

**Received:** 18 November, 2025

**Accepted:** 09 March, 2026

**Published:** 29 April, 2026

# Corruption as Lived Experience: A Descriptive Political Philosophy of Everyday Governance in Vietnam

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**Cite this article:**

Hung, T. Q. (2026). Corruption as Lived Experience: A Descriptive Political Philosophy of Everyday Governance in Vietnam. *Cultura Científica*, (24), pp. 229–239.

## Abstract

This paper reconceptualizes corruption as a lived experience embedded in everyday governance, using province-level evidence from Vietnam. Drawing on data from the Vietnam Provincial Governance and Public Administration Performance Index (PAPI) and the Provincial Competitiveness Index (PCI), the study examines how informal payments manifest across administrative procedures, healthcare, education, and firm–state interactions. The descriptive analysis documents substantial cross-provincial variation in corruption, indicating that corruption is shaped by localized governance environments rather than being uniformly distributed. Sectoral patterns show that administrative procedures

and public services constitute the primary arenas of everyday corruption. By integrating descriptive evidence with political philosophy, particularly theories of justice and capability, the paper interprets corruption as a territorially differentiated form of governance that conditions access to public authority. The findings suggest that corruption in Vietnam operates less as an isolated institutional failure and more as a routine feature of state–society interaction across provinces.

**Keywords:** corruption, lived corruption, everyday governance, subnational governance, informal payments, Vietnam, PAPI, PCI

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Corruption is commonly analyzed as a macro-level institutional problem or as an outcome of individual behavior. However, such approaches often abstract away from the everyday interactions through which citizens and firms encounter the state. In many developing contexts, corruption is not primarily experienced through large-scale scandals but through routine informal payments required to access public services and administrative procedures [1, 2].

While macro-level perspectives are useful for comparative analysis, they often fail to capture how corruption is reproduced in everyday interactions. A focus on lived experience brings attention to the micro-foundations of governance, where formal rules are implemented, negotiated, and sometimes circumvented in practice.

Understanding corruption as lived experience therefore shifts the analytical focus from institutional design to everyday governance processes. It requires attention to how rules are implemented, negotiated, and sometimes circumvented in practice. This perspective does not replace institutional analysis but complements it by revealing the mechanisms through which corruption is sustained at the micro level.

Recent research has increasingly emphasized the importance of micro-level governance and everyday practices in shaping institutional outcomes [3, 4]. In this perspective, corruption is not merely a violation of formal rules but a pattern embedded in routine state–society interactions. In Vietnam, provincial governance plays a central role in structuring these interactions, making subnational variation particularly relevant [5, 6].

This paper adopts a province-level perspective to examine corruption as a lived experience. Using aggregated indicators from PAPI and PCI, the analysis documents how corruption varies across provinces, sectors, and over time. The results show that corruption is not uniformly distributed but reflects localized governance environments. This perspective shifts the focus from corruption as a national-level phenomenon to corruption as a territorially differentiated feature of governance. In the Vietnamese context, where provincial authorities play a central role in implementing policies and delivering services, such a perspective is particularly relevant for understanding how corruption is experienced in practice.

This paper adopts a descriptive approach and does not aim to establish causal relationships. Instead, it is guided by a set of research questions and descriptive propositions.

The paper addresses three research questions. First, how does corruption vary across provinces in Vietnam? Second, how is corruption distributed across different domains of everyday governance, including administrative procedures and public services? Third, to what extent do citizen-based and firm-based measures of corruption align at the provincial level?

The analysis is further guided by three descriptive propositions. First, corruption is expected to exhibit substantial cross-provincial variation, reflecting localized governance environments. Second, corruption is likely to be concentrated in specific domains of everyday governance rather than being uniformly distributed. Third, citizen-based and firm-based measures are expected to capture related but distinct dimensions of corruption.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.1. CORRUPTION AS AN INSTITUTIONAL AND GOVERNANCE PROBLEM

The mainstream literature conceptualizes corruption as a deviation from formal rules in the allocation of public resources. Early contributions define corruption as the misuse of public office for private gain, emphasizing principal–agent problems and weak institutional constraints [7, 8]. More recent work has shifted toward a broader governance perspective, highlighting the role of institutional quality, accountability, and transparency in shaping corruption outcomes [9, 10].

Beyond the principal–agent framework, more recent approaches have emphasized that corruption is not only a problem of monitoring and incentives but also of institutional equilibrium. In contexts where informal practices are widespread, corruption may become a self-reinforcing equilibrium in which both officials and citizens adjust their expectations and behavior accordingly. Under such conditions, compliance with formal rules may be perceived as inefficient or even irrational, further entrenching informal practices within governance systems.

This perspective suggests that corruption cannot be reduced to individual deviations from rules but must be understood as a systemic outcome shaped by institutional configurations. In particular, weak enforcement, limited transparency, and fragmented accountability mechanisms can create environments in which informal payments become normalized. This line of reasoning reinforces the need to examine corruption not only at the national level but also across subnational units where institutional conditions vary.

Within this framework, corruption is often measured using perception-based indicators at the national level. While these measures provide useful cross-country comparisons, they tend to obscure variation within countries and overlook the mechanisms through which corruption is experienced in daily life [2]. As a result, there is growing recognition that corruption cannot be fully understood without examining how it operates at lower levels of governance.

## 2.2. CORRUPTION AS LIVED EXPERIENCE

A parallel strand of literature approaches corruption as a social and experiential phenomenon. Rather than focusing solely on institutional failure, this perspective examines how corruption is embedded in routine interactions between citizens and the state. [1] shows that corruption is not only a legal or administrative issue but also a cultural and discursive practice that shapes how citizens perceive the state. Similarly, [3] argues that frontline bureaucrats play a central role in translating formal rules into practice, often creating space for informal payments.

Recent studies emphasize that corruption is frequently encountered in everyday contexts, such as accessing healthcare, education, or administrative services [11]. These interactions constitute what may be described as “everyday corruption,” where informal payments become normalized within governance systems. This perspective is particularly relevant in developing countries, where formal institutions coexist with informal practices.

By focusing on lived experience, this literature highlights that corruption is not only about high-level political actors but also about ordinary encounters that shape citizens’ access to public goods.

Beyond individual encounters, everyday corruption can also be understood as a form of informal institution that structures expectations and behavior. When informal payments become widespread, they may reduce uncertainty in accessing services by creating predictable, albeit unofficial, rules of interaction. In this sense, corruption may operate as a parallel governance system that coexists with formal institutions.

However, this apparent functionality comes at the cost of equity and legitimacy. Informal systems privilege those with greater resources or connections, thereby reinforcing social and regional inequalities. Moreover, the normalization of informal payments can erode trust in public institutions, as citizens come to perceive formal rules as ineffective or symbolic.

This dual nature of corruption, as both a coping mechanism and a source of inequality, underscores the importance of examining how corruption is experienced in practice rather than relying solely on formal institutional indicators.

If corruption is embedded in everyday interactions, then its manifestation is likely to vary across the local contexts where these interactions take place. This makes subnational governance a critical lens for understanding how corruption is structured in practice.

## 2.3. SUBNATIONAL GOVERNANCE AND CORRUPTION

An important development in the literature is the increasing focus on subnational variation in governance. Studies show that corruption can vary significantly within countries due to differences in local institutions, administrative capacity, and political incentives [12]. Subnational analyses provide a more nuanced understanding of governance by capturing local heterogeneity that national indicators cannot reveal.

In the context of Vietnam, provincial governance has been widely studied using datasets such as the Provincial Competitiveness Index (PCI). Research based on PCI highlights substantial variation in economic governance and business environments across provinces [5]. These differences are linked to variations in local leadership, administrative practices, and reform efforts.

Similarly, the Vietnam Provincial Governance and Public Administration Performance Index (PAPI) provides citizen-based measures of governance quality, including corruption. Studies using PAPI data show that corruption is experienced differently across provinces and sectors, particularly in administrative procedures and public service delivery [6].

Despite these advances, most existing studies either focus on firm-level corruption using PCI or citizen perceptions using PAPI. Few studies integrate these perspectives or interpret them through a broader theoretical lens.

Subnational variation is particularly important in countries characterized by the decentralized implementation of policies. Even within a unified legal framework, differences in administrative practices, leadership styles, and local incentives can generate heterogeneous governance outcomes. This implies that corruption should be analyzed as a spatially differentiated phenomenon rather than a uniform national condition.

In the Vietnamese context, provincial governments exercise considerable discretion in policy implementation, administrative procedures, and service delivery. This creates scope for variation not only in economic performance but also in governance quality, including corruption. As a result, province-level analysis provides a more granular understanding of how corruption operates in practice and how it is experienced by citizens and firms.

## 2.4. RESEARCH GAP AND CONTRIBUTION

This paper contributes to the literature in three ways. First, it integrates citizen-based and firm-based measures of corruption to provide a more comprehensive view of governance. Second, it adopts a descriptive approach that emphasizes patterns of corruption across provinces, rather than focusing on causal identification. Third, it interprets these patterns through the lens of political philosophy, conceptualizing corruption as a territorially embedded form of everyday

governance.

By doing so, the paper bridges the gap between institutional analyses of corruption and experiential approaches, offering a new perspective on how corruption operates within subnational governance systems.

## 2.5. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study draws on political philosophy to interpret corruption as a problem of justice and governance. From the perspective of [13], a just system requires fairness in access to basic goods and public services. Provincial variation in corruption suggests that such fairness is not consistently achieved, as access to services may depend on local conditions rather than uniform rules.

The capability approach developed by [14] further highlights that unequal access to services can translate into unequal capabilities across regions. When informal payments are required in some provinces but not others, individuals face different opportunities to achieve valued outcomes.

At the implementation level, the concept of street-level bureaucracy introduced by [3] helps explain how corruption emerges in practice. Differences in administrative behavior across provinces can generate variation in corruption outcomes, even within a common institutional framework.

Together, these perspectives suggest that corruption should be understood as a territorially embedded feature of governance that shapes access to public authority.

Taken together, these theoretical perspectives can be integrated into a coherent analytical framework. Corruption is conceptualized as an outcome of everyday governance practices, shaped by interactions between institutional rules, administrative behavior, and citizen experiences. Subnational variation reflects differences in how these elements are combined across provinces.

Within this framework, corruption is not treated as an exogenous shock or isolated failure but as a patterned feature of governance that emerges from routine interactions. This approach provides the basis for interpreting descriptive evidence not merely as statistical variation but as a manifestation of underlying governance structures.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

The analysis uses province-level data from the Vietnam Provincial Governance and Public Administration Performance Index (PAPI) and the Provincial Competitiveness Index (PCI).

On the citizen side, corruption is measured using indicators that capture informal payments across multiple domains of interaction with the state, including access to information, land administration, certification procedures, commune-level administrative services, healthcare, and primary education. Indicators originally coded as the absence of bribery are reverse-coded so that higher values indicate higher levels of corruption.

To ensure comparability across components, all indicators are standardized to have a mean of zero and unit variance. Based on these standardized measures, three composite indices are constructed. The administrative corruption index captures corruption in bureaucratic procedures, including land administration, certification, and local administrative services. The public service corruption index captures corruption in healthcare and education. The lived corruption index is constructed as the average of all standardized components, providing a summary measure of everyday corruption experienced by citizens.

In addition, sector-specific indicators, such as land and hospital bribery frequencies, are retained in their original form to capture domain-specific variation.

On the firm side, the analysis uses PCI indicators, including the informal charges index, the share of firms reporting informal payments, and administrative rent-seeking. These variables capture corruption in business–government interactions and complement the citizen-based measures.

A key advantage of the constructed indices is that they allow for consistent comparison across domains of corruption while preserving relative variation across provinces. Standardization ensures that each component contributes equally to the composite indices, avoiding dominance by variables with larger scales or variances.

At the same time, the analysis retains sector-specific indicators in their original form to capture domain-specific variation that may be obscured by aggregation. This dual approach allows the study to examine both general patterns of corruption and localized dynamics within specific sectors.

It is important to note that the use of aggregated province-level data implies that the analysis captures average experiences rather than individual-level variation. While this limits the ability to examine within-province heterogeneity, it is appropriate for the study's focus on subnational governance patterns.

Finally, the descriptive nature of the analysis implies that the results should be interpreted as patterns rather than causal relationships. The objective is to document variation and structure, providing a foundation for future empirical investigation.

#### 4. DESCRIPTIVE EVIDENCE ON CORRUPTION ACROSS PROVINCES AND DISCUSSION

Building on the measurement strategy outlined above, this section presents descriptive evidence on corruption across provinces in Vietnam. The analysis focuses on patterns of variation, distribution, and co-movement across indicators, rather than causal relationships.

##### 4.1. DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Table 1 reports summary statistics for the main corruption indicators constructed from PAPI and PCI.

**Table 1.** *Descriptive statistics*

	Count	Mean	SD	Min	Max
PAPI control of corruption	373	6.766	0.846	0	8.286
Administrative corruption index	373	$-3.05 \times 10^{-9}$	0.706	-1.725	5.265
Public service corruption index	373	$-5.89 \times 10^{-10}$	0.952	-1.999	6.711
Lived corruption index	373	$-2.03 \times 10^{-9}$	0.746	-1.364	5.747
Corruption victimization	373	0.043	0.103	0	1
Land bribery frequency	373	0.451	0.159	0	1.048
Hospital bribery frequency	373	0.482	0.148	0	0.903
PCI informal charges	378	6.781	0.638	4.706	8.392
Share of firms paying informal charges	378	0.436	0.121	0.167	0.808
Administrative rent-seeking	378	0.610	0.117	0.163	0.884

Several patterns are immediately apparent. First, the PAPI control of corruption index exhibits a relatively high mean value (6.766) with moderate dispersion, indicating variation in perceived governance quality across provinces. In contrast, the constructed corruption indices, including administrative corruption, public service corruption, and lived corruption, are centered around zero with substantial variation. This reflects their normalization and highlights meaningful cross-provincial differences.

Second, sector-specific corruption indicators display distinct distributions. Land bribery frequency and hospital bribery frequency have means of 0.451 and 0.482, respectively, suggesting that informal payments are common but not universal across provinces. The dispersion of these variables indicates that corruption in specific sectors varies considerably depending on local conditions.

Third, the PCI indicators provide a complementary perspective from firms. The informal charges index has a relatively high mean (6.781), while the share of firms paying informal charges averages 0.436. Administrative rent-seeking also shows substantial variation. These patterns suggest that corruption in firm–state interactions is both widespread and heterogeneous across provinces.

Overall, the descriptive statistics indicate that corruption is neither uniformly low nor uniformly high but varies significantly across provinces and across domains of governance. The contrast between standardized composite indices and raw sectoral indicators further highlights the multi-layered nature of corruption. While composite indices capture general patterns of governance, sector-specific measures reveal localized dynamics that may not be fully reflected in aggregate indicators. This distinction is important for interpreting variation across provinces, as it suggests that corruption operates simultaneously at multiple levels.

##### 4.2. DISTRIBUTION OF LIVED CORRUPTION

Figure 1 presents the distribution of the lived corruption index.

The distribution is concentrated within a relatively narrow range, with most observations clustering around the mean. This indicates that while corruption is widespread, extreme values are limited to a small number of province–year observations. The distribution exhibits slight right-skewness, suggesting that a subset of provinces experiences higher levels of corruption.

Importantly, the absence of extreme outliers indicates that the composite index is stable and not driven by anomalous values. This supports its use as a summary measure of everyday corruption across provinces.

The relatively concentrated distribution also suggests that differences across provinces are incremental rather than extreme. This pattern is consistent with a governance system in which corruption is widespread but varies in intensity rather than presence. Such a distribution reinforces the interpretation of corruption as a routine feature of governance rather than an exceptional condition.

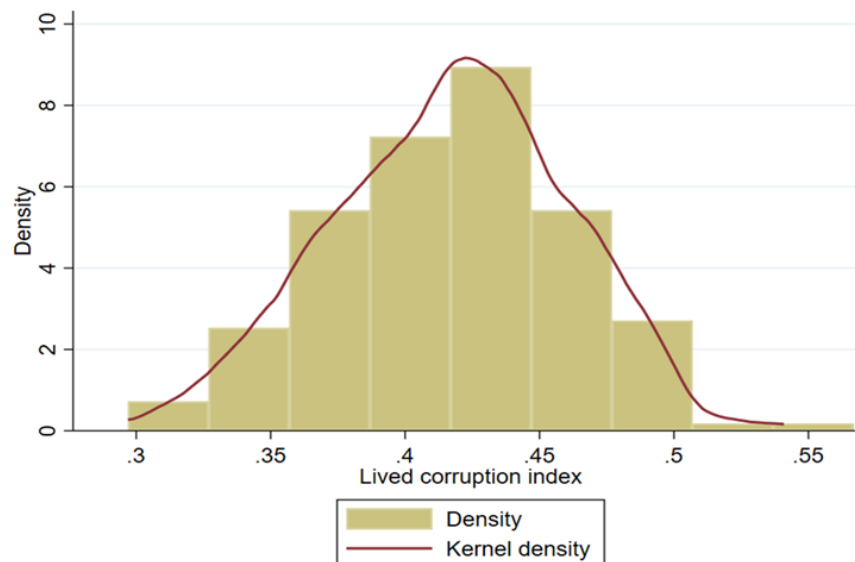


Figure 1. Distribution of lived corruption

### 4.3. CORRELATION STRUCTURE OF CORRUPTION MEASURES

Table 2 reports the pairwise correlations among the main corruption indicators.

Table 2. Correlation matrix

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
PAPI control of corruption (1)	1								
PAPI Administrative corruption (2)	-0.254*	1							
PAPI Public service corruption (3)	-0.431*	0.585*	1						
PAPI Lived corruption (4)	-0.377*	0.908*	0.871*	1					
PAPI Land bribery frequency (5)	-0.073	0.078	0.105*	0.101	1				
PAPI Hospital bribery frequency (6)	-0.084	-0.223*	-0.033	-0.152*	0.060*	1			
PCI informal charges (7)	0.041	0.182*	-0.053	0.083	-0.038	-0.091	1		
PCI Firms paying informal charges (8)	-0.076	-0.172*	0.064	-0.071	0.0001	-0.014	-0.578*	1	
PCI Administrative rent-seeking (9)	-0.107	0.197*	0.0983	0.170*	-0.030	0.005	-0.097*	0.127*	1

\*: Significant at the 5% level.

A clear pattern emerges within the PAPI-based indicators. Administrative corruption and public service corruption are positively correlated ( $r = 0.585$ ), indicating that corruption in administrative procedures tends to co-occur with corruption in service delivery. The lived corruption index is strongly associated with both administrative corruption ( $r = 0.908$ ) and public service corruption ( $r = 0.871$ ), confirming that it captures the common variation in everyday corruption experiences.

The control of corruption index is negatively correlated with all experiential measures of corruption. In particular, its correlation with public service corruption ( $r = -0.431$ ) and lived corruption ( $r = -0.377$ ) suggests that provinces with stronger perceived governance quality tend to exhibit lower levels of corruption in practice.

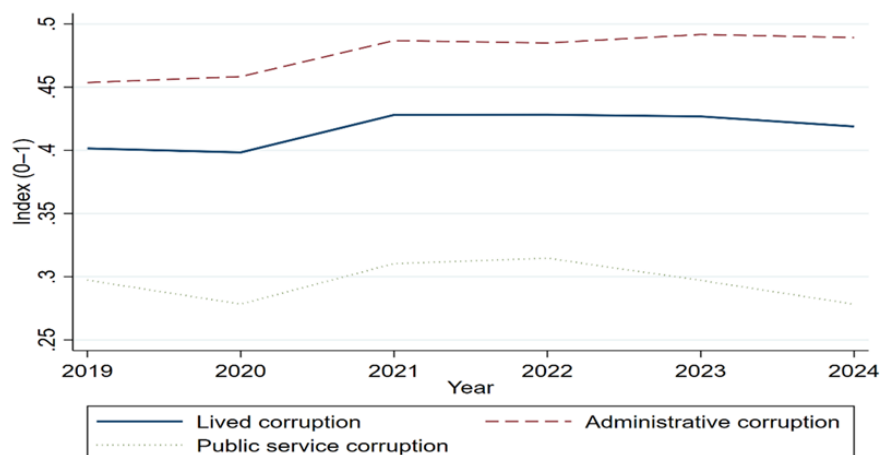
Sector-specific indicators, such as land and hospital bribery frequencies, show relatively weak correlations with broader corruption measures. This indicates that corruption in these sectors reflects localized conditions and does not fully overlap with general corruption intensity.

The relationship between PAPI and PCI indicators is comparatively weak. Firm-based measures such as informal charges and rent-seeking show only limited association with citizen-based corruption measures. For instance, PCI informal charges is weakly correlated with lived corruption ( $r = 0.083$ ), while the share of firms paying informal charges is negatively correlated with administrative corruption ( $r = -0.172$ ). These patterns suggest that firms and citizens experience corruption through different channels.

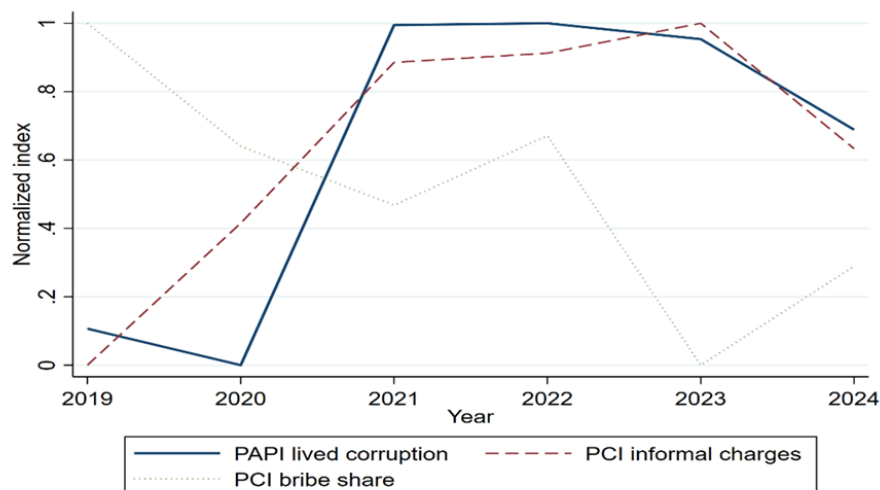
The strong internal correlation among PAPI-based indicators suggests that corruption experienced by citizens is structured and internally consistent across domains. This coherence contrasts with the weaker relationships observed between citizen-based and firm-based measures, reinforcing the idea that corruption manifests differently depending on the type of interaction with the state.

#### 4.4. TEMPORAL TRENDS

Figure 2 presents the evolution of PAPI corruption indicators over time, while Figure 3 compares trends between citizen-based and firm-based measures.



**Figure 2.** *Trend in PAPI corruption indicators (normalized)*



**Figure 3.** *Trends in citizen and firm corruption*

The PAPI indicators display relatively smooth variation over time. Administrative corruption, public service corruption, and lived corruption follow broadly similar trajectories, reflecting their strong internal correlation. The absence of abrupt shifts suggests that corruption evolves gradually rather than through sudden institutional changes.

When comparing PAPI and PCI indicators, the trends do not fully align. In some periods, firm-based measures move differently from citizen-based indicators, indicating that the experiences of firms and citizens are not synchronized. This divergence highlights the multi-dimensional nature of corruption and the importance of considering multiple perspectives.

The gradual evolution of corruption indicators over time suggests a degree of institutional persistence. Rather than responding immediately to policy changes, corruption appears to be embedded in longer-term governance dynamics. This temporal stability further supports the interpretation of corruption as a structural feature of local governance.

#### 4.5. STYLIZED FACTS

Taken together, the descriptive evidence reveals several stylized facts that characterize corruption in Vietnam. First, corruption exhibits systematic cross-provincial variation, indicating that it is shaped by localized governance environments rather than being randomly distributed. This spatial differentiation suggests that corruption is closely linked to subnational institutional conditions.

Second, corruption is concentrated in specific domains of everyday governance, particularly administrative procedures and public service delivery. These domains represent the primary points of interaction between citizens and the state,

making them central arenas for informal practices. Sector-specific indicators further reveal that corruption does not operate uniformly even within these domains, but reflects localized administrative dynamics.

Third, corruption experienced by citizens displays a high degree of internal coherence, as reflected in the strong correlations among PAPI-based indicators. This suggests that everyday corruption is structured and systematic rather than episodic. In contrast, firm-based measures capture a related but distinct dimension of corruption, highlighting differences in how firms and citizens interact with the state.

Fourth, the temporal patterns indicate that corruption evolves gradually over time, without abrupt structural breaks. This persistence suggests that corruption is embedded in longer-term governance dynamics rather than being driven by short-term shocks.

Together, these stylized facts support the interpretation of corruption as a territorially embedded and structurally persistent feature of everyday governance.

#### 4.6. DISCUSSION

The descriptive evidence presented in Section 4 suggests that corruption in Vietnam is best understood not as a uniform institutional failure but as a territorially differentiated feature of everyday governance. The observed cross-provincial variation indicates that corruption is embedded in localized administrative practices and governance environments, rather than being evenly distributed across space. The use of standardized indices allows the analysis to compare corruption across domains while preserving relative variation across provinces.

From an institutional perspective, this variation aligns with the literature emphasizing subnational differences in governance quality. Previous studies have shown that regional disparities in administrative capacity and political incentives can produce uneven governance outcomes within a single national framework [12, 5]. The patterns documented here are consistent with this view, as provinces exhibit distinct profiles of corruption across both citizen-based and firm-based measures.

At the same time, the strong internal coherence of the PAPI-based indicators highlights the structured nature of corruption as experienced by citizens. The close association between administrative corruption, public service corruption, and the lived corruption index suggests that corruption is not a set of isolated incidents but a recurring feature of routine interactions with the state. This finding resonates with the concept of “everyday corruption,” where informal payments become normalized within governance processes [1, 11].

Importantly, the relatively weak correlation between PAPI and PCI indicators points to a divergence between citizen and firm experiences of corruption. Firms and citizens interact with different parts of the state apparatus and face distinct institutional constraints, leading to differentiated patterns of corruption. This distinction supports the argument that corruption is multi-dimensional and cannot be fully captured by a single type of indicator [2, 4].

From a political philosophy perspective, these findings raise important questions about fairness and access to public authority. The observed provincial variation implies that individuals face unequal conditions in accessing public services, depending on where they live. This challenges the Rawlsian principle of equal access to basic goods under a just institutional arrangement [13]. If similar administrative procedures require informal payments in some provinces but not others, then equality before public institutions is not fully realized.

The findings also resonate with the capability approach developed by [14], which emphasizes that unequal access to services translates into unequal opportunities to achieve valued outcomes. Provincial disparities in corruption can therefore be interpreted as differences in the effective capabilities available to citizens, rather than merely differences in administrative performance.

At the level of implementation, the variation in corruption patterns is consistent with the concept of street-level bureaucracy [3]. Frontline officials play a critical role in translating formal rules into practice, and their behavior can vary across local contexts. This creates space for informal practices to emerge and persist, even within a unified institutional framework.

Taken together, these interpretations suggest that corruption in Vietnam operates less as an exceptional deviation from formal rules and more as a routine feature of governance embedded in everyday interactions. The coexistence of sector-specific corruption, composite indices, and divergent firm and citizen experiences points to a complex governance landscape in which corruption is structured, persistent, and context-dependent.

An additional implication of the findings is that corruption may function as an informal mechanism that shapes access to public services. In contexts where formal procedures are complex or inefficient, informal payments may act as a parallel system that facilitates access, albeit in an unequal manner. This dual structure of formal rules and informal practices complicates the distinction between institutional failure and adaptive behavior within governance systems.

Another important implication concerns the relationship between formal institutional reforms and lived experiences of corruption. Even when formal rules are improved, changes in everyday corruption may lag behind due to entrenched administrative practices and behavioral norms. This gap between formal reform and lived experience highlights the limits

of institutional change when implementation mechanisms remain unchanged.

In this sense, corruption can be seen as embedded not only in institutions but also in practices and expectations. Addressing corruption therefore requires not only formal reforms but also changes in administrative behavior and citizen–state interactions at the local level.

Importantly, the descriptive nature of this study does not allow for causal claims regarding the determinants of corruption. However, the documented patterns provide a structured empirical foundation for future research. In particular, the divergence between citizen-based and firm-based indicators, as well as the persistence of provincial variation over time, point to promising directions for further investigation.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This paper has examined corruption in Vietnam from a descriptive and subnational perspective, emphasizing corruption as a lived experience embedded in everyday interactions between citizens, firms, and the state. Using province-level data from PAPI and PCI, the analysis documents substantial variation in corruption across localities, institutional domains, and over time.

Several key findings emerge from the descriptive evidence. First, corruption is not uniformly distributed across provinces but exhibits clear spatial differentiation, suggesting that local governance conditions play a central role in shaping corruption outcomes. Second, corruption manifests differently across domains. Administrative procedures and public service delivery remain the primary arenas in which citizens encounter informal payments, while firm-level indicators reveal parallel patterns of rent-seeking in business–government interactions. Third, the correlation structure indicates that different forms of corruption tend to co-move, pointing to an underlying governance environment that simultaneously affects multiple sectors.

Taken together, these findings support a reconceptualization of corruption as a routine and structured feature of governance rather than a collection of isolated incidents. Corruption, in this sense, reflects how authority is exercised, negotiated, and accessed in everyday life. The observed variation across provinces further suggests that corruption is shaped by localized institutional arrangements, administrative capacity, and enforcement practices.

The contribution of the paper is primarily descriptive and interpretive. By combining citizen-based and firm-based measures, the study provides a more comprehensive picture of corruption as experienced in practice. The use of standardized indices allows for consistent comparison across domains, while the focus on subnational variation highlights dimensions of corruption that are often obscured in national-level analyses.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The analysis does not attempt to establish causal relationships between governance factors and corruption outcomes. Instead, it provides a systematic descriptive foundation upon which future research can build. In particular, subsequent work may explore the institutional determinants of the observed variation, including the role of local political incentives, administrative reforms, and economic structure.

From a policy perspective, the findings suggest that anti-corruption strategies should move beyond uniform national approaches and pay greater attention to provincial heterogeneity. Targeted interventions that address specific domains of corruption, such as administrative procedures or public services, may be more effective than broad, undifferentiated reforms.

More broadly, the findings underscore the importance of adopting a micro-level perspective in the study of corruption. By focusing on how corruption is experienced in everyday interactions, researchers can gain insights that are often overlooked in macro-level analyses based on perception indices. This perspective is particularly valuable in contexts where formal institutions coexist with deeply embedded informal practices.

In sum, the paper argues that understanding corruption requires moving closer to how it is experienced in everyday governance. By documenting patterns of lived corruption across provinces, the study provides a foundation for both empirical inquiry and policy design in contexts where corruption is deeply embedded in routine state–society interactions.

Future research may build on this descriptive foundation by exploring the institutional and political determinants of subnational variation in corruption. In particular, the role of local leadership, administrative reforms, and fiscal capacity may provide important insights into why some provinces perform better than others.

In addition, further work using micro-level data could complement the province-level analysis by examining how individual characteristics shape exposure to corruption. Such approaches would help bridge the gap between aggregate patterns and individual experiences, providing a more comprehensive understanding of corruption as both a structural and lived phenomenon.

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