

Sexualised Corruption in High-Income Democracies: Sub-National Evidence from the European Union

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Abstract

This article examines whether sexualised corruption – the abuse of entrusted power to obtain sexual favours – follows the same opportunity structure as routine bribery within advanced democracies. Leveraging 40,663 interviews from the 2023 *Global Corruption Barometer* – European Union (GCB-EU), we construct the first regionally disaggregated measures of sexualised corruption for all 27 EU member states. Aggregating responses to 89 NUTS-1 regions and estimating linear-regression models with country fixed effects, we test the “shared opportunity structure” hypothesis: if officials readily trade discretion for money, they will also trade it for sex. The results support this claim. A rise in regional bribery prevalence is associated with a substantial increase in sexualised-corruption prevalence; moving from the first to the third quartile of the bribery distribution predicts a 26 percent jump relative to the sample mean. These findings locate sexualised corruption squarely within mainstream corruption theory: it is neither confined to weak states nor reducible to gender-based violence but instead constitutes a systematic by-product of the same opportunity and impunity structures that sustain petty graft.

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Introduction

Sexualised corruption refers to the abuse of entrusted power to obtain sexual favours – effectively, the use of sex as currency in a corrupt exchange. It occurs when an official or other authority figure demands sexual acts instead of, or alongside, monetary bribes in return for services, jobs, grades, or other benefits under their control. Existing evidence, drawn largely from cross-national studies in the Global South, suggests that sexualised corruption is more common where routine bribery is widespread. Yet those studies cannot tell us whether the relationship holds once national institutions are taken into account, nor do they reveal how sexualised corruption varies within high-income democracies, where strong formal rules may conceal pockets of everyday abuse. This article addresses both gaps through a sub-national analysis of the European Union.

We leverage more than 40,000 GCB-EU interviews to construct the first EU-wide, regionally disaggregated measures of sexualised corruption. Aggregating responses to the NUTS-1 level ($N = 89$) and embedding them in a model with country fixed effects, we evaluate the shared-opportunity-structure hypothesis: if officials routinely abuse office for money, they should also abuse it for sex. By holding national legal and cultural frameworks constant, our design isolates the local component of sexualised corruption – something no prior study has attempted.

Monetary bribery is a strong predictor of sexualised corruption across the EU and within individual member states, even after controlling for regional differences in education, urbanisation, demographic structure, and survey design effects. Sexualised corruption is more prevalent in regions where a larger share of residents report difficulty making ends meet, while the effect of education remains statistically indeterminate. This pattern suggests that material vulnerability, rather than greater recognition or disclosure in affluent areas, increases

exposure to sexualised abuse. These findings challenge the view that sexualised corruption is confined to low-income states or can be subsumed under gender-based violence. Instead, they show that sexualised corruption is a systematic by-product of the same opportunity structures that sustain petty graft – even in high-capacity democracies.

The rest of the article is organised in five parts. Section 2 clarifies key terminology, tracing the shift from sextortion to the more inclusive concept of sexualised corruption. It explains why this change is necessary for analytical precision, measurement, and effective legal and policy responses. Section 3 develops the shared-opportunity-structure hypothesis, arguing that sexualised corruption emerges under the same institutional conditions that permit routine bribery, and outlining the mechanisms that shape when and where sex becomes a substitute for money in corrupt exchanges. Section 4 describes the data, variables, and research design. Section 5 presents the empirical results. Section 6 concludes with reflections on theory, policy, and future research.

From Sextortion to Sexualised Corruption: Definitions and Challenges

In recent years, a growing body of scholarship has highlighted a form of corruption where sexual access, rather than money, is demanded or exchanged by public officials in positions of power. This behaviour, while often prosecuted under sexual violence or harassment statutes, clearly resembles classic corruption: an abuse of entrusted authority for personal gain. To describe this phenomenon, the International Association of Women Judges (IAWJ) introduced the term sextortion in 2008, defining it as a form of corruption in which sex, not money, is the currency of the bribe (Eldén *et al.* 2020). The concept gained traction quickly, particularly in legal and development circles seeking to expose forms of abuse that had long

gone unaddressed in institutional settings (Transparency International 2020; International Bar Association 2019).

Yet despite its early usefulness, the term sextortion presents several limitations. First, it overlaps with a separate and growing area of concern – namely, online image-based blackmail – leading to confusion in both academic and policy discussions. Second, the suffix “-extortion” implies a threat-based dynamic that does not capture the full range of exchanges in which sexualised corruption can occur. In many cases, sexual acts are not extracted through overt threats, but are instead offered, expected, or normalised within institutional cultures where access to jobs, grades, permits, or services is routinely mediated through gendered power imbalances. The narrow framing of sextortion around explicit coercion thus risks excluding other exploitative but less visibly coercive practices from empirical analysis and legal remedy.

There is growing recognition that the definitional and operational challenges associated with the term sextortion call for a broader, more analytically precise concept. The term sexualised corruption – or, in some sources, sexual corruption³ – has emerged as a more inclusive alternative (Bjarnegård *et al.* 2024). This terminology refocuses attention on the corrupt transaction itself, identifying the abuse of office for private sexual gain as the central feature, regardless of whether the sexual favour is demanded, offered, or informally expected. Rather than defining the problem solely in terms of extortion, it captures a wider spectrum of corrupt practices where sexual gratification functions as the illicit benefit. In doing so, it aligns the

³ We prefer the term sexualised corruption due to the moralistic overtones that “sexual corruption” carries in the English language.

phenomenon more closely with conventional definitions of corruption and reduces ambiguity about what type of behaviour is under discussion.

The shift from sextortion to sexualised corruption also helps resolve the confusion created by overlapping legal and enforcement frameworks. Whereas sextortion is sometimes treated as a cybercrime perpetrated by private individuals, sexualised corruption situates the abuse clearly within the domain of public integrity, emphasising the role of power and position. This makes it easier to locate the phenomenon within anti-corruption strategies and legal frameworks, rather than relegating it to areas of law that may not adequately capture the nature of the abuse.

Another advantage of the term sexualised corruption is that it better reflects the gendered and structural nature of these exchanges (UNCAC Coalition 2023). Scholars have shown that these practices disproportionately affect women, LGBTQ+ persons, and individuals from socio-economically marginalised groups who are more likely to depend on officials for access to public goods and services (Abut 2022). By situating the problem within the broader context of corruption, rather than isolating it as a distinct form of sexual violence, this approach helps expose how gender hierarchies are reproduced through institutionalised abuse.

However, there are several obstacles to mainstreaming this broader terminology. One of the most significant is legal: many anti-corruption statutes define undue advantage in financial terms, leaving sexual payments in a legal grey area (Transparency International 2020).

Prosecutors may try to apply either sexual offence laws or general corruption laws, but in practice both approaches face limitations. The evidentiary burden is also substantial. Unlike

monetary bribes, sexualised corruption often leaves little trace and is rarely documented in ways that can be used in court. Victims often hesitate to report such abuse due to stigma, fear of retaliation, or a lack of faith in the integrity of reporting channels – particularly when the perpetrator is embedded in the very institution meant to offer protection.

A further challenge is that official data on corruption seldom disaggregates by type of benefit received, and gender-based violence statistics rarely include information about the power dynamics or institutional settings in which sexual abuse occurs (Kirya 2024). As a result, sexualised corruption remains largely invisible in administrative data and national integrity frameworks. This lack of visibility, in turn, hampers the development of effective policy responses.

Finally, the international landscape remains fragmented in its use of terminology. Various actors refer to “sextortion,” “sexual extortion,” “sexualised corruption,” and “gendered corruption,” often without clearly defining the scope of each term. While there are signs of convergence – such as the 2023 UNCAC Resolution 10/10, which recognises sexual demands as a form of corruption – national implementation remains inconsistent (UNCAC Coalition 2025).

In this context, the move toward a more inclusive and analytically grounded term such as sexualised corruption represents a constructive step. It offers conceptual clarity, acknowledges the full spectrum of abuse, and creates space for a more effective legal and policy response. Yet this terminological shift must be matched by concrete reforms: legislative changes to recognise non-pecuniary forms of bribery, improved data collection methods, and reporting systems that are accessible and safe for victims. Without such

measures, the problem will remain hidden in plain sight, shielded by institutional silences and conceptual ambiguity.

The Shared Opportunity Structure Hypothesis

The hypothesis we test makes a straightforward claim: where institutional conditions permit public officials to trade their discretion for money, those same conditions may also enable them to trade it for sex. Sexualised corruption, in this view, is not an anomaly but a variant of corruption that emerges when alternative “currencies” are more readily extracted than cash. While corruption is typically defined as “the abuse of entrusted power for private gain,” gain need not be monetary. Drawing on Lindberg and Stensöta’s (2018) exploitation framework, Bjarnegård et al. (2024) reconceptualise sexualised corruption as a transactionally equivalent exchange: a public decision traded for private benefit, with sexual access replacing pecuniary reward.⁴ The analytical question is therefore not whether sex can be a bribe, but under what conditions officials prefer that currency to others.

At the heart of the argument lie two familiar determinants of corrupt behaviour: opportunity and impunity. Opportunity arises from discretionary authority combined with information asymmetries between officeholders and citizens. Impunity follows from weak monitoring or symbolic enforcement. Where both are present, the expected utility of corruption rises regardless of the form of payment. In low-resource settings, sex may be a more accessible tender than cash because victims lack liquid assets; in gender-stratified bureaucracies, sexual demands may carry lower social discovery costs, as they are normalised, trivialised, or negotiated privately. From this logic follow two empirical predictions: first, that monetary

⁴ Scholars like Bjarnegård et al. (2024) argue that understanding sexual corruption requires tools from gender-based violence research alongside classic corruption frameworks. In positioning sextortion within corruption studies, researchers are effectively building a more intersectional approach – one that recognizes how corruption can exploit gender vulnerabilities and how patriarchal power dynamics can facilitate corruption.

corruption and sexualised corruption should be positively correlated across jurisdictions; and second, that the strength of this correlation should weaken where legal, technological, or normative reforms increase the marginal risk of sexual predation relative to cash solicitation.

A growing body of comparative evidence supports the first claim. Analysing 94,000 respondents from Transparency International's 2019–22 Global Corruption Barometer, Aja-Eke *et al.* (2023) find that a one standard deviation increase in reported cash bribe-paying is associated with a roughly three-percentage point rise in reported sexualised corruption, controlling for income, regime type, and women's parliamentary representation.⁵ Qualitative studies converge on the same pattern. In Malawi's customary land system, village chiefs who extracted informal payments from applicants frequently substituted or supplemented them with demands for sexual access, particularly when female claimants were cash-poor (Basel Institute 2021).⁶ Research on North African migration routes similarly finds officials demanding both money and sex – “the double price,” as one migrant described it – depending on what victims could offer (Transparency International 2020). These examples illustrate the fungibility of corrupt currency in environments where enforcement is weak and gatekeepers operate with impunity.

⁵ Another cross-national analysis by Sundström & Wängnerud (2021) examined micro-data from the first Latin American sextortion survey to identify individual-level risk factors. While detailed statistical results were limited by data availability, their work revealed important descriptive patterns. Perhaps counterintuitively, men and women reported exposure to sextortion at similar rates in some surveys, but this is believed to reflect the phrasing “you or someone you know” – many male respondents may be reporting incidents that happened to female relatives or friends. In addition, Stahl (2021) suggests that overall corruption appears to condition sextortion as well – finding that as informal patronage networks displace formal rules, the likelihood of sexual extortion rises.

⁶ In another relevant study, Bicker Caarten *et al.* (2022) conducted a study on migrants' experiences of sextortion during journeys to South Africa. Through interviews with experts and collected testimonies, they found that irregular female migrants are the most vulnerable to sexual extortion by officials (such as border agents, police, or immigration officers). Further research has examined sextortion as a violation of human rights and as an obstacle to sustainable development (Eldén, Å., *et al.* 2020).

The second claim – attenuation of the relationship under conditions of increased risk – helps explain why sexualised corruption is relatively rare in high-income democracies, even where pecuniary corruption persists. Three mechanisms are particularly relevant. First, digitisation reduces the face-to-face interactions that sexualised corruption typically requires. The transition to fully online procurement, for example, may cut kickbacks and thereby reduce. Second, legal reform can shift the cost–benefit calculation. Jurisdictions that expand bribery statutes to include “any undue advantage” – explicitly covering sexual services – raise the likelihood of prosecution. Third, the diffusion of #MeToo norms increases reputational costs. In environments where an allegation can undermine a career, risk-averse officials may still extract private benefits, but gravitate toward less stigmatised, less personally exposing forms of rent. These mechanisms do not eliminate sexualised corruption, but they disrupt the correlation between money and sex predicted by the baseline model.

Yet opportunity and impunity remain elastic. Sexualised corruption resurfaces in sectors where oversight is limited, rules are discretionary, or formal protections do not reach the front lines. Education, local policing, and humanitarian aid are recurrent examples. The phenomenon of survival sex in refugee camps emphasizes the point. Despite zero-tolerance policies at the institutional level, locally contracted guards and aid workers retain the ability to withhold goods or services – and often face little risk of sanction. The result is a pocket of high opportunity and high impunity embedded within systems that may otherwise appear rule bound.

Measuring sexualised corruption poses unique methodological challenges. Victims may be reluctant to report such experiences not only due to fear of retaliation, but because many legal codes treat bribe-giving and bribe-taking as joint offences. A woman who provides sex in

exchange for a permit may believe she has committed a crime. The recent inclusion of sexual corruption questions in major corruption surveys marks a significant advance, but such instruments still depend on whether respondents perceive their experience as corruption. The perception–experience gap identified by Aja-Eke *et al.* (2023) – where high incidence is paired with low perceived prevalence in the most corrupt countries – suggests that in deeply embedded systems, such exchanges are normalised rather than contested. Better measurement will likely require combining large-scale surveys with targeted sectoral studies that trace how authority, discretion, and accountability vary across settings.

Two scope conditions warrant emphasis. First, while the presence of sexualised corruption typically signals broader governance failures, its absence does not necessarily imply integrity. It may simply reflect a context in which other forms of rent extraction are safer or more rewarding. Second, gender composition alone is an unreliable constraint. Neither women’s legislative representation nor female labour-force participation significantly reduces sexualised corruption once conventional corruption levels are accounted for (Aja-Eke *et al.* 2023). What matters more is the presence of effective mechanisms for victim voice – ombuds offices, whistleblower protections (Kubbe and Merkle 2025), or trusted complaint channels – which reduce impunity even when opportunity remains high.

Sexualised corruption is best understood not as a distinct category of abuse but as a variant of corruption that emerges under familiar conditions. When individuals lack cash but possess attributes that officials value – especially sexualised ones – and when formal constraints do not raise the costs of exploitation, sex becomes a convenient medium of exchange. The shared opportunity structure hypothesis thus offers a unified framework for understanding the conditions under which officials deviate from formal duty, regardless of what they extract.

The next section outlines a research design for testing these propositions using cross-national survey data.

Data and Measurement

Our empirical analysis draws on the 2023 wave of the *Global Corruption Barometer – European Union* (GCB-EU), a representative household survey conducted in all twenty-seven EU member states between April and July 2023. The usable sample comprises 40,663 individuals. Each interview is geo-referenced to a NUTS 2 unit, which is nested within a NUTS 1 region and member state.

Sexual corruption prevalence is measured using item Q17B: “In the last twelve months, did a public official ask you – or someone you know personally – for a sexual favour in exchange for a service?” We construct a binary indicator at the individual level (1 = yes, 0 = no), and then aggregate to the NUTS 1 level by taking the survey-weighted mean. Monetary bribery is drawn from item BRIBETOTFIN, which asks whether the respondent paid a bribe – defined as money or a gift – to a public official in the past year. We construct a binary variable at the individual level and aggregate it to the NUTS 1 scale in the same manner as the sexualised corruption measure.

To address potential confounding, we include the survey-weighted regional means of five demographic and socio-economic characteristics commonly used in corruption research: the proportion of respondents who are female; mean age; mean position on a six-point household income ladder; mean educational attainment (using a harmonised six-point ISCED scale); and the share residing in medium or large urban areas. Because national level institutions and reporting norms may influence both corruption and disclosure, all models include a full set of country fixed effects.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

	(1)			
	Mean	S.D.	Min.	Max.
Sextortion prevalence	0.079	0.037	0.020	0.188
Bribery prevalence	0.053	0.042	0.000	0.171
Share female	1.465	0.061	1.260	1.592
Mean age	52.092	3.552	43.490	60.060
Household income (1–6)	1.806	0.367	1.293	2.767
Education (ISCED 1–6)	1.389	0.102	1.153	1.708
Share urban	0.676	0.138	0.394	0.997
Obs.	89			

Results

Table 2 reports OLS estimates of sexualised corruption (we use sextortion as shorthand in tables and equations) prevalence across the 89 NUTS-1 regions of the European Union. The dependent variable is the share of respondents who report that they – or someone they know – were asked for sexual favours by a public official in the previous year. Regional values range from 2.0 % to 18.8 % (mean = 7.9 %, s.d. = 3.7). The key explanatory variable is the regional prevalence of monetary bribery, measured as the share of residents who paid money or a gift to a public official; this variable ranges from 0 to 17.2 % (mean = 5.3 %, s.d. = 4.2).

$$\text{Sextortion}_r = \alpha + \beta_1 \text{Bribery}_r + \mathbf{X}'_r \boldsymbol{\beta}_2 + \gamma_c + \varepsilon_r$$

where r indexes regions and γ_c are EU member state fixed effects. The model (column 7) explains 85 % of the cross regional variation in sexualised corruption ($R^2=0.854, F(32,56)=10.26, p<0.001$).

The coefficient on monetary bribery is 0.374 (column 7). Substantively, a one-percentage-point rise in bribery prevalence is associated with a 0.37-point increase in sexualised corruption prevalence. Moving from the first to the third quartile of the bribery distribution ($\approx$

2.5 % to 8.1 %, a 5.6-point shift) predicts an increase of about 2.1 percentage points in sexualised corruption – roughly a 26 % jump relative to the sample mean of 7.9 %.

Household income is positively and significantly related to sexualised corruption, but because the six-point ladder is coded so that higher values indicate lower income, the coefficient implies that economically stressed regions face higher levels of sexualised corruption.

Education shows a smaller, statistically indeterminate association. In short, material hardship – not affluence – appears to create conditions in which officials can extract sex as a corrupt payment. Neither the regional gender composition nor mean age reaches conventional significance thresholds, and the urban share is effectively zero.

The country fixed effects are jointly significant, indicating substantial national heterogeneity once regional covariates are held constant. Several Baltic and southern member states – Latvia, Lithuania, Portugal and Hungary – exhibit markedly lower sexualised corruption prevalence than the omitted reference country, whereas Luxembourg is the only state with a (statistically insignificant) positive deviation. These residual differences point to institutional or cultural factors – legal definitions of sexual corruption, complaint mechanisms, gender norms – that are not captured by the present data.

Overall, three findings stand out. First, even in advanced democracies sexualised corruption follows systematic geographical patterns rather than isolated anecdotes. Second, routine bribery and sexualised corruption are tightly linked, suggesting a common opportunity structure for multiple “currencies” of corruption. Third, socio-economic advantage does not insulate regions from sexualised corruption in reported terms, complicating the view that the phenomenon is concentrated only among the poorest. Together, these results integrate

sexualised corruption into mainstream corruption research and suggest the need to understand how national institutions and local opportunity structures jointly shape its incidence. In future work, we plan to replicate the analysis at the NUTS 2 level (~ 240 regions) in order to provide further evidence that the core linkage operates not only between countries but within them.

Table 2. Determinants of Sexualised Corruption in the EU at the Regional Level

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Bribery	0.472** (0.197)	0.429** (0.198)	0.341* (0.187)	0.478** (0.189)	0.471** (0.190)	0.462** (0.196)	0.374** (0.179)
Gender		-0.074 (0.054)					-0.054 (0.050)
Age			-0.004*** (0.001)				-0.002 (0.001)
Income				0.060** (0.024)			0.075*** (0.023)
Education					0.089** (0.038)		0.089 (0.055)
Urban						0.026 (0.020)	-0.008 (0.025)
Constant	0.071*** (0.018)	0.182** (0.083)	0.275*** (0.064)	-0.022 (0.041)	-0.044 (0.053)	0.056** (0.021)	0.043 (0.145)
Observations	89	89	89	89	89	89	89
R-squared	0.791	0.797	0.823	0.811	0.808	0.797	0.854
Country FE	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES

Standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

To confirm that the link between bribery and sexualised corruption is not simply an artefact of regional aggregation, we replicate the analysis at the individual level. Using 38,673 survey responses with full data, we estimate probit models predicting whether a respondent experienced sexualised corruption in the past twelve months (Q17B), clustering standard errors by NUTS-1 region and including controls for age, gender, education, household income, and a full set of country fixed effects.

The results closely match the regional analysis. Individuals who report having paid a bribe are 14 percentage points more likely to report sexualised corruption (s.e. = 0.009), a large and statistically precise effect that remains stable across all specifications. Given a base rate of 8.7%, this corresponds to a substantial increase in predicted risk. The pattern is consistent with the regional slope, where increases in bribery prevalence are strongly associated with higher rates of sexualised corruption.

Age and income are also significant predictors. The risk of experiencing sexualised corruption declines steadily with age (about 0.14 percentage points per year), and individuals in lower income quintiles are substantially more likely to report abuse. Education has no clear relationship with the outcome, echoing the regional results.

When we estimate separate models by gender, we find that the association between bribery and sexualised corruption is strong and statistically significant for both men and women. The marginal effect is slightly higher for men (0.153) than for women (0.130), but the confidence intervals overlap. This suggests that, conditional on having paid a bribe, men and women face similar risks of sexual exploitation – challenging assumptions that this form of abuse targets women exclusively.

Country fixed effects (not displayed in Table 3) remain important, but the core association between bribery and sexualised corruption holds within countries and across subgroups.

Taken together, these results support the central argument of the paper: when officials are in a position to extract bribes, they may just as readily demand sexual favours. The relationship is not limited to specific countries, regions, or demographic groups, and it persists when moving from aggregate to individual-level data. This reinforces the interpretation that both forms of

abuse emerge from shared opportunity structures and highlights the practical value of using bribery exposure as a risk indicator for sexualised corruption.

Table 3. Individual-Level Determinants

	(1) All	(2) Men	(3) Women
Bribery	0.142*** (0.009)	0.153*** (0.010)	0.130*** (0.013)
Gender	-0.012*** (0.004)		
Age	-0.001*** (0.000)	-0.001*** (0.000)	-0.002*** (0.000)
Low Income	0.015*** (0.004)	0.017*** (0.005)	0.012** (0.005)
Low-Middle Income	0.037*** (0.006)	0.040*** (0.009)	0.033*** (0.008)
Middle Income	0.060*** (0.008)	0.067*** (0.013)	0.054*** (0.010)
High Income	0.040*** (0.011)	0.060*** (0.016)	0.027** (0.013)
Secondary or Higher Education	0.005* (0.003)	0.001 (0.004)	0.010** (0.004)
Observations	38,673	20,065	18,598
Country FE	YES	YES	YES

Robust standard errors clustered at NUTS 1 in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Conclusion

This article tests a straightforward proposition: if public officials have opportunities to trade their discretion for money, they should also trade it for sex. Using more than 40,000 interviews from the 2023 *Global Corruption Barometer–European Union* – the first survey to measure sexualised corruption systematically inside advanced democracies – we produce the most fine-grained evidence to date on the geography of sexualised corruption. Three conclusions follow.

First, sexualised corruption is endemic but patterned. Reported prevalence varies almost ten-fold across EU regions, clustering in places where routine bribery is also common. The regional models explain over four-fifths of that variation, and the bribery coefficient remains stable across specifications. Sexualised corruption is therefore neither anecdotal nor divorced from mainstream corruption dynamics; it is a predictable feature of the same opportunity structures that sustain petty graft.

Second, the data show that material disadvantage heightens exposure to sexualised abuse. Regions where more residents report inadequate income also report markedly higher levels of sexualised corruption, while the education gradient remains unclear. This finding complicates the notion that sexualised corruption flourishes only in weak states or in the world's poorest societies; even within high-income EU democracies, it persists in pockets of economic hardship – places where discretion, impunity, and gender asymmetries still intersect despite otherwise robust formal institutions.

Third, national context matters, but does not erase local drivers. Country fixed effects remain jointly significant, confirming that legal definitions, enforcement practices and social norms condition the overall level of sexualised corruption. Yet the bribery–sexualised corruption link persists within countries, indicating that sub-national variations in opportunity and impunity operate even under a shared legal umbrella. Anti-corruption policy that focuses only on national frameworks risks overlooking these regional pockets of vulnerability.

For research, our findings place sexualised corruption squarely inside principal-agent models of corruption and suggest that future work should treat the “currency” of extraction – money, sex, votes, contracts – as an endogenous choice shaped by relative risks and pay-offs.

Comparative studies that ignore sexualised corruption may underestimate the full welfare costs of graft and misread gendered power relations in the state.

For policy, the results stress the importance of integrated integrity systems. Reforms that narrow discretion (e-government portals), raise detection probability (independent complaint mechanisms), and equalise voice (whistleblower hotlines, survivor protection) are likely to curb both cash and sexual bribery. Conversely, anticorruption strategies that criminalise monetary graft but leave coercive sex in a legal grey zone merely displace extraction from one currency to another.

The analysis relies on self-reported victimisation and thus remains sensitive to disclosure biases. Although we address this by controlling for socioeconomic characteristics and by comparing results across regions within the same legal regime, survey under-reporting may still mask latent abuse in more conservative areas. A second limitation is the cross-sectional design: we observe correlations, not causal trajectories. Panel data – ideally combining repeated GCB waves with administrative complaints – would allow stronger inference about how reforms shift the relative costs of monetary and sexual corruption over time.

Despite these caveats, the study demonstrates that sexualised corruption is neither marginal nor idiosyncratic in the European Union. It is a routine, measurable – and therefore governable – manifestation of corruption. By illuminating its sub-national contours, we provide a foundation for scholars to incorporate sexualised corruption into general theories of accountability and for policymakers to design interventions that confront all currencies of abuse, not just those denominated in cash.

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