

Governance Indicators and the Fight Against Corruption: A Cross-National Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Corruption is an institutionalised hindrance of effective governance by breaching public institution principles of openness and accountability. In Asia wide, governance structure of voice and accountability, political stability, effective governance, regulatory quality, rule of law, and corruption control prevents occurrence of corrupt behaviours and promote integrity. This study analyses the manner each of the six indicators of governance influences corruption levels across 44 countries of Asia over a 24-year period from 2000 to 2023 by possessing a data set of 1,056 observations. By cross-country analysis across data, the academic study identifies strong patterns that require that quality of governance be an underlying contributor towards corruption eradication. The findings report strong negative associations between levels of corruption with six dimensions of governance. That is, high levels of voice and accountability, political stability, effective governance, regulatory capacity, rule of law, corruption control associate with lower corruption. Such findings require strengthening of the structure of governance provides an effective solution towards minimisation of corruption while enhancing more credible development of public institution across Asia.

Keywords: Corruption, Political stability, Government effectiveness, Regulatory quality, Rule of law, Voice and Accountability, Control of Corruption

■ Introduction

Corruption is a global problem that affects developed as well as developing nations. It entails the use of practices of bribes, embezzlement, nepotism, and misuse of public office for personal gain (Waller et al., 2002). Corruption blocks economic progress, destroys social trust, and consolidates inequality, posing serious roadblocks for good governance (Del Monte & Pennacchio, 2020). According to The Transparency International (2024), corruption particularly affects the poor by draining public resources from essential services such as healthcare, education, and infrastructures. Therefore, addressing corruption not only becomes a matter of moral obligation but also a key component of building sustainable development as well as equitable governance. Defined by the World Bank (2024) as the quality of public services, the capacity of the civil service, and the independence of institutions from political pressures, government effectiveness plays a pivotal role in reducing opportunities for corrupt practices. When governments are effective, they implement transparency regulations, enforce accountability mechanisms, and foster trust between the state and its citizens. This particularly important in public procurement, a sector often susceptible to corruption. For instance, robust procurement policies and digital platforms that track expenditures can help deter corrupt practices and ensure that public funds are allocated efficiently (Rose-Ackerman & Palifka, 2016).

One of the mechanisms whereby effective government minimises corruption is by establishing effective institutional mechanisms. Efficient government integrate legally binding and holistic anti-corruption measures. Independent supervision mechanisms such as corruption commissions ensure that abuse of authority cases are noted and prosecuted. The digitalisation of government services has been shown to reduce corruption by minimising direct human interactions. According to research by Andersen (2009), countries with high levels of e-government tend to exhibit lower levels of corruption. In shaping transparency, governance attributes voice and accountability, political stability, government effectiveness, regulatory quality, rule of law, and control of corruption play a pivotal role. Transparency fosters openness and builds trust between governments and citizens, enabling more equitable and sustainable governance. Voice and accountability empower citizens by providing platforms for participation and ensuring that public officials are held responsible for their actions. Political stability ensures consistent governance, creating an environment where long-term transparent policies can thrive (Abdillah et al., 2020; Fjelde & Hegre, 2014; Shabbir et al., 2016). Government effectiveness enhances the quality of public services and reduces inefficiencies that might otherwise create opportunities for corruption (Ionescu, 2010; Montes & Paschoal, 2016). Furthermore, regulatory quality establishes clear and predictable rules, minimising ambiguities that foster corrupt practices (Handoyo & Fitriyah, 2018). The rule of law ensures that everyone, including those in power, is held accountable under an impartial legal system. Finally, control of corruption directly addresses the misuse of public resources, promoting an environment where transparent practices become the norm (Li et al., 2020). Collectively, these attributes create a system in which transparency flourishes, enabling governments to allocate resources efficiently, foster trust, and ensure equitable outcomes.

Despite this extensive literature, important gaps remain. Large-scale empirical studies focusing specifically on Asian countries are relatively limited, with many existing governance studies relying on global samples that may under-represent the institutional, political, and economic diversity of the Asian region. In addition, prior research often examines shorter or earlier time periods, which may not fully capture recent governance reforms and structural changes. Furthermore, existing studies frequently analyse individual governance indicators in isolation rather than examining the combined effects of multiple governance dimensions within a unified framework.

To address these gaps, the present study examines the relationship between governance attributes, voice and accountability, political stability, government effectiveness, regulatory quality, rule of law, and control of corruption and transparency across 44 Asian countries over an extended period from 2000 to 2023. By adopting a comprehensive, multi-indicator approach over a long time horizon, this study provides a more holistic and region-specific understanding of governance–transparency dynamics in Asia.

The following research questions are therefore proposed:

RQ1: To what extent does voice and accountability influence the corruption index of Asian countries?

RQ2: How does political stability impact the transparency level of Asian countries?

RQ3: What is the relationship between government effectiveness and corruption index in Asian countries?

RQ4: How does regulatory quality contribute to corruption index of Asian countries?

RQ5: What is the effect of the rule of law on corruption index of Asian countries?

RQ6: How does the control of corruption affect corruption index Asian countries?

■ Literature review and Hypothesis development

Voice and accountability

Voice and accountability (VA) refer to the extent to which citizens can participate in governance, express their views freely, and hold public officials responsible for their actions. Strong VA mechanisms are fundamental to promoting good governance and combating corruption, as they enable civil society, the media, and oversight institutions to scrutinize government behaviour and expose misconduct. According to Kaufmann et al. (2011), countries with higher levels of voice and accountability often experience lower corruption rates due to the enhanced role of public scrutiny and democratic government. Corruption thrives in environments where public participation is restricted, and accountability measures are weak. Studies suggest that a lack of VA fosters unchecked authority, enabling corrupt behaviour to permeate public institutions (Treisman, 2007). In contrast, environments characterised by restricted participation and weak accountability often allow corrupt behaviour to flourish (Rose-Ackerman & Palifka, 2016). For instance, electoral competition and independent watchdogs encourage leaders to act transparently, fearing reputational damage or legal consequences. However, the relationship between VA and corruption is complex.

Nevertheless, the relationship between VA and corruption is not always straightforward. In some cases, even well-designed accountability frameworks fail to curb corruption due to deeper institutional weaknesses, such as compromised judicial systems or entrenched elite networks. Thus, while enhancing voice and accountability is vital, its success depends on broader institutional reform and political will. Based on this understanding, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Increased voice and accountability are associated with lower levels of corruption.

■ Political stability

Political stability (PS) is a crucial force that defines the environment of governance of a country and is known broadly as one of the most influential factors of corruption prevalence (Fjelde & Hegre, 2014). Political stability creates a stable institutional climate in which the systems of governance follow a predictable routine while preventing any kind of immediate policy shifts or bureaucratic disruptions that tend to generate opportunities for rent-seeking and corruption. Political stability, as mentioned by Handoyo and Fitriyah (2018), strengthens the strength and persistence of institutional mechanisms that enables the governing bodies to follow medium- to long-run strategies of fighting against corruption while tackling wider goals such as environment sustainability.

Political instability, characterised by repeated leadership changes, civil unrest, or armed aggression, erodes institutional strength and leaves an open window for systemic corruption and patronage networks (Shleifer & Vishny, 1993). Other studies confirm that political stability fortifies public trust that creates strengthened active citizenship that places sustained demands upon governing entities for an end to corruption (Beju et al., 2024; Kaufmann et al., 2009). Political stability-conducive regimes are best set for guaranteeing strong legal backgrounds, supervision mechanisms, and independent entities, pillars of corruption minimisation (Asongu & Nwachukwu, 2015; Treisman, 2007).

Political stability alone is not a sufficient condition for corruption reduction. Political stability in the long term in certain authoritarian regimes could co-exist with pervasive corruption and lack of transparency. Political stability therefore forms a condition of necessity for corruption reduction, but its effectiveness depends on the aggregate climate of institutional quality as well as democratic government. That being the case the following hypothesis is propounded:

H2: Increased political stability is associated with lower levels of corruption.

■ Government effectiveness

Government effectiveness (GE) is a crucial governance indicator signifying the quality of public services delivery, policy development and implementation, as well as the credibility of government commitments (Garcia-Sanchez et al., 2013). Improved government effectiveness fortifies openness by enhancing government accountability, reducing bureaucratic redundancy, and establishing institutional credibility (Kaufmann, Kraay, & Mastruzzi, 2011). Effective governments adopt policies that drive openness, ensure public access to information, reduce opportunities for corrupt gains, thereby improving the quality of government. Weak government effectiveness forms obscure implementation processes that foment corruption that undermines public credibility (Rose-Ackerman & Palifka, 2016). Statistical evidence establishes a robust positive correlation between government effectiveness and openness. Empirical evidence highlights a strong positive relationship between government effectiveness and transparency. For instance, Holmberg and Rothstein (2012) demonstrate that effective governments are best placed to prevent corruption while maintaining openness, constructing higher public credibility as well as stimulating economic development.

Montes and Paschoal (2016) indicate that countries with lower levels of corruption tend to have higher-quality public services, more effective policy formulation and implementation, and greater credibility in the government's commitment to these policies. Additionally, their results reveal that the impact of corruption on government effectiveness is more pronounced in developed countries. Mongi and Saidi (2023) also find that government effectiveness increase economic growth for 48 middle-income countries. However, Quah (2015) finds that the effectiveness of anti-corruption agencies (ACAs) varies across countries due to differing political and policy contexts. Singapore's Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau is successful due to strong political will and a supportive policy framework. In contrast, the Philippines and Taiwan struggle with ineffective ACAs that are underfunded, understaffed, and competing for limited resources. China's Central Commission for Discipline Inspection is hindered by its practice of disciplining rather than prosecuting corrupt party members, with corruption often used as a political tool against opponents. In Japan, weak political will limits efforts to address structural corruption. The study concludes with policy recommendations to improve ACA effectiveness in these five countries (Quah, 2015). Based on this evidence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Increased government effectiveness is associated with lower levels of corruption.

■ Regulatory quality

Regulatory quality (RQ) reflects the government's ability to formulate good policies and regulations that spur the growth of the private sector and apply laws consistently and impartially. Poor regulatory quality often feeds directly into greater corruption because such situations offer complex bureaucratic procedures, ambiguity regarding the structure of regulations, and discretion for officials (Kaufmann et al., 2011). For instance, countries with high RQ tend to experience lower corruption levels and improved public access to information (Handoyo & Fitriyah, 2018; Kaller et al., 2018). Jalilian et al. (2007) find that better regulatory quality significantly improved transparency and reduces corruption in developing economies, particularly where institutions are weak. Similarly, Breen and Gillanders (2012) and Kaufmann et al. (2011) demonstrated that regulatory reforms positively influence governance indicators, including transparency, by mitigating arbitrary decision-making by policy makers. Conversely, weak regulatory quality leads to inefficiencies and creates opportunities for corruption. Marshall (1998) showed that poor regulatory frameworks in South Asia correlate with higher levels of opacity and governance failures. This evidence supports the hypothesis:

H4: Increased regulatory quality is associated with lower levels of corruption.

■ Rule of law

A country's level of corruption is closely linked to the strength of its rule of law. Corruption flourishes in environments where legal systems are weak, laws are inconsistently enforced, and public officials act with impunity. The rule of law ensures that laws are clear, publicly accessible, and applied fairly, conditions that reduce opportunities for abuse of power and illegal enrichment. When legal institutions function independently and effectively, they create an environment of accountability, reducing the likelihood of corrupt behaviour among public servants and political elites. However, Frye et al. (2010) state that addressing corruption and upholding the rule of law involve both technical and political challenges. On the technical front, this requires establishing effective incentives for bureaucrats and legal officials to prioritise public interests over private ones. Typical strategies for legal reform include enhancing judicial training, allocating additional resources for judges and bailiffs, and using technology to streamline case management and boost efficiency. In this regard, Russia has shown relatively positive progress in recent years. Khosrowjerdi (2022) indicates that good governance, characterised by strong rule of law, significantly predicts information transparency across nations. A study analysing 117 countries found that governance indices, including the rule of law, were robust predictors of national information transparency, even when accounting for variables like GDP per capita and corruption rates. Therefore, this study hypothesises that:

H5: Increased rule of law is associated with lower levels of corruption.

■ Control of corruption

Control of corruption (CC) represents the extent to which public authorities actively prevent, detect, and sanction the misuse of public power for private gain. It reflects institutional capacity and policy action, including the effectiveness of anti-corruption agencies, enforcement of integrity regulations, judicial independence, and administrative oversight mechanisms (Kaufmann et al., 2009). Corruption, by contrast, reflects the observable or perceived outcome of these efforts, manifested through bribery, embezzlement, and abuse of public office. While closely related, control of corruption and corruption outcomes capture different stages of the governance process.

Importantly, CC should be interpreted as an ex-ante governance activity or institutional response, whereas the corruption index reflects the ex-post level of corruption experienced or perceived within a country. From this perspective, stronger corruption control mechanisms are expected to reduce corruption outcomes over time by increasing the probability of detection, punishment, and deterrence. Countries that invest in robust anti-corruption frameworks typically exhibit higher public trust, improved investment climates, and more sustainable economic performance (Kaufmann et al., 2009; Rose-Ackerman & Palifka, 2016)

Transparency initiatives, such as open data systems, transparent procurement processes, and whistleblower protection, further enhance the effectiveness of corruption control by increasing oversight and limiting opportunities for malfeasance. According to Transparency International, higher levels of transparency are associated with lower perceived corruption, as citizens and monitoring bodies are better able to observe and evaluate government performance. Nevertheless, in many developing economies, institutional weaknesses, limited enforcement capacity, and entrenched political norms may weaken the effectiveness of corruption control efforts, resulting in persistent corruption despite formal policies.

While acknowledging the close conceptual proximity between CC and corruption perceptions, examining this relationship remains analytically meaningful. Doing so allows an assessment of whether institutional anti-corruption efforts translate into measurable reductions in corruption outcomes, rather than assuming such effectiveness a priori. Treating CC as an explanatory variable therefore provides insight into the extent to which governance actions are reflected in observable corruption levels across countries and over time. Based on this reasoning, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H6: Increased control of corruption is associated with lower levels of corruption.

Although the six governance indicators are discussed separately for analytical clarity, they are not independent in practice. Rather, they operate as an interconnected system in which improvements in one dimension often reinforce others. For example, a strong rule of law underpins voice and accountability by protecting civil liberties and ensuring that participatory mechanisms are enforceable. Government effectiveness relies on regulatory quality, as effective policy implementation and service delivery depend on clear, predictable, and enforceable regulatory frameworks. Political stability further supports these relationships by providing institutional continuity that allows governance reforms to be implemented and sustained over time. Recognising these interdependencies provides a richer theoretical framework and helps explain why governance indicators are frequently highly correlated in empirical analyses. As such, any observed multicollinearity reflects structural institutional overlap rather than a methodological weakness.

■ Research Methodology

Data for the independent variables, voice and accountability (VA), political stability (SP), government effectiveness (GE), regulatory quality (RQ), rule of law (RL), and control of corruption (CC), are obtained from the Worldwide Governance Indicators database ([www. https://databank.worldbank.org/source/worldwide-governance-indicators](https://databank.worldbank.org/source/worldwide-governance-indicators)). Since higher transparency scores imply lower corruption, the index was reverse-coded (i.e., 100 minus transparency score) to obtain a corruption index where higher values indicate higher corruption. This transformation allows for more intuitive interpretation when examining the relationship between governance variables and corruption. The study covers 44 Asian countries over a 24-year period from 2000 to 2023. This period was selected because it captures the post-Asian Financial Crisis recovery phase, major governance and institutional reforms across the region, increased globalisation and regulatory harmonisation, as well as more recent structural shifts associated with digital transformation and the COVID-19 pandemic. Collectively, this timeframe provides sufficient longitudinal variation to examine long-term trends and policy impacts while ensuring data availability and comparability across countries. List of countries included in the sample is presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Country sample used in this study

Southeast Asia	South Asia	East Asia	Central Asia	West Asia (Middle East)	Eurasia
Brunei	Afghanistan	China	Kazakhstan	Armenia	Russia
Cambodia	Bangladesh	Japan	Tajikistan	Azerbaijan	
Indonesia	Bhutan	South Korea	Uzbekistan	Bahrain	
Malaysia	India	North Korea		Cyprus	
Myanmar	Maldives	Mongolia		Georgia	
Philippines	Nepal			Iran	
Singapore	Pakistan			Iraq	
Thailand	Sri Lanka			Israel	
Timor-Leste				Jordan	
Vietnam				Kuwait	
				Lebanon	
				Oman	
				Qatar	
				Saudi Arabia	
				Syria	
				United Arab Emirates	
				Yemen	

■ Cross-Sectional Data analysis

Although the dataset covers 44 Asian countries over a span of 24 years (2000–2023), this study adopts a cross-sectional approach rather than a panel data design. The decision is driven by both methodological and practical considerations. First, data availability and completeness vary significantly across countries and years. Many governance and corruption-related indicators are either missing or inconsistent over time for certain countries, limiting the feasibility of constructing a balanced or even a reliable unbalanced panel dataset. To ensure robustness and comparability, the study selects the most recent or representative year of available data for each country, effectively creating a cross-sectional dataset with the maximum number of complete observations. Second, the research objective is to explore the structural relationship between governance indicators and corruption levels across countries, rather than analysing trends or changes over time within countries. Cross-sectional analysis is appropriate for this purpose, as it focuses on cross-country variation rather than within-country dynamics. Third, by avoiding panel data complications, such as unobserved heterogeneity, time-specific shocks, and serial correlation, the cross-sectional approach allows for a clearer interpretation of the direct impact of governance indicators on corruption without the need to control for time effects or country fixed effects, which may obscure the relationships of interest. Lastly, the use of cross-sectional data is consistent with previous influential studies on corruption and governance (Kaufmann et al., 2009, 2011; Treisman, 2007), which also rely on country-level cross-sectional analysis to draw generalized conclusions across regions.

■ Empirical regression models

To examine the relationship between governance attributes and the corruption index in this study, we employ the following regression models:

$$\text{H1: } \text{CORRUPT}_{i,t} = \beta_0 + \beta_{VA_{i,t}} + \gamma' \text{Control}_{i,t} + \epsilon \quad (1)$$

$$\text{H2: } \text{CORRUPT}_{i,t} = \beta_0 + \beta_{PS_{i,t}} + \gamma' \text{Control}_{i,t} + \epsilon \quad (2)$$

$$\text{H3: } \text{CORRUPT}_{i,t} = \beta_0 + \beta_{GE_{i,t}} + \gamma' \text{Control}_{i,t} + \epsilon \quad (3)$$

$$\text{H4: } \text{CORRUPT}_{i,t} = \beta_0 + \beta_{RQ_{i,t}} + \gamma' \text{Control}_{i,t} + \epsilon \quad (4)$$

$$\text{H5: } \text{CORRUPT}_{i,t} = \beta_0 + \beta_{RL_{i,t}} + \gamma' \text{Control}_{i,t} + \epsilon \quad (5)$$

$$\text{H6: } \text{CORRUPT}_{i,t} = \beta_0 + \beta_{CC_{i,t}} + \gamma' \text{Control}_{i,t} + \epsilon \quad (6)$$

Where: $CORRUPT_{i,t}$ represents the corruption index of country i in year t .

β_0 : The intercept term, representing the baseline level of transparency when all predictors are zero.

$\beta_{VA_{i,t}}$ represents Voice and accountability of country i in year t .

$\beta_{PS_{i,t}}$ represents Political stability of country i in year t .

$\beta_{GE_{i,t}}$ represents Government effectiveness of country i in year t .

$\beta_{RQ_{i,t}}$ represents Regulatory Quality of country i in year t .

$\beta_{RL_{i,t}}$ represents Rule of Law of country i in year t .

$\beta_{CC_{i,t}}$ represents Control of Corruption of country i in year t .

ϵ is the error term capturing unobserved factors affecting transparency.

The decision to estimate governance indicators in separate regression models is driven by the presence of high multicollinearity among the WGI indicators, as reported in Table 2. Including all governance variables simultaneously in a single model would result in unstable coefficient estimates and inflated standard errors. Estimating separate models therefore represents a pragmatic strategy to isolate the association between each governance attribute and corruption. At the same time, this approach implies that the models are inherently underspecified, as each governance indicator is estimated without controlling for other highly correlated governance dimensions. Consequently, the estimated coefficients should be interpreted as isolated associations rather than fully conditional effects, and they may partially absorb the influence of omitted governance variables. This limitation reflects the interconnected nature of governance institutions, rather than a modelling flaw, and is explicitly acknowledged when interpreting the empirical results.

■ Results and discussion

Table 2 reveals high inter-correlations between the indicators of good governance (e.g., $GE-RQ = 0.917$, $GE-RL = 0.904$, $CC-GE = 0.907$). Therefore, simultaneously including the full set of indicators in a multiple regression model could result in multicollinearity. This statistical problem causes an inflation of variance of coefficient estimates that makes them unstable and unreliable (Gujarati, 2009). An appropriate solution adopted by the study is a bivariate regression strategy, running regression of $CORRUPT$ (Y) on each of the indicators of good governance (X) individually, yielding six separate regression models as shown in Table 4 to Table 9 that isolate and precisely estimate each of the effects of the factors of good governance on corruption.

Table 2 Pair-wise correlations

	CORRUPT	VA	PS	GE	RQ	RL	CC	GDP
CORRUPT	1							
VA	-.512**	1						
PS	-.671**	.281**	1					
GE	-.888**	.558**	.659**	1				
RQ	-.837**	.603**	.581**	.917**	1			
RL	-.857**	.530**	.691**	.904**	.842**	1		
CC	-.948**	.544**	.694**	.907**	.842**	.897**	1	
GDP	-.170**	0.050	.080*	.220**	.110**	.141**	.140**	1

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 3 summarises statistics of all variables used for analysis, including governance indicators, corruption index, as well as the use of GDP as a control variable. Dependent variable CORRUPT is at 6.163 with a standard deviation of 1.784, meaning moderate variation across observations. Of the governance indicators, Voice and Accountability (VA) as well as Political Stability (PS) have negative mean values of -0.687 and -0.447 respectively, meaning relatively lower mean scores for the two dimensions across the sample. Skewness of most of the governance indicators is close to zero, meaning approximate symmetry of distributions. GDP has high positive skewness of 6.401 as well as kurtosis of 49.262, meaning strongly skewed distribution due to large differences across countries in economic size. The large variation of GDP ensures that there exists widespread cross-country analysis of economic size that needs to be controlled. Generally, data appear appropriate for regression analysis despite the requirement of transformation of GDP for its non-normality.

Table 3 Descriptive statistics

Variables	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
CORRUPT	0.600	9.600	6.163	1.784	-0.794	0.099
VA	-2.313	1.117	-0.687	0.806	0.294	-0.574
PS	-3.180	1.599	-0.447	1.035	-0.285	-0.539
GE	-2.362	2.470	-0.113	0.916	0.230	-0.198
RQ	-2.527	2.309	-0.216	0.928	-0.009	-0.187
RL	-2.096	1.838	-0.232	0.861	0.102	-0.658
CC	-1.798	2.301	-0.302	0.887	0.697	-0.119
GDP (\$Million)	366.92	18,270,356.65	544,975.54	1,737,228.54	6.401	49.262

As expected in our hypothesis, Table 4 presents the results of the multiple linear regression model testing Hypothesis 1, which proposes that Voice and Accountability (VA) has a negative impact on corruption levels (CORRUPT) with a p-value < 0.001 level. This indicates a strong negative relationship between voice and accountability and corruption. In other words, as VA increases, corruption significantly decreases. This finding is consistent with the theoretical expectation that greater civic engagement and freedom of expression enable citizens, civil society, and the media to monitor government behaviour, hold officials accountable, and reduce the space for corrupt practices.

This aligns with prior studies (Kaufmann et al., 2011; Treisman, 2007), which emphasise the importance of participatory governance in curbing corruption. Therefore, the results provide empirical support for Hypothesis 1, reinforcing the argument that strengthening voice and accountability is a crucial strategy in the fight against corruption.

Table 4 Regression model for hypothesis 1

Unstandardised Coefficients			Standardised Coefficients		
Model 1	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	5.511	.068		63.242	<.001***
VA	-1.073	.064	-.482	15.856	<.001***
GDP	-1.419e-13	.000	-.146	4.953	<.001***

Dependent Variable: CORRUPT, R=.511, R Square =.261, Adjusted R Square =.259, *, **, *** indicates significance at the 90%, 95%, and 99% level, respectively.

Table 5 provides evidence supporting Hypothesis 2, which proposes that Political Stability (PS) has a negative impact on corruption. Our result suggests that countries with higher levels of political stability tend to experience lower levels of corruption. The result is highly statistically significant ($p < .001$), indicating a strong negative relationship between political stability and corruption. In practical terms, politically stable countries are significantly less likely to exhibit high levels of corruption.

This finding is consistent with the rationale that political stability promotes consistent policy implementation, institutional continuity, and fewer opportunities for rent-seeking or abuse of power. Conversely, political instability, manifested through frequent leadership changes, civil unrest, or conflict, can erode institutional strength and create environments conducive to corruption. These results align with previous studies (Fjelde & Hegre, 2014; Shleifer & Vishny, 1993), which emphasise the role of stability in strengthening governance and reducing corruption risk. Therefore, the regression model provides strong empirical support for Hypothesis 2, highlighting political stability as a critical factor in curbing corruption across countries.

Table 5 Regression model for hypothesis 2

Unstandardised Coefficients			Standardised Coefficients		
Model 1	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	5.638	.050		112.518	<.001***
PS	-1.153	.042	-.668	-27.225	<.001***
GDP	-1.051e-13	.000	-.108	-4.410	<.001***

Dependent Variable: CORRUPT, R=.687, R Square =.472, Adjusted R Square =.470, *, **, *** indicates significance at the 90%, 95%, and 99% level, respectively.

Table 6 presents the results of the regression analysis for Hypothesis 3, which posits that Government Effectiveness (GE) has a negative effect on corruption levels. The findings provide strong empirical support for the hypothesis, with the result being highly statistically significant ($p < .001$). This indicates a very strong negative relationship between government effectiveness and corruption, suggesting that as the quality and efficiency of government services, policy implementation, and public sector performance improve, corruption levels tend to decline significantly.

This outcome aligns with theoretical expectations and previous studies, which argue that effective governments deliver services more efficiently, enforce laws more equitably, and reduce opportunities for discretionary abuse and rent-seeking (Kaufmann et al., 2011). Well-functioning public institutions enhance administrative efficiency and restrict the channels through which corruption can occur (Quah, 2015). In conclusion, the regression results strongly support Hypothesis 3, affirming that government effectiveness is a critical determinant in reducing corruption across countries.

Table 6 Regression model for hypothesis 3

Unstandardised Coefficients			Standardised Coefficients		
Model 1	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	5.998	.029		205.389	<.001***
GE	-1.793	.032	-.893	-55.837	<.001***
GDP	3.215e-14	.000	.033	2.071	.039**

Dependent Variable: CORRUPT, R=.886, R Square =.785, Adjusted R Square =.785, *, **, *** indicates significance at the 90%, 95%, and 99% level, respectively.

Table 7 presents the regression results for Hypothesis 4, which proposes that Regulatory Quality (RQ) has a negative effect on corruption levels. The findings provide strong empirical support for this hypothesis, with the results being highly statistically significant ($p < .001$). The analysis reveals a very strong negative relationship between regulatory quality and corruption, suggesting that as the clarity, consistency, and effectiveness of regulatory policies improve, corruption levels tend to decline significantly.

This finding aligns with the theoretical expectation that high-quality regulation reduces bureaucratic discretion, limits opportunities for rent-seeking, and promotes rule-based governance (La Porta et al., 2000; Rose-Ackerman & Palifka, 2016). In contrast, weak or inconsistent regulatory systems often lead to inefficiencies, ambiguity, and environments where public officials exploit loopholes and discretionary power for personal gain (Cucciniello et al., 2015). Taken together, these results validate Hypothesis 4 and underscore regulatory quality as a critical institutional mechanism in curbing corruption. Strengthening regulatory frameworks should therefore be a central priority for countries aiming to improve governance and public sector integrity.

Table 7 Regression model for hypothesis 4

Unstandardised Coefficients			Standardised Coefficients		
Model 1	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	5.909	.035		169.845	<.001***
RQ	-1.686	.038	-.826	-44.695	<.001***
GDP	-7.505e-14	.000	-.077	-4.186	<.001***

Dependent Variable: CORRUPT, R=.838, R Square =.702, Adjusted R Square =.701, *, **, *** indicates significance at the 90%, 95%, and 99% level, respectively.

Table 8 presents the regression results for Hypothesis 5, which posits that Rule of Law (RL) negatively affects corruption levels. The results provide strong empirical support for the hypothesis. The standardized coefficient (Beta) for RL is -0.845, and the effect is highly statistically significant ($p < .001$). This reflects a very strong negative relationship between the rule of law and corruption, suggesting that countries with stronger legal systems, where laws are fairly enforced, judicial independence is respected, and legal protections are upheld, tend to have significantly lower levels of corruption.

This finding aligns with theoretical expectations and previous research, which argue that the rule of law is a cornerstone of anti-corruption efforts. A well-functioning legal system not only deters corrupt behaviour by increasing the likelihood of detection and punishment but also promotes public trust and institutional accountability (Goltz et al., 2015; Levie & Autio, 2011; Rose-Ackerman & Palifka, 2016; Treisman, 2007). Taken together, our results confirm Hypothesis 5 and emphasise that strengthening the rule of law is a critical mechanism for combating corruption and enhancing governance quality.

Table 8 Regression model for hypothesis 5

Unstandardised Coefficients			Standardised Coefficients		
Model 1	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	5.817	.034		173.162	<.001***
RL	-1.758	.037	-.845	-47.751	<.001***
GDP	-4.821e-14	.000	-.050	-2.806	.005**

Dependent Variable: CORRUPT, R=.854, R Square =.728, Adjusted R Square =.728, *, **, *** indicates significance at the 90%, 95%, and 99% level, respectively.

Table 9 presents the regression results for Hypothesis 6, which posits that Control of Corruption (CC) has a negative effect on corruption levels. The findings provide very strong empirical support for the hypothesis. The standardised coefficient (Beta) for CC is -0.943, and the relationship is highly statistically significant ($p < .001$). This represents the strongest negative association among all models tested, indicating that countries with greater institutional capacity to detect, prevent, and sanction corrupt practices tend to exhibit significantly lower levels of corruption.

This result aligns with theoretical expectations and previous research, which identify control of corruption as a central mechanism in mitigating unethical behaviour within public institutions. Robust anti-corruption frameworks, including independent enforcement agencies, legal protections for whistleblowers, and transparent oversight mechanisms, are effective in reducing opportunities for bribery, embezzlement, and abuse of power (Rose-Ackerman & Palifka, 2016). Our results also align with governance literature, which consistently emphasises the critical role of corruption control in fostering accountability and transparency (Handoyo & Fitriyah, 2018). Similarly, Mackey and Cuomo (2020) find that well-defined anti-corruption indicators can enhance transparency and accountability, thereby reducing opportunities for corrupt practices. Overall, these findings strongly validate Hypothesis 6 and underscore control of corruption as the most influential governance factor in reducing corruption across countries.

Table 9 Regression model for hypothesis 6

Unstandardised Coefficients			Standardised Coefficients		
Model 1	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	5.614	.021		267.485	<.001***
CC	-1.882	.022	-.943	-87.416	<.001***
GDP	-3.064e-14	.000	-.032	-2.925	.004***

Dependent Variable: CORRUPT, R=.948, R Square =.899, Adjusted R Square =.899, *, **, *** indicates significance at the 90%, 95%, and 99% level, respectively.

■ Conclusion

This study examines the relationship between key governance indicators and corruption levels across 44 Asian countries over the period 2000–2023. The findings provide consistent empirical evidence that governance quality plays a critical role in shaping corruption outcomes. Specifically, Voice and Accountability, Political Stability, Government Effectiveness, Regulatory Quality, Rule of Law, and Control of Corruption are each found to be negatively associated with corruption. These results highlight the importance of accountability mechanisms, institutional capacity, legal integrity, and citizen participation in limiting opportunities for corrupt practices and strengthening public trust. Among the governance dimensions examined, Control of Corruption, Government Effectiveness, and Rule of Law emerge as particularly influential, underscoring the central role of institutional enforcement and legal frameworks in anti-corruption efforts.

This study contributes to the literature by offering a comprehensive and region-specific analysis of governance and corruption in Asia, a region that remains underrepresented in large-scale governance research. By examining 44 Asian countries, the analysis provides comparative insights into how governance quality relates to corruption across diverse political and economic contexts. Empirically, the study identifies governance dimensions that appear most strongly associated with lower corruption, offering useful guidance for policy prioritisation. Practically, the findings suggest that sustained investment in institutional development, regulatory capacity, and legal enforcement can form the backbone of effective anti-corruption strategies across the region. At the same time, the findings should be interpreted in light of several important methodological limitations. First, although the data span multiple years, the study adopts a cross-sectional research design, which limits causal inference and precludes examination of within-country changes over time. Second, due to high multicollinearity among governance indicators, the empirical strategy relies on separate bivariate regression models. While this approach avoids unstable estimates, it results in models that are inherently underspecified. Consequently, the reported coefficients should be interpreted as isolated associations rather than fully conditional effects, and they may partially capture the influence of omitted, highly correlated governance dimensions. These limitations reflect the interconnected nature of governance institutions rather than weaknesses in data quality, but they nonetheless constrain the scope of inference.

These limitations also point to several avenues for future research. Subsequent studies could employ panel data techniques to explore dynamic relationships between governance reforms and corruption over time or use alternative modelling strategies to jointly estimate governance dimensions while addressing multicollinearity. Future work may also examine interaction effects among governance indicators to better capture their interdependence, or investigate how contextual factors such as political regimes, economic development, or cultural norms condition the effectiveness of governance in reducing corruption. In addition, qualitative case studies could complement cross-country analysis by providing deeper insight into how anti-corruption institutions operate in practice.



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