

# **Cultural Influence towards Corruption: Perceptions of Construction Practitioners in Indonesia**

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## **Abstract**

The construction sector is one of the most vulnerable sectors to corruption. Previous publications have examined the causes, types, impacts, and strategies for preventing and eradicating corrupt practices in the construction sector. This research, however, focuses on the influence of cultural aspects on corrupt practices in the Indonesian construction sector. Through a mixed-method approach, this research identifies various forms of corruption in the construction sector and measures construction practitioners' perceptions regarding the frequency of these corrupt practices. In summary, 14 forms of corrupt practices can occur at four stages of construction procurement. The analysis results also show practitioners' perception of corruption as a norm in the construction business. This is motivated by the influence of cultural aspects in Indonesian society, especially related to the practice of connections and insiders, as well as a permissive attitude towards corruption. The results of this research contribute as a reference for stakeholders in understanding the influence of cultural aspects comprehensively so that they can take effective steps in establishing an anti-corruption culture in Indonesia.

**Keywords:** construction, corruption, culture, Indonesia, practice

## **1. Introduction**

The construction sector is one of the sectors that plays an important role in Indonesia's national economic growth. Based on the latest statistics, the construction sector contributes up to 9.86% of Indonesia's GDP [1]. In addition, the construction sector also supports the growth of other sectors by providing infrastructure to increase production and facilitate the distribution of goods and services in Indonesia. This sector is also closely related to investment and labor absorption. Realizing the important role of the construction sector, the government continues to boost economic growth and equality through infrastructure development. However, the reputation of the construction sector is often tarnished by various problems such as poor performance, complicated bureaucracy, low profits, and rampant corruption practices [2], [3], [4]. These problems affect not only the image of the construction sector but also the performance of the construction sector and Indonesia's competitiveness. Regarding corruption practices, the construction sector is one of the most vulnerable sectors. This is agreed upon not only in Indonesia but also globally. Various publications have examined the problem of corruption in the construction sector as faced by developed and developing countries, including Indonesia, Canada, Portugal, and China [5], [6], [7].

Previous research on corrupt practices in the construction sector has been widely conducted. For example, research related to the forms of corruption in the construction sector has been conducted by [8], [9], [10], [11]. Likewise, research related to the factors causing corrupt practices in the construction sector has been conducted by [2], [12], [13], [14], [15]. Meanwhile, [5], [16], [17], [18] have studied the impact of corruption practices in the construction sector. However, studies related to

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corruption practices are sensitive topics [19], [20]. One of the things that makes the study of corruption practices sensitive is the presence of cultural elements. In Indonesia, corruption practices are considered an extraordinary crime deeply rooted in people's lives [21], [22]. [7] emphasizes the need for a context-specific study that prioritizes cultural aspects and their relevance to corruption practices and their eradication. This cultural aspect is a major challenge in eradicating corruption in Indonesia, including in the construction sector. Permissive attitudes and feudalistic culture are characteristic of Indonesian culture [23]. This also makes corrupt practices face systemic challenges in eradicating them [24].

Considering the background above, this study aims to investigate Indonesian construction practitioners' opinions regarding the culture of corruption. In the context of this study, the culture of corruption studied is the forms of corruption in the construction sector and the perceptions related to this acceptability, which is considered normal in the construction business. Understanding this will be useful in determining strategic steps to form an anti-corruption culture in the construction sector.

## 2. Method

A mixed-method approach was adopted in this study. In the first stage, a narrative literature review (NLR) was applied to identify various forms of corruption practices that occur in construction work. NLR is a conventional qualitative literature review technique [25]. This technique does not aim to conclude the studies that have been conducted but provides researchers with the freedom to selectively choose to focus attention on certain things from the existing literature [26]. The results of the NLR are in the form of research variables used as input to the questionnaire, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Research variables

Code	Statement	References
X1	How common is corruption to occur at the project initiation and planning stage?	[8], [9], [12], [27], [28]
X2	How common is corruption to occur at the tendering stage?	[8], [9], [11], [12], [13], [14], [18], [27], [29], [30], [31]
X3	How common is corruption to occur at the work execution and contract administration stage?	[5], [8], [9], [12], [27], [28]
X4	How common is corruption to occur at the contract termination stage (final account)?	[8], [9], [12], [27], [28]
X5	How common is bribery in the construction industry?	[8], [10], [11], [13], [15], [16], [17], [18], [19], [20], [28], [31], [32], [33], [34], [35], [36]
X6	How common is embezzlement in the construction industry?	[6], [8], [11], [16], [17], [20], [28], [32], [33], [34], [36]
X7	How common is document forgery in the construction industry?	[6], [8], [18], [19], [20], [28], [31], [32], [33], [34], [36], [37]
X8	How common is evidence tampering in the construction industry?	[18], [31], [35], [37]
X9	How common is extortion in the construction industry?	[8], [16], [18], [20], [31], [34], [36]
X10	How common is fraudulent practice that harms others in the construction industry?	[6], [8], [9], [11], [14], [16], [17], [18], [20], [28], [31], [33], [34], [35], [37], [38]

Table 1 Research variables (Continued)

Code	Statement	References
X11	How common is the leakage of confidential information (especially during the tender process) in the construction industry?	[12], [18], [20], [31], [36], [39]
X12	How common is the usurpation of other people's assets occur in the construction industry?	[11], [17], [37]
X13	How common is falsification of information in the construction industry?	[8], [18], [28], [31], [36]
X14	How common is the practice of not providing information occur in the construction industry?	[8], [16], [18], [20], [31], [34]
X15	How common is gratification (veiled bribery, giving something in the hope of getting something) in the construction industry?	[8], [9], [12], [13], [18], [28], [31], [37]
X16	How common are conflicts of interest in procurement occur in the construction industry?	[9], [11], [12], [16], [17], [18], [19], [31], [33], [34], [39]
X17	How common are rejections of tender participants without clear reasons occur in the construction industry?	[6], [12], [18], [20], [31], [36]
X18	How common are appointments of winners with indications of conflicts of interest (e.g. acquaintances or family) occur in the construction industry?	[6], [8], [11], [12], [14], [16], [17], [18], [20], [28], [31], [33], [34], [36]
X19	How common is it considered a 'fair' practice?	[2], [13], [14], [16], [17], [28], [32], [34], [36], [40]

The second stage is a questionnaire that aims to measure the perceptions of construction practitioners in Indonesia regarding the frequency of corrupt practices in construction work. Perception is a person's interpretation and assessment of a particular social phenomenon [40]. The Likert scale is used as a tool to measure this perception. In this study, the Likert scale used was 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (disagree), 3 (agree), and 4 (strongly agree). The questionnaire was presented online via Google Form and distributed to respondents who met the criteria, namely (1) construction practitioners, (2) having at least one year of work experience in the construction industry. The questionnaire was distributed from October 4 to November 23, 2022, and obtained 117 responses. However, only 102 responses could be analyzed based on the initial examination. Table 2 shows the profile of the respondents obtained.

This study applies descriptive statistical analysis. Formula (1) is the Total Score obtained by adding the results of multiplying each scale number by the number of responses ( $R_i$ ) on the scale. Formula (2) is the highest score value ( $Y$ ) obtained from the results of multiplying the highest scale number (in this case is 4) by the total number of responses.

$$Total\ Score = R_1 \times 1 + R_2 \times 2 + R_3 \times 3 + R_4 \times 4 \quad (1)$$

$$Y = 4 \times Total\ Responses = 4 \times 102 \quad (2)$$

Formula (3) shows the final value, which is the percentage of the result of dividing the Total Score by the highest score value. Meanwhile, for the purpose of interpretation, it is necessary to find the percentage score interval (I) with the formula (4), which is obtained by dividing 100% by the highest scale number. The criteria for interpreting scores based on intervals are shown in Table 3.

$$Final\ Score = \frac{Total\ Score}{Y} \times 100 \quad (3)$$

$$Interval = \frac{100\%}{4} = 25\% \quad (4)$$

Table 2 Respondent profiles

Profile	Number	Percentage	Profile	Number	Percentage
Age			Highest education		
21-30	31	30.39	High school	33	32.35
31-40	45	44.12	Diploma 3	2	1.96
41-50	20	19.61	Bachelor	59	57.84
51-60	6	5.88	Master	6	5.88
Total	102	100	Doctor	2	1.96
Years working experience			Total	102	100
1-5	36	35.29	Affiliation type		
6-10	29	28.43	Government	5	4.90
11-15	28	27.45	Developer	18	17.65
16-20	5	4.90	Consultant	19	18.63
21-25	2	1.96	Contractor	49	48.04
26-30	2	1.96	Others	11	10.78
Total	102	100	Total	102	100
Gender			Professional membership		
Female	13	12.75	Yes	24	23.53
Male	89	87.25	No	78	76.47
Total	102	100	Total	102	100

Table 3 Interpretation of final score

Final score range	Interpretation
0% - 24,99%	Strongly disagree
25% - 49,99%	Disagree
50% - 74,99%	Agree
75% - 100%	Strongly agree

### 3. Results and Discussion

In general, the construction sector is one of the sectors most vulnerable to corrupt practices. Likewise, various studies have been conducted in Indonesia on corrupt practices in the construction sector [4], [7], [9]. This study provides additional insights regarding the influence of cultural aspects on corrupt practices in the construction sector. The influence of this cultural aspect is examined by measuring the perceptions of construction practitioners regarding the frequency of various types of corrupt practices in construction work and their acceptability as normal in the construction business. Through descriptive statistical analysis, this study succeeded in measuring the perceptions of construction practitioners regarding the research variables, as presented in Table 4.

Table 4 Study result

No	Scale				Total response	Total score	Y	Final score	Interpretation
	1	2	3	4					
X1	6	23	46	27	102	298	408	73.04	Agree
X2	3	35	35	29	102	294	408	72.06	Agree
X3	2	19	42	39	102	322	408	78.92	Strongly agree
X4	6	18	52	26	102	302	408	74.02	Agree
X5	1	18	33	50	102	336	408	82.35	Strongly agree
X6	5	29	40	28	102	295	408	72.30	Agree
X7	9	24	39	30	102	294	408	72.06	Agree
X8	12	34	31	25	102	273	408	66.91	Agree
X9	5	28	46	23	102	291	408	71.32	Agree
X10	4	23	51	24	102	299	408	73.28	Agree
X11	2	26	43	31	102	307	408	75.25	Strongly agree
X12	8	37	37	20	102	273	408	66.91	Agree
X13	5	35	26	36	102	297	408	72.79	Agree
X14	4	23	51	24	102	299	408	73.28	Agree
X15	2	14	38	48	102	336	408	82.35	Strongly agree
X16	0	21	48	33	102	318	408	77.94	Strongly agree
X17	6	35	34	27	102	286	408	70.10	Agree
X18	0	22	39	41	102	325	408	79.66	Strongly agree
X19	1	18	53	30	102	316	408	77.45	Strongly agree

### 3.1 Perception of frequency of corrupt practices in construction procurement stages

A construction procurement can be divided into several stages, namely the initiation and planning stage, the tender stage, the execution and contract administration stage, and the contract termination stage. The initiation and planning stage includes all activities in starting and preparing a construction project, including the scope, design, and specifications required in the work. The tender stage includes announcing a construction project to obtain offers from the work implementer or contractor. The execution and contract administration stage are where the tender winner begins to carry out the actual construction work in the field. Meanwhile, the contract termination stage is the completion stage of the work that ends the contractual relationship between the project owner and the implementer/contractor.

Based on the results of the analysis, overall Indonesian construction practitioners agreed that the frequency of corrupt practices often occurs at various stages of construction projects. The execution and contract administration stage (X3) has the highest final value of 78.92, which can be interpreted as the majority of practitioners “strongly agree” regarding the view that corrupt practices often occur at this stage.

Likewise, for the other three stages, namely the project initiation and planning stage (X1), the tender stage (X2), and the contract termination stage (X4), each received a level of approval with a final value of 73.04; 72.06; and 74.02. This is an interesting finding, considering those various other publications state that the tender stage is the stage most vulnerable to corrupt practices [8], [14], [27], [29], [30]. Meanwhile, the analysis results show that the tender stage is not where corrupt practices occur most often in Indonesia but at the execution and contract administration stages. This could be due to the various efforts made by the government to increase transparency and accountability in the construction procurement process through the implementation of e-tendering [41].

### 3.2 Perception of frequency of forms of corruption practices in the construction sector

This study identified various forms of corruption practices in the construction sector. Based on the analysis results, the top five forms of corruption practices from Indonesian construction practitioners’ perspective are bribery, leaking of

confidential information, gratification, conflict of interest, and indications of conflict of interest in appointing winners. Bribery (X5) and gratification (X15) are the most common forms, with a final value of 82.35. According to various studies, bribery is the most common form of corruption in the construction industry [14], [33], [38]. This unethical act refers to offering, giving, receiving or asking for something of value to influence officials' actions in the procurement or tender process or the execution of contracts [42].

Similar to bribery, gratification is defined as a gift in a broad sense and not a promise. Gratification can be considered as bribery if the gift is related to the position and contrary to the obligation or duty. The main difference lies in whether or not there is a meeting of minds when the act is committed. In bribery, there is a meeting of minds between the perpetrators who give the bribe and the bribe recipient. In gratification, there is no transactional meeting of minds [43]. Examples of gratification are giving gifts, discounts, travel tickets, and accommodation facilities. Other forms that occur most often are the appointment of winners with indications of conflict of interest (X18), conflict of interest in procurement (X16), and leaking of confidential information (X11) with final values of 79.66, 77.94, and 75.25, respectively. The appointment of winners with indications of conflict of interest occurs when there is an element of nepotism. This refers to actions by someone who still has a family or friendship relationship [14], [42]. This practice can have a negative impact on construction project performance, such as low productivity and managerial efficiency [8].

Conflict of interest occurs when a professional cannot fulfil his duties neutrally due to ambivalent professional or personal interests [14], [17], [42]. This practice can lead to impropriety, decrease trust, and have an impact on poor project performance [14]. Meanwhile, leaking confidential information can occur during the construction project tender process. A company's bidding documents are confidential. Thus, leaking company secrets to other companies either for the common good or to benefit one party is an unethical act that falls into the category of corruption.

In addition to the five forms above, nine other forms received an acceptance level of "agree", namely embezzlement, document forgery, destruction of evidence, extortion, fraudulent acts, asset seizure, falsification of information, failure to provide information, and rejection of tender participants without clear reasons. Embezzlement (X6) received a final score of 72.30. A common example of embezzlement in construction work is the misappropriation of project funds [11]. This embezzlement practice harms project cost management [32]. In addition, this practice can also result in a project being stopped because payments that should have been given to one of the parties are hampered [8].

Document forgery (X7) is one of the unethical acts that received a final score of 72.06. In Indonesia, forgery of documents or letters has been regulated in Article 263 of the Old Criminal Code and Article 391 of Law No. 1 of 2023 concerning the New Criminal Code. Meanwhile, destruction of evidence (X8) received a final score of 66.91 and its prohibition has been regulated in Article 233 of the Criminal Code. Extortion (X9) received a final score of 71.32 and refers to actions motivated by personal desires to obtain additional income, which are carried out in the form of coercion of bribes and pressuring vulnerable parties in the project [14], [32]. Extortion usually occurs from one party pressuring another more vulnerable party, for example, extortion by the project owner to the contractor, extortion from the contractor to subcontractors and suppliers, or extortion from the authorities (for example, licensing institutions) to the project owner or contractor. In this case, some extortionists earn illegal income [8].

Fraudulent practices that endanger others (X10) received a final score of 73.28. This generally occurs when one party cheats by circumventing their obligations to gain additional benefits. For example, contractors cheat on material specifications or field testing. Meanwhile, the usurpation of other people's assets (X12) received a final score of 66.91, generally occurring in land mafia activities [44]. This practice is carried out using violence or threats by using the services of thugs to obtain land objects or to carry out construction work [45].

The practice of falsifying information (X13) received a final score of 72.79. Falsification of information (misleading

information) occurs when someone intentionally provides misleading information or statements. Related to this practice is the practice of not providing information (X14), which received a final score of 73.28. The practice of not providing information (withholding information) occurs when one party does not provide the information required by the authorities. Meanwhile, rejecting tender participants without a clear reason (X17) received a final score of 70.10 and refers to unethical actions carried out by the tender committee who rejected tender participants without providing a clear reason or in accordance with applicable procedures.

### *3.3 Perception of acceptability of corrupt practices due to cultural influence*

Based on the analysis results of the frequency of corrupt practices at the procurement stage (X1-X4) and the frequency of forms of corrupt practices in the construction sector (X5-X18), it can be seen that the acceptance of respondent practitioners who stated “agree” and “strongly agree” that corrupt practices often occur in procurement and implementation of construction projects. Likewise, regarding the perception of construction practitioners in viewing this corrupt practice as something normal in the construction business (X19), it received a final score of 77.45 which was interpreted as “strongly agree”. This strengthens previous publications that show the views of construction practitioners to engage in corrupt practices because they see it as a norm of normality in the construction business [46].

Eradicating corrupt practices in Indonesia and in many other countries faces challenges, especially due to the influence of community culture [13], [22], [32], [47]. For example, in China there is a term ‘guanxi’ deeply rooted in Chinese culture. The practice of guanxi refers to the activity of building networks or connections used to open doors for new businesses and facilitate deals. This practice plays a role in creating an environment conducive to corruption [8], [13]. A study even called it one of the six groups of causes of corruption in the construction sector in China [13].

The influence of a culture that gives way to corruption can also be seen in the ‘jeitinho’ mindset in Brazil. Jeitinho refers to the effort to achieve goals by any means necessary, even if it is against applicable regulations. This jeitinho mindset creates a corrupt environment in Brazilian society [48]. Similar concepts can be found in Argentina and Uruguay with the term ‘viveza criolla’, in Hungary with the term ‘megoldani okosba’, and in Poland with the term ‘kombinowac’.

In Indonesia, the influence of cultural aspects on corrupt practices is reflected in the terms ‘koneksi’ (connections) and ‘orang dalam’ (insiders). Both refer to a business culture that relies on strong relationships in the hope of exchanging favors [49]. In this case, one party will usually give something to achieve a certain goal promised by the other party. This practice does not only occur in the construction sector, but also in other sectors, making it a socially existing mentality in Indonesian society [7]. Even corrupt practices are often considered normal in doing business in Indonesia [50], [51]. Connections and insiders are closely related to the culture of giving and maintaining good relationships. Both can be considered to facilitate corrupt practices. For example, the culture of giving can be considered gratification, and the culture of maintaining good relationships can be considered nepotism or favoritism. This is exacerbated by the permissive attitude of Indonesian society towards acts of corruption. This permissive attitude towards corruption is the biggest challenge in forming an anti-corruption culture [23], [24]. [52] calls it a cultural obstacle in eradicating corruption in Indonesia.

### *3.4 Research implications*

This study examines the influence of cultural aspects on corruption practices in the construction sector. By taking a context-based study approach, namely the construction sector in Indonesia, the opinions of construction practitioners were measured to see the perception of the acceptability of corruption practices. The results of the analysis show that in general construction practitioners view corruption as a natural thing in the construction business. Various forms of corruption practices also have a high frequency, according to Indonesian construction practitioners. This confirms the opinion [46] that construction practitioners who view corruption as a natural thing will tend to be involved in corrupt practices.

This study is important because the influence of cultural aspects that view corruption as a natural thing or norm in business must be corrected. Corruption practices in any form should be viewed as an unethical act. According to the Fraud Triangle theory, three elements form corruption, namely opportunity, need or pressure, and rationalization [14]. Opportunity refers to the possibility of someone to commit corruption. Need or pressure relates to the reasons for committing corruption. While rationalization refers to the justification for corrupt behavior that is carried out. In this case, the influence of culture is included in the rationalization element.

Various publications have examined the practice of corruption as a cultural phenomenon in Indonesia [21], [22]. Thus, it is important to acknowledge the role and influence of cultural aspects in corrupt behaviour in society, including in the construction sector [7]. Cultural reform that changes the view of corruption as a normal thing in business must be carried out continuously and systematically with the support of all levels of society to change the existing mindset and culture. The eradication of corrupt practices would not have been effective without this cultural reform. Although cultural reform is a long and difficult process, this effort is very important in forming an anti-corruption culture, especially for the next generation [48].

#### 4. Conclusions

The construction sector is one of the sectors most vulnerable to corruption practices. This study aims to investigate the opinions of Indonesian construction practitioners regarding the culture of corruption. In the context of this study, the culture of corruption studied is the forms of corruption in the construction sector and the perceptions regarding this acceptability, which is considered normal in the construction business. Through a mixed methods approach, this study successfully identified various forms of corruption practices in the construction sector and measured practitioners' perceptions regarding the frequency of these practices. There are five forms of corruption practices that have the highest implications (strongly agree), namely bribery, leaking confidential information, gratification, conflict of interest, and indications of conflict of interest in appointing winners.

This study shows the perception of construction practitioners who consider corruption to be normal in the construction business. This is due to the influence of cultural aspects in Indonesian society, especially related to the practice of connections and insiders, as well as a permissive attitude towards corruption. The discussion of this study emphasizes the large role of cultural aspects, which is why cultural reform is needed to prevent and eradicate corruption in the construction sector. The results of this study are important as a reference for stakeholders to understand the influence of cultural aspects comprehensively so that they can take effective steps in forming an anti-corruption culture in Indonesia.

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