purdy (2018) argue that multi-stakeholder partnerships have become essential mechanisms for addressing complex public policy problems, whereas Mahajan et al. (2024) emphasize that sustainable development increasingly depends upon effective collaboration across organizational and institutional boundaries.

Comparative research examining stakeholder dynamics across different institutional environments remains limited despite the growing importance of collaborative governance. Pakistan and Canada provide particularly valuable contexts for comparative investigation because they represent contrasting governance systems, institutional capacities, regulatory frameworks, and public sector management practices. Canada possesses relatively mature governance institutions characterized by strong regulatory oversight, stakeholder participation, and institutional accountability. Conversely, Pakistan continues strengthening its governance mechanisms while managing challenges related to institutional capacity, political influence, and resource constraints (Khan & Han, 2023). Examining stakeholder interactions across these two countries provides an opportunity to understand how institutional environments influence power relationships within public sector projects.

Furthermore, international commitments toward achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have intensified the need for effective partnerships across governments, businesses, civil society organizations, and local communities. Cross-sector collaboration has therefore become a strategic requirement rather than merely a governance preference. Existing literature consistently recognizes collaborative partnerships as fundamental drivers of sustainable public service delivery, social innovation, and institutional resilience (Fontana et al., 2021; Hipsher, 2021; Mahajan et al., 2024). Despite these developments, limited qualitative evidence explains how stakeholder power evolves throughout project lifecycles across multiple sectors and national contexts.

Problem Statement

Although stakeholder management has received considerable scholarly attention, existing research primarily investigates individual sectors or specific project contexts rather than offering comparative insights across multiple public service domains. Most previous studies emphasize governance structures, public-private partnerships, or project performance while providing limited understanding of how stakeholders negotiate power, influence decision making, and resolve conflicts throughout project implementation (Maqbool & Sridhar, 2024; Malik & Nurunnabi, 2024).

Current literature also lacks comparative investigations between developed and developing countries, particularly regarding the influence of institutional environments on stakeholder relationships. The interaction among governments, private organizations, NGOs, regulatory agencies, and local communities differs substantially according to governance maturity, institutional capacity, and political contexts. Nevertheless, empirical evidence explaining these variations remains limited. Furthermore, previous studies rarely integrate infrastructure, healthcare, and renewable energy projects within a single comparative framework, thereby restricting the broader understanding of stakeholder governance across public sector initiatives (O'Sullivan & Mazutis, 2025; Kritz, 2017; Kolk & Lenfant, 2013). Accordingly, this study seeks to address these research gaps by comparatively exploring stakeholder power dynamics across Pakistan and Canada using a qualitative thematic analysis approach.

Research Questions

1. How do stakeholder power dynamics differ across infrastructure, healthcare, and renewable energy projects?
2. How do institutional environments in Pakistan and Canada influence stakeholder relationships?
3. What governance mechanisms facilitate effective stakeholder collaboration?
4. What barriers influence equitable stakeholder participation?
5. How can cross-sector collaboration improve public project outcomes?

Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are:

- To examine stakeholder power structures across infrastructure, healthcare, and renewable energy projects.
- To compare governance practices influencing stakeholder relationships in Pakistan and Canada.
- To identify governance mechanisms that support collaborative decision making.
- To explore stakeholder conflict management and negotiation strategies.
- To develop a conceptual framework explaining stakeholder power dynamics across public sector projects.

Significance of the Research

This research contributes to both theory and practice. From a theoretical perspective, the study extends Stakeholder Theory by integrating perspectives from collaborative governance and institutional theory to explain stakeholder interactions across diverse public sector environments. The comparative analysis advances understanding of how institutional contexts shape stakeholder influence and governance practices while enriching literature on cross-sector partnerships and sustainable public administration (Gray & Purdy, 2018; Hipsher, 2021; Mahajan et al., 2024).

From a practical perspective, the findings will provide valuable guidance for policymakers, project managers, public administrators, and development organizations seeking to improve stakeholder engagement and collaborative governance. The proposed framework will support more transparent decision making, strengthen public-private partnerships, enhance conflict resolution mechanisms, and facilitate sustainable project implementation across infrastructure, healthcare, and renewable energy sectors. Moreover, the comparative evidence generated from Pakistan and Canada will offer transferable lessons for governments pursuing institutional reforms and collaborative governance strategies to achieve long-term sustainable development objectives (Khan & Han, 2023; Fontana et al., 2021; Owoola et al., 2024).

2. Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in Stakeholder Theory (Freeman, 1984) and Collaborative Governance Theory (Ansell & Gash, 2008), which together provide a comprehensive theoretical foundation for examining stakeholder power dynamics in public sector projects. Stakeholder Theory explains how organizations create value by recognizing and balancing the interests of multiple stakeholder groups possessing varying levels of power, legitimacy, and urgency. In public sector projects, governments, private organizations, regulatory agencies, development partners, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), investors, and local communities all influence project planning, implementation, and outcomes. Consequently, project success depends upon effectively understanding and managing these diverse stakeholder relationships.

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Collaborative Governance Theory Complements Stakeholder Theory by explaining how public agencies and non-state actors collectively participate in decision making, resource sharing, conflict resolution, and policy implementation. Rather than relying solely on hierarchical governance, collaborative governance emphasizes consensus building, institutional trust, transparency, and shared responsibility among stakeholders. This theoretical perspective is particularly suitable for infrastructure, healthcare, and renewable energy projects where multiple organizations possess complementary resources, expertise, and institutional authority. Integrating these two theories enables a comprehensive understanding of how stakeholder influence evolves throughout project lifecycles and how institutional environments shape collaborative governance practices across Pakistan and Canada.

Recent scholarship further highlights that sustainable public governance increasingly requires multidisciplinary collaboration that extends beyond traditional public–private partnerships. Corporate collaborations and NGO partnerships have become important mechanisms for strengthening financial sustainability, institutional resilience, and long-term development outcomes, particularly in resource-constrained environments (Gouda, 2026). Broader governance reforms have also emphasized transparent fiscal management and evidence-based public budgeting as essential foundations for accountable project implementation and stakeholder confidence (Islam, 2025). At the macro level, economic diversification, prudent external debt management, and digital transformation significantly influence governments' capacity to finance large-scale infrastructure and public service initiatives while maintaining institutional stability (Ali, 2026; Ali & Rasheed, 2026a, 2026b; Rasheed & Ali, 2026). Similarly, advances in digital marketing and immersive technologies illustrate how emerging digital ecosystems facilitate stakeholder engagement, communication, and citizen participation, offering innovative approaches for strengthening public-sector interactions (Abrar & Amjad, 2026). From a sustainability perspective, financial technology innovations are increasingly recognized as enablers of inclusive financing, transparency, and sustainable development through improved access to financial services and investment mechanisms (Offiong et al., 2025). Furthermore, comparative assessments of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) implementation demonstrate that resilient governance systems depend upon coordinated stakeholder participation, adaptive institutional policies, and cross-sector partnerships capable of responding effectively to evolving socio-economic and environmental challenges (Singh et al., 2025). Collectively, these studies reinforce the argument that effective stakeholder governance requires integrating sound economic management, technological innovation, institutional accountability, and collaborative partnerships to achieve sustainable public sector outcomes.

Stakeholder Power and Public Project Governance

Stakeholder power has emerged as one of the most significant determinants of successful public project governance. Modern public sector projects involve numerous actors with different organizational objectives, institutional responsibilities, financial interests, and regulatory authority. Governments typically possess legal authority and policy-making responsibilities, while private organizations contribute technical expertise, financial investment, and project management capabilities. Communities, NGOs, and civil society organizations contribute social legitimacy by representing public interests, whereas development agencies influence projects through funding, technical assistance, and policy guidance.

According to Stakeholder Theory, organizations must recognize that stakeholders differ in terms of power, legitimacy, and urgency, resulting in unequal influence over strategic decisions. Effective governance therefore requires continuous stakeholder engagement, transparent communication, and collaborative decision making to balance competing interests throughout the project lifecycle. Rather than viewing stakeholder diversity as an obstacle, contemporary governance recognizes diverse stakeholder perspectives as valuable resources for improving project quality, accountability, and sustainability.

Gray and Purdy (2018) argue that solving contemporary public policy challenges increasingly requires multi-stakeholder partnerships because no single organization possesses sufficient resources or expertise to independently address complex societal issues. Similarly, Khan and Han (2023) demonstrate that institutional capacity significantly strengthens collaborative governance by improving coordination among public organizations and enhancing public service delivery. Malik and Nurunnabi (2024) further report that ineffective stakeholder participation frequently contributes to governance failures, implementation delays, and declining public trust. These findings collectively demonstrate that stakeholder power should be strategically managed through collaborative governance mechanisms rather than hierarchical control structures.

Cross-Sector Collaboration in Public Projects

Cross-sector collaboration refers to cooperative relationships among governments, private organizations, NGOs, academic institutions, financial organizations, and local communities working collectively toward common public objectives. Increasing urbanization, climate change, fiscal constraints, technological transformation, and sustainable development priorities have encouraged governments to replace traditional bureaucratic governance with collaborative governance models emphasizing partnership and shared responsibility.

Public-private partnerships have become essential mechanisms for implementing infrastructure, healthcare, education, and renewable energy initiatives because they combine governmental legitimacy with private sector efficiency and community participation. Such collaborative arrangements improve resource mobilization, knowledge sharing, innovation, and institutional accountability while distributing project risks among participating organizations.

Hipsher (2021) argues that cross-sector partnerships constitute one of the most important mechanisms for achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals because they facilitate coordinated action among governments, businesses, civil society organizations, and international institutions. Fontana et al. (2021) similarly demonstrate that collaborative partnerships strengthen institutional capacity by integrating complementary organizational capabilities and promoting inclusive decision making. Maurrasse (2013) further emphasizes that strategic public-private partnerships stimulate innovation while supporting economic and social development. Likewise, Owoola et al. (2024) report that successful infrastructure development increasingly depends upon effective collaboration among governments, private investors, engineering organizations, and regulatory authorities. Kolk and Lenfant (2013) additionally highlight that collaborative governance becomes even more critical within politically sensitive and institutionally complex environments where trust, transparency, and legitimacy significantly influence project success.

Stakeholder Dynamics in Infrastructure and Healthcare Projects

Infrastructure and healthcare projects involve highly interconnected stakeholder networks characterized by varying institutional responsibilities, organizational cultures, technical expertise, and governance priorities. Infrastructure development typically requires cooperation among government ministries, engineering consultants, construction companies, investors, environmental regulators, financial institutions, and local communities. Similarly, healthcare systems involve ministries of health, hospitals, healthcare professionals, NGOs, donor organizations, insurance providers, regulatory agencies, and patient communities working toward common public health objectives.

Because these stakeholders possess different priorities and organizational interests, effective governance requires continuous communication, negotiation, and conflict management throughout project implementation. Public sector organizations generally emphasize accountability and social welfare, whereas private organizations often prioritize efficiency, innovation, and financial sustainability. Reconciling these diverse objectives requires governance mechanisms capable of promoting collaboration while maintaining transparency and public accountability.

Raman and Björkman (2008) demonstrate that public-private partnerships significantly improve healthcare accessibility and operational efficiency when supported by effective governance structures. Similarly, Maqbool and Sridhar (2024) argue that sustainable infrastructure projects require governance mechanisms capable of minimizing opportunistic behavior while strengthening stakeholder collaboration. Malik and Nurunnabi (2024) identify poor communication, fragmented institutional coordination, and inadequate stakeholder participation as major barriers affecting project implementation in developing countries. Furthermore, Mousavi et al. (2025) explain that implementing climate-related health policies requires extensive coordination among governments, healthcare organizations, environmental agencies, and development partners because fragmented governance substantially reduces policy effectiveness. These studies collectively suggest that stakeholder power continuously evolves throughout project implementation and therefore requires adaptive governance strategies.

Renewable Energy Governance and Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration

Renewable energy projects represent one of the most collaborative forms of contemporary public governance because they simultaneously pursue economic growth, environmental sustainability, energy security, and climate resilience. These projects involve governments, regulatory agencies, private investors, energy companies, research institutions, environmental organizations, international development agencies, and local communities. Consequently, stakeholder collaboration becomes essential for balancing economic, environmental, technological, and social objectives.

Taghizad-Tavana et al. (2025) explain that renewable energy implementation depends upon technological innovation, energy storage capabilities, supportive regulations, and coordinated stakeholder engagement. Nwala et al. (2025) similarly propose an integrated framework illustrating that renewable energy governance requires simultaneous consideration of technological, environmental, economic, regulatory, and social dimensions. Nwokediegwu et al. (2024) further emphasize that renewable energy technologies require stronger collaboration among engineers, policymakers, researchers, and investors to accelerate innovation and technology adoption.

Policy coordination also remains fundamental for sustainable energy transitions. Benitez (2026) argues that climate-resilient power systems require policy integration alongside technological innovation. Nour and Arbussà (2026) identify cross-sector collaboration as a critical driver of green hydrogen innovation and sustainable business model development. Gould et al. (2026) additionally demonstrate that clean energy transitions generate significant public health benefits when governments coordinate energy and healthcare policies. George (2026) further highlights that emerging energy technologies require multidimensional governance approaches integrating scientific expertise, institutional regulation, and stakeholder participation. Collectively, these studies reinforce the importance of collaborative governance for renewable energy development.

Comparative Governance between Developed and Developing Countries

Institutional environments significantly influence stakeholder relationships, governance quality, and project outcomes. Developed countries generally possess mature governance systems characterized by transparent regulations, institutional accountability, stakeholder participation, and effective policy implementation. Conversely, many developing countries continue strengthening institutional capacity while addressing governance challenges associated with bureaucratic complexity, resource limitations, political influence, and administrative fragmentation.

Canada represents a governance environment emphasizing participatory decision making, regulatory transparency, and institutional accountability. Pakistan has made considerable progress in governance reforms; however, institutional capacity continues to vary across sectors and governmental levels. Comparing these two countries therefore provides valuable opportunities to understand how institutional maturity influences stakeholder power, collaborative governance, and project implementation.

White and Alkandari (2019) demonstrate that institutional infrastructure and national culture substantially influence stakeholder engagement practices. Khan and Han (2023) similarly conclude that institutional capacity mediates the relationship between collaborative governance and effective public service delivery. O'Sullivan and Mazutis (2025) argue that power asymmetries remain major barriers to successful cross-sector partnerships pursuing sustainable transformation. Likewise, Mahajan et al. (2024) conclude that sustainable development increasingly depends upon effective collaboration among governments, businesses, academia, and civil society organizations operating within supportive institutional environments.

Gaps in Existing Research

Despite the substantial body of literature on stakeholder management, collaborative governance, and public-private partnerships, several important research gaps remain. First, existing studies predominantly investigate stakeholder relationships within a single sector, such as infrastructure, healthcare, housing, or renewable energy, with limited comparative analysis across multiple public sector domains (Maqbool & Sridhar, 2024; Raman & Björkman, 2008; Taghizad-Tavana et al., 2025). Second, previous research has primarily examined developed and developing countries independently, resulting in limited understanding of how institutional environments comparatively shape stakeholder power dynamics and governance practices between countries such as Pakistan and Canada (White & Alkandari, 2019; Khan & Han, 2023). Third, although collaborative governance has received growing scholarly attention, much of the literature remains conceptual or quantitative, offering limited qualitative evidence regarding how stakeholders negotiate influence, resolve conflicts, and build trust throughout project implementation (Gray & Purdy, 2018; Hipsher, 2021). Fourth, studies examining public-private partnerships often emphasize governance structures and project outcomes while providing comparatively little attention to the evolving perceptions and experiences of diverse stakeholder groups involved in decision-making processes (Fontana et al., 2021; Kolk & Lenfant, 2013; O'Sullivan & Mazutis, 2025). Finally, existing research rarely integrates Stakeholder Theory and Collaborative Governance Theory within a comparative, cross-sector, and cross-country qualitative framework capable of simultaneously examining infrastructure, healthcare, and renewable energy projects. Addressing these limitations, the present study employs qualitative thematic analysis to explore stakeholder power dynamics across Pakistan and Canada and proposes an integrated conceptual framework that advances both stakeholder governance and collaborative public administration literature while extending current knowledge on sustainable cross-sector partnerships (Mahajan et al., 2024; Gao et al., 2025; Owoola et al., 2024).

3. Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative comparative multiple-case study design grounded in the interpretivist research paradigm to explore stakeholder power dynamics across public sector projects in Pakistan and Canada. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study sought to develop an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences, perceptions, and interpretations regarding stakeholder influence, collaborative governance, institutional relationships, and decision-making processes within infrastructure, healthcare, and renewable energy projects. Unlike quantitative approaches, qualitative research enables researchers to explore complex organizational and governance phenomena within their natural settings while capturing the contextual factors influencing stakeholder interactions. Similar qualitative designs have been successfully employed to investigate organizational practices, governance challenges, managerial experiences, and institutional dynamics across diverse sectors (Ashraf et al., 2025; Bhatti et al., 2026; Imtiaz et al., 2026; Khan et al., 2026; Rehmat et al., 2025). The comparative multiple-case approach further facilitated the identification of similarities and differences between Pakistan and Canada, allowing institutional contexts to be examined through rich empirical evidence.

Sampling Strategy

A purposive sampling strategy was employed to recruit participants possessing substantial knowledge and practical experience in planning, implementing, regulating, or managing public sector projects. Purposive sampling was considered appropriate because the study required information-rich participants capable of providing detailed insights into stakeholder relationships and governance practices rather than statistically representative samples. Participants were selected from infrastructure, healthcare, and renewable energy sectors to ensure maximum variation in professional backgrounds and organizational perspectives. The sample included senior government officials, project directors, policy advisors, healthcare administrators, renewable energy specialists, engineering consultants, and managers representing both public and private organizations. A total of 16 participants were interviewed, which was considered adequate because thematic saturation was achieved during the later interviews, with no substantially new concepts emerging. Similar participant sizes have been adopted in recent qualitative studies investigating organizational experiences, public administration, software engineering, financial services, and technology adoption (Ashraf et al., 2025; Bhatti et al., 2026; Khan et al., 2026; Rehmat et al., 2025; Yaseen et al., 2026).

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Data Collection

Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews, which provided sufficient flexibility to explore participants' experiences while maintaining consistency across interviews. An interview protocol was developed based on the study objectives, Stakeholder Theory, and Collaborative Governance Theory. The interview questions explored stakeholder influence, governance mechanisms, power distribution, institutional collaboration, conflict resolution, decision-making practices, and project implementation challenges. Interviews were conducted either face-to-face or through secure online platforms according to participant availability and geographical location. Each interview lasted approximately 45–60 minutes. With participants' informed consent, all interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim to preserve the richness and accuracy of the data. Semi-structured interviews have been widely employed in recent qualitative investigations examining managerial experiences, governance challenges, public policy implementation, digital transformation, financial inclusion, and technology adoption because they encourage participants to provide detailed narratives while allowing researchers to probe emerging issues (Ashraf et al., 2025; Bhatti et al., 2026; Imtiaz et al., 2026; Khan et al., 2026; Rehmat et al., 2025; Yaseen et al., 2026).

Data Analysis

The interview transcripts were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis, which provides a systematic and flexible framework for identifying recurring patterns across qualitative data. Initially, all interview transcripts were read multiple times to achieve familiarity with the data. Subsequently, open coding was performed to identify meaningful statements related to stakeholder power, governance mechanisms, institutional capacity, collaboration, and conflict management. Similar codes were grouped through axial coding before being refined into broader themes using selective coding. Continuous comparison across participants, sectors, and countries strengthened analytical consistency while enabling the identification of both common and context-specific patterns. The resulting themes were interpreted using Stakeholder Theory and Collaborative Governance Theory to explain stakeholder interactions across different institutional environments. Thematic analysis has been extensively utilized in recent qualitative studies examining banking, project management, fintech entrepreneurship, software engineering, artificial intelligence adoption, digital education, hybrid work models, and organizational transformation, demonstrating its suitability for exploring complex organizational and governance phenomena (Ashraf et al., 2025; Bhatti et al., 2026; Khan et al., 2026; Khan et al., 2026; Khan et al., 2026; Khan et al., 2026; Rehmat et al., 2025; Yaseen et al., 2026).

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to established ethical principles throughout the research process. Participation was entirely voluntary, and all participants received detailed information regarding the objectives of the research before providing informed consent. Participants were assured that their identities, organizations, and professional affiliations would remain confidential through the use of anonymous participant identifiers (P1–P16). Interview recordings and transcripts were securely stored and were accessible only to the researchers. Participants retained the right to withdraw from the study at any stage without consequence. Furthermore, the findings were reported objectively while avoiding any form of participant identification or organizational disclosure. Maintaining confidentiality, informed consent, transparency, and research integrity is consistent with ethical practices adopted in recent qualitative investigations involving organizational leaders, managers, policymakers, and technology professionals (Ashraf et al., 2025; Bhatti et al., 2026; Imtiaz et al., 2026; Khan et al., 2026; Rehmat et al., 2025).

Participants' Profile

The table below presents the demographic and professional characteristics of the participants who contributed to this study. The respondents were purposively selected from Pakistan and Canada to ensure representation across infrastructure, healthcare, renewable energy, and public governance sectors. Their extensive professional experience enabled the collection of rich insights regarding stakeholder influence, collaborative governance, institutional capacity, and project decision-making.

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Table 1
Participant Profiles

Participant ID	Country	Sector	Position	Experience (Years)
P1	Pakistan	Infrastructure	Project Director	15
P2	Pakistan	Infrastructure	Senior Project Manager	13
P3	Pakistan	Healthcare	Hospital Administrator	17
P4	Pakistan	Healthcare	Public Health Manager	12
P5	Pakistan	Renewable Energy	Energy Policy Director	16
P6	Pakistan	Renewable Energy	Renewable Energy Consultant	11
P7	Pakistan	Infrastructure	Civil Engineering Consultant	14
P8	Pakistan	Cross-Sector Governance	Government Policy Advisor	18
P9	Canada	Infrastructure	Infrastructure Program Director	20
P10	Canada	Infrastructure	Senior Engineering Manager	16
P11	Canada	Healthcare	Healthcare Operations Director	19
P12	Canada	Healthcare	Health Systems Manager	15
P13	Canada	Renewable Energy	Clean Energy Program Manager	17
P14	Canada	Renewable Energy	Sustainability Director	14
P15	Canada	Cross-Sector Governance	Senior Policy Advisor	18
P16	Canada	Public Administration	Executive Director	22

4. Findings and Discussion

The thematic analysis of sixteen semi-structured interviews identified five major themes explaining stakeholder power dynamics across infrastructure, healthcare, and renewable energy projects in Pakistan and Canada. Although participants acknowledged that stakeholder collaboration has become increasingly institutionalized, they emphasized that power distribution, governance structures, organizational trust, and institutional capacity significantly shape collaborative outcomes. The findings are interpreted using Stakeholder Theory and Collaborative Governance Theory, illustrating how stakeholder influence evolves across different institutional contexts.

Theme 1: Unequal Distribution of Stakeholder Power Shapes Project Decisions

Participants consistently reported that stakeholder influence was not equally distributed among project actors. Government agencies generally possessed the highest decision-making authority because of their regulatory responsibilities and funding control. However, private organizations increasingly influenced project priorities through technical expertise, financial investment, and implementation capacity.

A Pakistani infrastructure manager (P2) explained:

"Government approval determines whether projects move forward, but private contractors often shape practical implementation because they possess the technical expertise."

Similarly, a Canadian renewable energy director (P13) observed:

"Regulators establish the framework, but collaboration with communities and industry determines whether projects succeed."

Participants also highlighted that local communities possessed significant social legitimacy despite having relatively limited formal authority. Their acceptance frequently determined project continuity, particularly within renewable energy and infrastructure developments.

These findings support Stakeholder Theory by demonstrating that stakeholder influence extends beyond formal authority to include expertise, legitimacy, and resource dependence. They also reinforce Gray and Purdy's (2018) argument that contemporary public projects require balancing multiple stakeholder interests rather than relying exclusively upon hierarchical governance. Similar observations were reported by Khan and Han (2023), who concluded that institutional capacity strengthens stakeholder coordination, while

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Malik and Nurunnabi (2024) found that ineffective stakeholder participation contributes to governance failures and implementation delays.

Theme 2: Collaborative Governance Improves Institutional Coordination

Participants consistently emphasized that collaborative governance significantly improved communication, coordination, and decision-making among organizations. Regular stakeholder meetings, shared planning processes, transparent communication channels, and joint monitoring mechanisms reduced conflicts while increasing organizational accountability.

A healthcare administrator from Pakistan (P4) commented:

"Projects become smoother when every stakeholder participates from the beginning rather than being consulted after major decisions have already been made."

Similarly, a Canadian policy advisor (P15) stated:

"Early engagement builds ownership. When stakeholders understand their responsibilities, implementation becomes much more efficient."

Participants from both countries agreed that collaborative governance improved resource sharing, accelerated problem solving, and strengthened institutional trust. However, Canadian participants described more structured consultation mechanisms, whereas Pakistani respondents emphasized informal coordination and relationship-building.

These findings strongly support Collaborative Governance Theory, which argues that consensus building and shared decision-making improve governance effectiveness. Similar conclusions were reported by Hipsher (2021), Fontana et al. (2021), and Maurrasse (2013), who highlighted collaborative partnerships as essential mechanisms for sustainable public administration. Owoola et al. (2024) likewise emphasized that coordinated stakeholder engagement enhances infrastructure governance and institutional performance.

Theme 3: Institutional Capacity Influences Stakeholder Relationships

Another recurring finding concerned the role of institutional capacity in determining stakeholder influence and collaborative effectiveness. Participants observed that organizations possessing stronger governance systems, technical expertise, financial resources, and regulatory clarity exercised greater influence throughout project implementation.

A senior government official from Pakistan (P8) remarked:

"Many conflicts arise because institutional responsibilities overlap and coordination mechanisms remain weak."

Conversely, a Canadian infrastructure director (P9) explained:

"Clearly defined institutional roles reduce uncertainty and help organizations focus on solving problems rather than negotiating authority."

Participants agreed that stronger institutional arrangements promoted transparency, accountability, and timely decision making. Canadian respondents generally described more formal governance systems, whereas Pakistani participants identified bureaucratic delays, political influence, and fragmented institutional responsibilities as persistent challenges.

These findings correspond with Khan and Han (2023), who identified institutional capacity as a mediator between collaborative governance and public service delivery. White and Alkandari (2019) similarly argued that institutional infrastructure significantly influences stakeholder relationships and governance quality. The findings further support O'Sullivan and Mazutis (2025), who identified institutional power asymmetries as important determinants of cross-sector collaboration.

Theme 4: Trust and Transparency Sustain Long-Term Collaboration

Participants repeatedly identified trust as one of the most important factors influencing stakeholder cooperation. Organizations demonstrating transparency, accountability, and consistent communication developed stronger collaborative relationships and experienced fewer implementation conflicts.

A renewable energy consultant from Pakistan (P6) observed:

"Communities support projects when they believe information is shared honestly and their concerns are genuinely considered."

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Likewise, a Canadian healthcare director (P11) noted:

"Transparency creates confidence. Even difficult decisions become acceptable when stakeholders understand how and why they were made."

Several respondents emphasized that trust develops gradually through repeated interaction, fair decision making, and consistent stakeholder engagement rather than through formal agreements alone. Participants also stressed that transparency regarding project funding, environmental impacts, and implementation timelines significantly strengthened stakeholder confidence.

These findings support Collaborative Governance Theory, which recognizes trust as the foundation of collaborative institutions. Similar observations were reported by Fontana et al. (2021), Kolk and Lenfant (2013), and Hipsher (2021), who concluded that transparency and trust are fundamental prerequisites for successful cross-sector partnerships.

Theme 5: Adaptive Governance Enhances Sustainable Project Outcomes

The final theme demonstrated that successful public projects increasingly depend upon adaptive governance capable of responding to changing stakeholder expectations, policy environments, technological innovation, and sustainability priorities. Participants emphasized that rigid governance structures frequently delayed implementation, whereas flexible decision-making mechanisms encouraged innovation and stakeholder participation.

A renewable energy program manager from Canada (P14) explained:

"Projects evolve continuously. Governance systems must adapt because stakeholder expectations and regulations constantly change."

Similarly, a project director from Pakistan (P1) stated:

"Flexibility helps resolve conflicts quickly because stakeholders feel their concerns can still influence project decisions."

Participants consistently associated adaptive governance with continuous learning, institutional flexibility, stakeholder empowerment, and long-term sustainability. Renewable energy projects particularly demonstrated the need for adaptive governance because technological developments and environmental regulations evolve rapidly.

These findings align with Mahajan et al. (2024), who argued that sustainable development increasingly depends upon collaborative organizational adaptation. Similar conclusions were reported by Nwala et al. (2025), Gould et al. (2026), Benitez (2026), and Nour and Arbussà (2026), who emphasized adaptive governance for sustainable infrastructure and renewable energy transitions.

Synthesis of Findings

The findings collectively demonstrate that stakeholder power dynamics are shaped by institutional capacity, collaborative governance, organizational trust, and adaptive decision-making rather than formal authority alone. Across both countries, governments retained regulatory authority; however, private organizations, communities, NGOs, and technical experts increasingly influenced project implementation through expertise, legitimacy, and resource contributions. Canadian participants generally described more institutionalized collaborative governance practices, whereas Pakistani respondents highlighted greater dependence upon interpersonal coordination and administrative flexibility. These findings extend Stakeholder Theory by demonstrating that stakeholder influence evolves throughout project implementation rather than remaining static. Furthermore, Collaborative Governance Theory is reinforced by illustrating that transparency, trust, institutional capacity, and adaptive governance collectively improve stakeholder coordination across complex public sector projects.

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Table 2
Thematic Analysis of Findings

Theme	Categories	Representative Codes	Participant Evidence	Interpretation
Unequal Distribution of Stakeholder Power	Authority, legitimacy, resource control	Government authority, technical expertise, community legitimacy, funding influence	P2: "Government approval determines whether projects move forward." P13: "Industry and communities shape implementation."	Stakeholder influence is multidimensional and extends beyond formal authority.
Collaborative Governance Improves Coordination	Joint planning, communication, participation	Consultation, coordination, shared decision-making, accountability	P4: "Every stakeholder should participate from the beginning." P15: "Early engagement builds ownership."	Collaborative governance strengthens institutional coordination and reduces conflict.
Institutional Capacity Influences Relationships	Governance quality, organizational capability	Institutional clarity, regulatory support, administrative capacity	P8: "Responsibilities overlap." P9: "Clear institutional roles reduce uncertainty."	Strong institutions improve governance effectiveness and stakeholder collaboration.
Trust and Transparency Sustain Collaboration	Confidence, openness, accountability	Information sharing, stakeholder confidence, fairness	P6: "Communities support honest projects." P11: "Transparency creates confidence."	Trust functions as the foundation for long-term stakeholder partnerships.
Adaptive Governance Enhances Sustainability	Flexibility, innovation, continuous learning	Institutional adaptation, responsive governance, stakeholder empowerment	P1: "Flexibility resolves conflicts." P14: "Governance must evolve with changing expectations."	Adaptive governance enables resilient and sustainable public sector project implementation.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study reinforce the central proposition of Stakeholder Theory that stakeholder influence extends beyond formal authority and is shaped by legitimacy, expertise, resource ownership, and institutional capacity. Participants consistently indicated that although governments retained regulatory authority, effective project implementation increasingly depended on collaboration among public agencies, private organizations, local communities, and technical experts. This finding supports Gray and Purdy (2018), who argue that complex public challenges require multi-stakeholder partnerships, and aligns with Khan and Han (2023), who identified institutional capacity as a key determinant of collaborative governance effectiveness. The findings further demonstrate that collaborative governance strengthens communication, accountability, and shared decision-making, corroborating the work of Hipsher (2021) and Fontana et al. (2021), who emphasize that cross-sector partnerships enhance institutional coordination and sustainable development outcomes. Moreover, trust and transparency emerged as critical enablers of long-term stakeholder collaboration, supporting previous research by Kolk and Lenfant (2013) and O'Sullivan and Mazutis (2025), who highlighted the importance of trust in sustaining cross-sector partnerships. The comparative findings also reveal that governance maturity influences stakeholder engagement practices, with Canada's institutionalized governance mechanisms differing from Pakistan's more relationship-driven

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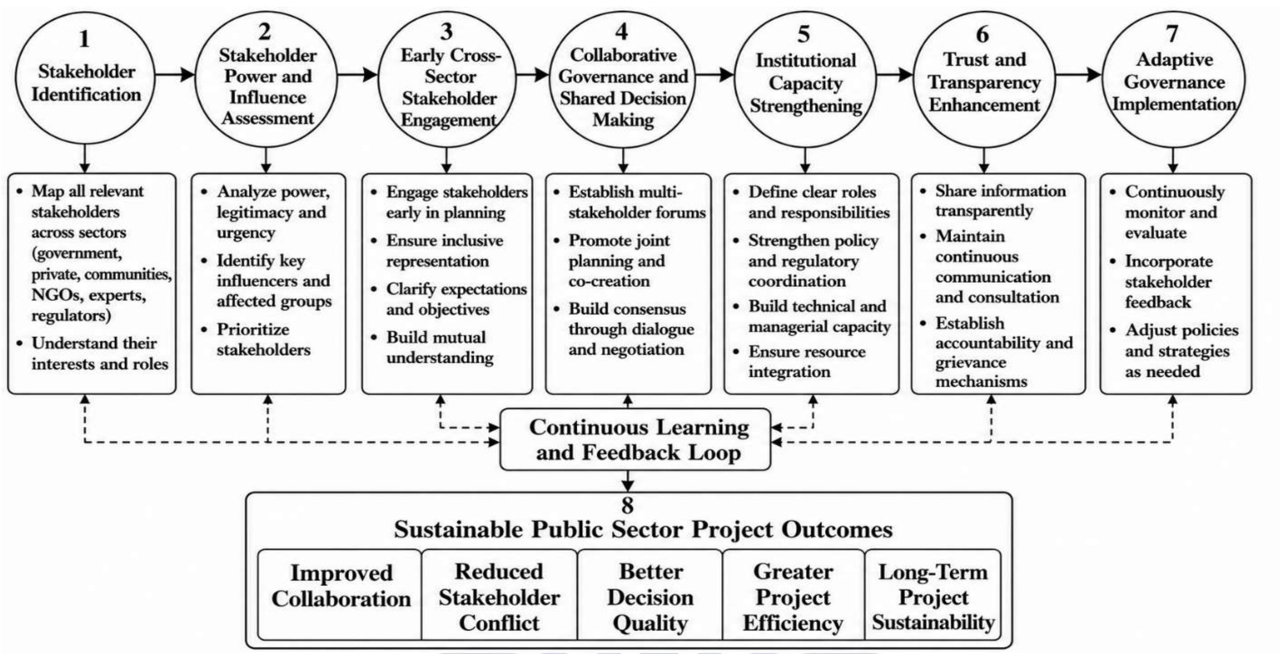
coordination approaches. These findings extend existing literature by demonstrating that adaptive governance, institutional flexibility, and continuous stakeholder engagement collectively strengthen sustainable public sector project implementation across infrastructure, healthcare, and renewable energy sectors. Consequently, the study provides empirical evidence that effective stakeholder governance requires an integrated approach combining institutional capacity, collaborative governance, transparency, and adaptive decision-making to achieve long-term project success (Mahajan et al., 2024; Maqbool & Sridhar, 2024; Owoola et al., 2024).

Figure 1

Proposed Stakeholder Governance Action Framework for Public Sector Projects



6. Conclusion

This study explored stakeholder power dynamics across infrastructure, healthcare, and renewable energy projects through a comparative examination of Pakistan and Canada. Using a qualitative comparative multiple-case study design, the research investigated how different stakeholders influence project planning, governance, implementation, and long-term sustainability within contrasting institutional environments. Guided by Stakeholder Theory and Collaborative Governance Theory, the study analyzed the experiences of sixteen professionals representing public agencies, private organizations, healthcare institutions, engineering firms, renewable energy organizations, and policy-making bodies.

The findings demonstrate that stakeholder power is multidimensional and extends beyond formal authority. Although government institutions retained primary regulatory and policy-making responsibilities, private organizations increasingly influenced project implementation through technical expertise, innovation, financial investment, and project management capabilities. Likewise, local communities, civil society organizations, and development partners contributed legitimacy, social acceptance, and contextual knowledge that significantly affected project success. These findings indicate that effective public sector governance depends upon balancing diverse stakeholder interests rather than relying exclusively on hierarchical decision-making structures.

The study further revealed that collaborative governance plays a central role in strengthening institutional coordination, reducing conflicts, and improving project outcomes. Participants consistently emphasized the importance of early stakeholder engagement, transparent communication, joint decision-making, and shared accountability throughout the project lifecycle. While both Pakistan and Canada demonstrated increasing adoption of collaborative governance practices, Canadian organizations generally exhibited more formalized institutional coordination mechanisms. In contrast, Pakistani organizations relied more heavily on interpersonal relationships, administrative flexibility, and informal collaboration to overcome governance challenges. These institutional differences highlight the importance of governance maturity in shaping stakeholder interactions.

Another significant finding concerns the role of institutional capacity in determining stakeholder influence and governance effectiveness. Organizations possessing clearly defined responsibilities, stronger regulatory systems, greater technical expertise, and adequate financial resources demonstrated greater capacity to coordinate stakeholders and manage complex public projects. Conversely, institutional fragmentation, overlapping responsibilities, bureaucratic delays, and political influence frequently reduced collaborative effectiveness. The study also identified trust and transparency as fundamental conditions for sustaining long-term stakeholder partnerships. Participants emphasized that transparent information sharing, fairness, accountability, and continuous stakeholder engagement strengthened confidence among project partners while minimizing resistance and conflict.

Finally, the findings demonstrate that adaptive governance has become increasingly important within contemporary public sector projects. Infrastructure, healthcare, and renewable energy projects operate within rapidly evolving policy, technological, environmental, and social environments. Consequently, governance systems must remain flexible and responsive to changing stakeholder expectations, regulatory requirements, and sustainability priorities. Organizations adopting adaptive governance practices were better positioned to resolve conflicts, encourage innovation, and achieve sustainable project outcomes.

Theoretical Implications

This study makes several important theoretical contributions to the literature on stakeholder management and collaborative governance. First, it extends Stakeholder Theory by demonstrating that stakeholder power is dynamic rather than static. Stakeholder influence continuously evolves throughout project implementation as organizations negotiate authority, legitimacy, expertise, and resource dependencies. These finding advances existing stakeholder literature by emphasizing the contextual and relational nature of stakeholder power within complex public sector environments.

Second, the study strengthens Collaborative Governance Theory by providing empirical evidence that trust, institutional capacity, transparency, and adaptive decision-making collectively enhance stakeholder collaboration across multiple sectors. Rather than treating collaboration as a procedural activity, the findings demonstrate that collaborative governance represents a continuous institutional process shaped by organizational relationships and governance maturity.

Third, the study contributes to comparative public administration literature by integrating Stakeholder Theory and Collaborative Governance Theory within a cross-country qualitative framework. By comparing Pakistan and Canada across three public sectors, the research provides new insights into how institutional environments influence stakeholder relationships, governance practices, and collaborative outcomes. The proposed conceptual understanding therefore broadens existing knowledge regarding stakeholder power dynamics in diverse governance contexts.

Practical Recommendations

Based on the findings, several practical recommendations are proposed. Public sector organizations should institutionalize stakeholder engagement during the earliest stages of project planning to encourage inclusive decision-making and reduce implementation conflicts. Governments should establish standardized stakeholder management frameworks that clearly define stakeholder roles, responsibilities, communication protocols, and accountability mechanisms throughout project lifecycles.

Policy makers should invest in strengthening institutional capacity by improving regulatory coordination, administrative efficiency, and inter-organizational collaboration. Capacity-building initiatives for project managers and public administrators should emphasize negotiation, conflict resolution, collaborative leadership, and stakeholder communication skills. Organizations should also adopt transparent information-sharing practices that promote trust among governments, private organizations, communities, and development partners.

Furthermore, infrastructure, healthcare, and renewable energy projects should establish permanent multi-stakeholder coordination platforms that facilitate continuous dialogue, joint monitoring, and collaborative problem-solving. Governments should encourage adaptive governance by developing flexible policies capable of responding to technological innovation, changing stakeholder expectations, and emerging sustainability challenges. Finally, lessons learned from Canada's institutionalized collaborative governance practices may provide valuable guidance for strengthening stakeholder engagement and public sector governance within Pakistan while remaining sensitive to local institutional and cultural contexts.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Although this study provides valuable insights into stakeholder power dynamics, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the research employed a qualitative methodology involving sixteen participants; therefore, the findings cannot be statistically generalized to all public sector projects. Second, the comparative analysis focused exclusively on Pakistan and Canada, limiting the applicability of the findings to other institutional settings. Third, the study examined only three sectors, infrastructure, healthcare, and renewable energy, while excluding other important public service domains such as education, transportation, water management, and digital governance. Finally, the findings are based on participants' perceptions and experiences, which may be influenced by organizational context and individual interpretation.

Future research should quantitatively validate the relationships identified in this study through structural equation modelling or other multivariate analytical techniques. Comparative investigations involving additional developed and developing countries would further strengthen understanding of institutional influences on stakeholder governance. Longitudinal studies could examine how stakeholder power evolves throughout different stages of project implementation. Future research may also explore the influence of artificial intelligence, digital governance platforms, smart cities, and data-driven public administration on stakeholder collaboration and decision-making. Additionally, sector-specific studies focusing on climate adaptation, sustainable infrastructure, digital healthcare, and green energy transitions would further enrich knowledge regarding collaborative governance in increasingly complex public sector environments.

Contribution of Authors

All the authors participated in the ideation, development, and final approval of the manuscript, making significant contributions to the work reported.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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Informed Consent

Informed consent was obtained from all participants.

Data Availability

The datasets generated during and analysed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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