

The Economics of Police Corruption: Incentives, Institutional Failures, and Policy Solutions

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Received: March 20, 2025

Revised: December 15, 2025

Accepted: February 12, 2026

Abstract

Corruption inside the police force is a lasting issue that diminishes the power of law, trust of the public, and economic development. The present systematic review gathers the peer-reviewed studies published from 2020 to 2025 that map the economic and institutional forces driving police corruption. Sticking to PRISMA guidelines, an all-embracing search of international databases provided 1,079 records, out of which 43 studies were finally selected as meeting the inclusion criteria for further analysis. The studies were compared altogether, which used econometric analyses, behavioral experiments, and dynamic modeling, and identified three closely linked roots of police corruption: inadequate performance-related pay, institutional norms that breed a “survival attitude,” and strategic opposition from the powerful. A very important result is that, for example, big pay raises or the installation of technological monitoring are all useless without wide-ranging institutional reform. The review presents a comprehensive integrated conceptual framework of systemic corruption equilibrium and offers a future research agenda directed at causal identification, longitudinal analysis, and context-sensitive policy design, which is particularly pertinent to Thailand and the ASEAN region, among others.

Keywords: Police Corruption, Economics, Incentives, Institutional Failures, Policy Remedies

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เศรษฐศาสตร์ของคอร์รัปชันตำรวจ: แรงจูงใจ ความล้มเหลวของสถาบัน และนโยบายแก้ไข

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บทคัดย่อ

ระบบคอร์รัปชันในสถาบันตำรวจเป็นปัญหาค้างคาที่ลดความศักดิ์สิทธิ์ของกฎหมาย ความไว้วางใจจากภาคประชาชนและการพัฒนาทางเศรษฐกิจ การทบทวนวรรณกรรมอย่างเป็นระบบนี้ รวบรวมบทความ การศึกษาที่ผ่านการประเมินโดยผู้ทรงคุณวุฒิ ซึ่งตีพิมพ์ระหว่างปี พ.ศ. 2563 ถึง พ.ศ. 2568 ที่สร้างแผนที่ของแรงผลักดันจากระบบสถาบันและเศรษฐกิจที่ก่อให้เกิดคอร์รัปชันขึ้น ทั้งนี้ ใช้แนวปฏิบัติของปริสมา (PRIMSMA) ซึ่งเป็นการค้นหาแบบครอบคลุม จากฐานข้อมูลนานาชาติ ซึ่งแสดงผลงานทั้งหมด 1,079 ชิ้น โดยที่มีผลงาน 43 ชิ้น ผ่านเกณฑ์การคัดเลือกที่จะต้องมีการวิเคราะห์ขั้นต่อไป เมื่อนำการศึกษาดังกล่าว มาทำการเปรียบเทียบกัน โดยใช้การวิเคราะห์แบบเศรษฐมิติ การทดลองเชิงพฤติกรรม และการจัดทำโมเดล พบว่า การคอร์รัปชันของตำรวจมีรากยังลึกที่ผูกกันสามประการ คือ การปฏิบัติหน้าที่ไม่เต็มกำลังเกี่ยวกับค่าตอบแทน บรรทัดฐานสถาบันที่ปลูกฝัง “ทัศนคติการอยู่รอด” และกลยุทธ์การต่อต้านจากผู้มีอำนาจ ตัวอย่างผลการศึกษาที่สำคัญคือ การปรับค่าจ้างหรือติดตั้งเครื่องเฝ้าสังเกตการณ์นั้นไร้ประโยชน์ หากปราศจากการปฏิรูปสถาบันในองค์กรรวม การทบทวนวรรณกรรมนี้นำเสนอกรอบแนวคิดบูรณาการแบบสมบูรณ์ของความสมดุลการคอร์รัปชันอย่างเป็นระบบ และนำเสนอวาระการวิจัยในอนาคต ด้วยวิธีการระบุความสัมพันธ์เชิงสาเหตุ การวิเคราะห์งานศึกษาตามยาว และการออกแบบนโยบายที่ตอบสนองต่อบริบท ซึ่งมีความเกี่ยวข้องอย่างยิ่งต่อประเทศไทยและภูมิภาคอาเซียนรวมทั้งบรรดาประเทศอื่น ๆ

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Introduction

Corrupt practices among law enforcement officers cause significant institutional damage, undermining both the law and public trust in the system that should serve as the primary defense against criminals. Once again, Holmes (2020) points out that police corruption varies to a great extent among different areas both in terms of its levels and its motivations (e.g., Harris & Katusiimeh, 2020). The literature usually argues that crime and corruption within public systems are interdependent phenomena, albeit with the warning that they are not just problems but rather traps where law enforcement might be compelled to function according to the “underworld” instead of the constitution. Therefore, in such circumstances, deviance, if not taken firmly and harshly in time, can be transformed into a way of life, and hence, operationally, it always poses a threat and perhaps the difficulty of being unearthed. Delalić and Sojkić (2023) stress the point that the constant occurrence of misconduct is very frequently an indication of the failure of anti-corruption measures and the softness of rules in the institution. The digital revolution worldwide is, moreover, a crucial problem for the global community, as it requires more openness in companies and governments while at the same time breaking down the old barriers of corruption that used to exist in the past governance. Therefore, addressing this issue involves not only examining the legal provisions but also tackling the underlying social and economic factors contributing to the problem.

This systematic review is going to focus on the identification of the economic incentives as well as the institutional malfunctions that promote police corruption, particularly in the case of Thailand and the ASEAN region. It will be grounded on a synthesis of theoretical frameworks and research papers published from the years 2020 to 2025, which will include diverse economic analysis methods, qualitative behavioral studies, and mixed-methods research. A preliminary scan of academic databases has revealed that, besides the availability of numerous case studies, no recent systematic review has explicitly linked economic incentive theory and models of institutional failure, particularly in the Southeast Asian context. Thus, the study follows three research questions of central importance: (1) What are the specific economic drivers that give rise to police misconduct? (2) How do institutional structures either support or hinder such behaviors? (3) What evidence-based policy solutions could be applied in the ASEAN region?

This review not only unifies the findings from different nations but also depicts the comprehensive way that corruption penetrates all types of societies (Bleakley, 2023; D’Emidio, 2025). The three goals are to locate the economic and institutional factors of misconduct with the highest impact, to assess how effective the current preventive measures are, and to make empirical evidence-based conclusions. The research contends that legal sanctions alone are not enough; successful reform wins only when the change occurs in both economic orthodoxy and institutional diagnostics at the same time. The framework is a strong base for Thailand and other countries to create effective anti-corruption measures and restore public trust in police.

Methodology

Literature Search Strategy

To represent the police corruption phenomenon as being studied by different scientific disciplines such as criminology, public economics, and public administration, a certain process of searching through the most important academic databases was conducted: Scopus, Web of Science, JSTOR, PubMed, EconLit, SSRN, ScienceDirect, Semantic Scholar, and Google Scholar. This choice of a wide variety of databases ensured that there would be the incorporation of different points of view, starting with mainstream sociology and general governance, which are not far from economic modeling or health safety either. The study was confined to English-language peer-reviewed journal articles presenting the latest available evidence and published between January 1, 2020, and December 2025, a period specifically selected to eliminate the influence of older evidence while capturing the impact of new governance practices, the rise of surveillance technologies such as the use of body-worn cameras, and the establishment of new policy systems after the pandemic. The search for the right studies was supported by a search strategy that followed Boolean logic to link the search terms for the three central topics—misconduct, drivers, and solutions. The controller search term used was: (“police corruption” OR “law enforcement bribery” OR “police misconduct”) AND (“economic incentives” OR “institutional failures” OR “governance structures”) AND (“policy solutions” OR “anti-corruption measures” OR “policy reform”). We also made sure to consider and apply wildcard characters and proximity operators where available, not only to mimic the beautiful variety of language but also to maintain a high thematic correspondence.

Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

To verify that the studies were solid, they were chosen on the basis of clear, predefined criteria that aimed to identify the very best evidence that would be related to the research aims. Only studies published in peer-reviewed academic journals were accepted if they had economic dimensions of police corruption as their object of study, either empirically or theoretically, or if they focused on the examination of institutional or structural drivers behind misconduct and proposed or evaluated the effectiveness of certain policy measures. Rather, the articles from non-peer-reviewed sources, such as editorials, commentaries, or white papers, were excluded from the lists because they lacked a clear methodological structure and relied on anecdotal evidence. Furthermore, research focusing solely on political corruption, lacking a similar law enforcement emphasis, and failing to convincingly synthesize information was excluded to narrow the review for analysis.

Screening Procedures and Data Selection

The whole process was made in the first set of studies that indicated the PRISMA flow diagram (Figure 1). The search of the databases at first only gave us 1,060 records, but we had to add 16 more to our list since they came from citations; thus, the total number of potential studies was 1,076 ($N = 1,076$). These archives were put into a reference management software program, and that is where the 397 duplicates were deleted. The rest of the 679 unique records then had to pass through a two-step screening process meant to confirm their quality and relevance. The first step focused only on the debate of titles and abstracts to come up with the 215 records that were mainly off-topic and, therefore, excluded. The second step had to be taken to access and evaluate the entire reading of the 464 texts and determine if they meet the inclusion criteria. After completing the final part of the quality assessment and ranking the relevance of the studies that met the criteria, 417 studies were excluded because their methodological depth was insufficient or they did not disclose the necessary economic and institutional context. The 47 studies that passed the above filtration ($N=47$) were marked to have the screening decisions as correct and the review as being true to the context of the study.

Analytical Framework and Synthesis

Data synthesis was carried out using a thematic analysis method due to the various methodological characteristics of the studies that had been included—ranging from qualitative ethnographic fieldwork to quantitative econometric modeling—and the fact that the statistical meta-analysis was not possible because of the lack of similar effect sizes and the varied data structures. So the alternative, the systematic review method, was carried out to synthesize the results, in which selected studies were inductively coded to find out the common patterns. The main topics were sounded out around three major areas: the economic drivers, which examined the ways in which low wages and bad motives made it possible for bribes to be practiced; institutional failures, which focused on the negative side of the organization; and policy interventions, which questioned the success of the reforms. By doing this, qualitative data, including the context of corruption, could be made part of the discussion alongside a quantitative approach in an attempt to get a complete picture of the overall corrupt police system's nature.

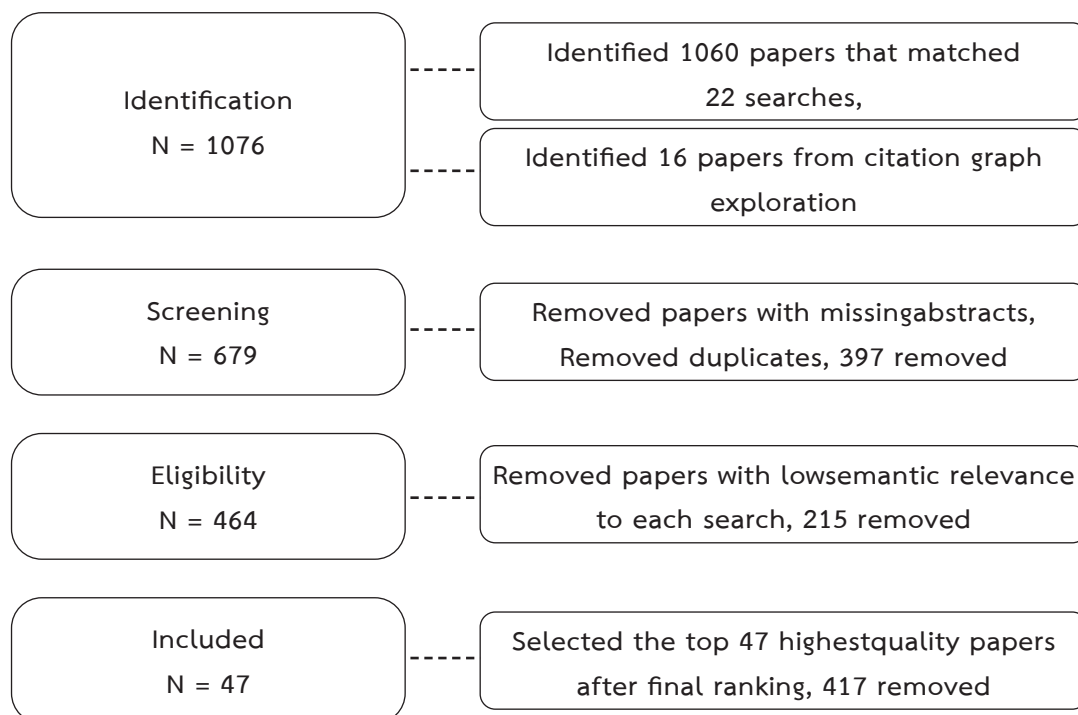


Figure 1: Flow Diagram of the Literature Search and Selection Process.

Thematic Synthesis of Findings

This section of the literature review focuses on the problem of corruption in the police and other law enforcement agencies. The paper does not simply summarize the data in a dull way but rather walks the reader through varied theories and then finally separates the data into specific categories. It also evaluates whether the most famous studies are scientifically valid and then goes on to build a multifarious conceptual model that displays the connections between the behavioral, structural, and economic dimensions. The researchers' synthesis is full of the revelation of new trends, probing methodological vagueness, and creating a gap in the literature. The use of these findings in the emerging markets is discussed rigorously, especially in the ASEAN area, where patronage systems are common; hence, standard economic models don't work as expected.

Theoretical Frameworks and Key Trends: Rationality vs. Strategic Interaction

Rational Choice and the Economics of Survival

It is generally accepted in the academic world that rational choice theory is the most notable viewpoint to identify corruption, and it suggests that a corrupted individual makes a decision that involves taking a risk, expecting a higher utility, and considering that the expected value of the present activity is greater than the expected value of the punishment (Becker, 1968; Heinzeroth, 2020; Yan & Qi, 2020). These studies update the framework by talking about the police department's ethics, especially in the cases of poverty-stricken countries like Pakistan, Indonesia, and Ghana, where the police have to make curtailments in their living standards and justify the corruption as a means to satisfy the basic needs (Addo, 2022; Hussain et al., 2021; Khan et al., 2021; Simaremare & Claudia, 2025). Conversely, when we consider the closely knit ASEAN setting of Thailand, the business flexibility beneficiaries of corruption are expanded to the case of social and power networks that grant political jobs but at the same time necessitate moral obligations (B. Charoen, 2020; B. Krijgsman, 2020; T. Santoso, 2020). Thus, an understanding of “corrupt income” confined to the financial domain fails to acknowledge the pervasive character of corruption, which is a power structure present in politics and societies and at the same time acts as a crucial element in professional survival within a hierarchical organization that is politicized (Malik & Qureshi, 2020; Osasona, 2020; Singh, 2020).

Institutional Entrenchment and Strategic Resistance

Recent studies have transcended the practice of identifying corrupt individuals, reconceptualizing corruption as a whole system with policing being a crucial but corrupt part. Police officers are depicted as “veto players” who consistently obstruct any reform initiatives to preserve their authority. González (2022) exposes a pattern of “strategic policy substitution,” where the authorities make cosmetic changes (like body cameras) and at the same time claim they are doing everything possible to comply—although the changes do not touch the “Blue Brotherhood” as they could bring disruptive changes or “insider” solidarity (Bleakley, 2020). This situation is most powerful in the countries with the strictest societal structures, where the police serve as tools for the ruling class. Mutahi et al. (2020) in Kenya and Brierley (2020) in Ghana observe in their studies that the corrupt acts of the police are instigated by the demand for campaign donations and that the organizational structure is such that the money is siphoned off to the political leaders or ‘godfathers,’ an equilibrium that is so stable. Eventually, the strategic activities carried out by the police departments leave very little room for the public to obtain answers, as these activities result in a superficial presence within the forces, causing the reformation processes to remain unchanged and ineffective for society (Bleakley, 2023; Doucette, 2023).

The Normative Cycle of Corruption

In addition to the situations that allow for corrupt behavior, corruption is also maintained by social norms that are present in the institution itself and that thus enable and reinforce such behavior. Matusgu and colleagues (2023) as well as D'Emidio (2025) have taken a look at the question of police culture and crime in the context of different theoretical lenses and settings but they both seem to agree that social norms and economics could be the roots of social and economics as part of the police culture and enforcement of changes being at the core; consequently, they have set in motion a corruption loop within the system where the thin police-public trust has developed into a crime-heavy setting which in return has caused the public to have strong suspicions about the police possible corrupt practices and the police to have a strong position about the policies that yet might be corrupt (Gillanders et al., 2023). Thus, it can be said that corruption is simultaneously a failure of an institution and a form of a normative trap, where external social pressures and the practices of the institution constantly and mutually justify each other, and, therefore, corrupt behaviors' elimination can only be possible to a certain extent through large-scale social changes.

The literature does indicate that the various theoretical perspectives offer partial explanatory power for the causes of corruption. However, the literature also indicates that these factors do not function independently of each other. Based upon the synthesis of findings presented by Becker (1968), Mutahi et al. (2022), and González (2022), the current research offers a multi-dimensional framework. As illustrated in Figure 2, the proposed model presents how the three primary dimensions of the sustainability of corruption within law enforcement systems, identified above, interact with each other to create a systemic corruption equilibrium. These three dimensions include: (A) structural factors, which include a lack of compensation, a lack of accountability mechanisms, and a lack of effective supervisory bodies, creating a foundation of vulnerability; (B) behavioral factors, which include the existence of social norms that are supportive of corrupt behavior, implicit psychological contracts, and “survival ethics” that shape the motivations of individuals to either accept or engage in corrupt behavior; (C) strategic factors, which include the ability of elites to use their influence to protect themselves from accountability for their actions, veto players, and patronage networks, allowing actors to take advantage of institutional vulnerabilities over time; and (D) the intersection of the first three dimensions creates a system-wide corruption equilibrium: a self-reinforcing condition in which corruption becomes an accepted part of the institution's functioning, persists, and is highly resistant to piecemeal or single dimensional reform initiatives.

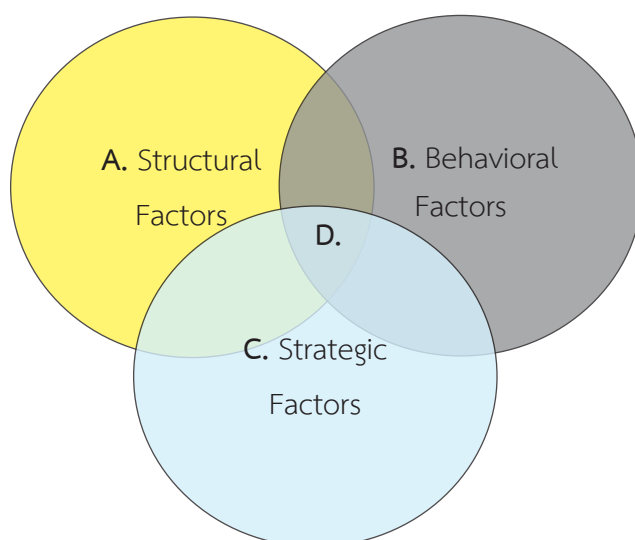


Figure 2: Unified Conceptual Model of Systemic Police Corruption

Theoretical frameworks that have been guiding this analysis are shown in a comparative synthesis in Table 1, where the difference between the traditional reductionist models and the complex systemic realities of the ASEAN region is pointed out. On one hand, the rational choice perspective is placed, which considers corruption as a mere individual utility calculation influenced by low wages, while on the other hand, new structural theories like institutional entrenchment and the normative cycle of corruption are brought in. The counterargument stresses an essential change in understanding: in high-context cultures, police malpractice is no longer merely regarded as a source of empirical data but rather as a fortress backed by the elite, “Blue Brotherhood” unity, and strategies against reform, hence calling for the most extensive solutions that are not merely deterrence.

Table 1: Theoretical Frameworks and Key Trends in Police Corruption

Theoretical Lens	Core Premise	Key Mechanisms & Context	Key Citations
Rational Choice & Survival Ethics	Corruption is a calculated risk where utility outweighs punishment or a necessity for basic survival (low wages).	- Cost-Benefit: Calculated risk of punishment vs. gain. - Survival Ethics: Low wages drive officers to justify graft to meet family needs. - Context: Developing economies (Pakistan, Indonesia, Ghana).	Addo (2022); Becker (1968); Heinzeroth (2020); Hussain et al. (2021); Khan et al. (2021); Simaremare & Claudia (2025); Yan & Qi (2020)
Institutional Entrenchment & Strategic Resistance	Police act as “veto players” who strategically resist reform to maintain autonomy and group solidarity.	- Strategic Policy Substitution: Adopting superficial reforms (e.g., body cams) to avoid structural change. - Elite Capture: Flows of illicit funds to political “principals” or “godfathers.” - Blue Brotherhood: In-group solidarity protects members.	Bleakley (2020, 2023); Brierley (2020); Doucette (2023); González (2022); Mutahi et al. (2022)

Table 1: Theoretical Frameworks and Key Trends in Police Corruption (Continued)

Theoretical Lens	Core Premise	Key Mechanisms & Context	Key Citations
The Normative Cycle of Corruption	Corruption is reinforced by social norms and reciprocal relationships between police and society.	- Moral Economy: Bribery is normalized as a standard transaction. - Reciprocity: High crime erodes trust, justifying corrupt/aggressive tactics. - Mimetic Behavior: Corruption becomes a learned, socialized behavior.	D'Emidio (2025); Gillanders et al. (2023); Masugu et al. (2023)

Measurement of Variables and Methodologies

Divergent Methodological Approaches

A comprehensive literature survey uncovers a drastic difference between the quantitative economic research techniques and qualitative behavioral studies. Every method has its distinct view on the issue of police corruption. The case for the latter is backed by Hossain and Kryzanowski's (2020) and Gillanders et al.'s (2023) works and mostly depends on macroeconomic variables such as transaction costs and inward investments to create extremely loose links. However, the quantities used in these studies are often based on the same flawed data, specifically respondent-based ratings, which are susceptible to various types of biases. Recent studies indicate that the most effective method is inner validity, substantiated by findings from game theory experiments (Armand et al., 2023; Chaiwat & Yomnak, 2023; Quinteros et al., 2021) and mixed-method approaches. For example, the author of the article may use two methods. One method is the bribery simulations combined with standardized questionnaires to identify the psychological factors behind the bribes (Ponce-Daz et al., 2024), while another method that can be used to clarify his point is comparative analyses, which demonstrate that the environmental context significantly affects the officer's assessment (Amagnya, 2024). However, while these designs are capable

of drawing psychological foci from individual behavior to a further extent, they are often criticized for the lack of ecological viability when carried out in real organizations where peer pressure and fixed social norms are the determiners of moral actions rather than the individual.

Causality and Advanced Modeling

Despite the diversity of methods, most studies are cross-sectional, thus limiting the ability for clear causality in the presence of public trust and corruption. The ambiguity in time leaves the “chicken-and-egg” problem unresolved, yielding little knowledge about whether corruption indicates institutional decay or the reverse. A few recent studies, therefore, have begun to attempt the use of sophisticated longitudinal methodologies such as predictive modeling as in De Blasio et al. in Italy (2022), agent-based simulations like that of Aldana et al. in Mexico (2022), and fractional order differential equations through Hannington and Baba (2025) combined with evolution models through Liu and Chen (2022). Such dynamic modeling techniques enable the analysis of corruption over time and facilitate predictive analytics that go beyond static data snapshots. Nevertheless, the use of such sophisticated methodologies is not common in Southeast Asia, highlighting a significant gap in regional research capacity that future scholarship must address to enable more effective interventions.

Table 2 is a fundamental overview of the methodological field depicting clearly delineated areas where the considerable strengths and dramatic weaknesses of different research methodologies used for the study of police corruption can be acutely contrasted. Establishing clear causal inference may compete with ecological validity: that is, up to what point in the continuum and to what extent will mechanisms or outcomes either suggest or reveal whether the effect can be demonstrated in the real world as exposed? The viewpoints that were listed earlier reveal various approaches to the subject; the extensive macroeconomic econometric study might only reveal broad and general correlations, while a profound insight into micro-level particulars might confuse the cause-and-effect relation due to the impact of subjective opinions. On the other hand, behavioral experiments are successful in removing and managing individual psychological factors, yet their security measures in real life are very restricted, as the lab results might not be similar to the field, where penalties and social structures have a forceful impact on the decisions of the faculty.

Table 2: Methodological Approaches, Strengths, and Limitations

Methodology	Primary Focus	Strengths & Innovations	Limitations & Gaps	Key Citations
Quantitative/ Econometric	Macroeconomic indicators (e.g., transaction costs, FDI) and corruption indices.	Establishes broad correlations between corruption and economic stagnation.	Relies on perception-based indices prone to bias; typically cross-sectional (snapshots) rather than longitudinal.	Gillanders et al. (2023); Hossain & Kryzanowski (2020)
Behavioral/ Experimental	Individual decision-making, psychological motivations, and game theory.	- Game Theory: Isolates specific variables in controlled settings. - Mixed Methods: Combines simulations with questionnaires to assess context.	Lacks ecological validity ; lab settings may not reflect real-world peer pressure or entrenched social norms.	Amagnya (2024); Armand et al. (2023); Chaiwat & Yomnak (2023); Ponce-Daz et al. (2024); Quinteros et al. (2021)
Advanced Longitudinal Modeling	Dynamics over time, predictive analytics, and agent-based simulations.	- Predictive Modeling: Tracks corruption trends and “chicken-and-egg” causality. - Simulations: Models complex interactions in systems (e.g., organized crime reduction).	Sparse application in Southeast Asian contexts; requires high-quality data often unavailable in developing nations.	Aldana et al. (2022); De Blasio et al. (2022); Hannington & Baba (2025); Liu & Chen (2022)

Determinants, Consequences, and Contradictions

The Behavioral and Structural Determinants of Corruption

Economic incentives are undeniably the main reason behind police corruption, but at the same time, they are intertwined with highly influential behavioral and structural factors that form the self-reinforcing systems of misconduct. Perceived injustice at the organizational level is an important factor in this regard; in fact, Balogun (2022) speaks of the existence of a psychological contract through which officers perceive corruption as the restoration of the denied justice when they are not promoted fairly by senior gatekeepers (Amagnya et al., 2024). This hierarchy permits corruption to go on spreading downwards and, thus, confirms Singh's (2022) view that the external anti-corruption measures without the internal structural reform will simply fail. The dynamics involved are, in fact, intensified by the Contagion Model of social norms (Cislaghi & Heise 2020; Gilsinan et al., 2023), especially so in high-context cultures like those of ASEAN and Africa, where the bribery phenomenon often occurs mingled with the moral economy. In such situations, corrupt activities are gradually accepted through socialization until they appear to be completely similar to the legitimate policing duties; hence, corruption is regarded as a mimetic behavior rather than just an individual moral failure (Malik & Qureshi, 2020; D'Emidio, 2025).

Systemic Consequences: Economic and Institutional Decay

The behavioral entrenchment has far-reaching consequences, not just in the case of individual bribes, but it also distorts the economy on a large scale and discredits institutions very much. Corruption is economically perceived as a tax that, instead of leveling the playing field, pushes the resources towards the area of "rent-seeking"; thereby, the investors in developing markets have to ask for a "trust premium" that will eventually stop the inflow of foreign capital and the development of new ideas (Gillanders et al., 2023; Hossain & Kryzanowski, 2020). Moreover, the level of corruption in a given society modifies the basic character of the interaction between the government and the citizens, resulting in the transformation of the police into an authoritative body (Ponce et al., 2021; Wakeham, 2022). Nalla and Name (2020), alongside Bolkvadze (2025), state that such disintegration is aggravated when political leaders utilize law enforcement for resource extraction and population control simultaneously, which finally leads to the downfall of democratic norms and the establishment of the underground rule. As a result, the collapse of the financial systems has shaken even the foundations of legal and governmental authority.

Contradictions in Reform and Theory

Theoretical understanding and practical remediation of police corruption are significantly complicated by contradictions, although there is a vast amount of literature on the subject. Procedural justice presents one of the main paradoxes. While Nalla and Name (2020) indicate that fair treatment can moderate the loss of public trust, relying on procedural fairness without reform raises the question of whether the public can still regard the police as legitimate when the latter operate in a corrupt environment. In addition, the reforms regarding the taking of lines, like body-worn cameras, may sometimes reveal cases of resistance used as a tactic. González (2022) states that these agencies will probably make use of the new technologies to convince people, which means that they would practically be undermining their authority, and resistance at the organizational level would thus be taking place. Furthermore, the debate over the “corruption-violence nexus” also indicates the presence of resistance that is stronger than ever, since the disputes related to the connection between the decline of law and order and the increase of crime are very intense (Gillanders et al., 2023). Thus, the intervention needs to include a skillful and careful navigation of such paradoxes to prevent the power shifts required from being impeded by mere reforms.

Table 3 depicts the causes of police corruption and the comprehensive effects it has on the whole organization in great detail. The misconduct perception has shifted through this very process from regarding it as a mere series of isolated and individual failings to a widespread and systemic decay. The table delineates how the structural and behavioral determinants of the “psychological contract,” which leads officers to feel entitled to engage in corruption due to perceived injustices, interact with a “contagion model” of socialized norms, resulting in deeply rooted misconduct within the organization. The combination of these various factors leads to a state of corruption, which completely alters the image of law enforcement and, more importantly, transforms it into a form of brutality that results, among other consequences, in the total collapse of the legal system.

Table 3: Determinants, Consequences, and Contradictions

Dimension	Description & Impact	Key Insights	Key Citations
Structural & Behavioral Determinants	Interaction between organizational injustice, hierarchy, and social contagion.	- Psychological Contract: Unfair promotions lead officers to justify corruption as “restorative justice.” - Contagion Model: Corruption spreads like a virus through social norms and peer socialization.	Amagnya et al. (2024); Balogun (2022); Cislighi & Heise (2020); Gilsinan et al. (2023); Malik & Qureshi (2020); Singh (2022)
Systemic Consequences	Economic distortions and institutional delegitimization.	- Trust Premium: Investors demand higher returns, stifling FDI. - Predatory Institutions: Police become tools for rent-seeking and political repression (hybrid regimes). - Parallel Governance: Erosion of state legitimacy fosters criminal governance.	Bolkvadze (2025); Gillanders et al. (2023); Hossain & Kryzanowski (2020); Nalla & Name (2020); Ponce et al. (2021); Wakeham (2022)
Critical Contradictions	Paradoxes in reform and theory.	- Procedural Justice Paradox: Fair treatment may mask systemic corruption. - Reform Gap: Technologies (e.g., cameras) are used to signal compliance while resisting real change. - Corruption-Violence Nexus: The direction of causality between crime and corruption remains contested.	Gillanders et al. (2023); González (2022); Nalla & Name (2020)

Policy and Practical Implications

Re-aligning Incentives and Structural Reforms

Recent findings assert that the traditional anti-corruption techniques—most of which involve severe punishments and increased wages—are insufficient, as the root cause of bribery in the police is still there. Hence, the policy should not simply rely on punishment; it should also consider the police's actions and change the rewards in such a way that people will find being honest and reporting others more profitable, both in terms of money and social status, than being corrupt (Brookshaw, 2024; Singh, 2022; Van Aaken, 2024). As evidenced by Khan and his colleagues (2021), economic motivators are ineffective unless they are accompanied by strong oversight measures. This means that it is only with the combination of the two that we can go about the reform process in a successful way—redesigning the incentives so that they incorporate both the financial and non-financial rewards (e.g., both the status and career development) and, at the same time, applying a very tight control to eradicate the mindset of practical “survival” ethics, which are used to justify corruption. Besides, this is also the time for the policymaking to act by being inhospitable to graft, and procedural justice can be a smooth interim policy because working among the citizens with dignity can support the least functional legitimacy and prevent state fragility until the more substantial structural reforms are put in place (Nalla & Name, 2020).

Context-Specific Challenges in ASEAN

Systemic reform in the ASEAN region is a very tough nut to crack due to the fact that police leadership is seen as a kind of internal “veto player” in a cartel-like structure. Nevertheless, this obstacle is not a single one. In countries like Thailand, on the one hand, corruption is mainly located in the central areas where huge amounts of money are moving around within close-knit groups. On the other hand, in cases of decentralized democracies like Indonesia, the capture of functions or even of the state within certain territories is the most widespread corruption problem, and—in the case of single-party states—then the vertical corruption chains are the main issue. Therefore, the realization of these ideas in practice demands strategies that are adjusted to the local scene. For example, in the case of Thailand, not only will scrapping police autonomy be made possible by the presence of external supervisory bodies, but the whole matter must also be backed up by the requirement of

monitors' impartiality since the latter can fall under the patronage of the elites and therefore are easily captured. Effective design must therefore incorporate “triangulated accountability”—granting civil society and judicial actors distinct powers over appointments—to truly insulate these institutions from the political elites who benefit from the status quo (González, 2022). Specific reforms should be tailored to deal with the powerful patronage networks that offer critical social security functions, the strong cultural norms that prefer relational harmony to formal rules, and the high-context communication styles. Moreover, these reform projects should be designed in such a way that they could influence the regime's dynamics of power where political struggle might, on one hand, lead to a greater likelihood of the police undermining the government's authority (Bolkvadze, 2025). Given the often limited capacity of civil society for external monitoring, successful reform relies on dissecting the specific intersections of the “moral economy,” political alliances, and institutional weaknesses unique to the region.

Integrating Political Will and Organizational Culture

It is convincingly shown that the most effective anti-corruption policy should be more than just a matter of law and involve solving deep-rooted and large-scale structural and institutional issues. The realization of policy is essentially a direct result of the will of politics and the breaking-down of the patron-client networks that lead to the support of corruption (Malik & Qureshi, 2020). Thus, policymakers must incorporate integrity-reinforcement measures in their agendas for development, which will also take care of major issues such as poverty and inequality (Khan et al., 2021). To achieve this end, reforms need to identify and establish independent institutions as the first preference, which will eventually include bodies specially created to fight corruption that would have to be endowed with adequate investigative powers and remain entirely independent under the president or his office's influence or interference (Bolkvadze, 2025; González, 2022). Finally, the changes must be implemented both externally and internally within the police force to ensure that both civil society and the police establishment are affected, fostering a culture of integrity through legal control, punishment, and the internalization of procedural justice, which negatively correlates with corruption (Nalla & Nam, 2020). This three-pronged approach of political will, institutional independence, and organizational culture is at the heart of the police integrity journey when it moves from being nothing but an ideal to being a real, sustained practice.

Table 4 above depicts a dramatic change in government strategy, moving from being largely conventional and ineffective in their anti-corruption strategies to being highly advanced and region-focused, which is a requirement given the ASEAN setting. Table 4 above further reveals a situation where conventional marginal economic models not only become less feasible but also become less relevant in a context where deeply entrenched actors with a veto impact exist, such as in local law enforcement institutions. The table, however, proposes an idea called “triangulated accountability,” which finds a cultural voice in this model with two additional actors: “society” and “judges,” which function as additional sites of accountability.

Table 4: Policy Implications and Reform Strategies

Strategy Area	Proposed Interventions	Challenges (ASEAN & General)	Key Citations
Re-aligning Incentives	Shift from pure punishment to behavioral economic incentives.	- Dual Approach Needed: Salary increases must be paired with strict oversight; money alone is insufficient. - Whistleblowing: Make ethical behavior economically superior to graft.	Brookshaw (2024); Khan et al. (2021); Singh (2022); Van Aaken (2024)
Structural Reform & Oversight	“Triangulated Accountability” involving civil society and judicial actors.	- Elite Capture: Independent bodies are often co-opted by political elites. - Veto Players: Police leadership in ASEAN often acts as a cartel to block reform. - Political Competition: Can paradoxically increase subversion in hybrid regimes.	Bolkvadze (2025); González (2022); Malik & Qureshi (2020)

Table 4: Policy Implications and Reform Strategies (Continue)

Strategy Area	Proposed Interventions	Challenges (ASEAN & General)	Key Citations
Organizational Culture	Internal procedural justice and community engagement.	- Cultural Norms: High-context cultures (Thailand/ASEAN) value relational harmony over formal rules. - Buffer Strategy: Procedural justice acts as a temporary stabilizer for public trust.	Balogun (2022); D'Emidio (2025); Nalla & Name (2020)
Future Research	Developing integrative frameworks and rigorous evaluation.	- Gap: Lack of models linking economic, cultural, and political drivers. - Need: Longitudinal studies and machine learning applications in local contexts.	Bleakley (2023); De Blasio et al. (2022); Hannington & Baba (2025)

Challenges and Future Directions

Challenges and Limitations of Existing Studies

Despite abundant academic interest, the subject of police corruption is among the most fragmented in terms of theories and research methods. One of the toughest challenges scholars face is the practice of considering various sources of corruption separately. For example, researchers attribute this phenomenon to political patronage networks (Malik & Qureshi, 2020), crisis-driven policing (Shodunke, 2023), or procedural deficits such as underreporting (Delalić & Sojkić, 2023), without incorporating these various views as one. In addition, there are also issues related to methodological soundness, mainly through the use of sample data that is only specific to a certain context or through the inconsistent operationalization of variables, thus hindering the possibility of making cross-national comparisons. At the moment, the field is devoid of a coherent “behavioral-institutional model” that would

be the basis of an integrated framework with the combination of economic incentives, political interference, and cultural norms being it. Research is not of much help for finding the right ways to reform completely because of disconnection among the parts in the models, and that is why, with the current pace, more holistic frameworks rather than merely a few pilot studies are what research should aim at.

Future Research Directions: Macro, Meso, and Interdisciplinary Analysis

To overcome the limitations, subsequent scholarship needs to take a broader and more methodical approach. On the one hand, there is a strong requirement for studies at the country level to go beyond national boundaries and undertake very comparable designs and longitudinal analyses. Matching high-integrity and law-and-order jurisdictions against those suffering from systemic corruption will diagnose the factors for successful changes (Holmes, 2021). Furthermore, it is suggested that long-term studies would be able to better follow up and provide sounder evidence than the static pictures (De Blasio et al., 2022; Hannington & Baba, 2025). At the same time, research conducted at the organizational level should focus more on the aspect of organizational justice serving as a protective mechanism against corruption, and such investigation should be done through practical tests of the integrity of the behavior and the role of fair procedures, distribution, and interactions on the integrity of officers (e.g., Nalla & Nam, 2020; Balogun, 2022). Totally, a deep and all-covering understanding needs a blend of interdisciplinary work and the merging of the theoretical paradigms of political economics, psychology, and sociology to add the insight of individual attitudes and ‘survival ethics’ in the context of the wider societal norms (Gillanders & Van Der Werff, 2021).

Conclusion

This systemic review amalgamates various theoretical and empirical traditions to contend that police corruption is no longer a phenomenon of isolated moral lapses but rather a “systemic corruption equilibrium” maintained by the interplay of economic, structural, and behavioral factors. The body of proof brings the conclusion that the conventional “rational choice” inclinations—which understand corruption as a simple trade-off—are not enough to clarify why unacceptable conduct in developing countries like Thailand and the ASEAN region lasts for so long. On the contrary, the literature points out a crucial area of agreement on the signification of “survival ethics” and “patronage networks,”

wherein corruption is seen as the standard operation to the extent that it is an unavoidable change of means for the financial security and career advancement within the highly politicized power structure (Wang, 2020). By balancing game-theoretic behavioral insights and the analysis of macro-institutional factors, this article designs a single conceptual model that simplifies how these aspects interplay to the advantage of corruption and how it spreads in a society with high-context culture.

There have been many great innovations; however, our analysis indicates that a range of very significant limitations still actually hold back the process of creating strong social interventions. One of the very first drawbacks is the strong dependence of the sector on very shallow and easy and perception-based evaluations. These measures are usually biased and do not allow for tracing the root cause of corruption, as may be the case in an underperforming institution where the need for an institution overhaul is not clear. The literature also exhibits theoretical divergence; much research focuses on a single factor, such as poverty wages, or suffers political intimidation, without considering the “policy ballet” aspect in which agencies enact cosmetic reforms to disguise deeper organizational aversions. In the complete absence of any forms of evaluations, the result is largely pessimistic, and even anti-corruption schemes in the Southeast Asian region, which could make use of the state-of-the-art dynamic modeling steps, e.g., time-series data analysis, are very limited in terms of their extent and reach, particularly at the subnational level.

To overcome these drawbacks, the forthcoming research needs to change its method to a more comparative and interdisciplinary one, whose quality can be seen in the way it captures systemic corruption complexity. It is rather obvious that the researchers should use longitudinal designs and machine learning-based predictive models to observe the corruption dynamics in real time rather than just analyze the primary data. It should be decided for the investigation to be performed at the “meso” level; this way the relationship between organizational fairness and the fairness of internal processes in the context of the socialization of corrupt norms will be explored, particularly their function in impeding the progress of such norms. Again, it is highly important to make the most of the cases in different countries that have a common point in their system between the West and the South, and those might be, for example, comparing a strong and corrupt regime in the West with a similar setting but a comparatively mild form of corruption in the South, which is functioning through personal connections. The UC Model is thus superior, as it is being applied to different sets of data.

Implementing these findings in reality means a significant shift from specific legal modifications to comprehensive and multi-faceted reforms. Policymakers must consider that measures focused solely on salary increases and deterrent punishments will continue to fail unless they also address the issues of “veto players” and elite capture that sustain the current system. Reform becomes effective only when the above-discussed changes meet with the making of the independent oversight bodies not subject to political influence and, similarly, internal changes coordinating career growth inclinations and ethical behavior. The crucial point in intervention is that it must begin with “behavioral insights,” which will encompass behavioral justice aimed at changing the internal culture of the police department and achieving the ultimate goal of breaking the cycle of “survival ethics” that enables corruption.

Finally, the review eschews a global anti-corruption mandate. It is said that the development of the anti-corruption drive in the country has been hampered by 'strategic policy substitution,' which entails the setting of one's own rules in place of those of another country, among other things. It is only through recognizing that changing the 'moral economy' of policing is what is required instead of just the technical fixes that reform can be sustainable. When the issues of political will, institutional independence, and organizational culture are correctly tackled, integrity can cease to be a rule and become a norm that is accepted and shared by all.

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