THE IMPACT OF THE 2008-2009 GLOBAL CRISIS ON CORRUPTION: THE CASE OF THE POST-SOVIET VERSUS OTHER DEVELOPING ECONOMIES

HALIL D. KAYA
PROFESSOR OF FINANCE, NORTHEASTERN STATE UNIVERSITY,
kaya@nsuok.edu

Abstract

This study examines the impact of the 2008–2009 global financial crisis on corruption levels across manufacturing, service sector, and core industry firms in Eastern Europe and Central Asia (EECA). Using data from the Business Environment and Enterprise Performance Surveys (BEEPS IV and V), we compare firm-level perceptions of overall corruption, as well as corruption related to Customs/Imports, Courts, and Taxes/Tax collection during the crisis period (2009) and the post-crisis period (2013–2014). The analysis includes 3,723 manufacturing firms, 2,959 service sector firms, and 2,229 core industry firms across 29 countries, with sub-group comparisons between post-Soviet and non-post-Soviet countries. Mann-Whitney-Wilcoxon tests reveal that, for the overall samples in all three sectors, reported corruption levels declined significantly after the crisis across all categories. In post-Soviet countries, firms in all sectors also experienced statistically significant reductions in corruption in every category. However, in non-post-Soviet countries, while overall corruption and judicial corruption declined significantly, improvements in Customs/Imports and Tax-related corruption were not statistically significant for service sector and core industry firms. These findings suggest that the crisis may have catalyzed broad institutional or governance reforms in the EECA region, particularly in post-Soviet economies, though sector- and region-specific disparities in anti-corruption progress remain.

Keywords: *Socio-economic challenges, global crisis, corruption, bribery, post-Soviet, developing economies, transition economies, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, EECA*

Clasificare JEL : *D73, L60, L80, L90, O17, P26*

1. Introduction and context of the study

Corruption remains a significant challenge for firms operating in transition and developing economies, where interactions with public officials are often marked by informality, opacity, and rent-seeking behavior. While corruption can take many forms, its intensity and channels of influence frequently differ across economic sectors. Manufacturing firms tend to face corruption in areas such as customs clearance, taxation, and trade regulation. Core industry firms, particularly those engaged in construction, energy, and infrastructure, often encounter corruption in public procurement and large-scale government contracts. Service sector firms, though less frequently highlighted in corruption discourse, also experience illicit demands, especially in processes involving licensing, inspections, and judicial enforcement.

The 2008–2009 global financial crisis served as a major stress test for public institutions and governance systems across Eastern Europe and Central Asia (EECA). In response to economic uncertainty and fiscal constraints, many governments in the region expanded regulatory oversight, adjusted public spending, or implemented governance reforms. These shifts in policy and institutional behavior had the potential to either intensify or reduce corruption, depending on how reforms were structured and enforced. The impact of these changes likely varied across sectors and regional contexts, especially given the diverse administrative legacies of post-Soviet and non-post-Soviet countries in the EECA region.

This study investigates whether corruption levels changed significantly across manufacturing, service sector, and core industry firms following the global financial crisis. Using firm-level survey data from two waves of the Business Environment and Enterprise Performance Surveys (BEEPS), the analysis compares perceptions of corruption during the crisis period and several years afterward. The study focuses not only on overall corruption but also on specific areas, including

Customs/Imports, Courts, and Taxes/Tax collection. It further explores whether trends differ between post-Soviet and non-post-Soviet countries.

By examining sectoral and regional differences, this study aims to provide a deeper understanding of how large-scale economic shocks can influence corruption dynamics. In doing so, it sheds light on the resilience or vulnerability of governance systems in the face of crisis and offers insights into which sectors and institutional contexts may be more responsive to reform efforts.

2. Literature Review

Corruption, often viewed as an extra-legal institution, plays a central role in the interaction between firms and government officials, particularly in developing and transition economies. Scholars such as Leff (1964), Aidt (2003), Drury (2006), Glaeser (2006), and Pellegrini (2011) define corruption as the abuse of public office for private gain, emphasizing its adverse impact on institutional trust and economic activity. Anokhin and Schulze (2009) highlight how corruption erodes the trust required for trade, innovation, and entrepreneurship—foundations critical to firm growth across sectors.

In the context of developing countries, corruption has been shown to be especially prevalent due to institutional weaknesses such as political instability, inefficient bureaucracy, and fragile legal systems (Mauro, 1998; Tanzi & Davoodi, 1997). Several studies focus on sectoral differences in corruption prevalence, offering insights into how corruption varies across manufacturing, services, and core (often infrastructure or resource-intensive) industries.

Manufacturing firms, especially those operating in countries with high bureaucratic complexity, often face significant corruption related to trade regulation, taxation, and customs (Mauro, 1998; Mbaku, 1996). Misangyi (2008) supports this view, framing corruption as a strategic behavior where firms seek to manage regulatory burdens through informal means. In times of crisis, such as the 2008–2009 global financial crisis, these pressures may intensify, as governments tighten regulations or shift enforcement priorities, potentially altering corruption dynamics across sectors.

Core industries—such as construction, energy, and natural resources—are frequently identified as corruption hotspots (Kenny, 2007; Kronenberg, 2004; Leite & Weidmann, 1999). These industries typically involve large government contracts and substantial capital investment, creating opportunities for rent-seeking behavior among public officials and private firms alike. Osei-Tutu et al. (2010) and Tanzi and Davoodi (1997) note that public procurement and capital project complexity are often linked to bribery, kickbacks, and other illicit transactions. Bennedsen et al. (2009) further distinguish between "strong" and "weak" firms, showing that larger, export-oriented firms often influence policy outcomes without necessarily resorting to bribery, while smaller firms are more vulnerable to extortion.

Service sector firms, in contrast, are less frequently discussed in the literature on corruption, though they remain significantly affected, particularly in interactions involving licensing, inspections, or judicial processes. Henderson and Kuncoro (2004) point to corruption among local officials seeking electoral advantage or compensating for low salaries by extracting rents from service providers. Mehnaz et al. (2001) argue that both profitable and less-resourced firms in services are targeted by corrupt officials, though larger firms are more capable of absorbing the associated costs.

Sectoral differences in corruption may also influence how firms respond to external shocks, such as economic crises. Kapur and Vaishnav (2013) argue that corruption levels often fluctuate with macroeconomic and electoral cycles. Tonoyan et al. (2010) suggest that post-Soviet economies, characterized by high state control, experience elevated corruption levels, making the EECA region particularly relevant for studying the sector-specific impacts of the global crisis.

Importantly, some scholars adopt a more nuanced view of corruption's role in developing economies. Dreher and Gassebner (2013) and Gould and Amaro-Reyes (1983) argue that, under certain conditions, corruption can serve a functional role by helping firms circumvent burdensome

regulations and expedite business operations. Svensson (2005) and Jain (2001) similarly find evidence of a positive association between corruption and entrepreneurial activity. However, this perspective is contested by Bardhan (1997) and Ngunjiri (2010), who maintain that corruption distorts resource allocation, discourages innovation, and ultimately stifles economic growth.

In summary, existing research highlights significant variation in the prevalence and impact of corruption across economic sectors. Manufacturing firms typically face corruption related to trade and taxation, core industry firms grapple with corruption in public contracting and infrastructure, while service firms encounter corruption in licensing and regulatory compliance. The 2008–2009 global financial crisis likely reshaped these patterns, particularly in the EECA region, offering an important opportunity to examine whether corruption levels fell and whether those changes differed meaningfully across sectors.

3. Data and Methodology

Our sample consists of firms in the manufacturing, service sector, and core industries across twenty-nine countries in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. We use the BEEPSIV and BEEPSV surveys (i.e., Business Environment and Enterprise Performance Surveys). The BEEPS IV survey (i.e., 2009) represents the crisis period, and the BEEPS V survey (i.e., 2013-2014) represents the post-crisis period.

There are 3,723 manufacturing firms (i.e., 1,860 are in post-Soviet countries and 1,863 are in other countries), 2,959 service sector firms (i.e., 1,714 are in post-Soviet countries and 1,245 are in other countries), and 2,229 core industry firms (i.e., 1,184 are in post-Soviet countries and 1,045 are in other countries.

First, for manufacturing firms, we compare the overall level of corruption, the level of corruption in Customs/Imports, the level of corruption in Courts, and the level of corruption in Taxes/Tax collection across the two periods (i.e., the Crisis period to the post-Crisis period). We use non-parametric tests (i.e., the Mann-Whitney-Wilcoxon tests) to achieve that. We do the comparisons for the overall manufacturing sample, for manufacturers in post-Soviet countries, and for manufacturers in other countries. Did corruption go down post-Crisis for the overall sample, for the post-Soviet sample, and for the other countries' sample? After doing the comparisons for manufacturers, we do the same comparisons for service sector firms and core industry firms.

4. Empirical Results

Table 1 shows the results of the comparison between the Crisis period and the post-Crisis period for manufacturing firms. The last column shows the p-values for the Mann-Whitney-Wilcoxon tests. Panel A shows the results for all firms, while Panels B and C show the results for post-Soviet firms (i.e., firms in the post-Soviet countries) and other firms (i.e., firms in the other countries in the region), respectively.

Table 1. Corruption in Crisis versus Post-Crisis Periods (Manufacturing Firms)

	Crisis			Post-Crisis			Mann-W.
Variables	**N**	**Mean**	**Std**	**N**	**Mean**	**Std**	**p-value**
Panel A. All Firms							
Overall	3,723	2.0706	1.3234	3,825	1.8604	1.1217	<0.0001
Customs/imports	3,533	1.6519	1.1655	3,656	1.5096	0.9613	<0.0001
Courts	3,495	1.5345	1.0680	3,640	1.4346	0.8909	0.0031
Taxes/Tax collection	3,693	1.7590	1.1660	3,739	1.6435	1.0251	0.0004
Panel B. Post-Soviet Firms							
Overall	1,860	2.3151	1.4038	1,911	2.0225	1.1509	<0.0001
Customs/imports	1,713	1.7782	1.2956	1,777	1.5751	0.9989	0.0004

Courts	1,692	1.6744	1.2109	1,770	1.5107	0.9547	0.0017
Taxes/Tax collection	1,833	2.0175	1.2834	1,846	1.8418	1.0974	0.0004
Panel C. Other Firms							
Overall	1,863	1.8266	1.1891	1,914	1.6985	1.0678	0.0013
Customs/imports	1,820	1.5330	1.0142	1,879	1.4476	0.9203	0.0038
Courts	1,803	1.4032	0.8945	1,870	1.3626	0.8198	0.1674
Taxes/Tax collection	1,860	1.5043	0.9727	1,893	1.4501	0.9088	0.0657

Note: Never is 1, Seldom is 2, Sometimes is 3, Frequently is 4, Usually is 5, Always is 6.

Panel A shows that, for the whole manufacturing firm sample, the overall corruption as well as corruption in Customs/Imports, Courts, and Taxes/Tax Collection went down significantly after the crisis. The overall mean response for the Crisis period was 2.0706 (i.e., somewhere between "Seldom" and "Sometimes"), it went down to 1.8604 (i.e., somewhere between "Never" and "Seldom"). The mean response for Customs/Imports was 1.6519 (i.e., somewhere between "Never" and "Seldom"), and it dropped to 1.5096 (i.e., again somewhere between "Never" and "Seldom", but closer to "Never"). The mean response for Courts was 1.5345 (i.e., somewhere between "Never" and "Seldom"), and it dropped to 1.4346 (i.e., again somewhere between "Never" and "Seldom", but closer to "Never"). The mean response for Taxes/Tax collection was 1.7590 (i.e., somewhere between "Never" and "Seldom"), and it dropped to 1.6435 (i.e., again somewhere between "Never" and "Seldom", but closer to "Never"). The p-values are less than 0.01.

Panel B shows that, for the post-Soviet manufacturing firms, again, corruption in all categories went down significantly. The mean response for the overall sample was 2.3151, and it dropped to 2.0225. The mean response for Customs/Imports was 1.7782, and it dropped to 1.5751. The mean response for Courts was 1.6744, and it dropped to 1.5107. The mean response for Taxes/Tax collection was 2.0175, and it dropped to 1.8418. Again, the p-values are less than 0.01. For the post-Soviet manufacturers, all of the mean values are higher than their corresponding values in Panel A. Therefore, we can conclude that corruption was more serious for post-Soviet manufacturers compared to the overall sample, both during and after the crisis.

Panel C shows that, for the other manufacturing firms, corruption in all categories went down significantly except for corruption in the Courts. The drop in corruption in Courts is not statistically significant (p=0.1674). On the other hand, overall corruption, corruption in Customs/Imports, and corruption in Taxes/Tax collection went down significantly (p<0.01).

Table 2 shows the results of the comparison between the Crisis period and the post-Crisis period for service sector firms. The last column shows the p-values for the Mann-Whitney-Wilcoxon tests. Panel A shows the results for all firms, while Panels B and C show the results for post-Soviet firms (i.e., firms in the post-Soviet countries) and other firms (i.e., firms in the other countries in the region), respectively.

Table 2. Corruption in Crisis versus Post-Crisis Periods (Service Firms)

	Crisis			Post-Crisis			Mann-W.
Variables	**N**	**Mean**	**Std**	**N**	**Mean**	**Std**	**p-value**
Panel A. All Firms							
Overall	2,959	2.1551	1.3539	2,665	1.7899	1.0902	<0.0001
Customs/imports	2,728	1.5872	1.1473	2,570	1.4949	0.9885	0.0327
Courts	2,723	1.5711	1.1198	2,562	1.3966	0.8575	<0.0001
Taxes/Tax collection	2,870	1.8091	1.2332	2,611	1.5879	1.0240	<0.0001
Panel B. Post-Soviet Firms							

Overall	1,714	2.2585	1.4089	1,328	1.7899	1.0975	<0.0001
Customs/imports	1,531	1.6937	1.2858	1,252	1.4888	1.0039	0.0005
Courts	1,549	1.6243	1.2038	1,250	1.3872	0.8678	<0.0001
Taxes/Tax collection	1,650	2.0079	1.3504	1,285	1.6490	1.0615	<0.0001
Panel C. Other Firms							
Overall	1,245	2.0129	1.2609	1,337	1.7898	1.0833	<0.0001
Customs/imports	1,197	1.4511	0.9237	1,318	1.5008	0.9740	0.1371
Courts	1,174	1.5009	0.9942	1,312	1.4055	0.8478	0.0110
Taxes/Tax collection	1,220	1.5402	0.9934	1,326	1.5287	0.9830	0.2779

Panel A shows that, for all service sector firms, corruption in all categories went down significantly. The p-values are less than 0.01 for the overall sample and for corruption in Courts and corruption in Taxes/Tax collection, and the p-value for corruption in Customs/Imports is 0.0327.

Panel B shows similar results for service sector firms in the post-Soviet countries. The p-values of the drops in each category, as well as in the overall sample, are less than 0.01. Overall, these findings for service sector firms in post-Soviet countries are similar to the overall sample. There were significant drops in corruption in all three categories.

Panel C shows that, for service sector firms in non-post-Soviet countries, the overall corruption went down significantly ($p<0.0001$). The corruption in Courts went down significantly as well ($p=0.0110$). However, corruption in Customs/Imports and corruption in Taxes/Tax collection did not go down significantly. The p-value for Customs/Imports is 0.1371, and the p-value for Taxes/Tax collection is 0.2779. Therefore, we can conclude that for service sector firms in non-post-Soviet countries, corruption did not go down significantly in these two categories.

Table 3 shows the results of the comparison between the Crisis period and the post-Crisis period for core industry firms. The last column shows the p-values for the Mann-Whitney-Wilcoxon tests. Panel A shows the results for all firms, while Panels B and C show the results for post-Soviet firms (i.e., firms in the post-Soviet countries) and other firms (i.e., firms in the other countries in the region), respectively.

Table 3. Corruption in Crisis versus Post-Crisis Periods (Core Industries)

	Crisis			Post-Crisis			Mann-W.
Variables	**N**	**Mean**	**Std**	**N**	**Mean**	**Std**	**p-value**
Panel A. All Firms							
Overall	2,229	2.1884	1.3597	2,920	1.8473	1.1234	<0.0001
Customs/imports	2,040	1.6211	1.1601	2,821	1.4913	0.9750	0.0013
Courts	2,079	1.5854	1.0712	2,809	1.4183	0.8684	<0.0001
Taxes/Tax collection	2,180	1.7950	1.2079	2,856	1.5606	0.9745	<0.0001
Panel B. Post-Soviet Firms							
Overall	1,184	2.3674	1.4465	1,394	1.8286	1.0831	<0.0001
Customs/imports	1,045	1.7483	1.2943	1,319	1.5375	1.0276	0.0006
Courts	1,081	1.7003	1.1804	1,308	1.4557	0.9024	<0.0001
Taxes/Tax collection	1,137	2.0475	1.3267	1,346	1.6582	1.0278	<0.0001
Panel C. Other Firms							
Overall	1,045	1.9856	1.2235	1,526	1.8644	1.1591	0.0061

Customs/imports	995	1.4874	0.9831	1,502	1.4507	0.9248	0.2331
Courts	998	1.4609	0.9233	1,501	1.3857	0.8365	0.0198
Taxes/Tax collection	1,043	1.5197	0.9934	1,510	1.4735	0.9161	0.1473

Panel A shows that, for all core industry firms, corruption in all categories went down significantly. The p-values are less than 0.01 for the overall sample and for the three categories. There were significant drops in all categories.

Panel B shows similar results for core industry firms in the post-Soviet countries. The p-values of the drops in each category, as well as in the overall sample, are less than 0.01. Overall, these findings for core industry firms in post-Soviet countries are similar to the overall sample. There were significant drops in corruption in all three categories.

Panel C shows that, for core industry firms in non-post-Soviet countries, the overall corruption went down significantly (p=0.0061). The corruption in Courts went down significantly as well (p=0.0198). However, corruption in Customs/Imports and corruption in Taxes/Tax collection did not go down significantly. The p-value for Customs/Imports is 0.2331, and the p-value for Taxes/Tax collection is 0.1473. Therefore, we can conclude that for core industry firms in non-post-Soviet countries, corruption did not go down significantly in these two categories.

5. Conclusion

This study explores how the 2008–2009 global financial crisis influenced firm-level perceptions of corruption across the manufacturing, service, and core industry sectors in Eastern Europe and Central Asia (EECA). Using data from the BEEPS IV (2009) and BEEPS V (2013–2014) surveys, the analysis revealed a statistically significant decline in reported corruption levels across most categories and sectors during the post-crisis period. The reductions were most consistent and pronounced in post-Soviet countries, where firms in all three sectors reported significant declines in overall corruption, as well as corruption related to Customs/Imports, Courts, and Taxes/Tax collection. In contrast, while firms in non-post-Soviet countries also reported lower levels of overall and judicial corruption, the improvements in Customs and Tax-related corruption were less robust, especially in the service and core industry sectors.

These findings suggest that the crisis may have acted as a catalyst for institutional change, particularly in economies with historically higher levels of corruption. The observed declines could reflect post-crisis reforms in regulatory oversight, anti-corruption enforcement, or broader improvements in governance. However, the persistence of corruption in certain categories—especially in non-post-Soviet service and core industry firms—highlights that institutional reform is uneven and that sector-specific challenges remain.

Firms operating in sectors or regions prone to corruption should prioritize strengthening their internal compliance systems and ethics training to minimize risks. Participating in collective action initiatives, such as industry coalitions that advocate for transparency and fair competition, can help create external pressure on governments to improve regulatory frameworks. Additionally, implementing robust internal reporting mechanisms and protections for whistleblowers will enable firms to detect and address corrupt practices more effectively and proactively.

To ensure lasting progress, post-crisis governance reforms must be institutionalized and extended beyond immediate recovery periods. Anti-corruption efforts should be designed with sensitivity to sector-specific vulnerabilities, recognizing that approaches effective in customs may differ from those needed in judicial or tax systems. Furthermore, sustained support for independent oversight bodies and reforms aimed at improving public sector compensation are essential to maintain and deepen the reductions in corruption observed in the aftermath of the crisis.

In terms of future research, there is a need for longitudinal research to determine whether the decline in corruption observed post-crisis is durable and whether it leads to tangible improvements in firm performance and investment. Sector-specific case studies could provide more detailed understanding of how reforms are implemented and enforced in practice. Incorporating qualitative data, such as firm-level narratives, would enrich analysis by revealing how businesses adapt their strategies in response to evolving corruption landscapes.

Overall, this study underscores the potential for major economic disruptions to trigger positive institutional change, but also the importance of sectoral nuance and regional variation in shaping anti-corruption outcomes. A sustained focus on targeted reform, monitoring, and collaborative governance will be essential to consolidating the progress achieved in the aftermath of the global financial crisis.

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