

EXPLORING PERCEPTIONS OF CORRUPTION: REGIONAL DISPARITIES IN ALBANIA'S RURAL DEVELOPMENT

A. GJELOSHI, A. BOSHNJAKU

Aljula Gjeloshi¹, Anila Boshnjaku²

^{1 2} Agricultural University of Tirana, Tiranë, Albania

¹ <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-4155-3541>, E-mail: agjeloshi@ubt.edu.al

² <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-1159-4323>, E-mail: aboshnjaku@ubt.edu.al

Abstract: *This study explores the perception and impact of corruption on rural development in Albania. Focusing on regional disparities and the role of media, it examines how corruption undermines economic growth, access to public services, and trust in governance. Using survey data from farmers and rural residents, the study identifies significant regional differences in corruption's effects, highlighting the critical need for tailored anti-corruption policies and enhanced transparency. The findings emphasize the importance of empowering rural communities and leveraging media to combat misinformation and foster development. This research contributes to understanding the perception of corruption's multidimensional impact on rural development and offers actionable insights for policymakers and stakeholders.*

Keywords: *Corruption, Rural Development, Media Influence, Transparency, Albania, Regional Disparities*

1. Introduction

Rural development is a key priority for many countries, including Albania, where challenges such as limited infrastructure, resource scarcity, and economic constraints hinder progress. These challenges are compounded by corruption, which diverts resources, erodes public trust, and undermines the effectiveness of governmental and non-governmental initiatives. Addressing corruption is crucial not only for improving the well-being of rural communities but also for fostering balanced national growth and reducing migration pressures on urban areas.

This study investigates how corruption is perceived within rural communities in Albania and examines its impact on development efforts. Specifically, it focuses on the influence of corruption in shaping access to resources, agricultural support, and infrastructure investments. Understanding the experiences and perspectives of those directly affected by corruption is essential for designing effective anti-corruption strategies and development policies. The study employs quantitative survey data collected from rural stakeholders, including farmers and local government representatives. By capturing regional disparities in perceptions and experiences of corruption, this research aims to provide actionable insights for policymakers, community leaders, and development practitioners. Ultimately, the findings highlight the importance of anti-corruption strategies on empowering rural communities, enhancing transparency, and addressing misinformation to promote sustainable rural development in Albania.

EXPLORING PERCEPTIONS OF CORRUPTION: REGIONAL DISPARITIES IN ALBANIA'S RURAL DEVELOPMENT

This study aims to address the following research questions:

1. How is corruption perceived by stakeholders in rural communities in Albania, particularly farmers and local government officials?
2. What are the specific ways in which perceptions of corruption influence rural development, particularly in terms of economic growth, access to agricultural resources, and infrastructure quality?
3. How do regional disparities affect the impact of corruption on rural development?
4. How do social media and traditional media shape public perceptions?
5. What strategies can be implemented to reduce corruption and promote transparency in rural governance?

1.1 Corruption and Rural Development in Albania: A Contextual Analysis

1. Corruption Trends in Albania

According to Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) 2023, Albania has made notable strides in prosecuting high-level corruption but still faces significant challenges. With a score of 37 out of 100, Albania remains one of the most corrupted countries in Europe. The broader Eastern Europe and Central Asia region, which averages a CPI score of 35, ranks as the second lowest globally, reflecting systemic corruption. While efforts to combat corruption have gained momentum—particularly within political and public institutions—the effectiveness of these initiatives hinges on strengthening the independence of the judiciary and ensuring that oversight bodies, such as the parliament and civil society organizations, can operate free from political interference. Transparency International (TI) has consistently highlighted several key factors that contribute to corruption in Albania. The main factors often identified in their assessments include: Weak Rule of Law and Judicial System, Political Corruption and Patronage, Weak Institutions and Governance, Economic Factors and Poverty, Lack of Transparency and Accountability, limited media freedom and civic engagement as well as cultural aspects.

2. Anti-Corruption Efforts and Institutional Challenges

Albania has implemented several mechanisms aimed at addressing corruption, including the establishment of the Special Anti-Corruption Structure, responsible for investigating and prosecuting high-level corruption cases. Despite these measures, political parties often resist addressing corruption within their own ranks. According to Freedom House (2023), safeguards against corruption in Albania remain weak and ineffective, and the European Union has repeatedly called for more rigorous enforcement of anti-graft policies, particularly within the judiciary. Political challenges, including partisan resistance, continue to hinder substantial progress in the fight against corruption. Albania has undertaken a variety of anti-corruption strategies and reforms over the years, especially as part of its aspiration to join the European Union (EU). While challenges remain, the country has implemented several key strategies to combat corruption. These include institutional, legal, and procedural reforms, as well as efforts to improve transparency and public accountability. Some of the major anti-corruption strategies and reforms in Albania are: Judicial Reform, Vetting Process: Strengthening the High Council of Justice. From the institutional perspective one very

important step undertaken is the establishment of the Anti-Corruption Agency (ACC). The aim of this agency is to prevent and combat corruption, monitor public officials' assets, and promote transparency in public procurement. The agency is responsible for investigating and exposing corruption at the public administration level.

Although there have been notable successes, such as SPAK investigations and arrests in high-level cases, a lack of comprehensive reforms remains an obstacle to sustained change. The GRECO (2022) Compliance Report notes that only five of the twenty-four recommendations from the Fifth Round Evaluation Report have been fully implemented, with the majority either partly addressed or not tackled at all. These shortcomings contribute to the persistence of corruption in public and business sectors, with preventive measures proving largely ineffective, especially in vulnerable sectors such as healthcare and agriculture (EC, 2023).

3. Transparency and Media Independence

Albania's legal framework for access to information exists but remains underdeveloped in practice. Public procurement processes and financial management are often opaque, further reducing transparency in government operations. For instance, the approval of Albania's 2024 budget in November 2023 was marred by protests in parliament, highlighting the political instability surrounding critical government decisions. While the Albanian constitution guarantees freedom of expression, the Council of Europe (2022) notes that media independence is severely compromised. The concentration of media ownership among political and business elites limits the ability of the press to act as an independent check on corruption. Journalists face threats, including job insecurity, low salaries, and even physical violence, which undermines the media's potential to hold the government accountable.

4. Informal Payments and Corruption in Public Services

Informal payments, especially in sectors like healthcare, remain a widespread manifestation of corruption in Albania. OSCE (2021) research indicates that informal payments are especially burdensome for the poorest segments of society. Existing complaint mechanisms for reporting corruption are underutilized, as citizens lack trust in state institutions and believe that reporting corruption will lead to no meaningful consequences. Cultural factors, such as a normalization of corrupt practices, further prevent individuals from reporting corruption, particularly when they perceive it as a minor offense or believe they will gain no benefits from reporting it (Husted, 1999). This lack of accountability reinforces the persistence of corruption, particularly in rural areas, where economic hardships make such practices more entrenched (Olken, 2007).

5. Relevance for Rural Development

The persistence of corruption poses significant challenges for rural development in Albania. Rural areas, which already face economic constraints, are disproportionately impacted by corruption. This undermines efforts to improve infrastructure, access to services, and economic opportunities for farmers. Corruption within public services, such as healthcare and agricultural subsidies, prevents rural communities from accessing essential resources for sustainable development. A notable case of corruption involving EU funds for rural development highlights these challenges. Investigations by OLAF into misuse of IPARD II funds, which were meant to modernize the Albanian agricultural sector, uncovered serious

EXPLORING PERCEPTIONS OF CORRUPTION: REGIONAL DISPARITIES IN ALBANIA'S RURAL DEVELOPMENT

irregularities, including inflated prices, rigged contracts, and the requirement for grant applicants to pay a large portion of their funds to 'pre-selected' consultancy firms. These findings demonstrate how corrupt practices prevent the effective use of development funds intended for rural progress.

The continued lack of transparency and accountability in government operations hinders local capacity-building efforts, exacerbates inequality, and limits long-term economic growth. Corruption perpetuates a cycle of poverty and underdevelopment in rural communities, making it even harder for them to escape economic marginalization.

6. Study Focus

This study aims to explore the complex relationship between corruption and rural development in Albania. By examining how corrupt practices limit opportunities for farmers and rural communities to access essential services, government support, and development programs, the study seeks to highlight the need for stronger institutional reforms, enhanced transparency, and greater media independence. In particular, it focuses on how these factors contribute to the sustainability of rural development efforts and calls for more effective anti-corruption measures to promote long-term growth in Albania's rural regions.

2. Literature Review: The Impact of Corruption on Rural Development

Corruption remains a significant obstacle to rural development, undermining institutional integrity, economic opportunities, and social equity, particularly for rural communities. In this section, we review relevant theories that provide a framework for understanding the multifaceted effects of corruption on rural development. Specifically, we will examine **Power Asymmetry Theory**, **Weak Institution Theory**, and **Dependency Theory**.

Power Asymmetry Theory focuses on how corruption exacerbates inequalities by favoring the politically connected and those benefiting from corrupt systems, while sidelining ordinary farmers from vital development opportunities and institutional support (Mauro, 1995; Rose-Ackerman, 1999; Mungiu-Pippidi, 2015). Corruption leads to the exclusion of less powerful individuals, reinforcing unfair power structures that hinder equitable development in rural areas (Olken & Pande, 2011). In the case of Albania, for instance, political ties often determine access to agricultural subsidies or other forms of institutional support, sidelining many rural residents. The theory of power asymmetry is crucial in understanding how corruption in Albania's rural areas marginalizes farmers, especially in a context where access to resources is often contingent on political affiliation. Studies have shown that such power dynamics undermine farmers' ability to access essential services, perpetuating inequality and stifling development.

Weak Institution Theory posits that corruption weakens the institutions responsible for governance, ultimately undermining rural development. North (1990) and Acemoglu & Robinson (2012) highlight how weak, corrupt institutions fail to provide the necessary structures for supporting economic growth and social stability. Corruption hampers service delivery, reduces transparency, and discourages investment, all of which are crucial for development, especially in rural areas (Rothstein, 2011; Rose-Ackerman, 1999). In Albania, the weakness of rural institutions, compounded by corruption, severely limits the effectiveness

of governance and service delivery in agriculture and rural development. Corruption is a major barrier to accessing subsidies, financing, and other institutional support needed for sustainable rural development. This directly relates to weak institutional frameworks that fail to protect citizens' rights and ensure equitable growth.

Dependency Theory, as articulated by Andre Gunder Frank (1966), argues that underdevelopment is not simply the absence of development but is actively created by exploitative relationships between dominant and dependent groups. Cardoso and Faletto (1979) extended this by showing how internal elites, in collaboration with external powers, perpetuate systems of dependency that exploit rural economies. Corruption is central to this process, as it reinforces these unequal structures. In Albania, the rural economy is often heavily dependent on informal networks that perpetuate corruption, such as in land disputes or access to state resources. The theory of dependency helps explain how these relationships limit rural growth and foster an environment where political and economic elites maintain control over resources, leaving rural populations vulnerable to exploitative practices.

Rose-Ackerman's foundational works (*Corruption and Government: Causes, Consequences, and Reform*, 1999; Rose-Ackerman & Palifka, 2016) highlight the systemic nature of corruption and its impact on public decision-making. These insights are crucial in understanding how entrenched corruption affects rural governance in Albania. Similarly, North (1990) emphasizes how weak institutional frameworks foster environments conducive to corruption, particularly in regions with limited accountability mechanisms.

Huntington (1968) explores how political transitions exacerbate corruption, particularly in societies where traditional and modern structures coexist uneasily—a relevant context for Albania's democratic and economic transition. Mungiu-Pippidi (2015) and Persson, Rothstein, and Teorell (2013) argue that systemic corruption represents a collective action problem, where the widespread societal acceptance of corrupt practices prevents effective reform. Persson et al. (2013) emphasize that traditional anti-corruption strategies often fail because they assume that individuals act as rational agents in isolation, whereas systemic corruption is sustained by entrenched social norms. This perspective is particularly relevant for Albania, where rural communities often perceive corruption as an inevitable part of governance due to weak institutional enforcement and limited alternatives. Further, Treisman (2007) links corruption to weak governance and low trust levels, both of which are pressing issues in many rural regions. Rothstein (2011) builds on this, exploring how corruption erodes social cohesion and trust in public institutions, essential elements for effective rural development.

The economic implications of corruption are extensively documented. Mauro (1995) identifies corruption as a barrier to economic growth, reducing investment incentives and distorting resource allocation. Olken and Pande (2011) analyze its unique challenges in developing countries, where corruption disrupts market mechanisms and the provision of public goods. Xhindi and Gjika (2023) highlight these dynamics in the Western Balkans, emphasizing systemic governance challenges that disproportionately affect Albania's rural areas.

Hellman et al. (2000) introduce the concept of "state capture," where private interests significantly influence public policies—a phenomenon evident in Albania's governance challenges. Tanzi (1998) expands on the economic cost of corruption, illustrating its role in undermining state capacity and increasing rural poverty.

*EXPLORING PERCEPTIONS OF CORRUPTION: REGIONAL DISPARITIES IN
ALBANIA'S RURAL DEVELOPMENT*

Kaufmann et al. (1999) and Olken (2007) provide empirical evidence showing that corruption siphons funds meant for rural development projects, perpetuating poverty cycles. These issues are exacerbated in Albania by high rates of emigration and weak infrastructure.

Strengthening governance and accountability is vital for mitigating corruption and fostering rural development. Transparency International's reports (2020, 2023) and the European Commission's Albania Reports (2020, 2023) highlight the structural issues hindering Albania's institutional progress, such as state capture and undue political influence. Andersson and Heywood (2008) argue for increased transparency and robust public monitoring mechanisms to enhance governance in rural areas.

The link between corruption and economic development has been widely explored in the literature. Fisman and Svensson (2007) examine whether corruption and taxation truly hinder economic growth, showing that the relationship is complex, but ultimately corruption remains a significant barrier to long-term development. They highlight that while corruption may initially provide short-term economic gains, its long-term effects are detrimental, especially in regions with weak institutions and governance structures. In this context, Imami, Pugh, and Lami (2024) provide insights into how fiscal enforcement and electoral dynamics intersect in highly corrupt settings, where fiscal policies are often manipulated to serve political agendas. These dynamics exacerbate developmental disparities, particularly in rural areas like Albania, where governance weaknesses allow corruption to distort resource allocation and hinder equitable growth.

This is particularly relevant for rural Albania, where corruption distorts market mechanisms, impacting investments and access to public goods. Such findings underscore the critical need for institutional reforms and the implementation of robust fiscal policies to counteract corruption's far-reaching effects.

Similarly, Galtung (2006) discusses how corruption acts as a tax on development, diverting resources away from productive uses and preventing the equitable distribution of wealth. His analysis underscores how corrupt practices increase the costs of public services and infrastructure development, a crucial concern for rural areas in Albania, where infrastructure challenges are compounded by systemic corruption.

Ghani and Lockhart (2008) argue that the failure of states to effectively manage corruption and implement reform leads to the destabilization of rural economies. Their framework on rebuilding fractured states highlights the necessity of strong institutions for development, particularly in post-conflict and transitional settings, such as Albania. The authors assert that governance reforms are pivotal for improving rural development, suggesting that a failure to address corruption hinders sustainable growth. Paldam (2002) explores the cross-country patterns of corruption, highlighting how cultural and economic factors interact in shaping corruption levels. His concept of "seesaw dynamics" suggests that attempts to reduce corruption in one domain often shift it to another, rather than eliminating it entirely. This dynamic is particularly relevant to Albania, where anti-corruption initiatives may push corrupt practices into informal or less visible areas, especially in rural regions with limited oversight.

Haggard and Tiede (2011) extend this argument by demonstrating how the "rules of the game" in certain countries can either inhibit or foster development, particularly in the context of governance. They show that Asian developmental states were able to overcome corruption

through strict institutional controls, suggesting that similar measures could benefit Albania's rural regions, where corruption and weak governance are particularly pervasive.

The concept of "quality of government" discussed by Holmberg, Rothstein, and Nasiritousi (2009) is also crucial for understanding the impact of corruption in rural Albania. They argue that when governments fail to provide high-quality services or maintain trust, development efforts are thwarted. In rural areas, this lack of trust in institutions undermines efforts to promote sustainable agricultural practices, further exacerbating inequality. The relationship between the quality of governance and corruption is a central theme in understanding development dynamics. La Porta, Lopez-de-Silanes, Shleifer, and Vishny (1999) emphasize the importance of government quality, arguing that countries with better governance systems tend to experience stronger economic performance. They propose that the roots of corruption lie in weak institutions, which fail to enforce rules, leading to a lack of accountability. Comparative studies provide valuable lessons for Albania. Fazekas et al. (2014) demonstrate how targeted transparency measures enhance governance. Klitgaard (1988) emphasizes the importance of integrity in public administration to combat systemic corruption.

The authors' argument aligns with Fisman and Svensson (2007), who suggest that poor governance exacerbates inequality by discouraging investment and inhibiting the proper allocation of resources. The quality of government, therefore, directly influences rural development outcomes, particularly in regions like Albania, where governance reform is essential for addressing both corruption and economic underperformance. Their analysis suggests that corruption can lead to inefficiencies in resource allocation and dissuade investment, challenges particularly evident in rural areas where development initiatives are often stifled by governance issues. This argument complements the observations by You and Khagram (2005) on corruption's exacerbation of social inequality and barriers, as well as Anderson and Tverdova (2003) on the erosion of public trust in rural communities. Dixit (2012) further elaborates on how economic inequality influences political power, which can perpetuate corruption and limit equitable development in rural areas.

These studies collectively contribute to the understanding that effective governance and the reduction of corruption are critical for rural development. Addressing corruption in Albania requires comprehensive institutional reforms and a commitment to improving the quality of government, as these are central to fostering trust and ensuring that resources are allocated to the most critical development needs.

Peiffer and Rose (2018) underscore the role of community engagement in successful anti-corruption campaigns. For Albania, fostering local participation in governance processes is key to sustainable rural development. Heeks (2011) adds that adopting digital tools for transparency could significantly strengthen anti-corruption efforts in the country's rural regions.

The social dimensions of corruption are particularly pronounced in rural settings. Sik (2009) examines the social structure of corruption, shedding light on how societal norms, networks, and relationships influence corrupt behaviours. He emphasises that corruption is not merely an individual failing but often embedded within the social and economic structures of a community. In the context of rural Albania, where tight-knit communities and informal networks play a significant role in daily governance, this perspective is particularly pertinent. Understanding the relational dynamics that facilitate corruption is crucial for designing

EXPLORING PERCEPTIONS OF CORRUPTION: REGIONAL DISPARITIES IN ALBANIA'S RURAL DEVELOPMENT

effective reforms aimed at fostering transparency and accountability in these regions. Husted (1999) and Chêne (2018) discuss how corruption disproportionately affects women, especially in patriarchal rural societies. In Albania, the OSCE (2021) highlights the gendered impact of corruption, emphasizing challenges such as limited access to healthcare, education, and resources for rural women.

Sachs et al. (2019) argue that achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) necessitates addressing corruption as a core barrier. Lee and Chang (2011) explore the intersections of corruption, technological inclusion, and rural development, highlighting the potential for ICTs to foster more equitable resource distribution. These insights are particularly relevant for addressing Albania's digital divide in rural areas. Hamann et al. (2023) discuss how governance corruption derails environmental and energy transitions—an essential consideration for Albania's rural development agenda.

Further, Andersson and Heywood (2009) show that regional cooperation and alignment with international anti-corruption standards can drive reforms. Albania could benefit from EU integration processes to strengthen its rural development policies.

The literature highlights corruption's multifaceted impact on rural development, encompassing economic, social, and institutional dimensions. For Albania, addressing corruption requires a comprehensive approach, combining institutional reforms, enhanced transparency, and community empowerment. Future research should focus on localized solutions tailored to Albania's unique challenges, while leveraging international best practices to build resilient governance systems.

Relevance to the Research: Theoretical Framework in Albania

The theories reviewed provide an insightful lens for analyzing the impact of corruption on rural development in Albania. By applying Power Asymmetry, Weak Institution, and Dependency Theories, this study aims to explore how corruption disrupts the potential for equitable growth in rural communities. Specifically, the study will investigate the role of institutional corruption in exacerbating inequality in Albanian rural areas, where a lack of transparency and weak governance often result in the exclusion of farmers from development opportunities. Additionally, the research will examine how corruption contributes to the dependency of rural areas on informal networks, which undermines sustainable development and economic autonomy.

3. Methodology

This research follows a quantitative data collection technique to provide a comprehensive analysis of corruption's impact on rural development in Albania. The study aims to examine the perceptions of corruption and its effects on rural communities, with a particular focus on the role of social media and traditional media in shaping public perceptions.

1. Research Design

This study adopts a **descriptive research design** to explore the relationship between corruption and rural development. Descriptive analysis will be used to map the current state of corruption, the functioning of institutions, and the use of media in rural areas. Additionally,

comparative analysis will be conducted to compare different regions in Albania, taking into account factors like local governance, infrastructure, and access to information.

2. Sample Selection

The sample for this study consists of **farmers and local government employees**. These participants were selected through **stratified random sampling** to ensure that individuals from different sectors and regions are represented. A total of **131 respondents** were surveyed. The areas covered in the study include **Tirana, Fier, Berat, and Lushnje**, with a focus on both urban and rural settings.

3. Data Collection Methods

A **questionnaire** was developed to collect quantitative data on the perceptions of corruption and its impact on rural development. The survey includes closed-ended questions with Likert scale ratings to capture the intensity of respondents' perceptions and experiences. Topics covered include:

- **Corruption Perceptions** in local governance, public services, and access to development programs.
- **Impact of Corruption on Rural Development**
- **The Role of Media and Social Networks** in shaping perceptions of corruption.
- **Engagement in anti-corruption initiatives** and the role of the media in facilitating or hindering such efforts.
- **Anti-Corruption Strategies**

4. Data Analysis

The quantitative data were analysed using a combination of descriptive and inferential statistical techniques: Descriptive Statistics: Frequencies, means, and standard deviations were calculated to summarise the data and provide an overview of responses; Inferential Statistics: Correlation Analysis: Explored relationships between key variables, such as the connection between media usage and perceptions of corruption or the link between education levels and anti-corruption awareness; Regression Analysis: Examined relationships between variables, such as the impact of corruption on rural development and the moderating effects of social and traditional media use; ANOVA (Analysis of Variance): Assessed differences across regions to uncover variations in perceptions and experiences of corruption. The dataset includes responses to survey questions measuring perceptions and experiences of corruption. Key variables analyzed are: Perceived prevalence of corruption, Personal encounters with corruption, Payment of bribes for public services, Perceived impact of corruption on economic development, Perceived impact on infrastructure quality, Perceived hindrance to investment. Each response was numeric, with Likert-scale data representing the level of agreement or frequency. Data were grouped into four areas: Berat, Fier, Lushnje, and Tirana. For each variable, ANOVA was conducted to determine if the mean scores differed significantly between regions. Null Hypothesis (H_0): The means across regions are equal. Alternative Hypothesis (H_1): At least one region's mean differs from the others. Results were considered statistically significant at a p-value < 0.05 .

These methods enabled a deeper understanding of the dynamics of corruption at the local level, particularly within rural contexts, providing valuable insights for targeted interventions and policymaking.

*EXPLORING PERCEPTIONS OF CORRUPTION: REGIONAL DISPARITIES IN
ALBANIA'S RURAL DEVELOPMENT*

5. Ethical Considerations

Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, and their consent was obtained before participation. The study ensures confidentiality and anonymity of respondents, with all data securely stored and used solely for research purposes.

6. Limitations

The study's limitations include the potential for **response bias**, particularly in regions where participants may be hesitant to report corruption due to fear of retaliation. Additionally, the focus on specific regions may limit the generalizability of the findings to other parts of Albania. Finally, the self-reported nature of the data may not fully capture the extent of corruption in rural areas.

4. Discussion of Results

The demographic data collected from the survey provide insights into the characteristics of the participants, most of whom are farmers. This demographic overview provides context for understanding the survey responses and interpreting regional and thematic differences.

Table 1: Demographic Summary

Demographic Indicator	Categories	Percentage (%)
Gender Distribution	Male	60%
	Female	40%
Age Groups	18-30 years	20%
	31-50 years	50%
	51 years and above	30%
Educational Level	Primary Education	25%
	Secondary Education	50%
	Higher Education	25%
Regional Distribution	Berat	25%
	Fier	30%
	Lushnje	20%
	Tirana	25%
Occupation	Farmers	75%
	Other (traders, public employees)	25%
Experience with Development Programs	Participants	35%
	Non-participants	65%

Source: Authors' elaboration

The demographic data from the survey reveals that the participants are primarily male (60%), with a significant portion in the 31-50 age range (50%). Education levels are mostly secondary (50%), and most participants are farmers (75%). The sample is evenly distributed across the four areas (Berat, Fier, Lushnje, Tirana).

Additionally, 65% of respondents have not participated in rural development programs. This demographic profile provides a foundation for understanding regional and thematic differences in perceptions of corruption and rural development.

Impact of Education: Respondents with higher education (25% of the sample) are more likely to perceive corruption as a systemic barrier to development. Spearman’s Correlation shows a positive relationship ($\rho = 0.45, p < 0.05$) between education level and awareness of corruption’s systemic impact. Respondents with higher education are more likely to identify corruption’s role in hindering infrastructure development and economic growth. Farmers, representing 75% of the sample, with primary or secondary education report higher sensitivity to corruption’s impact on agricultural services.

Role of Profession: Farmers, being the majority group, express significant concerns over corruption in accessing agricultural subsidies and land management services. Point-Biserial Correlation reveals that farmers ($\rho = 0.39, p < 0.05$) are more sensitive to corruption’s economic implications compared to non-farmers. Traders and public employees exhibit comparatively less concern about direct experiences of corruption. **Gendered Experiences of Corruption:** Female respondents report a higher frequency of corruption encounters (44.07%) compared to males (36.62%). This difference may reflect distinct social roles and exposures.

Analysis of Regional Differences in Corruption Perceptions and Experiences

This analysis examines regional differences in the perception and experience of corruption across four areas: Berat, Fier, Lushnje, and Tirana. The analysis of survey results reveals several regional differences in perceptions of corruption. Perceptions of corruption are uniformly high across regions, suggesting a nationwide concern about governance and integrity in public services.

Figure 1: Perception of Corruption by Area

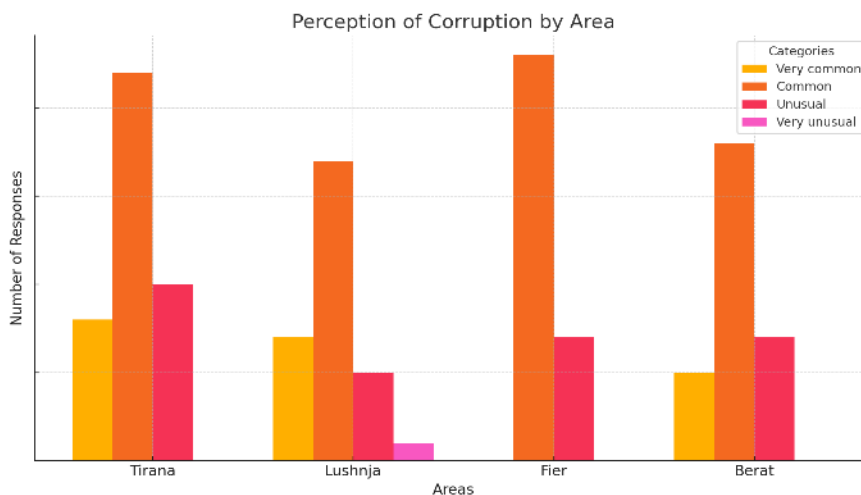


Figure 1 illustrates perceptions of corruption across four areas: Tirana, Lushnja, Fier, and Berat. Response categories include "Very common," "Common," "Unusual," and "Very unusual." The majority of respondents in all areas rated corruption as "Common," while the lowest percentage of responses fell into the "Very unusual" category. This suggests that corruption is widely perceived as a prevalent issue in most of these areas. A significant 60% of respondents have personally encountered corruption in their agricultural or economic activities,

*EXPLORING PERCEPTIONS OF CORRUPTION: REGIONAL DISPARITIES IN
ALBANIA'S RURAL DEVELOPMENT*

while 40% have not. This suggests that a majority of individuals in the surveyed areas have experienced corruption in their professional lives.

Figure 2: Percentage of People Who Experienced Corruption in Different Areas

Percentage of People Who Experienced Corruption in Different Regions

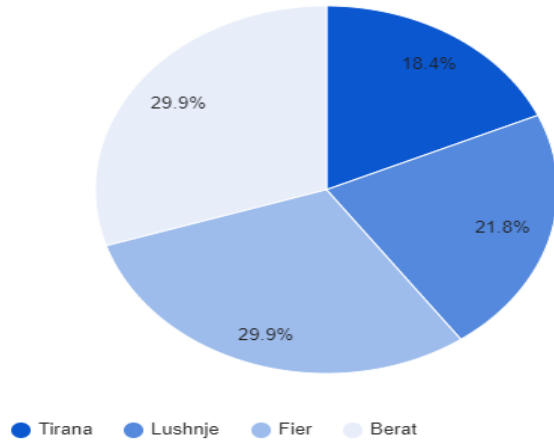
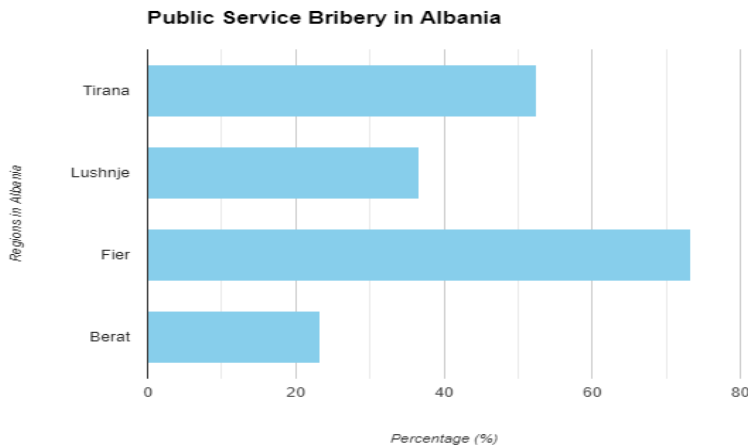


Figure 2 illustrates the proportion of individuals who have encountered corruption in various regions. It reveals that Tirana has the lowest incidence of reported corruption at 18.4%, while Fier and Berat exhibit the highest rates at 29.9% each. Lushnje falls in the middle with 21.8% of respondents acknowledging experiences with corruption. Overall, the data suggests that corruption is a prevalent issue across all regions, with Fier and Berat demonstrating notably higher levels.

Figure 3: Public Service Bribery in Albania



While no significant differences were found regarding the perceived prevalence of corruption, the payment of bribes for public services showed significant variation, with Fier and Tirana reporting higher frequencies.

EXPLORING PERCEPTIONS OF CORRUPTION: REGIONAL DISPARITIES IN ALBANIA'S RURAL DEVELOPMENT

The table 2 presents a comprehensive analysis of regional differences in perceptions of corruption, focusing on various factors such as education, frequency of encounters, and sectors most affected by corruption. It highlights that all regions show positive correlations between education and corruption perception, with Fier exhibiting a stronger correlation. In terms of corruption encounters, females report higher frequencies than males across all regions. Health is consistently identified as the sector most affected by corruption, followed by agriculture and public administration. The analysis also shows that a significant percentage of respondents in all regions agree that corruption hinders investment, with Lushnje showing the strongest consensus. Suggested anti-corruption measures vary across demographics, with younger individuals emphasizing education and transparency, while older respondents prioritize legal reforms.

Table 2: Regional differences in perceptions of corruption

Region	Correlation Between Education and Corruption Perception	Frequency of Corruption Encounters	Sectors Most Affected by Corruption	Impact on Investment	Common Consequences of Corruption	Suggested Anti-Corruption Measures
Tirana	Positive (0.39): Moderate correlation.	36.62% of males, 44.07% of females.	Health (most frequent), followed by Agriculture.	Highest mean response (1.20); 80% believe corruption hinders investment.	Lack of investments, reduced opportunities for economic growth.	Legal reforms, transparency, education about rights.
Lushnje	Positive (0.34): Moderate correlation.	Higher encounter rates in older age groups.	Health (most frequent), followed by Agriculture.	Lowest mean response (1.03), but 96.7% agree corruption hinders investment.	Poor infrastructure, difficulty in obtaining subsidies.	Community education, monitoring, transparency.
Fier	Strong positive (0.60): Higher education linked to greater perception.	Similar frequency for both genders.	Public Administration (most frequent), Health significant.	Mean response 1.07; 93.3% agree corruption hinders investment.	Barriers to accessing loans, deterioration of infrastructure.	Strengthening laws, internal monitoring.
Berat	Positive (0.31): Moderate correlation.	Encounters are more balanced across demographics.	Health (most frequent), Agriculture follows.	Mean response 1.17; 83.3% agree corruption hinders investment.	Reduced development opportunities, lack of financial support.	Transparency, strengthening local governance.

Source: Authors' elaboration

The ANOVA results highlight significant regional differences in certain aspects of corruption. Notably, disparities are observed in personal encounters with corruption, payment of bribes for public services, and the perceived impact on infrastructure quality. Significant

differences are also evident in access to agricultural services and financial support, particularly between Berat, Fier, and Lushnje. Conversely, no significant regional differences are found in the perceived prevalence of corruption, its impact on economic development, or its hindrance to investment. These findings underscore the need for targeted approaches to address corruption's varied effects across regions (table 3).

Table 3: ANOVA analysis on Regional differences

Variable	F-value	p-value	Significant?	Key Observation
Perceived Prevalence of Corruption	1.23	0.308	No	No significant regional differences.
Personal Encounters with Corruption	3.03	0.0319	Yes	There are significant differences in personal encounters with corruption among the regions.
Payment of Bribes for Public Services	6.26	0.0005	Yes	There is a significant difference in the payment of bribes between Berat and Fier (p-adj = 0.0004). There is also a significant difference between Fier and Lushnje (p-adj = 0.0168).
Impact on Economic Development	1,17	0.3231	No	There are no significant differences in the perceived impact of corruption on economic development among the regions.
Impact on Infrastructure Quality	7.46	0.0001	Yes	There is a significant difference in infrastructure quality between Berat and Fier (p-adj = 0.0001). There is also a significant difference between Fier and Lushnje (p-adj = 0.0024). Other comparisons do not show significant differences, as indicated by p-values greater than 0.05.
Hindrance to Investment	1.98	0.1208	No	There are no significant differences in the perceived hindrance to investment among the regions.
Impact on access to agricultural services and financial support	13.18	1.54	Yes	There are significant differences in access to agricultural services and financial support between Berat and Fier, and between Berat and Lushnje. The differences between Fier and Lushnje, as well as between Fier and Tirana, are also significant. Other comparisons do not show significant differences, as indicated by p-values greater than 0.05.

Source: Authors' elaboration

The role of media and social networks in combating corruption is strongly supported across all regions, with significant emphasis on disseminating information and organizing awareness campaigns. The majority of respondents (91%) believe that media and social networks can play a significant role in fighting corruption, with Fier shows unanimous support for the role of media and social networks, while Tirana and Berat exhibit slightly more scepticism. Preferred methods include: Disseminating information on corruption cases; Organising awareness campaigns; Encouraging community participation in reporting corruption.

EXPLORING PERCEPTIONS OF CORRUPTION: REGIONAL DISPARITIES IN ALBANIA'S RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Table 4: The Role of Media in Addressing Corruption and Promoting Rural Development

Aspect	Social Media	Traditional Media
Primary Source of Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Used by 50% of respondents. - Accessible, interactive, and real-time sharing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Used by 30% of respondents. - Provides in-depth news and analysis.
Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Easy access and quick updates. - Interactive platform for awareness campaigns. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Higher perceived reliability due to fact-checking. - Comprehensive coverage of key issues.
Weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Risk of misinformation. - Lack of fact-checking mechanisms. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Limited accessibility in rural areas. - Often less focused on local issues.
Perceived Role in Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Effective for spreading quick messages. - Encourages participation in discussions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Informative for detailed analysis. - Supports public education on governance issues.
Trust Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 35% highlight misinformation concerns. - 25% report political manipulation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Less dynamic but still affected by political influences in some cases.
Impact on Rural Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Encourages citizen participation. - Highlights local issues and promotes initiatives. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Facilitates transparency in policy promotion. - Builds trust in government programs.

Source: Authors' elaboration

This structured table (4) provides a clear comparison of the roles, strengths, and weaknesses of social media and traditional media in the context of corruption and rural development. The survey data shows that social media is the primary source of information for around 50% of respondents, offering accessibility, interactivity, and real-time updates but also posing risks of misinformation. Traditional media, relied upon by 30%, is seen as more reliable due to stricter fact-checking, though it faces limitations in rural areas and focuses less on local issues. Regarding the media's role, 70% believe it is key in educating the public about corruption, while 40% see social media as encouraging participation. However, 35% express concerns over misinformation and 25% feel media is politically influenced. Both media types are recognized for promoting rural development, with 60% supporting their role in transparency and policy advocacy.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

The analysis reveals significant insights into corruption perceptions and experiences across different regions and demographics. Education plays a crucial role in shaping individuals' awareness of corruption, with those holding higher education perceiving corruption as a more systemic barrier to development. Farmers, who represent the majority of respondents, show heightened sensitivity to corruption's impact on agricultural services and subsidies, compared to non-farmers. Regionally, while corruption is perceived as widespread across all areas, Fier and Berat stand out with notably higher frequencies of personal encounters, as well as issues related to

bribery and infrastructure quality. Health, agriculture, and public services providers are consistently identified as the sectors most affected by corruption. The findings also highlight the important role of media and social networks in combating corruption, with 70% of respondents acknowledging their effectiveness in raising awareness and advocating for transparency. However, challenges such as misinformation in social media and limited accessibility to traditional media in rural areas must be addressed. The results suggest that anti-corruption strategies should be tailored to specific demographic and regional needs, focusing on education, transparency, and legal reforms, while also strengthening infrastructure and addressing regional disparities to mitigate corruption's detrimental effects on rural development.

Addressing the research questions, this study finds:

Perception of Corruption by Stakeholders in Rural Communities: Corruption is widely perceived as a significant issue in rural communities, particularly among farmers and local government officials. Farmers, who make up the majority of respondents, report frequent encounters with corruption, especially in accessing agricultural subsidies and services. Local government officials also acknowledge corruption but often exhibit varying levels of engagement with anti-corruption measures, suggesting that it is both a systemic and culturally ingrained issue within rural governance.

Impact of Corruption on Rural Development: Perceptions of corruption significantly influence rural development, particularly in economic growth, access to agricultural resources, and infrastructure quality. Farmers with higher education levels are more likely to recognize corruption as a barrier to economic development and infrastructure improvements. Corruption hampers access to agricultural resources, such as subsidies and other financial support, which further affects the ability of rural communities to thrive. This results in stagnated growth, poor infrastructure, and limited opportunities for economic advancement.

Regional Disparities in the Impact of Corruption: Regional disparities play a crucial role in shaping how corruption impacts rural development. Fier and Berat show the highest frequencies of corruption encounters, with corruption affecting critical areas such as public services providers and agriculture. Significant differences are also evident in access to agricultural services and financial support, particularly between Berat, Fier, and Lushnje. Tirana, in contrast, reports lower corruption levels, likely due to its urban nature and stronger governance systems. These regional differences suggest that targeted anti-corruption efforts are needed to address the specific needs and challenges faced by rural areas.

Role of Media in Shaping Public Perceptions: Both social media and traditional media significantly shape public perceptions of corruption. Social media is widely used, particularly in rural areas, to disseminate information about corruption, although it faces challenges like misinformation and political manipulation. Traditional media, though more reliable in terms of fact-checking, is less accessible in rural regions and focuses less on local issues. Despite these limitations, both forms of media play an essential role in raising awareness and fostering public discussions about corruption and governance issues in rural communities.

*EXPLORING PERCEPTIONS OF CORRUPTION: REGIONAL DISPARITIES IN ALBANIA'S
RURAL DEVELOPMENT*

Strategies to Reduce Corruption and Promote Transparency: Effective anti-corruption strategies must be tailored to the specific needs of rural communities. Key strategies include enhancing education about rights and transparency, strengthening legal frameworks, and promoting community participation in governance. The role of media—particularly social media—should be harnessed to promote transparency and accountability. Additionally, strengthening local governance and ensuring more effective monitoring mechanisms can help reduce corruption and build trust in public institutions.

Key Recommendations:

Addressing the pervasive issue of corruption and its impact on rural development requires a comprehensive and multi-dimensional approach. The following strategies are proposed to tackle this challenge effectively:

Firstly, strengthening governance is of utmost importance. Albania's Anti-Corruption Agency must be equipped with the capacity and resources necessary to address corruption cases, particularly those affecting rural areas. Judicial independence should be fortified to ensure enforcement is free from political interference. Furthermore, implementing transparent public procurement processes, particularly for infrastructure development in rural regions, is essential to prevent the mismanagement of resources and restore trust in public institutions.

Empowering rural communities is critical to combating corruption sustainably. Establishing community-based monitoring systems can provide citizens with a safe and effective means of reporting corrupt practices. Moreover, participatory budgeting initiatives should be introduced, enabling rural residents to have a direct voice in financial decisions that impact their communities. These measures not only increase transparency but also foster a sense of ownership and accountability within rural populations.

Public awareness must also be prioritised. Social media, with its extensive reach and interactive capabilities, should be utilised to disseminate anti-corruption campaigns tailored to rural audiences. These campaigns should focus on spreading clear and factual information to counter misinformation. Simultaneously, traditional media should continue to serve as a reliable source of in-depth reporting and analysis, helping to educate the public about the far-reaching consequences of corruption. To enhance the efficacy of these efforts, media literacy programmes should be rolled out in rural areas, empowering citizens to critically evaluate information and identify trustworthy sources.

Given the regional disparities revealed in this study, targeted interventions are essential to effectively combat corruption and promote sustainable rural development. The findings highlight that regions like Fier and Berat experience higher levels of corruption, particularly in areas such as public administration, agriculture, and infrastructure, while Tirana exhibits lower levels of corruption due to its more developed governance systems. To address these regional challenges, interventions should be tailored to the specific needs and vulnerabilities of each area. This includes strengthening local governance, improving transparency, enhancing education about anti-corruption measures, and ensuring better access to agricultural resources and financial support. Additionally, media, both traditional and social, should be leveraged to raise awareness, combat

misinformation, and encourage public participation in anti-corruption initiatives. Such region-specific approaches will help foster a more equitable and transparent development process across rural communities in Albania.

The agricultural sector, a cornerstone of rural livelihoods, demands particular attention. Simplifying the processes for allocating agricultural subsidies is vital to reducing opportunities for corruption and ensuring farmers receive timely and fair support. Establishing an independent oversight body to monitor the distribution of agricultural resources will further promote equity and transparency, reinforcing farmers' trust in government programmes.

Finally, fostering collaboration across sectors is essential. Partnerships among civil society, academic institutions, and international organisations can provide the expertise and resources necessary to design and implement holistic anti-corruption policies. These policies must address the legal, economic, and cultural dimensions of corruption to ensure meaningful and lasting change. By working together, stakeholders can create a robust framework to mitigate corruption and support sustainable rural development.

In conclusion, while these recommendations require a concerted effort, political will, and sustained commitment, their implementation is essential to overcoming the barriers posed by corruption. By prioritising governance reforms, community empowerment, and public awareness, Albania can pave the way towards equitable development, enhanced trust in institutions, and a more prosperous future for its rural communities.

REFERENCES

1. Andersson, S., & Heywood, P. M. (2008). The politics of corruption in Eastern Europe. *East European Politics*, 24(4), 323-341. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21599160802402215>
2. Cardoso, F. H., & Faletto, E. (1979). *Dependency and development in Latin America*. University of California Press.
3. Chêne, M. (2018). *Anti-Money Laundering in Developing Countries*. U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Centre.
4. Dixit, A. (2012). *Affluence and influence: Economic inequality and political power in America*. Princeton University Press.
5. European Commission. (2020). *Albania 2020 report*. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/countries/detailed-country-information/albania_en
6. European Commission. (2023). *Albania 2023 report*. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/countries/detailed-country-information/albania_en
7. Frank, G. (1966). *The Development of Underdevelopment*. Monthly Review Press.
8. Freedom House. (2023). *Freedom in the World 2023: Albania*. Retrieved from <https://freedomhouse.org/country/albania/freedom-world/2023>
9. Fisman, R., & Svensson, J. (2007). Are corruption and taxation really harmful to growth? *Journal of Development Economics*, 83(1), 63-75. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdeveco.2006.01.002>

*EXPLORING PERCEPTIONS OF CORRUPTION: REGIONAL DISPARITIES IN ALBANIA'S
RURAL DEVELOPMENT*

10. Galtung, F. (2006). Measuring the costs of corruption. *International Social Science Journal*, 58(1), 231-245. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2451.2006.00652.x>
11. Ghani, E., & Lockhart, C. (2008). *Fixing failed states: A framework for rebuilding a fractured world*. Oxford University Press.
12. GRECO. (2023). *Fifth evaluation round: Preventing corruption and promoting integrity in central governments (top executive functions) and law enforcement agencies, compliance report Albania*. Group of States Against Corruption.
13. Haggard, S., & Tiede, L. (2011). The rules of the game and the development of the Asian developmental state. *The Journal of Politics*, 73(2), 136-148. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022381611000170>
14. Holmberg, S., Rothstein, B., & Nasiritousi, N. (2009). Quality of government: What you get. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 12, 135-161. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.12.040607.085754>
15. Husted, B. W. (1999). Wealth, culture, and corruption. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 30(2), 339-359. <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.jibs.8490075>
16. Imami, D., Pugh, G., & Lami, E. (2024). Fiscal enforcement and elections in the context of high corruption. *Public Finance Review*, 52(5), 679-714. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10911421241234116>
17. Kaufmann, D., & Kraay, A. (2002). Growth without governance. *World Bank Policy Research Working Paper No. 2928*. <https://doi.org/10.1596/1813-9450-2928>
18. Kaufmann, D., Kraay, A., & Mastruzzi, M. (1999). Governance matters. *World Bank Policy Research Working Paper No. 2196*. <https://doi.org/10.1596/1813-9450-2196>
19. Kaufmann, D., & Mastruzzi, M. (2006). Measuring corruption: Myths and realities. *Development Outreach*, 8(1), 40-45.
20. La Porta, R., Lopez-de-Silanes, F., Shleifer, A., & Vishny, R. W. (1999). The quality of government. *Journal of Law, Economics, & Organization*, 15(1), 222-279.
21. Mauro, P. (1995). Corruption and growth. *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 110(3), 681-712. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2946696>
22. Mungiu-Pippidi, A. (2015). *The quest for good governance: How societies develop control of corruption*. Cambridge University Press.
23. NDI. (2023, September). *Strengthening the Role of Albanian Parliament in Curbing Corruption*.
24. North, D. C. (1990). *Institutions, institutional change, and economic performance*. Cambridge University Press.
25. Olken, B. A. (2007). Monitoring corruption: Evidence from a field experiment in Indonesia. *Journal of Political Economy*, 115(2), 200-249. <https://doi.org/10.1086/517935>
26. Olken, B. A., & Pande, R. (2011). Corruption in developing countries. *Annual Review of Economics*, 3, 379-409. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.economics.031208.133103>
27. OSCE. (2021). *Gender and corruption in Albania*. Retrieved from <https://www.osce.org/gender-corruption-albania>

28. Persson, A., Rothstein, B., & Teorell, J. (2013). Why anticorruption reforms fail—systemic corruption as a collective action problem. *Governance*, 26(3), 449-471. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gove.12012>
29. Paldam, M. (2002). The cross-country pattern of corruption: Economics, culture, and the seesaw dynamics. *European Journal of Political Economy*, 18(2), 221-240. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0176-2680\(02\)00028-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0176-2680(02)00028-3)
30. Rose-Ackerman, S. (1999). *Corruption and government: Causes, consequences, and reform*. Cambridge University Press.
31. Rose-Ackerman, S. (2016). Corruption: The boom and bust of global anti-corruption efforts. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 30(1), 3-20. <https://doi.org/10.1257/jep.30.1.3>
32. Rose-Ackerman, S., & Palifka, B. J. (2016). *Corruption and government: Causes, consequences, and reform* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
33. Sachs, J., et al. (2019). *The SDGs and corruption: A barrier to achieving the 2030 agenda*. Cambridge University Press.
34. Shleifer, A., & Vishny, R. W. (1993). Corruption. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 108(3), 599-617.
35. Sik, E. (2009). *The social structure of corruption*. World Scientific Publishing.
36. Svensson, J. (2005). Eight questions about corruption. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 19(3), 19-42. <https://doi.org/10.1257/089533005774357860>
37. Tanzi, V. (1998). Corruption around the world: Causes, consequences, scope, and cures. *IMF Staff Papers*, 45(4), 559-594.
38. Transparency International. (2020). *Corruption perceptions index 2020*. Retrieved from <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2020/index/nzl>
39. Transparency International. (2023). *Corruption perceptions index 2023*. Retrieved from <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2023/index/nzl>
40. Treisman, D. (2007). What have we learned about the causes of corruption from ten years of cross-national empirical research? *Annual Review of Political Science*, 10, 211-244. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.10.081205.095418>
41. UNDP. (2018). *Corruption and human development: Transparency, accountability, and empowerment*. United Nations Development Programme.
42. Xhindi, M., & Gjika, A. (2023). Corruption and economic development in the Western Balkans: An empirical analysis. *Journal of Economics and Business*, 23(1), 45-59.
43. You, J. S. (2005). Corruption, democracy, and economic growth. *International Journal of Public Administration*, 28(1), 47-60. <https://doi.org/10.1081/PAD-200029272>