Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Research Fundamentals (ISSN: 2748-9345)

Received: 10 September 2026 | Accepted: 04 October 2026 | Published: 31 October 2026

DOI: 10.55640/jsshrf-06-10-06

RESEARCH ARTICLE

From Information Silos to Integrated Data Exchange: A Digital Anti-Corruption Platform for Road Infrastructure Projects in Uzbekistan

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VOLUME: Vol.06 Issue10 2026

PAGE: 29-37

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper examines the legal and institutional case for an interagency information platform that enables rapid data exchange and the integration of government information systems for corruption prevention, using road transport infrastructure projects in Uzbekistan as a case.

Design/methodology/approach – The study combines doctrinal analysis of Uzbek legislation, in particular Presidential Decree No. UP-270 of 30 December 2025, with a comparative analysis of Estonia's X-Road and the Republic of Korea's Clean Portal and an electronic survey of 8,356 law enforcement officers conducted in 2026.

Findings – Before the reform, corruption-related information was exchanged mainly through paper correspondence, and government information systems operated as isolated "information silos". Only 9.9% of respondents rated cooperation among anti-corruption actors as satisfactory, whereas 72.2% described it as unsystematic or episodic; 29.3% named an integrated information platform as the top-priority prevention measure. Decree UP-270 created a legal basis for real-time access to the databases of 38 state bodies, the digitalisation of internal compliance units and AI-assisted detection of conflicts of interest in public procurement. The platform's effectiveness, however, depends on legal safeguards that remain underdeveloped.

Research limitations/implications – The survey covers law enforcement officers only and measures perceptions; the platform has operated for less than a year, so its effects cannot yet be estimated causally.

Practical implications – The paper proposes statutory grounding, purpose limitation and access logging, due-process guarantees for automated exclusion decisions, and the integration of road-project lifecycle data.

Originality/value – The paper documents a case in which a doctoral research proposal on anti-corruption data integration was incorporated into national legislation, and offers a framework for evaluating such platforms in transition economies.

KEYWORDS

Corruption prevention; interoperability; interagency information sharing; e-government; road infrastructure; Uzbekistan.

1. INTRODUCTION

Road infrastructure is among the most capital-intensive areas of public spending, and it is consistently identified as one of the sectors most exposed to corruption. Large, technically complex and non-standardised projects, the dominant role of the state as client and the difficulty of verifying the quality of completed works create favourable conditions for collusion, cost inflation and the falsification of performance data (Kenny, 2009). Using European procurement data, Fazekas and Tóth (2018) found that high corruption risk is associated with road construction prices 30–35% above average. In Uzbekistan, the stakes are rising: since 2023 about 26 trillion soum has been allocated to the construction, repair and maintenance of roads (Spot.uz, 2025), and foreign financing for the sector tripled to USD 1.2 billion in 2025 (Press Service of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2025).

National indicators confirm the urgency of the problem. In the 2025 Corruption Perceptions Index, Uzbekistan scored 31 points and ranked 124th (Transparency International, 2026). In 2025, 7,517 persons were prosecuted for corruption-related crimes, and the damage to state interests exceeded 2.9 trillion soum (Yuz.uz, 2026). The road sector illustrates how such losses arise: inspections in 2021–2022 identified 45 cases of ineffective or unlawful spending worth 34.5 billion soum in road projects, including fictitious works recorded in reports, and noted that completed works were still accepted on paper (Qalampir.uz, 2022). In 2026, price fixing, sham winners and forged documents were found in tenders for the laboratory testing of road construction quality (Gazeta.uz, 2026).

A recurring explanation for the persistence of these schemes is institutional fragmentation. The Anti-Corruption Agency, law enforcement bodies, the Chamber of Accounts, the State Financial Control Inspectorate and the internal compliance units of ministries each held a fragment of the relevant information, but there was no mechanism to combine these fragments in time. In March 2025, the Head of State criticised the Agency for acting as a "statistician" that counts criminal cases rather than analysing sectors and proposing systemic solutions (Anhor.uz, 2025).

The academic literature offers both encouragement and caution. Cross-country evidence associates e-government with lower corruption (Andersen, 2009), and information and communication technologies have been described as tools for building a culture of transparency (Bertot et al., 2010). At the same time, a systematic review concludes that the introduction of digital tools does not automatically translate into anti-corruption outcomes and that effects depend on institutional context (Adam & Fazekas, 2021). Research on government inter-organisational information sharing shows that such initiatives succeed or fail on legal, organisational and technical determinants rather than on technology alone (Gil-Garcia & Sayogo, 2016). In Uzbek legal scholarship, Mamanov (2024) analysed internal compliance control, and Kenjaev (2022) proposed "smart regulation" software for detecting corruption-generating factors in draft legislation. However, the legal design of an integrated, cross-agency anti-corruption data platform, and its application to infrastructure projects, has not been examined.

This paper addresses that gap. It builds on the author's doctoral research, which substantiated the need for an information and software complex that ensures rapid data exchange between state bodies and the integration of their information systems. This proposal was used in drafting paragraph 13 of Presidential Decree No. UP-270 of 30 December 2025 (implementation certificate of the Anti-Corruption Agency No. 3 of 20 January 2026). The paper asks three research questions: (RQ1) What deficits of the pre-reform information environment hindered corruption prevention in road infrastructure projects? (RQ2) How does the new legal framework address these deficits? (RQ3) What design features and safeguards are required for the platform to be effective and consistent with the rule of law?

The remainder of the paper is organised as follows. Section 2 describes the materials and methods. Section 3 presents the results, Section 4 discusses them in light of the theoretical framework and comparative experience and formulates proposals, and Section 5 concludes.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1 Research design and materials

The study uses a mixed-methods design that combines doctrinal legal analysis, comparative analysis and a descriptive survey. The legal materials include Decree No. UP-270 and its annexes, the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On Personal Data" and related acts. Documentary materials include official reports of the Anti-Corruption Agency and published findings of audits and inspections in the road sector for 2022–2026.

2.2 Comparative cases

Two foreign models were selected as reference cases: Estonia's X-Road, a widely cited national data exchange layer, and the Clean Portal of the Anti-Corruption and Civil Rights Commission (ACRC) of the Republic of Korea, a centralised digital reporting hub. The selection reflects two contrasting architectures, decentralised exchange and centralised aggregation, and the fact that Uzbek policy explicitly refers to the Korean experience: Annex 1 to Decree UP-270 envisages improving the national E-Anticor.uz system on the basis of the Clean Portal (Decree No. UP-270, 2025).

2.3 Survey

An electronic questionnaire was administered in 2026 to 8,356 law enforcement officers. It contained eleven closed questions, each with a single permitted answer. This paper uses five of them: the relevance of anti-corruption efforts in road projects, the state of cooperation among prevention actors, the project stage with the highest corruption risk, the most common corruption schemes, and priority prevention measures. Results are reported as frequencies and percentages. Because respondents were drawn from one professional group and participated voluntarily, the results reflect expert perceptions rather than a probability sample of the population.

2.4 Analytical framework

The analysis draws on Klitgaard's (1988) formula, according to which corruption equals monopoly plus discretion minus accountability. Information integration is expected to act on two of these variables: it narrows discretion by replacing manual checks with automated cross-verification, and it strengthens accountability by making the actions of each controller visible to others. The concept of collaborative governance (Ansell & Gash, 2008) is used to assess whether data exchange is embedded in a durable institutional arrangement rather than in ad hoc cooperation.

3. RESULTS

3.1 The pre-reform information environment

Until the reform, information exchange among internal compliance units, law enforcement and supervisory bodies and the Anti-Corruption Agency took place mainly through paper documents and official correspondence. The information systems of state bodies were not integrated and functioned as "information silos". As a result, the Agency could not centrally monitor the work of compliance units or assess it objectively, and the human factor remained present at every stage of control. The potential of compliance units was considerable: in one reporting period they conducted 1,293 control measures and identified financial violations worth more than 791.4 billion soum (Mamanov, 2024). Yet these results were not systematically matched with the work of law enforcement bodies and the Agency, which limited their preventive effect.

The survey confirms this diagnosis (Table 1). Almost three quarters of respondents (73.7%) considered anti-corruption efforts in road projects highly relevant, while only 11.1% regarded existing control mechanisms as sufficient. Only 9.9% rated cooperation among prevention actors as satisfactory, with regular data exchange in place; 42.1% described it as unsystematic, with each actor working separately and information about identified risks reaching others late, and a further 30.1% described it as episodic, limited to individual joint inspections.

Table 1. Survey results on cooperation and priority measures (N = 8,356)

Question and answer	n	%
Relevance of anti-corruption efforts in road projects		
Highly relevant: large budgets, complexity and multiple stages	6,156	73.7
Partly relevant: no different from other sectors	1,276	15.3
Not relevant: existing controls are sufficient	924	11.1
Cooperation among prevention actors		
Unsystematic: each actor works separately, information arrives late	3,514	42.1
Episodic: limited to joint inspections, no permanent basis	2,517	30.1
Satisfactory: regular data exchange in place	829	9.9
Cannot say	1,496	17.9
Top-priority prevention measure		
Information platform for rapid data exchange and system integration	2,451	29.3
Integrated system based on permanent cooperation of actors (cluster)	2,104	25.2
Community initiative groups monitoring investment projects	2,063	24.7
Mandatory independent ex-ante appraisal of large projects	1,232	14.7
A separate law regulating the sector	506	6.1

Source: author's survey of law enforcement officers, 2026. Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding.

3.2 Corruption risks across the project lifecycle and their data footprint

Respondents identified public procurement as the riskiest stage (35.3%), followed by project selection and planning (18.4%), construction works (16.1%) and acceptance and audit (11.8%); another 18.4% considered the risk equal across all stages. The most common schemes were tender rigging or collusion (32.3%), documenting works that were never performed (24.5%), accepting poor-quality works in exchange for bribes (16.6%), substituting cheaper materials (15.3%) and inflating volumes and costs in design and estimate documentation (11.2%).

The distribution of answers shows that no single stage or controller captures the full risk. More importantly, each scheme leaves traces in databases held by different institutions (Table 2). Fictitious works, for example, can be detected only by matching Treasury payments with acceptance certificates, laboratory test results and the findings of construction inspectors, which sit in separate systems. Collusion becomes visible when bid data are linked with company ownership records and tax data on related parties. Fragmentation therefore does not merely slow control down; it makes the most damaging schemes structurally invisible.

Table 2. Corruption schemes in road projects and their data footprint

Project stage	Typical scheme (share of respondents naming it most common)	Data needed for detection and their holders
Planning and estimates	Inflated volumes and costs (11.2%)	Project registry, estimate norms and unit prices (ministry, expert review bodies)
Procurement	Tender rigging and collusion (32.3%)	Bid data (procurement platforms), ownership and affiliation records (registries, tax authority)
Construction	Fictitious works (24.5%); cheaper materials (15.3%)	Treasury payments, e-invoices (tax authority), laboratory tests, inspection reports
Acceptance and audit	Accepting poor-quality works for bribes (16.6%)	Acceptance certificates, audit findings (Chamber of Accounts, financial control), complaints

Source: compiled by the author on the basis of the 2026 survey and the legal analysis.

3.3 The legal design of the platform under Decree UP-270

Decree UP-270 responded to these deficits with two linked instruments. Section III created a Corruption Prevention Cluster, a permanent cooperation framework of the Agency, law enforcement and supervisory bodies, research institutions, internal compliance units and civil society institutions, coordinated by the Agency. Section IV provided its technological counterpart: the "Digital Compliance" information and software complex, launched in test mode on 1 July 2026 (Decree No. UP-270, 2025).

Under paragraph 13 of the Decree, the complex has four functions: rapid data exchange among cluster participants; the integration of the information systems of state bodies and organisations to supply the Agency with information; the full digitalisation of internal compliance units through an "E-Komplaens" module; and artificial intelligence tools that identify corruption risks on the basis of data analysis and detect affiliation and conflicts of interest when bidders respond to public offers in public procurement, automatically restricting their participation. A state technology park was designated as the single integrator and tasked with bringing the complex into full operation by the end of 2026.

The Decree also established a Risk Analysis Centre within the Agency, responsible for digitalising high-risk administrative procedures and for automated anti-corruption control in public procurement. Annex 3 lists 38 state bodies, including the Ministry of Transport, the Ministry of Construction and Housing and Communal Services, the construction supervision inspectorate, the Treasury, the Tax Committee and the Cadastre Agency, whose databases the Centre may access in real time, and a further 44 entries, including state-owned enterprises, commercial banks and the regional single-client engineering companies that manage construction projects, which exchange data upon electronic request. Real-time access is granted without the right to interfere with the functions or content of the source databases. Finally, the Decree treats the failure to provide data, the provision of false data or unjustified resistance to the integration of information systems as obstruction of the Agency's lawful activity (paragraph 18).

3.4 Early implementation evidence

Implementation began in 2026. At a meeting on the organisation of the cluster, the Agency announced the launch of an "E-klaster" electronic module for data exchange among participants and presented the "Public Procurement" and "Ethics" modules of the Digital Compliance complex, designed for the early detection of conflicts of interest and affiliation in procurement and for real-time monitoring of ethics commissions (Anti-Corruption Agency, 2026). In the first half of 2026, financial violations related to corruption risk worth

1.886 trillion soum were identified. Internal compliance units conducted 19,709 control measures, eliminated violations worth 264.7 billion soum and prevented the misuse of a further 587.8 billion soum; violations were found in 92 public procurement procedures worth 350 billion soum, and administrative protocols were drawn up against 137 officials for breaches of conflict-of-interest rules (Anhor.uz, 2026).

These figures cannot be attributed causally to the platform, which was still in test mode, and they cover all sectors rather than roads alone. They nevertheless show that the volume of detected violations is substantial and that compliance-unit findings are now reported through a common channel. The survey indicates strong professional support for this direction: an information platform for rapid data exchange and system integration was the most frequently chosen priority measure (29.3%), ahead of the cluster itself (25.2%) and community initiative groups (24.7%) (Table 1).

4. DISCUSSION

4.1 Interpreting the findings

In terms of Klitgaard's (1988) formula, the platform targets discretion and accountability simultaneously. Automated cross-checks of procurement, payment and registry data reduce the room for discretionary decisions by individual officials, while the shared visibility of control results makes it harder for any controller to ignore a signal identified elsewhere. This is consistent with the evidence that e-government reduces corruption (Andersen, 2009) and with experimental findings from road projects that a higher probability of external audit substantially reduces missing expenditures (Olken, 2007). The Uzbek reform also follows the logic of collaborative governance: by combining a permanent cooperation framework with a shared data infrastructure, it seeks to turn episodic contacts into institutionalised collaboration (Ansell & Gash, 2008). The caution of Adam and Fazekas (2021) nevertheless applies: the platform will reduce corruption only if the data it receives are reliable, its outputs are acted upon, and its powers are constrained.

4.2 Comparative perspective

Table 3 compares the Uzbek model with the two reference cases. Estonia's X-Road is a decentralised exchange layer: data remain with their owners, while all outgoing data are digitally signed and encrypted and all incoming data are authenticated and logged; about 78,000 organisations use its services indirectly, with some 2.2 billion transactions a year (e-Estonia, n.d.). Korea's Clean Portal is a centralised one-stop reporting hub that connects more than 1,100 public organisations; the number of public interest reports grew from 292 in 2011 to 3,266 in 2022 (Anti-Corruption Knowledge Hub, n.d.).

Table 3. Comparison of the Uzbek platform with reference models

Feature	Estonia: X-Road	Korea: Clean Portal	Uzbekistan: Digital Compliance
Architecture	Decentralised data exchange layer; data stay with their owners	Centralised digital reporting hub	Centralised analytical hub at the Anti-Corruption Agency with real-time access to source databases
Scale	About 78,000 organisations; 2.2 billion transactions a year	More than 1,100 public organisations connected	38 state bodies in real time; 44 entries on electronic request
Primary function	Interoperability of public and private services	Corruption and public interest reporting and whistleblower protection	Risk analysis, digital compliance, AI detection of conflicts of interest
Key safeguard	All exchanges signed, encrypted, authenticated and logged	Integration of reporting with reporter protection	Read-only access to source databases; broader safeguards not yet specified

Sources: e-Estonia (n.d.); Anti-Corruption Knowledge Hub (n.d.); Decree No. UP-270 (2025).

The comparison yields an important lesson. Uzbekistan has chosen a centralised model that maximises analytical capacity: a single agency can see and combine data from dozens of sources. This choice suits the goal of detecting cross-agency schemes, but it concentrates both data and power. In X-Road, trust rests on the fact that every exchange is authenticated and logged, so that access itself becomes auditable. The Uzbek framework secures read-only access, but it does not yet require that each query to a source database be logged, justified and open to independent review.

4.3 Legal risks and required safeguards

Four legal risks deserve attention. First, the platform rests mainly on a presidential decree, whereas it involves large-scale processing of personal data and affects the rights of officials and businesses. The Law "On Personal Data" requires that processing have a lawful basis and a defined purpose (Law No. ZRU-547, 2019). Embedding the platform's purposes, data categories, retention periods and access rules in statute would increase legal certainty and protect it against future reversal.

Second, there is a risk of function creep: data collected for corruption-risk analysis may be used for unrelated purposes. Purpose limitation should be stated explicitly, together with a prohibition on secondary use without a separate legal basis.

Third, the automatic restriction of bidders on the basis of detected affiliation directly affects the freedom to conduct business. Registry data may be outdated or wrong, and algorithms can generate false positives. Such decisions should therefore be accompanied by human review, notification of the reasons and a rapid appeal procedure that suspends the restriction while the complaint is considered.

Fourth, the value of any analytical platform depends on the quality of its inputs. Where completed road works are still accepted on paper (Qalampir.uz, 2022), automated cross-checks have little to work with. Electronic acceptance certificates, geotagged photographs of hidden works and the automatic upload of laboratory results are therefore preconditions rather than optional additions.

4.4 Proposals for road infrastructure projects

On the basis of the analysis, the paper proposes the following measures. (1) Adopt statutory provisions on interagency anti-corruption data exchange that define purposes, data categories, retention periods and the rights of data subjects. (2) Introduce mandatory logging of every query to a source database, with periodic review by an oversight body independent of the Agency. (3) Establish due-process guarantees for automated procurement restrictions, including human confirmation, reasons and appeal. (4) Integrate the full lifecycle of road projects into the platform, from the project registry and procurement data through Treasury payments and construction supervision to laboratory results and acceptance certificates, and include the debarment lists of international financial institutions. (5) Publish aggregated, non-personal project data in line with the open data approach of the Infrastructure Transparency Initiative (CoST, n.d.), so that civil society can verify the platform's outputs. (6) Evaluate the platform against measurable indicators, such as the time from risk detection to response, the share of signals confirmed by subsequent checks and changes in road unit costs.

4.5 Limitations and future research

The study has several limitations. The survey reflects the perceptions of law enforcement officers and may not represent the views of procuring entities, contractors or civil society. The platform has been in operation for less than a year, and the available performance data cover all sectors and do not isolate its effect. Future research should evaluate the platform once sector-specific data become available, preferably with quasi-experimental designs that compare projects or regions with different levels of integration, and should examine how affected businesses experience automated decisions.

5. CONCLUSION

This paper has shown that the main obstacle to corruption prevention in Uzbekistan's road infrastructure projects was not a lack of control bodies but the fragmentation of the information they held. Paper-based exchange and isolated information systems made the most damaging schemes, such as fictitious works and collusive tendering, structurally invisible, a diagnosis shared by most of the 8,356 surveyed officers.

Decree UP-270 addressed this problem by combining a permanent cooperation framework with an integrated information and software complex that grants the Anti-Corruption Agency real-time access to the databases of 38 state bodies, digitalises internal compliance and applies AI-

assisted risk detection in procurement. The incorporation of this doctoral research proposal into legislation confirms its practical relevance, and early implementation data point to a substantial volume of detected violations.

The comparative analysis suggests, however, that the decisive factor will be the quality of the platform's safeguards rather than its technical capabilities. Statutory grounding, purpose limitation, auditable access, due process for automated decisions and reliable input data are needed to ensure that the move from information silos to integrated data exchange strengthens accountability without creating new risks to rights. For road infrastructure, integrating the full project lifecycle into the platform offers the most direct way to make cross-agency schemes visible and to protect the growing public investment in the sector.

Declarations

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency.

Conflict of interest: The author declares no conflict of interest. The author's doctoral research proposals were used in drafting Decree No. UP-270, as stated in Section 1.

Data availability: Aggregated survey data are available from the author upon reasonable request.

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