

# Critical Review of Studies on Corruption in the Public Sector in South American Countries. An Objective Analysis

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**How to cite this paper:** Maldonado, X. M. T. (2025). Critical Review of Studies on Corruption in the Public Sector in South American Countries. An Objective Analysis. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, 13, 136-155.

<https://doi.org/10.4236/jss.2025.1312011>

**Received:** September 11, 2025

**Accepted:** December 14, 2025

**Published:** December 17, 2025

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## Abstract

This scientific contribution aims to provide a critical and objective review of studies on corruption in the public sector in South American countries. The document presents the following results: 1) Lines of research and main outcomes of the most acclaimed contributions by the global scientific community. 2) Bibliometric analysis of the scientific contributions considered in this research. 3) A structured discussion of the results of the identified research, based on the logical and conceptual construct of the objective of this research. 4) Final considerations or conclusions, supported by the recurring lines of results of the identified research, based on the objective of this scientific contribution.

## Keywords

Perception of Corruption, Fight against Corruption, Government Transparency, Democracy, South America, Society

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## 1. Introduction

According to the Spanish dictionary, corruption is defined as behavior consisting of bribery, offering, or promises to another person holding public office, or to private individuals, for the purpose of obtaining advantages or benefits that are unlawful or fraudulent in nature (Militello, 2021). Furthermore, corruption is understood as grounds for invalidating a treaty arising from acts carried out directly or indirectly by a negotiating party against the representative of another party with the aim of exerting fundamental influence over their willingness to conclude the treaty (Jones & Comunale, 2018). A valid allegation requires conclusive proof of

attribution of said acts to the party responsible.

Combating the scourge of corruption is fundamental because its negative effects directly impact people, institutions, and the development of a society (Pansarelli & Lima, 2022). The fight against corruption and its symptoms: allows for the promotion of justice and equity, fosters economic development, strengthens democracy and the rule of law, reduces poverty and improves the quality of life, and prevents conflicts and guarantees the prosperous stability of South American nations (Weintraub, 2004).

### **A Brief History of Corruption**

Corruption is a social phenomenon as old as the existence of human organizations and power structures. From the earliest civilizations to the present day, corruption has been present as a phenomenon linked to the abuse of authority for personal benefit and/or that of a specific group (Miranda-Soberón et al., 2023).

In early civilizations, such as Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece, and Rome, cases of corruption were already recorded. Clay tablets and papyri document that officials, judges, and scribes often accepted bribes to alter records or favor decisions (Oxhorn, 2011). In classical Greece, specifically in Athens, Socrates and other philosophers reflected on moral and political corruption. In Athenian democracy, some offices were manipulated through bribery. In the Roman Empire, corruption was common, especially in the sale of public offices and the misappropriation of funds. Cicero criticized the abuse of power by Roman governors in the provinces (Park, 2014). In the Middle Ages, corruption was especially prevalent in the Church and feudal systems.

On the other hand, the Catholic Church, notable for its sale of indulgences and church offices (simony), was one of the most criticized corrupt practices, which eventually motivated the Protestant Reformation. In the Feudal Age, feudal lords often abused their power to impose unfair taxes and seize land (Fallaw, 2012). In the Modern Age, with the consolidation of nation-states and the growth of international trade, corruption took on new forms. In the Renaissance, the scourges of nepotism and cronyism were common among monarchies and papacies (Amin et al., 2010).

During the historical period of Colonialism, during European expansion, colonial administrators often enriched themselves through the plunder and exploitation of local resources. Already in the 18th and 19th centuries, with the rise of the Industrial Revolution and capitalism, corrupt practices such as influence peddling and monopoly emerged (Hall et al., 2020). In the so-called Contemporary Era, that is, between the 20th and 21st centuries, corruption became a globalized problem due to social, cultural, economic, and political interconnectedness. Totalitarian regimes such as the dictatorships of Fidel Castro in Cuba, Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua, Nicolas Maduro in Venezuela, and other totalitarian leaders used corruption to concentrate power and eliminate opponents.

In another scenario, collusion between large corporations and governments led

to scandals related to public contracts and labor exploitation. This practice is known in economics and business as corporate corruption. Meanwhile, in democratic and authoritarian systems, illicit campaign financing, money laundering, and international bribery are common phenomena; defined by political science as political corruption (Barreneche, 2019).

Today, corruption is more visible thanks to the globalization of information and the efforts of organizations such as Transparency International. However, it remains a challenge in many South American countries (Hinojosa & Acosta, 2021). Scandals such as those involving the Brazilian mega-company Odebrecht or the misuse of public funds in various regions demonstrate that combating this phenomenon requires strong institutions, transparency, and citizen participation (Bizzarro & Coppedge, 2017). The aim of this scientific contribution is to provide a critical and objective review of studies on corruption in the public sector in South American countries. The document presents the following results: 1) Lines of research and main results of the contributions most acclaimed by the global scientific community. 2) Bibliometric analysis of the scientific contributions considered in this research. 3) A structured discussion of the results of the identified research, based on the logical and conceptual construct of the objective of this research. 4) Final considerations or conclusions, supported by the recurring lines of results of the identified research, based on the objective of this scientific contribution.

## 2. Materials and Methods

In the conception and preparation of this review-type research work, various computational tools were used for bibliometric analysis of scientific activity and bibliographic management. The Scopus academic research database and directory was also used.

### 2.1. Scopus Academic Research Database and Directory

Scopus is the world's largest and most recognized bibliographic reference and abstract database platform, developed by Elsevier (Hidalgo & Hernández, 2020). It is widely used in academia and science to search, analyze, and track research publications in various disciplines.

This academic research database and directory features content from areas such as life sciences, physical sciences, social sciences, arts, and humanities. It covers more than 25,000 peer-reviewed scientific journal titles, books, conference proceedings, and patents. It allows users to track how many times an article has been cited by other works, helping to measure its scholarly impact. It offers analytical tools to evaluate trends, journal and author impact, and collaborations between institutions. It provides detailed information about authors, such as their scholarly output, citations, and areas of specialization. It includes metrics such as the renowned H-index, citation impact, and altimetric.

Access to Scopus is typically available through institutional subscriptions, such

as those at universities, research centers, or specialized libraries. In short, Scopus is an essential tool for academics, researchers, and librarians who need to explore, analyze, and track high-quality scientific publications.

## **2.2. Computational Tool for Bibliometric Analysis of Science, VOSviewer**

This is specialized software for creating and visualizing bibliometric maps. It is a widely used tool for analyzing and visualizing research data, such as publication networks, authors, and keywords. It was developed by Leiden University's Centre for Science and Technology Studies (CWTS) in the Netherlands. This tool primarily allows for:

- Network visualization, in other words, allows you to create graphical maps based on bibliographic data. These maps represent relationships such as co-citations, collaboration between authors, or co-occurrence of terms.
- Bibliometric data analysis, which means it allows you to work with data from databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, and PubMed. It also supports custom data in CSV format.
- Co-occurrence maps: Show relationships between specific keywords or terms.
- Collaboration Maps: Visualize cooperation between authors, institutions, or countries.
- Citation Maps: Analyze connections between documents or authors based on citations received.

VOSviewer is a relevant and essential software for review-type research; it is a powerful and accessible tool for researchers and librarians who want to analyze and visually present complex relationships in the world of science and research.

## **2.3. EndNote, a Computational Tool for Managing Scientific Bibliocracies**

This is a bibliographic reference management software that helps researchers, academics, and students efficiently organize and manage citations and bibliographies. It was developed by Clarivate Analytics and is widely used in academia and science. This tool is focused on:

- Reference Management: Allows you to store, organize, and search bibliographic references in a personal database.
- Supports various reference formats, including books, journal articles, book chapters, and more.
- Automatically generates citations and bibliographies in thousands of styles (including APA, MLA, Chicago, IEEE, and others).

EndNote is available as desktop software and as a web-based version (EndNote Online). It generally requires a paid license, although some academic institutions offer free access to their members. It is an essential tool for researchers who want to manage references professionally and save time when preparing their academic papers.

## 2.4. Research Methodology

Using the search criteria: “corruption AND south AND American” in the title, abstract, and keywords of scientific contributions from Scopus, 134 results were obtained. Of the 134 contributions detected, 121 were written in English, 6 in Spanish, 3 in French, 3 in Portuguese, and 1 in Russian. The research was conducted between the years 1984 and 2024.

The information detected in the Scopus database was exported in (.CSV) format for processing by VOSviewer software. This step generated the term map shown in the bibliometric analysis section. Additionally, this information was imported from the Scopus database in (.RIS) format for processing by EndNote software, which generated citations to the references considered in this research.

## 3. Results

### 3.1. Lines of Research and Main Results of the Most Acclaimed Contributions by the Global Scientific Community

This section of the document analyzes and organizes, from highest to lowest citation count, the scientific contributions most praised by the international scientific community on this research topic. It is pertinent to note that this research focuses only on inspiring academic contributions published on the Scopus platform.

In this article (Posada-Carbo, 2000), electoral practices classified as “corrupt” in Latin America between 1830 and 1930 are examined from a comparative perspective, in order to better understand the significant role that elections have played in the history of the region. The article begins by using the term “electoral corruption” in its general sense, as used by contemporaries to refer to the various practices that, in their view, distorted the vote and, consequently, the meaning of suffrage. Based on this general definition, the article goes on to distinguish between the different types of corrupt practices, with the aim of identifying the extent to which they affected electoral competition. By offering a review of the assumptions that have so far served to undermine the historical meaning of suffrage, this article aims to stimulate the study of electoral history in the region. The examination of electoral corruption is, therefore, preceded by a brief review of the historiography of Latin American elections. The authors’ research (Domareski-Ruiz et al., 2020) highlights that the competitiveness of tourism destinations is a multidimensional concept widely studied in the academic literature. Corruption affects the business environment of countries, generating a negative image and barriers that hinder their ability to compete as a global player. This article analyzes this relationship in the tourism industry in a sample of South American countries through a five-year comparison based on the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index (TTCI) with the variation in the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI). An exploratory analysis was conducted to verify the rise and fall in these indicators. The relationship between the TTCI and the CPI was verified through regression analysis. This research directly contributes to addressing an underexplored topic in the tourism sector: the influence of perceived corruption on destination

competitiveness. The results confirm that perceived corruption impacts countries' tourism competitiveness, but in the presence of strong sources of tourist attraction, such as mega-events, this relationship was reduced.

The purpose of this article (Pansarelli & Lima, 2022) is to present the topic of corruption, drawing on the political philosophy of Enrique Dussel. Within the framework of the critical movements emerging in the so-called Global South, Dussel's theoretical work aims to develop a framework that allows for the critique of what he calls the fetishization of power. The fetishization of power is presented as a foundation of institutional corruption, which, unnoticed by the modern philosophical tradition, implies a political theory that legitimizes corrupt power. In the argument, the architecture of Dusselian politics is exposed, distinguishing the concepts of *potentia* and *potestas*. These concepts, in turn, allow us to differentiate between the delegated use of power and the corrupt exercise of power. We will then explain the movement Dussel assumes based on Marx's critique of political economy to indicate the material content from which the critical constitution of a new political theory must be developed—a content inspired by Latin American political experiences.

The manuscript by (Abioro, 2021) indicated that corruption in public procurement can be classified as administrative or state-based. However, transparency, competence, and integrity were identified as the hallmarks of a good procurement system. Unfortunately, monopoly of power, impunity, wide discretion, lack of transparency, and weak accountability over time have characterized government agencies and transactions, particularly in developing countries, and this has created a path to service failure in those countries. The study examined procurement laws, impact, and the corruption perception index in Nigeria and South Africa as it relates to governance and service delivery. Notably, corruption can occur throughout the entire procurement cycle, from needs assessment to the completion of a contract or even the disposal of assets. It is noteworthy that national governments and other agencies fund large infrastructure projects across the developing world, amounting to billions of dollars annually, and organizations such as the World Bank, the African Development Bank Group, the Asian Development Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, and the Inter-American Development Bank adopt “cross-barring” as a deterrent measure. The study adopted secondary data and a descriptive analysis method. Nevertheless, corruption remains a major burden on procurement and service delivery in these countries. While there may be no one-size-fits-all approach to addressing the situation, e-procurement should be encouraged when procurement processes are identified as dangerous and subject to close monitoring, and violations are subject to administrative law remedies. This publication (Moya-Espinoza et al., 2022) studies how, in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic crisis in Latin America, numerous acts of corruption affected containment strategies and weakened institutional systems. A systematic review was conducted during the first wave of infections in 2020 to analyze the relationship between corruption and COVID-19

in Latin American countries, highlighting its components and the institutions involved. Following PRISMA guidelines, searches were conducted in scientific databases and preprints using the terms (((SARS-CoV-2) OR (Covid-19)) AND ((Corruption) AND (Latin America))). Seventy-two studies were included in the initial search: 36 in MEDLINE/PubMed, 20 in Scielo, and 11 preprints. Of the 25 eligible studies, none met the standard required for inclusion. Although corruption is endemic in Latin America, its levels and impact during the first wave of COVID-19 infections have not been quantified.

This paper (Gledhill, 2017) unravels two basic approaches to corruption in Latin America. One is the view enshrined in the global anti-corruption campaign sponsored by multilateral agencies such as the World Bank, that corruption is a pathology of “underdevelopment” that can and should be addressed by the “international community” assisting local efforts to strengthen “civil society.” The other is that the sources of corruption are rooted in Latin American culture and history and can only be eliminated by taking advantage of the opportunities offered by economic globalization and neoliberal reform to effect radical changes in the region’s institutions and social patterns. It is undeniable that Latin American history has a significant influence on how its legal and political institutions function today, but this research rejects the possibility of understanding Latin America, or any other region of the South, from this sole perspective. This article argues that the opposition in dominant Northern discourses between “the state” and “civil society” (as a potential source of reform) is, at best, Eurocentric and, indeed, theoretically incoherent in a more fundamental sense. This conceptual framework has led many analysts to ignore important past efforts to reform governance in Latin America or to misinterpret the reasons for their limited success. At the same time, focusing on the need to reform “the others” promotes an uncritical view of both the consequences of Northern interventions and the achievements of Northern democracies themselves.

Researchers (Barber & El-Adaway, 2013) report that the World Bank and other development banks regularly fund major energy projects to restore and improve aging infrastructure systems in African countries. Energy is arguably the most important form of infrastructure in all economies, whether developing, emerging, or advanced. All other forms of infrastructure are created, developed, or improved through energy. However, when energy production significantly exceeds energy consumption, this creates opportunities for opportunistic individuals more interested in improving their financial well-being than in managing an infrastructure project in an ethical and morally acceptable manner. This paper investigates infrastructure development within the energy sector in six sub-Saharan African countries: Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique, South Africa, Swaziland, and Zimbabwe. The objective is to determine the relationship between energy production and consumption and corruption. Several relationships were found to be significant at the 0.05 and 0.10 alpha levels, offering insight into the potential impact that corruption can have on the energy sector in sub-Saharan Africa. This study

will better enable and align North American contractors implementing infrastructure projects in these countries to develop effective and efficient management strategies that match the unique characteristics governing the operations of these energy sectors.

LeVine's contribution (LeVine, 2024) establishes that until the mid-1970s, with very few exceptions, analyses of political corruption focused on the specifically national and subnational aspects of the phenomenon, although in several cases, due note was taken of the contributions of foreign business interests to domestic official corruption. 1) Gunnar Myrdal noted—albeit without providing much data—that bribery of local officials by foreign companies was common throughout South Asia; 2) this author detailed the institutionalized nature of such arrangements in Nkrumah's Ghana; 3) Eugene Burdick devoted an entire book to the massive corruption that took place in Vietnam, much of it inspired and promoted by private and public American businessmen; 4) Bretton, 5) Andreski, 6) Price, 7) Gould, 8) and others observed similar activity in Africa. However, except in the reports of Congressional hearings devoted to Vietnam, or to multinational corporations, defense contractors, and other large private enterprises doing business abroad, there was little description or analysis of what can legitimately be termed “transnational corruption” on a grand scale. 9) By 1975, the picture had changed. Once the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission began its series of sensational revelations in the wake of the Watergate scandal, once the details of the ITT-Chile and Eli Black-United Brands scandals became public, and once Congress began considering the legislation that eventually became the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act of 1977, the popular and academic literature on the subject grew at an almost exponential rate.

This article (Posada-Carbo, 2000) examines, from a comparative perspective, the electoral practices characterized as “corrupt” in Latin America between 1830 and 1930, in order to better understand the significant role that elections have played in the history of the region. The article begins by using the term “electoral corruption” in its general sense, as used by contemporaries themselves to refer to the various practices that, in their view, distorted the vote and, consequently, the meaning of suffrage. Based on this general definition, the article proceeds to distinguish between different types of corrupt practices, with the aim of identifying the extent to which they affected electoral competition. By offering a review of the assumptions that have so far served to undermine the historical meaning of suffrage, this article aims to stimulate the study of electoral history in the region. The examination of electoral corruption is, therefore, preceded by a brief review of the historiography of Latin American elections.

The scientific proposal put forward by the authors (Davis et al., 2021) highlights that one of the most pressing challenges in anti-corruption law is whether and how to coordinate law enforcement across multiple agencies, that is, under conditions of institutional multiplicity. One approach is modular enforcement, which involves dividing responsibility for law enforcement across multiple institutions

that can, but are not required to, coordinate their activities. The relatively impressive performance of Brazil's anti-corruption agencies in the early 20th century has been attributed to this type of institutional modularity. We examine whether other countries in similar situations adopted the Brazilian approach. Specifically, we compare the extent to which the modular approach to anti-corruption law enforcement was reflected in the national anti-corruption institutions of Brazil and five other South American countries in 2014. We find little evidence that Brazil's neighbors adopted the modular approach and suggest a variety of political, intellectual, and institutional factors that may limit the attractiveness of institutional modularity outside the Brazilian context. Our analysis also demonstrates the value of a comparative legal analysis approach that extends beyond the judiciary and the police to cover the full range of institutions involved in law enforcement.

This paper (Galinato & Galinato, 2013) explores how governance, particularly control of corruption and political stability, affects deforestation due to agricultural expansion. We estimate the short- and long-term effects of control of corruption and political stability on deforestation in South American and Asian countries using data from 1990 to 2003, where the conversion of forest land to agricultural land is a major issue. Political stability has a positive and significant effect on forest cover in the short term, but an insignificant effect in the long term. In contrast, control of corruption has a negative and significant effect on forest cover in both the short and long term, with a larger magnitude in the former. One possible explanation is that corruption control induces greater technological productivity, and if technology and land use are complementary, increases in technological development led to expansion of agricultural land.

This study (Wellalage, 2019) examines how petty corruption affects innovation in micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) in emerging economies. Innovators in emerging economies face considerably high bribery pressure from corrupt public officials and little or no institutional support for innovative firms. Corruption undermines the foundations of institutional trust, which is necessary for developing entrepreneurial and innovative activities. It has been argued that corruption increases transaction costs, making innovation opportunities much less attractive. Since innovators have been recognized as the main driver of long-term economic growth, a clear understanding of how corruption affects innovation can aid MSME development. Our examination of the relationship between innovation and corruption uses firm-level data for 3368 MSMEs in South American countries. We observe some firms that pay bribes and others that do not, but a direct comparison between them leads to an identification problem because bribery participation can be correlated with unobserved firm determinants. To overcome this potential bias, we use the propensity score matching (PSM) method to find a comparison group for individual firms in the bribe-paying group. After controlling for firm characteristics and addressing observable firm characteristics typically linked to innovation decisions, we find systematic differences in firm-level innovation activities associated with bribery paying. In particular, the results

indicate that the estimated average effect of bribe paying on innovation output for firms that engaged in bribery is 11 percent. However, significant heterogeneity is also observed in innovation and bribe paying. Empirically, we find that the average effect of bribe paying on innovations is significantly larger for process innovation output than for product innovation. We also find that, with weaker institutions, the effects of bribery on innovation are more pronounced. The main contribution of this paper to knowledge is twofold. First, to our knowledge, this paper is the first investigation of innovation in MSMEs from the perspective of innovation and corruption, using rich and recent cross-national microdata. Furthermore, extending previous research, we additionally report a heterogeneity effect of bribe payments on product and process innovations. Previous innovation studies, which use microdata, primarily examine a single country. Comparative studies using microdata focus on large firms in developed markets. The policy derived from these studies of large firms and mature markets appears problematic for MSMEs in emerging economies, given size effects, corruption levels, etc. Second, this study provides a fresh perspective on previous studies of corruption in emerging economies, highlighting the importance of formal institutions in addressing corruption. While previous studies on the role of institutions have focused primarily on formal tension, this study emphasizes the importance of the local environment in gaining legitimacy for innovative entrepreneurs or MSMEs. In emerging economies, ineffective legal enforcement of contracts, weak regulations, and difficult enforcement of property rights encourage private entrepreneurs to rely on informal forms of security. Consequently, informal ties and relational governance tend to fill the “institutional vacuum” where there is inadequate formal institutional infrastructure.

- **Synthetic, articulated and comparative analysis of the research:**

The collection of articles analyzed reveals a broad, multidisciplinary, and comparative overview of contemporary corruption studies, particularly in Latin America, Africa, and emerging economies. Although each publication addresses different scenarios—elections, tourism, political philosophy, public procurement, the pandemic, energy, environmental governance, business innovation, among others—they all share a central interest: understanding how corruption manifests itself, what its structural causes are, and what effects it produces on institutions, economic sectors, and social processes. From this perspective, the research objectives allow for mapping the different epistemological and methodological approaches.

The first group of articles focuses on the historicity and conceptualization of political corruption, with the work of [Posada-Carbo \(2000\)](#) being emblematic. Its objective is to comparatively examine electoral practices considered corrupt in Latin America between 1830 and 1930. Its main purpose is to reconstruct the historical significance of suffrage and demonstrate how different forms of electoral manipulation affected political competition. This objective is primarily historiographical and seeks to open new lines of research in Latin American electoral his-

tory, demonstrating that corruption is not merely a contemporary phenomenon, but a structural practice embedded in the formation of republics.

A more theoretical approach appears in [Pansarelli and Lima \(2022\)](#), who, drawing on the political philosophy of Enrique Dussel, direct their research toward constructing a critical conceptual framework for understanding corruption as the “fetishization of power.” Their aim is not to measure or compare phenomena, but to explain the ethical and political foundations that underpin institutional forms of corruption. This perspective introduces a normative and philosophical dimension, moving away from empirical analysis, but contributing conceptual depth to the debate.

A second group of articles focuses on evaluating the impact of corruption on specific economic sectors, such as tourism, energy, and agriculture. [Domareski-Ruiz et al. \(2020\)](#) analyze the relationship between perceived corruption (CPI) and tourism competitiveness index (TTCI) in South American countries. Their objective is to empirically demonstrate how corruption deteriorates tourist appeal, while acknowledging that extraordinary events can temporarily alter this relationship. The study by [Barber and El-Adaway \(2013\)](#) also adopts a sectoral approach, seeking to determine the relationship between energy production/consumption and corruption in southern African countries. Their aim is to understand how energy imbalances and large investments create opportunities for opportunistic practices, in order to help international contractors design ethical management strategies.

For their part, [Galinato and Galinato \(2013\)](#) examine the impact of corruption on deforestation, focusing on how governance—measured by political stability and corruption control—influences the conversion of forests to agricultural land. Their objective is to quantify short- and long-term effects, explaining the mechanisms by which corruption incentivizes agricultural expansion and, consequently, the loss of forest cover.

A third group of studies explores the institutional effects of corruption and the regulatory challenges to combating it. [Abioro \(2021\)](#) aims to evaluate how public procurement laws and corruption perception indices affect governance and service delivery in Nigeria and South Africa. They seek to establish that corruption can occur throughout the procurement cycle and that digitalization (e-procurement) could be a strategy to reduce it. Similarly, [Davis et al. \(2021\)](#) focus their research on comparing anti-corruption institutional coordination in Brazil and other South American countries, evaluating the “modular approach” to law enforcement. Their objective is to determine whether other nations adopt similar structures and to explain why this approach has not been widely replicated.

[Moya-Espinoza et al. \(2022\)](#), during the first wave of COVID-19, set out to identify how corruption affected pandemic management in Latin America through a systematic review. Their purpose is to highlight corrupt practices that occurred during the health emergency, although they conclude that there are not enough rigorous studies to quantify its impact.

Another article with a macrostructural focus is that of [Gledhill \(2017\)](#), whose objective is to critique the dominant theoretical frameworks that explain corruption in the Global South, arguing that Northern views of “corrupt state vs. reformist civil society” are Eurocentric and insufficient. Their contribution seeks to formulate a more balanced analysis, recognizing local histories and questioning the role of international actors.

Finally, [Wellalage \(2019\)](#) introduces an objective focused on business development: to evaluate how small-scale corruption affects innovation in SMEs. Their study seeks to measure the causal impact of bribery on innovative capacity, differentiating between product and process innovation, and highlighting the importance of formal and informal institutions in emerging economies.

In short, the research objectives of all the articles converge on an interest in understanding, measuring, theorizing, or mitigating corruption, from historical, philosophical, economic, institutional, and business perspectives. Although they address different contexts, they all acknowledge that corruption is a multidimensional phenomenon that requires interdisciplinary approaches and comparative frameworks to be understood in its complexity.

### **3.2. Bibliometric Analysis of the Scientific Contributions Considered by This Research**

A bibliometric analysis is a quantitative method used to evaluate and analyze scientific production in a specific field. This analysis is based on the study of bibliographic characteristics, such as publications, citations, authors, journals, institutions, and countries, to identify trends, patterns, and impact on research. It is a key tool in scientific evaluation and strategic decision-making in research and development. The bibliometric study or analysis focuses on the following objectives:

- Measure scientific productivity, that is, analyze the number of publications produced by authors, institutions, or countries.
- Identify research trends, identify emerging topics, the most popular areas of study, and shifts in focus within a field.
- Evaluate research impact, examine the influence of articles through metrics such as the number of citations, h-index (for authors), or impact factor (for journals).
- Study scientific collaborations, through the analysis of co-authorship networks among researchers, institutions, or countries.

Bibliometric analysis is widely used in libraries, research management, and scientific policy evaluation, as it provides an objective basis for understanding and improving scholarly production. These ideas are imperfectly aligned with the theme of this scientific contribution, given that it is titled: “Critical Review of Corruption Studies in the Public Sector in South American Countries. An Objective Analysis.”

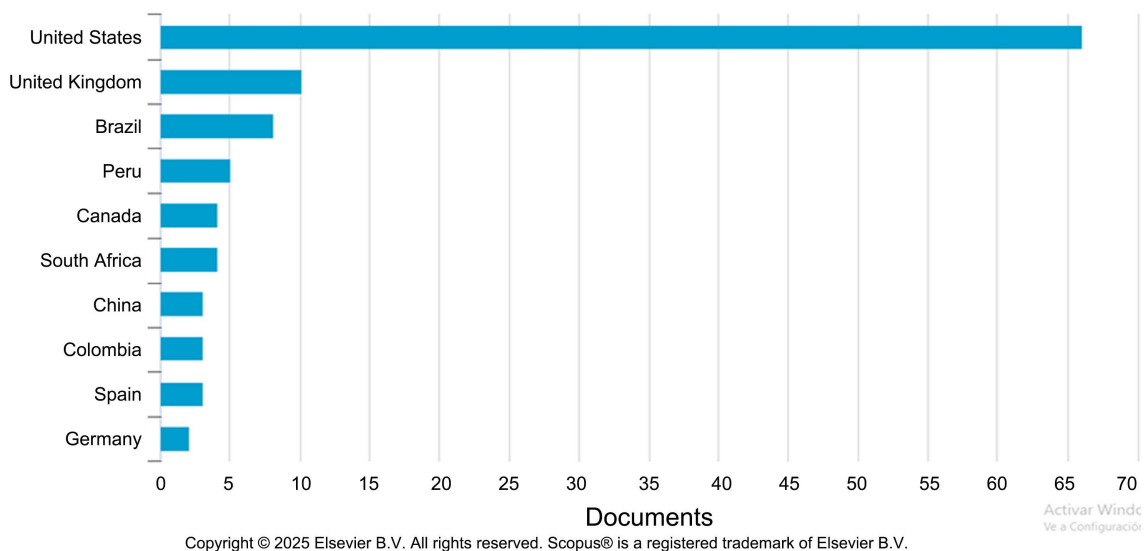
This bibliometric analysis begins by highlighting the countries with the highest

scientific productivity in this line of research. The United States of America, the United Kingdom, Brazil, Peru, and Canada are the nations, in that order, with the most research published in Scopus on the topic addressed in this study. **Figure 1** shows the list of published scientific contributions by country. The United States accounts for the majority of research published in Scopus, for two main reasons. First, the great cultural diversity and representation of South American countries in that nation are reflected in this line of research. And second, the ease with which this nation offers scientific dissemination, starting with the unavoidable advantage of the English language, since this language is the transit language of the international scientific community.

### Documents by country or territory

Scopus

Compare the document counts for up to 15 countries/territories.



**Figure 1.** Scientific contributions published in the academic directory Scopus, by nation.

In recent years, the number of publications related to this topic in the Scopus database has increased. This is due to the growing interest of the international scientific community in unraveling and addressing the phenomenon of corruption in the nations of the South American continent. **Figure 2** shows a positive trend in the number of publications per year starting in 2004. This reality is another important variable that justifies a review-type research project such as the one presented here.

The 134 scientific contributions identified using the search criteria established in the research methodology section are classified by document type as shown in **Figure 3**. The fact that 53% of the research is published as a scientific article demonstrates the dynamic nature of knowledge dissemination on the topic addressed by this research. This result is also consistent with the fact that the phenomenon of corruption is constantly evolving and renewing within the sociopolitical and economic environment of South America and the world.

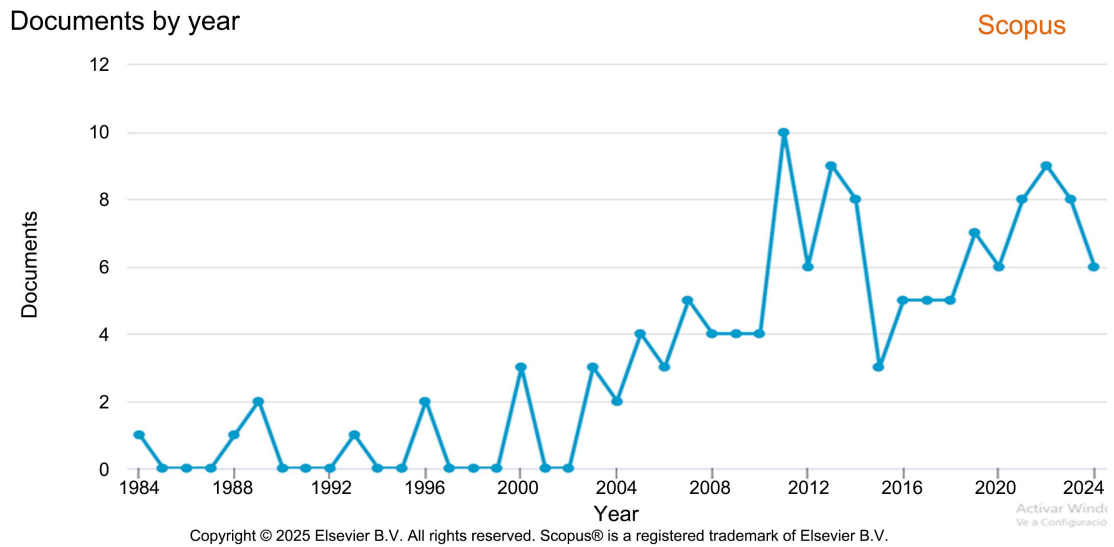


Figure 2. Scientific contributions published in the academic directory Scopus, by nation.

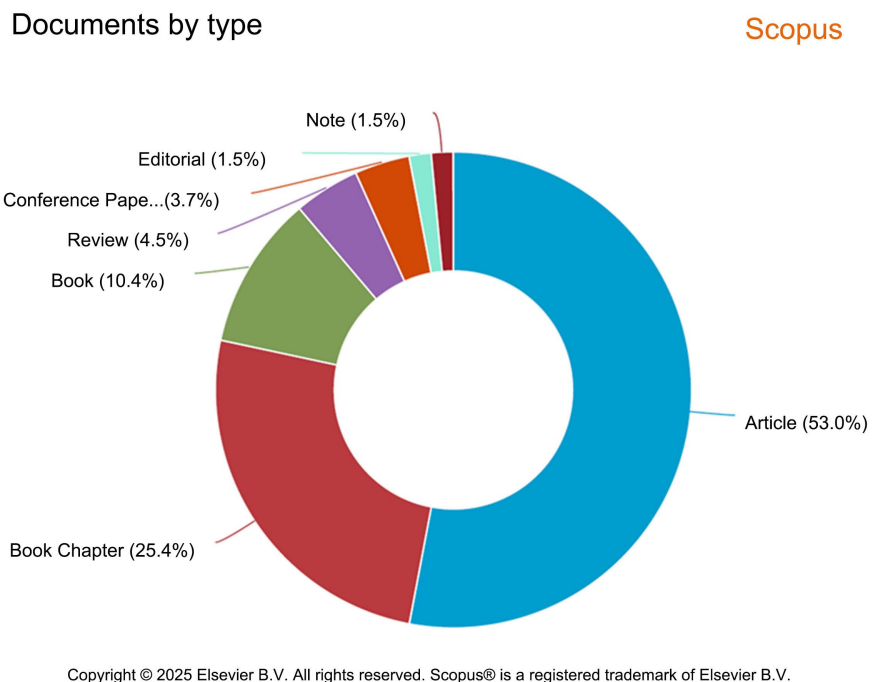


Figure 3. Scientific contributions detected in the Scopus academic directory, by type.

Analyzing the information detected, as indicated in the Materials and Methods section, and using the computational tool VOSviewer, a text mining analysis was performed on the 134 scientific contributions. The text mining study was conducted using the indexed keywords of the publications. The text mining study was limited to research published between 2003 and 2024. The analysis yielded Figure 4. This figure is a term map, which progressively indicates which terms have driven research related to studies of corruption in the public sector in South American countries.

In Figure 4, the size of the circles indicates the relative intensity of co-occur-



tionship is bidirectional: while society creates the conditions for corruption to flourish, it in turn erodes values, institutions, and collective well-being. Reflecting on this connection allows us to understand its origins, impact, and possible solutions.

If the phenomenon of corruption is understood as a reflection of social values, it can establish the mental construct that corruption does not occur in a vacuum; it arises from a sociocultural context where ethical and moral values may be weakened. In societies where inequality, lack of justice, and tolerance of improper practices prevail, corruption tends to become normalized. Expressions such as “he who doesn’t compromise doesn’t advance” are symptoms of a mentality that legitimizes the abuse of power as a means to progress. The fundamental sociocultural elements detected are:

- Extreme individualism: placing personal interest above the collective, which fosters disregard for norms and the common good.
- The lack of civic values and attitudes, since societies with low levels of civic awareness tend to accept corruption as inevitable.
- Institutional mistrust is also a scourge that, unfortunately, is rife in South American nations. When people perceive that the system is not working, they see corruption as a way to obtain justice or access to resources.

Another aspect of this research considers the impact of corruption on society. Corruption has devastating consequences that affect both individuals and communities. It undermines trust in institutions, perpetuates inequality, and hinders economic and social development.

The main consequences of this amoral phenomenon can be listed as deep inequalities, since corruption benefits a few at the expense of the majority, widening the gap between the wealthy and low-income people. Another of the main consequences of corruption in the public sector in South American countries is poverty. Resources allocated to basic services, such as health, education, and housing, are diverted, primarily affecting the most vulnerable sectors.

A crisis of trust is another consequence of corruption in the public sector in South American countries. The perception of impunity generates discontent and distrust in governments and the law. This is a heavy burden on the economic, financial, political, social, and cultural development of the South American continent. This reality evidently hinders the positive evolution of any country. In nations with corrupt economic and financial structures, investors withdraw, which limits growth and job creation (Hinojosa & Hernández, 2022).

Considering the above, a certain degree of societal responsibility in the fight against corruption can be inferred. While it is easy to point to rulers and leaders as the primary culprits, society also plays a crucial role. Corruption is not just a problem for the elites; It is often perpetuated in small, everyday actions, such as petty bribery, favoritism, or evasion of responsibilities.

Faced with the complex and multidimensional phenomenon of corruption in the public sector in South American countries, society can and should take the

following actions:

- Promote ethical values, since ethical and moral formation must begin in the family and be reinforced in schools and communities. Remember that the family is the foundation of society. An honest family is an honest nation.
- Demand transparency, since citizens have the power to hold their leaders accountable through democratic mechanisms.
- Encourage and promote participation in institutional decisions through social movements, civil society organizations, and the press. These media play a key role in denouncing and exposing corruption.
- Not being complicit, that is, rejecting corrupt practices, even in small acts, contributes to generating cultural change.

Corruption is not only a political or economic problem, but also a moral and cultural one. The fight against corruption requires not only stronger laws and institutions, but also a profound transformation in the values of the societies of South American nations. Only when ethics and the common good are placed above personal interest will it be possible to build a more just, equitable, and corruption-free social structure. Change begins with each individual and is strengthened when society collectively decides to reject corruption in all its forms. This is the way; this is the truth.

### **In the Context of Global Public Policies, Combating the Phenomenon of Corruption Is a Universal Consensus**

Just as Mexico enacted its Federal Law against Corruption in Public Procurement in 2012, other Latin American countries have adopted similar legal frameworks focused on preventing bribery, collusion, and manipulation of government procurement processes.

In the regional context, these instruments share three central objectives:

Strengthening transparency in public procurement, where a significant portion of government spending is concentrated. Imposing severe administrative and economic sanctions on individuals and legal entities involved in corrupt practices. Regulating relations with foreign companies, adapting to international standards (OECD, UN, GAFILAT). At the Latin

American level, equivalent legislation exists, such as:

- Brazil—Lei da Empresa Limpa (2014), which introduced administrative sanctions for companies involved in national and transnational corruption.
- Chile—Law 20.880 (2016) on probity in public service and the prevention of conflicts of interest.
- Colombia—Anti-Corruption Statute (2011), which strengthens controls on government contracting and sanctions for collusion.
- Peru—Legislative Decree 1352 (2017), which establishes the criminal liability of legal entities for bribery.

Overall, Latin America has replicated or adapted the model of monetary sanctions, disqualifications, and increased oversight of public procurement processes,

with national variations but following the same regional trend.

## 5. Conclusion

Corruption is a complex and persistent problem that has evolved alongside societies, adapting to the political, economic, and technological structures of each era. Combating corruption not only improves citizens' quality of life but also ensures that resources are used responsibly, strengthens institutions, and promotes sustainable and equitable development. Public corruption can be understood as a deviation in the actions of politicians and bureaucrats from the behavior expected by key stakeholders (voters and citizens in general), but the extent to which this phenomenon spreads is determined by the context in which public office is exercised. Thus, an educated society, for example, constitutes an adverse environment for corrupt individuals, making it more likely that they will be discovered and punished. Similarly, characteristics such as the effectiveness and independence of the judiciary are fundamental to addressing this problem, as empirically corroborated in several studies referenced in this paper. The United States leads the research field on corruption in the public sector in South American countries, followed by the United Kingdom and Brazil. Since 2004, there has been a notable increase in scientific contributions of all types, disseminated by scientific journals listed in Scopus and related to the topic of this manuscript.

The changing environment of the corruption phenomenon in South American nations has generated a profound dynamism in scientific activity on this topic, manifested in a 53% increase in contributions in the form of scientific articles. It should be noted that when the research topic is more stable over time, the trend in scientific productivity focuses more on scientific contributions such as books and/or book chapters.

Text mining analysis of indexing keywords reveals a significant fragmentation of terms or conceptual elements on the topic: corruption in the public sector in South American countries. On the other hand, the publishing houses most focused on the socialization of research related to this topic are named: Latin American Perspectives, Ariel and Courier Des Pays De L Est.

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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