Public Organization Review
https://doi.org/10.1007/s11115-026-01052-x

MANUSCRIPT

Does Corruption Erode Institutional Trust? Micro-level Evidence from Sub-Saharan Africa"

Porto Bazié[1] · **Mamadou Abdoulaye Diallo**[2,3] · **Ahmadou Tanou Diallo**[3]

Received: 10 March 2026 / Accepted: 16 October 2026
© The Author(s), under exclusive licence to Springer Science+Business Media, LLC, part of Springer Nature 2026

Abstract

This article explores the relationship between corruption perception and institutional trust in developing countries. We used five waves of Afrobarometer and data from the World Development Indicators databases. Factor analysis is used to construct indicators of institutional trust and perception of institutional corruption. Multilevel regression analysis was carried out at individual and national levels. The results show that corruption negatively affect institutional trust. They are robust to variations in methods and the use of alternative indicators of corruption. These results suggest the need for political decision-makers to step up the fight against corruption, restore their credibility and legitimacy with citizens.

Keywords Trust · Institution · Governance · Africa · Hierarchical linear model

JEL Classification Z13 · O17 · O55 · C23

✉ Porto Bazié
portobazie@gmail.com; porto.bazie@uts.bf

Mamadou Abdoulaye Diallo
m.abdoulaye.diallo90@gmail.com

Ahmadou Tanou Diallo
ahmadoutanou.diallo@gmail.com

[1] Present address: Thomas Sankara University, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso

[2] Consortium pour la Recherche Economique et Sociale (CRES), Dakar, Senegal

[3] Cheikh Anta Diop University, Dakar, Senegal

Published online: 30 October 2026

Introduction

Institutional efficiency, and hence state efficiency, inevitably depends on respect for the social contract. Indeed, OECD (2011) points out that states are responsive if they provide services (health, education, security etc.) that correspond to key social expectations regarding the relationship between state and society. Trust governs interactions between people and institutions and is an important determinant of human well-being and economic development. Thus, the trust citizens place in state institutions through the way they operate is unquestionably a source of legitimacy for the state, which appears to guarantee the survival and integration of society (Chevalier, 2018). In other words, transparency in the operation of institutions and their successes are sources of trust. However, unnatural practices such as corruption, rent-seeking, social injustices, etc. can lead to a loss of trust in the institutions that provide public services, both in terms of quality and quantity. Among these scourges, corruption in all its forms remains the crux of the debate. Corruption is defined as the abuse of public power for personal gain.

Transition economies, particularly those in sub-Saharan Africa, are countries where corruption levels remain very high. According to Afrobarometer data, the level of perceived corruption rose from 43% to 47% between 2011 and 2023 in the case of the legislative branch (Fig. 2 in appendix). For the judiciary, the perception of corruption rose from 25% to 39% over the same period. The situation of civil servants has risen from 36% to 39%.

The literature on the provision of public goods highlights the fundamental role played by corruption, which economists have always paid lip service to, based on the hypothesis of rent-seeking by decision-makers with discretionary power on the one hand, and on the theory of oil in the wheels on the other. Indeed, corrupt officials will favor the most bribe-generating projects, not necessarily the most efficient or productive (Shleifer & Vishny, 1993). They believe that public sectors (defense, security, energy or law and order) where investment decisions are made in a secretive environment and are generally not subject to competitive bidding for public contracts are sources of rent-seeking. Furthermore, Barro (1990), considers a model in which public expenditure includes public goods (services), Babar (2011), shows that in the presence of corruption, public goods are at a significantly lower level than in the absence of corruption. Indeed, he shows that corrupt civil servants and bureaucrats steal part of the resources that would normally increase the supply of public goods. In his demonstration, whether corruption is accompanied by theft, the level of accumulated human capital remains below the level of corruption. Furthermore, Baliamoune-Lutz & Ndikumanan (2009) show that corruption increases public investment, albeit inefficiently. Indeed, they support the theory that corrupt bureaucrats seek to increase investment spending relative to operating expenditure to maximize private gain (rent-seeking). The result is a reorientation of public spending towards unproductive areas, in the sense that it benefits those who hold the reins of power and enables them to manipulate institutional capital to their own ends. Political theory, according to which institutional capital is the result of a conflict of interest, is a good illustration of this assertion. Empirical studies also point to the negative impact of corruption on trust in political institutions. Della Porta (2000) finds that corruption considerably

reduces trust in governments in Italy, France and Germany. Anderson & Tverdova (2003) conclude that citizens living in the most corrupt countries of Eastern and Western Europe have less confidence in their political system. Several studies on the situation in Latin America (Seligson, 2002), East Asia (Chang & Chu, 2006) and Africa (Cho & Kirwin, 2007) find similar results.

However, there is some evidence that corruption is good for the economy, and therefore good for people. Indeed, the theories of "efficient corruption" and "second-rate corruption" have long prevailed in political science and economics analyses of corruption. For these theories, corruption is an effective means of reducing red tape in an environment of heavy bureaucratic burdens and long delays and can therefore stimulate economic and political development (Leff, 1964; Huntington, 1968). For example, in political science, corruption is presented as facilitating the development of political parties and the emergence of a stable political environment. Corruption may also increase citizens' loyalty and trust in their political institutions (Bayley, 1967; BecquartLeclerq, 1989).

This level of corruption in these countries is accompanied by a decline in confidence in institutions. According to Afrobarometer data, trust in the executive dropped from 59% to 47% between 2012 and 2023 (Fig. 3 in appendix). As for the legislative power, it lost credibility from 50% to 33% over the same period. For the judiciary, from 59% to less than 47%. This situation raises the following question: Does the perception of corruption affect institutional belief in sub-Saharan African countries?

Understanding the effects of perceived corruption in Sub-Saharan African countries is of unprecedented importance, as governments are loathed by their populations, leading to military coups or popular uprisings. To analyze the role of corruption on institutional trust in Sub-Saharan Africa, this paper uses data from Afrobarometer Round 5 to Round 9 and WDI, WDI, concerning a panel of 24 countries. to estimate a multilevel model. Three indicators were used: perception of a general increase in corruption; (ii) perception of institutional corruption; and (iii) experience of corruption. Factor analysis was performed to construct corruption perception index and institutional trust index. We estimated multilevel model to carried out at individual and country level. The main results indicate that an increase in the perception of corruption is a source of deterioration in institutional confidence.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows: Sect. 2 reviews the various works on the relationship between corruption and institutional belief. Section 3 is devoted to the methodological analysis, while Sect. 4 presents the results and discussions. The conclusion and policy implications are the subject of Sect. 4.

Literature review

Citizens' quality of life is directly linked to the decisions of political actors and institutions (Hakhverdian & Mayne, 2012). Citizens' trust in institutions is observed when institutions perform well and meet people's expectations (Godefroidt et al., 2017; Mishler & Rose, 2001). Nevertheless, there are two approaches to institutional trust. The first is the cultural approach to trust, which is learned early in life (Hudson, 2006). A sense of belonging or national attachment serves to facilitate institutional trust making the population more

willing to cooperate with government and be governed by a representative part of the population (Godefroidt et al., 2017). People who trust each other more are also more likely to support institutions (Godefroidt et al., 2017). The second is the institutional performance approach, which is an endogenous approach and is influenced by the objective conditions of institutional performance and is a gas of stability and trust (Hudson, 2006; Lühiste, 2006; Newton, 2001). Institutional trust is based on rational evaluations of institutional performance (Godefroidt et al., 2017). Institutional trust is supposed to develop when institutions succeed in delivering the goods and services for which they were designed (Godefroidt et al., 2017; Kaasa & Andriani, 2022). The performance of institutions at the local level plays a particularly important role in the influence of people's trust, as it is the most visible and has the greatest impact on people's real lives (Yang & Tang, 2010). However, this approach to institutional performance only considers actual performance and is often criticized for not including citizen assessment of performance (Kaasa & Andriani, 2022). This evaluation by citizens extends to the perception of public officials' behavior in relation to public and personal interests, considering the perception of corruption (Andersen & Tverdova, 2003). Some researchers assess institutional trust through support for the system, while others argue that we need to dissociate all the objects of trust and study citizens' trust separately through trust in presidents, parliament, judges, the police, the army, local elected officials etc. (Godefroidt et al., 2017; Hakhverdian & Mayne, 2012; Hudson, 2006; Kaasa & Andriani, 2022). Trust evolves over time and is linked to social relationships, individual characteristics and lived experiences, so that it varies considerably according to perception, gender, corruption, socio-economic variables (Godefroidt et al., 2017).

Corruption, defined as the abuse of a public office for personal enrichment, has evolved into variants that refer to the abuse of authority or power through the occupation of positions in both the public and private sectors, as well as the occupation of official or trusted positions (Tacconi & Williams, 2024). This actor-centred view of corruption is the basis of economists' and political scientists' analysis of corruption through the prism of principal-agent theory (Tacconi & Williams, 2024). Corruption is likely to be an essential component of government performance that individuals use to judge institutional policies (Andersen & Tverdova, 2003). Corruption leads individuals to believe that the political system works less well than it could, and this calls into question the legitimacy of institutions (Andersen & Tverdova, 2003; Lühiste, 2006). According to the study by Andersen and Tverdova (2003), people living in countries with high levels of corruption have less trust in institutions. Corruption has a negative impact on institutional trust (Habibov et al., 2017). According to institutional theories, overall levels of corruption are negatively associated with popular trust in institutions (Mishler & Rose, 2001). However, results obtained by Habibov et al. (2017) and Mishler and Rose (2001) show that the higher the level of satisfaction with public services, the less individuals feel the negative effects of corruption. In addition to the perception of corruption, other socio-demographic factors have been shown to be determinants of institutional trust (Habibov et al., 2017).

On the other hand, institutional trust is considered an essential feature of a well-functioning system (Juen, 2023). It is the gas of stability and is strongly linked to governmental, political and economic performance (Juen, 2023; Yang & Tang, 2010). In the case of the European Union, which has both national and supranational gover-

nance, the persistence of widespread inequality leads people to doubt the reliability of national institutions (Hudson, 2006; Lipps & Schraff, 2021). And this could have repercussions on perceptions of the quality of national governance, and in such a context, people might consider supranational governance more favorable than national institutions (Lipps & Schraff, 2021).

Age, gender and education are also important factors in decision-making. Research has shown that age is negatively associated with institutional trust, demonstrating that younger people have slightly higher trust in political institutions than older people (Cole, 1973; Lühiste, 2006). Age is a proxy for wisdom; as age increases, we gain more experience and tend to be more discriminating (Naouri, 2023). Also, institutional trust is negatively related to being male (Hakhverdian & Mayne, 2012). Women have greater trust in institutions than men (Lühiste, 2006). According to studies by Hakhverdian and Mayne (2012) and Lühiste (2006), higher levels of education are negatively associated with institutional trust. They allow for greater skills, an ability to analyze political information and a more critical mindset towards government and its performance (Hakhverdian & Mayne, 2012; Lühiste, 2006; Stretesky et al., 2023; Yang & Tang, 2010). Moreover, education is weakly linked to countries with a high poverty perception index (Hakhverdian & Mayne, 2012).

Other factors, such as poverty level or unemployment, affect trust in institutions. The decline in trust in institutions is more rapid among the disadvantaged than among the better-off (Miller & Borrelli, 1991). As Yang and Tang (2010) observe, people with experience of unemployment trust institutions less. Unemployment tells us about labor market performance, part-time work opportunities, work in the informal economy and all the variables that influence the unemployment rate (Western, 2001). Variation in unemployment is closely linked to variation in state and labour market institutions, as well as bargaining agreements between employers, union leaders and state actors to improve national economic performance (Western, 2001). Rising unemployment rates reduce confidence in the European Union (Lipps & Schraff, 2021). The unemployed may also blame the institution responsible for their misfortune, namely the government and the bank (Hudson, 2006).

Area of residence plays an important role in institutional trust. Urban residents are more independent and critical of what they hear and learn from government, and they trust administrative and societal institutions less than people living in rural areas (Yang & Tang, 2010). In addition, Yang and Tang (2010) found from ordinary least squares (OLS) modeling in China that, at equal levels of education, institutional trust among urban residents decreases while that of rural residents increases. Urban modernization is accompanied by economic and socio-political resistance factors such as income, access to infrastructure and education. These factors enable independent and critical thinking, leading to a decline in trust in institutions (Yang & Tang, 2010).

Other studies have highlighted the importance of actual institutional performance. For example, Rothstein and Stolle (2008), using a multivariate model, have shown that GDP per capita is linked to generalized trust. This means that the most efficient and impartial institutions are found in countries with a high level of generalized trust in institutions (Rothstein & Stolle, 2008). This is confirmed by the study carried out by (Lipps & Schraff, 2021) that increasing the level of national GDP per capita positively influences trust in the European Union.

Methodology

Data Source

The data used in this study are from Round 5 to Round 9 Afrobarometer surveys in Sub-Saharan countries. Afrobarometer is a Pan-African, non-partisan survey research network that has been producing reliable data on Africans' experiences and perceptions of democracy, governance, quality of life and related issues since 1999. In each country, Afrobarometer works with a national partner to collect the data. Interviews were conducted face-to-face in the respondent's own language with nationally representative samples [1]. Sample sizes vary between 1,200 and 2,400 depending on the country. The selection of respondents is based on a stratified random sample drawn in two stages. In the first stage, primary units are selected with probability proportional to population size (PPPS). In each primary unit, a fixed number of 08 adults are selected. Samples of this size provide results with a margin of error at the 95% confidence level of +/-2.8 and 2.0% points, respectively for the 12,000 and 2,400 sample sizes.

Other data sources were also considered. These include the World Bank's World Development Indicators (WDI) database, from which GDP per capita and tertiary education rates were collected. The Quality of Governance (QoG) database was also used to collect the variable on the quality of governance in countries. This variable is constructed in the form of an index combining scores for the level of management difficulty, steering capacity, resource efficiency, consensus-building and international cooperation.

For variables from the WDI, mean values for each variable coinciding with the years of the different Afrobarometer survey Rounds were calculated. For example, for Round 5, the average GDP per capita for each country between 2011 and 2013 were determined. However, for the quality of governance indicator from QoG database, the following years were considered: 2013 (Round 5), 2015 (Round 6), 2017 (Round 7), 2019 (Round 8) and 2021 (Round 9).

Multilevel Regression Model

Institutional trust can also vary at different levels: individual and national. Thus, multi-level model is estimated, since the data are hierarchical, with individuals representing level 1 and countries level 2. As a first step, it was checked whether the conditions for applying this type of model were met. So, the model was estimated using only the constant and the country level. The estimation revealed that the random intercepts (country group effects) were statistically significant. Furthermore, the intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC) was estimated at 0.101, demonstrating the existence of country context effects in explaining institutional trust. Indeed, the multilevel model is recommended when the ICC of the model without explanatory variables exceeds 5%. As a reminder, the ICC is a measure of non-independence, testing

[1] https://www.afrobarometer.org/surveys-and-methods/sampling/.

the percentage of variance explained by a set of contextual variables. Consequently, the multi-level approach is applicable at both individual and national levels. The model is specified in a generalized form as follows:

$$Inst.trust_{ij} = \beta_0 + \sum_{k=1}^{n} \beta_k ind.level\ indicator_{kij} + \sum_{l=1}^{m} \beta_p country.level\ indicator_{pj} + \mu_j + \epsilon_{ij}$$

Where $Inst.trust_{ij}$ is the dependent variable, constructed from the seven items defined above. The subscript kij represents the effect of variable k at the individual level, the subscript pj represents the effect of variable p at the country level, μ_j represents the random intercept in the equation ($\mu_j \rightsquigarrow \mathcal{N}(0, \sigma_{\mu^2})$), and ϵ_{ij} the residuals at the individual level ($\epsilon_{ij} \rightsquigarrow \mathcal{N}(0, \sigma_{\epsilon^2})$). Mixed package available on Stata 16 software was used to perform all statistics.

Study Variables

The variables of interest in this study concern corruption. Three indicators are used for this purpose: (i) perception of a general increase in corruption; (ii) perception of institutional corruption; and (iii) experience of corruption. The first indicator concerns the response to the question "In your opinion, has the level of corruption increased, decreased or remained the same in this country over the past year?", the variable is coded "1" if the respondent believes that corruption has increased. The second indicator relates to the perception of corruption among the following people: the president and presidential officials, members of the National Assembly, members of the government, police and gendarmes, judges and magistrates. Factor analysis was used to construct the index of perception of corruption. The Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (BToS) and Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy were used to assess the suitability of scale items for factor analysis. All factor analyses employed the principal components method as the extraction method. Following the factor analysis, the internal consistency of the scales was assessed using Cronbach's alpha (α). In relation to the experience of bribery, respondents were asked about paying a bribe or gift to obtain a public service (school, hospital, issuing of administrative documents, water purification, etc.). The variable is coded "1" if the individual has at least once paid a bribe to obtain the public service they needed.

In addition, the dependent variable in this study concerns institutional trust. Respondents were asked: "b To what extent do you trust each of the following institutions, or have you not heard enough about them to give an opinion?". Institutions include the government (head of state), parliament, courts, police, army, ruling party and opposition parties. We used factor analysis to construct the institutional trust index, in the same way as for the corruption perception index. Other variables were used, lived poverty constructed by Afrobarometer, GDP per capita, quality of governance, etc. (Table 1).

Table 1 Descriptive statistics

	N	Min	Max	Mean	Standard deviation
Institutional trust (Index)	108,123	0	3	1,5	0,8
Citizen's perception of Corruption (Index)	98,743	0	3	1,5	0,7
Corruption experienced (Yes = 1)	108,123	0	1	0,3	0,4
Perception in increase of corruption (Yes = 1)	108,123	0	1	0,6	0,5
Perception of institutional performance (Index)	108,123	1	4	2,1	0,7
Gender (Male = 1)	108,123	0	1	0,5	0,5
Age (years)	108,123	18	106	37	14
Education (Ordinal)	108,123	0	3	1,5	1,0
Lived poverty (Index)	108,123	0	3	1,6	0,9
Residential area (Rural = 1)	108,123	0	1	0,6	0,5
GDP per capita (USD)	104,321	6,2	9,0	7,2	0,7
Education tertiary (%)	100,847	0,9	28,1	11,4	6,5
Quality of governance (Index)	104,321	2,0	7,3	5,2	1,0

Sources: Authors

Findings and Discussions

Descriptive Analysis

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics for the model variables. A total sample of 108,123 individuals aged between 18 and 106 was used for the analysis, 50% of whom were men and 50% women. On average, most responds (60%) included in the study live in rural areas. Too few (11.4%) had reached university level. On average, six people out of 10 perceived an increase in corruption, and only three people out of 10 experienced corruptions on average. The average index of perceived quality of governance (5.2) is just above the average (5). GDP per capita averages 1,339 (USD) per year. So, on average, Sub-Saharan African countries are in the lower-middle-income category.

Figure 1 shows us that there is a negative effect between institutional trust and the three corruption variables, namely the corruption index, perceived corruption and experience of corruption. However, institutional trust increases with the institutional performance index.

Estimations Results

In this section, we present the results of the multilevel model estimation using the synthetic index of institutional trust, followed by a robustness check using alternative indicators of institutional trust.

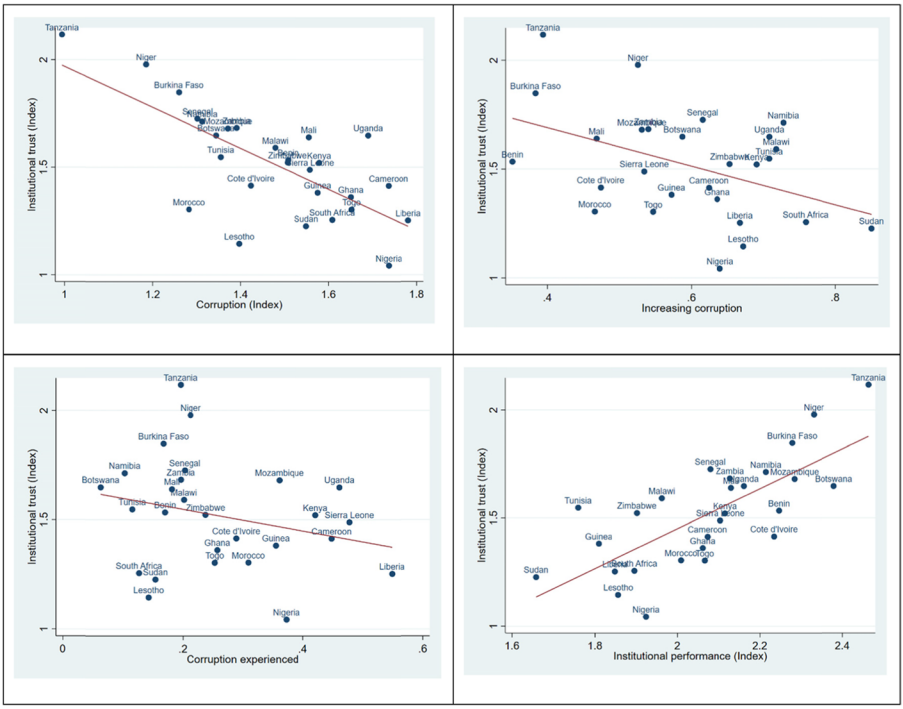


Fig. 1 Corruption, performance perception and institutional trust

Effect of Corruption on the Institutional Trust Index

The Wald test is significant at the 1% level, indicating that the model is globally significant and that the explanatory power of the factors included in the model is satisfactory. The estimation results are presented in Table 3. All variables linked to individual characteristics are significant. The corruption perception index has a negative effect on institutional trust. Institutional trust increases for men and for people living in rural areas. As age increases, so does the level of trust in institutions. However, the level of education and the experienced poverty index have a negative effect on institutional trust. The results of the multilevel model show that country-level characteristics have a negative impact on institutional trust. As GDP per capita increases, institutional trust decreases; similarly, as the number of individuals with secondary education in a country increase, institutional trust decreases.

The results presented in the table (Table 2) reveal a robust and statistically significant relationship between corruption and institutional trust in Sub-Saharan African countries, using three alternative measures of corruption: the Corruption Perceptions Index (Model 1), the perceived increase in corruption overall (Model 2), and direct experiences of corruption (Model 3). Regardless of the indicator employed, corruption exerts a negative and highly significant effect on the dependent variable, suggesting that increases in corruption (whether perceived or experienced) systematically erode citizens' trust in public institutions.

Table 2 Multilevel regression results

	Model 1 institutional trust index	Model 2 institutional trust index	Model 3 institutional trust index
Fixed effect			
Individual level characteristics			
Corruption perception index	-0.291***		
	(0.003)		
Perception of increase of corruption in general		-0.205***	
		(0.005)	
Corruption experienced			-0.105***
			(0.005)
Institutional performance index	0.395***	0.437***	0.478***
	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Gender (Male = 1)	0.049***	0.036***	0.042***
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)
Age	0.002***	0.002***	0.002***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Education	-0.052***	-0.065***	-0.065***
	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Lived poverty index	-0.019***	-0.027***	-0.026***
	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Residence (Rural = 1)	0.110***	0.128***	0.131***
	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)
Country level characteristics			
GPD per capita (in log)	-0.048*	-0.072***	-0.086***
	(0.025)	(0.026)	(0.026)
Tertiary education	-0.014***	-0.011***	-0.014***
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.002)
Quality of governance	-0.006	-0.016*	-0.018*
	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)
Constant	1.646***	1.474***	1.404***
	(0.180)	(0.188)	(0.189)
Year	Yes	Yes	Yes
Random effects			
Variance of random intercept	0.025***	0.036***	0.0368***
	(0.008)	(0.011)	(0.011)
Observations	92 201	100 847	100 847
Number of groups	24	24	24
Wald chi2	34,927***	29,683***	27,701***
Intraclass correlation coefficients (ICC)	0.059	0.077	0.077
	(0.017)	(0.022)	(0.022)
Akaike inform. Criterion (AIC)	178,191	202066.2	203609.4

Sources: Authors

This finding is consistent with the existing literature, which argues that corruption undermines state legitimacy and weakens the social contract, particularly in developing countries where institutions tend to be fragile (Rose-Ackerman, 1999; Mauro, 1995). In Sub-Saharan Africa, where access to public services is often conditioned by informal practices, corruption reinforces feelings of injustice and exclusion, thereby reducing institutional trust (Bratton & Gyimah-Boadi, 2016; Lavallée et al., 2008).

In contrast, the institutional performance index displays a positive and highly significant effect across all three models. This relationship highlights that improvements in institutional efficiency, the quality of public service delivery, and the state's capacity to respond to citizens' needs contribute to strengthening institutional trust. This result is in line with the work of Rothstein and Teorell (2008), who demonstrate that institutional quality (beyond purely economic characteristics) is a key determinant of citizens' trust in the state. In the Sub-Saharan African context, where institutional reforms are often incomplete, these findings suggest that strengthening governance can mitigate the detrimental effects of corruption on public trust.

Individual-level characteristics also play an important role. The positive coefficient associated with gender (male = 1) indicates that men, on average, exhibit higher levels of institutional trust than women. This outcome may reflect differences in exposure to public institutions as well as persistent gender inequalities in Sub-Saharan Africa, where women are often more vulnerable to institutional dysfunctions (Dollar et al., 2001). Age has a positive but relatively small effect, suggesting that older individuals tend to express slightly higher levels of trust, possibly due to longer political socialization or different institutional expectations.

By contrast, education is negatively associated with institutional trust in all three models. This result, frequently observed in developing countries, suggests that more educated individuals tend to be more critical of institutions and more aware of corrupt practices (Algan & Cahuc, 2010; Norris, 2011). Similarly, the lived poverty index exerts a significant negative effect, indicating that individuals facing precarious living conditions are more likely to distrust institutions perceived as unable to effectively meet their basic needs.

Place of residence also appears to be a significant determinant: individuals living in rural areas display higher levels of institutional trust than their urban counterparts. This finding may be explained by lower exposure to political scandals and media coverage in rural areas, as well as by lower institutional expectations, as suggested by Bratton and Mattes (2001).

At the macroeconomic level, GDP per capita (in logarithms) exhibits a significant negative effect in Models 2 and 3. Although this result may appear counterintuitive, it is consistent with the notion that in relatively wealthier countries within the region, citizens have higher expectations regarding governance and therefore become more critical when institutions fail to meet these expectations (Helliwell & Putnam, 2004). In addition, the share of the population with tertiary education is negatively associated with institutional trust, reinforcing the hypothesis of greater civic vigilance in more educated societies. Finally, the quality of governance shows a negative but weakly significant effect, which may reflect measurement issues or substantial institutional heterogeneity across Sub-Saharan African countries. The negative time effects observed in Models 1 and 2 indicate a gradual deterioration of

institutional trust over time, possibly linked to the persistence of corruption, political crises, and conflicts in several countries in the region.

Robustness Check of the Effects of Corruption on Institutional Trust

To ensure the robustness of the results, the disaggregated indicators broadly indicate that the findings are stable and consistent. We successively present the results for the three alternative indicators of institutional trust: trust in government, trust in the political opposition, and trust in national defense.

Regarding trust in government, the results consistently show that corruption has a negative and statistically significant effect on public trust in government, regardless of the corruption measure used. In Model 1, the Corruption Perception Index is negatively associated with trust, indicating that when citizens perceive a high level of corruption in their country, their institutional trust decreases substantially. This finding is confirmed in Model 2, where the perception of an increase in corruption also reduces trust, suggesting that perceived dynamics-rather than absolute levels alone- influence political legitimacy. Finally, Model 3 shows that direct experience of corruption negatively affects trust, although the effect is smaller compared to perceptual measures.

These results are in line with the institutional literature, which emphasizes that corruption undermines state legitimacy and erodes political capital (Rose & Mishler, 2001). Rothstein & Teorell (2008) argue that the impartiality and quality of public institutions constitute a central foundation of political trust, explaining why widespread perceptions of corruption have a particularly strong effect. Similarly, Anderson & Tverdova (2003) demonstrate that corruption reduces support for the government, even in consolidated democratic contexts. Seligson (2002) highlights that personal experiences of corruption erode institutional trust by undermining belief in system fairness. Finally, Mishler & Rose (2001) show that political trust is more strongly grounded in evaluations of institutional performance than in abstract normative attachments, which helps explain the strength of the effects observed in our models (Table 3).

The results highlight differentiated effects of the three measures of corruption on trust in the political opposition. Unlike the patterns typically observed for trust in government, the impact of corruption on trust in the opposition appears more nuanced and, in some cases, counterintuitive. In Model 1, the Corruption Perception Index exhibits a negative and statistically significant coefficient. This finding indicates that in contexts where corruption is perceived to be high at the national level, trust in the political opposition also decreases. In other words, systemic corruption appears to affect the entire political system, including opposition parties. This dynamic may be explained by a "political contamination" phenomenon, whereby citizens generalize their distrust across the entire political class without clearly distinguishing between government and opposition. In environments characterized by entrenched corruption, the opposition may be perceived as part of the same failing system, limiting its capacity to be seen as a credible alternative. This result suggests that widespread perceived corruption undermines the overall legitimacy of the political arena rather than targeting only the ruling power.

Table 3 Effect of corruption on public trust in government

Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
	public trust in government	public trust in government	public trust in government
Corruption perception index	**-0.337*** (0.004)		
Perception of increase of corruption in general		**-0.300*** (0.006)	
Corruption experienced			**-0.125*** (0.006)
Individual level characteristics			
Institutional performance index	0.546*** (0.004)	0.581*** (0.004)	0.642*** (0.004)
Gender (Male = 1)	0.023*** (0.005)	0.008 (0.005)	0.016*** (0.005)
Age	0.003*** (0.000)	0.003*** (0.000)	0.003*** (0.000)
Education	-0.070*** (0.003)	-0.082*** (0.003)	-0.083*** (0.003)
Lived poverty index	-0.026*** (0.003)	-0.035*** (0.003)	-0.035*** (0.003)
Residence (Rural = 1)	0.123*** (0.006)	0.143*** (0.006)	0.147*** (0.006)
Country level characteristics			
GDP per capita (log)	-0.006 (0.032)	-0.014 (0.032)	-0.032 (0.032)
Tertiary education	-0.016*** (0.002)	-0.012*** (0.002)	-0.016*** (0.002)
Quality of governance	-0.043*** (0.011)	-0.050*** (0.011)	-0.053*** (0.011)
Constant	1.244*** (0.229)	0.939*** (0.227)	0.844*** (0.232)
Year FE (ref. = 2015/16)			
2017/2018	Yes	Yes	Yes
2019/2021	yes	yes	yes
2022/2023	yes	yes	yes
Random effects			
Variance of random intercept	0.041***	0.042***	0.046***
Observations	92,201	100,847	100,847
Number of groups	24	24	24
Wald chi2	37,822***	35,212***	32,100***
ICC	0.061	0.059	0.063
AIC	219,672	245,603	247,936

Source : Authors

Model 2 introduces the perception of an increase in corruption, which exhibits a positive and statistically significant effect. This result contrasts with the first model and reveals a more political dynamic. When citizens perceive that corruption is rising, their trust in the opposition tends to increase. This relationship can be understood as a political sanctioning mechanism: in response to the perception of ethical deterioration within the incumbent government, individuals are more likely to turn to the opposition as a potential alternative. The perception of worsening corruption may thus enhance the appeal of the opposition, particularly if it adopts a credible anti-corruption platform. This finding suggests that it is not only the absolute level of corruption that matters but also its perceived trajectory. A perceived increase can activate mechanisms of protest or political realignment, benefiting the opposition.

In Model 3, direct experience of corruption shows a positive but statistically non-significant coefficient. The lack of significance indicates that personally encountering corrupt acts does not robustly affect trust in the political opposition. This distinction from perceptual measures is particularly noteworthy. It suggests that attitudes toward the opposition are more strongly shaped by generalized perceptions and collective narratives than by isolated individual experiences. Personal experiences may generate dissatisfaction, but they do not necessarily translate into increased support for the opposition. Individuals may interpret their experiences as local administrative problems rather than as national-level political issues necessitating a change in leadership. These findings are consistent with those of Bazie & Diallo (2025) in the context of Burkina Faso (Table 4).

The results clearly and robustly indicate that corruption exerts a strongly negative effect on trust in national defense, regardless of the measure of corruption used. In Model 1, the Corruption Perception Index is negatively and significantly associated with trust. The magnitude of the coefficient is particularly large, suggesting that widespread perceptions of corruption substantially weaken the legitimacy of defense institutions. This indicates that when corruption is perceived as systemic, it undermines the credibility of state institutions, including those traditionally associated with authority and sovereignty.

Model 2 shows that the perception of an increase in corruption is also negative and significant. This result underscores the importance of the perceived dynamics of corruption: it is not only the level of corruption that matters, but also its trajectory. When citizens perceive that corruption is worsening, trust in national defense declines markedly. This may reflect growing concerns about the integrity of the armed forces or the management of public resources allocated to national security.

In Model 3, direct experience of corruption is also negatively and significantly associated with trust, although the effect is of smaller magnitude compared to perceptual measures. This finding can be interpreted as showing that personal exposure to corrupt practices erodes institutional trust, while macro-level perceptions exert a stronger influence. Collective representations thus appear to play a more decisive role than isolated individual experiences in shaping trust in national defense (Table 5).

Table 4 Effect of corruption on trust in the political opposition

Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
	Trust in the political opposition	Trust in the political opposition	Trust in the political opposition
Corruption perception index	**-0.049*** (0.005)		
Perception of increase of corruption in general		**0.019*** (0.007)	
Corruption experienced			**0.015** (0.008)
Individual level characteristics			
Institutional performance index	0.048*** (0.006)	0.065*** (0.005)	0.061*** (0.005)
Gender (Male = 1)	0.087*** (0.007)	0.088*** (0.007)	0.088*** (0.007)
Age	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)
Education	-0.014*** (0.004)	-0.019*** (0.004)	-0.019*** (0.004)
Lived poverty index	0.010** (0.004)	0.007* (0.004)	0.007 (0.004)
Residence (Rural = 1)	0.050*** (0.007)	0.053*** (0.007)	0.053*** (0.007)
Country level characteristics			
GDP per capita (log)	0.050 (0.035)	0.039 (0.034)	0.039 (0.034)
Tertiary education	-0.024*** (0.002)	-0.023*** (0.002)	-0.023*** (0.002)
Quality of governance	0.054*** (0.014)	0.057*** (0.013)	0.057*** (0.013)
Constant	0.759*** (0.246)	0.714*** (0.242)	0.722*** (0.241)
Year FE (ref. = 2015/16)			
2017/2018	Yes	Yes	Yes
2019/2021	yes	yes	yes
2022/2023	yes	yes	yes
Random effects			
Variance of random intercept	0.024***	0.025***	0.024***
Observations	92,201	100,847	100,847
Number of groups	24	24	24
Wald chi2	1,038***	1,047***	1,044***
ICC	0.023	0.023	0.022
AIC	266,59	292,738	292,741

Source: Authors

Table 5 Effect of corruption on trust in national defense

Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
	Trust in national defense	Trust in national defense	Trust in national defense
Corruption perception index	**-0.982***		
	(0.012)		
Perception of increase of corruption in general		**-0.548***	
		(0.017)	
Corruption experienced			**-0.367***
			(0.018)
Individual level characteristics			
Institutional performance index	1.075***	1.251***	1.356***
	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.012)
Gender (Male = 1)	0.184***	0.137***	0.160***
	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.016)
Age	0.003***	0.005***	0.004***
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Education	-0.141***	-0.186***	-0.183***
	(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.010)
Lived poverty index	-0.061***	-0.089***	-0.084***
	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)
Residence (Rural = 1)	0.349***	0.417***	0.421***
	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.017)
Country level characteristics			
GDP per capita (log)	-0.305***	-0.456***	-0.476***
	(0.097)	(0.100)	(0.100)
Tertiary education	-0.024***	-0.018***	-0.024***
	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)
Quality of governance	0.017	-0.018	-0.027
	(0.034)	(0.034)	(0.034)
Constant	6.427***	6.240***	6.010***
	(0.697)	(0.727)	(0.725)
Year FE (ref. = 2015/16)			
2017/2018	Yes	Yes	Yes
2019/2021	yes	yes	yes
2022/2023	yes	yes	yes
Random effects			
Variance of random intercept	0.433***	0.673***	0.640***
Observations	92,201	100,847	100,847
Number of groups	24	24	24
Wald chi2	22,041***	17,092***	16,347***
ICC	0.072	0.101	0.096
AIC	420,614	466,447	467,087

Source: Authors

Conclusions and Policy Implications

This study analyzes the relationship between corruption and institutional trust. Based on Afrobarometer, WDI, WGI data, the paper performed factor analysis used to construct institutional trust and estimated multilevel regression model on a panel of 24

Sub-Saharan African countries. The article uses different indicators of corruption to look at perception, experience of corruption and overall corruption. The results indicate that the perception and experienced corruption deteriorate institutional trust through the disaggregation of variables according to individual country characteristics and taken as a whole. Citizens living in rural areas have more confidence in institutions than those living in urban areas. Level of education is a strong determinant of institutional trust. The results are robust to variations in methods and the use of alternative variables. The results suggest that public authorities respect their commitments to citizens and fight corruption in public administrations.

Appendix

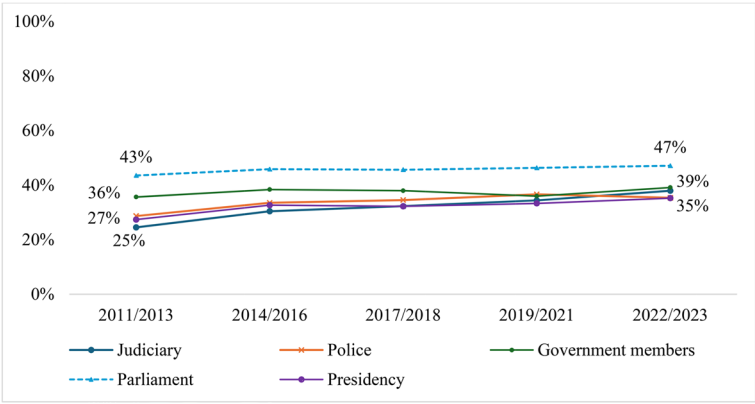


Fig. 2 Change in perception of corruption in 30 countries, 2011-2023. Note: This is the percentage of respondents who feel that "most" or "all" of them are corrupt for each institution. Source: Authors based on Afrobarometer data, 2011-2023

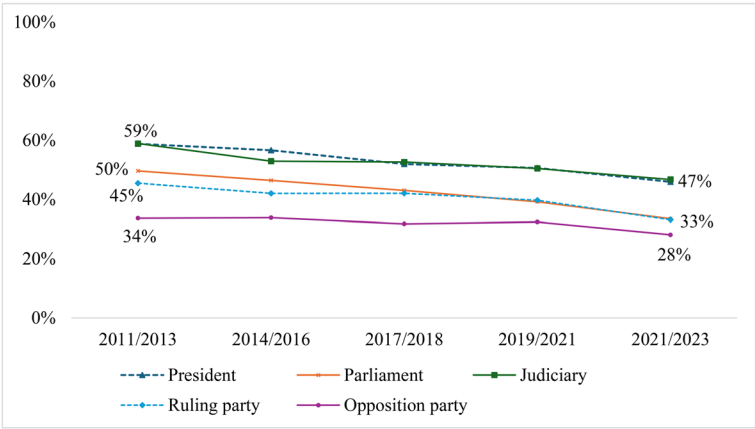


Fig. 3 Trends in trust in different institutions in 30 countries, 2011-2023. Source: Authors based on Afrobarometer data 2011-2023

Author Contributions BP: conceptualization, introduction, discussion of results, and conclusion. DMA: writing of methodology and estimation of results, discussion of results. MT: writing of literature review, discussion of results.

Data Availability The data is available on request with corresponding author.

Declarations

Ethical Approval None

Informed Consent All authors certify that they have no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest.

Conflict of Interest The authors have no competing interests to declare that are relevant to the content of this article.

References

Algan, Y., & Cahuc, P. (2010). Inherited trust and growth. *American Economic Review*, *100*(5), 2060–2092. https://doi.org/10.1257/aer.100.5.2060

Andersen, C. J., & Tverdova, Y. V. (2003). Corruption, political allegiances, and attitudes toward government in contemporary democracies. *American Journal of Political Science*, *47*(1), 91–109. https://doi.org/10.1111/1540-5907.00007

Babar, S. (2011). Corruption and public goods provision: Evidence from a theoretical model. *Journal of Economic Development*, *36*(1), 1–20.

Baliamoune-Lutz, M., & Ndikumana, L. (2009). Corruption and growth in African countries: Exploring the investment channel. *Journal of African Economies*, *18*(4), 552–584. https://doi.org/10.1093/jae/ejn034

Barro, R. J. (1990). Government spending in a simple model of endogenous growth. *Journal of Political Economy*, *98*(5), S103–S125. https://doi.org/10.1086/261726

Bayley, D. H. (1967). The effects of corruption in a developing nation. *Western Political Quarterly*, *19*(4), 719–732.

Bazie, P., & Diallo, M. A. (2025). State legitimacy in Sahelian countries: Exploring the impact of insecurity on institutional trust in Burkina Faso. *Cogent Economics & Finance*, *13*(1). https://doi.org/10.1080/23322039.2025.2524574

Becquart-Leclerq, J. (1989). *Paradoxes de la corruption politique*. Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques.

Bratton, M., & Gyimah-Boadi, E. (2016). Do trustworthy institutions matter for development? Corruption, trust, and government performance in Africa. *Afrobarometer Working Paper*.

Bratton, M., & Mattes, R. (2001). Support for democracy in Africa: Intrinsic or instrumental? *British Journal of Political Science*, *31*(3), 447–474. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123401000181

Chang, E. C. C., & Chu, Y. H. (2006). Corruption and trust: Exceptionalism in Asian democracies? *Journal of Politics*, *68*(2), 259–271. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2508.2006.00404.x

Chevalier, J. (2018). *L'État post-moderne*. LGDJ.

Cho, W., & Kirwin, M. F. (2007). A vicious cycle of corruption and mistrust in institutions in Sub-Saharan Africa. *Afrobarometer Working Paper*.

Cole, R. L. (1973). Toward a model of political trust: A causal analysis. *American Journal of Political Science*, *17*(4), 809–817.

Della Porta, D. (2000). Social capital, beliefs in government, and political corruption. In S. J. Pharr, & R. D. Putnam (Eds.), *Disaffected democracies: What's troubling the trilateral countries?* Princeton University Press.

Dollar, D., Fisman, R., & Gatti, R. (2001). Are women really the fairer sex? Corruption and women in government. *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization*, *46*(4), 423–429.

Godefroidt, A., Langer, A., & Meuleman, B. (2017). Developing political trust in a developing country: The impact of institutional and cultural factors on political trust in Ghana. *Democratization*, *24*(6), 906–928. https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2016.1248416

Habibov, N., Afandi, E., & Cheung, A. (2017). Sand or grease? Corruption-institutional trust nexus in post-Soviet countries. *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, *8*(2), 172–184. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.euras.2017.05.001

Hakhverdian, A., & Mayne, Q. (2012). Institutional trust, education, and corruption: A micro-macro interactive approach. *Journal of Politics*, *74*(3), 739–750. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022381612000412

Helliwell, J. F., & Putnam, R. D. (2004). The social context of well-being. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B*, *359*(1449), 1435–1446.

Hudson, J. (2006). Institutional trust and subjective well-being across the EU. *Kyklos*, *59*(1), 43–62. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6435.2006.00319.x

Huntington, S. P. (1968). *Political order in changing societies*. Yale University Press.

Juen, C. M. (2023). The impact of government participation on the political trust of populist party supporters. *Government and Opposition*, *59*(2), 425–440.

Kaasa, A., & Andriani, L. (2022). Determinants of institutional trust: The role of cultural context. *Journal of Institutional Economics*, *18*(1), 45–65. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1744137421000199

Lavallée, E., Razafindrakoto, M., & Roubaud, F. (2008). Corruption and trust in political institutions in Sub-Saharan Africa. *Afrobarometer Working Paper*.

Leff, N. H. (1964). Economic development through bureaucratic corruption. *American Behavioral Scientist*, *8*(3), 8–14.

Lipps, J., & Schraff, D. (2021). Regional inequality and institutional trust in Europe. *European Journal of Political Research*, *60*(4), 892–913. https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12430

Lühiste, K. (2006). Explaining trust in political institutions: Some illustrations from the Baltic states. *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, *39*(4), 475–496. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.postcomstud.2006.09.001

Mauro, P. (1995). Corruption and growth. *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, *110*(3), 681–712. https://doi.org/10.2307/2946696

Miller, A. H., & Borrelli, S. A. (1991). Confidence in government during the 1980s. *American Politics Quarterly*, *19*(2), 147–173. https://doi.org/10.1177/1532673X9101900201

Mishler, W., & Rose, R. (2001). What are the origins of political trust? Testing institutional and cultural theories in post-communist societies. *Comparative Political Studies*, *34*(1), 30–62. https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414001034001002

Naouri, D. (2023). The association between age and admission to an inappropriate ward: A cross-sectional survey in France. *Health Services Insights*, *16*, 1–9.

Newton, K. (2001). Trust, social capital, civil society, and democracy. *International Political Science Review*, *22*(2), 201–214. https://doi.org/10.1177/0192512101222004

Norris, P. (2011). *Democratic deficit: Critical citizens revisited*. Cambridge University Press.

OECD. (2011). *Government at a glance 2011*. OECD Publishing.

Rose-Ackerman, S. (1999). *Corruption and government: Causes, consequences, and reform*. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139175098

Rothstein, B., & Stolle, D. (2008). The state and social capital: An institutional theory of generalized trust. *Comparative Politics*, *40*(4), 441–459. https://doi.org/10.5129/001041508X12911362383334

Rothstein, B., & Teorell, J. (2008). What is quality of government? A theory of impartial government institutions. *Governance*, *21*(2), 165–190. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0491.2008.00391.x

Seligson, M. A. (2002). The impact of corruption on regime legitimacy. *Journal of Politics*, *64*(2), 408–433. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2508.00132

Shleifer, A., & Vishny, R. W. (1993). Corruption. *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, *108*(3), 599–617.

Stretesky, P. B., Short, D., & Stamford, L. (2023). The role of institutional trust in shaping perceptions of risk. *Sociological Perspectives*, *66*(3), 496–522.

Tacconi, L., & Williams, D. A. (2024). Corruption and anti-corruption in environmental and resource management. *Annual Review of Environment and Resources*, *48*, 59–84.

Western, B. (2001). *Institutions, investment, and the rise in unemployment*. Princeton University Press.

Yang, Q., & Tang, W. (2010). Exploring the sources of institutional trust in China. *Social Science Quarterly*, *91*(2), 344–365. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-009-9483-5

Publisher's Note Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

Springer Nature or its licensor (e.g. a society or other partner) holds exclusive rights to this article under a publishing agreement with the author(s) or other rightsholder(s); author self-archiving of the accepted manuscript version of this article is solely governed by the terms of such publishing agreement and applicable law.