

STRUCTURAL EFFECTS OF CORRUPTION ON ECONOMIC GROWTH AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT: A REVIEW OF LITERATURE IN LATIN AMERICA

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the structural effects of corruption on Gross Domestic Product (GDP), public expenditure, investment, and social development through a focused literature review in the Latin American context. A systematic review methodology with an interpretive approach was employed, based on clearly defined selection criteria and using databases such as SciELO, Dialnet, and Scopus. A total of 23 relevant articles were identified, coded, and thematically classified. The findings reveal that corruption exerts a detrimental impact on economic growth by distorting resource allocation, undermining productive public investment, and weakening social protection systems. Additionally, it leads to institutional inefficiency, erodes public trust, and compromises oversight mechanisms for public spending. While empirical evidence varies across countries, there is a broad consensus that structural corruption acts as a constraint on sustainable development. The study concludes that addressing corruption effectively requires comprehensive reforms aimed at strengthening transparency, internal control systems, and citizen participation. Finally, it acknowledges limitations associated with the databases consulted and recommends broadening the comparative regional scope in future research.

Keywords: Corruption, gross domestic product, social development, public management.

1. Introduction

Corruption represents a critical threat to sustainable development, as it distorts the economy, weakens institutions, and negatively affects Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Its effects undermine the efficiency of public spending, exacerbate social inequalities, and reduce trust in the state. In this context, investigating mechanisms of control, transparency, and accountability becomes essential to strengthen governance, improve the investment climate, and ensure more equitable and effective development.

At the global level, corruption constitutes one of the main barriers to sustainable economic development, affecting public spending efficiency, investment attraction, and social equity. It is estimated that corruption causes annual losses exceeding USD 3.6 trillion, equivalent to 5% of global GDP (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2023a). Moreover, in countries with high levels of corruption, foreign direct investment decreases by an average of 23%, limiting job creation and access to advanced technologies (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2023b). These distortions especially affect emerging economies, where state capacity to control resource diversion tends to be limited or weak (World Economic Forum, 2020).

In Latin America, corruption is a structural phenomenon that hinders economic growth and widens social gaps. It is estimated that the region loses around USD 220 billion annually due to corrupt practices, equivalent to nearly 4% of regional GDP (Transparency International, 2022). Additionally, about 56% of Latin American citizens perceive that corruption has increased in the past five years, which negatively impacts institutional trust (Red Anticorrupción Latinoamericana, 2021). These losses diminish the quality of public spending, affect the provision of basic services, and limit the capacity of states to respond to social and economic crises (Fernand & Pastás, 2022).

In Peru, corruption has acquired a systemic character, with direct consequences for economic development, social cohesion, and institutional legitimacy. It is estimated that nearly 17 billion soles are lost annually due to acts of corruption, representing approximately 12% of the national public budget (Ministry of Economy and Finance of Peru, 2023). Moreover, 72% of the Peruvian population considers corruption the country's main problem, ranking above insecurity or unemployment (Zavaleta, 2023). This perception reflects an environment in which the allocation of public resources is distorted, affecting the quality of state services and reducing investment in key sectors such as health, education, and infrastructure (Palacios et al., 2022).

Corruption is a cross-cutting phenomenon that affects all countries, regardless of their level of development, and has a profoundly negative impact

on various dimensions of growth and well-being (Ministry of Economy and Finance of Peru, 2023). In the economic realm, corruption distorts resource allocation, diverting funds that could be invested in infrastructure, health, and education toward private interests. This limits human capital development and reduces the efficiency of public projects, directly affecting GDP (Palacios et al., 2022). Socially, corruption increases inequality by favoring a few at the expense of the majority, generating distrust in institutions and weakening social cohesion. Both foreign and domestic investment are affected, as investors prefer more transparent and predictable markets, which hinders job creation and economic development. Thus, corruption is a critical obstacle to sustainable and equitable national progress (Zavaleta, 2023).

This research is justified by the systemic impact of corruption, which affects economies across the development spectrum. This phenomenon poses a direct threat to economic growth by distorting markets, reducing the efficiency of public spending, and discouraging investment. It also generates fiscal losses and weakens competitiveness. Socially, corruption undermines institutional trust, exacerbates inequality, and restricts equitable access to basic services such as health, education, and infrastructure. Due to its structural nature, it is necessary to address it from a comprehensive perspective that allows for understanding its causes, dynamics, and impacts. This research seeks to contribute scientific evidence to inform the design of more transparent, effective, and socially oriented public policies within the framework of democratic governance. Accordingly, the research question is: What are the effects of corruption on gross domestic product, considering its links with investment, public spending, and social development in Latin American contexts? The main objective is to identify and analyze these effects in relation to economic performance and social sustainability in the region.

Unlike previous studies that address corruption from fragmented approaches or isolated variables, this literature review proposes an analytical integration that combines a structural-institutional perspective with a comparative territorial approach tailored to the Latin American context. This constitutes an original contribution, as it articulates macroeconomic effects (GDP, investment, public spending) with the social and institutional consequences of corruption, while also highlighting how these impacts vary depending on the level of institutional strength in each country and region. The study thus provides a multiscalar and multidimensional reading of the phenomenon, useful for designing more effective and context-specific public policies in settings marked by institutional vulnerability.

2. Theoretical Framework

The phenomenon of corruption has been analyzed from multiple disciplinary perspectives, with one of its most influential formulations found in the proposal of Robert Klitgaard, who introduced an explanatory equation linking institutional factors with individual behavior: “corruption = monopoly + discretion – accountability.” This formulation, developed in the context of administrative reforms in Latin America, Africa, and Asia, enabled an understanding of corruption not merely as an ethical or legal issue, but as a functional behavior incentivized by flawed institutional structures (Pinandito, 2022). From this perspective, corruption is predictable in environments where unchecked power, administrative discretion, and regulatory opacity converge (Pedersen, 2024).

Subsequent theoretical developments have expanded this approach to incorporate sociocultural, structural, and political elements. Authors such as Wrage and Birenbaum (2022) argue that corruption may become a systemic practice when institutions allow its reproduction and normalization. This view recognizes that corruption is not simply an exception but may constitute a normalized mode of interaction between public and private actors. Consequently, its mitigation cannot be limited to punitive mechanisms; it requires a reconfiguration of the institutional rules of the game.

At the organizational analysis level, forms of structural corruption have been identified in strategic sectors such as higher education. Pedersen (2024) outlines how academic clientelism, influence peddling, and the simulation of quality standards reflect corruption embedded in the daily functioning of institutions. These manifestations, either tolerated or rendered invisible, ultimately erode institutional capital and undermine the legitimacy of public organizations.

Within this framework, the link between corruption and public spending efficiency becomes central. Various studies have shown that corruption distorts resource allocation, generates cost overruns in state contracts, and reduces the effectiveness of public services. Hamadou and Karim (2024) assert that such distortions are particularly detrimental in contexts of institutional weakness, where spending oversight is limited. For their part, Malyniak et al. (2024) emphasize the need to develop analytical frameworks that assess expenditure efficiency from an ontological rather than merely accounting perspective.

Joksimović et al. (2023) examine the self-organization of public spending in Slovenia, showing that the absence of effective oversight perpetuates inefficient and corrupt dynamics, especially in sectors such as education, health, and infrastructure, where budgetary opacity generates

inequalities and undermines state legitimacy (Joksimović et al., 2023; Malyniak et al., 2024). From an economic perspective, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) reflects not only quantitative growth but also institutional stability and the effectiveness of public policies (Ogujiuba&Mngometulu, 2022). Pulka and Gawuna (2022) note that investment in infrastructure and education drives economic growth, but only in contexts with low levels of corruption. Aguilar-Rivera (2021) emphasizes that such investment requires legal predictability and effective governance; otherwise, corruption hampers productivity and innovation. Palacios et al. (2022) warn that the misuse of public resources erodes state legitimacy, and Zavaleta (2023) argues that in Peru, corruption constitutes a structural barrier to human development. Thus, corruption must be understood as a multidimensional phenomenon with far-reaching macroeconomic, social, and institutional effects.

3. Methodology

This study was conducted through a scientific literature review aimed at identifying, analyzing, and synthesizing the current state of knowledge on the effects of corruption on gross domestic product, public investment, and social development. This methodology allows for the establishment of thematic patterns, conceptual gaps, and documented causal relationships from previous research, ensuring the traceability and replicability of the analytical process. Searches were performed in the Scopus, SciELO, and Dialnet databases, selected for their Latin American regional coverage and their inclusion of relevant studies in social sciences, economics, and governance.

Controlled terms and Boolean operators were used to refine the results. The following search combinations were employed:

- “corrupción” AND “producto interno bruto” AND “desarrollo social”
- “corrupción” OR “producto interno bruto” OR “desarrollo social”
- “corrupción” AND “producto interno bruto” AND (“desarrollo social”)
- “producto interno bruto” AND “desarrollo social” AND (“corrupción”)
- “producto interno bruto” AND (“corrupción” OR “desarrollo social”)

These strings were adapted to the search engine of each database to ensure precision and comprehensiveness in information retrieval.

The following inclusion criteria were established:

- Articles published between 2021 and 2025.
- Empirical studies of a quantitative, qualitative, or mixed nature, as well as previous systematic reviews related to the topic.
- Publications explicitly addressing the effects of corruption on gross domestic product, investment, or social development.

Exclusion Criteria:

- Letters to the editor, conference proceedings, book chapters, and narrative reviews.
- Articles without full-text access.
- Studies that did not offer an original contribution or did not focus their analysis on the direct relationship between corruption and economic/social performance.

The initial search yielded a total of 348 scientific articles, compiled from three databases: SciELO, Dialnet, and Scopus. After removing 89 duplicate records, 259 unique articles were evaluated. Through a preliminary review of titles, abstracts, and keywords, a thematic screening process was applied to determine the relevance of each study. As a result, 71 studies were selected for full-text reading, of which 23 met all established methodological criteria.

This literature review focused on relevant research concerning the links between corruption, gross domestic product, social development, and public management. Although Scopus was included for its global scope, priority was given to articles from Scopus, SciELO, and Dialnet due to their emphasis on Spanish-language, open-access publications with a Latin American regional focus. This strategy aligns with the aim of the review: to analyze the effects of corruption on economic growth and social development within the sociopolitical contexts specific to Latin America. While databases such as Scopus offer greater international visibility, their content often centers on Anglophone or developed-country contexts, which may limit the contextual representativeness of the phenomenon under study. In contrast, a significant portion of the academic production on governance and public policy in Latin America is published in journals indexed mainly in regional databases.

The review process included manual thematic coding, through which recurring themes were identified, such as: corruption and investment, corruption and public spending, and corruption and social development. A thematic approach and a comparative criterion were adopted with the purpose of constructing a structured knowledge map of a problem highly relevant to economic development and democratic governance in Latin America.

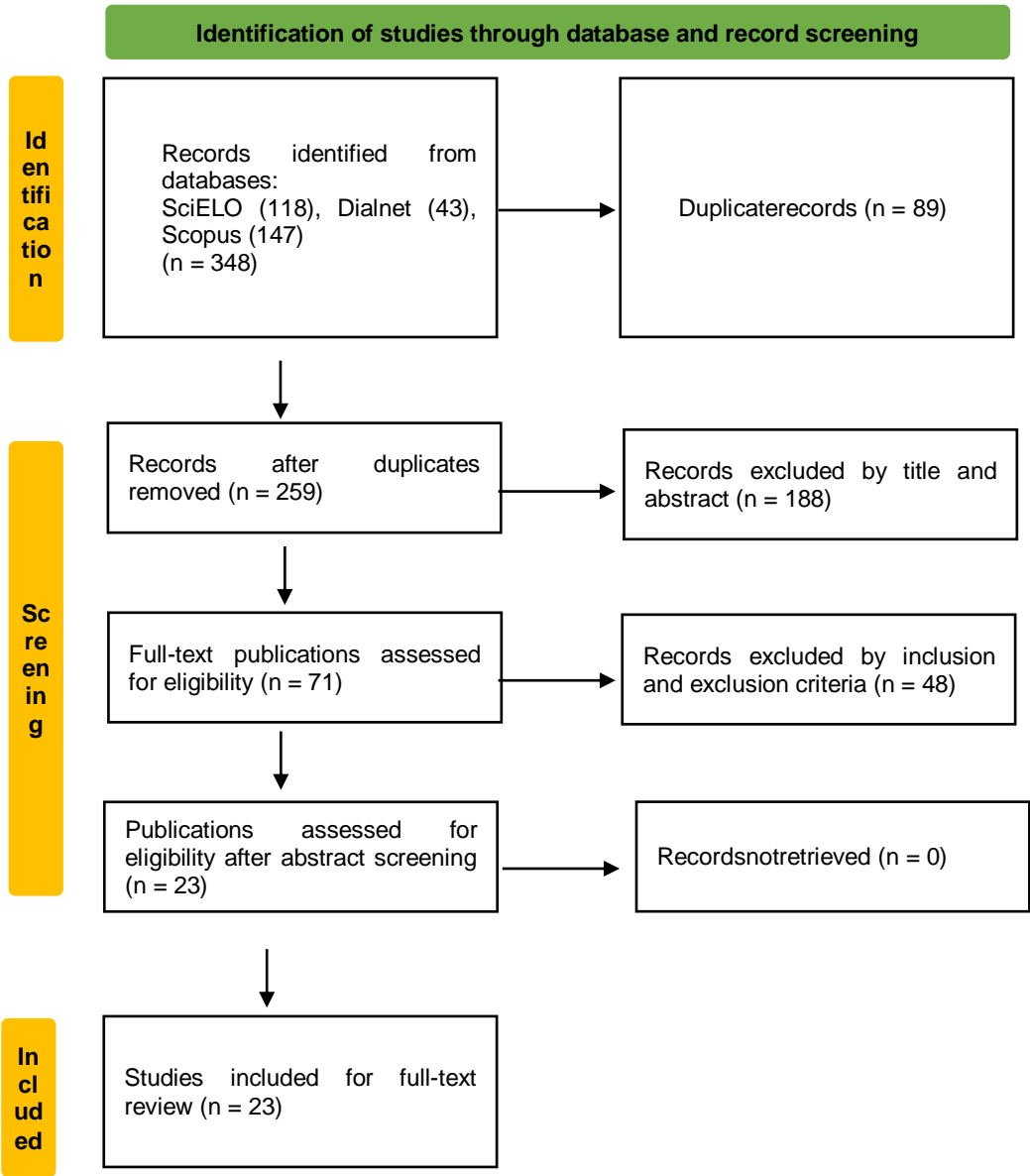


Figure 1. Flowchart of the identification, selection, and analysis process of scientific articles included in the review

After applying the selection criteria, 23 full-text publications were selected for systematic analysis, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Characteristics of the reviewed studies

N ^o	Author	Article Title	Methodology	Country	Year	Database
1	Zavaleta (2023)	Corruption in Public Administration and its Impact on Political, Economic, and Social Development in the Peruvian Context	Mixta	Peru	2023	Scielo
2	Acosta et al. (2024)	Corruption and its Impact on Latin American Governance: A Systematic Review	Revisión sistemática	Latin America (includes studies from Ecuador)	2024	Scielo
3	Algalobo & Espinoza (2025)	Corruption and its Relationship with Extreme Poverty Rates in Peru	Cuantitativa	Peru	2025	Scielo
4	Araujo (2022)	Changing the Mindset to Combat Political Corruption	Cualitativa	Peru	2022	Scopus

5	Pino et al. (2021)	Large-Scale Corruption Not Typified in the Colombian Legal Framework	Cualitativa	Colombia	2021	Scielo
6	Valdivia & Bautista (2025)	Corruption in Government Contracts and its Impact on the Violation of the Right to Education in Peru	Revisión sistemática	Peru	2025	Scielo
7	Florián et al. (2023)	Corruption of Officials and Abuse of Preventive Detention in the Justice System, Trujillo, Peru	Cuantitativa	Peru	2023	Scielo
8	Vega et al. (2023)	Corruption among Judicial Operators and Effective Justice in the District of Chimbote, Peru	Cuantitativa	Peru	2023	Scielo
9	Riveros (2022)	Corruption and Social Capital: Relational Explorations, Opposing	Cualitativa	Latin America	2022	Scielo

		Cases, and the Bolivian Context				
1 0	Erazo (2024)	Organized Criminal Groups and Corruption in the Era of Microtraffick ing	Mixta	Colom bia	202 4	Scielo
1 1	Cuevas & Jaime (2021)	Corruption Control, Human Capital, and Economic Growth: A Dynamic Panel Data Model	Cuantitativa	Latin Ameri ca	202 1	Scielo
1 2	Desfrancois & Pastás (2022)	Corruption and Economic Growth in Latin America and the Caribbean	Cuantitativa	19 Latin Ameri can and Caribb ean countri es	202 2	Scielo
1 3	Fairbrother (2016)	Trust in Institutions and Support for Environment al Policies: Evidence from Comparative Data	Cuantitativa	18 Latin Ameri can countri es	202 1	Scielo
1	Rivera et al. (2023)	Impact of	Cuantitativa	OECD	202	Dialne

4		Corruption on GDP		countri es	2	t
15	Santos et al. (2024)	The Impact of Corruption on Society and the Economy of Public Administration in Ecuador	Cuantitativa	Ecuador	2024	Dialnet
16	Diago et al. (2024)	Corruption and its Relationship with Economic Growth in Popayán	Cuantitativa	Colombia	2024	Dialnet
17	Viviano & Cárdenas (2024)	Corruption of Public Officials and the Economic Harm to the State	Cualitativa	Peru	2024	Dialnet
18	Dávila et al. (2021)	Transparency and Social Oversight in Public Procurement in Ecuador	Cualitativa	Ecuador	2021	Scopus
19	Gutiérrez-Romero et al. (2024)	Youth Tolerance Toward Corruption: Exploring the Influence of Monetary	Cuantitativa	Colombia	2024	Scopus

		Inequity Sensitivity and Sociodemogr aphic Factors				
2 0	Trejo (2021)	Corruption: Understandin g the Multifaceted Concept from Different Approaches. A Review of Mexico's Anti- Corruption Policy, 2012–2021	Revisión sistemática	Mexic o	202 1	Scopu s
2 1	Yuhui (2021)	The Cancer of Corruption in Latin America: The Odebrecht Case	Cualitativa	Brazil	202 1	Scopu s
2 2	Martínez-Hernández (2024)	The Effects of the Consolidatio n of Corruption on Public Policies and Types of Subnational Systems in Mexico	Cuantitativa	Mexic o	202 4	Scopu s

2	Ramírez et al. (2021)	Sextortion as	Cualitativa	Mexic	202	Scopu
3		a New Form of Corruption in Public Service				

4. Results and Discussion

According to the literature review conducted, the following theme is addressed: the effects of corruption on Gross Domestic Product.

Table 2
Contributions of the analyzed scientific articles

Authors	Article Objective	Methodology/Technique	Article Results	Article Conclusions
Zavaleta (2023)	Analyze corruption in public administration and its impact on political, economic, and social development in Peru. Identify how it affects political management, the economy, and social cohesion.	Documentary, qualitative review based on a systematic literature review and analysis of studies related to corruption in public administration.	It mentions a severe impact on economic development, affecting fiscal revenues, investment, and productivity, without specific data on GDP, growth, social indicators, or resource allocation. It focuses on economic destabilization and loss of	Corruption in Peru has had a negative impact on political, economic, and social development, generating distrust in institutions, inequality, poverty, and a deterioration of governance and growth.

		institutional trust.	
Acosta et al. (2024)	Analyze the relationship between corruption and governance in Latin America, focusing on institutional quality and public trust.	Systematic, qualitative, and descriptive review. Analysis of 20 articles from 2007–2024 using databases such as Scielo and Scopus.	It is stated that corruption negatively impacts governance, institutional effectiveness, and resource distribution. Corruption hinders governance and institutional strengthening in Latin America. Institutional reforms are required to improve transparency and reduce corruption.
Algalobo & Espinoza (2025)	Analyze the relationship between corruption and extreme poverty in Peru, including its impact on economic growth and public management.	Quantitative, descriptive, and relational. Statistical analysis using ordinary least squares regression, with data from the last 30 years.	Econometric and correlation analysis was applied, without detailing numerical results on GDP or indicators. It concludes that corruption negatively affects economic development and public management. Corruption in Peru is endemic, generating distrust, weakening the justice system, and harming the most vulnerable. Without effective countermeasures, it will continue to increase.

Araujo (2022)	Philosophically reflect on political corruption and propose effective strategies to combat it, highlighting the need to change the mindset about power.	Documentary review of books and journals from the last five years, including contributions from contemporary philosophers and cognitive neuroscience.	A conceptual and philosophical approach to beliefs about power and corruption.	Political corruption is a mindset. Combating it requires changing the belief that power inherently leads to corruption.
Pino et al. (2021)	Describe corruption as a social phenomenon in state-private relations, analyzing possible scenarios based on criminal classification in the Colombian legal framework.	Qualitative approach based on the construction of legal scenarios and analysis of corruption-related crimes.	It is noted that many corrupt acts are not criminalized, which affects economic and social stability.	There is a distinction between real cases of corruption and legal responses. Specific legal classification is proposed, along with analysis of its impact on democratic institutions.
Valdivia & Bautista (2025)	Analyze corruption in government procurement and its impact on the right to education in Peru, exploring public	Qualitative, systematic review of scientific sources using the PRISMA 2020 model.	It is mentioned that in 2022, only 3.8% of Latin America's GDP was allocated to education. Corruption	It is essential to strengthen internal controls to prevent corruption in public procurement, protect the right to

	spending, internal control, and public management.	affects resource allocation and economic development . No additional numerical data are provided.	education, and promote development.
Florián et al. (2023)	Legally analyze the corruption of public officials and the abuse of preventive detention in the justice system in Trujillo.	Quantitative, based on documentary review of texts, doctrines, regulations, and theses.	A moderate relationship between preventive abuse of detention and criminal doctrine in corruption cases is confirmed. Legal analysis is emphasized to better understand the judicial system.
Vega et al. (2023)	Legally analyze corruption among judicial operators and the perception of effective justice in Chimbote, Peru.	Quantitative approach, documentary-bibliographic typology, surveys.	There is a significant perception of corruption and dissatisfaction with the justice system. Judicial integrity and public perception must be

			justice: improved. 41.5% rate it very good, 34.4% fair, and 23.6% poor. A negative perception predominate s.
Riveros (2022)	Analyze the relationship between corruption and social capital, its conceptualizati on, measurement, trends, and links to economic development.	Documentary review and comparative descriptive analysis.	Countries positive with high relationship social capital between social tend to have capital and lower lower perceptions corruption of corruption levels; further and greater studies are economic needed to development establish . No clear causality and causality is understand established. conditioning factors.
Erazo (2024)	Analyze how corruption affects the effectiveness of operations against microtraffickin g and its impact on public policy.	Mixed approach: surveys, interviews, focus groups, and logistic regression models.	It is stated that corruption reduces institutional and public service quality, affecting policy implementati on. Corruption enables state capture, resource misappropriati on, and reduces the effectiveness of public policies. Regional measures are required.

Cuevas & Jaime (2021)	Evaluate the effect of corruption control, human capital, and other variables on GDP per capita in 15 countries (including Mexico) between 2002 and 2017.	Quantitative. Dynamic panel data model.	Corruption control has positive or neutral effects. Human capital, institutions, and physical capital are key to growth.	Fighting corruption must go hand in hand with institutional improvements. Investment in education, innovation, and physical capital is essential.
Desfrancois & Pastás (2022)	Estimate the economic impact of corruption in Latin America, evaluating channels such as investment, human capital, and institutions.	Quantitative. Panel data. Regression models with fixed effects and Hausman test (1998–2018).	Corruption has a negative effect on GDP growth. 49% of the total effect is direct; 45% through investment; it also affects human capital and institutions.	Corruption hinders economic development. Institutional reforms and strong anti-corruption policies are recommended.
Fairbrother (2016)	Analyze how experiences with corruption (bribery) affect environmental priorities in Latin America and the mediating role	Quantitative. LAPOP 2016 surveys, ordinal logistic regression, structural equations.	Bribery reduces public prioritization of the environment, mediated by low interpersonal trust. GDP	Corruption reduces citizens' environmental concern and negatively affects interpersonal trust. The study

	of interpersonal trust.		or social indicators are not analyzed.	contributes to understanding institutional effects on ecological attitudes.
Rivera et al. (2023)	Analizar la relación entre corrupción y crecimiento económico en países OCDE en 2022, mediante el Índice de Percepción de la Corrupción y el PIB per cápita.	Cuantitativa, diseño no experimental, alcance descriptivo y correlacional, con datos secundarios de Transparencia Internacional, Banco Mundial y OCDE.	Relación significativa entre percepción de corrupción y PIB per cápita. Menor corrupción se asocia con mejor crecimiento económico. Afecta negativamente el desarrollo y genera incertidumbre.	Existe relación negativa entre corrupción y crecimiento económico. Reducir corrupción promueve desarrollo económico.
Santos et al. (2024)	Analizar los efectos de la corrupción en indicadores macroeconómicos clave en Ecuador (2010-2022).	Revisión documental con análisis cuantitativo, diseño transversal y descriptivo.	Corrupción genera desconfianza, baja inversión extranjera, afecta educación, salud, empleo. Relación inversa con	Corrupción debilita estabilidad social y económica, erosiona confianza institucional. Se necesitan políticas efectivas y más

			PIB. Casos transparencia. como Odebrecht ejemplifican mal manejo público.
Diago et al. (2024)	Analizar la relación entre corrupción y crecimiento económico en Popayán (2018-2021), considerando percepción de corrupción, gobernabilidad y políticas públicas.	Descriptiva, explicativa, cuantitativa, basada en revisión documental y análisis de datos.	Relación compleja: a corto plazo corrupción puede influir en desarrollo económico y gobernabilidad. Se requiere fortalecer instituciones para mejorar resultados económicos y sociales.
Viviano & Cárdenas (2024)	Explorar la corrupción de funcionarios públicos y su impacto económico en el Estado, mediante revisión de 25 investigaciones clave.	Revisión documental.	Corrupción reduce inversión, desacelera crecimiento, empeora desigualdad y pobreza, distorsiona recursos y calidad de servicios públicos.
Dávila et al. (2021)	Realizar un análisis jurídico con referencia a la	Metodología cualitativa mediante revisión bibliográfica	La corrupción en la contratación pública

	contratación pública en Ecuador torno a la emergencia sanitaria derivada del Covid-19, enfocándose en la transparencia y control social.	interpretación en hermenéutica de la normativa jurídica ecuatoriana relacionada con la contratación pública, considerando aspectos legales y principios internacionales.	pública durante la pandemia están marcados por corrupción que vulnera la transparencia y afecta la rendición de cuentas. Se requiere fortalecer mecanismos de control y fomentar la participación ciudadana para garantizar la transparencia.
Gutiérrez -Romero et al. (2024)	Explorar la relación entre tolerancia a la corrupción, sensibilidad a la inequidad monetaria y variables sociodemográficas en jóvenes colombianos.	Cuantitativa experimental; dos tareas experimentales: tarea de corrupción (CT) y tarea de sensibilidad a diferencias recompensas monetarias (MR); muestra de 220 estudiantes entre 15 y 23 años.	Mayor aversión a la inequidad monetaria se asocia con menor tolerancia a la corrupción. La sensibilidad a la inequidad es clave para moderar la tolerancia a la corrupción. Factores sociodemográficos y sesgos sociales también influyen. Limitaciones: muestra no representativa y falta de enfoque en

			herramienta experimental nueva.	género binario.	no
Trejo (2021)	Aportar a la comprensión del fenómeno de la corrupción desde enfoques analíticos (económico, politológico y sociológico), y reflexionar sobre su impacto en las políticas anticorrupción .	Revisión teórica y documental; sin análisis cuantitativos/cualitativos directos; análisis conceptual.	Muestra que la corrupción afecta negativamente la organización y valores públicos; la política anticorrupción debe considerar múltiples enfoques para ser efectiva.	La corrupción es multifacética. Las políticas deben alinearse con el enfoque particular del fenómeno para tener éxito. Reformas mal alineadas pueden debilitar capacidades institucionales.	
Yuhui (2021)	Determinar causas y consecuencias de la corrupción en el caso Odebrecht sobre la inestabilidad política en América Latina en los últimos 15 años.	Investigación bibliográfica documental cualitativa con la revisión de fuentes oficiales, periodísticas y especializadas.	La corrupción de Odebrecht debilitó instituciones y legitimidad democrática en América Latina, afectando el desarrollo económico y político regional.	La corrupción estructurada ha provocado rechazo institucional. Urge el fortalecimiento institucional para frenar sus efectos. Investigación futura necesaria por la magnitud del caso.	
Martínez - Hernánd	Determinar los efectos de la corrupción en	Cuantitativa; modelos estadísticos y análisis factorial	La corrupción deteriora la	La corrupción consolidada afecta	

ez (2024)		las políticas multivariante; base calidad de negativamente públicas de datos CCFDB de las políticas la calidad municipales en 255 municipios; públicas. política local. México y enfoque Existen Se necesita caracterizarla comparativo. excepciones análisis en relación donde ampliado, con su calidad. corrupción metodologías coincide con mixtas y calidad estudios sobre aceptable, lo redes de que indica corrupción. complejidad del fenómeno.
Ramírez et al. (2021)	Exponer una forma de sextorsión en el servicio público basada en abuso de poder para obtener favores sexuales, no solo difusión de material íntimo, y así facilitar políticas públicas.	Revisión bibliográfica documental cualitativa de fuentes como Transparencia Internacional, IAWJ, artículos científicos. La sextorsión es una forma de corrupción con efectos graves, principalmente sobre mujeres, violando derechos y dificultando acceso a servicios públicos. La sextorsión es una corrupción con enfoque de género, poco visible y subdetectada. Se requieren políticas específicas para su prevención y sanción.

4.1 Corruption and Economic Growth: Systemic Effects and Structural Contradictions

Multiple studies have confirmed that corruption represents a structural obstacle to economic growth. In OECD countries, a correlation has been observed between low levels of corruption and higher per capita GDP, highlighting the role of transparency and institutional integrity (Rivera et al., 2023). In Latin America, although this relationship is more complex, corruption affects growth mainly through investment, which accounts for approximately

45% of the total impact (Desfrancois& Pastás, 2022). In local cases such as Popayán (Colombia), corruption distorts institutional functioning and limits sustained development by weakening state capacities (Diago et al., 2024).

While some forms of corruption may appear efficient in the short term, they produce negative effects in the medium term (Kaufmann & Vicente, 2011; Méndez & Sepúlveda, 2019). In countries that have achieved sustained improvements in per capita GDP, effective control mechanisms have been implemented, such as digital traceability systems and autonomous oversight bodies (Rivera et al., 2023). Corruption also undermines innovation and productivity by reducing investment returns and discouraging economic initiatives (Araujo, 2022; Desfrancois& Pastás, 2022). This vicious cycle erodes public trust and restricts long-term investment (Fairbrother, 2016; Zavaleta, 2023).

4.2 Institutional Distrust and Governance Weakening: Social Effects and Institutional Dilemmas

One of the most persistent consequences of corruption is the progressive loss of public trust in state institutions, which weakens democratic governance. Santos et al. (2024) document how the lack of transparency in resource management during the pandemic in Ecuador led to a legitimacy crisis and public perception of institutional capture. This phenomenon is not isolated: in Latin America, corruption in public procurement generates a pattern of institutional credibility erosion (Valdivia & Bautista, 2025).

In Peru, distrust particularly affects the judicial system, perceived as biased and ineffective, thus limiting its operational capacity (Vega-Medina et al., 2023). This situation fuels a “foundational governance crisis” (Przeworski, 2019), where the bond between the state and its citizens begins to fracture. Moreover, distrust has cumulative effects on citizen participation and the effectiveness of public policy. In Ecuador, the discrediting of political parties has led to abstentionism and the election of populist options (Santos et al., 2024); in Peru, corruption in the education sector reinforces the perception of state inefficacy (Valdivia & Bautista, 2025).

The impact also compromises the operational capacity of the state. In Ecuador, the lack of transparency weakened crisis response mechanisms (Santos et al., 2024); in Peru, irregular processes in educational hiring have decreased spending efficiency and heightened the sense of social exclusion (Valdivia & Bautista, 2025). This situation also affects social cohesion and perceptions of justice. According to Vega-Medina et al. (2023), many citizens have ceased to turn to the judicial system, and in Ecuador the crisis of institutional representation has deepened (Santos et al., 2024).

In sum, without the recovery of institutional trust, both Ecuador and Peru face serious challenges in formulating sustainable public policies. Corruption in public procurement distorts the social purpose of spending and undermines the perception of justice (Valdivia & Bautista, 2025; Vega-Medina et al., 2023).

4.3 Corruption, Investment, and Human Capital: Breakdowns in Sustainable Development

Corruption is one of the main factors explaining economic stagnation in countries with low institutional quality, particularly due to its inhibitory effects on investment and human capital. Cuevas and Jaime (2021) emphasize that controlling corruption has a direct and positive impact on per capita GDP growth by improving the structural conditions necessary for human capital development. Complementarily, Desfrancois and Pastás (2022) estimate that around 45% of the negative effect of corruption in Latin America manifests through investment, both private—affected by risk perception and bribery—and public—distorted by state capture mechanisms.

In the Peruvian context, Viviano and Cárdenas (2024) note that corruption reduces the efficiency of public spending in sectors such as education and health, restricting access to essential services. Corruption also generates indirect effects on productivity and future income by discouraging skill accumulation among vulnerable groups (Cuevas & Jaime, 2021). On the private side, regulatory opacity hinders business expansion and deters foreign investment (Desfrancois & Pastás, 2022).

In the public sector, corruption prevents improvements in educational infrastructure, particularly in Andean and Amazonian regions, perpetuating structural inequalities (Viviano & Cárdenas, 2024). In addition, institutional distrust reduces investment in science, technology, and innovation, and promotes brain drain, weakening the country's strategic capacities (Cuevas & Jaime, 2021). Regional models confirm that corruption control is associated with higher educational performance and productivity, while its persistence erodes both physical and human capital. A key finding is that countries with sustained investment in health and education exhibit lower levels of corruption, suggesting a virtuous relationship between human development and institutional strengthening (Cuevas & Jaime, 2021).

4.4 Corruption and Social Rights

Corruption in services such as health, education, and security represents one of the most visible forms of institutional capture, undermining the provision of basic rights. In Ecuador, during the pandemic, the diversion of funds and irregular procurement led to the collapse of public hospitals, exposing the

fragility of the healthcare system in the face of corrupt networks (Santos et al., 2024). In Peru, Valdivia and Bautista (2025) show how corrupt contracting practices reduce the efficiency of educational spending, deepen historical inequalities, and foster a perception of state abandonment.

In the area of security, Erazo (2024) warns that corruption within police institutions has limited the State's capacity to combat drug trafficking and organized crime, creating zones of functional impunity. These practices compromise both the coverage and quality of services by distorting resource allocation and weakening public infrastructure. In the health sector, scandals involving inflated supply prices in Ecuador and low budget execution in Peru have shown how corruption undermines the state's response capacity (Santos et al., 2024; Valdivia & Bautista, 2025).

A critical phenomenon is the creation of "parallel systems" in which access to services depends on bribes or clientelist ties, systematically excluding the most vulnerable sectors. In Peru, irregular allocation of teaching posts has exacerbated inequalities, especially in rural and Amazonian regions (Valdivia & Bautista, 2025). This is compounded by the absence of effective citizen oversight. In Ecuador, Santos et al. (2024) report how auditing failures enabled the illicit enrichment of hospital system officials. In Peru, corruption in educational procurement has led to cost overruns and disrupted service continuity (Valdivia & Bautista, 2025). Erazo (2024) notes that criminal infiltration in the police has weakened the effectiveness of urban security policies.

These processes have triggered citizen disaffection and social protest. In Ecuador, this translated into mass political rejection (Santos et al., 2024); in Peru, the perception of state ineffectiveness has led to the normalization of informal arrangements and extralegal justice (Erazo, 2024). This degradation of social rights—turned into tradable goods—erodes full citizenship. The deterioration of public education in Peru perpetuates intergenerational inequality (Valdivia & Bautista, 2025), while the lack of coordination in security and justice policies hampers state responses to illicit economies (Erazo, 2024).

In sum, corruption not only harms the financial integrity of the State but also violates the real exercise of social rights. Further studies are needed to measure its impact on service quality and to strengthen citizen oversight mechanisms with territorial focus, particularly in historically excluded sectors.

4.5 Corruption and Public Policy: Loss of Coherence, Operability, and Legitimacy

Specialized literature has shown that corruption distorts the public policy cycle in its phases of design, implementation, evaluation, and institutionalization, compromising both the operational effectiveness of the State and its legitimacy. In the field of citizen security, Erazo (2024) demonstrates that the infiltration of corrupt networks prevents the development of sustained strategies against urban drug trafficking, resulting in fragmented and manipulable state action. The study of Popayán (Colombia) by Diago et al. (2024) reveals how corruption in local governments limits the implementation of social and economic programs, particularly in contexts of low institutional capacity. The lack of transparency in resource allocation generates regulatory uncertainty and disrupts the continuity of public interventions. In the justice system, Florián-Tacanga et al. (2023) document that the discretionary application of pretrial detention in Trujillo (Peru) reflects an ideologically driven use of the penal system, weakening legal coherence and violating fundamental rights.

Furthermore, citizen perception is affected: corruption undermines the credibility of public policies and fuels social skepticism. Erazo (2024) warns that distrust reduces citizen cooperation in the fight against organized crime. Diago et al. (2024) and Florián-Tacanga et al. (2023) agree that institutional capture negatively conditions the design and legitimacy of public policies, affecting both their implementation and their social acceptance.

4.6 Structural and Institutional Reforms: A Necessary Condition to Reverse Systemic Corruption

The persistence of corruption as a structural phenomenon has called into question the sufficiency of current legal frameworks. Specialized literature warns that traditional responses—focused on individual criminal sanctions—are insufficient to address the complex dynamics of institutionalized corruption. Riveros (2022) argues that strong social capital can reduce the perception of corruption, but only if institutions are capable of channeling that civic cohesion into sustained governance processes. Without that synergy, even dense social networks lose transformative capacity.

Fairbrother (2016) reinforces this idea by noting that the impunity of repeated corrupt acts erodes interpersonal trust and weakens collective action, generating civic apathy. From a legal perspective, Pino et al. (2021) argue that Latin American criminal justice systems do not adequately address systemic forms of corruption, which prevents the prosecution of organized networks within the State.

Riveros (2022) emphasizes that in regions with low social capital, such as many areas of Peru, the absence of citizen oversight mechanisms facilitates the misuse of public resources. Likewise, Fairbrother (2016) shows that widespread perception of corruption undermines public support for necessary policies, such as environmental measures. In Colombia and Peru, according to Pino et al. (2021), the lack of appropriate legal definitions limits judicial response to phenomena such as collusion between public entities and corporations.

The literature converges in recognizing that a punitive approach is insufficient. Riveros (2022) and Fairbrother (2016) stress the need for preventive strategies based on active transparency, civil service professionalization, and civic monitoring. Without structural reforms, corrupt elites will continue to capture the State, blocking the sustainability of any anti-corruption policy. Pino et al. (2021) recommend expanding legal doctrine to incorporate complex practices such as the manipulation of control systems. If the institutional framework is not reconfigured, anti-corruption efforts will remain fragmented and vulnerable to reversal.

4.7 Structural Corruption and Social Equity: Distortions in Collective Well-Being

Structural corruption in Latin America generates profound distortions in social equity, affecting collective well-being through institutional erosion and the normalization of unjust practices. Various findings have shown that greater aversion to monetary inequality is associated with lower tolerance toward corruption, suggesting that perceptions of economic justice directly influence social attitudes toward corrupt acts (Gutiérrez-Romero et al., 2024). Moreover, evidence gathered in Ecuador indicates that corruption in public procurement during the health emergency deteriorated state efficiency and widened social inequalities (Dávila et al., 2021). From a conceptual perspective, Trejo (2021), in analyzing organizational and sociological approaches, argues that corruption undermines public values and limits effective collective action. Similarly, Yuhui (2021), in studying the Odebrecht case, contends that structured corruption has weakened democratic legitimacy and eroded the institutional foundations of sustainable development.

At subnational levels, the consequences are equally severe, as the consolidation of corrupt networks negatively impacts the quality of municipal public policies, limiting their capacity to generate distributive equity (Martínez, 2024). Additionally, recent research on sextortion in the Mexican public sector reveals that the abuse of power for sexual purposes deepens gender inequalities, turning access to rights into a coercive practice (Ramírez et al., 2021).

Complementarily, Yuhui (2021) maintains that the normalization of such forms of corruption creates an institutional parallelism that degrades public service. Likewise, Martínez (2024) highlights that variations in local institutional conditions partly explain why some structures manage to contain corruption while others perpetuate it.

Therefore, it is essential to articulate a comprehensive vision of the phenomenon that incorporates structural, normative, and cultural approaches. In this regard, Trejo (2021) argues that designing effective anti-corruption strategies requires acknowledging the multidimensional complexity of the problem and its differentiated manifestations. Additionally, the lack of transparency and citizen participation documented in the Ecuadorian case illustrates how corruption weakens the state's capacity to respond with justice and equity (Dávila et al., 2021). Likewise, Gutiérrez-Romero et al. (2024) emphasize that attitudes toward corruption are mediated by sociodemographic factors and perceptions of inequality, which reinforces the need to incorporate social variables into the design of public policies.

4.8 Comparative Estimation of the Economic Impact of Corruption in Latin America

Table 3
Economic impact of corruption in latinamerica

Country	Estimated Losses Due to Corruption	Annual to	% of Affected	GDP	Most Affected Sectors
Peru	17 billion (approx. billion)	soles 4.5 USD	12% of national budget	the public	Education, infrastructure, justice
Mexico	Approx. USD 9 billion (OECD, 2022)		5% of GDP		Public procurement, health, security
Brazil	USD 27 billion (estimated Lava Jato case)		1.5–2.3% of GDP		Public works, energy, construction
Colombia	Approx. USD 7.5 billion (2021)		1.9% of GDP		Health, justice, security
Ecuador	USD 2.5 billion (public procurement)		2–3% of GDP		Public health, education, social programs

Argentina	Approx. USD 6 billion (2020 estimate)	2% of GDP	Transport, energy, justice
Bolivia	No official consolidated figure	1.5–2% of GDP (estimated)	Road infrastructure, health
Chile	~USD 2 billion (isolated large-scale cases)	1% of GDP	Pensions, public acquisitions
Latin America (average)	USD 220 billion total (Transparency International, 2022)	4% of regional GDP	Public services, public investment

The comparative estimation of economic losses attributable to corruption in Latin America highlights the structural magnitude of the phenomenon and its ability to erode the fiscal and social foundations of States. As shown in the table, countries such as Peru, Mexico, and Brazil face annual losses ranging between 2% and 12% of their public budgets or GDP, directly affecting the state’s capacity to invest in key sectors such as health, education, infrastructure, and justice.

These percentages, although variable depending on each country’s context and institutional capacity, reflect a common pattern: corruption not only distorts resource allocation but also fuels vicious cycles of inequality, citizen distrust, and institutional fragility. In countries such as Ecuador and Colombia, empirical evidence points to a direct impact on public procurement systems, resulting in cost overruns, low execution, and limited coverage of essential services.

Furthermore, the correlation between corruption and vulnerable sectors reveals a negative distributive bias, where the most affected groups are precisely those who depend most on an efficient and transparent state. The loss of institutional legitimacy, combined with the weakening of human capital and the stagnation of productive investment, constitutes a critical obstacle to sustainable development in the region. In this context, standardizing data on the economic impact of corruption is essential not only for monitoring public policies but also for developing regulatory frameworks that are more sensitive to the socioeconomic context of each country. The presented table underscores the urgency of integrating preventive and structural approaches into anti-corruption strategies, as well as implementing financial traceability mechanisms that reduce institutional opacity and discretion.

5. Conclusions

This study has demonstrated that corruption is neither an isolated phenomenon nor exclusively individual in nature, but a structural dynamic that undermines economic development, democratic legitimacy, and the effectiveness of public policies in Latin America, particularly in the Peruvian context. The reviewed evidence indicates that corruption acts as a direct inhibitor of economic growth by distorting investment incentives, creating legal uncertainty, and reducing the expected return on productive projects. Although some contexts have tolerated corrupt practices in the short term for their perceived functionality, the literature concludes that these ultimately erode the institutional foundations necessary for long-term sustainability.

One of the most persistent effects is the progressive loss of citizen trust in institutions, which weakens social cohesion, civic participation, and the State's capacity to implement reforms. The experiences analyzed in Ecuador and Peru show that perceptions of impunity and institutional capture generate political disaffection, undermine state credibility, and obstruct the formulation of effective policies. This loss of legitimacy affects not only the symbolic dimension but also the actual implementation of programs and services.

Corruption also deteriorates investment in human capital, negatively impacting educational quality, incentives for innovation, and social mobility. In Peru, documented cases in the public procurement system—especially in the education sector—show how corruption deepens structural inequalities and limits development opportunities, particularly in regions with high vulnerability. Without transparent and accountable institutions, it is unfeasible to sustain a long-term public or private investment strategy.

In the realm of essential public services, corruption has direct consequences on fundamental rights such as health, education, and citizen security. Evidence shows the existence of parallel systems in which access depends on bribes or clientelist networks, reinforcing social exclusion and weakening the principles of equity and justice. This institutional deterioration fosters the consolidation of structural gaps and a social narrative of injustice that further erodes the social contract.

From a normative and institutional perspective, the findings of this study highlight the insufficiency of current legal frameworks to address complex and organized forms of corruption. Existing criminal legislation, focused on individual offenses, does not adequately respond to networks of state capture operating across multiple levels of the public apparatus. The absence of legal doctrines addressing structural corruption limits the judicial system's ability to dismantle institutionalized illicit power structures.

Based on these findings, the following recommendations are proposed to advance a comprehensive and sustained anti-corruption agenda:

1. **Develop differentiated legal frameworks** that include the criminal classification of structural corruption, illicit inter-institutional collusion, and manipulation of control systems. This requires redefining traditional legal approaches and strengthening institutional capacities to address complex crimes.
2. **Implement multidimensional indicators** to measure the “cost of corruption” beyond financial terms, including its impact on human capital, unexecuted infrastructure, and the efficiency of public policies. This tool would facilitate the design of more targeted and sustainable strategies.
3. **Strengthen the public integrity ecosystem** through digital citizen audits, regional transparency observatories, and secure whistleblower channels. These tools should be supported by interoperable technological systems that ensure spending traceability and effective citizen participation.
4. **Reinforce social capital as an anti-corruption tool** by promoting community cohesion, youth participation, civic technology use, and ethical education in schools and communities. Democratic regeneration requires an active and empowered citizenry capable of resisting corruption from the ground up.
5. **Promote administrative and fiscal reforms oriented toward transparency**, such as process simplification, civil service professionalization, and the promotion of open public procurement. These measures should be territorially applied, taking into account historical disparities and varying levels of institutional vulnerability.

This study acknowledges the methodological heterogeneity of the reviewed research, which made it impossible to conduct a quantitative meta-analysis. Consequently, the findings are based on a qualitative and thematic analysis that, while rigorous, limits empirical generalizability.

As a future research line, the systematic study of the relationship between social capital, institutional resilience, and anti-corruption practices is proposed. Understanding how certain communities succeed in containing or reversing corrupt dynamics through civic oversight, collective action, and civic technologies could provide key insights for designing public policies grounded in co-responsibility and democratic strengthening at the local level.

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