Why do citizens of democracies tolerate corruption?

Preliminary evidence from the World Value Survey

Raffaele Asquer
Ph. D. Candidate
University of California, Los Angeles
(raffasquer@ucla.edu)
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1. Introduction.

Why do citizens of democracies tolerate corruption? The question is especially important given that politicians charged with, or convicted for, corruption-related crimes are generally reelected (for an overview, Golden 2009). From a normative point of view, we should be concerned with what seems to be a failure of political accountability. In a democratic system with competitive elections, politicians found to be corrupt should be voted out of office, thus restraining other politicians from getting involved in such activities. Instead, by failing to punish allegedly corrupt officials, voters contribute to make corruption a self-reinforcing equilibrium, which in turn leads to various negative consequences. Government corruption, for example, is linked to distortions in the allocation of governmental expenditures (Mauro 1998), poor governmental services (Bussell 2010), and reduced support for the political system (Anderson and Tverdova 2003).

There are two strands of literature related to the question at hand. The first one has to do with the electoral success of legislators charged with corruption. As it is difficult to collect systematic data on politicians’ illegal activities, most studies use judicial investigations to identify corrupt incumbents. Studies conducted in the U.S. show that most charges did not lead to an incumbent’s defeat. However, charged House incumbents did lose between 6 and 18 percentage points of electoral margin.

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1 Interestingly, the mechanism of accountability does not seem to “work” properly even in well-established, wealthy democracies, contrary to what the literature would predict. First, the public should be more educated and better informed in developed democracies, hence better able to monitor government decisions (Adserà, Boix and Payne 2003). Also, a higher media freedom should limit politicians’ ability to use public resources for private gains (Besley 2006).
(Peters and Welch 1980; Abramowitz 1991; Welch and Hibbing 1997; Brown 2001). In Japan, voters seem to be even more tolerant toward legislators indicted or convicted for corruption. While the former lose only a few percentage points, compared to their vote share in the previous election, the latter actually increase their vote share (Reed 2005; Nyblade & Reed 2008). Next, Italian voters reelected allegedly dishonest legislators for decades, at least until judicial investigations revealed systemic corruption in the early 1990s (Chang, Golden and Hill 2010). Finally, allegedly corrupt mayors in France do not suffer any punishment when running for reelection (Lemennicier and Duraisamy 2011).

To account for these findings, this literature proposes different explanations. First, some studies argue that citizens cannot distinguish between “bad” and “good” candidates but, once they are provided with sufficient information, they tend to vote dishonest politicians out of office. Thus, judicial investigations by themselves do not lead to electoral punishment, unless such episodes are widely reported by the media (Chang, Golden and Hill 2010; Ferraz and Finan 2008). Alternatively, material benefits may explain why dishonest politicians get reelected. Manzetti and Wilson (2007) claim that, especially in poorer countries, corrupt incumbents obtain votes by delivering basic goods and patronage jobs. Their argument refers to attitudes toward government in general, rather than voting behavior at the district-level. However, one can usefully extrapolate from their paper – despite the flaws in their research design.\(^2\) By a similar logic, then, even informed voters may vote for

\(^2\) Using cross-country survey data, Manzetti and Wilson (2007) claim to demonstrate the relationship between support of corrupt governments and diffusion of clientelistic practices, which they measure through the World Bank’s government effectiveness index. As the latter is strongly correlated with
allegedly corrupt incumbents, if they expect to receive from him or her some material benefits that other parties or candidates cannot guarantee (Golden 2009).

A third plausible argument is that citizens weigh corruption charges along with ideological considerations (Golden 2009) or party identification (Peters and Welch 1980; Welch and Hibbing 1997). Even assuming that voters are aware of the charges and have no material interests in her election, they may still value the policy position of the candidate or her party more than her personal characteristics. Whether partisanship is based on a set of cognitive attitudes or psychological attachment to a group, people should filter information about the candidates consistently with their partisan predispositions, and interpret it in ways that further reinforce them (Zaller 1992). Finally, Nannicini et al. (2012) suggest that voters’ support of allegedly corrupt legislators depends on their level of social capital. In the context of their study, “high-social-capital” citizens are those who “refrain from voting based on a narrow definition of welfare, and who instead hold politicians accountable for an aggregate measure of social welfare.” Analyzing the case of Italy, they find that charged incumbents are more likely to be punished by voters in districts that are richer in social capital.

Then, a separate strand of literature has examined individual attitudes toward corruption, revealing a number of empirical patterns. Experimental and cross-country observational studies find gender differences, with women appearing

cross-country corruption indexes, however, an alternative explanation could well be that corrupt governments maintain public support insofar as they are corrupt, which would not be a very satisfying answer. Also, another problem is that clientelism and patronage should have a limited role in developed countries. Hence, their argument would not be very useful to explain why voters support corrupt incumbents in the cases of advanced democracies mentioned above.
to be less likely to engage in and less tolerant of corruption (Atalas et al. 2010; Swamy et al. 2001). Better-educated individuals are also less willing to justify corruption on the part of public officials. However, Torgler and Dong (2008) claim that education has no significant impact, once we control for political interest. Among the other findings, married individuals and highly religious ones prove less likely to tolerate corruption. The opposite is true for self-employed and unemployed people. Finally, according to Dong, Dullech, and Torgler (unpublished) a person’s willingness to accept corruption depends on his/her perception of pro-social behavior among other citizens. Using cross-country survey data, they find that the higher the level of perceived corruption, the more citizens see it as justifiable.

Linking together these two literatures, this paper tries to test some of the proposed arguments using cross-country data on individual attitudes toward corruption. The studies on charged politicians offer interesting theoretical insights, but due to practical limitations they use country-specific evidence to test them. In order to prove the validity of these arguments, then, it seems worthwhile to check whether they hold true at cross-country level as well. Obviously, we recognize that we are not examining the same dependent variable, as attitudes toward corruption are different from voting behavior. However, the relationship between the two should be close enough to justify this study. Citizens who, in principle, do not justify corruption at all may still vote for allegedly corrupt politicians, but they would need stronger incentives than citizens who are generally more willing to tolerate it. Finally, as far as the studies on attitudes toward corruption are concerned, we hope to contribute by replicating their research on a much bigger dataset, which should
lead to more robust results. Scholars in this field have either relied on experimental evidence, which raises obvious concerns of external validity, or have drawn only from a specific wave of the World Value Survey or the European Value Survey. Instead, this paper will use the aggregated World Value Survey dataset, including almost 100,000 individuals from 88 country-years between 1981 and 2008.

The paper will proceed as follows. In the next section, we draw on the literature on the electoral success of charged politicians to develop four hypotheses, explaining why citizens in a democracy may justify corruption. Section 3 describes the data used for this research and includes some descriptive statistics on the dependent variable, the Justifiability of corruption item in the World Value Survey dataset. Next, Section 4 presents the method used for the preliminary data analysis and shows the results obtained so far. To preview our findings, the data supports two of the four hypotheses, related to the role of education and ideology. Higher education levels, as well as conservative beliefs on economic issues (role of government in the economy, importance of private property, and similar items), are associated with lower propensity to tolerate corruption. We find no empirical support for the other two hypotheses, having to do with income and social capital. Contrary to what some studies on charged politicians suggest, wealthier and more “civic” citizens (i.e. those endowed with higher social capital) are not less likely to justify government corruption. Finally, Section 5 concludes the paper.
2. Hypotheses.

Based on the studies on the electoral success of charged legislators, we develop some preliminary hypotheses to explain attitudes toward corruption. To begin with, more educated citizens should be less likely to justify government corruption (Hyp. 1). Several pieces of evidence point in this direction. First, some within-country studies highlight the role of information and media exposure. Ordinarily, citizens cannot distinguish between “bad” and “good” candidates, but, once they receive sufficient information from the media, they tend to vote dishonest politicians out of office (Chang, Golden and Hill 2010; Ferraz and Finan 2008). Second, also cross-country studies show the relationship between an uninformed electorate and corruption (Adserà, Boix and Payne 2003). One can argue that more educated voters are better able to access and process media information, hence they should be at least more likely to know about government corruption. Finally, studying attitudes toward corruption, Torgler and Dong (2008) argue that “politically interested citizens,” i.e. those who participate in political discussion and activities, acquire information about government performance more easily, hold public officials accountable to higher standards, and are more sensitive to corruption issues. Thus, based on the well-known relationship between education and political interest, we expect more educated citizens also to be less likely to justify corruption.

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3 Torgler and Dong (2008) claim that, once political interest is controlled for, education has no significant impact on the likelihood of justifying corruption. However, given the apparent correlation between the two variables, issues of multicollinearity may affect the accuracy of such estimates. At any rate, to account for this possibility, we are going to use a control variable for political interest in the statistical analysis.

4 In the American public opinion literature, scholars usually refer to “political awareness” to indicate
Next, we hypothesize that richer citizens should also be less likely to tolerate corruption (Hyp. 2). Manzetti and Wilson (2007) claim that, especially in poorer countries, corrupt incumbents obtain votes by delivering basic goods and patronage jobs. By a similar logic, Golden (2009) argues that even well-informed voters may still vote for allegedly corrupt incumbents, if they expect to receive from him or her some material benefits that other parties or candidates cannot guarantee. For this argument to hold true, one needs to assume that material benefits change attitudes toward corruption, thus leading citizens who in principle may disapprove of corruption to tolerate it. Wealthier individuals should be less sensitive to patronage goods and jobs, hence they should be less likely to be targeted by vote-seeking corrupt incumbents. As a result, their attitudes toward corruption should not be influenced by expectations or calculations regarding their own individual welfare. Having more money and leisure, higher-income citizens should also have greater access to information, hence they should demand a more effective performance as well as higher transparency from government officials.

Furthermore, the studies on the electoral success of charged legislators point to the role of ideology (Golden 2009) and party identification (Peters and Welch 1980; Welch and Hibbing 1997). Even assuming that voters are aware of the charges and have no material interest at stake, they may still value the ideological position of the charged candidate or that of her party more than her morals. If ideology appears a related concept. For example, Klasnja (2011) finds that high-awareness voters are more likely than low-awareness ones to punish U.S. Congressmen accused of corruption at the polls. It is important to recognize that political awareness refers to how much citizens know about government institutions and officials, hence it is better measured through factual items than through proxies such as education (Zaller 1992). Here, however, we consider political interest and awareness as deriving from education, rather than having an independent role, hence it seems justified to use education as an explanatory variable.
to affect voters’ support for dishonest candidates, how exactly should we expect it to frame attitudes toward corruption? At least considering the traditional cleavage over economic issues, it seems reasonable to expect conservatives to be more concerned about, hence less tolerant of, government corruption (Hyp. 3). Being skeptical about government economic intervention, individuals holding conservative views should find it especially troubling that public officials receive bribes for performing their duties. In addition to that, since corruption is commonly associated with the assignment of public contracts, conservatives should be worried that, if the assignment process is rife with corruption, public funds will be mismanaged and wasted. Ultimately, corruption ends up impacting taxpayers’ welfare, which is greatly valued by conservatives.5

Another argument that can be derived from this strand of literature is that high levels of social capital make individuals more averse to corruption (Hyp. 4). Putnam defines social capital as “the features of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions” (Putnam 1993: 167). Applying this concept to voting behavior, Nannicini et al. characterize as “civic citizens,” or citizens with high social capital, those who “refrain from voting based on a narrow definition of welfare, and who instead hold politicians accountable for an aggregate measure of social welfare” (2012: 5). In their study on Italy, they find that charged incumbents are more likely to be punished by voters in districts with higher social capital. Consistently with their argument and findings, we expect “high-social-capital” citizens to be concerned

5 On the “fiscal consequences of corruption,” see Depken and LaFountain (2006).
with collective welfare, rather than solely interested in their individual situation. As discussed above, corruption can be considered as a problem affecting every taxpayer in a given society, although each one of them probably receives little harm. “High-social-capital” citizens should recognize that corruption, in the long run, does represent a social problem, hence they should be less willing to tolerate it.6

Finally, drawing on studies of attitudes toward corruption, we develop a set of control variables to used in the statistical analysis. First of all, women are found to be less willing to justify corruption (Swamy et al. 2001), consistently with research in social psychology (Torgler and Dong 2008). However, Atalas et al. (2010) cast doubts on the argument that males are more willing to engage in and tolerate corruption, arguing that this difference may be specific to Western countries. Next, studies report differences among age groups. Whether the age effect is considered linear or not, older people are in general less likely to tolerate corruption (Swamy et al. 2001; Torgler and Valev 2004).7 These studies also find that being married is associated with a lower propensity to justify corruption. Torgler and Dong (2008) find higher religiosity to have a similar effect. As for economic status, income by itself may be insufficient to capture it. In fact, Torgler and Valev (2006) suggest that perceptions of economic welfare may influence attitudes toward corruption. People who are dissatisfied with their financial

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6 In fact, one of the reasons why corruption represents a self-sustaining equilibrium in many societies is that individual citizens have little incentive to oppose it, as the potential costs are not immediately visible and tend to be distributed across the population. Hence, the persistence of corruption may be thought of as a collective action problem. Along these lines, in a paper on which Nannicini et al. draw for their argument, Guiso, Sapienza, and Zingales (2010) define social capital as “those persistent and shared beliefs and values that help a group overcome the free rider problem in the pursuit of socially valuable activities.”

7 For an overview of the explanations behind this finding, see Torgler and Valev (2006).
situation might be more willing to act illegally, hence they might be more willing to justify illegal behaviors such as corruption. These authors also find that self-employed and unemployed people are more likely to justify corruption.

\[\text{8 However, they do not find empirical evidence for this effect in the data from World Values Survey wave III (1995-1997).}\]
3. Data.

The data for this study is drawn from the aggregated World Value Survey (WVS) database, which includes all the waves of the survey that have been conducted so far: 1981-1984, 1989-1993, 1994-1999, 1999-2004, 2005-2006, and 2008-2010. The WVS is a large cross-national project aimed at investigating the opinions of world citizens on a wide range of social, cultural, and political issues. In each country in which they administer the survey, researchers have to comply with specific requirements in order to ensure consistency in the data collection procedure. Using probability random methods, they select a representative sample from the population of age 18 or above. Since we are interested in democratic countries, we use two thresholds to build the dataset. First, in order to have a full picture of the data, we consider only countries that are classified at least as “open anocracies” in the Polity Score IV database. Then, for the actual statistical analysis we use only the countries classified as “democracies” and “full democracies.”

Obviously, we also exclude countries for which the dependent variable or some of the explanatory variables are not available. Thus, given that some countries participated in multiple waves of the survey, we are left with almost 100,000 individual observations from 88 country-years in the sample of democracies.

As a dependent variable, we use justifiability of corruption, which is assessed through the following survey question:

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Please tell me for each of the following statements whether you think it can always be justified, never be justified, or something in between, using this card:

Someone accepting a bribe in the course of their duties

(1 = Never justifiable, 10 = Always justifiable)

Thus, higher values on this item correspond to a higher willingness to tolerate corruption, while lower values express more dissatisfaction with corruption. Unfortunately, this measure suffers from social desirability bias. Although corruption may be widespread and even considered customary in some countries, bribe-taking is generally ruled out as illegal, so that we expect respondent to underreport the level at which they effectively tolerate corruption. However, given that there is some variation in the response distribution (see below), it should still be interesting to understand why certain people seem more willing to justify corruption than others. Another way to address this issue is to recode the original dependent variable as a dichotomous variable, collapsing all the responses different from “Never justifiable” into one category. In doing so, we hope to understand why respondents deviate from the socially desirable response, thus expressing a certain degree of tolerance toward corruption.

By looking at the distribution of the dependent variable in the full sample of country-years, one can see that there is small variation in the average response. Serbia in 2006 has the highest mean response (4.66 on scale from 1 to 10), i.e. the highest level of justifiability of corruption in the sample, followed by Brazil in 1997 (4.02). At the other extreme, Bangladesh and Argentina have the lowest values (1.04
and 1.26 respectively). About 75% of the observations fall between 1 and 2, with the average value being 1.83 (Figure 1). The smaller sample of democracies does not show significant differences. As for variation across time, attitudes toward corruption seem to be rather stable. Where multiple data points are available for the same country, corresponding to different survey waves, the wave-to-wave variation is generally smaller than .33 point on a 1-10 scale. The only two exceptions are India and Brazil. In the former country, the population seems to become increasingly more corruption-tolerant between 1990 (mean response = 1.41) and 2006 (mean response = 2.97), with a substantial increase between 2001 and 2006. As for the latter, the mean response jumped from 1.39 in 1991 to 4.02 in 1997, then went back to 1.85 nine years later. While it is not clear what caused that spike, we will consider dropping the anomalous 1997 observation from the subsequent analysis.10

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10 A look at the response distribution on related items, however, does not show the same anomalies. In a similar way to what is done for corruption, respondents are asked to rate how justifiable it is to “cheat on taxes,” “avoid paying fares on public transportation,” and “claim government benefits to which one is not entitled.” In the case of Brazil, the mean response on these items did increase between 1991 and 1997, but the increase was much smaller than for the justifiability of corruption item. Also, the 2006 mean response on those items did not revert back to the 1991 values, but rather kept increasing. Thus, we are left to wonder whether measurement error or a real change in public attitudes toward corruption is responsible for this pattern.
In order to have a better sense of what the dependent variable is measuring, it may be useful to study the relationship between justifiability of corruption, expressed by the mean response for each country-year, and the level of corruption in the corresponding year. As is common practice in this field, the latter is measured through the Transparency International Corruption Perception Index (CPI). Despite the well-known problems with this and similar measures (Treisman 2007), using the CPI should at least give an approximate idea of the relationship between the two variables at cross-country level. First thing to be noticed, justifiability of corruption and corruption level are only weakly correlated ($r=28\%$). As shown by Figure 2, the countries whose population has a higher tendency to justify corruption are also
perceived as relatively corrupt. However, the countries that appear to have stronger social norms against corruption do not turn out to be necessary less corrupt. For example, Sweden in 1999 shows the same mean response (1.85) as Russia in 2006, despite the fact that the two countries are separated by about 7 points, on a scale of 10, on the CPI index. On the other hand, respondents’ perceptions of corruption seem to match cross-country corruption ratings more accurately.\textsuperscript{11} Using a question on the perceived extent of corruption that was asked only in the 1994-1999 survey wave, Figure 3 shows a strong relationship between the mean individual response and the country’s corruption rating ($r=85\%$).\textsuperscript{12}

\textbf{Figure 2. Justifiability of corruption and Corruption level, all country-years}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{corruption_figure.png}
\end{figure}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{11} On this aspect, as well as the previous ones, the full sample of country-years and the smaller sample of Polity-ranked democracies do not show meaningful differences.
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\textsuperscript{12} The text of the question is: “How widespread do you think bribe taking and corruption is in this country? Almost no public officials engaged in it / A few are / Most are / Almost all public officials are engaged in it.” The responses are coded 1 to 4, with higher values corresponding to higher perceived corruption.
\end{flushright}
As for the explanatory variables, they are obtained with slight modifications from the WVS database. The *Education* variable, measuring the highest educational level reached by the individual, ranges from 1 (partial primary education) to 8 (completed university degree). As for *Income*, each respondent is placed into the corresponding decile in the country’s income distribution. Some of the survey waves include a question on *Economic satisfaction*, asking respondents to rate their satisfaction with the financial situation of their households. We also code two types of employment status (*Self-employed* and *Unemployed*). Then, *Religiosity* measures how often the person declares to attend religious services, aside from weddings, funerals, and christening. Similarly to Togler and Dong (2008), we attempt to
capture *Political interest* using three separate items, which are recoded so that more politically interested individuals have higher values.\(^{13}\)

Next, to measure ideological beliefs, we use both the respondent’s self-positioning on the left-right axis (*Ideology*) and the average response to three questions dealing with income inequality, private/government ownership, and economic competition (*Ideology scale*). In both cases, higher values correspond to rightwing/conservative beliefs. Finally, we proxy *Social capital* through generalized trust, which is measured by asking respondents if they think “most people can be trusted” or not.\(^{14}\) In fact, as one of the components of social capital originally outlined by Putnam (1993), generalized (or social) trust later turned out to drive most of the effects on life satisfaction, economic growth, and investment that were previously associated with social capital as a whole (Bjørnskov 2006; Knack 2002; Knack and Keefer 1997).\(^{15}\)

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\(^{13}\) The following questions are used. For *Political Interest 1*: “*When you get together with your friends, would you say you discuss political matters frequently, occasionally, or never?*” For *Political Interest 2*: “*How interested would you say you are in politics? Very interested / somewhat interested / not very interested / not at all interested.*” For *Political Interest 3*: “*How important is politics in your life? Very/rather / not very / not at all.*”

\(^{14}\) Alternatively, one could use the WVS item “*Trust: Other people in country*”, which would be more precise in that it is scaled 1-5. However, that question is available only for a few country-years.

\(^{15}\) In choosing to proxy social capital through generalized trust, we also follow Guiso, Sapienza, and Zingales (2004)
4. **Empirical analysis.**

In order to study how the explanatory variables affect attitudes toward corruption, a standard approach would involve running a regression on the entire dataset, and then examining the coefficients. With this dataset, however, such method would raise several problems. In fact, pooling together multiple waves of the World Value Survey gives us plenty of data to work with, but at the same time complicates the statistical analysis. First of all, we would have to account for the fact that all country-years have a similar sample size, whereas population size varies greatly across countries.\(^{16}\) If we used only one wave of the survey, we could weigh the observations by country size. Here, however, it is not clear whether we should use countries or country-years to weigh the observations. Next, the fact that some countries are surveyed more than once makes it problematic to calculate standard errors. Even if we decided between clustering the errors at the level of country or country-year, we would still have to account for the non-random selection of countries across the different waves of the survey. As a result, a multilevel model would probably represent the most satisfying solution, although conceptually and computationally complex.

Alternatively, as a preliminary approach to this research question, we will perform separate regressions for each country-year and analyze the resulting

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\(^{16}\) For example, in 1995 the US had a sample of 1519 respondents, which is slightly bigger than Georgia in 2008, while the population of the former was about 57 times bigger than the latter.
coefficient distribution. For the moment being, we will set aside the issues of weighting observations and clustering standard errors, since each country-year will have its own set of coefficients. Of course, by doing so we are not taking full advantage of the size of the WVS aggregated dataset. However, given that running a single regression on the entire dataset would require a number of questionable, and potentially consequential, modeling choices, there is a tradeoff between working with a larger dataset and being able to interpret our estimates more confidently. Also, running separate regressions has another advantage. Instead of focusing on the average effect, say, of education on justifiability of corruption, as we would do with a single regression, we will be able to characterize the coefficient distribution across countries, thus learning something about the effect of education in certain nations. After all, considering that our units of analysis are very heterogeneous, we should not expect the effect of a certain variable to be the same across countries. Finally, we leave it to a later stage to characterize the uncertainty surrounding the estimates, i.e. to analyze standard errors and confidence intervals.

Looking at the distribution of the Probit coefficients, we find preliminary support for Hyp. 1, which refers to the role of education (Figure 4). Using the sample of democracies and various sets of control variables, the regression coefficients fall largely below zero, meaning that the “effect” of one additional unit of education on the likelihood of justifying corruption is generally negative. In other

\footnote{For most of the empirical analysis, we relied on a Probit regression model using a dichotomous, recoded version of the “Justifiability of corruption” item as a dependent variable (see previous section). We also performed ordered logistic regressions on the original variable. However, given that we have not found substantial differences in the coefficient distribution, we are not discussing this second set of results.}
words, confirming our expectations, more educated people do tend to disapprove corruption. However, a number of caveats should accompany this finding. First, as stated above, we are only discussing point estimates, not the confidence intervals surrounding these estimates. Second, the Education variable measures the highest educational level reached by the individual, rather than years of schooling. Assuming that the effect is linear, we do not know if, say, college education is more or less important than high school in influencing attitudes toward corruption. Third and final, though usually negative, the effect of education is far from unambiguous. Going up one level on the educational scale, in fact, seems to increase Justifiability of corruption in Bangladesh by the same rate at which it decreases it in Georgia and Brazil. Thus, further analysis is necessary to understand if there is any systematic reason behind this variation.

Next, the World Value Survey data offers some evidence in support of Hyp. 3, i.e. the proposition that citizens holding conservative beliefs are less tolerant of government corruption. If one looks at the coefficient distribution for the Ideology variable (not shown here), expressing the respondent’s self-positioning on the left-right axis, it is actually hard to detect any effect. However, when it comes to the alternative variable Ideology_scale, the coefficients do tend to be negative. Since higher values correspond to economic conservatism, it would seem that right-wing ideological positions are associated, on average, with lower tolerance to government corruption. Aside from the caveats mentioned above, there are reasons to argue that the result obtained with the Ideology_scale variable is more reliable than the one obtained with the Ideology item. First, sample size is bigger when we use
Ideology_scale (almost 104,000 individuals) than when we use Ideology (88,000). Another reason to prefer Ideology_scale is that, as noticed by American public opinion scholars, ordinary citizens are not always able to place themselves “correctly” on the left-right axis. Instead, using their responses on a battery of questions, as the Ideology_scale does, should do a better job at capturing their ideological position.

Figure 4. Distribution of Probit coefficients for the main expl. variables

N= 88. Each figure plots the Kernel density of the coefficient of the corresponding variable across country-years. For each country-year, we estimate a Probit regression model with the four explanatory variables and a set of controls ("Female", "Age", "Married", "Formerly married", "Unemployed", "Self-employed", "Political interest 3", "Religiosity")
As for Hyp 2, our preliminary data analysis suggests that it is probably false. Across various iterations of the model, income does not seem to affect attitudes toward corruption in the expected direction. On average, in fact, the coefficients for the Income variable tend to be equal to zero, if not slightly positive, contrary to the expectation that, as citizens get richer, they are less likely to justify corruption. When adding the Economic satisfaction variable, either to complement or replace Income, the pattern does not change. Richer citizens, as well as citizens more satisfied with their economic situation, do not seem particularly averse to corruption. Interestingly, the control variables related to employment status seem to have little, if any, effect on the dependent variable. Contrary to studies such as Torgler and Valev (2006), we find that the effects of unemployment and self-employment, as captured by Probit coefficients, are very mixed. While this methodology is less accurate than a well-specified regression run on the entire dataset, it does show large variation in the direction of the effects for these two variables, thus casting doubts on those results. Overall, considering this set of variables, we conclude that the economic situation does not have a clear impact on how people feel about corruption.

Finally, we do not find empirical support for the hypothesis that high levels of social capital make individuals more averse to corruption (Hyp. 4). When proxied through generalized trust, the Social capital variable is not associated with the expected, negative effect on Justifiability of corruption. While the median Probit coefficient across all country-years equals zero, thus suggesting the lack of any meaningful impact, the average coefficient is actually positive, which completely
reverses our expectations. Under certain specifications of the model, including fewer control variables, the distribution of the Social capital coefficients does align with our theoretical expectations. However, there is no substantive reason to privilege a more restrictive model to a fully specified one, especially given that the literature finds the omitted control variables to be statistically significant. Hence, we can exclude that social capital affects attitudes toward corruption.
5. Conclusion

This paper has tried to link together two separate, yet related, strands of the literature on corruption. On the one hand, the scholars who study the electoral success of politicians charged with corruption offer a number of arguments and test them on within-country evidence. On the other hand, the research on attitudes toward corruption, using experimental and cross-country survey data, focuses on different empirical patterns. Drawing from the first body of literature, we developed four hypotheses to explain why citizens in a democracy may tolerate corruption. While voting behavior, which is the focus of these studies, is different from attitudes toward corruption, we argued that the two are closely related.

In order to test the hypotheses, we built a cross-country dataset drawn from the World Value Survey, including individual-level observations from a large number of democracies. Leaving it to a later stage to perform a standard regression on the entire dataset, as a preliminary step we analyzed the distribution of regression coefficients across all country-years. We found preliminary support for two of the four hypotheses, related to the role of education and ideology. Higher education levels, as well as conservative beliefs on economic issues (such as state intervention in the economy and role of private property), are associated with lower propensity to tolerate corruption. Then, contrary to our expectations, we found that wealthier citizens and those endowed with higher social capital are equally likely to justify government corruption as everyone else.
Bibliography


