

# Who will be the 'Principled Principals'? The determinants of active opposition to corruption

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This paper uses survey data from Transparency International's 2013 Global Corruption Barometer to examine what determines people's willingness to act against corruption in 71 countries. Recent literature has suggested that when people perceive corruption as pervasive they will experience 'corruption fatigue' and be less likely to engage in anti-corruption activism. Yet this study finds that people's perception of corruption as a growing problem tends to increase their willingness to take action against it. However, when they also perceive government anti-corruption efforts as effective, this reduces their motivation to get involved.

Donor-supported anti-corruption initiatives increasingly seek to support citizens to demand better control over corruption from their governments. Yet we know very little about what encourages people to actively oppose corruption. Few surveys ask about people's willingness to report a corrupt offense or to participate in a protest against corruption. We have found no other studies that examine this issue using the limited survey data available.

### Methodology

The paper uses data from the 2012-2013 wave of Transparency International's Global Corruption Barometer (GCB) to test two main hypotheses suggested in the recent literature:

- The more a person perceives corruption to be pervasively practiced in society, the less willing they will be to engage in anti-corruption activism (Persson, Rothstein & Teorell, 2013). Two measures are used to test this: respondents' perception of the level of government corruption; and how they think corruption has changed over the last two years.
- The more a person perceives their government's efforts to control corruption as effective, the less willing they will

be to engage in anti-corruption activism (Bauhr, 2012). The measure used to test this is respondents' ratings in response to the question, 'how effective do you think your government's actions are in the fight against corruption?'

The study focuses on nationally representative GCB samples, using data from 71 countries, and from a total of 77,535 respondents. It examines answers to four of the survey questions – whether or not respondents would be willing to:

- Take part in a peaceful protest or demonstration against corruption
- Join an organization that works to reduce corruption as an active member
- Pay more to buy from a company that is clean/corruption free
- Report an incident of corruption.

The study used logit analyses to examine the determinants of respondents' yes or no answers to these questions. Each logit analysis was run across three different samples: the data from 23 OECD countries, from 48 non-OECD countries, and from those 71 countries combined. The study examined four categories of possible determinants of active opposition to corruption: respondents' perceptions of corruption, their experiences of the state, their resources, and country-level contextual factors.

### Key findings

The study finds that people's perceptions of the corruption environment, and how these perceptions interact, significantly affect people's willingness to act against corruption. People's perceptions of corruption becoming more of a problem can increase their willingness to engage in anti-corruption activism. Respondents' perceptions of the level of government corruption do not affect their willingness to engage in anti-corruption activity. However, people across the 71 countries are seven

percent more likely to be willing to report corruption when they believe it has 'increased a lot' over the last two years than when they think it has 'decreased a lot' over the same period.

Yet this source of motivation tends to be hampered when people also view government anti-corruption efforts as effective. Interestingly, **the perception that the government is effective in controlling corruption has different impacts in OECD and non-OECD countries.** When influential, it reduces people's willingness to act against corruption in OECD countries and increases it in non-OECD countries. In the latter, a one-unit increase on the 5-point scale of perceived government effectiveness is associated with seven percent greater odds of being willing to join an anti-corruption organisation, and thirteen percent greater odds of being willing to report corruption.

In non-OECD countries where corruption is more likely to be systemic, perhaps respondents are prone to think that their own involvement is needed to combat corruption; when confidence in the government's efforts are high, they are more likely to believe that it is worthwhile joining the fight. In the OECD setting, on the other hand, as Bauhr (2012) argued, perhaps effective governments are thought to be able to handle corruption on their own.

In examining other categories of potential determinants of anti-corruption activism, the study also found that:

- Younger people, males, and people who come into contact with the state frequently tend to be more willing to actively oppose corruption
- While greater participation in bribery reduces people's willingness to report corrupt exchanges, it does not affect their willingness to engage in the other forms of anti-corruption activism analysed
- Respondents in societies that give greater value to gender equality and the rights of individuals and minorities—societies where women are more fully integrated in the formal workforce—are more likely to see themselves as potential anti-corruption activists
- Yet a country's level of democracy—as measured by the Freedom House Index—has no estimated impact on people's willingness to actively oppose corruption.

## Conclusions and implications for future research

The results suggest that a shift of focus might make anti-corruption campaigns more effective. Instead of highlighting government successes in identifying or prosecuting cases of corruption, should publicity focus more on corruption as an increasing problem in society? More research is needed to answer this question.

The initial evidence presented here indicates that while perceptions of the corruption environment matter, their effects on activism are not sequential. Future research could investigate how different factors shape people's perceptions of corruption. What role does the media play, for example? How, if at all, do anti-corruption campaigns shape perceptions of how pervasive corruption is? Do they inspire activism, or discourage it?

Further, the data used in this study only enable analysis of what citizens say they are *willing* to do. It is important to examine the perceptions, motivations and behaviour of those people actually participating in anti-corruption activism. How, for example, do active grassroots anti-corruption coalitions form and evolve?

If civic action is important in reducing corruption, we need to consider not only how people perceive their corruption environment, but how those perceptions are shaped, and what role anti-corruption programmes play in shaping them.

See the full paper at: <http://publications.dlprog.org/Anticorruption.pdf>

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