

DO FIRMS IN POST-SOVIET ECONOMIES SUFFER MORE FROM CORRUPTION? A COMPARISON OF POST-SOVIET AND OTHER DEVELOPING ECONOMIES

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Abstract

The study examines the socio-economic challenges arising due to corruption in post-Soviet and other developing economies. We use the World Bank's Business Environment and Enterprise Performance Survey (BEEPS). We use nonparametric tests to compare bribery in post-Soviet economies and other developing economies. Our results show that firms in post-Soviet countries have to deal with bribery more frequently when compared to firms in other developing economies. This finding holds for all three groups of firms, namely core industry firms, manufacturing firms, and service firms. Then, we differentiate between bribery in different areas which include customs/imports, courts, and taxes. When we compare firms in post-Soviet countries with firms in other developing countries, we find that all types of bribery are more common in post-Soviet countries. This finding holds for core industry firms, manufacturing firms, and service firms. The only exception is the result for service firms in bribery related to courts. For service firms, the frequency of bribery related to courts is not significantly different across post-Soviet and other countries. We conclude that the old habit of using bribery to do business in post-Soviet countries continues. Since corruption harms the economy, we urge policymakers in these countries to take stronger action to combat it.

Keywords: post-Soviet, developing economies, emerging markets, bribes, bribery, corruption, BEEPS

Clasificare JEL : B14, D72, D73

1. Introduction and context of the study

Corruption remains a persistent issue in post-Soviet countries, undermining democratic development, economic progress, and public trust in institutions. Previous papers analyzed the roots of corruption in these countries and linked it to several factors including weak institutions, historical legacies like political and economic structures, and informal networks. Historical legacies like the centralized and bureaucratic governance structures inherited from the Soviet era support the continuation of corruption in these countries. The informal practices in the Soviet system such as using personal connections for favors continued after the system's dissolution. Weak legal institutions and a lack of rule of law created an environment where corruption thrived.

Besides these factors, the transition to market economies in the 1990s created opportunities for corruption, particularly through privatization and the rise of oligarchic control over resources. Countries with strong authoritarian tendencies, such as Russia and Belarus, tend to exhibit systemic corruption, where elites use state mechanisms for personal enrichment. In contrast, more democratic-leaning states like the Baltic countries have implemented anti-corruption measures with relative success. While some post-Soviet countries have made some progress in reducing corruption at the lower levels of government, most of the former Soviet republics still have high-level officials involved in these activities.

This current paper examines whether firms in post-Soviet economies still suffer more from corruption compared to other developing economies in the region. Its contributions are three-fold: First, the paper examines 30 countries and more than 20,000 surveys. Therefore, it is not country-specific and it is very detailed. Second, the paper not only examines the overall level of corruption, it also looks into corruption in different areas including customs and imports, courts, and taxes and

tax collection. Therefore, it has a wider scope. Third, it differentiates between corruption in different sectors, including the manufacturing sector, the services sector, and the core industries.

The paper seeks to assist policymakers by identifying the areas and sectors where firms in post-Soviet economies experience the highest levels of corruption compared to other developing economies. The anti-corruption efforts in most of these countries have not been successful. Policymakers in post-Soviet countries must take decisive action to address the corruption problem before it further harms their economies. This paper aims to help policymakers in this endeavor.

The paper continues as follows: Section 2 goes over the previous literature. Section 3 states the paper's hypotheses. Section 4 explains the data and the methodology. Section 5 shows the results. Finally, section 6 concludes.

2. Literature Review

While the majority of studies including Bardhan (1997) and Ngunjiri (2010), suggest that corruption negatively impacts the business environment, others like Gould and Amaro-Reyes (1983), Svensson (2005), Jain (2001), Wang and You (2012), Ayaydin and Hayaloglu (2014), and Fisman et al. (2024), argue that corruption can promote economic or entrepreneurial growth. This second group of papers suggests that corruption may have a positive impact on growth because it can expedite government interactions.

Several papers examine the relationship between firm size and corruption. Earlier papers including Banfield and Banfield (1985), Becker and Stigler (1974), and Klitgaard (1988) argue that firm size has no significant impact on corruption. However, more recent papers like Kronenberg (2004), Kenny (2007), Osei-Tutu et al. (2010), and Tanzi and Davoodi (1997) show that firm size has a positive relationship with corruption. Nguyen (2020) shows that this positive relationship continues until the firm reaches a certain size.

Other papers focus on how to measure corruption. Bennison et al. (2009), Bai et al. (2019), and Goel et al. (2022) find that larger firms pay smaller bribes as a percentage of their size, but Nguyen (2020) corrects for endogeneity and finds that larger firms pay larger bribes in absolute terms. Blavatsky (2021) presents an unconventional approach to measuring corruption by correlating politicians' body mass index with corruption indices, suggesting physical characteristics may serve as proxies for corruption levels. Stefes (2007) highlights the need to move beyond conventional corruption indices, emphasizing that systemic corruption blurs the line between public and private sectors, making it difficult to dismantle entrenched corrupt networks.

Other than these general studies on corruption, many other studies including Boycko et al. (1995), Raiser (1999), Stephan (1999), Moran (2001), Karklins (2002), Kotkin and Sajo (2002), Treisman (2002), and Hellman and Kaufmann (2004), Holmes (2012), Obydenkova and Libman (2015), Kukhianidze and Kukhianidze (2024), Zagainova (2007), Shlapentokh (2013), Rigi (2017), and many others focus on corruption in post-Soviet states or other transition economies. These studies analyze its historical roots, evolution, and impact on political and economic systems. Corruption in post-Soviet countries remains a complex and deeply entrenched issue, shaped by historical legacies, political transitions, and systemic factors.

Holmes (2012), Obydenkova and Libman (2015), and Kukhianidze and Kukhianidze (2024) are among the ones who examine corruption in Russia. Holmes (2012) argues that it would take years to reduce corruption in Russia. According to Holmes (2012), while President Medvedev made genuine efforts to reduce corruption, systemic issues and the return of Putin to power threatened progress. Kukhianidze and Kukhianidze (2024) trace corruption in Russia back to the Soviet period and the Yeltsin era, arguing that modern Russia's governance is deeply rooted in past state terror, organized crime, and corruption. Obydenkova and Libman (2015) further explore how communist legacies influence corruption, dissecting its supply, demand, and public perception, showing how deeply embedded corruption is in Russian society.

Zagainova (2007) examines corruption and anti-corruption policies in post-communist countries, highlighting how historical legacies and transitional experiences shape corruption patterns. According to the author, the persistence of communist-era networks has evolved into modern clientelism, leading to two main forms of corruption: state capture (political corruption) and administrative corruption. Shlapentokh (2013) argues that corruption surged after privatization in 1991 due to weakened state control and the rise of a semi-feudal system, where officials exploited their autonomy for personal gain. Rigi (2017) contrasts Soviet-era corruption, which was tied to bureaucratic inefficiencies, with post-Soviet corruption, which is more extensive and shaped by emerging market mechanisms and weak governance structures. Round & Rodgers (2009) and Round et al. (2008) examine corruption in Ukraine's education and labor markets, revealing how bribery and informal networks shape access to education and employment. In two recent studies, Kaya and Engkuchik (2021a, b) focus on corruption in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. They show that, after the 2008-2009 global crisis, corruption by manufacturing firms as well as retailers in the region significantly declined.

A few papers contend that globalization has been one of the factors that promoted corruption in post-Soviet states. For example, Beesley (2015) explores the link between globalization and corruption, showing that firms engaged in international trade are more likely to pay bribes, particularly to customs officials. The study suggests that foreign direct investment does not necessarily reduce corruption unless the investor's home country has strong anti-corruption measures.

Rivkin-Fish (2005) views corruption as a fundamental threat to democracy, often overlooked in traditional international relations studies. The author presents an anthropological perspective, emphasizing how corruption operates through informal networks and social norms across transitional societies, including post-Soviet Russia and Romania. Since corruption generally negatively impacts the economy, preventing it is critical. A few papers including Kotchegura (2004) argue that while identifying corruption is relatively straightforward, implementing effective and sustainable anti-corruption measures is far more challenging, especially in transitional states.

Overall, these studies reveal that corruption in post-Soviet states is historical and systemic, affecting governance, economic development, and social institutions, requiring multifaceted strategies to combat.

3. Hypotheses

Since we expect post-Soviet firms to continue their way of doing business to a degree, we expect to find more frequent corruption in these countries compared to the other developing economies. We expect to see similar results for core industry firms, manufacturing firms, and service firms. Therefore, our hypotheses on the general incidence of bribery is as follows:

Hypothesis 1: Firms in all three sectors (core industry, manufacturing, and service) deal with more frequent corruption in post-Soviet economies when compared to firms in other developing economies.

With respect to bribery in different areas which include customs/imports, courts, and taxes/tax collection, we expect to find similar results. We expect to see a higher level of corruption in each area in post-Soviet economies when compared to other developing economies. Therefore, our hypotheses on bribery in each of these different areas are as follows:

Hypothesis 2: Firms in all three sectors (core industry, manufacturing, and service) deal with more frequent corruption related to customs/imports in post-Soviet economies when compared to firms in other developing economies.

Hypothesis 3: Firms in all three sectors (core industry, manufacturing, and service) deal with more frequent corruption related to courts in post-Soviet economies when compared to firms in other developing economies.

Hypothesis 4: Firms in all three sectors (core industry, manufacturing, and service) deal with more frequent corruption related to taxes and tax collection in post-Soviet economies when compared to firms in other developing economies.

The next section describes our data and variables.

4. Data

Our sample consists of firms across thirty countries in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, including Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, FYR Macedonia, Georgia, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Kosovo, Kyrgyz Republic, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Mongolia, Montenegro, Poland, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Tajikistan, Turkey, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan. Fourteen of these countries are post-Soviet countries. These are Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan. We use the BEEPSII (2007) and BEEPSIV (2011-2012) surveys. These are the Business Environment and Enterprise Performance Surveys done by the World Bank. In total, 20,095 surveys are included in this current study.

The first survey question deals with the frequency of overall bribery related to customs, licenses, taxes, regulations, and services. We coded the responses as follows: Never is “1”, Seldom is “2”, Sometimes is “3”, Frequently is “4”, Usually is “5”, and Always is “6”.

The second question deals with the frequency of bribery related to customs/imports. The third question deals with the frequency of bribery related to courts. The fourth question deals with the frequency of bribery related to taxes and tax collection. Similar to question 1, we coded the responses as follows: Never is “1”, Seldom is “2”, Sometimes is “3”, Frequently is “4”, Usually is “5”, and Always is “6”.

To compare firms in the post-Soviet economies to the firms in the other developing economies, we use non-parametric tests. More specifically, after coding the responses as explained above, we use the Mann-Whitney-Wilcoxon test to compare the frequencies of bribery in post-Soviet economies versus other developing economies.

The next section shows the results of the tests and their explanations.

5. Empirical Results

Table 1 shows the results of the non-parametric tests that compare corruption in the post-Soviet economies versus corruption in the other developing economies. The last column shows the results of the Mann-Whitney-Wilcoxon tests. The first row shows the results for overall corruption (Question #1). The second, third, and fourth rows show the results for corruption in Customs/Imports, Courts, and Taxes/Tax Collection, respectively (Questions #2,3,4).

Table No. 1. Informal Payments by Post-Soviet vs Other Firms

Variables	Post-Soviet			Other			-W. value	Mann p-value
	Mean	Median	S	Mean	Median	S		
Overall	1.391	1.1053	1.2954	1.930	1.8447	1.1628	0.01	<0.00
Customs/Imports	1.637	1.6391	1.1628	1.711	1.4790	1.9575	0.01	<0.00
Courts	1.650	1.5606	1.0726	1.658	1.4116	1.8809	0.01	<0.00
Taxes/Tax Collection	1.097	1.8786	1.2112	1.852	1.4979	1.9572	0.01	<0.00

Note: Never is “1”, Seldom is “2”, Sometimes is “3”, Frequently is “4”, Usually is “5”, Always is “6”.

The table shows that corruption is significantly more common in the post-Soviet economies than in the other developing economies. While the mean value of 2.1053 for the Post-Soviet economies falls somewhere between “Seldom” and “Sometimes”, the mean value of 1.8447 for the other developing economies falls somewhere between “Never” and “Seldom”. The difference between the two groups is significant at the 0.01% level.

The table also shows that corruption in each category (Customs/Imports, Courts, Taxes/Tax Collection) is significantly more common in the post-Soviet economies than in the other developing economies in the region. In the post-Soviet economies, the mean value is 1.6391 for Customs/Imports, while the corresponding value is 1.4790 in the other developing economies (the difference is significant at the 0.01% level). In the post-Soviet economies, the mean value is 1.5606 for Courts, while the corresponding value is 1.4116 in the other developing economies (the difference is significant at the 0.01% level). Similarly, in the post-Soviet economies, the mean value is 1.8786 for Taxes/Tax Collection, while the corresponding value is 1.4979 in the other developing economies (the difference is significant at the 0.01% level).

According to the table, for both the post-Soviet economies and the other economies, corruption is most common when dealing with Taxes/Tax Collection and least common when dealing with Courts. Also, the variation in the mean scores across Customs/Imports, Courts, and Taxes/Tax Collection for the post-Soviet economies is much larger compared to that in the other economies. The mean scores in these three categories in the post-Soviet economies range from 1.5606 (i.e. Courts) to 1.8786 (Taxes/Tax Collection), while the mean scores in these three categories in the other economies range from 1.4116 (i.e. Courts) to 1.4979 (i.e. Taxes/Tax Collection). This finding implies that some firms in the post-Soviet economies attempt to “game” the system more, while others are more law-abiding.

Table 2 shows the results of the non-parametric tests that compare corruption in the manufacturing sector across the post-Soviet and other economies. The table shows that overall corruption, as well as corruption in each category (Customs/Imports, Courts, Taxes/Tax Collection), is significantly more common in the post-Soviet economies than in the other developing economies in the region. The difference between the two groups is significant at the 0.01% level in each category.

Table No. 2. Informal Payments by Post-Soviet vs Other Manufacturing Firms

Variables	Post-Soviet			Other			-W. p-value	Mann
	Mean	Std	S	Mean	Std	S		
Overall	2.771	.1668	1.2900	2.777	.7617	1.1309	01	<0.00
Customs/imports	2.490	.6748	1.1584	2.699	.4896	1.9685	01	<0.00
Courts	2.462	.5907	1.0904	2.673	.3825	1.8574	01	<0.00
Taxes/Tax collection	2.679	.9293	1.1967	2.753	.4770	1.9413	01	<0.00

Note: Never is “1”, Seldom is “2”, Sometimes is “3”, Frequently is “4”, Usually is “5”, Always is “6”.

Table 3 shows the results of the non-parametric tests that compare corruption in the service sector across the post-Soviet and other economies. The table shows that corruption is significantly more common in the post-Soviet economies than in the other developing economies. While the

mean value of 2.0539 for the Post-Soviet economies falls somewhere between “Seldom” and “Sometimes”, the mean value of 1.8974 for the other developing economies falls somewhere between “Never” and “Seldom”. The difference between the two groups is significant at the 0.01% level.

Table No. 3. Informal Payments by Post-Soviet vs Other Service Firms

Variables	Post-Soviet			Other			-W. value	Mann p-
	Mean	Median	S	Mean	Median	S		
Overall	1.042	2.0539	1.3030	1.582	1.8974	1.1774	0.01	<0.00
Customs/imports	1.783	1.6015	1.1717	1.515	1.4771	1.9505	0	0.016
Courts	1.799	1.5184	1.0732	1.486	1.4505	1.9209	6	0.210
Taxes/Tax collection	1.935	1.8508	1.2448	1.546	1.5342	1.9878	0.01	<0.00

Note: Never is “1”, Seldom is “2”, Sometimes is “3”, Frequently is “4”, Usually is “5”, Always is “6”.

The table also shows that corruption in Customs/Imports as well as Taxes/Tax Collection is significantly more common in the post-Soviet economies than in the other developing economies in the region. In the post-Soviet economies, the mean value is 1.6015 for Customs/Imports, while the corresponding value is 1.4771 in the other developing economies ($p=0.0160$). Similarly, in the post-Soviet economies, the mean value is 1.8508 for Taxes/Tax Collection, while the corresponding value is 1.5342 in the other developing economies ($p<0.0001$). On the other hand, there is no significant difference between the frequency levels of corruption in Courts across the two groups of countries. In the post-Soviet economies, the mean value is 1.5184 for Courts, while the corresponding value is 1.4505 in the other developing economies ($p=0.2106$).

Table 4 shows the results of the non-parametric tests that compare corruption in the core industries across the post-Soviet and other economies. The table shows that overall corruption, as well as corruption in each category (Customs/Imports, Courts, Taxes/Tax Collection), is significantly more common in the post-Soviet economies than in the other developing economies in the region. The difference between the two groups is significant at the 0.01% level in each category.

Table No. 4. Informal Payments by Post-Soviet vs Other Core Industry Firms

Variables	Post-Soviet			Other			-W. value	Mann p-
	Mean	Median	S	Mean	Median	S		
Overall	1.578	2.0760	1.2910	1.571	1.9137	1.1870	0.01	<0.00
Customs/imports	1.364	1.6307	1.1576	1.497	1.4654	1.9484	0.01	<0.00
Courts	1.389	1.5663	1.0444	1.499	1.4158	1.8728	0.01	<0.00
Taxes/Tax collection	1.483	1.8365	1.1898	1.553	1.4924	1.9485	0.01	<0.00

Note: Never is “1”, Seldom is “2”, Sometimes is “3”, Frequently is “4”, Usually is “5”, Always is “6”.

To summarize, we failed to reject the null hypothesis of more frequent overall corruption in post-Soviet countries (all firms, core industry firms, manufacturing firms, and service firms) compared to other developing nations (Hypothesis 1). We also failed to reject the null hypothesis of more frequent corruption related to customs/imports, courts, and taxes/tax collection (Hypotheses 2, 3, and 4). Only for service firms, the result for “corruption in courts” is insignificant, meaning that there is no significant difference in the frequencies of corruption in courts for service firms in post-Soviet economies versus other developing economies.

6. Conclusions

This study examines the corruption levels in post-Soviet countries and other developing economies. More specifically, it compares the overall incidence of corruption as well as the incidence of corruption in specific areas (customs/imports, courts, and taxes/tax collection) across the two groups of countries. The study first examines all firms in the manufacturing, service, and core industries. Then, it looks into firms in each sector separately.

First, the study compares the overall incidence of corruption across the two groups for all sectors together. The findings indicate that bribery is more prevalent in the post-Soviet economies than in other developing economies. The mean frequency of bribery in the post-Soviet economies is somewhere between “Seldom” and “Sometimes”, while it is somewhere between “Never” and “Seldom” for firms in the other developing economies. Again, for all sectors, corruption in each area (Customs/Imports, Courts, and Taxes/tax collection) is more prevalent in the post-Soviet economies than in other developing economies. The differences between the two groups are significant at the 0.01% level.

Then, the study focuses on the manufacturing sector. The findings indicate that, for manufacturing firms, bribery is more prevalent in the post-Soviet economies than in other developing economies. The mean frequency of bribery for manufacturing firms in the post-Soviet economies is somewhere between “Seldom” and “Sometimes”, while it is somewhere between “Never” and “Seldom” for manufacturing firms in the other developing economies. For manufacturing firms, corruption in each area (Customs/Imports, Courts, and Taxes/Tax collection) is more prevalent in the post-Soviet economies than in other developing economies. The differences between the two groups are significant at the 0.01% level.

Then, the study focuses on the service sector. The findings indicate that, for service firms, overall bribery is more prevalent in the post-Soviet economies than in other developing economies. The mean frequency of bribery for service firms in the post-Soviet economies is somewhere between “Seldom” and “Sometimes”, while it is somewhere between “Never” and “Seldom” for service firms in other developing economies. However, for service firms, while the results for corruption in Customs/Imports and Taxes/Tax collection are statistically significant (i.e. more frequent corruption in these areas in post-Soviet economies), there is no statistically significant difference in the frequencies of corruption in Courts for the two groups of countries. In other words, the prevalence of corruption in Courts is similar in post-Soviet and other countries.

Finally, the study focuses on the core industries. The findings here are similar to the findings for the manufacturing sector. For core industry firms, bribery is more prevalent in the post-Soviet economies than in other developing economies. The mean frequency of bribery for manufacturing firms in the post-Soviet economies is somewhere between “Seldom” and “Sometimes”, while it is somewhere between “Never” and “Seldom” for manufacturing firms in the other developing economies. For these firms, corruption in each area (Customs/Imports, Courts, and Taxes/Tax collection) is more prevalent in the post-Soviet economies than in other developing economies. The differences between the two groups are significant at the 0.01% level.

Overall, our results show that corruption is significantly more common in post-Soviet

economies when compared to the other developing economies in the region. This applies to all sectors and all corruption categories (i.e. corruption regarding Customs/Imports, Courts, and Taxes/Tax Collection). The only exception is the frequency of corruption in Courts for the companies in the Service sector. For these companies, corruption frequencies regarding Courts are similar across the post-Soviet and other developing economies.

Our analysis leads us to conclude that the long-standing practice of using bribery to conduct business in post-Soviet countries remains widespread. This persistent reliance on corrupt practices undermines economic growth, discourages foreign investment, and erodes public trust in institutions. Given the detrimental effects of corruption on economic stability and development, it is imperative that policymakers in these countries implement stronger measures to combat bribery. This may include stricter enforcement of anti-corruption laws, increased transparency in business transactions, and the promotion of ethical business practices. Addressing this issue is essential for fostering a more sustainable and equitable economic environment.

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