Addressing Corruption in All its Forms Through Sustainable Development Goals: A Bibliometric Analysis

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ABTRACT

Corruption is a significant obstacle to sustainable development, weakening governance and public trust while deepening poverty and inequality. This paper examines global views on fighting corruption in all its forms through the lens of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Using bibliometric analysis in VOSviewer, the study reviews 112 scholarly articles across diverse disciplines to identify key trends, influential studies, and gaps in current research. The findings indicate an increasing academic interest in the relationship between corruption and sustainable development, with notable contributions from the UK, the US, and South Africa. The analysis underscores the crucial role of anti-corruption initiatives, particularly those aligned with SDG 16, in advancing the broader SDG agenda. By identifying emerging themes and overlooked areas, this study provides insights that can inform future research and strengthen cooperation among governments, civil society, and the private sector to promote transparency, accountability, and effective governance.

Keywords: Anti-Corruption, Bibliometric Analysis, Bribery, Corruption, Global Perspectives, Public Trust, Research Trends, Sustainable Development Goals.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Corruption is a formidable challenge that transcends national borders, posing a significant obstacle to sustainable development and the practical implementation of public policies. It is a complex issue that manifests in various forms, including bribery, embezzlement, nepotism, and fraud (Kratcoski, 2018). This insidious phenomenon not only erodes the foundations of governance but also weakens public trust in governmental institutions, ultimately compromising the social contract between citizens and their leaders (Munteanu et al., 2024). When citizens perceive their governments as corrupt, it can result in widespread disillusionment, apathy, and even civil unrest, further destabilising societies and hindering progress.

The effects of corruption are wide-spread, impacting economic development, social fairness, and environmental sustainability (Chang & Hao, 2017). It diverts resources from vital services, such as education, healthcare, and infrastructure, which exacerbates poverty and inequality. Furthermore, corruption undermines the rule of law, fostering an environment where illegal activities can operate with impunity (Hasnas, 2018) This not only hampers the effectiveness of public policies but also fosters a hard-to-break cycle of corruption, as those in power may prioritise personal gain over the welfare of the populace.

Recognising the critical need to tackle corruption, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have set specific targets to address this widespread issue. Target 16.5 explicitly calls for substantial reductions in all forms of corruption and bribery, emphasising that these issues are essential to achieving broader developmental objectives. The SDGs provide a global framework for action, urging countries to adopt measures that promote transparency, accountability, and integrity within their institutions (Georgeson & Maslin, 2018; Joseph et al., 2019; Kohler & Bowra, 2020). These efforts are vital not only for building trust among citizens but also for ensuring long-term sustainable economic growth and social stability.

Implementing these comprehensive and essential measures demands a highly collaborative approach that actively involves not only government bodies but also various segments of civil society and the private sector (Villarino, 2022). All elements must collaborate to create and maintain an environment where corruption cannot thrive or take hold. The challenges faced in this complex endeavour are numerous, including deeply rooted interests resistant to change, a widespread lack of political will that impedes progress, and insufficient resources needed for the effective enforcement of regulations and laws (Masud & Kim, 2020). Addressing and overcoming these substantial challenges is crucial for developing resilient institutions that uphold the rule of law, protect individual rights, and foster fair and equitable development across all sectors of society (Bozhenko et al., 2023). This effort is vital to creating a fairer, more balanced community for everyone.

In light of these challenges, this study seeks to explore global academic discourse on corruption within the framework of the SDGs. By synthesising existing knowledge and pinpointing key gaps in the literature, we aim to deepen understanding of how corruption is conceptualised, measured, and addressed across contexts. Bridging the gap between theory and practice requires a variety of methods and a commitment to institutional principles that embody the essence of SDG 16 (Rassanjani & Meesonk, 2025). This understanding is essential for developing more effective strategies to fight corruption in the era of the Sustainable Development Goals, as it enables targeted interventions that address the specific challenges faced by different countries and regions.

Bibliometric studies on corruption and the SDGs have been conducted separately. To date, no study has explicitly mapped the relationship between the two issues

within a single, integrated analysis. Previous research has generally focused on the dynamics of corruption (Bahoo et al., 2021; Mudey et al., 2025; Pozsgai-Alvarez & Sanz, 2021) or on the development of the SDGs literature (Mishra et al., 2023; Xin et al., 2024; Yamaguchi et al., 2023). However, they have not examined how corruption is discussed, linked, or positioned within the context of SDG implementation. Therefore, a bibliometric mapping is necessary to trace publication trends, patterns of scientific collaboration, and the intellectual structure of research at the intersection of corruption and the SDGs since the start of the 2030 global agenda in 2015. This gap is what researchers aim to address through a comprehensive bibliometric analysis, providing a complete picture of developments, research gaps, and future directions in the field of corruption and the SDGs.

Ultimately, this study aims to stimulate further research and dialogue on corruption and the Sustainable Development Goals, promoting collaboration among academics, practitioners, and policymakers. By illuminating the complex relationship between corruption and sustainable development, we hope to contribute to the global effort to build more transparent, accountable, and fair societies. Through a collective commitment to tackling corruption, we can pave the way for a brighter future where good governance and ethical leadership prevail, fostering trust and cooperation between citizens and their governments.

2. METHODS

The author employs bibliometric analysis and a comprehensive literature review as primary methods of analysis. By systematically examining existing research, the author aims to highlight prevailing trends, gaps, and focal points within the academic community regarding corruption within the Sustainable Development Goals framework. This exploration spans a broad range of disciplines, reflecting the issue's interdisciplinary nature.

Through bibliometric analysis, the author evaluates the volume and influence of scholarly publications on corruption and Sustainable Development Goals, pinpointing key authors, significant studies, and emerging themes within the literature. This quantitative approach offers valuable insights into how the academic community has engaged with the topic over time (Yan & Zhiping, 2023). Additionally, the literature review will provide a qualitative analysis of the different conceptual frameworks and methodologies used in corruption research, emphasising varied perspectives and methods for understanding this intricate phenomenon. The investigation aims not only to deepen scholarly understanding of corruption but also to guide policymakers and stakeholders on its implications for sustainable development.

This study presents a comprehensive, cross-sectional, descriptive investigation that carefully examines the extensive scholarly literature on corruption through the lens of sustainable development, systematically sourced from the diverse, multifaceted Scopus database. Recognised as a leading and comprehensive online repository, Scopus includes approximately 48,000 journals across a wide range of research fields. It was specifically used to perform this detailed analysis. The Scopus database is widely regarded as a valuable resource in bibliometric research. It is often considered particularly suitable for this endeavour, mainly because it includes a significantly larger number of indexed journals than other databases (Baas et al., 2020). The current investigation was carefully carried out in February 2025, with all aspects of data analysis, including detailed citation evaluations, systematically performed within that month to ensure accuracy and timeliness.

The specific terms and phrases used in the extensive search within the Scopus database included the key keywords: TITLE-ABS-KEY ("sustainable

development goals" AND "corruption" OR "anti-corruption"). These keywords are crucial for the research topic. Since the Sustainable Development Goals agenda was officially announced and made public on 25 September 2015, the author deliberately chose 2016 as the starting point for the search, with 2024 as the end date. Additionally, the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines will be followed to ensure a systematic and transparent review process, facilitating the identification and synthesis of key findings aligned with the research objectives. Please see Figure 1 for a visual representation of the search strategy and selection criteria.

After carefully navigating the rigorous document screening process, 112 distinct articles were successfully identified and acquired, all of which met the predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria established before the analysis. These 112 articles, deemed relevant and appropriate for the scope of this research, were subsequently used as the foundational source material for the comprehensive analysis conducted in this study. To facilitate detailed bibliometric processing, all relevant documents were downloaded in CSV format, which is compatible with VOSviewer. For an in-depth literature review, each document was downloaded in PDF format to enable thorough examination and interpretation.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Publication and Citation Trend
The number of publications related to the Sustainable Development Goals and corruption has increased significantly year by year. In 2016, this topic received little attention from academics, with only

Figure 1. **PRISMA Diagram for This Study**
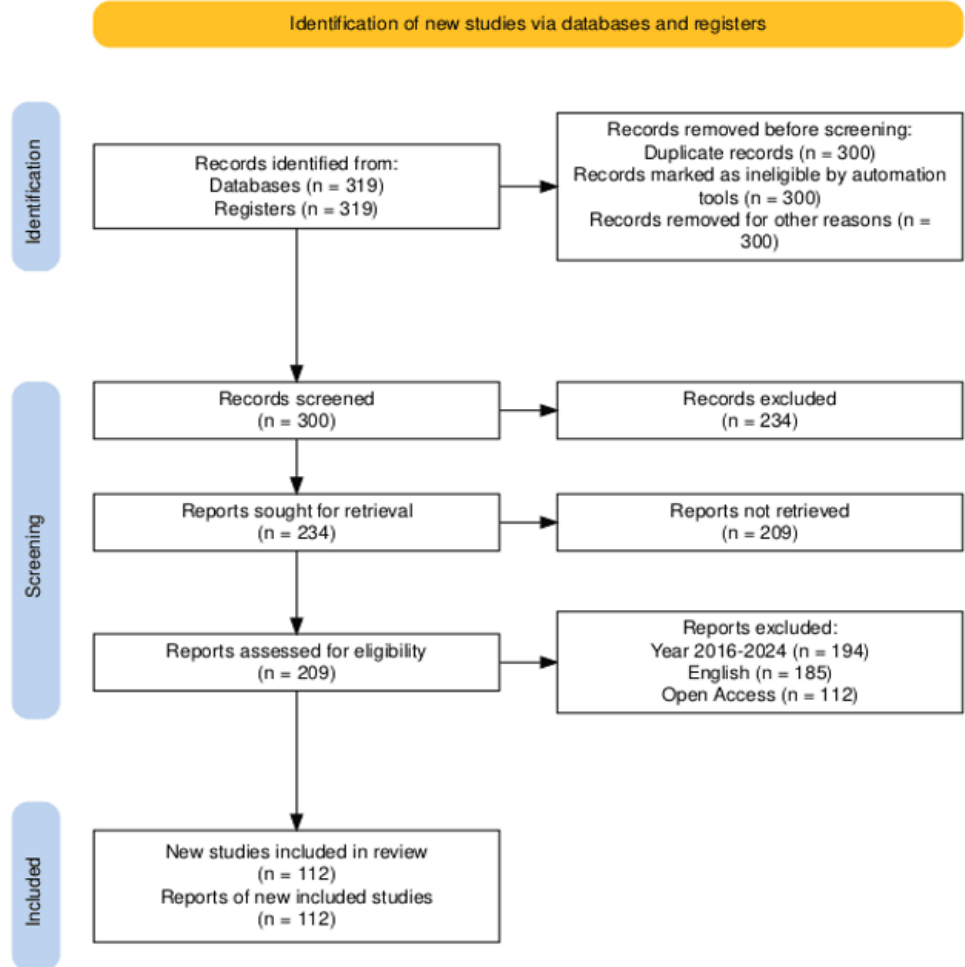
one publication recorded in the Scopus database. In 2017, no relevant publications were found. However, in 2018, there was an initial rise with four publications, suggesting that academic interest was beginning to grow. This trend continued in 2019, with 14 publications, followed by a slight decline to 13 in 2020. Nevertheless, in 2021, the number of publications increased again to 16, indicating that interest in the relationship between the SDGs and corruption is gaining strong attention.

The year 2022 saw 18 publications, which then rose significantly in 2023 to 25. This increase indicates that more scholars are focusing on the role of corruption in achieving the SDGs, especially regarding SDG 16, which highlights the importance of building strong, transparent, and accountable institutions. Although the number of publications declined slightly to 21 in 2024, this figure remains higher than in previous years, confirming that the study of corruption within the context of sustainable development remains a growing priority in public policy and governance research. Overall, this trend reflects the growing importance of understanding and addressing corruption

as a barrier to achieving the SDGs. The rise in publications indicates that the academic community is becoming increasingly engaged in exploring strategies and policies to combat corruption and understanding how these efforts can promote more sustainable and inclusive development. Please refer to Figure 2 for clearer statistics.

In recent years, topics related to the Sustainable Development Goals, corruption, and anti-corruption efforts have become a significant focus of academic research. This is reflected in the high number of citations received by articles discussing the linkages between sustainable development and governance. Overall, this research trend indicates a growing focus on how corruption can hinder the achievement of the SDGs, as well as on the role of anti-corruption policies in promoting more inclusive and sustainable development. These studies offer valuable insights into the role of institutional factors and public policies in fostering transparent and accountable governance, thereby supporting the more effective and sustainable implementation of the SDGs. Please see Table 1 for the leading article in the study area as of November 2025.

Figure 2. **Publication Trend During 2016-2024**
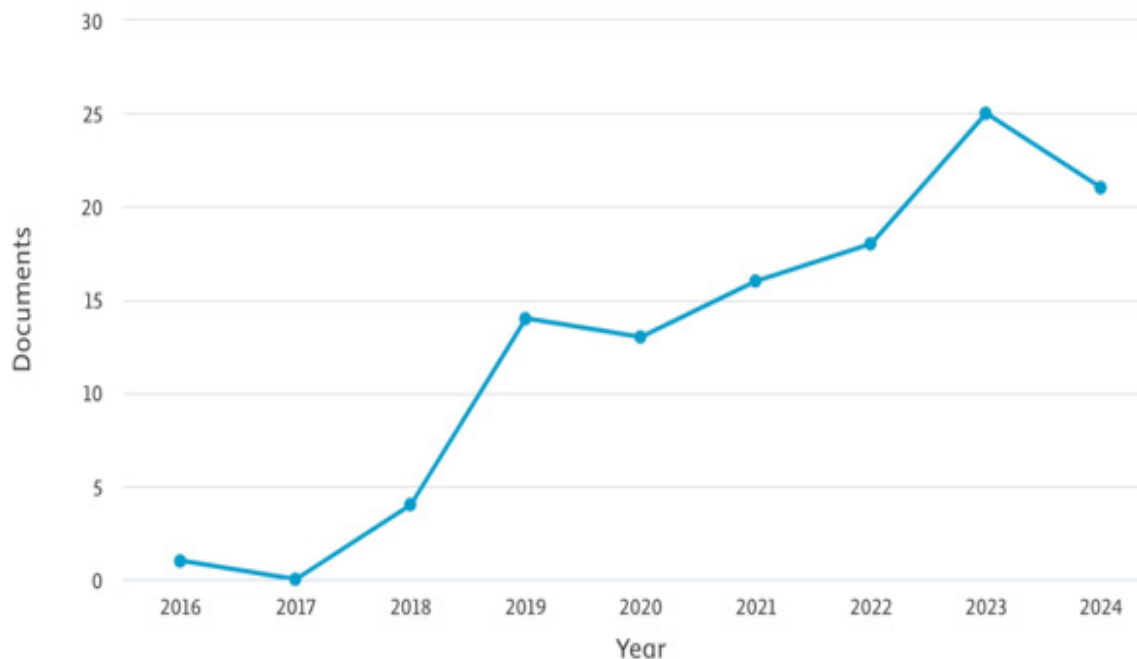
Source: Data Processed

Publications on the Sustainable Development Goals and corruption in recent years have attracted contributions from a diverse range of countries, reflecting a global focus on governance and sustainable development issues, often influenced by the Global North. Authors from the United Kingdom (UK) were the leading contributors with 19 papers, demonstrating the country's active engagement of scholars in research on corruption and the SDGs. This was followed by the United States (US) with 13 papers, emphasising the critical role of academic and research institutions in the Americas in global governance and transparency studies.

Moving to the Global South, South Africa (10 papers) and Nigeria (8 papers) make significant contributions to discussions on corruption and development from the African continent. Furthermore, Ukraine (8 papers) also stands out, likely influenced by the growing attention to governance and reforms in the country. Other countries actively involved in the research include Canada (6 documents), followed by Australia, China, Germany, Ghana, Italy, Malaysia, Pakistan, Romania, and Spain, each contributing five documents. The diversity of the authors' countries of origin demonstrates that corruption and the SDGs are cross-border concerns relevant in a range of social, economic,

Table 1. **Top 10 Most Cited Articles**

Title	Year	Source title	Cited by
Social impacts of climate change mitigation policies and their implications for inequality	2019	Climate Policy	249
Governing Artificial Intelligence to benefit the UN Sustainable Development Goals	2020	Sustainable Development	178
Socioeconomic factors affecting water access in rural areas of low and middle income countries	2019	Water (Switzerland)	88
Institutional quality and green economic growth in West African economic and monetary union	2024	Innovation and Green Development	78
Do hybrid organizations contribute to Sustainable Development Goals? Evidence from B Corps in Colombia	2021	Journal of Cleaner Production	76
Do dependence on fossil fuels and corruption spur ecological footprint?	2021	Environmental Impact Assessment Review	75
The sustainable development goals as a framework to combat health-sector corruption	2018	Bulletin of the World Health Organization	71
Private Sector Corruption, Public Sector Corruption and the Organizational Structure of Foreign Subsidiaries	2020	Journal of Business Ethics	70
Enhancing institutional quality to boost economic development in developing nations: New insights from CS-ARDL approach	2023	Research in Globalization	62
Exploring foreign direct investment-economic growth nexus-Empirical evidence from Central and Eastern European countries	2019	Sustainability (Switzerland)	56

Source: Data Processed

and political contexts worldwide. Figure 3 below displays the details of the countries and their corresponding numbers.

Overall, research on the SDGs and corruption has shown a notable increase year after year, especially after 2018, reflecting the growing academic interest in the link between governance and sustainable development. The relatively high number of citations in several leading publications confirms that this study has a broad impact on global scientific discourse. Additionally, the involvement of researchers from various countries, with notable representation from the UK, the US, and several African and European nations, indicates that this issue has garnered widespread geographic attention. The combination of rising publication volume, high citation rates, and contributions from different regions of the world suggests that the study of corruption and the SDGs is increasingly becoming a vital research area for effectively achieving sustainable development goals.

Co-Occurrence Analysis

Co-occurrence analysis is a bibliometric method used to identify relationships among keywords, concepts, or terms within a collection of scientific documents. This technique enables researchers to identify the co-occurrence patterns of specific terms in literature, providing insights into thematic relationships within a field of study. In academic research, co-occurrence analysis is often used to reveal the conceptual structure of a topic, identify research trends, and identify underexplored research gaps.

The significance of co-occurrence analysis lies in its capacity to systematically portray the scientific landscape of a field. By visualising relationships between concepts through network mapping, this method helps researchers identify key keywords, link related sub-themes, and understand how a topic has evolved. Moreover, this analysis is crucial in interdisciplinary research, as it can reveal connections between different disciplines that may not be apparent in a traditional literature review. Therefore, co-occurrence analysis becomes a crucial tool for examining research trends and the development of theories across various academic disciplines.

The co-occurrence network visualisation in Figure 4 depicts the relationships between keywords in a dataset through a network of nodes and edges. Nodes represent keywords, while edges illustrate the connections between them based on

Figure 3. **Top 15 Countries' Authorship's**
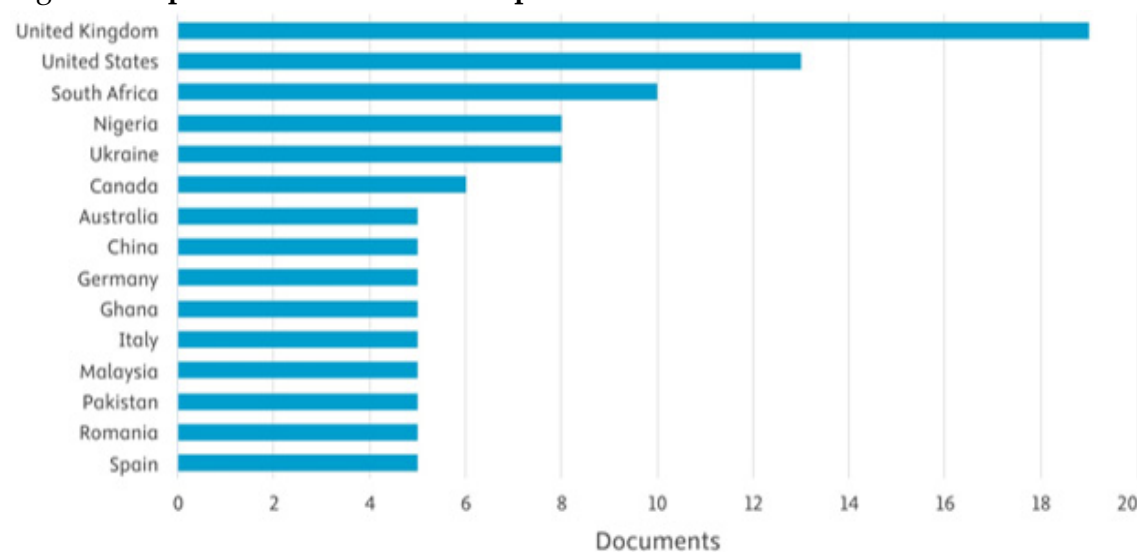
Source: Data Processed

the frequency with which they appear together in documents. In this visualisation, groups of closely related keywords form distinct clusters, highlighting the field's central themes. Isolated clusters or few connections may suggest a topic that is still marginal or emerging in the research landscape. For example, suppose the visualisation shows a large cluster linking "sustainable development", "governance", and "corruption". In that case, it indicates that examining the relationship between sustainable development and governance within the context of corruption is a prominent area of research. Conversely, small sub-clusters connecting keywords like "climate change" and "corruption" might reflect that the link between climate resilience and anti-corruption policies remains relatively under-explored research.

The limited co-occurrence suggests that research combining climate resilience frameworks with anti-corruption perspectives remains relatively infrequent, despite their growing significance for achieving the SDGs. This gap is particularly notable because climate adaptation and mitigation often involve large-scale public spending and complex governance, both of which are associated with higher corruption risks. Studying the links between climate resilience, integrity mechanisms, and governance could offer valuable insights into how corruption may undermine climate policies and the achievement of the SDGs. Additionally, other peripheral areas—such as social protection, environmental governance, and public finance—show weak connections to the research on corruption. This suggests that discussions on these topics tend to be separate rather than integrated, leading to gaps in understanding how corruption affects outcomes in these fields. Addressing these gaps offers opportunities for interdisciplinary research, such as examining the role of corruption in the accuracy of social protection targeting or analysing how integrity risks impact

Figure 4. **Co-occurrence Network Visualisation**
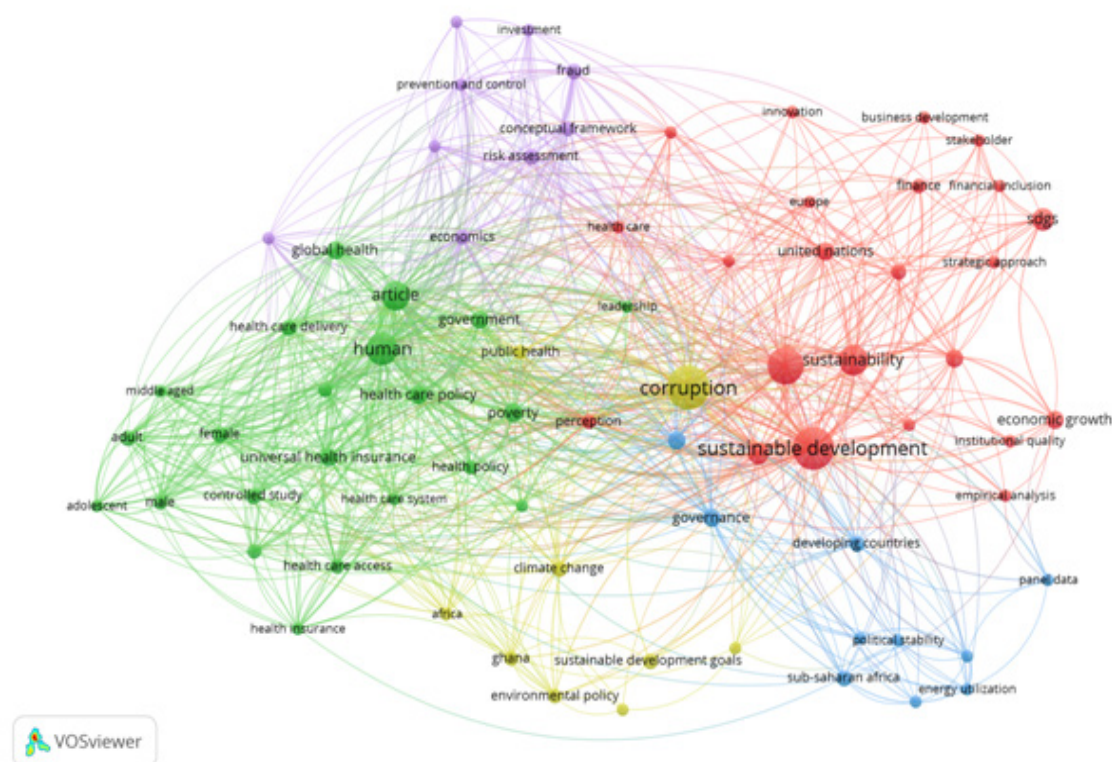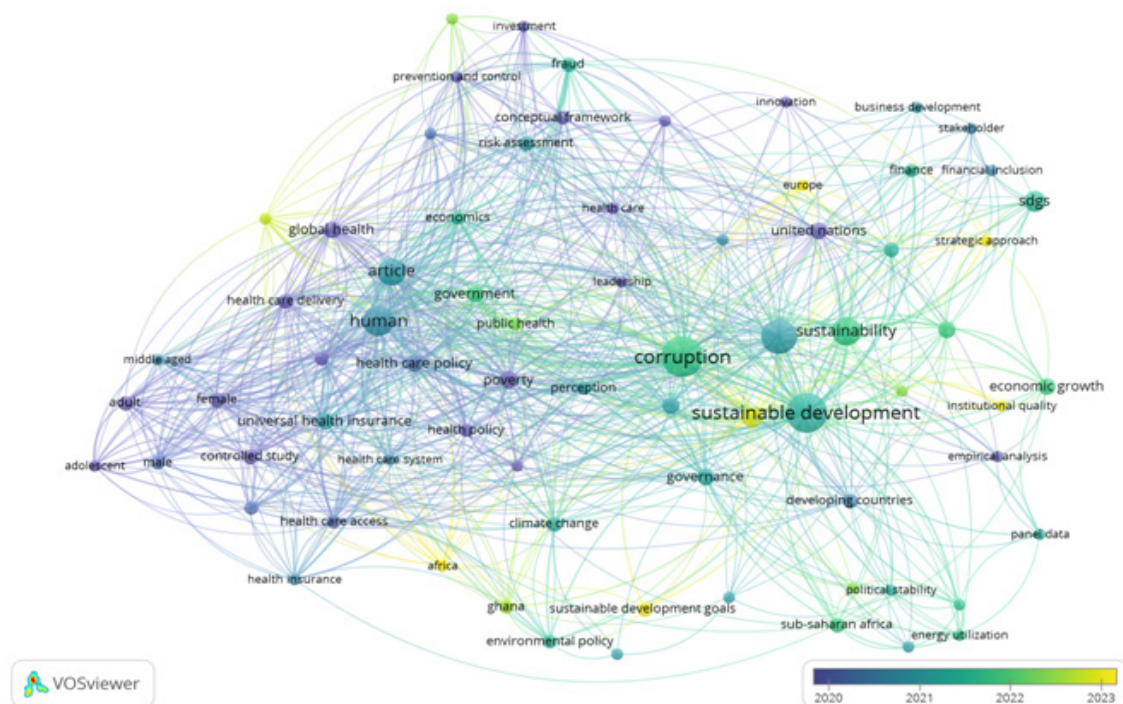

Source: Data Processed

environmental regulation and resource management. Overall, these emerging clusters highlight areas where theoretical and empirical work are still limited, providing a roadmap for expanding the field's scope.

Co-occurrence Overlay Visualisation in Figure 5 introduces a temporal dimension to keyword relationship networks. It often uses colour gradients to show when a keyword first became frequently used in research, with lighter colours for newly emerging terms and darker colours for older, well-established terms. This provides insight into how research trends evolve. For instance, in this visualisation, a keyword like "corruption" appears in a darker colour, while "institutional quality" is shown in a lighter colour. This suggests that academic focus on the SDGs has been ongoing for a considerable period, whereas studies on strategies to enhance institutional quality within the SDGs are relatively recent. In this way, overlay visualisation helps identify the evolution of research and potential emerging topics.

The emerging focus underscores a growing awareness of the importance of institutional performance, administrative capacity, and integrity systems in achieving SDG goals. However, the recent appearance of these keywords also reveals a research gap. Despite the vital role of institutions in implementing the SDGs, there is a limited empirical and theoretical body of work on institutional quality and integrity mechanisms within the broader SDG discussion. Other keywords, shown in lighter shades—such as "sustainable development goals" and "strategic approach"—suggest that scholars are only beginning to develop systematic frameworks that link governance reforms, anti-corruption efforts, and achievement of the SDGs. This trend indicates a shift towards more nuanced, cross-sectoral debates that connect governance quality with broader development issues. Nevertheless, these connections are weakly theorised and underexplored. Recognising these newer keywords highlights key opportunities for future research, such as exploring how institutional strength influences SDG progress across sectors, designing strategic policies with integrity safeguards, and analysing how

Figure 5. **Co-occurrence Overlay Visualisation**

Source: Data Processed

governance failures impede SDG success. The overlay visualisation emphasises areas where scholarly activity is just beginning, highlighting the need for further theoretical development, comparative studies, and interdisciplinary research to understand better how governance and integrity shape sustainable development pathways.

The density co-occurrence visualisation in Figure 6 helps identify areas with high concentrations of keyword relationships. The denser an area in this visualisation, the more research connects the keywords. Brighter colours or areas with high density indicate that the topic has been a central focus in academic literature. Conversely, areas with dimmer colours suggest less exploration or potential for further research. For example, suppose a specific area of the visualisation shows bright colours around the keywords "human" and "health care policy". In that case, it suggests that research on the quality of human resources in establishing a health governance system free from corruption has made a significant academic contribution. Conversely, suppose there is a section with dimmer colours connecting the keywords "political stability" and "sub-saharan africa". In that case, this may suggest that studies on government efforts in Sub-Saharan regions to improve political stability, particularly in relation to corruption, still require further investigation.

Overall, these three visualisations—Figures 4, 5, and 6—offer comprehensive insights into the dynamic evolution of research topics, revealing the interconnectedness of key concepts and highlighting promising areas that still present valuable opportunities for future exploration and development.

Anti-Corruption in SDG 16

Corruption, in its various insidious forms and manifestations, plays a significant and detrimental role in the ongoing depletion and degradation of our valuable natural resources, thereby exacerbating the already dire conditions of poverty and

Figure 6. **Density Co-occurrence Visualisation**
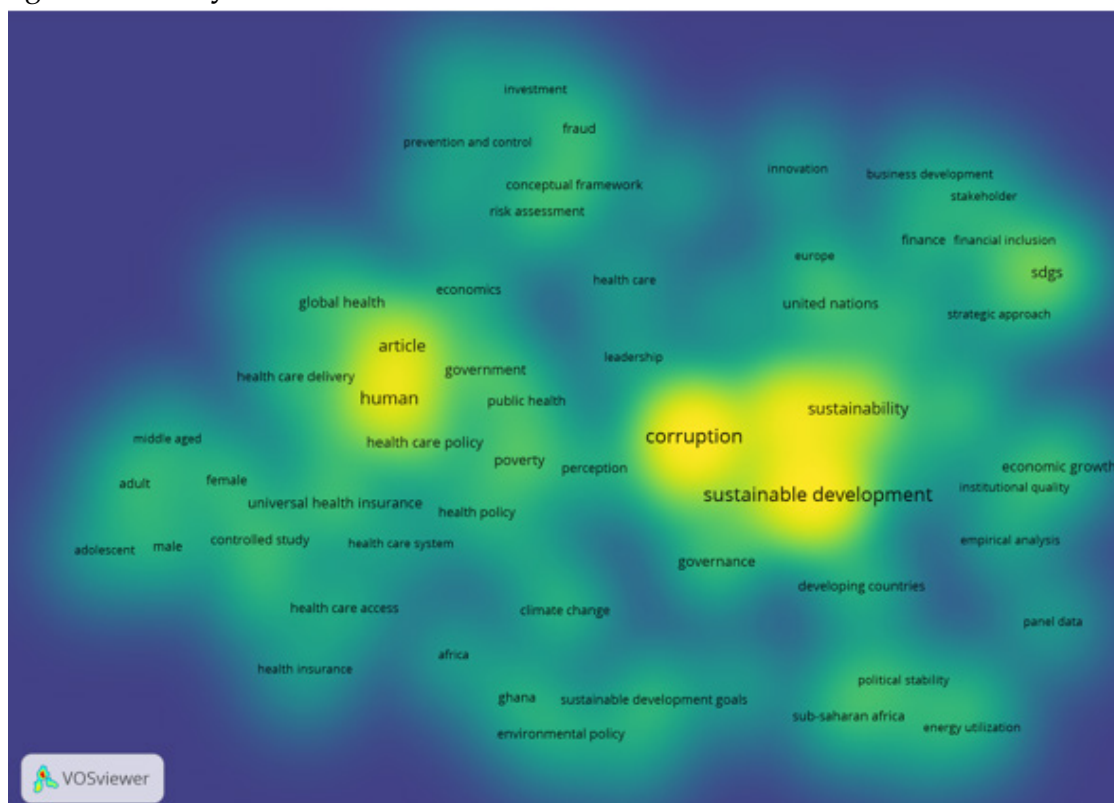
Source: Data Processed

deepening existing inequalities within societies (Damijan, 2023). Corruption has serious adverse effects that not only harm the integrity of institutions but also slowly undermine the crucial trust among the people (Warf, 2016). This erosion of trust undermines both economic prosperity and political stability, both of which are vital to a functioning society. To date, widespread corruption worldwide has disproportionately and severely affected all groups and individuals, leading to a significant deterioration in the competencies and capabilities of the human resources essential to development.

Corruption has the potential to significantly hinder the achievement and realisation of the 17 essential and distinct goals outlined in the SDGs framework by 2030 (Frolova et al., 2019; Mugellini et al., 2021). Ultimately, this hampers global progress and development efforts. Recognising this urgent issue and the significant impact corruption has on sustainable development, global policymakers have carefully designed the SDGs to incorporate comprehensive efforts to eradicate corruption into the core of the 17 SDG goals. A key objective within the SDG framework, focusing on eliminating corruption, is reflected in Goal 16, which emphasises the importance of peace, justice, and the establishment of strong institutions essential for a fair society.

SDG 16 not only aims to reduce corruption in all its forms but also strives to promote transparency, accountability, and participatory decision-making across all levels of governance (Radin, 2019). Achieving this goal requires a multifaceted approach that includes strengthening legal frameworks, enhancing institutions' capacity, and fostering a culture of integrity among citizens and public officials alike. The successful implementation of these strategies will ultimately contribute to sustainable development, ensuring that all individuals have access to justice and are protected from the harmful effects of corruption. Such an environment not only empowers citizens but also enhances public trust in government, leading to more effective and equitable service delivery across various sectors.

A strong and vigorous response to the widespread issue of corruption will significantly enhance the chances of achieving the ambitious goals and specific targets set out by the SDGs by 2030 (Mackey et al., 2018; Mugellini et al., 2021). Progress on Sustainable Development Goal 16, which emphasises promoting peace, ensuring justice, and strengthening institutions, can create a positive and self-reinforcing cycle that benefits various aspects of society. The sixteenth goal of the Sustainable Development Goals is not merely optional but a vital foundation for the successful realisation and implementation of all the other Goals, which collectively aim to promote global development (Malone, 2018). Progress toward achieving the Sustainable Development Goals is a key driver, enabling a stronger, more effective strategy to combat corruption in all its forms.

In the complex and multifaceted context of SDG 16 indicator 16.5, two main themes clearly emerged during the comprehensive discussion: widespread corruption across public and business interactions. Please refer to Table 2.

The specific metric, known as indicator 16.5.1, carefully measures the proportion of individuals who have interacted with public officials and have either been asked for a bribe or paid a bribe in the past twelve months. Similarly, the indicator designated as 16.5.2 aims to measure the proportion of businesses that have had contact with public officials and have faced the issue of a bribe being solicited or paid during their interactions within the same twelve-month period.

Corruption is widely seen as a significant barrier to sustainable development (Bozhenko et al., 2023). Even after the SDGs were adopted, it remains challenging to determine with certainty whether global corruption levels are rising or falling. This is mainly because available international datasets cover only a short

Table 2. **Targets and Indicators for Anti-Corruption in the SDG 16**

Goal 16	
Peace, justice and strong institutions	
Target	Indicators
16.5. Substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all their forms	16.5.1. Proportion of persons who had at least one contact with a public official and who paid a bribe to a public official, or were asked for a bribe by those public officials, during the previous 12 months. 16.5.2. Proportion of businesses that had at least one contact with a public official and that paid a bribe to a public official, or were asked for a bribe by those public officials during the previous 12 months.

Source: UNDP, 2016

Figure 7. **Proportion of People Who Reported Being Asked for a Bribe or Having Paid One**
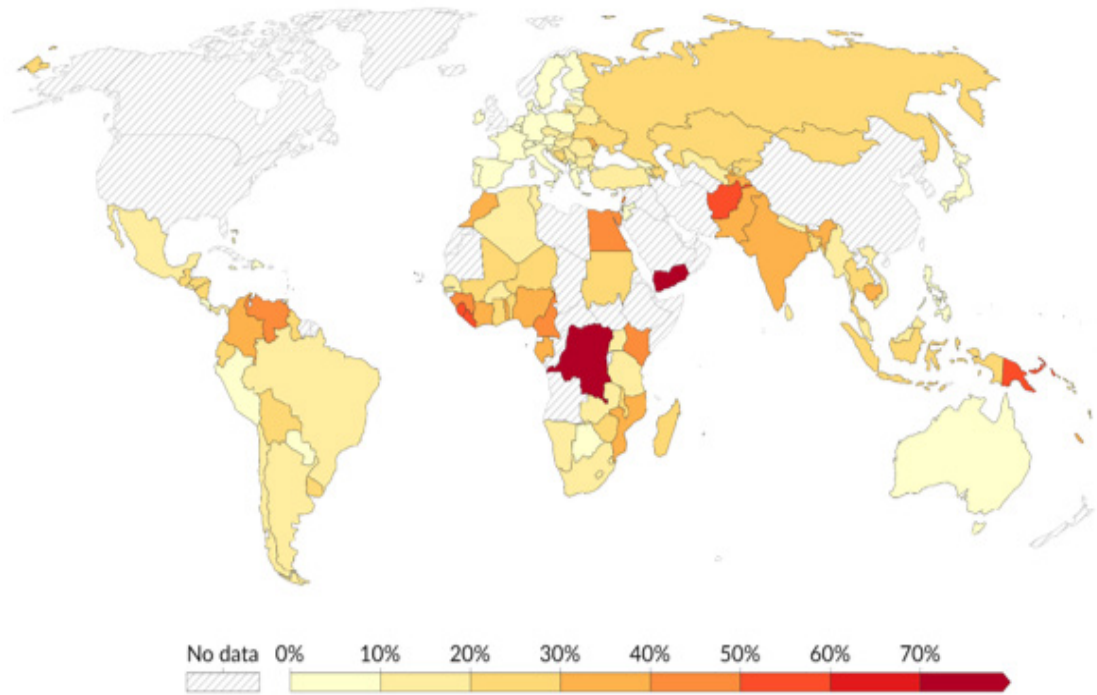
Source: Our World in Data (2025)

time span, making it hard to identify long-term patterns (Herre et al., 2016). As a result, careful interpretation of corruption trends is necessary, since apparent differences may stem from measurement issues rather than actual improvements or declines in governance.

The map in Figure 7 highlights notable variations in bribery rates worldwide. Some African nations are experiencing very high levels, with 40–70% of citizens reporting being asked for bribes during dealings with public officials. In regions like South and Southeast Asia, the prevalence ranges from 20–40%, reflecting persistent corruption in routine administrative interactions. Conversely, most countries in Western Europe, East Asia, and Oceania report rates below 10%, indicating stronger institutional integrity and enforcement. These figures underscore the unequal global distribution

of administrative corruption and the need for tailored strategies to achieve SDG 16.

Indicator 16.5.1: Corruption in public interactions

This particular form of corruption can significantly erode citizens' trust in government institutions, while also obstructing and stifling economic development, ultimately deepening inequality across different segments of society. The research related to this specific theme intersects with comprehensive studies focused on the principles of transparency (Hunter et al., 2020; Knapp et al., 2021; Mugellini et al., 2021), the overall effectiveness and impact of specific anti-corruption policies (Mackey et al., 2016; Maponga et al., 2022; Misra et al., 2022), as well as the active involvement of civil society in their continuous efforts to combat and eliminate corruption from all areas of society (Kachur et al., 2020; Villarino, 2022), and others.

Corruption in interactions between individuals and public officials significantly undermines public trust in government institutions (Gillanders & Neselevska, 2018). This erosion of trust not only hampers the effectiveness of governance but also discourages citizen participation and investment, creating a vicious cycle that perpetuates corruption and undermines democratic values. Restoring public trust requires a multifaceted approach that includes enhancing accountability measures, promoting ethical behaviour among officials, and fostering an informed citizenry capable of demanding transparency and integrity from their government leaders.

Bribery and gratification practices in public services can substantially hinder individuals' access to fundamental rights, essential services, and various administrative functions vital for societal operation (Gans-Morse et al., 2022). This troubling situation not only exacerbates existing social inequalities affecting many communities but also undermines the systems of governance intended to be transparent and accountable to

the people they serve. Such corruption undermines public trust and discourages civic participation, perpetuating a cycle of apathy where citizens feel powerless to effect change in their communities.

Academic research and scholarly investigations have provided substantial evidence indicating that effectively reducing and managing corruption in various public interactions, such as those between government officials and citizens, significantly depends on the proper implementation of data-driven policies supported by a strong framework of oversight mechanisms designed to uphold the integrity and ethical conduct of public officials as they carry out their responsibilities. For instance, Adam & Fazekas (2021) show that digital and data-driven technologies can notably reduce corruption risks by increasing transparency and monitoring government–citizen interactions. Similarly, Tran & Nguyen (2020) find that performance measurement systems combined with accountability mechanisms enhance organisational behaviour in the public sector, thereby reducing opportunities for unethical behaviour.

Moreover, Borlini (2024) as well as compliance with them. It is based on the observation that a comprehensive study of the operation and outcomes of international anti-corruption treaties' monitoring and compliance mechanisms (MMs highlights the role of data-driven monitoring and compliance frameworks in diagnosing and predicting integrity breaches in international anti-corruption efforts. In the public service delivery context, Matheus et al. (2020) demonstrate how data dashboards improve transparency and accountability in smart-city governance. Overall, these studies emphasise that controlling corruption effectively depends on policy design and the systematic use of data and oversight mechanisms to promote ethical behaviour among public officials. This comprehensive and multifaceted approach not only promotes transparency

in government operations but also plays a vital role in building and maintaining public trust among citizens, which is essential to ensuring the overall well-being and health of a vibrant, functioning democratic society.

Indicator 16.5.2: Corruption in business interactions

This specific and troubling form of corruption risks creating a notably uneven playing field in the business world, leading to a situation in which honest and diligent companies face substantial difficulties competing against unscrupulous entities that engage in unethical, morally dubious practices. This significantly undermines the principles of fair market competition, hindering innovation and creativity within the industry. Such an environment not only discourages ethical behaviour among businesses but also damages consumer confidence, fostering a cycle of distrust with far-reaching consequences for economic growth and social progress.

In-depth research on this vital theme mainly focuses on exploring the complex influence of corruption on different facets of the investment climate (Ashta, 2021; Meressa, 2022), the complexities of business regulation (Aziani et al., 2022; Truby, 2020), and the strategic approaches that private-sector entities adopt to address and mitigate bribery-related risks effectively (Sartor & Beamish, 2020). This comprehensive analysis emphasises the importance of transparency and accountability in fostering a healthier business environment, where ethical practices can thrive and contribute to both economic stability and social well-being.

Corruption within the business sector significantly promotes inequality, ultimately creating a distorted landscape of competition among companies and thereby hindering innovation and the flow of investment, which are essential for economic growth and development (Tomaszewski, 2018). When companies are forced to pay illegal bribes to secure vital contracts or business licences, this shameful practice not only increases their operational costs but also damages and significantly reduces the overall competitiveness of the economy (Bąk, 2020). This vicious cycle perpetuates a culture of mistrust among consumers and investors alike, thereby hindering the potential for sustainable economic growth and social development. The long-term effects of such corruption can be disastrous, as they discourage new entrants into the market and deter foreign investment, ultimately stalling economic progress and worsening inequality within society.

Academic studies show that business environments characterised by corrupt practices tend to grow more slowly, as investors and business actors are hesitant to operate in environments that lack transparency and are high-risk (Ahmed & Anifowose, 2024; Lu et al., 2019; Van Zanten & Van Tulder, 2018). To break this cycle, governments and regulatory bodies must adopt robust anti-corruption measures that promote transparency, accountability, and ethical business conduct. Such measures not only rebuild trust among stakeholders but also foster a more favourable environment for innovation and investment, ultimately supporting long-term economic stability and growth.

As more countries worldwide take significant steps to implement and enforce strict regulations aimed at fighting corruption within the business sector, numerous studies focusing on this theme also highlight the substantial effectiveness of these policies in promoting an environment marked by greater transparency and a stronger sense of responsibility among corporate entities (Abhayawansa et al., 2021; Donner et al., 2025; García-Sánchez et al., 2020). As these organisations strive to adapt to the ever-changing, complex legal landscape shaped by such regulations, they are increasingly allocating substantial resources to deploying advanced technology and sophisticated data analytics systems. These

systems monitor compliance diligently and help identify potential misconduct before it escalates into more serious issues. This proactive approach not only helps reduce risks associated with unethical practices but also significantly enhances the organisation's reputation, fostering trust among stakeholders and contributing to long-term success in a competitive market.

4. CONCLUSION

This study adds to the expanding body of research on corruption and sustainable development by providing the first systematic mapping of how these themes intersect in global academic work since the adoption of the SDGs. The bibliometric data indicate that research on corruption has increasingly shifted from traditional governance issues to more multifaceted perspectives, including institutional quality, policy effectiveness, and cross-sectoral SDG linkages. By identifying emerging clusters especially those related to institutional performance, climate governance, and strategic governance this study enhances understanding of corruption as a barrier to achieving the SDGs. It also highlights existing theoretical gaps that warrant further investigation. These findings provide a valuable foundation for future research focused on integrating governance, integrity systems, and sustainable development within a unified analytical framework.

This study has several limitations that need to be acknowledged. First, the bibliometric analysis relies solely on publications indexed in Scopus, potentially omitting relevant studies published in non-indexed journals, institutional reports, or grey literature, all of which often contribute to discussions on corruption and sustainable development. Second, while bibliometric methods help identify publication trends, keyword networks, and intellectual structures, they do not capture the full depth of theoretical nuances or the contextual dynamics found in qualitative research. Third, the analysis includes publications only up to 2024; thus, recent developments—particularly in governance innovations, digital integrity systems, and SDG implementation—may not yet be reflected. Additionally, keyword-based clustering is constrained by author-selected terms, which may not always accurately reflect substantive content or conceptual intent. These limitations imply that the results should be seen as a broad overview of scholarly patterns rather than a comprehensive account of the entire field.

Future research could build on this study in several ways. First, incorporating multiple databases or grey literature would provide a broader perspective on global discussions surrounding corruption and the SDGs. Second, employing qualitative or mixed-methods approaches such as systematic reviews, content analysis, or case studies could enhance understanding of how corruption is perceived and addressed across contexts, complementing the macro-patterns identified here. Third, researchers may explore specific emerging clusters highlighted in the overlay visualisation, like institutional quality, accountability mechanisms, strategic governance, and the connection between climate resilience and anti-corruption efforts. These areas are promising but still underexplored, necessitating further theoretical and empirical research. Finally, future studies could pay closer attention to regional or sectoral differences to better understand how governance systems, institutional capacities, and policy environments affect corruption challenges and SDG progress across countries.

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