

Anti-Corruption Reforms in Ukraine: Institutional Progress and Public Perception in the Context of EU Integration

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Abstract

Corruption has long been one of Ukraine's most pressing issues, imposing significant costs on the state budget, businesses, and citizens while discouraging investment and undermining the rule of law. Combating corruption is also essential for Ukraine's EU integration, given that compliance with anti-corruption standards is a core accession requirement. This article explores the evolution and effectiveness of Ukraine's anti-corruption reforms in the context of European integration. It analyses the historical and structural features of corruption in Ukraine and identifies its dominant form as being driven by the elite. Using a combination of policy analysis alongside public opinion data, the study evaluates the implementation of reforms and how society perceives their impact. Despite notable institutional progress, public trust remains limited, highlighting a discrepancy between formal advancements and citizens' perceptions. By comparing reform outcomes with public opinion, the article highlights the crucial role of civil society and businesses in sustaining anti-corruption efforts and provides policy recommendations to strengthen public credibility and ensure the long-term success of reforms. The recent controversy surrounding Law No. 12414, which temporarily undermined the independence of Ukraine's key anti-corruption bodies, highlights the importance of robust anti-corruption frameworks and an engaged civil society.

Keywords: Ukraine, corruption, European integration, public perception, reforms

JEL codes: D73, F02, P11

Introduction

Corruption has long been one of Ukraine's most serious and persistent challenges. It is deeply entrenched in various sectors, making it difficult to eradicate, yet it is critically important to address it as it imposes heavy costs on the state budget, businesses, and citizens. Corruption also deters domestic and foreign investment and weakens the rule of law. Effective anti-corruption measures are vital for efficient use of resources, attracting investment and aid, and shaping Ukraine's image as a credible partner — all of which are key to the country's economic recovery and EU integration (Markovska et al., 2025). The urgency of tackling corruption has increased in the context of Ukraine's pursuit of European integration similar to other candidate countries (Tankovsky & Endrődi-Kovács, 2023). As an EU candidate country, Ukraine must fulfil key accession criteria, the most important of which is demonstrating real and sustained progress in fighting corruption.

From a theoretical standpoint, corruption can arise due to a variety of factors. Principal-agent model views corruption as stemming from a divergence of interests between principals (such as citizens or the state) and agents (such as public officials). In this model, agents exploit the resources and powers entrusted to them for personal gain, often due to weak oversight or low penalties. In contrast, collective action theory frames corruption as a coordination problem at the societal level, whereby individuals recognise the harm caused by corruption, but have little incentive to act honestly if they believe that others will continue to engage in corrupt practices (Lukashuk, 2024). This article is based on Johnston's (2017) typology, which links different patterns of corruption to their underlying causes, offering a nuanced framework for understanding the interaction between institutional, political and societal factors.

Since corruption is one of the structural problems in Ukraine, many works by Ukrainian and foreign scholars (Cifuentes-Faura, 2024; Gressel, 2016; Markovska et al., 2025; Pak et al., 2022) have been devoted to the challenges of combating corruption in Ukraine. However, since the EU recommendations for Ukraine's accession to the EU were developed only in 2023 and Ukraine is actively working on reforms in the anti-corruption sector, the topic of progress towards fulfilling these requirements has not yet been sufficiently researched (Demchuk et al., 2024; Politova, 2022). The recommendations on combating corruption in the European Union's conclusions on Ukraine's membership application emphasise the need for further academic research on this topic. Although many scholars have examined how Ukrainian society views corruption (Odarchenko & Poznii, 2024; Zhyvko & Hura, 2023), this article offers a unique perspective by contrasting the progress of anti-corruption reforms with societal and business perceptions of their effectiveness and the perceived changes in corruption within the country.

As Ukraine works to meet the EU's accession requirements, particularly those related to anti-corruption measures, numerous reports have been published assessing the country's level of compliance (Agency for Legislative Initiatives, 2024; Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations, 2023,

2024; GRECO, 2025; Transparency International Ukraine & Basel Institute on Governance, 2024, 2025). This article provides a concise overview of Ukraine's key anti-corruption achievements and remaining gaps, based on a detailed analysis of these reports.

The article applies a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative components. The qualitative analysis uses official legislation, policy documents, GRECO and EU reports, as well as expert assessments to trace the development of Ukraine's anti-corruption reforms within the context of EU integration. Reports were selected based on their relevance to EU conditionality, the credibility of the source and temporal coverage from 2014 to 2025. The quantitative analysis relies on public opinion surveys, such as Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index, and national polling data to capture societal perceptions of the effectiveness of reforms. Institutional performance is assessed using composite indicators from sources including the National Agency on Corruption Prevention (NACP) and the European Commission's progress reports. These focus on measurable outputs, such as the number of cases investigated and the number of EC and GRECO recommendations implemented. By combining these datasets, the study cross-checks formal progress with public trust levels to identify any discrepancies between policy adoption and perceived enforcement. While offering a comprehensive view of reform dynamics, the study acknowledges limitations such as potential bias in institutional reports, restricted access to internal evaluations, and unpredictability due to Ukraine's ongoing political and security challenges.

This study aims to evaluate the scope and efficacy of Ukraine's anti-corruption reforms within the context of EU integration. The paper examines the persistent discrepancy between Ukraine's formal progress in anti-corruption reforms, which are driven by EU integration requirements, and the ongoing public scepticism surrounding their effectiveness. It hypothesises that although substantial legislative and institutional changes have been implemented, public perception of corruption has remained largely unchanged, suggesting that these reforms have yet to yield tangible, credible results.

This article first examines the key features of corruption in Ukraine, considering how these have evolved since the country gained independence. Using Johnston's (2017) typology as a reference point, the article classifies the prevalent form of corruption in Ukraine to better understand its specific characteristics and identify the most effective strategies for combating it. The analysis then turns to public opinion surveys to assess Ukrainian society's and businesses' perceptions of corruption. The second chapter focuses on major anti-corruption reforms, particularly those driven by EU integration requirements. Based on an evaluation of relevant reports and institutional data, the article assesses the progress of these reforms. This dual analysis of reform implementation and public perception offers insights into their effectiveness and provides the opportunity to draw up policy recommendations for strengthening Ukraine's anti-corruption efforts.

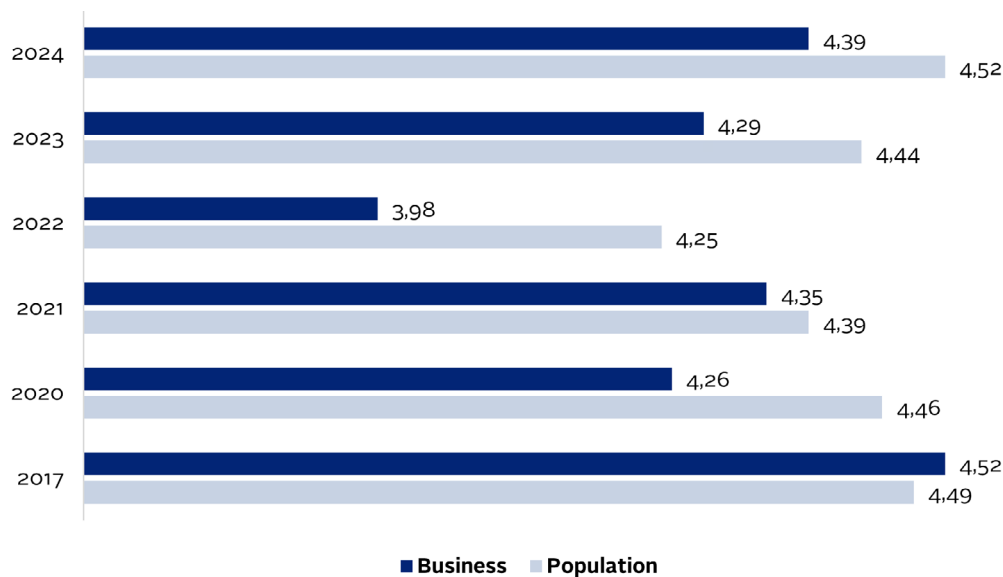
1. Key features and public perception of corruption in Ukraine

Combatting corruption is essential not only for further EU integration but also for the well-being of Ukrainian society and the business sector, since corruption places a heavy burden on the state and the economy. In Ukraine, the detrimental impact of corruption on the relationship between the state and society has led to a significant decline in the level of trust that civil society institutions have in public authorities. Eliminating corruption was one of the demands of both the Orange Revolution and the Euromaidan. The fight against corruption was also one of the key expectations among Ukrainians regarding EU integration. A 2013 survey showed that 49% believed the Association Agreement with the EU would contribute to this (International Republican Institute, 2013).

In the early years of independence, particularly during the presidencies of Kuchma and Yanukovych, Ukraine's political system was heavily dominated by oligarchic clans. Each major clan established its political party to consolidate its influence: the Kyiv clan, led by Medvedchuk, formed the Social Democratic Party of Ukraine; the Donetsk clan, under Akhmetov, created the Party of Regions; and Viktor Pinchuk of the Dnipropetrovsk clan backed the Party of Labour. These oligarchs also controlled major media outlets to shape public opinion. Their vast financial resources funded political campaigns, thus cementing their dominance within Ukraine's emerging pseudo-democratic framework (Karatnycky, 2005). As Johnston (2017) theorises, corruption driven by oligarchic clans typically emerges in newly liberalised systems where markets function poorly and institutions remain weak — conditions that characterise post-Soviet Ukraine.

Volodymyr Zelensky's election marked the first time that Ukraine's presidency had been held by someone free from corruption scandals and oligarchic influence (Moravcsik & Emmons, 2021). His victory prompted a wave of political participation from Ukraine's middle and creative classes, including entrepreneurs, designers, architects and journalists, many of whom stood for local and parliamentary office (Trushevych, 2024). The influx of newcomers into the Verkhovna Rada signalled a significant shift in the country's political landscape, fueling hope for substantial reform and a departure from the entrenched corruption of the Soviet era. Hence, since the victory of Zelensky, Ukrainian corruption can be described as “elite cartel” corruption according to Johnston's (2017) classification, which frequently develops in consolidating or reforming democracies with liberalising markets and only moderately strong institutions. Scholars argue that Zelensky's administration during the war, which wields broad powers and significant media influence, and which is targeting Russian oligarchs, political rivals and even allied politicians, marks a departure from Ukraine's past. Under Western oversight, a return to the former oligarch-driven system is considered unlikely (Tankovsky & Ráti, 2025).

Figure 1. Perceived prevalence of corruption: population and business assessments



Source: Edited by the author based on National Agency on Corruption Prevention (2024)

A defining feature of corruption in Ukraine is the decline in public tolerance of corruption since the start of the war. Although petty corruption has decreased, corruption at an elite level continues to rise (Markovska et al., 2025). A survey conducted by the National Agency on Corruption Prevention in 2024 found that both the general public and business representatives in Ukraine identified corruption as the second most pressing issue facing the country, after Russian aggression. Thus, Ukrainians do not tolerate corruption, viewing it as a critical issue that must be addressed. Notably, both the general population (about 80% of respondents) and the business community (about 76%) perceive political corruption at the highest levels of government as a particularly severe problem. Meanwhile, perceptions of corruption in everyday life, such as in schools and hospitals, are considerably lower, with about 19% of the general population reporting it as a grave concern. According to the general population, the judiciary, customs, and border control are the most corrupt sectors. However, businesses perceive the highest levels of corruption in customs, issuance of permits and extraction of minerals, and public procurement, particularly in road construction and maintenance (National Agency on Corruption Prevention, 2024).

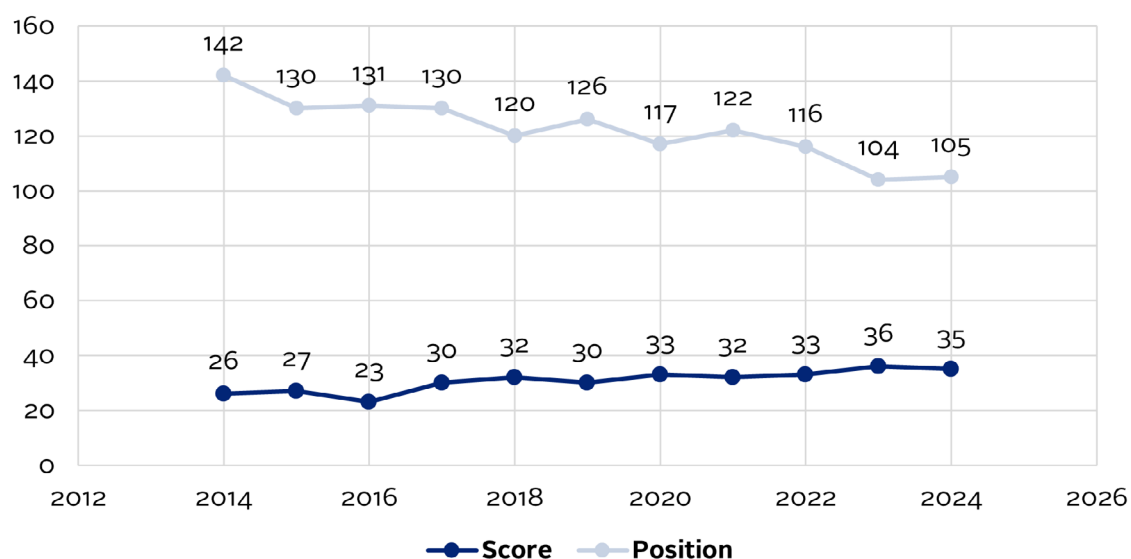
As Figure 1 shows, perceptions of corruption in Ukraine have been steadily declining since 2017, reaching a record low in 2022. This reflects the gradual institutional reforms brought about by the European integration process (Tankovsky et al., 2025), as well as a temporary increase in public trust during the initial months of the Russian full-scale invasion. However, perceptions have since risen sharply, surpassing 2017 levels. This is driven by factors such as increased defence spending and wartime procurement, which create new opportunities for the misuse of funds, as well as growing public disillusionment with the slow pace of governance reforms during the war. This trend is not unexpected, as corruption often increas-

es during armed conflict (Le Billon, 2003; Tankovsky, 2020). In Ukraine's case specifically, there is growing public concern that corruption in the government is linked to the military sector, which has gained expanded authority and resources. This creates greater opportunities for illicit activities, such as the misappropriation of arms or evasion of mobilisation (Odarchenko & Poznii, 2024). This is arguably one of the main reasons behind the substantial rise in perceived corruption since the war began. However, the outlook remains promising: once the war ends and anti-corruption reforms linked to EU integration continue to be successfully implemented, public perception is likely to improve, though this will probably only become apparent in the longer term.

A survey conducted by the Rating Group Ukraine found that, concerning local government, 38% of respondents viewed local authorities as corrupt, down from 63% in 2015 (Rating Group Ukraine, 2016), indicating a notable shift in public perception. However, the number of reported instances of bribery was relatively low: only 3% of respondents admitted to giving a bribe to local authorities, compared to 19% in medical institutions, 8% in educational institutions, around 6% in interactions with the police and only about 2% in courts and customs authorities, and 3% in tax authorities (Rating Group Ukraine, 2024). Although 91.4% of Ukrainians believe that corruption is somewhat or very widespread, only 18.7% say they have personally encountered it (National Agency on Corruption Prevention, 2024). This indicates a gap between perception and experience.

Corruption remains one of the significant problems for foreign and domestic businesses. Corruption is recognised as one of the top five constraints faced by small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Ukraine. According to a SME survey, in 2014, when the Association Agreement was signed, the most significant obstacles identified by businesses were: high cost of finance, limited availability of finance, political instability, corruption, and high tax rates (Hellyer et al., 2014). The survey conducted by Dragon Capital in 2020 identified corruption as the second most significant obstacle to foreign investment, after a lack of trust in the judiciary (Dragon Capital, European Business Association & Center for Economic Strategy, 2020). In addition, according to the World Economic Forum survey of 2017, corruption was identified as one of the most problematic factors for doing business in Ukraine, along with inflation, policy instability, tax rates and regulations, government instability, and bureaucracy (Schwab, 2019). Furthermore, one of the key expectations of the DCFTA for Ukrainian SMEs was the implementation of anti-corruption reforms, as well as improved governance and other institutional improvements (Adarov & Havlik, 2017).

Figure 2. Trend of Ukraine's corruption perception index (2014–2024)



Source: Edited by the author based on Transparency International Ukraine & Basel Institute on Governance (2024)

In 2024, Ukraine ranked 105th out of 180 countries in Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index with a score of 35, up from 26 and a rank of 142nd in 2014. (see Figure 2), where 100 is very clean and zero is very corrupt. This puts Ukraine on a par with other EU candidate countries such as Serbia (35), and ahead of Turkey (34) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (33). However, Ukraine's progress is still well behind that of Moldova (43) and Georgia (53), highlighting the considerable potential for further improvement. Ukraine's slower progress points to persistent institutional weaknesses, the inconsistent application of anti-corruption legislation, and a gap between legislative changes and tangible governance outcomes. Despite reforms, Ukraine remains one of the most corrupt countries in Europe, highlighting the scale of the challenges ahead. However, Ukraine's level of corruption is relatively moderate for a country engaged in active warfare. According to the 2024 CPI, Syria was ranked 177th out of 180 countries, Afghanistan 165th, Sudan 170th and Russia 154th — significantly higher than Ukraine. These figures suggest that Ukraine has maintained a comparatively stronger anti-corruption performance despite the challenges of war.

2. Progress on the fulfilment of EU requirements to combat corruption

The fight against corruption is a central principle and a key area of cooperation between the parties to the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the EU (Articles 3 and 14) (Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations, 2019). Since 2013, the European Union has provided systemic support for reforms to the rule of law in Ukraine through the 'Pravo-Justice' project. This project promotes judicial reform, aligns legislation with EU standards and strengthens key justice institutions (Zharonkina, 2024).

Since 2017, Ukraine has received support in its anti-corruption efforts through the EU Anti-Corruption Initiative (EUACI), co-funded by the EU and Denmark. The first phase of the initiative (2017-2019), with a budget of €15.84 million (EUACI, 2020), resulted in key achievements such as the establishment of a robust legal framework, the creation of anti-corruption agencies, the establishment of the High Anti-Corruption Court, and the implementation of modern anti-corruption measures such as the electronic asset declaration system and the ProZorro public procurement platform. In 2019, the programme was extended to a second phase (2020-2025) with an additional €15 million. This phase aims to ensure the sustainability of reforms, further strengthen anti-corruption efforts at national and local levels, and empower civil society, the private sector, and citizens to promote good governance, the rule of law, and integrity (European Commission, 2019).

In December 2023, the Council of the EU recognised that Ukraine had made significant progress towards meeting the EU's accession objectives despite the ongoing war. The Council decided to open accession negotiations with Ukraine. However, it noted that further action was needed in areas such as the fight against corruption (Fella, 2024). As a candidate country, Ukraine must fulfil the key requirements of the Copenhagen criteria to join the EU, which include ensuring stable democratic institutions, the rule of law, human rights, and minority protection; having a functioning market economy capable of competing within the EU; and the ability to adopt and implement EU laws and policies, including commitments to political, economic, and monetary union. Moreover, the Commission's recommendation to the European Council to grant Ukraine candidate status was accompanied by a call for urgent reforms in seven key areas: the judiciary, the rule of law, anti-corruption measures, the rights of national minorities, anti-money laundering legislation, anti-oligarchy legislation and media legislation in line with the EU acquis (Petrov, 2023). Hence, combating corruption has become a critical and urgent issue as it is now one of the main requirements for joining the EU.

Following the Revolution of Dignity, Ukraine firmly set its course toward European integration and launched a concerted effort to combat corruption. Several reforms were implemented to fight corruption as part of EU integration. From 2014 to 2019, a functioning system of anti-corruption bodies has been created - the National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine (NABU), the Specialised Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office (SAPO), the High Anti-Corruption Court (HACC),

the National Agency for the Prevention of Corruption (NACP) and the Asset Recovery and Management Agency (ARMA) (Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations, 2019).

Moreover, Ukraine has undergone a rapid and large-scale digital transformation, supplementing traditional anti-corruption approaches with modern, technology-based mechanisms. In 2019, Ukraine developed the Diia portal, which was officially launched in 2020, offering 27 public services online. Diia now provides access to 72 services and 15 digital documents, including a certificate for internally displaced persons. In 2021, a law was passed recognising electronic passports in Diia as equivalent to paper documents, making Ukraine the first country to do so. The same year, Ukraine was ranked first in Europe for open data development. However, during the early stages of the full-scale invasion, most state registers and databases were closed for security reasons, and many are now accessible again under specific security restrictions (Demchuk et al., 2024). The introduction of these digital tools has the potential to increase transparency and combat corruption.

The country has also implemented several anti-corruption measures, including e-declarations and the public e-procurement system Prozorro and Prozorro. Sale of public property transactions. In addition, government registers have been made accessible, a whistleblower protection programme has been established, and a central web portal for managing public funds has been launched. In 2021, the NACP introduced the POLITDATA Register of Political Parties' Reports, marking a significant step forward in the transparency of political party financing. The same year, the Law on Prevention of Corruption was amended to create a unified whistleblower reporting portal, which was officially launched in September 2023 (Demchuk et al., 2024).

Following the full-scale Russian invasion in 2022, Ukraine's anti-corruption reforms faced significant challenges, including the disruption of Ukraine's anti-corruption infrastructure, as resources were diverted to the war effort. Martial law temporarily restricted some anti-corruption procedures. For example, the mandatory submission of asset declarations by public officials and their verification by the NACP did not resume until September 2023, albeit with significant shortcomings. However, Ukraine's status as a candidate for EU membership, granted in June 2022, motivated the resumption and strengthening of the anti-corruption reforms. In 2023, the European Commission acknowledged that Ukraine had continued to make progress in democratic and rule-of-law reforms despite Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022. At the same time, it identified the removal of legal restrictions on the authority of the NABU and the expansion of its staffing as key anti-corruption priorities (Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations, 2023). To address this, the Ukrainian Parliament adopted the Anti-Corruption Strategy for 2021-2025, and the NACP began developing the State Anti-Corruption Programme (SACP), which was approved by the Cabinet of Ministers in March 2023. Also, in response to the European Commission requirements, a key issue related to the lack of leadership in four out of five anti-corruption institutions, including NABU, was addressed, with new leaders appointed based on the results of

the competition (Demchuk et al., 2024). On 10 December 2023, a law came into force to strengthen the institutional capacity of NABU by gradually increasing its staff numbers from 700 to 1,000 by 2026 (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2023).

Moreover, the abuse of power and bribery are common forms of corruption during the war. In Ukraine, numerous corruption cases emerged during the war involving high-ranking officials and civil servants. These include the misuse of war-time aid, embezzlement and bribery, such as the sale of fake medical certificates to avoid conscription. Notable cases include the arrest of Deputy Infrastructure Minister Vasyl Lozynsky for accepting a \$350,000 bribe related to generator procurement, and the exposure of over 100 corruption cases in regional military enlistment offices, resulting in the dismissal of all their heads. Investigations have revealed bribes ranging from €2,000 to €10,000, and over 100 criminal cases have been opened (Cifuentes-Faura, 2024). While corruption is difficult to avoid during wartime, especially in a country like Ukraine, where it has deep historical roots, it is evident that the government is actively combating it. This effort is driven by both public pressure and the need to meet European Union accession requirements.

Another significant effort the Ukrainian government pursues to combat corruption is reforming anti-corruption legislation, primarily by codifying numerous anti-corruption regulations. On 13 December, the Verkhovna Rada adopted the law “On Amendments to Certain Legislative Acts of Ukraine to Clarify Provisions on Competitive Selection of Candidates for the Position of a Judge of the Constitutional Court of Ukraine”. However, the re-establishment of the Constitutional Court of Ukraine is still ongoing, with competition for new appointments starting in March 2024 (Demchuk et al., 2024). The Law on “The Prevention of Threats to National Security Related to the Excessive Influence of Persons with Significant Economic and Political Weight in Public Life (Oligarchs)”, which came into effect in 2021, aimed to reduce the influence of oligarchs on political processes and separate big business from politics, receiving positive feedback from the EU. To implement this law, a Presidential Decree in June 2022 approved regulations for creating a register of individuals with significant economic and political influence (Razumkov Centre, 2022). However, the Venice Commission criticised the law on combating oligarchic influence, stating that it does not effectively address the problem and that reform requires substantial changes in key institutions such as the Anti-Monopoly Committee and the National Bank (Demchuk et al., 2024).

On 6 September 2022, Ukraine adopted a law to align its anti-money laundering legislation with FATF standards, aiming to improve legal entities' reporting of ultimate beneficial owners and ownership structures. This is expected to enhance financial monitoring and help to meet Ukraine's international obligations. A separate law was adopted in November 2022 to further align Ukrainian legislation with FATF standards and EU directives. Ukraine has also started the process of joining the OECD's Working Group on Combating Bribery in International Commercial Transactions (Razumkov Centre, 2022).

According to the latest report of the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO), which Ukraine joined in 2006, Ukraine has fully implemented 18 out of 31 recommendations aimed at preventing corruption among parliamentarians, judges, and prosecutors. Significant progress has been made in strengthening oversight of financial declarations, regulating interactions between parliamentarians and lobbyists, and reforming judicial appointments. Eleven recommendations have been partly implemented, while two — both relating to the prosecution system — remain unaddressed. The latter refers to introducing a system for randomly allocating cases to individual prosecutors, a more precise definition of disciplinary offences relating to prosecutorial conduct and ethical compliance, and expanding the range of available disciplinary sanctions to ensure greater proportionality and effectiveness (GRECO, 2025).

Hence, by 2025, Ukraine had implemented most of the European Commission's recommendations for starting EU accession negotiations. These included appointing heads of key anti-corruption bodies, setting up a new High Judicial Council and High Qualification Commission for Judges, introducing measures to combat money laundering and updating laws on national minorities and the media. Therefore, the government has intensified its fight against corruption despite the war.

However, most anti-corruption efforts in Ukraine have focused on institutional reform. According to the report of Transparency International Ukraine, between 2020 and 2023, anti-corruption agencies increased their average overall performance score from 3.4 to 3.9 on a five-point scale (Transparency International Ukraine & Basel Institute on Governance, 2024). At the same time, public opinion polls suggest that Ukrainians are still sceptical about the progress in the fight against corruption, probably because the impact of reforms takes time to become apparent and is not yet visible to most citizens (Odarchenko & Poznii, 2024). Johnston (2017) argues that even the best institutional and legal reforms will fail without strong social and political foundations. To combat corruption driven by the elite, it is crucial to actively empower citizens and businesses to resist corrupt practices. This must be accompanied by administrative and procedural reforms, such as enhancing transparency, accountability, professionalisation and access to public officials, to allow emerging actors to pursue diverse and legitimate interests (Johnston, 2017). Moreover, citizens must be informed about public spending, particularly wartime aid, and be given the means to report misconduct through robust whistleblowing protections. Promoting awareness of civic rights, improving access to information and encouraging public oversight are also essential. Ultimately, widespread engagement and understanding of the harms caused by corruption can strengthen accountability and accelerate reform (Cifuentes-Faura, 2024). Thus, the success of anti-corruption efforts hinges on active public engagement, which will also improve the public perception of corruption.

Civil society, the media and grassroots movements are pivotal in promoting accountability. Involving society in anti-corruption reforms is crucial to ensuring accountability and bottom-up oversight. Ukrainian society has proven to be highly proactive and politically engaged, particularly concerning corruption. This is evi-

dent in the two uprisings, the Orange Revolution in 2004 and the Revolution of Dignity in 2013, which called for systemic change and an end to entrenched corruption. Civil society in Ukraine is influential, and much of the progress in implementing reforms is due to sustained public pressure. Notably, grassroots-level corruption is relatively low compared to corruption at the elite level, suggesting a high public awareness and intolerance of such practices.

The recent corruption scandal surrounding Bill No. 12414 exposed attempts to undermine the independence of Ukraine's key anti-corruption bodies, the National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine (NABU) and the Specialised Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office (SAPO), by placing them under the control of the Prosecutor General. President Zelensky justified the move as a measure to protect Ukraine's anti-corruption infrastructure from Russian influence. The bill was hastily amended and passed by the Verkhovna Rada, sparking widespread public outrage and protests across multiple cities. Citizens and activists feared that the president could use the Prosecutor General to shield officials from accountability. Civil society played a decisive role in countering this threat, with activists organising street protests, engaging with policymakers and pressuring the president to submit a corrective bill (No. 13533), which restored NABU and SAPO's procedural independence and powers (Patrikieieva & Kuryshko, 2025). This precedent highlighted that the public's perception of widespread corruption among the elite is justified and emphasised the importance of active civil society engagement in countering corruption and improving the effectiveness of anti-corruption reforms. This case is notable because large-scale protests occurred amid a war when calls for unity often suppress civic action (Markovska et al., 2025). It demonstrates that Ukrainian society remains vigilant despite the ongoing war, and suggests that active public engagement could help to reduce corruption over time.

Conclusions

Corruption remains one of Ukraine's most pressing challenges. Although Ukraine has established the legislative and institutional framework required by the EU to combat corruption, public confidence in these reforms remains low. Perceptions of corruption in Ukraine have increased amid the ongoing war; however, the Corruption Perceptions Index remains moderate, reflecting sustained EU-driven reforms, which have likely prevented more severe deterioration of governance. While corruption remains high and there is room for further reform, it is clear that the Ukrainian government has increased its efforts to combat corruption despite the ongoing war.

This article argues that reducing corruption in Ukraine effectively requires the active engagement of civil society and businesses, and efforts to strengthen public trust in state institutions. The recent scandal surrounding Bill 12414 illustrates the importance of civil society, where widespread protests ensured that the independence of anti-corruption bodies was restored. This precedent highlighted how important it is for the public to be involved in holding the elite to account. Given

Ukraine's reliance on international financial assistance during the war and the anticipated need for continued support during the post-war reconstruction phase, establishing a reputation as a trustworthy and transparent country is essential. Therefore, Ukrainian society must actively monitor anti-corruption efforts and ensure effective checks and balances to sustain reform and build international confidence. This can be achieved through administrative reforms that strengthen transparency and accountability, improve access to public information, and encourage active citizen oversight. It is also important to implement robust whistleblower protections and raise public awareness of civic rights and the damaging effects of corruption. Even amidst the ongoing war, if Ukrainian society continues to exert pressure and demand accountability, further progress in anti-corruption efforts is not only possible but likely.

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