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Everyday Corruption: Mechanisms and Enabling Conditions Identified in Court Decisions

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Abstract

Everyday corruption, understood here as informal payments and exchanges that arise in ordinary dealings between citizens and public bodies, is seldom visible in official statistics, and its mechanisms are not always easy to separate from related offences such as fraud. This article considers what court decisions can tell us about such mechanisms and about the conditions that appear to accompany them. It draws on a qualitative content analysis of 19 court acts (18 verdicts and one ruling) issued between 2023 and 2026 in one district of Tashkent, together with a statistical profile of 46 recorded corruption-related facts. Each act was coded for its legal qualification, the factual mechanism, the purpose of the benefit, the role of an intermediary, the sphere of decision-making, situational conditions and the preventive response of the court, using a multi-label scheme based on the classical, structural, ethical and positivist approaches. Giving a bribe accounted for 34 of the 46 recorded facts (73.9%) and receiving a bribe for five (10.9%). Three mechanisms were identified in the acts: payment for the real or claimed ability to influence a decision (12 acts; 63.2%), direct giving or offering of a bribe to avoid a sanction (six acts; 31.6%) and direct receipt of a bribe by an official (one act; 5.3%). The first group concerned driving documents, employment, education and other procedures in which applicants could not readily verify the claimed connections or the status of their case. The material does not allow conclusions about how widespread such practices are or about the existence of a settled social norm. The results suggest that preventive attention may usefully be directed to the documentability, traceability and verifiable status of administrative procedures, to official payment channels and to confidential reporting arrangements, and indicators are proposed for each priority area.

Keywords: Everyday corruption, bribery, trading in influence, court decisions, prevention, Uzbekistan.

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1. Introduction

Corruption in everyday life often takes forms that are less visible than large-scale schemes: a payment offered to settle a traffic matter, a sum handed to an acquaintance who promises to "arrange" a document, a favour exchanged for a place at work or at a school. The literature on informality describes a wide field of social practice in which personal ties, favours and informal payments complement or replace formal procedures [1]. Studies of informal payments in health care, for example, have approached them from an institutional perspective, asking how the weaknesses and the formal rules of

institutions interact with informal expectations [2]. Whether a given practice amounts to a criminal offence, and which one, is a separate question, and in everyday settings the boundary between bribery, fraud and the sale of influence can be difficult to draw.

Uzbekistan has been strengthening its anti-corruption arrangements. A framework law on combating corruption has been in force since 2017 [3]; a dedicated agency has been established and the 2022 Development Strategy confirmed a zero-tolerance approach. The reforms have been reviewed under the Istanbul Anti-Corruption Action Plan [5]. A study of public and government attitudes found that fear of retaliation, cultural norms and gaps in trust may limit the reporting of corruption [6], and a study presented in 2026 pointed to shame, social perception and limited legal awareness as further considerations, particularly for women [7].

Everyday corruption has also been explicitly identified as a priority in Uzbekistan's anti-corruption policy. Paragraph 2 of Presidential Decree No. UP-71 of 21 April 2025 requires the National Anti-Corruption Council, together with the relevant territorial authorities, to ensure the annual approval of regional anti-corruption road maps, expressly addressing everyday corruption, and to oversee their implementation [18]. An official presidential communication of 29 July 2025 further emphasised the need to address the causes of everyday corruption, noting persistent bureaucratic obstacles and opportunities for corruption in institutions that citizens routinely approach [19]. This policy emphasis provides a practical rationale for examining the specific mechanisms and enabling conditions documented in individual cases. For the present study, the relevance lies in identifying how court records can inform targeted local prevention, rather than in estimating the national prevalence of everyday corruption.

Less is known about how everyday corruption actually unfolds in individual cases, as documented in the decisions of the courts. Such decisions are an imperfect but valuable source: they record what was offered, to whom, for what result, and in which circumstances. This article uses court acts issued in one district of Tashkent between 2023 and 2026 to address three questions: (RQ1) Which factual mechanisms of corruption-related conduct are described in the acts, and how frequent are they? (RQ2) Which causes and enabling conditions can be supported directly by the material? (RQ3) Which preventive measures follow from the identified mechanisms, and how could their implementation be verified? The article offers a descriptive contribution, together with a set of practical indicators for local prevention.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Informal practices, institutions and social norms

Research on informal payments suggests that institutional features and social expectations operate together. The study of patient payments in Central and Eastern Europe during the COVID-19 pandemic adopts an institutional perspective, relating informal payments to the gap between formal and informal institutions [2], while an analysis based on survey data from 33 countries in Europe and Central Asia adds a measure of corruption-related social norms and finds that stronger norms are associated with a higher likelihood of informal payments in health care [8]. Evidence on norms is mixed and context-dependent. In a lab-in-the-field experiment in South Africa with 311 participants, posters conveying dynamic descriptive norms reduced the perceived frequency of bribery and bribe-giving in a corruption game [9], which illustrates that perceived norms can respond to communication. The broader literature on informality cautions that practices which appear similar from the outside may serve different functions and carry different meanings in different settings [1]. For the present study, the implication is that repeated references to "connections" in court acts should be read with care and not taken as proof of a general norm.

2.2. Trading in influence and neighbouring offences

A recurring difficulty in practice is the distinction between paying a bribe through an intermediary, being deceived by a person who only claims to have influence, and trading in influence as such. A study of the criminalisation of trading in influence in Lithuania notes that the offence needs to be distinguished from fraud, in particular where the influence is pretended or unreal, and that overly broad wording may complicate application [10]. In the legal system under study, the distinction is addressed in the resolutions of the Plenum of the Supreme Court (No. 19 and, more recently, No. 17 of 2023): mediation in bribery presupposes that the person actually takes part in the transfer, whereas a person who only claims to be able to pass money on, or to resolve a matter through acquaintances, and has no intention of doing so, may be held liable for fraud. For this reason, the present article uses a descriptive category, "real or claimed influence over a decision", which does not

prejudge legal qualification.

2.3. Court records and analytic frameworks

Court case content has been used as a source for understanding corruption. An analysis of 838 corruption and related-offence cases from Portuguese first-instance courts, for example, built a framework for extracting information from court decisions and linked higher exposure to sectors marked by informality, weak transparency and poor oversight, while noting limited access to decisions as a constraint [11]. Court acts describe the facts that were established and are not a sample of all corruption. As an interpretive tool we use the typology of Albanese and Artello, who distinguish four approaches to offender motivation: classical (a choice weighing benefit against the likelihood of detection and punishment), structural (institutional and systemic conditions), ethical (a deficit of ethical constraints) and positivist (internal and external influences such as social learning and group pressure) [12]. Because one mechanism can show features of several approaches, the coding is multi-label.

2.4. Prevention and gender-related considerations

The evidence on what reduces corruption in the public sector is uneven. A systematic review of reforms found that deterrence and control measures performed better than organisational and cultural interventions in the short term, although many studies were laboratory experiments [13]. A systematic review of 63 articles on electronic government and corruption describes the existing views as diverse and proposes an integrated framework and an agenda for further research, which suggests that digital arrangements are a topic still being worked out and should not be assumed to work by themselves [14]. Gender adds a further consideration. Anti-corruption guidance notes that women and men may be exposed differently and that sensitive cases are seldom reported [15]; Transparency International has described situations in which the benefit sought is sexual, which fall between anti-corruption and gender-based violence policy [16]; and the international framework itself gives limited attention to gender [17]. These points are relevant here only to the extent that court acts document them.

3. Methods

3.1. Material and unit of analysis

The material consists of 19 court acts (18 verdicts and one ruling) from one district of Tashkent concerning corruption-related conduct in 2023–2026. Four pre-trial procedural documents were used only as additional qualitative information. The unit of analysis is the court act. In addition, a statistical profile of 46 recorded facts, grouped by article of the Criminal Code and by reporting period (2023–2024, 2024–2025 and 2025–2026), is reported to place the acts in context. The statistical profile is a separate summary of recorded facts; it is reported alongside the content analysis, and the two sets are not assumed to coincide one-to-one.

3.2. Coding

For each act the following were recorded: the legal qualification applied; the factual mechanism; the purpose of the transfer or receipt of the benefit; the presence and role of a real or claimed intermediary; the sphere of the decision concerned; motives directly reflected in the text; organisational and situational conditions; the social-psychological context; the presence of gender-related factors; and the preventive reaction of the court, including any treatment of causes and conditions of the offence. Coding was multi-label: one mechanism could be related to more than one approach in the typology of Albanese and Artello [12]. Interpretations that go beyond what the acts state directly are identified as such. No inter-coder reliability statistics are reported.

3.3. Definitions

Three descriptive mechanisms are used. M1, “real or claimed influence over a decision”, covers cases in which a person receives or intends to receive a reward for a promise to secure a result through claimed connections, standing or the possibility of affecting those who decide. M2 covers the direct giving or offering of a bribe to an official in order to avoid a sanction or another adverse decision. M3 covers direct receipt of a bribe by an official. The categories are criminological and do not determine legal qualification, which varied within M1.

3.4. Ethics and confidentiality

The study analyses judicial acts and involves no contact with participants. [State ethical approval or the grounds for exemption, as required by the author’s institution.] The study reports aggregated findings only. Names, case numbers, file identifiers and details that could allow a person, a case or an institution to be recognised are omitted, and amounts and locations are described in general terms.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Statistical profile

Table 1 shows the 46 recorded facts. Giving a bribe (Art. 211) accounts for 34 facts (73.9%) and receiving a bribe (Art. 210) for five (10.9%), so that the two categories together make up 39 of 46 (84.8%). Five facts (10.9%) were qualified as fraud under part 3(c) of Art. 168, and two further facts fall under other articles. The numbers for Art. 211 are 12, 16 and six in the three consecutive periods. No facts were recorded under the articles on mediation in bribery or on commercial bribery. Taken together, this profile suggests that the concentration in this district lies in bribery in the public sphere, in particular giving a bribe, rather than in commercial bribery or in mediation as a separate category.

Table 1. Recorded facts by article of the Criminal Code and reporting period (N = 46)

Article	2023–2024	2024–2025	2025–2026	Total
Art. 211 (giving a bribe)	12	16	6	34
Art. 210 (receiving a bribe)	3	1	1	5
Art. 168, part 3(c) (fraud)	4	1	0	5
Other articles	1	0	1	2
Total	20	18	8	46

Source: Aggregated court and statistical data; authors' calculations. No facts were recorded under the articles on mediation in bribery, commercial bribery or the other corruption-related articles examined.

4.2. Mechanisms in the court acts

Three mechanisms account for all 19 acts (Table 2; Figure 1B). The largest group, M1, comprises 12 acts (63.2%). M2 comprises six acts (31.6%), and M3 a single act (5.3%). The predominance of M1 is the main empirical observation of the study. It suggests that, in this set of acts, the most frequent situation is not a proven payment to an official through an intermediary but a payment made to a person who offers to resolve a matter through claimed connections. This agrees with the legal observation in Section 2.2 that such conduct needs to be distinguished from mediation in bribery.

Table 2. Factual mechanisms identified in the court acts (N = 19)

Code	Mechanism	Acts	%
M1	Real or claimed influence over a decision, in exchange for a reward	12	63.2
M2	Direct giving or offering of a bribe to an official in order to avoid a sanction or another adverse decision	6	31.6
M3	Direct receipt of a bribe by an official	1	5.3
	Total	19	100.0

Source: Content analysis of court acts; authors' calculations.

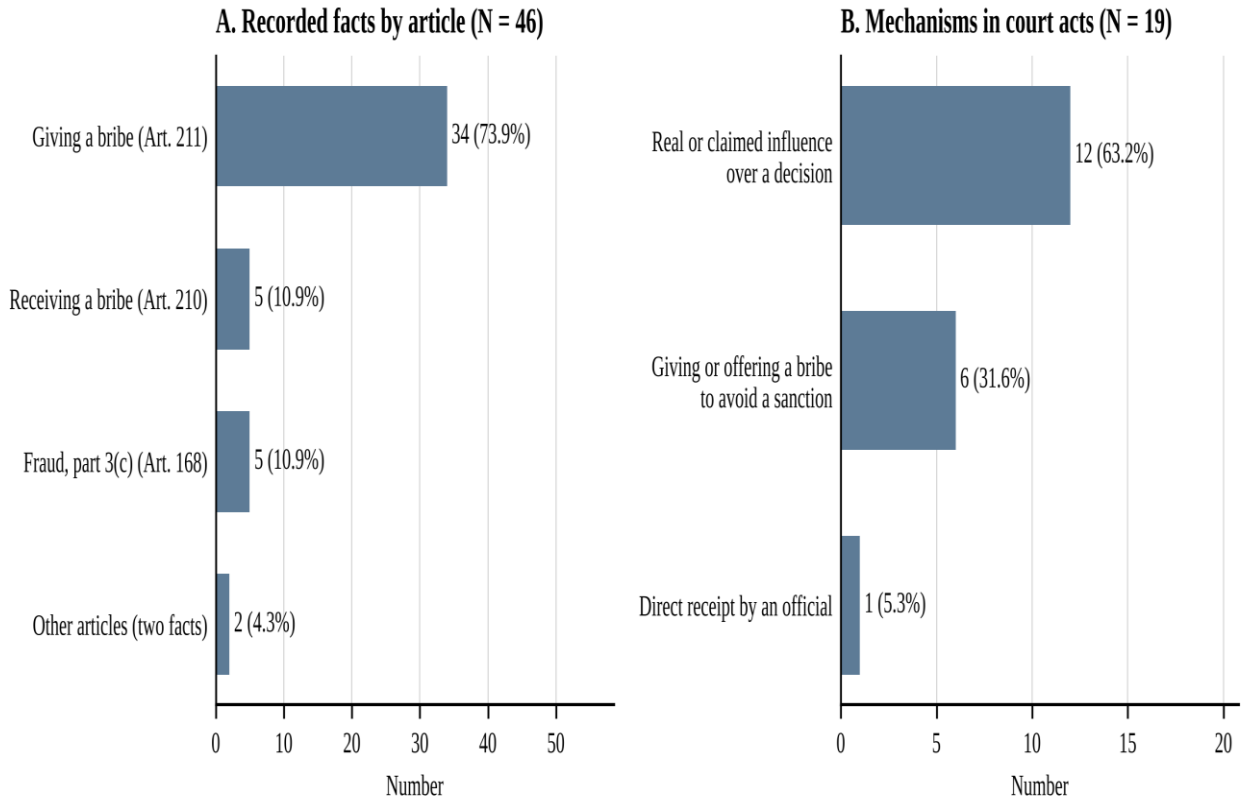


Figure 1. Recorded facts by article (A) and mechanisms identified in court acts (B)

Source: Aggregated court and statistical data; authors' calculations.

4.3. Real or claimed influence over a decision (M1)

In 12 of 19 acts a reward was sought or received for a promise to secure a result through claimed connections, standing or influence. The legal qualification of these acts is not uniform. In one act the court recognised an attempted fraud involving the use of an official position and, at the same time, discontinued a charge related to inducing a bribe because the elements of that offence were absent. What unites the group is the shared factual mechanism, which rests on trust in the real or claimed ability to affect a decision, not a single qualification.

Table 3 shows the spheres in which the result was promised. Driving documents, employment and education each account for three acts, and tax control, a permit procedure in the gas supply sector and a court decision in a family dispute for one each. The promises included obtaining a driving licence outside the established procedure, employment in the medical field or abroad through claimed acquaintances, enrolment, a diploma, a language certificate or a school document, non-recording of identified violations, and influencing the outcome of a family dispute. At the individual level, the acts themselves most directly show a pecuniary motive, expressed as a wish to obtain property gain through deception and through the trust placed in claimed connections

Table 3. Spheres of the promised result in M1 acts (n = 12)

Sphere	Acts	Content of the promise
Driving documents	3	Obtaining a driving licence through claimed informal connections, outside the established procedure
Employment	3	Employment in the medical field or abroad through claimed connections
Education and education documents	3	Enrolment, a diploma, a language-level certificate or a school document through claimed influence over those concerned
Tax control	1	Non-recording of identified violations and "protection", by a person without the claimed authority
Permit procedure (gas supply)	1	Issuing a gas-supply permit for a monetary reward
Court decision	1	Influencing the outcome of a family dispute through claimed connections
Total	12	

Source: Content analysis of court acts; authors' calculations.

Four conditions that facilitated the mechanism can be derived from the acts: the applicant could not directly verify whether the person had the claimed connections or authority; the applicant lacked reliable information on who was authorised to take the decision (information asymmetry); promises were made to resolve the matter through acquaintances or officials outside the official procedure; and it was difficult to check independently the procedure and stage of the process by which the result was to be obtained. These are consistent with the institutional emphasis in the literature on informal payments [2, 8] and with the view that weak transparency gives room for claims that cannot be tested [14].

The repetition of promises to "resolve the matter" through acquaintances allows one to suppose that some participants held the idea that a result may be obtained through personal connections, outside or alongside the procedure. The court acts, however, do not provide grounds to regard this as a settled social norm in the district or to draw a conclusion about the spread of an "everyone does it" attitude. Evidence of that kind would require data on attitudes and experiences of the population, of the type discussed in the literature on perceived norms [9]. In terms of the typology, M1 relates mainly to the classical approach, because the conduct is directed at a pecuniary gain; to the structural approach, because it is facilitated by the limited verifiability of procedures and of the claimed influence; and to the ethical approach, because the gain rests on deception and abuse of trust [12]. Attributing an individual episode to the positivist approach would be justified only where the act itself reports external or internal circumstances affecting the person's behaviour.

4.4. Direct giving or offering of a bribe to avoid a sanction (M2)

Six acts (31.6%) concern the direct giving or offering of money to an official. In five of them the context was road control, administrative liability or the return of a vehicle from an impound lot; in the sixth, a person offered a payment to a law-enforcement officer after an item subject to criminal liability was found, in order to avoid responsibility. In contrast to M1, the motive is stated more clearly: the person seeks, through an unlawful payment, to avoid or reduce an expected adverse legal consequence. Within the classical approach this may be read as a choice between the expected cost of the lawful sanction and the supposed benefit of avoiding it [12]. The conditions that facilitate the mechanism are personal contact with a representative of authority in a situation calling for a prompt decision and the high importance to the person of the possible consequences, such as liability, impounding of a vehicle or criminal-law risk. Preventive attention for this group may therefore be directed to reducing the room for informal influence on the outcome of control and law-enforcement procedures, through recording of official contact, traceability of administrative material and of operations at the impound lot, registration of later changes and cancellations of decisions, and exclusion of cash settlements between the

person checked and the officer.

4.5. Direct receipt of a bribe by an official (M3)

One act (5.3%) concerns direct receipt of a bribe by an official, in this case a manager in a health-care institution acting together with others, who received a reward for arranging a medical intervention in breach of the established procedure. A single act does not allow generalisation, and the observation is recorded for completeness of the picture and for its possible relevance to health-care procedures.

4.6. Causes and enabling conditions

Table 4 summarises the causes that have the strongest support in the material, together with the nature of the evidence. A pecuniary motive and a wish to avoid a sanction are directly stated in the acts. Trust in informal access and personal connections is an interpretation of repeated episodes and is not shown to be a norm. The commercialisation of claimed official influence and the exploitation of trust follow from the mechanisms themselves.

Table 4. Causes with the strongest evidential support

Level	Cause	Evidential support
Individual	Pecuniary motive and rational choice of an unlawful gain	Follows directly from the demands, the receipt of money and the purpose of the conduct stated in the acts
Individual	Wish to avoid a sanction or another adverse decision	Stated directly in the six acts on giving or offering a bribe
Social-psychological	Trust in informal access and personal connections as a way to obtain a result	A reasonable interpretation of repeated episodes; not shown to be a norm in the population
Ethical	Commercialisation of claimed official influence and exploitation of trust	Follows from the mechanisms of selling access and of using an official function for gain

Source: Content analysis of court acts.

4.7. Spheres of heightened vulnerability

The spheres that appear most distinctly are road control, impound lots and driving documents; personnel decisions and employment, including in medical organisations and promises of work abroad; education and confirmation of qualifications; tax control; permit procedures; law enforcement; medical activity; and the judicial sphere, represented by a promise to influence a decision through connections. The listing does not mean that these procedures, or the decisions taken within them, are corrupt in themselves. The acts point to a different risk: the possibility of obtaining a result through personal connections may be used in a real corrupt exchange, or may serve as the basis for deceiving a person by someone who only claims to have such influence. Prevention should therefore address two linked risks, namely reducing the real room for informal influence on decisions and reducing the plausibility of false claims of such influence. Transparency of decision-making, verifiability of the authority of participants, the possibility of following the stage of a procedure and minimisation of informal contact at the most vulnerable points would all be relevant.

4.8. Gender-related component

Among the acts, a single episode has a clear gender-related component. According to the testimony of the applicant, a person who had held a managerial position linked assistance with employment to a demand for a sexual relationship and later demanded money for a promise of employment through claimed connections. The first demand is reflected in the evidence but did not receive a separate legal qualification. The episode is therefore treated here only as a documented gender-related risk factor, arising where a person depends on the promised assistance, and not as a separate offence or as evidence of the spread of such cases in the district. It is consistent with the point in the literature that benefits sought in corrupt exchanges are not always monetary [16] and that sensitive cases may be less often reported [15], and it suggests that confidential and accessible channels for reporting demands of money, sexual relations or other undue benefit connected with employment or an official decision may be useful.

4.9. Preventive measures and indicators

The recommendations follow the sequence "identified mechanism or risk condition, specific preventive measure, verifiable indicator" (Table 5). They are formulated as suggestions for discussion with the institutions concerned and have not been tested. Two features are shared by most of them: the applicant should be able to see the official procedure and the stage of the matter, and payments should pass through official channels only. This is in line with the reasoning of the literature that digital and transparent arrangements may reduce room for discretion, while their effect depends on implementation [14], and with the finding that control and deterrence measures show clearer short-term effects than cultural measures alone [13]. The sixth row concerns the criminal process itself: the courts are in a position to identify causes and conditions of an offence and, where grounds exist, to use the submission and the separate ruling provided for in Articles 297 and 298 of the Criminal Procedure Code, with follow-up under Article 299.

Table 5. Priority areas, suggested measures and indicators

Priority area	Suggested measure	Example indicators
1. Road control and impound lots	Documented official contact from detection to the final material; traceability of the grounds for impounding and release; changes and cancellations recorded with grounds and person	Share of control actions with a full digital trace; share of changed decisions with recorded grounds
2. Driving documents	Official information on training, exam admission, results and stage of issue; explanations that payment to third parties for a guaranteed result is not provided for	Share of stages whose status the applicant can check; number of reports of persons offering informal help
3. Employment, in particular in medical organisations	Open vacancies, requirements, stages and results; a way to check the credibility of offers of employment	Share of vacancies with published conditions and results; number of reports of offers of informal help
4. Education, diplomas and certificates	Complete, current and accessible electronic services for checking exam results, enrolment status and authenticity of documents; information at points of service	Share of documents and results available for electronic check; number of data mismatches
5. Permit and other administrative procedures	Reliable information on the stage, deadlines, competent unit, required documents and payments; payment through official channels only	Share of procedures with accessible status; share of payments through official channels
6. Causes and conditions in the criminal process	Consistent recording of identified causes and conditions with the underlying facts; use of Articles 297–299 where grounds exist	Share of proceedings with a reasoned assessment; number of submissions and separate rulings; share of timely replies
7. Gender-sensitive reporting	Confidential channel for demands of money, sexual relations or other undue benefit; routing that excludes first review by the person complained about	Time to first response; existence of a protected registration procedure; repeat contact with the person complained about

Source: Authors' synthesis of the findings.

4.10. Limitations

Several limitations apply. The analytic set is small (19 acts) and comes from a single district, so the findings describe the material and cannot be generalised. Court acts record cases that reached a court; they say little about conduct that was not detected, not reported or not prosecuted, and they reflect the choices of investigators and courts. Frequencies, including the shares of the mechanisms, are descriptive and not estimates of prevalence. Coding of mechanisms and typology categories involves interpretation, no inter-coder reliability was assessed, and the multi-label scheme means that categories overlap. The sphere-level groups are very small. The recommendations are derived from

the mechanisms and have not been evaluated. Finally, the time frame of 2023–2026 and the reporting periods used in the statistical profile may not coincide with the dates of the acts. Further work could compare several districts, add data on attitudes and experiences, and test the proposed indicators in a pilot.

5. Conclusion

This article used court acts from one district of Tashkent to describe mechanisms of everyday corruption and the conditions that appear to accompany them. Three observations stand out. Bribery in the public sphere, in particular giving a bribe, dominates the recorded facts (73.9% for Art. 211). Among the 19 acts, the most frequent mechanism is payment for real or claimed influence over a decision (63.2%), followed by direct giving of a bribe to avoid a sanction (31.6%). The conditions supported most directly by the material are limited verifiability of procedures and of claimed connections, information asymmetry and personal contact at points where a prompt decision is needed.

These patterns do not demonstrate how widespread such practices are, and they do not establish a social norm. They may be read as pointing to practical steps that are within the reach of institutions: making procedures and their stages visible and verifiable, keeping a documented trace of official contact, routing payments through official channels, offering confidential reporting channels, and recording causes and conditions in criminal proceedings with follow-up. Each of these can be monitored with the indicators proposed in Table 5. Future research could extend the analysis to other districts, combine court acts with data on experiences and attitudes, and evaluate the suggested measures.

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