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Social and Political Consequences of Administrative Corruption: A Study of Public Perceptions in Spain

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Source: *Public Administration Review*, Vol. 73, No. 1 (JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2013), pp. 85-94

Published by: Wiley on behalf of the American Society for Public Administration

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23355440>

Accessed: 22-05-2019 15:23 UTC

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## Social and Political Consequences of Administrative Corruption: A Study of Public Perceptions in Spain

*Spain experienced an outbreak of public sector corruption—much of it related to the involvement of regional and local administrators and politicians in the country's urban development boom—that angered the public and sparked calls for government reform. Using data from a 2009 survey that followed these events, the authors examine the association between perceived corruption and the attitudes and behaviors of citizens, including satisfaction with government and democracy, social and institutional trust, and rule-breaking behaviors. The findings suggest that perceptions of administrative as well as political corruption are associated with less satisfaction, lower levels of social and institutional trust, and a greater willingness to break rules. Although these survey results cannot prove causation, they are consistent with the notion that administrative and political corruption damages the legitimacy of government in the eyes of citizens and weakens the social fabric of democratic society.*

The study of corruption in government, and efforts to prevent or contain it, lies at the very core of modern public administration. In an important sense, the field emerged during the Progressive Era as an effort to combat cronyism, nepotism, favoritism, and other forms of corruption that characterized government in the late nineteenth century. Much has been written in the field about various institutional designs and professional standards to prevent or contain corruption (Klitgaard 1988; Rose-Ackerman 1999; Spector 2005). Empirical work in public administration and related fields has looked at the possible economic effects of corruption, including reduced effectiveness and efficiency of public services (Rose-Ackerman 1999), inflated transaction costs (Lambsdorff 2002; Wei 1997), distorted incentives (Ades and Di Tella 1997), and an undermining of the rule of law (Tanzi 1998). But corruption is also of concern because of its broader social and political consequences, particularly to the extent to which it

may lead citizens to distrust government institutions, to distrust each other, and to be less willing to follow rules and obey laws. Although public administration scholars have speculated about the potential for such social and political consequences, few attempts have been made to systematically measure and assess the problem. Moreover, such studies have not examined administrative corruption separately from political corruption.

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In this article, we empirically examine the perception of administrative and political corruption in Spain and its association with key attitudes and behaviors of citizens.

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Thus, in this article, we empirically examine the perception of administrative and political corruption in Spain and its association with key attitudes and behaviors of citizens. We begin with a review of the literature on corruption and provide background on Spain and the outbreak of corruption

cases at the regional and local level in the country at the end of the urban development boom of the 2000s. A discussion of the survey data and methodology follows. Next, we present results of a series of regression analyses of the extent to which perceptions of administrative and political corruption are associated with potential social and political consequences, including satisfaction with government and democracy, trust in institutions and in people, and willingness to obey rules. Although these regression analyses of survey data cannot prove causation, they at least provide a test of the extent to which—conditional on a large set of potentially confounding factors—there exists an association consistent with the notion that administrative and political corruption damages the legitimacy of government in the eyes of citizens and weakens the social fabric of democratic society. We conclude with a discussion of the limitations of our study and implications for both administrators and researchers.

### Government Corruption and Its Consequences

Public attitudes toward politics, politicians, and government institutions reflect a growing decline in

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*Public Administration Review*, Vol. 73, Iss. 1, pp. 85–94. © 2012 by The American Society for Public Administration.  
DOI: 10.1111/j.1540-6210.2012.02613.x.

citizens' confidence (Dalton 2004; DiPalma and McClosky 1970; Montero, Gunther, and Torcal 1997; Montero and Torcal 2006; Norris 1999; Pharr and Putnam 2000). Public opinion data clearly tell the story of this decline in citizens' confidence in institutions of representation and administration in contemporary democracies. So even as democracy broadens its reach across the globe (Huntington 1991; Markoff 1999), government legitimacy and the representativeness of democratic institutions appear to be in decline (Dalton 2004; Linde and Ekman 2003; Montero, Gunther, and Torcal 1997; Montero and Torcal 2006; Norris 1999; Pharr and Putnam 2000; Torcal 2003). Pharr and Putnam (2000) argue that in the most developed countries, mistrust of political leaders is based on the performance of politicians, changes in social prospects, and the role of the media. Concerning performance, one of several factors that might explain the decline in confidence is the perceived ethical deficit in the behavior of political and administrative representatives in terms of loyalty to citizens. Regarding changes in social prospects, some authors have suggested that a more educated and skeptical citizenship tends to be more stringent when judging government, as well as more sensitive to ethical issues (Parker et al. 2008). But researchers also point to government corruption as one of the potential causes of distrust in government and declining legitimacy of political institutions (Anderson and Tverdova 2003; Bowler and Karp 2004).

It is important at the outset to be clear about what we mean by corruption, as there are different definitions. The oldest and one of the most often employed definitions is the office-based conception of corruption. It holds that public corruption is the abuse of official duty by public officials, entailing a direct or indirect benefit derived from a public service position for an individual or a group by privileging private interests over the common good and encompassing the violation of rules regulating public service behavior or the ethics of public service (Villoria 2007a). Based on this definition and on previous research on political scandals and corruption in Spain (Iglesias 2007; Jimenez 2007, 2008, 2009a, 2009b; Lapuente 2009; Urquiza 2006; Villoria 2006, 2007c, 2008, 2010), this study looks only into corruption that occurs within the public sector and includes both grand or political corruption, which refers to corrupt actions by elected politicians, as well as petty or administrative corruption, which includes actions by public sector employees or bureaucrats.

As for the political and social consequences of corruption, previous research has considered how corruption can undermine the sustainability of democratic institutions as a result of the institutionalization of "illegal mechanisms used by elites to circumvent the rule of law and use of power for their own benefit" (Inglehart and Wenzel 2005, 192). In structural terms, the effects of corruption on sustainable economic development appear to be quite profound (Ades and Di Tella 1997; Della Porta and Vanucci 1997; Dreher and Herzfeld 2005; Drury, Kriekhaus, and Lusztig 2006; Gupta, Davoodi, and Alonso-Terme 1998; Hodgson and Jiang 2007; Kaufman, Kraay, and Zoido-Lobaton 1999; Kaufman, Kraay, and Mastruzzi 2007; Mauro 1995; Rose-Ackerman 1978, 2001; Tanzi and Davoodi 2001; Thomas

et al. 2000; Wei 1997). Thus, corruption is seen as a key factor hampering socioeconomic policies and the realization of efficient and effective governance (World Bank 2006). Additionally, recent studies suggest the harmful effects of corruption, not only in developing countries but also in developed ones, particularly in Southern Europe (Kaufmann 2005).

In institutional terms, corruption often negatively affects the functioning of legal and administrative mechanisms, thereby harming political equality and the common good by excluding citizens who do not engage in corruption from decision-making processes (Warren 2004). This undermines democratic and institutional legitimacy in the long run through increased inefficiency and injustice (Della Porta 2000; Della Porta and Vanucci 1997; Heidenheimer and Johnston 2002; Jain 2001). All of this may lead citizens to grow dissatisfied with democracy and government institutions while, at the same time, accepting rule-breaking behavior as the social norm. Generally speaking, corruption is presumed to negatively affect the functioning of democracy and the rule of law (Villoria 2007a).

The potential negative consequences of government corruption may also include increasing interpersonal and institutional distrust, which affects the civic culture and erodes existing levels of "good" social capital while strengthening "bad" social capital (Levi 1996). This means that corruption may act to generate a set of dark networks (Raab and Milward 2003) focused on the use of public institutions and funds for private purposes, acquisition of undue privileges, and generation of certain rules of the game that perpetuate a cycle of illegal activities, often unfiltered by the judicial system (Manzetti and Wilson 2007).

As a consequence, corruption constitutes a fundamental problem for democracy and for public administration. It represents a risk for democratic societies and an obstacle to the sustainability of political and administrative institutions and the enforcement of the rule of law. Corruption acts as a contagious disease or, as Bardhan (2005) characterizes it, a phenomenon whose equilibrium is frequency dependent, meaning the greater the frequency of corrupt acts, the fewer incentives there are for others to act honestly. Failure to contain corruption may thus have wider societal consequences in terms of legitimacy, accountability and citizenship. As noted by Philp, there is a risk of a "vicious spiral," as "the use of corrupt incentives

to influence policy makers and administrators leads to a reduction in confidence and trust of public servants, which in turn creates incentives to secure access by using officially prohibited means, further weakening the accountability and legitimacy of the political system" (2001, 358). Thus, the causal relationships between government corruption, legitimacy, and the trust of citizens in a society are likely to be reciprocal, complex, and evolving over time, making them especially difficult to study empirically.

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Finally, in order to appreciate the social consequences of corruption, it is important to consider the increased visibility of government corruption in the mass media (Castells 2010). Changes in political culture have been triggered by the decline of ideology in politics

and an increase in distrust of government. Politicians need to show a trustful and honest image of themselves to convince the electorate; thus, the political sphere (Thompson 2001) is transformed as it acquires a stronger symbolic power (Castells 1998). Symbolic capital in the form of reputation and image is important for symbolic power acquisition. Thus, in the political arena, improving one's own image and discrediting the rival's is fundamental in this "democracy of audience" (Manin 1998). In this sense, exposing individual and rival ethics through the mass media is a consequence of the political game. Moreover, the mediatization of politics generates an increased feeling of distrust of power, which has emerged among citizens in the wake of the increased visibility of political scandals. The emergence of postmodern values makes citizens more critical about the various forms of corruption. While technological changes in communications and vigilance have evolved in ways that make secrecy more difficult, public concern about the way in which government is managed continues to increase (Inglehart 1998; Inglehart et al. 2004). Thus, the mediatization of current corruption scandals amplifies their negative effects on the broader trust relationship between citizens and government (Castells 2010) and must be taken into account in any empirical analysis of corruption and its social consequences.

### The Case of Spain

Spain provides an especially compelling case and context in which to consider the social consequences of corruption. To begin with, it is a relatively new democracy, at least in comparison to the United States and much of Western Europe, and individual as well as collective memories of a turbulent modern history make Spaniards culturally and attitudinally well equipped to distinguish abuses of power (Montero, Gunther, and Torcal 1997). Following a bloody civil war (1936–39), the country was ruled for more than three decades (1939–75) by authoritarian dictator Francisco Franco. After his death in 1975, the country began a transition to democracy, and a new constitution was passed in 1978. A military coup attempt in the national congress in 1981, however, provided an indication of just how fragile and uncertain the emerging democracy was in Spain. King Juan Carlos intervened on the side of the democratic government, and a new Spain began to solidify. In successive developments of the constitution, the devolution of government authority to newly empowered regions (called autonomous communities) became a key feature of Spain's emerging federal arrangement (Agranoff and Ramos Gallarín 1997; Moreno 1997). The country joined the European Union in 1986, and it adopted the euro as its currency in 2002. During this period, Spain experienced rapid modernization and economic growth, including a boom in infrastructure spending, real estate development, and property prices.

It was precisely this rapid growth in urban development and property values that set the stage for an outbreak of public sector corruption, particularly at the regional and local levels of government, where public officials enjoyed new autonomy and control of land use and infrastructure. Some examples include town council scandals that made national headlines, together with numerous complaints of urban abuse that have been filed before the courts of justice and even the Committee on Petitions of the European Parliament or the Ombudsman (Jiménez 2009a). According to the Spanish legal framework, urban planning decisions are in the hands of town councils and mayors. The mayor is the authority in issuing

building permits, which developers need to apply for in advance before beginning construction, as well as in sanctioning any illegal procedures. Given the recent involvement of regional and local politicians in corruption cases, the enforcement system has been criticized for its inefficiency, and there have been increased calls for reform of the existing control mechanisms. The Land Law of 2007 is the best example of this attempt to improve controls and reduce corruption.

Until passage of the 2007 Land Law, which incorporated timid but important changes (the effects of which remain to be seen),<sup>1</sup> the regulation of urban development activity in Spain under the 1956 Francoist Land Law had generated an increasingly complex and sophisticated urban development model that strongly encouraged land speculation and government corruption. In fact, the legal framework of town planning until the 2007 law was based on three pillars. First, all land in the country was "classified" by the different municipal plans as either fit or unfit for building and urban development. Second, the greater part of the capital gains generated by the administrative decision to classify land as fit for development accrued to the lucky land owners, while only a minor part (10 percent to 15 percent) was recovered by government. And third, in cases in which public authorities needed to expropriate land for public uses, the law obliged them to calculate the value of the land in a way that made it impossible in actual practice to expropriate land classified as fit for urban development. Thus, given these three elements, while rural land was regarded as unsuitable for building and development (with no right to claim any compensation whatsoever), the land that the municipal plan classified as fit to be developed gained a totally different legal (and, of course, economic) status. Moreover, the legal framework until 2007 stipulated that—in the case of expropriation—rural land that became urban land under the municipal plan would be given a value as if it were already fully developed (urbanized and built on) simply by virtue of the municipal plan being approved. Of course, this singular trait was a major motivation for speculation and corruption. A large number of publications in Spain over the last several years have examined this problem (Aguilera Klink 2007; Alcaraz 2007; Díez Ripollés et al. 2004; Fernández Durán 2006; Iglesias 2007; Jiménez 2009a; Martín Mateo 2007).

Since 2006 (the beginning of the Operation Malaya campaign), there has been growing concern with the problem of corruption in Spain. The central government invested in new staff and better regulation in order to fight corruption and improve the local integrity system. As a consequence, a wave of investigations, political scandals, and indictments of politicians and administrators took place. The Spanish prosecutor general declared during a hearing in the Spanish Congress in November 2009 that his office was investigating almost 750 cases of government corruption, with more than 800 public officials involved, 600 of which bore correspondence to judicial proceedings and almost 150 of which were still under investigation. According to the information on judicial proceedings, these politicians were mostly indicted for discretionary behavior during the Spanish construction boom and belonged to all political parties with parliamentary representation. In general, almost all of the recent corruption cases were related to land classification and construction permits granted by regional and local government officials.

**Table 1** Newspaper Reporting of Corruption and Other Issues (September 2008–June 2010)

Newspapers	<i>El País</i>	<i>El Mundo</i>	<i>La Vanguardia</i>	<i>El Periódico</i>	<i>El Correo</i>	<i>ABC (Seville)</i>	Total
Economy	81	113	75	61	112	134	767
(%)	7.5%	9.3%	8.5%	6.7%	10.6%	12.6%	10.2%
Crisis	105	129	132	116	122	119	855
(%)	9.8%	10.6%	15.0%	12.8%	11.5%	11.2%	11.4%
Corruption	195	178	67	95	33	81	897
(%)	18.2%	14.6%	7.6%	10.5%	3.1%	7.6%	11.9%
Political parties	154	189	168	155	175	176	1189
(%)	14.4%	15.5%	19.1%	17.1%	16.5%	16.6%	15.8%

Source: CIS (2010).

This outbreak of corruption, combined with ineffective institutional responses, is likely to have produced widespread dissatisfaction and distrust on the part of Spanish citizens. Moreover, in societies in which people see government acting in a corrupt manner, it is reasonable to expect a greater willingness on the part of citizens themselves to disregard rules and laws. This is what Ostrom (1998)

calls the second-order collective action dilemma. According to this theory, rational actors are highly dependent on the shared expectations of how other people will act. Thus, if there is a belief that other key social actors, such as public administrators and politicians, are going to cheat, everyone has the incentive to act in a wrongful or corrupt way, as acting honestly will mean losses. Similarly, Gambetta and Origgi (2009) suggest that corruption appears more easily as “a social equilibrium with low quality exchanges.” In this equilibrium situation, people are not worried about achieving high-quality agreements in which there is a shared expectation of the rigorous compliance of shared promises, but rather prefer low-quality agreements in which there is an implicit assumption of noncompliance and a feeling that, even if someone is cheated, no rigorous compliance will be asked in return. Moreover, in societies in which this type of equilibrium is prevalent, those who comply are penalized for going against the equilibrium. Consequently, if certain social beliefs are consolidated as such, with their corresponding informal institution, a society perceiving corruption more submissively accepts the exchanges that result from such equilibrium (Charron and Lapuente 2011). For example, Jiménez (2008) reports that only around 30 percent of the incumbents accused of corruption before the 2007 polls were in fact ousted from office. These findings have been confirmed by other recent studies (Costas-Pérez, Solé-Ollé, and Sorribas-Navarro 2011; Gómez, Cabeza, and Palacios 2011; Rivero and Fernández-Vázquez 2011).

Corruption in local government has thus become an important and increasingly recognized problem in Spain. In almost 40 percent of the country's most important municipalities (with more than 90 percent of the population), there have been recent cases of corruption (Jimenez 2009b; Villoria 2006, 2007c, 2008). Table 1 presents the results of an analysis done by a Spanish research institute (CIS 2010) of headlines in the country's most important newspapers from September 2008 to June 2010. This analysis found that nearly 900 news stories were published during this period about political corruption in Spain. Indeed, news about corruption was the second most frequently covered topic in these papers during the period, with only news about political parties being a more frequently reported topic.

This outbreak of corruption, combined with ineffective institutional responses, is likely to have produced widespread dissatisfaction and distrust on the part of Spanish citizens.

There is evidence that this outbreak of corruption cases uncovered and prosecuted during the period greatly heightened the awareness of corruption among Spanish citizens. As evident from the results shown in table 2, perceptions of corruption in Spain increased dramatically from 2005 to 2009, rising by at least 15 percentage points for local institutions and 17 percentage points for regional and national

institutions. In contrast, the perception of corruption increased by less than half as much in Italy and France, the two countries in the European Union to which Spain is most often compared. This sudden increase in corruption cases—and in the public awareness of corruption in Spain—may have had important social and political consequences for the country that we aim to examine empirically.

## Objectives

With this background on the Spanish context and the country's recent experiences with corruption in mind, our study uses data from a 2009 survey that followed these events to examine the association between perceived corruption and various social and political attitudes of Spanish citizens. Based on the work of Almond and Verba (1963) and Inglehart (1988), we examine three of the five basic political attitudes that have been the pillars of the psychological approach to the study of political culture: satisfaction with the functioning of democracy (which measures political discontent), institutional trust (a very important variable measuring political disaffection), and interpersonal trust (an antecedent of political disaffection in the literature). We include two variables that also measure political discontent: satisfaction with the job being done by the current government in power and satisfaction with the role played by the opposition party. Finally, we add a variable that measures what is sometimes termed the “culture of legality” (Friedman and Perez-Perdomo 2003), that is, the extent to which citizens consider it justifiable to break various rules and laws.

**Table 2** Perception of Corruption in Local, Regional, and National Institutions

Country	Year	Local Institutions (%)	Regional Institutions (%)	National Institutions (%)
Spain	2005	74	73	74
Spain	2009	89	90	91
Change		+15	+17	+17
Italy	2005	81	81	84
Italy	2009	89	86	89
Change		+8	+5	+5
France	2005	71	73	81
France	2009	79	80	83
Change		+8	+7	+2

Source: European Commission (2005, 2009).

Based on the literature and theory reviewed earlier, our expectation is that corruption perceptions will be negatively associated with satisfaction and trust and, in turn, positively associated with rule-breaking behaviors. Moreover, because the survey included items asking about both grand or political corruption as well as petty or administrative corruption, we can ask a secondary but important research question: is the perception of administrative corruption more or less strongly associated with satisfaction, trust, and rule breaking than the perception of political corruption? That our survey data include measures of both forms of corruption is a unique feature of this study. Finally, it is worth noting that although many in the field assume that corruption has harmful social and political consequences, our objective here is to provide empirical evidence for such assumptions, as well as to suggest possible differential effects of administrative and political corruption.

## Data and Methodology

To examine these hypotheses, we use data from a December 2009 survey conducted by the Spanish Center for Sociological Research (CIS 2009). The survey involved in-person household interviews of 2,478 randomly selected adult residents of the 17 regions of Spain. The regional samples are proportionate to each region's population and range from a low of  $n = 18$  for Rioja to a high of  $n = 439$  for Andalusia, with a median of  $n = 94$ . The questions in the survey focused on attitudes toward government corruption in Spain, as well as standard background and political attitude questions asked regularly by the CIS.

Table 3 lists the series of survey questions about government corruption that we use for our main independent variables. The questions asked citizens how extensive corruption is in the following areas of government (in the original order of items): security forces, administration of justice, politicians, contracting authorities, authorities granting permits, inspectors, and the civil service. Separately, citizens were asked how extensive corruption is in local, regional, and national politics. All questions used the same five-point response scale to measure the extent of corruption, ranging from 1 = "not at all extensive" to 5 = "very extensive."

To reduce the data, and to look for underlying dimensions of corruption as seen by citizens, we ran an exploratory factor analysis on these 10 corruption questions (using principal-component factor analysis and varimax rotation). Although the eigenvalue criterion suggested a three-factor solution, we chose a two-factor solution

instead for theoretical reasons (and because the third factor had an eigenvalue of just 1.08, only marginally above the rule of thumb criterion for retaining it as a factor). As table 3 shows, the two-factor solution divided the items as follows:

- Political corruption, including ratings of the extent of corruption in regional, local, and national politics, as well as the extent of corruption among politicians.
- Administrative corruption, including government permitting, contracting, and inspections, as well as security forces, administration of justice, and the civil service.

We created factor-based scales by summing the questions that loaded on each factor, with internal reliabilities (Cronbach's alpha) of .83 for political corruption and .82 for administrative corruption (see also table 4). Because of a moderately strong correlation between the two scales ( $r = .62$ ), we also constructed an overall corruption index composed of all 10 corruption questions combined (alpha = .87, table 4).

Table 4 shows the dependent variables, which represent the potential political and social consequences of corruption available in the survey and correspond to the literature on political and legal culture. Note that some of these variables are single-item questions, while others are multi-item scales. They include satisfaction with the functioning of democracy in Spain, satisfaction with the job being done by the current government in power (the left-leaning Spanish Socialist Workers' Party at the time of the survey), satisfaction with the role played by the opposition party (the right-leaning Popular Party at the time of the survey), interpersonal trust, a five-item scale of institutional trust (including political parties, national government, judiciary, regional government, and local government), and a nine-item scale of the extent to which citizens consider it justifiable to break various rules and laws (including double parking, breaking the speed limit, littering, falsely claiming unemployment benefits, conspiring with a merchant to avoid sales tax, smoking in a nonsmoking area, failing to declare all income, calling in sick at work when you are healthy, and using a pensioner's receipts to get free medicine). See table 4 for the exact wording of the questionnaire items and for the descriptive and scale statistics on these dependent variables.

Table 4 also shows the control variables that we identified in the survey as plausibly related to both our independent and dependent

**Table 3** Question Items and Factors Measuring Perceived Corruption

Please tell us whether you think corruption is very, somewhat, a little, or not at all extensive in ... (original question order in parentheses)	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Factor Analysis	
					Political corruption	Administrative corruption
Regional politics (24b)	1=not at all extensive	5=very extensive	3.56	1.02	0.881	0.151
Local politics (24a)	1=not at all extensive	5=very extensive	3.53	1.08	0.830	0.097
National politics (24c)	1=not at all extensive	5=very extensive	3.71	0.99	0.768	0.278
Politicians (22c)	1=not at all extensive	5=very extensive	4.11	0.90	0.546	0.476
Administration of justice (22b)	1=not at all extensive	5=very extensive	3.23	1.09	0.193	0.765
Security forces (22a)	1=not at all extensive	5=very extensive	3.15	1.13	0.127	0.734
Civil servants (22g)	1=not at all extensive	5=very extensive	2.98	1.16	0.139	0.695
Inspectors (health, urbanism) (22e)	1=not at all extensive	5=very extensive	3.52	1.10	0.340	0.660
Contracting authorities (22d)	1=not at all extensive	5=very extensive	3.95	0.98	0.481	0.540
Authorities granting permits (22f)	1=not at all extensive	5=very extensive	4.02	0.95	0.466	0.514

Note: Factor analysis used principal-component factoring and varimax rotation. The 2-factor solution above explains 59% of the variance. Items shown in order of rotated factor loadings. Eigenvalues are 4.71 for factor 1 and 1.21 for factor 2.

**Table 4** Question Wording and Descriptive Statistics for Analytical Variables

Dependent variables		N	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Alpha
Satisfaction with democracy	We would like to know to what extent you are satisfied with the way democracy functions in Spain (0=completely unsatisfied, to 10=completely satisfied)	2401	0	10	5.19	2.40	–
Satisfaction with government	We would like to know to what extent you are satisfied with how the current government in Spain is doing its job (0=completely unsatisfied, to 10=completely satisfied)	2382	0	10	3.65	2.44	–
Satisfaction with the opposition party	We would like to know to what extent you are satisfied with the way in which the PP is functioning as one of the key opponents to the current government in Spain (0=completely unsatisfied, to 10=completely satisfied)	2330	0	10	3.04	2.32	–
Interpersonal trust	Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted, or that you need to be careful when dealing with people? (0=need to be careful when dealing with people, to 10=most people can be trusted)	2451	0	10	4.58	2.24	–
Institutional trust	To what extent would you say you can trust the following institutions: political parties, national government, judiciary, regional government, local government? (0=no trust, to 10=absolute trust)	2265	0	48	18.51	9.62	0.853
Justifiable to break rules	Please tell us to what extent do you find the following list of behaviors to be justifiable or unjustifiable: double parking, breaking the speed limit, littering, falsely claiming unemployment benefits, conspiring with a merchant to avoid sales tax, smoking in a non-smoking area, failing to declare all of your income, calling in sick at work when you are healthy, using a pensioner's receipts to get free medicines. (0=completely unjustifiable, to 10=completely justifiable)	2221	0	86	13.28	12.38	0.837
Independent variables							
Overall corruption	All items in Table 3	2478	10	50	35.77	7.09	0.871
Political corruption	Four items in first factor of Table 3	2478	4	20	14.91	3.25	0.828
Administrative corruption	Six items in second factor of Table 3	2478	6	30	20.86	4.61	0.812
Control variables							
Media: Radio exposure	Would you tell us how often do you listen to the radio news? (1=never, to 5=every day)	2471	1	5	2.85	1.75	–
Media: TV exposure	Would you tell us how often do you listen to the TV news? (1=never, to 5=every day)	2474	1	5	4.48	0.99	–
Media: Public affairs shows	Would you tell us how often do you listen to public affairs programs on TV or radio? (1=never, to 5=every day)	2469	1	5	2.23	1.38	–
Media: Newspaper	Would you tell us how often do you read the newspaper other than the sports section? (1=never, to 5=every day)	2470	1	5	2.85	1.66	–
Vote PSOE	In an election, what is the probability that you would vote for PSOE? (0=I would definitely not vote for PSOE, to 10=I would always vote for PSOE)	2478	0	10	4.11	3.24	–
Vote PP	(In an election) what is the probability that you would vote for PP? (0=I would definitely not vote for PP, to 10=I would always vote for PP)	2478	0	10	3.24	3.08	–
Ideology	When talking about politics, left and right ideology are often mentioned. On this card there are a series of cells that go from left to right. In which cell would you position yourself? (1=left, to 10=right)	2478	1	10	4.82	1.62	–
Interest in politics	Generally speaking, would you say politics interests you a lot, somewhat or not at all? (1=not at all, to 5=a lot)	2465	1	5	2.31	1.21	–
Sex (female)	Respondent's sex recoded as a dummy variable. (0=male and 1=female)	2478	0	1	0.51	0.50	–
Age	Quantitative variable measuring the respondent's reported years of age	2473	18	90	46.76	17.74	–
Education: less than HS	Dummy variable for respondents who had a less than high-school for an education level	2330	0	1	0.25	0.43	–
Education: HS	Dummy variable for respondents who had high school for an education level	2330	0	1	0.65	0.48	–
Education: more than HS	Dummy variable for respondents who had more than high school for an education level	2330	0	1	0.10	0.29	–
Practicing catholic	How frequently do you attend to mass or other religious event without accounting for other social ceremonies as weddings, holy communions or funerals? (0=never, 1=a few times a year or more)	2478	0	1	0.32	0.47	–
Unemployed	Were you ever unemployed during the past five years? (0=no, 1=yes)	2447	0	1	0.35	0.48	–
Economic situation	How would you define your personal economic situation? (1=very bad, 5=very good)	2437	1	5	3.00	0.94	–
Employment sector	Sector of employment or respondent (or person with the highest level of income). (0=not public sector, 1=public)	2478	0	1	0.15	0.35	–
Social class	To which social class would you say you belong? (1=low, to 5=high)	2407	1	5	2.61	0.74	–

variables, thus potentially biasing the results of our analyses if omitted (Remler and Van Ryzin 2011). It is especially important to control for such factors in our study because perceptions of corruption (our independent variable) and satisfaction, trust, and rule breaking (or dependent variable) are both attitudes measured in the same survey and thus may be spuriously correlated because of the influence of underlying common causes or factors. Thus, we seek to control for media exposure, including frequency of exposure to radio news, television news, public affairs programming, and newspapers. Although the media provide an important channel through which citizens learn about corruption, and thus might be considered an intervening variable or mediator rather than a control variable, media exposure is largely self-selected, and media coverage of

corruption in different markets can be uneven or even biased politically or in other ways. As a result, we felt that controlling for media exposure would provide a more rigorous test of the hypothesized relationships. We also control for the potential confounding influence of political party identification, as measured by voting intentions with respect to the two major political parties, and political ideology on 1–10 left–right scale. Although interest in politics could be interpreted as a possible consequence of corruption, we decided to include it as a control variable instead because interest in politics varies as a result of many individual factors (such as family upbringing, community or professional context, or even personal attraction to politics, etc.) (Almond and Verba 1963), and we wanted to adjust for such effects. Finally, we control for demographic



and socioeconomic characteristics, including sex, age, education, practicing Catholic, employment status, personal economic situation, employment sector (public or nonpublic), and perceived social class. To the extent that all of these control variables represent common causes of both corruption perceptions and potential social and political consequences (satisfaction, trust, and rule breaking), adjusting for them statistically provides a less biased estimate of the main hypothesized relationships. It is important to note, however, that this control variables strategy does not address the possibility of reverse causation (that dissatisfaction or distrust might cause citizens to see government as corrupt, for example) or the problem of omitted variables that were not measured in the survey. We will address both of these methodological issues later on.

## Findings

Table 5 presents the findings of our multiple regression analysis of the relationship between perceived corruption and potential political and social consequences, including satisfaction with government and democracy, social and institutional trust, and rule-breaking behavior, holding constant the influence of the 17 control variables just discussed. We ran regression models using the overall index of corruption, as well as models using the separate indices of political and administrative corruption, to compare their effects. The coefficients shown in table 5 are in standardized form to facilitate comparison of the strength of relationships across models, and significance tests are based on the default standard errors in Stata 12 (as the CIS survey data independently sampled citizens and there were no survey weights or clustering).

As the first columns of table 5 show, citizens who perceive more overall corruption are less satisfied with the functioning of democracy in Spain, less satisfied with the current government (Spanish Socialist Workers' Party), and also less satisfied with the role played by the opposition party (Popular Party). Although the separate indices of political and administrative corruption are both negatively related to satisfaction with democracy, the effect of administrative corruption is stronger, with a coefficient indicating twice the effect size and greater statistical significance. Only administrative corruption demonstrates a negative relationship to satisfaction with the functioning of the opposition party. The indices for political and administrative corruption are about equally related to satisfaction with the job performance of the current government.

Also in table 5, it can be seen that those who perceive more overall corruption are also less likely to trust their fellow citizens (social trust) and much less likely to trust government institutions. Indeed, the overall corruption index—as well as the separate political and administrative corruption indices—have their strongest relationship by far with trust of government institutions. This makes sense, especially given that some of the same institutions were mentioned explicitly in both the corruption questions and in the trust questions (see again tables 3 and 4). Interestingly, administrative corruption is somewhat more strongly associated with interpersonal trust than political corruption, although neither effect is very large.

In the last column of table 5, the results show that perceived overall corruption is positively related to rule breaking, meaning that citizens who see more corruption in government are more likely to think it is justifiable for citizens to cheat on taxes, falsely claim

**Table 5** Regression Analysis of the Relationship between Perceived Corruption and Social Consequences

Independent variables	Satisfaction with democracy	Satisfaction with government	Satisfaction with opposition party	Interpersonal trust	Institutional trust	Justifiable to break rules
Overall corruption	-0.186***	-0.126***	-0.072***	-0.111***	-0.034	-0.097***
Political corruption	-0.066**	-0.069***	-0.087***	-0.046*	-0.301***	-0.043*
Administrative corruption	-0.139***			-0.062**		
Control variables						
Media: Radio exposure	0.015	0.009	0.009	0.002	0.006	0.009
Media: TV exposure	0.043**	0.037**	0.037**	-0.014	0.052**	0.052**
Media: Public affairs	-0.024	-0.008	-0.008	-0.014	0.016	0.014
Media: Newspaper	-0.043*	-0.022	-0.022	0.033	0.008	0.006
Vote P SOE	0.279***	0.506***	0.505***	0.043*	0.371***	0.368***
Vote PP	0.081***	-0.114***	-0.114***	-0.037	0.144***	0.143***
Ideology	0.003	-0.126***	-0.126***	-0.050*	-0.056**	-0.056**
Interest in politics	0.087***	0.046**	0.046**	0.086***	0.140***	0.142***
Sex (female)	0.032	-0.001	-0.001	0.004	0.033*	0.032*
Age	0.006	0.005	0.005	-0.022	-0.044*	-0.045*
Education (less than HS)	-0.050*	0.007	0.007	-0.069**	0.020	0.020
Education (more than HS)	0.018	0.020	0.020	0.021	0.057***	0.057***
Practicing catholic	-0.038*	0.007	0.007	-0.019	0.040*	0.038*
Unemployed (last 5 y)	0.034	0.004	0.004	0.038	0.020	0.020
Economic situation	0.052**	0.083***	0.083***	0.076***	0.035	0.035
Employment sector (public)	-0.007	-0.001	-0.001	0.025	0.018	0.019
Social class	0.045*	0.025	0.026	0.024	0.088***	0.090***
N	2140	2127	2127	2164	2041	2007
Adj-R sq.	0.154	0.451	0.451	0.074	0.360	0.100

Note: Table shows standardized coefficients.

\* $p < .10$ ; \*\* $p < .05$ ; \*\*\* $p < .01$ .



benefits, break traffic laws, litter, and break other rules (see table 4). The coefficient is not as strong as most of the other models, but it remains statistically significant and is clearly important, given the implications of such rule-breaking behavior for society. Interestingly, the index of political corruption appears to be the determining factor here. Thus, citizens who view national, regional, and local politics and politicians as corrupt are more likely to believe that rule-breaking behavior is justifiable. Perceptions of administrative corruption, however, do not seem to be related to rule breaking (the coefficient is even in the opposite direction, although not significant statistically).

## Conclusions and Implications

The findings of our study provide some initial empirical support for the idea that perceptions of corruption are associated with lower levels of satisfaction with democracy and the performance of government, diminished levels of interpersonal and especially institutional trust, and somewhat greater acceptance of rule-breaking behavior. Interestingly, perceptions of administrative corruption appear to matter as much as, if not more than, political corruption, except in the case of rule breaking. Although such negative social and political consequences of corruption are often assumed or demonstrated anecdotally in the literature, our results provide more of a statistical foundation for these assumptions, even if they do not prove causality, for reasons that we discuss shortly. Nevertheless, our findings are at least consistent with the notion that corruption may weaken the legitimacy of government and harm the social fabric of democratic society. And the findings suggest that administrative corruption may be as damaging, if not more so, than political corruption in this regard. The context of our study, Spain, is an especially appropriate one in which to consider these issues because of the relative newness of the country's democracy (see Treisman 2000), which emerged after a long period of authoritarian rule following a bitter civil war, and because of the recent outbreak of corruption in the country tied to the boom in urban development and infrastructure that immediately preceded the survey.

However, this study has some limitations that must be acknowledged, and thus our findings should be interpreted with caution. The most important is that the indices of perceived corruption in our models are potentially endogenous, making it very difficult to establish unambiguous cause-and-effect relationships between corruption and outcomes such as satisfaction, trust, and rule breaking. We attempted to account for such endogeneity by using control variables to adjust for media exposure, ideology, and various background and other factors that might drive both perceptions of corruption and satisfaction, trust, and rule breaking. But we could not control for unobserved variables that also might be important, such as generalized optimism/pessimism or personality traits, with the result that some part of the relationship between perceived corruption and satisfaction, trust, and rule breaking could still be spurious. Moreover, there is also the possibility of reverse causation: that lower satisfaction, less trust, and greater acceptance of rule breaking may cause people to view government as more corrupt. In a cross sectional survey of perceptions and attitudes, there is often no way to know for certain which way the causal arrows point, and to the

extent that reverse causation plays a role, our results may also suffer from simultaneity bias (Remler and Van Ryzin 2011).

However, it remains likely that citizen perceptions of corruption in administrative institutions, as well as the political sphere, do lead them to form more negative assessments of these institutions and to trust them less. It is also plausible that seeing corruption in government, particularly at the most highly visible levels of political leadership in a society, produces a greater willingness among citizens to view rule breaking as justifiable. Moreover, the survey that we analyze here was conducted in December 2009, following an outbreak of corruption in Spain that sharply increased public perceptions of corruption from 2005 to 2009 (see table 2), suggesting that an exogenous shift in corruption perceptions occurred just prior to data collection.

More broadly, the relationships between corruption, satisfaction with government, trust, and rule breaking are likely to be closely intertwined and develop jointly over time in a society in complex ways. For example, rational actors are highly dependent on shared expectations about how other individuals will act, and insofar as a large enough number of actors are expected to play foul, everyone has something to gain personally from acting corruptly—Ostrom's (1998) second-order collective action dilemma. Distrust and alienation of citizens from the political process can make government less accountable and thus more prone to corruption, as well as the existence of corruption producing dissatisfaction and distrust in citizens. Clearly, the nature of these complex relationships requires much more research and study across national contexts and with various methodological approaches.

In sum, the limitations of our study suggest that caution should be used in drawing firm policy implications, particularly regarding cause and effect, and that more research examining the social consequences of corruption, including studies that make use of strong natural or quasi experiments, should be done.

Still, we believe that the findings of our study suggest some important implications for understanding government corruption and its social and political effects, as well as efforts to contain corruption. To begin with, our finding that perceptions of administrative corruption seem to matter as much as, if not more than, political corruption is a new and interesting finding that has both academic and practical implications. It certainly implies that future studies of corruption and its impacts on citizens and society should pay careful attention to the administrative sphere, as this seems to have a potentially large influence on how citizens evaluate democracy and form trust judgments. In terms of policy and practice, this finding suggests that anticorruption efforts should not be limited to grand or political corruption, despite the high profile of such cases, and that equal attention and effort should be given to preventing petty or administrative corruption at the street level, where citizens are most likely to have face-to-face encounters with government.

In addition, our study of the Spanish context highlights the importance of institutional designs that act to prevent or promote

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The findings suggest that administrative corruption may be as damaging, if not more so, than political corruption in this regard.

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corruption (Klitgaard 1988). The Spanish case shows how a flawed institutional design, in the form of perverse incentives inherent in the country's urban planning system, promoted corruption that, in turn, seems to have engendered widespread public dissatisfaction and distrust. Because construction booms have been a problem affecting many different countries, including the United States, Ireland, Turkey, Greece, and Montenegro, to name a few, this study calls attention to the potential consequences for a society of such faulty institutional designs that encourage corruption. Alternatively, our results imply that the overemphasis on the role of magistrates in the fight against corruption may have unintended consequences, as the Italian case shows. The press and the judiciary have a complementary role in making citizens aware of corruption, but if more and more corruption cases become visible and nothing changes, the consequence could be, as Vanucci observes for the Italian case, "a deep-rooted pessimism concerning the integrity of political and economic elites and reinforcement of the widespread tolerance of illegal practices" (2009, 258). Because of this risk, institutional designs and procedures that promote accountability and transparency in government, to the extent that they prevent corruption, may help diminish disaffection and promote compliance with laws and social norms. Certainly, future research should examine the effects that specific anticorruption strategies have in terms of reducing perceptions of corruption and, in turn, related political attitudes and social behaviors.

## Note

1. A complete account of the anticorruption amendments in the new law is given in Villoria (2007b).

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