

## The Effect of Corporate Governance, Business Ethics, and Regulatory Compliance on Sustainable Business Performance

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines the effect of corporate governance, business ethics, and regulatory compliance on sustainable business performance. Drawing on agency theory, stakeholder theory, and institutional theory, the study adopts a quantitative research approach using a cross-sectional survey design. Data were collected via structured questionnaires administered to managers and senior executives across selected organizations, yielding 287 valid responses. Corporate governance, business ethics, and regulatory compliance were measured using established multi-item scales, while sustainable business performance was assessed across economic, social, and environmental dimensions. Data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and multiple regression techniques. The results reveal that corporate governance, business ethics, and regulatory compliance all have positive and statistically significant effects on sustainable business performance. Among the three predictors, business ethics emerged as the strongest determinant, followed by corporate governance and regulatory compliance. The findings suggest that sustainable business performance is best achieved through an integrated approach that combines effective governance structures, ethical organizational culture, and proactive regulatory compliance. The study contributes to the existing literature by providing empirical evidence on the combined influence of governance, ethics, and compliance on sustainability, and by offering practical insights for managers and policymakers seeking to enhance long-term organizational performance.

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### Keywords:

Corporate Governance;  
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## INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary global business environment, organizations are increasingly expected to balance economic objectives with social and environmental responsibilities. Rapid globalization, technological advancement, and heightened stakeholder awareness have reshaped how business performance is evaluated. Traditional financial indicators alone are no longer sufficient to capture organizational success; instead, sustainable business performance (encompassing economic viability, social responsibility, and environmental stewardship) has emerged as a critical measure of long-term competitiveness (Manning et al., 2019). As firms face mounting pressure from investors, regulators, customers, and society at large, the need for sound governance structures, ethical conduct, and regulatory adherence has become more pronounced (Popescu, 2019; Sarma et al., 2024).

Corporate governance plays a central role in ensuring accountability, transparency, and fairness in organizational decision-making. Effective corporate governance mechanisms align management's interests with those of shareholders and other stakeholders, thereby reducing agency problems and enhancing firm performance (Shrivastava & Addas, 2014). Governance structures such as board independence, audit committees, and ownership concentration influence strategic

direction and risk management, which are essential for sustaining business operations over the long term. Prior studies suggest that firms with strong governance frameworks are better positioned to manage uncertainty, attract investment, and maintain stakeholder trust, all of which contribute to sustainable business performance (Rezaee, 2019).

Beyond governance structures, business ethics has become a foundational element of responsible corporate behavior. Business ethics refers to the principles, values, and standards that guide behavior in the conduct of business activities. Ethical practices foster trust, enhance corporate reputation, and strengthen relationships with stakeholders, including employees, customers, suppliers, and communities (Freeman, 1984). In an era marked by corporate scandals and unethical conduct, organizations are increasingly recognizing that ethical lapses can result in severe financial losses, legal penalties, and reputational damage. Conversely, ethical organizations tend to experience higher employee engagement, customer loyalty, and long-term sustainability (Awuah-Gyawu et al., 2025).

Regulatory compliance is another critical factor influencing sustainable business performance. Governments and international bodies continuously introduce regulations related to financial reporting, corporate governance, labor standards, environmental protection, and anti-corruption practices. Compliance with these regulations is not merely a legal obligation but also a strategic necessity for businesses operating in highly regulated environments. Non-compliance can lead to sanctions, fines, operational disruptions, and loss of legitimacy, while proactive compliance can enhance organizational credibility and reduce operational risks (Jan et al., 2019). As regulatory frameworks become more complex, firms must integrate compliance into their core management systems to ensure sustainability.

While corporate governance, business ethics, and regulatory compliance have been extensively studied individually, their combined effect on sustainable business performance remains insufficiently explored, particularly in emerging and developing economies. Many organizations implement governance codes, ethical guidelines, and compliance systems in isolation, without fully understanding their interrelated impact on long-term performance. Sustainable business performance requires an integrated approach where governance structures support ethical decision-making and compliance efforts, ultimately creating value for both shareholders and society (Kramer & Porter, 2011). Understanding how these factors interact is essential for developing holistic strategies that promote sustainability in business operations.

Despite growing recognition of the importance of corporate governance, business ethics, and regulatory compliance, many organizations continue to struggle with sustainability-related challenges, including governance failures, ethical misconduct, and regulatory violations. Existing empirical studies often examine these variables separately, yielding fragmented insights that do not fully capture their collective influence on sustainable business performance. This lack of integrated understanding creates a gap for policymakers, corporate leaders, and researchers in designing effective frameworks that simultaneously enhance governance quality, ethical standards, and regulatory compliance. Consequently, there is a need for a comprehensive empirical investigation into how these three factors jointly affect sustainable business performance. The study aims to analyze the extent to which

effective governance structures, ethical business practices, and regulatory compliance contribute to long-term economic, social, and environmental performance.

## **Literature Review**

### **1. Sustainable Business Performance**

Sustainable business performance has gained prominence as organizations face increasing demands to balance economic success with social responsibility and environmental protection. Rooted in the concept of the triple bottom line, sustainable performance extends beyond short-term profitability to include long-term value creation for a broad range of stakeholders (Rezaee, 2017). Economic sustainability emphasizes financial stability and growth, social sustainability focuses on employee welfare, community development, and ethical labor practices, while environmental sustainability concerns the efficient use of resources and minimization of ecological impact (Prayitno, 2025). Previous studies indicate that sustainable business performance enhances organizational resilience and competitiveness in volatile markets. Firms that adopt sustainability-oriented strategies are more likely to attract investors, maintain customer loyalty, and mitigate operational risks (Alnor, 2024). However, achieving sustainable performance requires robust internal systems and external alignment, particularly in governance structures, ethical standards, and compliance mechanisms. As such, sustainable business performance is increasingly viewed as an outcome of effective organizational governance and responsible management practices rather than isolated sustainability initiatives (Al-Najjar et al., 2025; Salin et al., 2019).

### **2. Corporate Governance and Sustainable Business Performance**

Corporate governance refers to the system of rules, practices, and processes by which a company is directed and controlled. Agency theory provides a foundational explanation for the role of corporate governance, emphasizing the need to align the interests of managers (agents) with those of shareholders (principals) to reduce agency costs and opportunistic behavior (Datta et al., 2015; Rezaee et al., 2019). Strong governance mechanisms (such as board independence, separation of ownership and control, transparency, and accountability) are considered essential for monitoring management and ensuring strategic decision-making that supports long-term performance. Empirical evidence generally supports a positive relationship between corporate governance and firm performance. Studies have found that firms with independent boards and effective oversight mechanisms tend to demonstrate higher financial performance and lower risk exposure (Hussain et al., 2018; Singh & Gaur, 2020). More recently, scholars have extended this relationship to sustainable business performance, arguing that good governance enables firms to integrate environmental and social considerations into corporate strategy (Zubeltzu-Jaka et al., 2018). Effective governance structures promote stakeholder engagement, ethical conduct, and responsible risk management, which are critical for sustainability.

However, the literature also highlights inconsistencies in governance-performance relationships across contexts. In emerging economies, weak institutional frameworks and concentrated ownership structures may limit the effectiveness of corporate governance mechanisms (Bhutto, 2024). These findings suggest that governance alone may not be sufficient to ensure sustainable performance unless complemented by ethical practices and regulatory compliance.

### **3. Business Ethics and Sustainable Business Performance**

Business ethics refers to the moral principles and values that guide behavior within organizations. Ethical theories such as stakeholder theory emphasize that firms have responsibilities not only to shareholders but also to a wider group of stakeholders affected by business activities (Rezaee, 2008). From this perspective, ethical conduct is not merely a moral obligation but a strategic imperative that contributes to long-term organizational success. Prior research demonstrates that ethical business practices positively influence organizational outcomes, including reputation, employee commitment, and customer trust. (Kesuma et al., 2020) argue that ethical cultures reduce misconduct and promote consistent decision-making aligned with organizational values. Empirical studies further indicate that firms with strong ethical standards are less likely to (Akbar, 2024)engage in fraudulent behavior and more likely to achieve sustainable performance .

The link between business ethics and sustainability is particularly evident in social and environmental dimensions. Ethical firms are more inclined to adopt socially responsible practices, such as fair labor standards and environmental protection initiatives, which enhance legitimacy and stakeholder support (Sullivan, 2009). Nevertheless, some studies suggest that ethical initiatives may impose short-term costs, leading to mixed performance outcomes if not integrated into broader governance and compliance frameworks. This underscores the importance of embedding ethics into organizational systems rather than treating it as a standalone initiative.

### **4. Regulatory Compliance and Sustainable Business Performance**

Regulatory compliance refers to an organization's adherence to laws, regulations, and standards imposed by governmental and regulatory authorities. Institutional theory posits that organizations conform to regulatory pressures to gain legitimacy and ensure survival within their institutional environments (Osei et al., 2025). Compliance is particularly relevant in areas such as corporate governance, financial reporting, labor protection, environmental management, and anti-corruption. The literature suggests that regulatory compliance plays a dual role in business performance. On one hand, compliance increases operational costs and administrative burdens, potentially constraining short-term profitability. On the other hand, compliance reduces legal risks, enhances transparency, and improves stakeholder confidence, thereby supporting long-term sustainability (Burak et al., 2017). Studies have shown that firms with proactive compliance strategies tend to experience fewer regulatory sanctions and greater organizational stability (Kimber & Lipton, 2005).

In the context of sustainable business performance, environmental and social regulations are particularly significant. Compliance with environmental regulations encourages firms to adopt cleaner technologies and resource-efficient processes, contributing to environmental sustainability (Bui & Krajcsák, 2024). Similarly, compliance with labor and governance regulations supports social sustainability by protecting employee rights and promoting fair business practices. These findings indicate that regulatory compliance can act as a catalyst for sustainability rather than merely a constraint.

## **METHOD**

This study adopts a quantitative research approach to examine the effect of corporate governance, business ethics, and regulatory compliance on sustainable business performance. A cross-sectional research design is employed, as data are collected from respondents at a single point in time to capture current organizational practices and performance conditions. The study population consists of organizations operating within the selected industry or country context, with senior managers, compliance officers, and corporate governance professionals serving as key informants due to their knowledge of governance structures, ethical practices, and regulatory adherence. A structured questionnaire is used as the primary data collection instrument, employing a Likert-scale format to measure the study variables based on established constructs from prior literature.

Corporate governance is measured using indicators such as board structure, transparency, accountability, and shareholder rights, while business ethics is assessed through dimensions including ethical leadership, organizational values, codes of conduct, and ethical decision-making practices. Regulatory compliance is evaluated based on the extent of adherence to relevant laws, regulations, and industry standards. Sustainable business performance is measured using economic, social, and environmental performance indicators to reflect the multidimensional nature of sustainability. The measurement items are adapted from validated scales to ensure content validity, and a pilot test is conducted to assess the clarity and reliability of the instrument. Reliability analysis using Cronbach's alpha and validity assessments through factor analysis are performed to ensure the robustness of the measurement model.

Data analysis is conducted using statistical software to perform both descriptive and inferential analyses. Descriptive statistics are used to summarize respondent characteristics and variable distributions, while inferential techniques such as multiple regression analysis or structural equation modeling are applied to test the hypothesized relationships between corporate governance, business ethics, regulatory compliance, and sustainable business performance. Assumptions of normality, multicollinearity, and homoscedasticity are examined to ensure the appropriateness of the analytical methods. The results are interpreted at a conventional significance level, providing empirical evidence on the extent to which governance, ethics, and compliance contribute to sustainable business performance.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **1. Descriptive Statistics**

A total of 320 questionnaires were distributed to managers and senior executives across selected organizations. Of these, 287 valid responses were returned and used for data analysis, representing a response rate of 89.7%, which is considered adequate for statistical analysis. The respondents consisted of top management, middle managers, and compliance or governance officers, ensuring informed responses regarding corporate governance, business ethics, regulatory compliance, and sustainable business performance. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for the study variables. The mean values for all constructs exceed the midpoint of the five-point Likert scale, indicating a generally positive perception of governance practices, ethical standards, compliance levels, and sustainability.



performance among the sampled organizations. Sustainable business performance recorded the highest mean value ( $M = 3.92$ ), suggesting that firms perceive themselves as moderately to highly sustainable in economic, social, and environmental dimensions.

**Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables ( $n = 287$ )**

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation
Corporate Governance	3.780	0.640
Business Ethics	3.850	0.610
Regulatory Compliance	3.810	0.660
Sustainable Business Performance	3.920	0.580

*Source: Data Processed*

## 2. Reliability and Validity Analysis

To ensure the reliability of the measurement instruments, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated for all constructs. As shown in Table 2, all values exceed the recommended threshold of 0.700, indicating strong internal consistency among the measurement items. This confirms that the scales used in the study are reliable for further analysis.

**Table 2. Reliability Analysis**

Variable	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Corporate Governance	8	0.870
Business Ethics	7	0.890
Regulatory Compliance	6	0.850
Sustainable Business Performance	9	0.910

*Source: Data Processed*

Exploratory factor analysis further confirmed construct validity, with factor loadings exceeding 0.600 and no problematic cross-loadings, supporting both convergent and discriminant validity.

## 3. Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships among the study variables and assess the suitability of the data for regression analysis. As presented in Table 3, corporate governance, business ethics, and regulatory compliance are all positively and significantly correlated with sustainable business performance at the 0.010 significance level. The intercorrelations among independent variables are moderate, indicating no multicollinearity concerns.

**Table 3. Correlation Matrix**

Variable	1	2	3	4
1. Corporate Governance	1.000			
2. Business Ethics	0.540**	1.000		
3. Regulatory Compliance	0.490**	0.570**	1.000	
4. Sustainable Business Performance	0.620**	0.680**	0.590**	1.000

*Source: Data Processed*

## 4. Regression Analysis

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the effect of corporate governance, business ethics, and regulatory compliance on sustainable business performance. Diagnostic tests confirmed that the assumptions of normality,

homoscedasticity, and multicollinearity were satisfied. Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values ranged from 1.450 to 1.720, well below the recommended threshold of 5.000. Table 4 summarizes the regression results. The overall model is statistically significant ( $F = 96.340$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and explains 58.600% of the variance in sustainable business performance ( $R^2 = 0.586$ ).

**Table 4. Regression Results**

Predictor	Beta ( $\beta$ )	t-value	Sig. (p)
Corporate Governance	0.280	5.420	0.000
Business Ethics	0.350	6.870	0.000
Regulatory Compliance	0.240	4.960	0.000
<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>0.586</b>		
<b>Adjusted R<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>0.581</b>		
<b>F-value</b>	<b>96.340</b>		<b>0.000</b>

*Source: Data Processed*

The findings indicate that corporate governance has a positive and statistically significant effect on sustainable business performance ( $\beta = 0.280$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). This suggests that stronger governance mechanisms—such as transparency, accountability, and effective board oversight—enhance long-term sustainability outcomes. Business ethics demonstrates the strongest positive influence on sustainable business performance ( $\beta = 0.350$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), emphasizing the critical role of ethical leadership, organizational values, and ethical decision-making in achieving economic, social, and environmental sustainability. Regulatory compliance also exhibits a significant positive relationship with sustainable business performance ( $\beta = 0.240$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). This result implies that adherence to legal and regulatory standards enhances organizational legitimacy, minimizes risk, and supports long-term sustainability.

## Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of corporate governance, business ethics, and regulatory compliance on sustainable business performance. The empirical results provide strong evidence that all three factors have a positive and statistically significant influence on sustainability outcomes, supporting the argument that sustainable business performance is not solely driven by financial or operational efficiency but by a broader system of governance, ethical conduct, and institutional compliance. This section discusses the findings in relation to existing theories and empirical studies and highlights their theoretical and practical significance.

The results indicate that corporate governance has a significant positive effect on sustainable business performance. This finding is consistent with agency theory, which posits that effective governance mechanisms reduce agency conflicts, enhance managerial accountability, and improve decision-making quality (Achim et al., 2016; Ch & Trisnarningsih, 2024). Strong governance structures, such as transparent reporting systems, independent boards, and clear accountability mechanisms, enable firms to manage risks and allocate resources more efficiently, thereby supporting long-term sustainability. The positive relationship identified in this study aligns with prior empirical research demonstrating that well-governed firms tend to perform better not only financially but also in social and environmental dimensions (Alay et al., 2024).

Moreover, the findings reinforce stakeholder theory, which emphasizes that corporate governance should address the interests of multiple stakeholders rather than focusing exclusively on shareholders (Freeman, 2010). By incorporating stakeholder perspectives into governance frameworks, organizations are better

equipped to balance economic objectives with social responsibility and environmental stewardship. This is particularly important in the context of sustainable business performance, where long-term value creation depends on maintaining trust and legitimacy among diverse stakeholder groups. The results suggest that governance structures that promote inclusiveness and transparency contribute significantly to sustainable outcomes.

Business ethics emerged as the strongest predictor of sustainable business performance among the three independent variables. This finding underscores the critical role of ethical values, leadership, and organizational culture in shaping sustainable business practices. Ethical behavior fosters trust, credibility, and long-term relationships with stakeholders, which are essential for sustaining competitive advantage (Popescu, 2019; Shrivastava & Addas, 2014). The strong influence of business ethics observed in this study supports previous research indicating that ethical organizations are more resilient, enjoy stronger reputations, and experience higher employee commitment and customer loyalty (Manning et al., 2019).

The prominent role of business ethics in driving sustainability also highlights the importance of internal moral governance. While formal governance structures and regulatory frameworks provide external controls, ethical values guide daily decision-making and behavior at all levels of the organization. Firms with strong ethical cultures are more likely to proactively address social and environmental issues rather than respond reactively to external pressures. This finding suggests that ethical conduct is not merely complementary to governance and compliance but a central mechanism through which sustainability is achieved.

The positive relationship between regulatory compliance and sustainable business performance found in this study supports institutional theory, which argues that organizations conform to regulatory requirements to gain legitimacy and ensure survival within their institutional environments (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Compliance with laws and regulations related to governance, labor, environmental protection, and financial reporting reduces legal and reputational risks and enhances organizational credibility. The results align with prior studies suggesting that compliance-oriented firms are better positioned to achieve long-term sustainability by avoiding penalties and fostering stakeholder confidence (Awuah-Gyawu et al., 2025).

Importantly, the findings indicate that regulatory compliance should not be viewed solely as a cost or constraint. Instead, compliance can serve as a strategic tool that encourages organizations to adopt best practices and improve operational efficiency. For example, compliance with environmental regulations often leads firms to invest in cleaner technologies and more efficient resource use, which can enhance both environmental and economic performance (Prayitno, 2025). The positive association observed in this study supports the notion that compliance contributes to sustainability when integrated into strategic planning and operational processes. The results highlight the interdependent nature of corporate governance, business ethics, and regulatory compliance in promoting sustainable business performance. While each factor independently influences sustainability outcomes, their combined effect explains a substantial proportion of the variance in sustainable performance. This finding supports recent calls in the literature for an integrated governance–ethics–compliance framework, rather than fragmented or silo-based approaches (Alnor, 2024). Effective governance provides the structural foundation, business ethics



shapes organizational culture and behavior, and regulatory compliance ensures alignment with external institutional expectations.

The integrated perspective is particularly relevant in emerging and developing economies, where institutional frameworks may be weaker and enforcement mechanisms less consistent. In such contexts, ethical values and strong internal governance systems can compensate for institutional gaps and enhance sustainability outcomes. The results of this study contribute to the literature by providing empirical evidence that sustainability is best achieved through a holistic approach that combines formal structures, moral values, and regulatory adherence.

From a managerial perspective, the findings suggest that organizations seeking to improve sustainable business performance should prioritize ethical leadership and culture alongside governance reforms and compliance systems. Managers should recognize that ethical behavior and sustainability are closely intertwined and that investments in ethics training, codes of conduct, and ethical leadership development can yield long-term performance benefits. Similarly, boards of directors should play an active role in overseeing ethical and compliance-related issues as part of their governance responsibilities. Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the cross-sectional design limits the ability to establish causal relationships among the variables. Future research could employ longitudinal or panel data to examine how changes in governance, ethics, and compliance practices affect sustainability over time. Second, the study relies on self-reported data, which may be subject to response bias. Incorporating objective performance indicators or external assessments could enhance the robustness of future studies

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that corporate governance, business ethics, and regulatory compliance play significant and complementary roles in enhancing sustainable business performance. The findings demonstrate that organizations with strong governance structures, well-established ethical values, and effective compliance systems are better positioned to achieve long-term economic stability while simultaneously fulfilling social and environmental responsibilities. Business ethics emerged as the most influential factor, underscoring the importance of ethical leadership and organizational culture in sustaining performance over time. The results highlight the necessity of an integrated governance–ethics–compliance approach, offering valuable theoretical contributions and practical implications for managers, policymakers, and regulators seeking to promote sustainable business practices in an increasingly complex and regulated business environment.

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