

Experience versus perception of corruption: Russia as a test case

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Corruption is important because it undermines bureaucratic predictability and is a potential threat to support for a political regime. The perception of corruption is the most commonly used measure of the actual incidence of corruption. This article marshals the New Russia Barometer survey data to challenge this assumption. Even though most Russians perceive a variety of everyday public services as corrupt, this assessment is not based on first-hand experience. Only a minority pays bribes. We test four hypotheses about differences in individual perception and experience of paying bribes: the ability to pay, contact with public services, normative acceptability and political awareness. Contact is most important for paying bribes whereas political awareness is most important for the perception of corruption. We also test how much the perception and experience of corruption, as against other forms of political and economic performance, affect support for the regime. Support is driven by the substantive performance of government, especially its management of the economy, rather than by the perception or experience of corruption.

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Political corruption, the misuse of public power for private material gain, is important as an indicator that institutions of governance fall short of the Weberian paradigm of political systems that operate predictably by bureaucrats impersonally applying rules and laws and policy-makers accepting their constraints when making decisions.¹ The cash cost is higher when corruption involves large government purchases, but the number of people affected is much greater when corruption involves health care and education services affecting many millions of citizens. In the former case, the cost of wholesale corruption is indirectly distributed and in small sums to individuals in the population, whereas in the case of 'retail' corruption the payer of the bribe bears the whole burden. In so far as decisions affected by corruption result in the misallocation or waste of public funds or in illegal and criminal activities that are inefficient and costly, then corruption reduces the benefits of economic growth to society as a whole. This is a problem of particular importance in developing countries.²

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2. See, for example, Michael Johnston, *Syndromes of Corruption: Wealth, Power and Democracy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Susan Rose-Ackerman, *Corruption and Government: Causes Consequences and Reform* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999); and Vito Tanzi, 'Corruption Around the World', in *Governance, Corruption and Economic Performance*, ed. G. Abed and S. Gupta (Washington, DC: International Monetary Fund, 2002), 19–58.

In democratic political systems, making decisions on the basis of illegal payments is a 35
 departure from accountability to the electorate. Corruption can breed popular distrust in
 government with consequences for lower participation in politics and support for protest
 parties or, in authoritarian regimes, demonstrations that may even lead to regime change.³
 In societies in which there is widespread awareness of corruption and a belief that every-
 body is doing it, an equilibrium can be arrived at in which public officials and citizens engage 40
 in ‘I-let-you-corrupt-me-and-you-let-me-corrupt-you’ transactions⁴ until an ‘optimal’ level
 of corruption is achieved.⁵ Thus, corruption can maintain a ‘low level equilibrium trap’ that
 becomes ‘the natural result of efficient predatory behaviour in a lawless world’.⁶

In principle the substance of corruption – the exchange of money or tangible benefits for
 identifiable public services – is observable. Therefore, it should be less difficult to collect 45
 empirical evidence of corruption than to measure an abstract concept such as democracy.
 However, because corruption is illegal, participants in corrupt political practices normally
 conceal such activities. Individual cases of corruption offer a starting point for analysis.
 Journalists, lawyers and historians provide thick descriptions of particular cases involving
 the payment of a large sum of money to an individual politician or party to obtain the pas- 50
 sage of legislation, an administrative ruling, a license to exploit natural resources or a
 multi-million dollar contract from the government. If the media obtains evidence of such
 an activity, the prominence of those involved is headline news. Opposition politicians and
 anti-corruption campaigners have an incentive to encourage the belief that the government
 as a whole is corrupt.⁷ Ethnographers can draw on experience of living in a village or 55
 being embedded in street corner activities to produce a thick description of corruption in a
 given community. However, the generalisability of a single example is problematic.

The most commonly used measure is the perception of corruption.⁸ It is assumed that
 perceptions of corruption provide a reliable if not perfectly accurate indicator of the extent to
 which corruption actually exists in a society. Perceptions of corruption can also be treated 60
 as important correlates of political attitudes and behaviour. The Corruption Perception

3. See, for example, Christopher J. Anderson and Y.V. Tverdova, ‘Corruption, Political Allegiances and Attitudes Toward Government in Contemporary Democracies’, *American Journal of Political Science* 47, no. 1 (2003): 91–109 and Mitchell A. Seligson, ‘The Impact of Corruption on Regime Legitimacy: A Comparative Study of Four Latin American Countries’, *Journal of Politics* 64, 2 (2002): 408–33.

4. Elemer Hankiss, ‘Games of Corruption: East Central Europe, 1945–1999’, in *Political Corruption in Transition: A Sceptic’s Handbook*, ed. S. Kotkin and A. Sajo (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2002), 248.

5. Eram Dabla-Norris, ‘A Game Theoretic Analysis of Corruption in Bureaucracies’, in *Governance, Corruption, and Economic Performance*, ed. G. Abed and S. Gupta (Washington, DC: International Monetary Fund, 2002), 111–34.

6. Joel S. Hellman, ‘Winners Take All: The Politics of Partial Reform in Postcommunist Transitions’, *World Politics* 50 (1998): 203–34 and Joshua Charap and Christian Harm, ‘Institutionalized Corruption and the Kleptocratic State’, in *Governance, Corruption, and Economic Performance*, ed. G. Abed and S. Gupta (Washington, DC: International Monetary Fund, 2002), 137.

7. C. McManus-Czubinska, W.L. Miller, R. Markowski, and J. Wasilewski, ‘Why Is Corruption in Poland “A Serious Cause for Concern?”’ *Crime, Law and Social Change* 41 (2004): 107–32.

8. For reviews, see Johann Graf Lambsdorff, *The Institutional Economics of Corruption and Reform* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Daniel Treisman, ‘What Have We Learned about the Causes of Corruption from Ten Years of Cross-National Empirical Research?’, *Annual Review of Political Science* 10 (2007): 211–44; Global Integrity, *A User’s Guide to Measuring Corruption* (New York: United Nations Development Programme, 2008); and Diana Schmidt, ‘Anti-corruption: What Do We Know? Research on Preventing Corruption in the Post-Communist World’, *Political Studies Review* 5, no. 2 (2007): 202–33.

Index (CPI) of Transparency International (TI) is the best-known example. Its purpose is to characterise the political system as a whole and it does so in more than 150 countries worldwide. Its raw data come from a multiplicity of desk-based studies and interviews with elites likely to be in the know about how decisions are made in one or more countries. 65 They are asked to assess the level of corruption in national governments familiar to them, drawing on their own undisclosed experience, what they are told by others whom they know in policy-making circles, and on the government's reputation. The Index converts these assessments into a standard set of metrics to assign a government a single Index rating from 10, least perception to 1, most perception.⁹ Similarly, the World Bank includes an evaluation of transparency, accountability and corruption as part of its international system of governance indicators.¹⁰ 70

Methodologies for scoring countries have attracted a variety of critiques.¹¹ Aggregate indexes do not specify the context in which bribes are paid, whether to secure a big public works contract or a simple local service. It is thus not possible to differentiate perceptual 75 judgements based on a single outstanding case of elite corruption from low-level corruption in the delivery of everyday services to ordinary citizens. There is also a danger of 'echo chamber' effects, as evaluators repeat the conventional wisdom about particular countries, in part reflecting awareness of TI's rating of a country. Such an interpretation is consistent with the strong correlation between different aggregate corruption indexes; these are indicators of reliability but not necessarily of substantive validity. 80

Public opinion surveys can ask about mass perceptions of corruption in government as a whole. In addition, questions can be asked of individuals about their experience of corruption. For example, TI has begun to include a short module of questions about the experience of corruption in a 60-country global survey organised by Gallup International ([http://](http://www.transparency.org/) 85 www.transparency.org/). The surveys, however, do not collect data of social science interest about the consequences of individuals perceiving or experiencing corruption. Although aggregate indexes of perception give the impression that 'everybody is doing it', surveys of individuals find that the percentage of people having experience of bribery is limited to a minority. 90

The use of perceptual measures to analyse corruption can be justified by W.I. Thomas's theorem: 'If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences'.¹² National indexes of the perception of corruption can be related to other holistic characteristics, such as a country's level of democracy, or to growth in its Gross Domestic Product. Such assessments normally find that corruption depresses economic growth and is also negatively correlated with the levels of democracy.¹³ Survey-derived measures of individual 95 perception can be related to individual attitudes towards the political system. If a regime is

9. See http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi/2009.

10. See www.governance.org; Daniel Kaufmann, Aart Kraay, and Massimo Mastruzzi, *Governance Matters VI: Aggregate and Individual Governance Indicators, 1996–2006* (Washington, DC: World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 4280, 2007).

11. See Christine Arndt and Charles Oman, *Uses and Abuses of Governance Indicators* (Paris: OECD Development Centre Studies, 2006) and Stephen Knack, 'Measuring Corruption: A Critique of Indicators in Eastern Europe and Central Asia', *Journal of Public Policy* 27, no. 3 (2007): 255–92.

12. W.I. Thomas, *The Unadjusted Girl* (Boston: Little Brown, 1923).

13. George T. Abed and Sanjeev Gupta, eds., *Governance, Corruption and Economic Performance* (Washington, DC: International Monetary Fund, 2002) and Johann Graf Lambsdorff, *The Institutional Economics of Corruption and Reform* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007): Chapter 5.

widely perceived as corrupt, this may substantially depress trust in political institutions and support for the regime¹⁴ and foster an ‘uncivic’ or exploitative culture among subjects.¹⁵

The object of this article is to test empirically whether mass perceptions of corruption are an accurate proxy for the experience of corruption; whether the causes of perceptions and experience are the same or different and what consequences such attitudes and experience have for support for the political system. It draws on the New Russia Barometer (NRB) survey, which has a full module of questions about the experience as well as the perception of corruption. Russia is a suitable test case for analysis because corruption was integral to the working of Communist political systems and its persistence since then has been persistently denounced by Vladimir Putin with little observable effect. As it is a major emerging market, corruption in Russia is also of major concern to foreign investors and to the World Bank.¹⁶ The TI Index consistently evaluates corruption there as high by both comparative and absolute standards.

Theories of corruption

Although aggregate measures of corruption are limited to testing theories about the systemic causes and consequences of corruption, survey data from individuals make it possible to test attitudinal and behavioural theories about why people living in the same political system differ in their experience and perception of corruption and its consequences.

Why people pay bribes

Hypothesis 1 (Ability to pay). Bribe-paying varies with the ability of individuals to meet the cost of a bribe. Economic theories of crime and corruption adopt a clinical cost–benefit approach.¹⁷ Bribery is deemed acceptable if you get what you pay for. Public services that would be expensive to buy privately, such as a place in a good school or privileged medical treatment, offer profit to providers and cash savings to those who can pay a bribe. An ability to pay predicts that higher income citizens will be more likely to engage in bribery because they can. Alternatively, theories of inequality propose a victimisation hypothesis: those who are poor and uneducated are more likely to be forced to pay bribes because they lack the non-pecuniary resources for obtaining services without bribery.

Hypothesis 2 (Contact). Bribe-paying varies with the extent to which individuals contact public services. An alternative theory is that the likelihood of paying a bribe depends on the need to make use of public services. The more contacts that people have with public services, then *ceteris paribus* the more likely they are to pay a bribe. Contact with services varies with the life cycle; older people do not have children of school age and have little

14. cf. Donatella Della Porta and Yves Meny, eds., *Democracy and Corruption in Europe* (London: Pinter, 1996); Susan J. Pharr and Robert D. Putnam, ed., *Disaffected Democracies: What's Troubling the Trilateral Countries?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 173; and Mitchell A. Seligson, 'The Impact of Corruption on Regime Legitimacy: A Comparative Study of Four Latin American Countries', *Journal of Politics* 64, no. 2 (2002): 408–33.

15. cf. Edward Banfield, *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society* (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1958).

16. For example, Joel S. Hellman, 'Winners Take All: The Politics of Partial Reform in Postcommunist Transitions', *World Politics* 50 (1998): 203–34; Rasma Karklins, *The System Made Me Do It* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2005); and S. Kotkin and A. Sajo, eds., *Political Corruption in Transition: A Sceptic's Handbook*. (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2002).

17. Gary Becker, 'Crime and Punishment: An Economic Approach', *Journal of Political Economy* 76 (1968): 169–217.

contact with educational institutions and officials whereas younger people do not seek medical services as much as their elders. Insofar as contact is also affected by social status, low-income people may experience less corruption by virtue of being excluded from ready access to public services.

Hypothesis 3 (Awareness). The more individuals hear about corruption in public services, the more likely they are to pay bribes. Awareness of bribery need not come from experience. It can be created through conversations and observations within one's community or media reports of cases of corruption nationally. Anti-corruption campaigns heighten awareness of corruption as part of a pressure group strategy to force political leaders to take steps to reduce the level of corruption. However, the first step, raising awareness, may succeed much more than the second, stopping corruption.

Hypothesis 4 (Everybody's doing it). The more individuals perceive paying bribes as normal and legitimate, the more likely they are to pay bribes. Anti-corruption campaigners denounce bribery as normatively wrong. For example, Gambetta¹⁸ describes corruption as the degradation of agents' ethical sense, their lack of moral integrity or even their depravity. However, norms can also refer to operational rules for behaviour. If corruption is considered normal, that is, 'everybody's doing it', then people may decide to go along with prevailing practices and pay a bribe.¹⁹

Why people perceive government as corrupt

Hypothesis 5. The degree to which government is perceived as corrupt reflects experience of the payment of bribes. This hypothesis builds on the foregoing discussion. It postulates that people who make use of public services often pay bribes and therefore will be more likely to perceive government as corrupt. Insofar as paying a bribe is both a necessary and a sufficient condition for perceiving government as corrupt, then measures of perception can be treated as equivalent to evidence of the payment of bribes.

However, experience of government is not necessary to form judgements about political institutions.²⁰ Survey research finds that many people are willing to offer personal assessments about the trust and integrity of many national institutions with which they have little or no contact. Their assessments are second hand based on national television and press or informal discussions with others who act as opinion leaders and establish a consensus within a face-to-face group. Based on the extent to which media reports and opinion-leader attitudes about corruption are themselves second hand, then public assessments may be third or even fourth hand. This is the basis of Hypothesis 3.

Consequences for regime support

Corruption is not only important in itself, but also because of its potential political consequences. When a citizen must pay a bribe to receive a public service, the public official

18. Diego Gambetta, 'Corruption: an Analytical Map', in *Political Corruption in Transition: A Sceptic's Handbook*, ed. S. Kotkin and A. Sajo (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2002), 33–56.

19. Bo Rothstein, 'Social Trust and Honesty in Government: A Causal Mechanisms Approach, in *Creating Social Trust in Post-Socialist Transition*, ed. Janos Kornai, Bo Rothstein, and Susan Rose-Ackerman (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 20–21.

20. William Mishler and Richard Rose, *Seeing Is Not Believing: Measuring Corruption Perceptions and Experiences* (paper presented at Midwest Political Science Association, Annual Meeting, Chicago, April 2–5, 2009).

benefits whereas the citizen not only loses money but also may feel aggrieved at being exploited. When a million-dollar bribe is paid by a private-sector company to public or party officials to secure a multi-million dollar contract from the government, from the participants' perspective this may appear to be a 'win-win' outcome, because the bribe payer gains a contract whereas the public official gains a material benefit. The taxpayer loses, however, and insofar as such cases occur frequently, this may have negative consequences for the public perception of government as a whole. 170

Hypothesis 6. The more individuals perceive government as corrupt or themselves pay bribes, the less likely they are to support the political regime. Political performance is regarded as of central importance for support for a political regime²¹ and the extent to which political institutions deal honestly or corruptly with the public is integral to political performance. In David Easton's²² model of a political system, political support is generated through a continuing interaction between the demands of the public, the response of government and the feedback of this information to citizens. Insofar as people expect government to treat each person fairly, then a higher degree of corruption, however, measured, should reduce support for the political regime. 180

Hypothesis 7. The better a regime's overall economic and political performance, the less effect corruption will have on support for the political system. Theories of political support are multivariate: even if corruption is recognised as contributing to support, it may be only one influence among many. A host of theories predict that support depends on economic performance.²³ Citizens may be more influenced in their political judgements by the payoff from a buoyant economy than by any side payments that government officials receive or that they are required to pay to use public services. For example, this is important in the claim of the People's Republic of China for mass support of a regime that delivers high economic growth and a high level of political corruption. 185 190

There is widespread agreement among theorists that corruption detracts from the quality of democracy.²⁴ Although statistical evidence can often be found that measures of corruption have a negative effect on political support, it may often be offset by other measures of political performance, such as the maintenance of democratic electoral competition, personal freedom and, in some cases, the appeal of political personalities. If a regime is perceived as corrupt but as relatively free and fair, then it may be supported on the grounds that it is a lesser evil than alternative regimes that are undemocratic as well as unfree.²⁵ 195

21. Russell Dalton, *Democratic Challenges, Democratic Choices: The Erosion of Political Support in Advanced Industrial Democracies* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004).

22. David Easton, *A Systems Analysis of Political Life* (New York: John Wiley, 1965).

23. W. van der Brug, C. van der Eljk, and M. Franklin, *The Economy and the Vote* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Raymond Duch and Randolph T. Stevenson, *The Economic Vote: How Political and Economic Institutions Condition Election Results* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

24. See, for example Leonardo Morlino, 'Good' and 'Bad' Democracies: How to Conduct Research into the Quality of Democracy, *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 20, no. 1 (2004): 5–27.

25. See Richard Rose, William Mishler, and Christian Haerpfer, *Democracy and Its Alternatives: Understanding Post-Communist Societies* (Oxford: Polity Press and Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998) and William Mishler and Richard Rose, 'Political Support for Incomplete Democracies: Realist vs. Idealist Theories and Measures', *International Political Science Review* 22, no. 4 (2001): 303–20, with William Mishler.

Measuring the incidence of corruption

Because corruption usually involves exchanges between public officials and citizens or organisations outside government, people can learn from their own experience and direct observation whether public officials are corrupt. Just as crime victimisation surveys can collect data about experiences not recorded by the police, so a nationwide corruption survey is even more likely to uncover evidence than that found in official documents and court records.

A survey turns attention from elite corruption involving large sums of money on a grand scale to petty corruption involving the payment of small sums for the delivery of public services to large numbers of citizens. It also raises questions of the meaning of terms in colloquial language. The academic literature is replete with the classification of concepts by which rules can be 'bent' or 'broken' to get things done. In Russian, the term 'blat' is used to describe the use of connections to get prompt action on a legal request or a favourable ruling on a request that violates the law; the Chinese use a similar term to describe connections, 'guanxi'.²⁶ Favouritism can be shown when public officials give preference to friends or friends of friends in expediting actions without breaking rules. When this is systematically organised, it can become clientelism. Bribery goes further, it involves a public official breaking a rule in exchange for a bribe, that is, cash or some other significant material benefit. It thus differs from 'gratitude' offerings of money or incidentals, such as fresh eggs, flowers or some other gift after a public official has provided a benefit.

The analysis that follows draws on a module of questions about corruption and bribery included in the fifteenth NRB survey fielded on behalf of the Centre for the Study of Public Policy by Russia's oldest not-for-profit survey institute, the Levada Centre (<http://www.levada.ru/>). A nationwide stratified random sample of 1606 adults was interviewed at home between 12 and 23 April 2007.²⁷ Although a single-country survey cannot claim to be globally representative, for four decades Russia was the central reference point for governments of hundreds of millions of people.²⁸ Moreover, the transformation of Communist into post-Communist regimes in the 1990s created many opportunities for corrupt behaviour through the privatisation of state-owned assets.²⁹ Presidents Vladimir Putin and Dmitry Medvedev have frequently spoken of the need to 'do something' about corruption in Russian government. A Google search of the terms Putin and corruption turns up 2,480,000 entries, and a comparable search for Medvedev returns 463,000 entries. The substantial level of corruption perceived in Russia places it closer to the median country on the TI Index. However, this leaves open whether the experience of ordinary Russians matches what is reflected in TI's perception-based aggregate Index.

Public officials widely perceived as corrupt

When the NRB asks the broad question – How widespread do you think bribe-taking and corruption are among public officials? – the result is unambiguous: five-sixths of Russians

26. Mayfair Mei-hui Yang, *Gifts, Favors and Banquets: The Art of Social Relationships in China* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994) and Alena V. Ledeneva, *Russia's Economy of Favours* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

27. For the full text of the questionnaire and the sample report, see Rose, 2007.

28. Rasma Karklins, *The System Made Me Do It* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2005).

29. See Chrystia Freeland, *Sale of the Century: The Inside Story of the Second Russian Revolution* (London: Little Brown, 2000) and Paul Klebnikov, *Godfather of the Kremlin: Boris Berezovsky and the Looting of Russia* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 2000). While carrying out further investigations into corruption in Russian government, Paul Klebnikov was murdered in Moscow in 2004.

perceive most officials as corrupt. The only difference is between the 35% who believe that ‘almost all’ public officials are corrupt and the 51% thinking ‘most’ officials are corrupt. Only 9% say that ‘less than half’ of officials are corrupt and 5% think ‘very few’ lack integrity. These views are consistent with perceptions of specific public officials and institutions. For example, only 20% of NRB respondents trust the police and less than one in eight trust members of parliament or political parties. 240

Generalised perceptions, like the aggregate TI Index, are consistent with ideal-type ‘vending machine’ theories of bureaucratic administration³⁰ that treat all kinds of public services as procedurally uniform. However, such theories fail to take into account the differences between public services that can affect the capacity of public officials to extract bribes. Klitgaard³¹ postulates that corruption is most likely to occur under two conditions: public officials are unaccountable monopoly suppliers and they also have substantial discretion. At high levels of government, contracts for the purchase of military hardware involve few potential suppliers, technical specifications that inhibit transparency and large sums of money. At the street level, police can take decisions without supervision by superiors and a teacher can award a student a good grade without further verification.³² By contrast, there is far less discretion in the computerised calculation of pension payments based on information obtained from a computerised database of social security payments. An important implication is that it is misleading to characterise the whole of government as corrupt, as the extent of corruption is not constant within government. 255

To test the pervasiveness of the perception of corruption, Russians were also asked the extent to which they perceive a variety of public institutions as corrupt. Instead of focusing on national institutions such as the Duma, which are remote from everyday experience or only known through the national media, the NRB survey asked about seven public services found in every community, which respondents are likely to know about from their own experience or that of other members of their family or friends. Most of these services give officials a degree of discretion, including that of professionals whose skills are difficult to challenge, such as doctors or teachers. 260

The extent to which Russians see specific public services as corrupt varies substantially. A total of 89% regard most police as corrupt, and more than three in four see hospitals and doctors as corrupt. Two-thirds or more regard most schools, the military, offices issuing permits and tax inspectors as corrupt. The most bureaucratized service, social security, where the qualification for a pension is based on a birth certificate, employment records and payments routinely entered in the public record, is least likely to be seen as filled with corrupt officials. 270

Actual experience of corruption is limited

Following questions about perceptions, NRB respondents were asked whether in dealing with any of seven public services did they or anyone in their family pay a bribe.³³ In economic terms each is a private good because access could be restricted to those who pay for

30. Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1947).

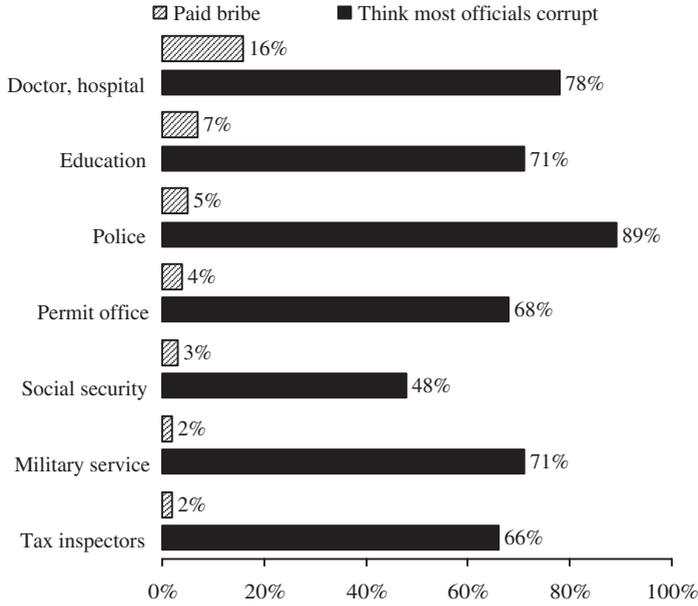
31. Robert E. Klitgaard, *Controlling Corruption* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 75.

32. Michael Lipsky, *Street-Level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services* (New York: Russell Sage, 1980).

33. The Russian word used, *vzyatka*, has similar connotations to the English word for bribe.

Q. To what extent do you see the following institutions as affected by corruption?

Q. In dealing with any of these institutions in the past two years, was it necessary for you or anyone in your household to give a bribe?



[Number of respondents: 1,606.]

Source: Centre for the Study of Public Policy, New Russia Barometer XV, 13–24 April, 2007.

Figure 1. Gap between perception and experience of corruption.

it and those who do not pay could be excluded, even if they have a legal entitlement.³⁴ The 275
time frame was the past 2 years to avoid vague memories or of Communist times, whereas
capturing interactions that might not occur annually, such as contacting the police or a tax
office.

Although big majorities see public services as corrupt, the proportion reporting that their 280
household has recently paid a bribe for a public service ranges from 2% to 16% (Figure 1).
It was lowest for tax inspectors and military service, and almost as low for social security
and for permit offices. Bribery was most often mentioned in two pillars of the welfare
state, education and medical treatment. Even though these services may be nominally free,
nonetheless officials can collect bribes for making them available or for giving better treat-
ment to patients or better marks to pupils. 285

In the absolute sense, the percentage of Russians reporting the payment of a bribe is
very low. In a cross-national context, however, it is not so low. The proportion of people
paying bribes is lower in old member states of the European Union, whereas it is similarly

34. Taxation, encounters with the police and military service may colloquially be described as private 'bads'. As such, people have an even greater incentive to pay a bribe in order not to be subject to such exactions.

high in most post-Communist states of Eastern Europe and even higher in many developing countries in other continents.³⁵

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The gap between perception and experience is greatest for the police: whereas 89% regard most police as corrupt only 5% report anyone in their household paying a bribe in the past 2 years. The gap between perception and experience is not quite as high for education and for health care, but that is because the incidence of paying bribes is higher.

The perception of corruption cannot be treated as a proxy for experience; a big majority of those perceiving corruption do not base their judgement on personal experience of paying bribes. The correlation between a generalised perception of corruption and paying a bribe is surprisingly weak ($r = 0.09$). As far more people perceive government as corrupt than pay a bribe, the consequence is that 75% of Russians who see most officials as corrupt have not had anyone in their family pay a bribe in the past 2 years.

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The gap between perceptions and experience of corruption is a caution against assuming that what people say about government is what they experience in their everyday lives. Moreover, it is consistent with surveys in other continents that have found the experience of corruption far below what perception data imply.³⁶ On a priori grounds, it could be argued that Russian respondents are unwilling to speak openly to an unknown interviewer, but surveys have documented that this is not the case,³⁷ and people who are made to pay bribes have an incentive to complain about this experience. Another explanation is that paying a bribe leaves an impression of generalised corruption that endures for many years after the event. Insofar as this may be true, it would undermine the validity of the perception of corruption as an indicator of current corruption.

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Testing causes of experience and perception

The hypotheses outlined above can, up to a point, be applied to both the experience and perception of corruption. However, the big difference in their incidence implies a need to test the hypotheses separately and this is also consistent with the two measures being set in different theoretical contexts. The NRB collects a multiplicity of indicators suitable for testing each hypothesis (see Appendix for details). However, statistical analysis shows that their salience is not the same for the two dependent variables.

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Paying bribes

Because most households make use of multiple public services, the cumulative reach of corruption is noteworthy. A total of 23% report that someone in their household had paid a

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35. European Commission, *The Attitudes of Europeans towards Corruption* (Brussels: Special Eurobarometer 291, 2008) and Transparency International, *Report on the Transparency International Global Corruption Barometer 2006* (Berlin: Transparency International, 2006).

36. Mitchell A. Seligson, 'The Impact of Corruption on Regime Legitimacy: A Comparative Study of Four Latin American Countries', *Journal of Politics* 64, no. 2 (2002): 418ff.; Mireille Razafindrakoto and François Roubaud, 'How Far Can We Trust Expert Opinions on Corruption? An Experiment Based on Surveys in Francophone Africa', in *Global Corruption Report 2005* (London: Pluto Press, 2005), 292–5; William L. Miller, Ase B. Grodeland and T.Y. Koshechikina, *A Culture of Corruption?* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2001), Tables 4.5, 4.6; Transparency International, *Report on the Transparency International Global Corruption Barometer 2006* (Berlin: Transparency International, 2006); and European Commission, *The Attitudes of Europeans towards Corruption* (Brussels: Special Eurobarometer 291, 2008).

37. Richard Rose, 'Going Public with Private Opinions: Are Post-Communist Citizens Afraid to Say What They Think?', in *Journal of Elections and Public Opinion* 17, no. 2 (2007): 123–42.

Table 1. Influences on paying bribes.

Dependent variable: number of bribes paid 0–7				
Variance accounted for:	1.6%	14.3%	18.7%	21.3%
	Beta	Beta	Beta	Beta
<i>H1: Capacity to pay</i>				
Age	–0.11***	–0.07**	–0.04	–0.04
Education	0.03	0.01	0.00	–0.01
Social status	–0.02	–0.02	0.01	–0.01
Income quartile	0.04	0.05	0.03	0.02
Female	–0.00	0.00	0.00	–0.01
<i>H2: Contact with officials</i>				
Number of contacts	–	0.36***	0.35***	0.35***
<i>H3: Political awareness</i>				
Learn from friends	–	–	–	0.11***
Learn from what I see	–	–	–	0.10***
Learn from media	–	–	–	0.06*
Political interest	–	–	–	0.01
<i>H4: Everybody is (not) doing it</i>				
Bribery acceptable	–	–	0.18***	0.16***
Perception of corruption	–	–	0.10***	0.05*

Number of respondents: 1606.

***Significant at 0.00, **Significant at 0.01, *Significant at 0.05.

Source: Centre for the Study of Public Policy, New Russia Barometer XV, 13–24 April, 2007.

bribe in the past 2 years, including 10% who paid bribes for more than one public service. Thus, our dependent variable is the number of bribes that the respondent's household has paid.³⁸ From the full-length NRB survey, initially we chose more than two dozen indicators of potential influences on paying a bribe. Those that added nothing significant were dropped. The results reported below concentrate on those indicators that significantly influence the likelihood of paying a bribe or else are important because they provide evidence of a lack of support for the above hypotheses. Given the importance of different hypotheses, a series of ordinary least squares regressions were run in which indicators relevant to different hypotheses were added sequentially. 325

Contrary to Hypothesis 1, bribe-paying is not influenced by individual ability to pay or vulnerability to being exploited (Table 1). Income has no significant influence on bribe-paying. Likewise, individuals with less education and lower social status are not especially likely to be victimised by having to pay a bribe for nominally free entitlements. Age is the only social-economic influence that initially appears significant, but this is not sustained when additional hypotheses are tested. Altogether, five socio-economic indicators at most account for only 1.6% of the variance in the payment of bribes. 330 335

To test Hypothesis 2, bribe-paying varies with the use of public services; questions were asked about whether anyone in the respondent's household has had contact with each of seven public services in the past 2 years. Even though the services are locally available, from two-thirds to seven-eighths of Russian households have not had contact with six of 340

38. Since there is a skew distribution in the number of bribes paid, we also ran regression equations which collapsed respondents into three categories, paying a bribe more than once, paying a bribe once, and not paying a bribe. The results are the same as those reported here.

Table 2. Contacts with services and payment of bribes.

Q. In the past two years have you or anyone in your household contacted any of the following public institutions?

Q. (IF answer is yes, there was contact) In dealing with this institution, was it necessary to pay a bribe?

	<i>No contact</i>	<i>Contact</i>	
		No bribe (% all respondents)	Bribe
Doctor, hospital	24	60	16
Police	75	20	5
Education	74	19	7
Permit office	78	19	4
Social security	67	30	3
Army recruiting	84	14	2
Tax inspectors	87	11	2

Note: Number of respondents: 1606.

Source: Centre for the Study of Public Policy, New Russia Barometer XV, 13–24 April 2007.

them (Table 2). The health service is the only public institution with which a majority of Russian households have a regular contact. However, because contacts are cumulative, 84% have been in contact with at least one public service in a 2-year period. Moreover, the median household has used two public services and 10% have contacted as many as five. When all of a household's contacts with public services are taken into account, Russians divide into three groups: 23% have had contacts that included payment of a bribe; 61% have had contact with public officials without paying a bribe and the remaining 16% have not been vulnerable to corruption because they have not had any contact with a public service. 345

Contact with public services does have a major influence on the payment of bribes. After controlling for socio-economic status, the more contacts a household has with public services, the more likely people are to pay a bribe. The effect is strong as well as significant; it boosts the amount of variance accounted for from almost nothing to 14.3% (Table 1). 350

Hypotheses 3 and 4 emphasise awareness of corruption as an important influence on paying bribes, insofar as it encourages people to regard bribery as both normal behaviour and normatively acceptable. To identify how people become aware of the possibility of corruption without experiencing it, the NRB survey asks: There are different ways in which people learn about corruption. To what extent are your views informed by what you learn from the media and television, friends and neighbours, what you see on the street around you and at work? National television and newspapers are by far the most important sources of information: 86% say they learn a lot or something about corruption from these media. Talking with friends and neighbours is considered important by 73%. What people see in the streets around them comes third, 59%, whereas 49% find that work provides information about corruption. When Russians are asked whether corruption is acceptable if it is the only way to get what you want from a public official, more than two-thirds say it is not, whereas 29% adopt the pragmatic view that it is. After controlling for contact with public services, those who view bribery as an acceptable means of working, the system are significantly more likely to pay a bribe. The perception that public services are corrupt has some influence too, but its effect is weaker (Table 1). 360 365

The belief that bribery is acceptable to get things done also has a significant influence on the likelihood of paying bribes. So too does the perception that bribery is widespread. Learning about corruption from friends and what you see yourself has the most influence. Because the media is only marginally significant, this suggests that ‘normalisation’, that is, learning about bribery, is more likely to occur in a local context. Awareness of corruption is not driven by political interest. People with the most interest in politics are no more likely to see their government as corrupt than are those who have no interest in politics. Together, being exposed to information about corruption and regarding it as acceptable as a means to get what one wants raises the variance the regression accounts for to 21.3%.

Perceiving corruption

Paralleling the experience of bribery, the perception of corruption is measured as the mean of individual perceptions of corruption across the seven specific public services (cf. Figure 1). As expected, the mean is high, 3.2, on a four-point scale. However, the standard deviation of 0.58 shows that Russians differ in the extent to which they perceive services as corrupt. An ordinary least squares regression accounts for 16.4% of the variance in perceptions of corruption (Table 3). However, the hypotheses that are most important in explaining this are not the same as those accounting for the experience of corruption.

There is no support for Hypothesis 5; the payment of a bribe has no significant influence on the perception of corruption. Similarly, people who have more frequent contacts with government are not significantly different in their perceptions of corruption. Thus, it is empirically misleading to treat perceived corruption in Russian society as if it were a proxy for the extent of corruption there.

Table 3. Influences on the perception of corruption.

	b	SE	Beta
<i>H1: Capacity to pay</i>			
Age	-0.00	0.00	-0.01
Education	0.00	0.02	0.00
Social status	-0.02	0.01	-0.04
Income quartile	0.02	0.02	0.03
Female	-0.01	0.03	-0.01
<i>H2: Contact with officials</i>			
Number of contacts	0.00	0.01	0.00
Number of bribes paid	0.02	0.02	0.03
<i>H3: Political awareness</i>			
Learn from friends	0.10	0.02	0.16***
Learn from what I see	0.09	0.02	0.15***
Learn from media	0.08	0.02	0.11***
Political interest	-0.02	0.02	-0.03
<i>H4: Everybody's (not) doing it</i>			
Officials act fairly	-0.17	0.02	-0.21***
Bribery acceptable	0.02	0.02	0.03

Note: Dependent variable: perception that seven public services are corrupt; variance accounted for 16.4%; range 4, almost all corrupt to 1, very few. Mean: 3.2; number of respondents: 1606.

**Significant at 0.00 *Significant at 0.01

Source: Centre for the Study of Public Policy, New Russia Barometer XV, 13–24 April, 2007.

Nor is there support for hypothesis 2: contact with public officials does not encourage an increased perception of corruption. Hypothesis 1 is also rejected: none of the five socio-economic indicators has a significant influence on the perception of corruption. People whose income may lead to public officials soliciting bribes on the assumption they can afford to pay them are no more likely to perceive the system as corrupt. Even though educated people ought to be more aware of how the political system works, the most educated Russians do not differ significantly from the least educated in their evaluation of the integrity of government. 395

A bad press and cynical friends and neighbours are more important than bad experiences in shaping popular perceptions of corruption, as Hypothesis 3 predicts. Many Russians are exposed to news of corruption on television and in the press; in conversations with friends and see conspicuous consumption by new-rich Russians as proof-positive of corruption. The more people are made aware of corruption by friends, what is seen in the community, and by the national media, the more they perceive public services to be corrupt. This is true whether or not they have paid a bribe or contacted public services. However, if what people hear about corruption is contradicted by an expectation that, whatever their degree of venality, public officials will treat people like themselves fairly, then Russians are less likely to perceive their political system as corrupt (see Table 3). 400 405

The dissociation of the experience and perception of corruption is confirmed by the regression analyses showing that the biggest influence on paying bribes – contact with public officials – has no statistical influence on the perception of corruption. The chief hypothesis positively supported in both analyses concerns political awareness. More frequent exposure to news about political corruption through multiple sources boosts the belief that most public officials are corrupt; it also has a significant but less dominant influence on the readiness to pay bribes. Beliefs about what everybody is doing are doubly significant: a belief that bribery is normal to get things done influences the readiness to pay bribes, whereas the expectation that public officials will treat one fairly reduces the perception of corruption. 410 415

Consequences for regime support

The fact that perceptions of corruption are not driven by personal experience merits treating this phenomenon as distinct from the actual payment of bribes. Hypothesis 6 summarises the expected consequences for regime support: the perception of corruption is likely to have a negative effect independent of individual experience. However, Hypothesis 7 cautions against a reductionist approach that makes corruption appear all important by calling attention to other features of political and economic performance that can influence the evaluation of government. 420 425

Support for the Russian regime

Although Russians tend to see their regime as corrupt, in itself this is not evidence that they reject its legitimacy. Samuel Huntington³⁹ argues that in badly governed countries corruption can be positively valued as ‘providing immediate, specific and concrete benefits’. In such circumstances, ‘the only thing worse than a society with a rigid, over-centralised dishonest bureaucracy is one with a rigid, over-centralised honest bureaucracy’ that cannot 430

39. Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 64, 69.

be circumvented by paying a bribe. A similar view is summed up in the Russian saying: ‘The law is like a door in the middle of a field. You can go through it if you want, but you don’t have to.’ When an earlier NRB survey asked for an evaluation of the effect of laws, 61% of Russians felt they were hard on ordinary people and 73% endorsed the view that the harshness of Russian laws is softened by their non-enforcement.⁴⁰ Such views imply that a generalised perception of corruption will have no effect on support for the regime or even the perverse hypothesis that such a view will increase toleration for a repressive regime.⁴¹

In the NRB, support for the regime is measured by asking respondents to rate ‘the current political system’, a phrase which avoids the misleading assumption that the regime is democratic simply because it holds multi-candidate elections. Replies are invited on a scale that runs from +100 to –100, thus giving equal weight to positive and negative views. In the April 2007 survey, those positive about the regime greatly outnumbered those negative: 70% were positive, 8% neutral and 22% negative. The standard deviation of 46 shows substantial variation around the mean of +19.

Consistent with Hypothesis 7, our regression model of regime support includes not only measures of perception and experience but also political and economic performance indicators that were found to be significant in earlier research.⁴² These include trust in political institutions, a sense of greater personal freedom than under the Soviet regime, a belief the regime is now democratic and an evaluation of the performance of the economic system (see Appendix for details).

Our multivariate model of regime support shows a very good fit: 39.6% of the variance is accounted for (Table 4). The chief influences on whether Russians support the current regime are five indicators of political and economic performance. Consistent with political economy models of voting, by far the biggest impact on support is how people evaluate the current economy. Oil prices were booming at the time of this NRB survey and 66% of Russians had a positive evaluation of the economy. Net of all other influences, for each additional point on the economy scale, support for the regime went up half a point. Four measures of political performance also have a significant effect on support for the regime. Russians who trust their political institutions and expect officials to treat them fairly are more positive in their view of the regime. The same is true of the big majority who feel much freer now than under the Soviet regime and the minority who consider that the regime is democratic rather than dictatorial.

Contrary to theories of the corroding consequences of corruption, after controlling for political and economic performance, none of the five corruption variables has any significant influence on support for the regime. Behavioural measures, such as the number of bribes paid or the number of contacts with public officials, have no influence. The perception of corruption likewise has no effect nor does the acceptability of bribery. The Huntington argument that corruption is acceptable because it makes government tolerable is not endorsed. Likewise, all the measures of awareness of corruption lack statistical significance.

40. Richard Rose, *Getting Things Done with Social Capital: New Russia Barometer VII*. Studies in Public Policy Number 303 (Glasgow: Centre for the Study of Public Policy, 1998), 48.

41. On this, see Janine R. Wedel, ed., *The Unplanned Society: Poland During and After Communism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992).

42. See Richard Rose, William Mishler, and Neil Munro, *Russia Transformed: Developing Popular Support for a New Regime* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), Chapters 5–8.

Table 4. Corruption has little effect on regime support.

	b	SE	Beta
<i>H6: General perception of corruption</i>			
Number of contacts	-06	07	-02
Number of bribes paid	-17	13	-03
General perception corruption	-10	14	-02
Mean perception, corrupt services	24	20	03
Bribery acceptable	00	12	00
<i>H7: Political performance</i>			
Evaluation current economy	51	02	54**
Trust political institutions	35	10	09**
Officials act fairly	59	16	09**
Feel freer now	38	14	06*
Regime is democratic	16	06	06*
<i>H3: Political awareness</i>			
Learn from friends	27	13	05
Learn from what I see	13	12	03
Learn from media	-15	14	-02
Political interest	24	12	05
<i>H1: Ability to pay</i>			
Age	-00	01	-00
Education	-20	12	-04
Social status	14	09	04
Income quartile	-02	11	-00
Female	31	21	03

Note: Dependent variable: support for political regime; variance accounted for 39.6%; range +10 to -10. Mean: +1.9; number of respondents: 1606.

**Significant at 0.00 *Significant at 0.01

Source: Centre for the Study of Public Policy, New Russia Barometer XV, 13–24 April, 2007.

Implications

The low incidence of reported bribery in Russia challenges the view generalised from aggregate ratings and headline cases of elite corruption that ‘everybody’s doing it’. Nonetheless, it leaves the open question: How do people get things done in countries where activities of government do not conform to strict Weberian rules of procedure? The answer is that the payment of bribes is but one alternative in a relationship between a person who wants a public service and the provider of that service. Instead of paying a bribe, a person can pay to secure a service in the market place, for example, private school. For those who do not have the money, use can be made of connections – friends, friends of friends or a patron in a clientelistic relationship. Begging or pleading to be granted a service as an act of sympathy or charity is another alternative. Relying on the system to work as it ought to do may be sufficient in countries where bureaucratic responsiveness is predictable but in Russia it can be a counsel of despair.

An earlier NRB social capital survey⁴³ explored alternatives to bribery, offering people options of getting services by the book (filling out forms and waiting), by hook

43. Richard Rose, *Getting Things Done with Social Capital: New Russia Barometer VII*. Studies in Public Policy Number 303 (Glasgow: Centre for the Study of Public Policy, 1998).

Table 5. Getting things done by the book, by Hook or by Crook.

Q. What should you do to get prompt admission to a hospital; a government-subsidized flat you were not entitled to; a permit or official document?

	Hospital	Housing	Permit
	(endorsing: more than one answer allowed)		
Use connections	44	24	38
Offer a "tip"	24	25	32
Beg, tell a story, write letter	22	5	27
Buy in the market	20	30	7*
Wait, nothing can be done	17	25	20

*Percent saying do what you want without a permit

Source: Centre for the Study of Public Policy, New Russia Barometer VII, 6 March – 13 April 1998. Number of respondents: 2002.

(e.g. connections) or by crook (paying a 'tip' or bribe). Three services were asked about getting admission to hospital for immediate treatment of a painful disease; securing a subsidised flat without being entitled to do so or getting a permit required by a cumbersome bureaucracy. More than one reply was accepted on the grounds that people who want something that they value will try more than one alternative to get what they want (Table 5). For example, if a lengthy wait makes people impatient, then they can turn to a connection or beg for action from an official. 490

The most frequently invoked strategy is to bend rather than break rules, that is, invoke connections to get speedy and preferential treatment from an official without offering a material benefit. Such behaviour is entirely consistent with the norms of societies in which people depend on a network of contacts in which the reputation for being helpful, rather than having a hand out for money, is important in maintaining ongoing exchanges of assistance and benefits. If a person can afford it and a service is available in the market, then buying it there is an alternative; about one-quarter indicate that they can afford to do so. If money is lacking, then a 'tip' or bribe can get what is wanted at a sub-market price. People who lack both money and connections are likely to beg or plead. The inhibition against openly breaking the law is shown by only 7% saying they would do what they wanted without a necessary permit, by comparison with 32% saying they would 'expedite' a permit by offering a bribe. The proportion of Russians who feel they could only depend on their administrative system was between one in four and one in six. The fact that most Russians chose only one alternative when a second alternative was allowed implies that many have a reliable strategy to get what they want straightaway.⁴⁴ 495

The disjunction between the experience and perception of corruption is not limited to Russia. A Eurobarometer survey of European Union citizens found that 75% perceived corruption as a major problem in their country, but only 7% reported being involved in bribery in the past year.⁴⁵ In the 60 countries covered in the 2006 TI Global Corruption Barometer, an average of 77% perceived most public officials as corrupt, whereas only 9% reported that anyone in their household had paid a bribe in the past year. On every 510

44. For comparative Asian answers, see Takashi Inoguchi, ed., *Human Beliefs and Values in East and Southeast Asia in Transition* (Tokyo: Akashi Shoten, 2009), 305.

45. European Commission, *The Attitudes of Europeans towards Corruption* (Brussels: Special Eurobarometer 291, 2008), 3, 12.

continent, big majorities see government as corrupt although everywhere the gap between perception and experience is large. In the mean Global Barometer country, for every nine persons who perceived government as corrupt, only one reported that their household had recent experience of corruption. The gap is least large in Africa, where the experience as well as the perception of corruption is high. 520

Global evidence of a big gap between the perception and experience of corruption implies the need for an explanatory theory that is general rather than country- or culture-specific.⁴⁶ However, because perceptions of corruption appear high in countries where its incidence tends to be low as well as in countries where it is high, this implies the need to take some contextual characteristics into account. One possible explanation is that perceptions are driven primarily by elite conceptions of how their political system ought to work. In countries where the integrity of public administration is relatively high, any departure from high absolute standards may produce an over-reaction, generalising such behaviour to the whole of the political system. On the contrary, in countries where corruption is relatively frequent, foreign observers from countries with high integrity may interpret this as a characteristic of the national culture. When corruption involves major infrastructure investment and military procurement, areas which do not directly involve ordinary people, elites may project their own corrupt practices onto the mass population to exculpate themselves on the grounds that 'everybody is doing it'. However, this argument is based on elite misperceptions about what their citizens think and do. A survey of elites and the general public in eight African countries found that elites over-estimated by 4 times the mass experience of paying bribes.⁴⁷ Elites also greatly over-estimated the general public's readiness to tolerate bribery. In other words, elites may justify their own corrupt behaviour with arguments inconsistent with the experience and values of the mass of their citizens. 525 530 535

46. See William Mishler and Richard Rose, 'Seeing Is Not Believing: Measuring Corruption Perceptions and Experiences' (paper presented at Midwest Political Science Association, Annual Meeting, Chicago, April 2–5, 2009).

47. Mireille Razafindrakoto and François Roubaud, 'How Far Can We Trust Expert Opinions on Corruption? An Experiment Based on Surveys in Francophone Africa', in *Global Corruption Report 2005* (London: Pluto Press, 2005), Table 26.1.

Appendix Table Variables included in regression analysis

540

	Range		Mean	SD
	Minimum	Maximum		
Mean, services perceived as corrupt	1	4	3.2	0.58
Contacts with public services	0	7	2.2	1.62
Number of bribes	0	6	0.4	0.88
Bribery acceptable	1	4	1.9	0.94
Officials act fairly	1	4	2.5	0.73
Support for political regime	-10	+10	1.6	4.6
<i>Learns about corruption from:</i>				
Media	1	4	3.4	0.75
Friends	1	4	3.0	0.91
What I see	1	4	2.7	0.97
Interest in politics	1	4	2.2	0.91
Age in years	18	89	44	17
Education	1	4	2.7	1.00
Social status	1	7	3.3	1.34
Income quartile	1	4	2.6	1.10
Gender female	0	1	0.57	0.50

General perception of corruption Min = 1; Max = 4. Mean 3.1; SD 0.79. Number of respondents: 1606.

Source: Centre for the Study of Public Policy, New Russia Barometer XV, 13–24 April, 2007.