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Migrants' Behavioral and Attitudinal Changes Toward Corruption***Göçmenlerin Yolsuzluğa Karşı Davranış ve Tutumlarındaki Değişiklikler** **Julianna GIANNOUTSOU*** **Shakhnoza AMANBAEVA*****Özet**

Bu çalışma, yüksek yolsuzluk oranına sahip ülkelerden düşük yolsuzluk oranına sahip ülkelere gelen göçmenlerin yolsuzluk uygulamalarına katılımındaki ve yolsuzluğa karşı tutumlarındaki değişiklikleri incelemektedir. Bu çalışma, Kolektif Eylem Teorisi çerçevesinde göçmenlerin davranışlarını ve algılarını ev sahibi ülkenin normlarına uyum sağlamak için düzenlediklerini ileri sürmektedir. Baltık ülkelerinde 114 Orta Asya göçmenine uygulanan bir anket, yolsuzlukla ilgili davranış ve tutumlarındaki değişikliklere ilişkin iki teorik önermeyi ölçmüş ve bu değişikliklerle ilişkili faktörleri saptamıştır. Bulgular, göç sonrası yolsuzluk eylemlerine katılım ve yolsuzluğa tahammül düzeylerinde belirgin bir düşüş yaşandığını ortaya çıkarmaktadır. Katılımcılar sözü edilen düşüşü büyük oranda demokratik yönetim, kanunların daha sıkı uygulaması, yeni kültürel normların deneyimi ve iyileşen sosyoekonomik koşulları ile ilişkilendirmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Göçmenler, Yolsuzluk, Kolektif eylem teorisi, Orta Asya.

Abstract

This study examines changes in migrants' engagement in corrupt practices and attitudes toward corruption following migration from high- to low-corruption environments. Drawing on Collective Action Theory, it posits that migrants adjust their behavior and perceptions to align with host-country norms. A survey of 114 Central Asian migrants in the Baltic States tested two theoretical propositions on changes in corruption-related behavior and attitudes and identified factors associated with these changes. Findings reveal a marked decline in both engagement in corrupt acts and tolerance for corruption after migration, which respondents attribute mainly to democratic governance, stricter law enforcement, exposure to new cultural norms, and improved socio-economic conditions.

Keywords: Migrants, Corruption, Collective action theory, Central Asia.

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Introduction

Corruption undermines democratic governance and slows development.¹ While institutional reforms are essential in combating this social ill, they may be insufficient if individual incentives for corruption remain unaddressed. Individual behavior -shaped by norms, beliefs, circumstances- remains a key driver of corrupt practices.²

Research on migration shows that norms and behaviors are not fixed. Migrants adapt, negotiate, and often transform practices when exposed to new environments.³ Despite this, corruption-related behavioral change among migrants remains understudied.

This article draws on Collective Action Theory, which conceptualizes corruption as a socially embedded phenomenon: individuals engage in corrupt practices when they perceive them as widespread and socially tolerated.⁴ By applying this theoretical lens, the study examines how migrants' behavior and perceptions related to corruption shift after moving from high- to low-corruption contexts.

This study is guided by the following two research questions:

1. How do migrants' behavior and attitudes toward corruption change when moving from a high- to a low-corruption environment?
2. Which factors contribute to a shift from corrupt to more honest behavior in this transition?

The study focuses on migrants from Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan who have settled in Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. Central Asia scores high on corruption (average 26.6/100 in the 2024 Corruption Perceptions Index), while the Baltic States perform significantly better (average 66/100), despite a shared Soviet legacy.⁵ This East-to-Baltic migration corridor provides a unique lens for examining how changes in institutional, legal, cultural, and economic contexts shape migrants' behavior and attitudes toward corruption. The findings aim to inform anti-corruption strategies and migrant integration policies in the Baltic States and offer lessons for broader contexts.

¹ Sanjeev Gupta-Hamid Davoodi-Rosa Alanso-Terme, "Does Corruption Affect Income Inequality and Poverty?", *Economics of Governance*, V. 3, I. 1, 2002, p. 23-45; Paolo Mauro, "Corruption and Growth", *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, V. 110, I. 3, 1995, p. 681-712.

² Margit Tavits, "Why Do People Engage in Corruption? The Case of Estonia", *Social Forces*, V. 88, I. 3, p. 1257-1279.

³ Nadzeya Laurentsyeva -Alessandra Venturini, "The Social Integration of Immigrants and the Role of Policy - A Literature Review", *Intereconomics*, V. 52, I. 5, 2017, p. 285-292; Peggy Levitt, "Social Remittances: Migration Driven Local-Level Forms of Cultural Diffusion", *International Migration Review*, V. 32, I. 4, 1998, p. 926-948; Jörg Rössel-Susanne Janssen-Miloš Jovanović-Tally Katz-Gerro, "Cultural Integration and Difference From Migrants' Perspective: Cultural Comparisons Between Country of Residence and Country of Origin", in S. Janssen, N.N. Kristensen and M. Verboord (eds.), *Engagement With Culture in Transformative Times: Mapping the Societal Drivers and Impacts of Cultural Understandings, Practices, Perceptions, and Values Across Europe*, 1st ed., Routledge, London and New York 2025, p. 153-170.

⁴ Alina Mungiu-Pippidi, *Contextual Choices in Fighting Corruption: Lessons Learned*, Report 4/2011, Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD), July 2011, Available at: <https://www.againstcorruption.eu/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/NORAD-final-report-lessons-learned.pdf> (Accessed: 29 August 2025); Heather Marquette-Caryn Peiffer, "Corruption and Collective Action", *Developmental Leadership Program*, University of Birmingham, 2015, Available at: <https://pure-oai.bham.ac.uk/ws/files/19752251/CorruptionandCollectiveAction.pdf> (Accessed: 29 August 2025); Ray Fisman-Miriam A. Golden, *Corruption: What Everyone Needs to Know*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2017; Anna Persson-Bo Rothstein-Jan Teorell, "Why Anticorruption Reforms Fail-Systemic Corruption as a Collective Action Problem", *Governance*, V. 26, I. 3, 2013, p. 449-471.

⁵ Transparency International, *Corruption Perceptions Index 2024*, Transparency International, Berlin 2024, Available at: <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2024> (Accessed: 22 August 2025).

Literature Review

Corruption not only affects individuals but also undermines social and economic development.⁶ Corruption is broadly defined as the exploitation of public office or authority for personal gain⁷ and occurs at multiple levels. Grand corruption involves large-scale practices by political elites, often extractive and power-preserving in nature.⁸ Bureaucratic corruption occurs in routine interactions with low-level officials, often involving small bribes for services.⁹ Legislative corruption entails manipulating laws or policies for private gain, thereby undermining democratic governance.¹⁰

Corruption can be studied as a behavioral phenomenon, where individuals' decisions are shaped by social norms, institutional frameworks, and contextual incentives.¹¹ Traditional anti-corruption strategies often rely on rational-choice or principal-agent frameworks, assuming that corruption results from self-interest and can be mitigated through enforcement. While these approaches highlight the role of incentives and sanctions, they may underestimate the influence of social norms, collective expectations, and contextual pressures on individual behavior.¹²

Collective Action Theory and Migration

This study primarily draws on Collective Action Theory to explain individuals' engagement in corrupt behavior. It conceptualizes corruption as a socially embedded phenomenon: individuals conform to corrupt practices when they perceive them as widespread and socially tolerated.¹³ Based on this theory, migrants moving from high- to low-corruption contexts will adjust their behavior in response to host-country norms. Other theoretical perspectives, such as rational-choice or principal-agent approaches, are useful for understanding individual incentives for corruption but are less effective for capturing the role of social norms in sustaining corrupt behavior,¹⁴ which is crucial for analysing how migrants adjust their behavior across different corruption contexts.

Research on migration demonstrates that behaviors and norms are not static. Migrants negotiate, adapt, and even transform behaviors in new institutional and social contexts.¹⁵ From a Collective Action perspective, individuals recalibrate which behaviors are socially tolerated to align with norms, avoid sanctions, and access cooperative networks.¹⁶ This recalibration occurs through several interrelated mechanisms. First, migrants are exposed to different social norms and shared expectations, learning which behaviors are considered acceptable or unacceptable in everyday interactions¹⁷. Second, the perceived credibility of institutions and the consistency of

⁶ Gupta-Davoodi-Alonso Terme, "Does Corruption Affect ...", p. 23-45; Mauro, "Corruption and Growth", p. 681-712.

⁷ Elvio Accinelli-Edgar J. Sánchez Carrera, "Corruption Driven by Imitative Behavior", *Economics Letters*, V. 117, I. 1, 2012, p. 84-87; Fisman-Golden, *Corruption: What Everyone ...*, 2017; Susan Rose-Ackerman, *Corruption and Government: Causes, Consequences, and Reform*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1999.

⁸ Inge Amundsen, "Extractive and Power-preserving Political Corruption", in I. Amundsen (ed.), *Political corruption in Africa: Extraction and power preservation*, Edward Elgar, Cheltenham 2019, p. 1-28; Rose-Ackerman, *Corruption and Government: ...*, 1999.

⁹ Tavits, "Why Do People Engage ...", p. 1257-1279.

¹⁰ Persson-Rothstein-Teorell, "Why Anticorruption Reforms ...", p. 449-471.

¹¹ Persson-Rothstein-Teorell, "Why Anticorruption Reforms ...", p. 449-471; Tavits, "Why Do People Engage ...", p. 1257-1279; Nieves Zúñiga, "Behavioural Changes Against Corruption", *U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Centre*, 8, 2018, p. 1-12, Available at: <https://www.u4.no/publications/behavioural-changes-against-corruption> (Accessed: 2 September 2025).

¹² Marquette-Peiffer, "Corruption and Collective Action", 2015

¹³ Mungiu-Pippidi, *Contextual Choices in Fighting Corruption: ...*, 2011; Marquette-Peiffer, "Corruption and Collective Action", 2015; Fisman-Golden, *Corruption: What Everyone ...*, 2017; Persson-Rothstein-Teorell, "Why Anticorruption Reforms ...", p. 449-471.

¹⁴ Persson-Rothstein-Teorell, "Why Anticorruption Reforms ...", p. 449-471.

¹⁵ Laurentsyeva-Venturini, "The Social Integration of ...", p. 285-292; Levitt, "Social Remittances: Migration ...", p. 926-948; Rössel-Janssen-Jovanović-Katz Gerro, "Cultural Integration and Difference ...", p. 153-170.

¹⁶ Mungiu-Pippidi, *Contextual Choices in Fighting Corruption: ...*, 2011; Marquette-Peiffer, "Corruption and Collective Action", 2015; Fisman-Golden, *Corruption: What Everyone ...*, 2017; Persson-Rothstein-Teorell, "Why Anticorruption Reforms ...", p. 449-471.

¹⁷ Mungiu-Pippidi, *Contextual Choices in Fighting Corruption: ...*, 2011.

rule enforcement alter individuals' expectations about others' behavior and increase the anticipated costs of corrupt practices.¹⁸ Third, repeated interaction within the host society facilitates norm internalization, as compliance with prevailing standards becomes necessary to maintain social trust and participate in cooperative networks.¹⁹ Together, these processes reshape migrants' expectations about what is socially tolerated and, in line with Collective Action Theory, reduce the perceived normality and utility of corruption.

This mechanism helps explain why exposure to lower-corruption frameworks and collective norms can encourage migrants from high-corruption countries to adopt less corrupt behavior, while broader migration research shows these adjustments are part of general adaptation to new social and institutional environments.²⁰ However, few studies have explored how migrants' involvement in and perceptions of corruption differ across contexts.

Theoretical Propositions

The study proposes the following theoretical propositions (TPs):

- * TP1: Migrants engage in less corruption after relocating to lower-corruption countries.
- * TP2: Migrants perceive corruption less favorably in lower-corruption environments.

Methodology

This study employs a survey with both closed- and open-ended questions to empirically examine the theoretical propositions. Surveys were administered to 114 Central Asian migrants residing in the Baltic States, providing both quantitative measures and qualitative insights. This approach captures aspects of the complexity of corruption and enriches understanding of participants' perspectives.²¹

Survey questions were neutrally worded and simplified to reduce social desirability and misinterpretation biases.²² The questionnaire was concise to minimize nonresponse and respondent fatigue.²³

Sampling

The study targeted Central Asian migrants who had lived in a Baltic country for at least one year, considered sufficient for initial integration.²⁴ Participants under 18 were excluded due to additional consent requirements. Participants were recruited through personal contacts and Facebook groups ("Foreigners in Latvia," "Foreigners in Lithuania," "Foreigners in Estonia") using snowball and judgmental sampling. These non-random methods are suitable for accessing hard-to-reach populations and sensitive topics.²⁵

Data Collection Instrument

Self-administered questionnaires were provided in Russian and English and included both open- and closed-ended questions. Sensitive terms, such as "corruption," were framed subtly to avoid negative reactions.²⁶ Ethical approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (*for anonymity purposes of a double-blind review, the name of the university is removed*). All

¹⁸ Persson-Rothstein-Teorell, "Why Anticorruption Reforms ...", p. 449-471.

¹⁹ Levitt, "Social Remittances: Migration ...", p. 926-948.

²⁰ Artjoms Ivlevs-Roswitha M. King, "Does Emigration Reduce Corruption?", *Public Choice*, V. 171, I. 4, 2017, p. 389-408; Levitt, "Social Remittances: Migration ...", p. 926-948

²¹ Jose F. Molina-Azorín, "Mixed Methods Research: An Opportunity to Improve Our Studies and Our Research Skills –Editorial", *European Journal of Management and Business Economics (EJM&BE)*, V. 25, I. 2, 2016, p. 37-38.

²² Kenneth K. Boyer-John R. Olson-Roger J. Calantone-Eric C. Jackson, "Print Versus Electronic Surveys: A Comparison of Two Data Collection Methodologies", *Journal of Operations Management*, V. 20, I. 4, 2002, p. 357-373; Jerry J. Vaske., *Survey research and analysis*, (2nd ed.), Sagamore-Venture Publishing, Champaign 2011.

²³ A. Regula Herzog-Jerald G. Bachman, "Effects of Questionnaire Length on Response Quality", *Public Opinion Quarterly*, V. 45, I. 4, 1981, p. 549-559.

²⁴ Laurensyeva-Venturini, "The Social Integration of ...", p. 285-292.

²⁵ Ilker Etikan-Sulaiman Abubakar Musa-Rukayya Sunusi Alkassim, "Comparison of Convenience Sampling and Purposive Sampling", *American Journal of Theoretical and Applied Statistics*, V. 5, I. 1, 2016, p. 1-4.

²⁶ Tavits, "Why Do People Engage ...", p. 1257-1279.

participants provided informed consent (see Appendix A), and anonymity and confidentiality were maintained.

The questionnaire comprised three sections:

* **Socio-demographic profile:** Age, gender, occupation, education, country of origin and residence, and time in residence.

* **Opinions on corruption:** Participants rated the acceptability of various forms of corruption on a four-point Likert scale from “Not acceptable” (1) to “Always acceptable” (4). The eleven items measuring the acceptability of different corrupt practices were treated as a corruption attitude scale capturing tolerance toward corruption. The internal consistency of this scale was assessed using Cronbach’s alpha and demonstrated acceptable reliability ($\alpha = 0.76$). Participants also indicated whether their opinions had changed since migrating (yes/no, with open-ended follow-up for explanations).

* **Engagement in corruption:** Frequency of offering bribes or gifts to public officials was measured on a five-point Likert scale from “Never” to “Always,” for both the country of origin (behavior before migrating) and host country (behavior in the last 12 months). Participants were also informed that the Baltic States have lower levels of corruption than Central Asian countries, according to Transparency International, and were asked to explain why they believed this was so.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS to identify patterns and changes in behavior. Descriptive statistics and scale-based analyses were used to examine attitudes toward corruption and self-reported engagement in corrupt practices. Qualitative responses were coded thematically to complement and contextualize the findings.

Results

Socio-Demographics

The survey sample comprised migrants from Central Asia residing in the Baltic States. The largest age group was 35–44 years (33%; $n = 38$), followed by 18–24-year-olds (23%; $n = 26$), while respondents aged above 54 were the least represented (10%; $n = 11$). Two-thirds of participants were male (67%; $n = 76$), females accounted for 32% ($n = 36$), and two participants (2%) chose not to disclose their gender.

The most common occupations were construction (27%; $n = 31$), students (21%; $n = 24$), and drivers (18%; $n = 21$), with smaller proportions working as cooks (9%; $n = 10$) or housewives (5%; $n = 6$), indicating that migrants were largely employed in service and manual labor sectors.

In terms of education, most respondents had completed technical school (36%; $n = 41$) or secondary school (33%; $n = 38$), while a smaller share held a bachelor’s degree (19%; $n = 22$) and postgraduate qualifications were rare (master’s degree 4%; $n = 5$; PhD 1%; $n = 1$). Overall, all participants had completed at least secondary education or equivalent.

The majority originated from Uzbekistan (43%; $n = 49$) and Kazakhstan (22%; $n = 25$), with smaller proportions from Kyrgyz Republic (17.7%; $n = 20$), Tajikistan (15.9%; $n = 18$), and Turkmenistan (0.8%; $n = 1$). Over half resided in Latvia (55%; $n = 63$), followed by Lithuania (31%; $n = 35$) and Estonia (14%; $n = 16$). Two-thirds (68%; $n = 77$) had lived in the Baltic States for one to four years, 28% ($n = 32$) for five years or more, and 4% ($n = 5$) for less than one year.

Attitudes Toward Corruption

Respondents evaluated eleven forms of corruption on a four-point scale ranging from “not acceptable” (1) to “always acceptable” (4). The results (Table 1) show that the overwhelming majority (93% average) considered all forms of corruption unacceptable. Limited tolerance was observed for certain practices: 15% ($n = 17$) viewed recruitment of public officers through family

or friendship ties as sometimes acceptable, and 11% (n = 13) indicated that offering a bribe to accelerate administrative procedures could be acceptable in some cases.

Corrupt practice	Mean Score*	Not acceptable	Sometimes acceptable	Usually acceptable	Always acceptable
Public officer being recruited on the basis of family ties and friendship networks	1.21	81.5 %	14.9%	1.7%	0.8%
Public officer asking for a bribe to speed up administrative procedures	1.05	93.8%	5.3%	-	-
Private citizen offering a bribe to a public official to speed up administrative procedures	1.14	86.8%	11.4%	-	0.8%
Elected official stealing public funds for private use	1.03	96.5%	2.6%	-	-
Elected official using stolen public funds to assist his or her community	1.1	91.2%	6.1%	1.7%	-
Law enforcement officer (police, customs, immigration, army) asking for a bribe to speed up administrative procedures	1.08	94.7%	3.5%	0.8%	0.8%
Law enforcement officer (police, customs, immigration, army) asking for a bribe to help a person evade legal responsibilities	1.04	94.7%	4.4%	-	-
Private citizen offering a bribe to a law enforcement officer to speed up administrative procedures	1.16	85.9%	11.4%	0.8%	0.8%
Private citizen offering a bribe to a law enforcement officer to evade legal responsibilities	1.04	95.6%	3.5%	-	-
Head of an organization asking for a bribe in exchange for job offer	1.04	95.6%	3.5%	-	-
Applicant offering a bribe in exchange for a job offer	1.06	92.1%	6.1%	-	-

Table 1: Migrants’ opinions on corrupt practices (mean scores, percentages, and counts).

*Key: 1 = Not acceptable; 2 = Sometimes acceptable; 3 = Usually acceptable; 4 = Always acceptable.

Change in Opinions After Migration

Respondents were asked whether their views on corruption had changed since moving to the Baltic States. A substantial majority (78%; n = 89) reported a shift in perspective, while 22% (n = 25) indicated that their views had remained unchanged. Among those providing explanations (n = 75), the most frequently cited reasons were improved economic conditions, including better salaries, work opportunities, and standards of living (29%; n = 22 and 21.3%; n = 16, respectively), followed by exposure to different cultures and traditions (24%; n = 18). Other explanations included experiencing democracy and freedom of speech (13.3%; n = 10) and stricter regulations (12%; n = 9).

Illustrative comments reinforced these themes. One respondent highlighted economic stability: “Less bureaucracy, better salary and more job opportunities for young people, resulting in no corruption.” Another emphasized the influence of social norms: “Society has a major impact on you... living in Uzbekistan made me think that it is totally okay to bribe anyone to achieve something. Moving to Europe finally cleaned my vision, so now I’m back to normal.”

Engagement in Corrupt Activities

Participants were also asked to report whether they had made additional payments (bribes) or provided gifts to public officials in both their country of origin (before migration) and country of residence. Responses were measured on a five-point scale (1 = “Never,” 5 = “Always”), and mean frequencies were calculated. In the country of origin, the highest reported

instances involved public doctors (M = 2.89), governmental agencies issuing driving licenses or car registrations (M = 2.88), teachers and lecturers in public schools (M = 2.87), and police officers (M = 2.75). By contrast, such practices in the country of residence over the past 12 months were rare, with a low overall mean across all public officials (M = 1.08; see Figure 1).

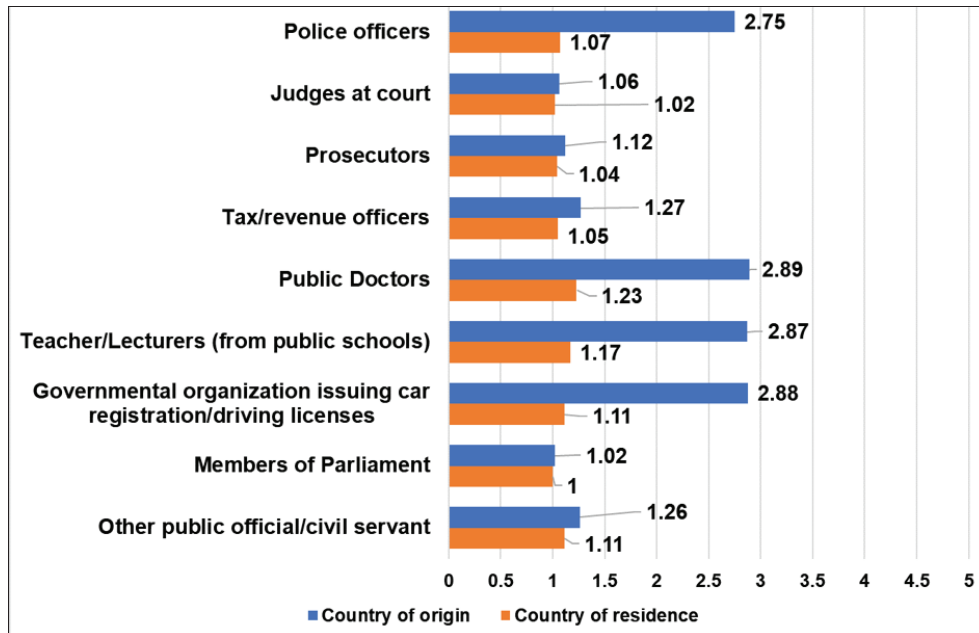


Figure 1: Comparison of self-reported engagement in corruption before and after migration.

Perceived Reasons for Lower Corruption in the Baltic States

Participants were informed in the survey that, according to Transparency International, the Baltic States have lower levels of corruption than Central Asian countries. They were then asked to provide possible reasons for this difference in an open-ended question. A total of 80 responses were collected.

The most frequently cited explanation (27.5%; n = 22) referred to the strength of institutions, democratic governance, and freedom of speech in the Baltic States. Respondents highlighted transparent political systems, open public debate, and fair elections as key factors reducing corruption. One participant stated that ‘Baltic states are more developed and have more freedom regarding the structure of the state. People are free to talk about politicians and will not be punished for that.’ Another explained that there is ‘independent media, distribution of powers and less concentration of power and authority in the hands of one politician, fair elections.’

Cultural and social factors were the second most frequently mentioned explanation (22.5%; n = 18). Participants emphasised that social norms and customs differ significantly between the two regions, often linking corruption in Central Asia to reliance on personal connections and family networks. Illustrative responses included ‘culture and customs are different’ (R14); ‘we have everything by acquaintance and for money’ (R17); and ‘Central Asia has high dependability on social and family opinion. People choose relatives over skilled workers.’

Stricter laws and fear of punishment were also commonly mentioned (13.75%; n = 11). As one respondent observed, ‘I think people are more scared to give bribes in Estonia’ (R87), while another noted, ‘maybe because people are scared to go to jail, strict laws’ (R10). Less frequent responses (10%; n = 8) referred to the post-Soviet legacy or to differences in economic structures. A notable share of participants (26.25%; n = 21) were uncertain or unable to explain the difference, often responding with ‘I don’t know.’

Evaluation of Theoretical Propositions

The survey findings were examined in relation to the two theoretical propositions.

TP1 – supported:

TP1 proposed that migrants engage in fewer corrupt acts after moving to countries with lower corruption levels. The results supported this proposition: participants' overall mean engagement in corruption significantly decreased from $M = 1.91$ in their country of origin to $M = 1.09$ in their country of residence. A Wilcoxon signed-rank test on participants' overall mean scores confirmed that this reduction was statistically significant ($Z = -8.73$, $p < .001$), indicating a robust decline in self-reported corrupt behavior following migration.

Further item-level analyses revealed significant reductions in corrupt interactions across multiple public sectors, including police officers ($Z = -7.952$, $p < .01$), public doctors ($Z = -7.775$, $p < .01$), teachers and lecturers ($Z = -8.031$, $p < .01$), and governmental agencies issuing driving licenses and car registrations ($Z = -7.936$, $p < .01$). Together, these findings provide strong empirical support for TP1, suggesting that migrants adapt their behavior to the lower-corruption norms and institutional expectations of their host societies.

TP2 – supported:

TP2 proposed that migrants perceive corruption less favorably after moving to countries with lower corruption levels. The results strongly support this proposition. A substantial majority (78%) of respondents reported that their views on corruption had become less tolerant since migrating to the Baltic States. Consistent with this attitudinal shift, evaluations of specific corrupt practices revealed overwhelmingly negative perception (overall $M = 1.11$), with over 93% of respondents rating all forms of corruption as unacceptable. This convergence between self-reported opinion change and low acceptance scores after migration reinforces the behavioral evidence showing a significant reduction in corrupt engagement in the host country.

Discussion

This study examined how Central Asian migrants in the Baltic States report adapting their perceptions and behaviors toward corruption in response to new institutional and normative environments. Guided by Collective Action Theory,²⁷ the analysis indicates that migration into low-corruption contexts may be linked to changes in individual behavior and attitudes, as migrants appear to adapt to the more honest norms prevalent in their host countries. From a migration-studies perspective, these changes can also be understood as part of broader processes of acculturation and normative adaptation that accompany cross-border mobility.

Behavioral and Attitudinal Adaptation

The study shows that respondents' engagement in corrupt acts and their tolerance of such behavior declined after migration. These shifts suggest adaptation to the prevailing social expectations and institutional realities of the host environment. In line with Collective Action Theory, individuals appear to adjust to what is socially acceptable within their new context.²⁸ This process is consistent with migration research emphasizing that exposure to new institutional arrangements and social norms can reshape migrants' attitudes and practices through everyday interaction and learning.²⁹ These findings resonate with previous research showing that migration can facilitate behavioral change by exposing individuals to new normative frameworks and

²⁷ Mungiu-Pippidi, *Contextual Choices in Fighting Corruption*:..., 2011; Marquette-Peiffer, "Corruption and Collective Action", 2015; Fisman-Golden, *Corruption: What Everyone ...*, 2017; Persson-Rothstein-Teorell, "Why Anticorruption Reforms ...", p. 449-471.

²⁸ Ivlevs-King, "Does Emigration Reduce Corruption?", p. 389-408; Levitt, "Social Remittances: Migration ...", p. 926-948; Mungiu-Pippidi, *Contextual Choices in Fighting Corruption*:..., 2011; Marquette-Peiffer, "Corruption and Collective Action", 2015; Fisman-Golden, *Corruption: What Everyone ...*, 2017; Persson-Rothstein-Teorell, "Why Anticorruption Reforms ...", p. 449-471.

²⁹ Laurentsyeva-Venturini, "The Social Integration of ...", p. 285-292; Levitt, "Social Remittances: Migration ...", p. 926-948.

governance systems.³⁰ In this sense, migrants' changing orientations toward corruption can be interpreted as a form of social remittance, whereby norms encountered in the host society are internalized and incorporated into migrants' own behavioral repertoires.³¹ As corruption becomes socially condemned rather than tolerated, migrants can recalibrate their behavior accordingly.

Perceived Factors of Change

Participants consistently attributed lower corruption in the Baltics to aspects of democratic governance, including transparency, accountability, and stricter law enforcement. Cultural and social factors also appeared to play a role in migrants' attitudinal and behavioral adaptation, with respondents linking their changing perspectives to exposure to different social norms and practices, as well as improved socio-economic conditions. Such accounts reflect key dimensions of acculturation processes, in which migrants learn, negotiate, and selectively adopt host-country norms through daily interactions in workplaces, institutions, and public spaces.³²

This combination of influences highlights the multi-layered nature of behavioral change: institutional features and enforcement are associated with reduction in the acceptability of corruption, while cultural adaptation and economic stability appear to diminish its perceived necessity. Migration research similarly underscores that adaptation is rarely driven by a single factor, but rather by the interaction between institutional contexts, social norms, and material conditions.³³ These observations align with prior research emphasizing the interplay between governance quality, social norms, and economic factors in shaping corruption-related behaviour.³⁴

Policy and Broader Implications

These results offer encouraging implications for both migration and anti-corruption policy. First, they suggest that migrants from high-corruption contexts may adjust to the behavioral standards of their host societies when institutional integrity is visible and credible. This adaptability counters narratives that associate migration with the importation of corrupt practices. Second, the findings highlight that behavioral adaptation is linked not only to formal institutions but also with exposure to cultural norms and improved socio-economic conditions. Policies that foster inclusive economic opportunities and facilitate cultural integration may therefore complement institutional practices, further encouraging honest behavior among migrants.

Limitations and Future Studies

Future research could expand on this study by examining larger and more diverse migrant populations across multiple countries, allowing for broader comparisons and more generalizable insights. Longitudinal designs would help track behavioral and attitudinal changes over time, providing a deeper understanding of the processes of adaptation. From a migration perspective, future work could also examine how different dimensions of acculturation—such as length of residence, language acquisition, and social contact with host communities—shape migrants' exposure to and internalization of anti-corruption norms. Although workplace integration, access to social services, and other socio-cultural factors have been widely studied in migration research, their role in shaping migrants' adjustment to low-corruption environments and influencing corruption-related behaviors remains underexplored. Investigating how these factors interact with

³⁰ Ivlevs-King, "Does Emigration Reduce Corruption?", p. 389-408; Levitt, "Social Remittances: Migration ...", p. 926-948; Zúñiga, "Behavioural Changes ...", p. 1-12.

³¹ Levitt, "Social Remittances: Migration ...", p. 926-948.

³² Jörg Rössel-Susanne Janssen-Miloš Jovanović-Tally Katz-Gerro, "Cultural Integration and Difference From Migrants' Perspective: Cultural Comparisons Between Country of Residence and Country of Origin", in S. Janssen-N.N. Kristensen-M. Verboord (eds.), *Engagement With Culture in Transformative Times: Mapping the Societal Drivers and Impacts of Cultural Understandings, Practices, Perceptions, and Values Across Europe*, 1st ed., Routledge, London and New York 2025, p. 153-170.

³³ ³³ Laurentyeva-Venturini, "The Social Integration of ...", p. 285-292.

³⁴ Gupta-Davoodi-Alonso Terme, "Does Corruption Affect ...", p. 23-45; Mauro, "Corruption and Growth", p. 681-712.

local social norms could further clarify the mechanisms that support such adaptation and provide additional insight into norm-based behavioral change as predicted by Collective Action Theory.

It is important to note that this study relied on non-random sampling through personal contacts and Facebook groups, which may limit the representativeness of the findings for the broader population of Central Asian migrants in the Baltic States. In addition, retrospective reporting of pre-migration behavior may be affected by memory distortion or idealization, particularly for sensitive behaviors, potentially influencing the accuracy of observed changes. The sensitive nature of corruption-related behaviors could also have introduced social desirability bias, even though questions were neutrally worded to reduce this effect. Finally, while ethical procedures including informed consent and confidentiality were followed, respondents from authoritarian contexts may have perceived risks in disclosing sensitive behaviors, which could have further shaped their responses.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Central Asian migrants in the Baltic States report adjustments in their attitudes and behaviors toward corruption after migration. Engagement in corrupt acts and tolerance of such behavior decreased substantially, reflecting alignment with the lower-corruption norms of the host countries. Migrants attributed this change primarily to democratic governance, stricter law enforcement, exposure to different cultural norms, and improved socio-economic conditions. In the Baltic and broader contexts, policies that strengthen institutional integrity while supporting migrants' cultural and economic integration may promote the adoption of honest practices.

Overall, the results support the idea that exposure to societies where corruption is condemned—both legally and socially—may encourage migrants to adjust their behavior accordingly. This aligns with Collective Action Theory, which emphasizes that individuals' expectations about others' behavior and the perceived integrity of institutions strongly influence their own actions. This suggests that migration has the potential to function not only as a process of economic and social integration but also as a mechanism for normative adaptation, particularly in relation to corruption.

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Appendix A

Informed Consent Form

Dear Participant:

Please consider participating in a study about the Central Asian migrants' experience in the Baltic States. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are under no obligation to participate in the study and, if you do decide to participate, you may stop at any time.

There will be no consequences for deciding not to participate or for deciding to stop participation in the study. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to complete the survey, which will take about 7 minutes to complete. No risks are anticipated.

The information you provide will remain confidential. Results will be reported only in aggregate form, and no identifying information will be released. To safeguard your confidentiality, please do not write your name or any identifying information on the survey. The information you provide will be used solely for this research project.

If you have any questions, you may contact the researchers (*for anonymity purposes of a double-blind review, the authors' names and contact information is removed*).

If you would like to participate, please sign below:

Extended Abstract

This study investigates how migrants' involvement in and attitudes toward corruption may change when they move from high- to low-corruption environments. While corruption is widely recognized as detrimental to democratic governance and socio-economic development, much less is known about how individuals adapt their corruption-related behavior when exposed to new institutional and cultural contexts. Drawing on Collective Action Theory, which frames corruption as a socially embedded phenomenon maintained by shared expectations about how others behave, this study examines whether and why migrants from Central Asia adjust their behavior and perceptions after settling in the Baltic States. The focus on migrants from Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan—countries that score low on Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index—provides a compelling opportunity to explore changes that may be associated with entering a lower corruption environment in Lithuania, Latvia, or Estonia.

Two theoretical propositions guided the study. The first posits that migrants engage in less corruption after relocating to a country with lower levels of corruption. The second proposes that migrants perceive corruption less favorably in their host environment compared to their country of origin. To examine these propositions, a mixed-methods survey was conducted with 114 migrants living in the Baltic States. The questionnaire, available in Russian and English, included both closed- and open-ended questions. It captured socio-demographic information, solicited evaluations of various corrupt practices using a likert scale, measured self-reported engagement in corruption before and after migration, and asked respondents to explain any changes in their opinions or behavior. Participants were also invited to articulate why they believed corruption levels were lower in the Baltic States, after being informed of Transparency International's assessments.

The results strongly support both theoretical propositions. Quantitatively, respondents reported significantly lower engagement in corrupt practices after migrating, with all measured interactions showing meaningful decreases. Before migration, participants indicated relatively frequent corrupt interactions with public doctors, teachers, police officers, and governmental agencies involved in issuing licenses or registrations. After migration, such behaviors were rare, with overall mean scores dropping substantially. Statistical analysis using the Wilcoxon signed-rank test confirmed that this reduction was significant across all categories, providing robust evidence that migrants adapted their behavior to the lower-corruption norms of the Baltic States.

Attitudinal change was similarly pronounced. A large majority—78 percent—reported that their views on corruption had changed since migration. Evaluations of eleven corrupt practices revealed very low acceptance, with more than 93 percent of respondents indicating that each form was “not acceptable.” These findings suggest that migrants adjust not only their actions but also their perceptions in response to the normative environment of their host country. Qualitative responses help illuminate these shifts, with participants attributing their changing perspectives to factors such as better salaries, improved living standards, different cultural norms, democratic governance, freedom of speech, and stricter regulations in the Baltic States.

Respondents' explanations for why corruption is lower in the Baltic States reflect the same themes. The most frequently cited reason was the strength of democratic institutions, including transparent political systems, open public debate, and fair elections. Others emphasized cultural differences, noting that reliance on personal connections and informal payments is more prevalent in Central Asia. Some pointed to stricter laws and harsher consequences for engaging in corruption in the Baltic States, suggesting that fear of punishment may also deter corrupt actions. A smaller number of participants referred to economic differences or post-Soviet legacies, while some expressed uncertainty.

Taken together, the results indicate that migrants' attitudes and behaviors may adjust when they enter institutional and cultural environments where corruption is less tolerated and less necessary to access services. These findings align with Collective Action Theory, which suggests that individuals modify their behavior based on what they perceive to be socially accepted or widespread. The study highlights the interplay between institutional integrity, cultural expectations, and socio-economic conditions in shaping corruption-related behavior. The findings offer valuable insight into how migrants navigate contrasting corruption contexts and provide a foundation for policy making and future research involving larger, more diverse samples and longitudinal designs.

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