

# Experts and Questions: Exploring Perceptions of Corruption<sup>1</sup>

ANETA PINKOVÁ AND JAKUB JUSKO



Politics in Central Europe (ISSN: 1801-3422)

Vol. 17, No. 2

DOI: 10.2478/pce-2021-0014

**Abstract:** *This article is a contribution to the 'know your data' approach to the issue of measuring corruption, in two specific areas: the impact of the way questions are formulated on the results of surveys on corruption perception; and the potential pitfalls of using businesspeople as expert respondents in surveys measuring corruption. The article first presents and analyses the sources of two most frequently used indicators to measure corruption perceptions – the Corruption Perception Index and the Control of Corruption, one of the Worldwide Governance Indicators. Based on this analysis, hypotheses are posed on how the formulation of the questions will influence the outcomes of surveys, and what differences there will be between studies conducted on the general public and businesspeople. These are tested using data obtained from two original survey experiments conducted concurrently, one on a representative sample of the public and another on businesspeople.*

**Keywords:** *Measuring Corruption Perceptions; Bribery; Corruption; Experts; Survey Experiment*

## Introduction

Political corruption is a topic that has long resonated in society, politics and academia – indeed, its resonance may be permanent. At the same time, it ranks among the social phenomena that we will probably never be able to measure satisfactorily. Corruption is largely a contextual, culturally conditioned phenom-

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<sup>1</sup> This article was written at Masaryk University with the support of the Specific University Research Grant provided by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Czech Republic and the Czech Science Foundation (GA18-16928S).

enon, and is usually clandestine. The question, then, is not just how to measure corruption, but what exactly are we to measure? As Alina Mungui-Pippidi (2015: 27) puts it: *'How can an insidious phenomenon, where academics only agree that the boundaries inherent to any definition are culturally and historically specific, be measured in a valid, precise, and reliable way so as to allow comparisons across space and time, leading to the elaboration of a comprehensive theory?'*

Despite, or perhaps because of, this, we have at our disposal an extensive toolkit that directly or indirectly measures corruption. Unlike the 1990s, when the question of corruption and subsequently also of its measurement became of political and scholarly interest, today we can no longer refer to a lack of surveys, indices or indicators concerned precisely with this issue.

The easier availability of instruments for measuring corruption also increases the risk of their incorrect use. More than any time before, it is essential today to know our data, that is, to understand what exactly it is that the available instruments are measuring, and what their limits and possible biases are.

This issue seems to be especially relevant in post-communist countries, including those in Central Europe. Economic and social transformation provided ample opportunities for corruption, including (at least seemingly) brand new forms of corruption not generally known in communist societies, economies and political system, such as collusion cartels. Simultaneously, the newfound freedom of the press in many formerly communist countries exacerbated perceptions that corruption is growing or has grown with the regime's change (see Karklins 2005, Naxera 2015, Pinková 2016). In recent years, the rise of protest and populist parties with their anti-corruption appeals (and frequent corruption scandals) added another layer of complications for those trying to measure corruption levels in post-communist countries. The relationship between post-communism and (perceptions of) corruption has been explored in depth from many angles (see, e.g. Holmes 2003, 2006, Karklins 2002, Krastev 2004, Naxera 2012, Obydenkova – Libman 2014). Yet relatively few works focus on the specifics of measuring corruption in the region (for exceptions, see, e.g. Knack 2006 or Naxera 2015). Apart from the general contribution to the 'know your data' approach in corruption research, we hope that our study, conducted in the Czech Republic, will also help to move forward on this path. Even if we are not concerned with our case's specifics compared to other countries, we hope that our data could serve for such purpose in the future.

In this paper, we focus on two specific issues: the use of experts – especially businesspeople – as respondents to corruption-measuring surveys, and the formulation of survey questions. Both are particularly relevant to instruments for measuring the perceptions of corruption, including the two most commonly used ones, Transparency

International's Corruption Perception Index (CPI) and the World Bank's Control of Corruption (CC), part of its Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI).

Beyond a discussion of both issues based on available literature and sources, we present the results of two original survey experiments, one conducted on a representative sample of general population, the second on businesspeople. We compare the perceptions of businesspeople and public and for both groups compare the answers to variously formulated questions. The results of the two surveys and their mutual comparison yields new information about how the formulation of the questions influences the results of corruption perception measurements, the differences in perception between the general population and businesspeople, and businesspeople's expertise as concerned with corruption.

## Indices, Indicators, Surveys...

Social sciences, economics, business, the public sphere and indeed the general public have today at their disposal a range of indicators that measure various social phenomena. These indicators are popular for their apparent simplicity and the possibility of comparing across time and space. Although these advantages often counterbalance (or overshadow) the disadvantages of single-number indicators, their limits are well described in current literature (for an overview, see, e.g. Engle Merry et al. 2015; Arndt – Oman 2006). These are particularly evident with complex yet vague phenomena such as corruption.

The notion of corruption itself can be considered as *'too broad and vague to measure meaningfully via one number'* (Zaman – Rahim 2008: 5). Likewise, the evaluation of a whole country by a single number represents a major simplification, because the level of corruption can vary significantly across the regions and sectors of the economy (Heywood 2018a). There is also the rather obvious problem that those involved in corruption are typically interested in concealing their actions. Despite these notorious problems with measuring corruption, there is certainly no shortage of efforts to evaluate or even to quantify the phenomenon. Today there are dozens of tools (indicators, reports and statistics) that measure corruption or that can be used as proxy indicators for measuring corruption indirectly, such as measures of transparency, the rule of law, etc.<sup>2</sup>

Over the past years, a classification of corruption-measuring tools into several generations has become established in the literature (e.g. Heinrich – Hodess 2011; Johnston 2000; Chabova 2016). The first generation includes (mostly composite or aggregated) tools focused on corruption perception, such as CPI and CC WGI, mentioned above. The second generation consists of indicators based on respondent experience, of which the best known are Transparency International's Global Corruption Barometer (GCB) and the International Crime Victim Surveys. The third generation includes the so-called disaggregated

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<sup>2</sup> A (no doubt incomplete) list of tools measuring corruption is available online on <http://polit.fss.muni.cz/pinkova-ciirml/>.

indicators (Heinrich – Hodess 2011: 22), which aim to evaluate the quality of anti-corruption tools or the anti-corruption environment.

Many authors argue that the first generation of indicators is outdated (Heinrich – Hodess 2011) or misleading (Kurtz – Shrank 2007; Razafindrakoto – Raubaud 2006). An evident and perhaps the most often mentioned problem is the very choice of corruption perception as a proxy indicator for the real level of corruption in the given area (typically a country). As Rose (2018a: 172) points out, there is nothing intrinsically wrong about a perception-based evaluation of corruption, as *'citizens of a country have directly lived experiences of the level of corruption in their own country'*. A problem arises, however, when the country's main issue is not street-level corruption, but, for example, state capture or corruption in public procurement. In such a case, we can assume that most respondents form their notion of the level of corruption based not on their personal experience, but the information they have at their disposal: rumours; what has been made available by judicial and police authorities; and from the media coverage of corruption broadly.

Although gossip can be an essential tool for creating social capital, it does not provide an ideal basis for creating indices that are later taken to be precise. Only uncovered cases of corruption, meanwhile, make it to trial; judicial statistics, therefore, do not tell us much about the level of corruption or the effectiveness of its prosecution, because we do not know how many cases of corruption go undetected. In some countries, official statistics could also suffer from the fact that they are controlled by the authorities (Miller et al. 2001). The role of the media is perhaps the most problematic. They certainly have essential influence over how corruption is perceived (an interesting view of this issue as it relates to CPI is given in e.g. Brown et al. 2010; for the media influence over individual perception formation, see e.g. Rizzica – Tonello 2016). The manner and frequency of presentation of corruption in the media, the actual level of corruption and the perception of corruption levels are intertwined and confront us with the Gordian knot of causality.

It is not only the choice of topics and selection of cases reported in the media that influences readers' perceptions of corruption. Perhaps even more importantly, when journalists use abstract concepts such as corruption, they co-construct their meaning for the mass audience (Bratu – Kažoka, 2018). Unfortunately, journalists are unlikely to convey a nuanced understanding of the many forms corruption can take<sup>3</sup>, given that even academic research habitually fails to differentiate between different forms of corruption (Heywood, 2017). It is, however, necessary to bear in mind that the media influence not only per-

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3 Indeed, in their research on the use of corruption metaphors in seven European countries, Bratu and Kažoka found out that in most corruption-related newspaper articles, corruption was treated as a 'free-floating abstract entity whose meaning was self-evident' (Bratu – Kažoka 2018: 65), without any elaboration on what the concept of corruption means or could mean.

ceptions of corruption levels but also the way we (often no doubt intuitively) interpret the concept itself.

Beyond available information, the perception of corruption is or may be influenced by a range of other factors, the study of which is so far relatively undeveloped (Zaman – Rahim 2008). These may include education, partisanship and relationship with the government party, ideology or socioeconomic status (Maeda – Ziegfeld 2015; Melgar et al. 2010; Rose 2018b).<sup>4</sup>

In addition to the issue of using perceptions, first-generation indicators suffer from many other limitations, which have been widely investigated in the literature (for a detailed discussion see e.g. Heywood 2018a; Chabova 2016; Lambsdorff 2006), often specifically in the context of CPI and CC WGI, the best-known and influential instances of such indicators. The major points of criticism, of which some are concerned with perception surveys in general and some with CPI and CC WGI in particular, can be summarised as follows:<sup>5</sup>

- a) **The perception problem.** As noted above, perceptions are not objective. Among other things, the perceptions of corruption in a country may be influenced by the indicators themselves, especially CPI, which has been given widespread media attention (see e.g. Akech 2015). This ‘problem of perception’ is often compounded by the often-incorrect ways in which perception-based indicators are used. This is true not just of political and media debates, as we might assume, but also of academia, where they are often used as indicators of the level of corruption without an explicit avowal that a proxy indicator is used, and often without noting the limitations of the approach.<sup>6</sup>
- b) **The construct validity problem.** Lack of conceptual precision is typical of measuring corruption (Arndt – Oman 2006; Andersson – Heywood 2009, Heywood 2017). Questions about perceptions are usually formulated more vaguely than questions on experience.<sup>7</sup> Thus, if a sufficiently clear defini-

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4 Most of these factors may also influence individual experience of corruption.

5 Literature also contains many other interesting findings, such that indicators based on perception tend to reflect absolute, not relative number of corruption cases, and that this disadvantages large countries (Donchev – Ujhelyi 2014).

6 A search for the term ‘Corruption Perception Index’ on the Web of Science’s Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI) database ([http://apps.webofknowledge.com/WOS\\_GeneralSearch\\_input.do?product=WOS&search\\_mode=GeneralSearch&SID=C3dcHEBvmyBo1niKjUP&preferencesSaved=](http://apps.webofknowledge.com/WOS_GeneralSearch_input.do?product=WOS&search_mode=GeneralSearch&SID=C3dcHEBvmyBo1niKjUP&preferencesSaved=)), limited to two publication years (2017 and 2018) produces 36 results. Of these 36 articles, 11 used CPI as a proxy indicator for the actual level of corruption, and only in one case did the article contain at least a brief discussion of the limitations of this approach. In three cases, CPI itself was even used as an independent variable, without a detailed explanation given. Only one article used CPI as an indicator of corruption perception, that is, the variable observed was the manner in which corruption is perceived. Eight articles focused directly on the issues of measuring corruption, seven used CPI as a proxy for another phenomenon (e.g. governance, transparency, control of corruption). In the remaining cases, CPI was simply mentioned, or the combination of search words appeared randomly in the text.

7 For instance, the GCB survey contains the following two questions. Perception: ‘In your opinion, over the past year, has the level of corruption in this country increased, decreased, or stayed the same?’

tion of corruption is not included in the survey, it is not evident what the respondents consider as corruption (Heywood 2018b). A frequent, but, as we shall see below, no longer entirely justified, critique of CPI and CC WGI is that though both indicators claim to measure corruption, their sources are primarily focused on bribery (Andersson – Heywood 2009, Heywood – Rose 2014).

- c) **The reliability problem.** Changeable and complicated methodologies of composite indicators such as CPI and CC WGI, different sources used in the countries examined, and a lack of publicly available information about some source surveys decrease the reliability and transparency of both indicators (Heywood 2018b, Treisman 2007, Hawken – Munck 2009).
- d) **The interpretation problem.** Some aspects of CPI and CC WGI are conducive to incorrect interpretation. In the media as well as in academia, one encounters interpretations of perception as an objective indicator of the level of corruption (see footnote 4 above); the interpretation of composite indicators according to their publication date, not the time when the initial data were collected; and interpretations of relative changes in countries' ranking as changes in the absolute values of corruption perception. In the case of CPI, the problematic presentations may be facilitated by the 0–100 scale that is used, as it misleadingly creates the impression of high precision (Andersson – Heywood 2009). Specific risk is posed by the fact that most sources are based on expert surveys or evaluations, and as such cannot be interpreted as corruption perception by the population.
- e) **The subjective scales problem.** Respondents typically evaluate the level of corruption on subjective scales. What is a low measure of corruption for one, might be high for another; furthermore, with some questions it is unclear whether respondents are evaluating the number of corruption cases, their importance, the extent of the damage created, or something else (Heywood 2018b, Andersson – Heywood 2009, Knack 2006).
- f) **The external validity problem.** Perception-based surveys often work with samples of convenience (businesspeople and experts), or even an established network of experts or collaborators. The willingness to cooperate (whether over the long term or simply by filling in a questionnaire) might be correlated with factors that are also related to the perception of corruption itself (for example, the position towards the non-profit sector, whose organisations often conduct the surveys, or interest in politics).

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Experience: "In the past 12 months have you had contact with a government official?" Followed by: "And how often, if ever, did you have to pay a bribe, give a gift, or do a favour for a government official in order to get the document you needed?" (Transparency International 2020).

Despite all these problems, the first-generation tools, especially CPI and CC WGI, remain the best-known and most used methods of measuring corruption (Mungui-Pippidi 2015), mainly because the alternatives suffer from substantial limitations themselves. Second-generation tools, such as the Global Corruption Barometer (GCB), focused on respondent experience, primarily reflect street-level bribery, which an ordinary citizen/respondent is most likely to encounter. Where respondents are businesspeople or public officials who are more likely to be actively involved in corruption networks, we can assume that they might be less willing to admit it (or even take part in the survey at all). Surveys focused on experience generally find it difficult to capture other forms of corruption than bribery. Furthermore, some of the limitations typically linked with first-generation tools apply to the second generation too.<sup>8</sup> Above all, there is the construct validity problem, where most surveys focused on the experience of corruption in reality measure the experience of bribery.

Third-generation tools do not observe the incidence of corruption or its perceptions but evaluate the quality of the anti-corruption environment. This effort is qualitative, mostly taking the form of reports or verbal evaluations, or focused on specific aspects of preventing and suppressing corruption, for example, the level of transparency. Using third-generation tools as proxy indicators for the level of corruption is equally, if not more disputable than the use of perception-based indices because with the third-generation tools the relationship with the level of corruption is ambiguous. Specifically, in cases of countries undergoing a top-down reform, typically performed under pressure from the international community (e.g. Moldova), some third-generation indicators could lead to overestimates of the success rate in combatting corruption.

Irrespective of the problems linked with CPI and CC WGI, their strong suit is that they are published by renowned institutions; they have long-term global coverage; and they quantify corruption, albeit problematically. Despite significant criticism, these indicators have become the '*norm in the field... [it is] due mainly to three mutually reinforcing reasons: validation by correlation, validation through impact and legitimacy through use*' (Razafindrakoto – Roubaud 2006: 6).<sup>9</sup> It would be unrealistic to assume that second- and third-generation tools could supplant CPI and CC WGI (and other first-generation tools) in the near future. Rather than rejecting them entirely, it seems appropriate to make an effort to understand them better (see also

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8 In the case of CPI, it is often and mostly in vain pointed out (even by the CPI team themselves) that it should not be used for time series research (Heywood and Rose 2014). The same is, however, true for most of GCB, due to changes in country coverage, changes in how the questions are formulated and high non-response rates (Mungui-Pippidi 2015).

9 The correlation argument is problematic when made about the sources of indices such as CPI and CC WGI, given that they are largely based on the same sources (see e.g. Chabova 2016; Razafindrakoto – Roubaud 2006; Andersson – Heywood 2009).

UNDP 2008; Heywood 2018a; Razafindrakoto – Roubaud 2006), which is what we hope to accomplish here.

CPI and CC WGI are well known today, but Table 1 provides more detailed information about their sources.<sup>10</sup> Given that in a subsequent section of the paper we present the results of a survey experiment conducted in the Czech Republic, here too we present the sources used by both indicators for the countries of Central Europe as of 2018.<sup>11</sup> For this region CPI was based on ten sources, CC WGI on 14 sources; they shared nine sources. For each source we indicate whether it measured perception (P) or experience (E), whether the respondents were experts (e) or the public (p) and who the experts were. The category of experts' perceptions (P/e) includes both traditional expert surveys and evaluations by, for instance, in-house experts, which we ultimately also consider as perceptions.

The columns of the table classify the survey questions according to what exactly they were about. The category 'specifically bribery' includes questions focused directly on the giving or taking of bribes, which may be described in various ways (bribes, favours, unofficial payments, etc.). The category 'tends to bribery' includes cases where the respondents are asked about unspecified corruption, but the question follows one concerned with bribery.<sup>12</sup> We assume that if the respondents were not presented with a definition of corruption and they recently answered a question about bribery, they will tend to take corruption and bribery as synonyms. The categories 'any corruption' and 'public sector corruption' include questions about corruption which were preceded by a definition of corruption, or explanation and examples of what respondents should consider corrupt acts. If the definition of corruption or the formulation of the questions themselves is aimed at public officials, these are included under 'public sector corruption'; if not, under 'any corruption'. The penultimate category includes questions about corruption where no definition, examples or context are given as guidance as to how to understand corruption. The last category includes third-generation tools, i.e. evaluations of the quality of anti-corruption measures.

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10 Basic information is available from Transparency International (2018a) and World Bank Group (2019a).

11 The following CC WGI sources are, therefore, not included: African Development Bank Country Policy and Institutional Assessments (ABD), Afrobarometer (AFR), Asian Development Bank Country Policy and Institutional Assessments (ASD), Freedom House Countries at the Crossroads (CCR), IFAD Rural Sector Performance Assessments (IFD), Latinobarometro (LBO), World Bank Country Policy and Institutional Assessments (PIA), Political Economic Risk Consultancy Corruption in Asia Survey (PRC) and Vanderbilt University Americas Barometer (VAB).

12 The Institutional Profiles Database is an exception to this: the respondents are asked about corruption involving two types of actor (e.g. administrations and local businesses). This procedure primes respondents for an understanding of corruption as bribery, because other forms of corruption do not require the participation of two actors.



**Table 1: WGI CC 2018 and PCI 2018 Sources (Relevant for Central Europe)**

Data source	Used for	What is measured:					
		Specifically bribery	Tends to bribery	Any corruption	Public sector corruption	Corruption (no definition, clarification or context)	Quality of anti-corruption measures
<b>Bertelsmann Stiftung Sustainable Governance Indicators 2017 (SGI)</b>	CPI	P/e					
		<i>Experts: Local and foreign academics (+ qualitative sources)</i>					
<b>Bertelsmann Stiftung Transformation Index (BTI)</b>	CPI WGI				P/e		
		<i>Experts: Local and foreign academics</i>					
<b>Business Enterprise Environment Survey (BPS)</b>	WGI	E/e + P/p	P/e				
		<i>Experts: Business owners and top managers, companies with 5 or more employees</i>					
<b>Economist Intelligence Unit Country Risk Service (EIU)</b>	CPI WGI	P/e			P/e		
		<i>Experts: In-house analysts</i>					
<b>Freedom House Nations in Transit (FRH NT)</b>	CPI WGI				P/e		
		<i>Experts: Independent researches from academia, journalism, and civil society</i>					
<b>Global Corruption Barometer Survey (GCB)</b>	WGI	E/p				P/p	
		<i>Public: Household survey</i>					
<b>Global Competitiveness Report (GCS) / Executive Opinion Survey (WEF)</b>	CPI WGI	P/e	P/e				
		<i>Experts: Business of various sizes</i>					

Notes: P/e = PERCEPTIONS of experts, P/p = public PERCEPTIONS, E/e = EXPERIENCE of experts, E/p = EXPERIENCE of public.

Source: Authors.

## What are the questions?

One of the critical questions concerned with indicators and surveys of corruption (or indeed any other phenomenon) is whether they genuinely measure what they ought to. In the case of corruption, the situation is made more complicated by the fact that corruption-measuring instruments are often presented in scholarly literature without indicating the definition of corruption on which the sources are based (see footnote 4 above), and some sources do not indicate this information themselves (see Table 1). The last-mentioned problem does not concern CPI or CC WGI, however. The CPI team define corruption generally as the *'abuse of entrusted power for private gain'* (Transparency International 2018b); however, CPI is presented as a measure of how corrupt public sectors seem to be (Transparency International 2018a). From this, we infer that for the purposes of CPI, corruption is understood as the *'abuse of public power for private gain'*. For WGI, the World Bank understands corruption as *'the extent to which public power is exercised for private gain, including both petty and grand forms of corruption, as well as "capture" of the state by elites and private interests'* (World Bank Group 2019b).

Though the World Bank's definition is the more detailed one, in essence, it understands corruption in the same way as Transparency International. The part about the capture of the state by private interests may be an exception to this, as that does not necessarily fall under the heading of the abuse of entrusted power. But because even state capture by private interests requires the cooperation of elected or appointed state officials, who do thereby abuse the power entrusted to them, we do not consider this a fundamental difference.

The understanding of corruption among CPI and CC WGI sources varies, yet in none of the cases observed is the understanding of corruption outright contradictory to the definitions based on which Transparency International and World Bank proceed. In the past, CPI and, to a lesser extent, CC WGI were frequently criticised for focusing too much on bribery (Heywood 2016). Table 1 shows that questions directly concerned with bribery or formulated in a way that focuses respondents' attention on bribery, are lacking in only two of the sources observed. Furthermore, four sources have solely questions of this type.

For that reason, we believe it is useful to ascertain how respondents' answers differ if they are asked about corruption and bribery respectively. In the academic world, bribery is generally considered one of many forms of corruption but in some languages (including Czech) the two words can be used as synonyms in an ordinary debate. Our survey experiment verifies multiple hypotheses that will allow us to ascertain whether respondents distinguish between these two terms.

*H1: The bribery level will be assessed as lower than the corruption level.*

We proceed on the assumption that respondents are aware of the difference between bribery as a narrower concept and corruption as a concept that includes bribery and other phenomena.

*H2: When a definition of corruption is given, the corruption level will be assessed as higher.*

In languages where the terms ‘bribery’ and ‘corruption’ are commonly used as synonyms, respondents may see corruption as bribery. The citing of a *corruption definition* therefore draws respondents’ attention to the fact that corruption entails a broader range of phenomena, and this should lead to increased perceptions of corruption, compared to the question variant where corruption is undefined.

*H3: When, in addition to a definition, examples of corruption are given, the corruption level will be assessed as the highest.*

We proceed from the assumption that providing examples will give the respondents a concrete idea of the forms corruption may take. Some of these phenomena, such as nepotism, cronyism and embezzlement, might not fit with their ordinary notion of what corruption is; the inclusion of the examples therefore should increase the gamut of phenomena that respondents assess as corruption.

## **Who are the experts?**

A substantial part of the sources used to measure corruption are expert surveys. Experts are expected to have more information, more in-depth understanding and broader familiarity with the subject. At first glance, they seem an ideal source of information about many complicated social phenomena, including political corruption. Yet the use of experts also entails certain risks. Compared to the general population, for example, they are more likely to influence each other (Knack 2006; Razafindrakoto – Roubaud 2006) and they are more likely to be aware of and influenced by the evaluated country’s previous scores and ratings (Lambsdorff 2005 as quoted in Andersson – Heywood 2009). This problem can be particularly serious with indices which have long collaborated with a small group of experts, or where the experts are in-house analysts. Moreover, we cannot know if seemingly independent sources did not use the same experts and the problem of selection bias is likely to be greater than in population-based surveys (Razafindrakoto – Roubaud 2006). Usually, we have very little information about how these samples of convenience are constructed (for example, the response rate when experts are approached) and what the criteria are for choosing the experts, for example, from among academics.

In general, we can encounter four types of experts in corruption research: academics, NGO and IGO staffers, government officials and businesspeople. The last, or more precisely their perception of levels of corruption, represent a relatively important source (six of the 15 sources of CPI in 2018 relied partially or exclusively on businesspeople as a source of information).

The presentation of businesspeople as experts on corruption can be problematic, especially in a situation where the respondents are chosen from firms of various sizes, including so-called micro-firms with fewer than nine employees (e.g. UNODC 2018) or even smaller businesses (e.g. Business Enterprise Environment Survey). Businesspeople might have more experience with (potentially) corrupt situations than randomly chosen respondents from the general population because they come into contact with officials more often. Larger businesses are more likely to bid for public contracts or find themselves in other situations where corruption might arise. But in most cases, this advantage as compared to the general population is nevertheless limited to the sector in which the businessperson operates. The assumption that businesspeople are better informed about the corruption rate in other fields of government, society or the economy is not sufficiently justified, theoretically or empirically.

Likewise, it remains unproven that businesspeople have a better-than-average understanding of the phenomenon of corruption (for example, what can be considered forms of political corruption) or that they are less influenced by media reflection of corruption, or moods in the population. Foreign businesspeople operating in the country under study might also not be able to notice some of the more subtle or sophisticated forms of corruption apart from bribery (Erlingsson – Kristinsson 2016).

Comparison of our two survey experiments should produce insights into this alleged expertise of businesspeople. Because experts (by definition) should have a greater understanding of the subject, they should be more aware of the various forms corruption can take, and how questions are formulated should, therefore, have a more significant impact on them. In our survey, we verified whether this was true of Czech businesspeople. We have formulated the following hypothesis.

*H4: The difference in assessments of corruption and bribery levels will be higher among businesspeople than among the general population.*

If experts-businesspeople have a deeper understanding of corruption issues, then the experimental effect should be greater among businesspeople than in the population-based experiment.

Irrespective of whether businesspeople are or are not experts on corruption issues, surveys among them form an essential part of corruption-measuring tools. We are also interested in whether, and if so how, their perceptions of cor-

ruption differ from those of other groups in society, or the general population. There is partial evidence that some social groups show systematic bias in relation to corruption perception (for more detail, see Maeda – Ziegfeld 2015) and that ‘some evaluators are stricter than others in their criteria’ (Heywood – Rose 2014). But there is not – at least to our knowledge – systematic information available about the possible bias of businesspeople.<sup>13</sup> It is well known that there are significant discrepancies between expert perceptions and popular experience (Heywood – Rose 2014; Treisman 2007), but the explanatory value of this finding is comparatively low. It might be due to the bias of experts or the population (or both); or it might as well reflect the fact that many forms of corruption (and often it is the most serious ones) do not touch citizens directly, who therefore have no personal experience with them. Although phenomena such as state capture or corrupt major public contracts can have massive repercussions for governance and the economy, very few citizens will have a direct experience of them. The questions in experience-focused surveys, furthermore, often fail to grasp this type of corruption for the simple reason that they primarily ask about bribery.

From this point of view, studies that focus on the relationship between expert and public perceptions, often by comparing results of CPI and GCB and similar household surveys (e.g. Lin – Yu 2014; Yu 2016; Chabova 2016), are more interesting. There is a problem, though: as a rule, authors typically compare the CPI, which is a composite index with various types of sources (including a household survey with questions on experience) with a single survey, such as GCB. A comparison of two survey experiments conducted concurrently using the same formulation of questions should, therefore, have a substantially higher explanatory value. The last hypothesis that we will be verifying is the following:

*H5: Businesspeople and the general public perceive the corruption level differently.*

## **Our data**

In this paper, we work with two original survey experiments, conducted concurrently in June 2019 in the Czech language. The first was an online survey conducted on a representative selective sample of the Czech population, carried out by an established agency<sup>14</sup> based on a survey prepared for this study (n = 1002, criteria including gender, age, education, municipality size and region). Each of the 1002 respondents was randomly assigned to one of the four conditions. In every condition, two questions were asked concerned with politicians and

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<sup>13</sup> Erlingsson and Kristinsson (2016), for example, conducted and compared three parallel surveys focused on the public, experts and local councillors. However, in their study, the experts were not businesspeople, but members of the Public Administration Association in Iceland.

<sup>14</sup> Focus Marketing & Social Research Agency (<https://www.focus-agency.cz/>).

public servants, that is, the key actors in public sector corruption. Questions used in those conditions use different formulations, based on the questions that often appear in corruption perception surveys.<sup>15</sup> Perceptions of corruption were measured for all questions on a 0–10 scale (0 = none, 10 = all), which is also employed by many corruption surveys.

Condition 1 (*corruption simple*):

- a) How many Czech politicians do you believe to be presently involved in corruption?
- b) How many Czech public servants do you believe to be presently involved in corruption?

Condition 2 (*corruption definition*):

- a) How many Czech politicians do you believe to be presently involved in corruption? By corruption, we mean any abuse of public power for private gain.
- b) How many Czech public servants do you believe to be presently involved in corruption? By corruption, we mean any abuse of public power for private gain.

Condition 3 (*corruption examples*):

- a) How many Czech politicians do you believe to be presently involved in corruption? By corruption, we mean any abuse of public power for private gain, that is, for example, favouring friends, acquaintances or family, bribery, embezzlement, clientelism or misuse of confidential information.
- b) How many Czech public servants do you believe to be presently involved in corruption? By corruption, we mean any abuse of public power for private gain, that is, for example, favouring friends, acquaintances or family, bribery, embezzlement, clientelism or misuse of confidential information.

Condition 4 (*bribery*):

- a) How many Czech politicians do you believe to be presently involved in bribery?
- b) How many Czech public servants do you believe to be presently involved in bribery?

The second was an online survey conducted on businesspeople who were members of the Union of Industry and Transport of the Czech Republic (SPČR) or the Association of Small and Medium Size Enterprises and Sole Traders of the Czech Republic (AMSP ČR). An email was sent to 1,100 randomly chosen mem-

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<sup>15</sup> E.g. Global Corruption Barometer (Transparency International 2020): *'How many of the following people do you think are involved in corruption, or haven't you heard enough about them to say?'*; World Justice Project (2017): *'Corruption exists in all countries and societies in some form or another. How many of the following people in [COUNTRY] do you think are involved in corrupt practices'*.

bers of both organisations asking them to fill in a short questionnaire with two questions. The first half of businesspeople (that is, 550 potential respondents) received a variant identical with Condition 1 (*corruption simple*); 40 answers were received. The second half received a variant identical with Condition 4 (*bribery*) and 56 answers were received. The very low response rate and the related self-selection bias of the respondents are evident problems of this part of our study. We assume, however, that other surveys of corruption perception among businesspeople face similar issues (and this might be the reason that response rates or criteria for selecting businesspeople as respondents routinely are not indicated). While it is technically a random purposive sample, the final group of respondents probably has a character of samples of convenience due to the expected high selection bias. While this does not pose a problem for the survey experiment itself, it is something that needs to be borne in mind when comparing the results of surveys between businesspeople and the general population. We expected a low response rate and hence the low number of questionnaires completed, and this was why we only included two conditions in the second survey experiment (*corruption simple* and *bribery*).

## Results

To analyse the results of both experiments, we use the primary descriptive findings and the ANOVA analysis or t-test, depending on how many categories we used in the given model. While regression analysis is often used in this case, we follow the recommendation of Mutz (2011) and others, who see it as unnecessary since control variables are randomly distributed in the experiment (Scherer – Curry 2010; Mutz – Pemantle 2015).<sup>16</sup>

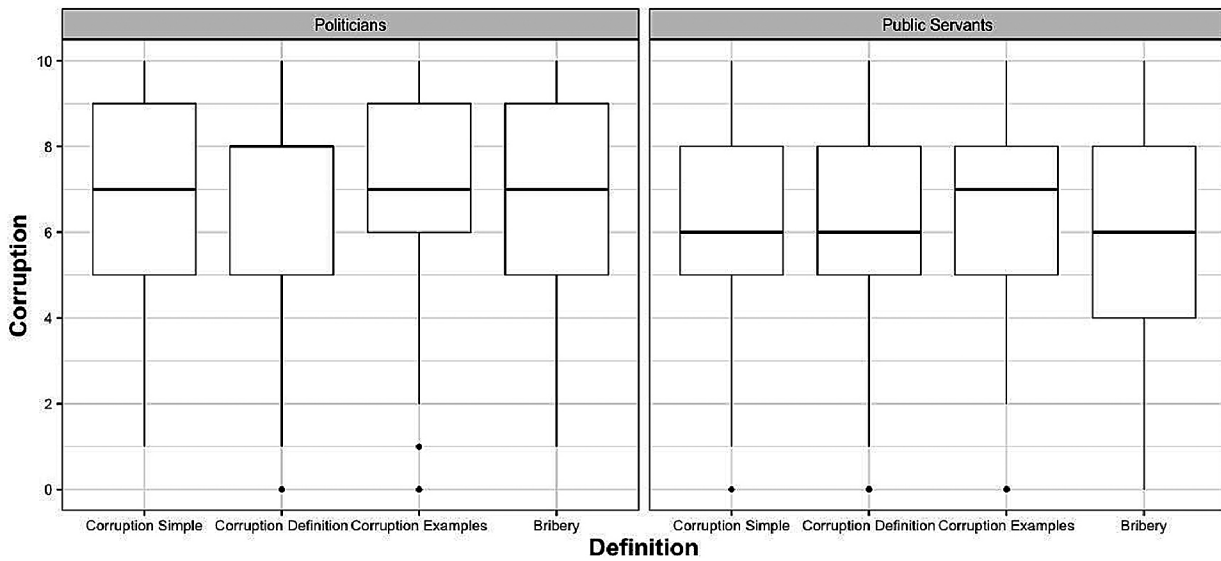
### ***Public perception of politicians' and public servants' corruption: a survey experiment***

There are two boxplots presented in Figure 1: the first one represents the scores of politicians' corruption for each condition as perceived by the public; the second one deals with perceived corruption of public servants. In both cases, the middleboxes overlap each other. The spread of scores in the first boxplot was reasonably similar in all conditions, although the '*corruption definition*' median is higher than the median in any other group. The three other groups have the same median score (7).

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<sup>16</sup> Assessment scores for none of the experimental group tested below were not normally distributed, as reported by Shapiro-Wilk's test ( $p < 0.05$ ). Since we expect this to be caused by large sample size, we proceeded with the analysis.

**Figure 1: Boxplots of corruption scores assessed by public (politicians and public servants)**



Note: The boxplots show distribution of scores provided by the public, depending on the definition of corruption that was randomly assigned to them. Respondents were to assess the corruption of politicians and public servants.

Source: Own calculations.

Compared with the second boxplot, it is clear that the distribution of scores is situated lower than in the first case. However, medians of three of the four groups (*'corruption simple'*, *'corruption definition'* and *'bribery'*) are again at the same level. All in all, inter-quartile ranges representing 50% of scores for the groups in both boxplots are relatively similar in size and position. However, the lines of the first boxplots upper quartiles are generally higher.

**Table 2: Public perception of politicians' corruption (survey experiment)**

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Min.	Max.
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Corruption Simple	244	6.87	2.186	.140	6.60	7.15	1	10
Corruption Definition	233	6.88	2.320	.152	6.58	7.18	0	10
Corruption Examples	224	7.07	2.216	.148	6.78	7.36	0	10
Bribery	237	6.74	2.352	.153	6.44	7.04	1	10
Total	938	6.89	2.269	.074	6.74	7.03	0	10

Note: Do not know / Do not want to answer n = 63.

Source: Own calculations.



**Table 3: ANOVA results (1)**

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	12.616	3	4.205	.817	.485
Within Groups	4809.853	934	5.150		
Total	4822.469	937			

Source: Own calculations.

A one-way ANOVA was conducted twice to determine whether the perception of various groups of participants was different for groups with different definitions of corruption or bribery, related first to politicians (Tables 2 and 3) and then public servants (Tables 4 and 5). Levene's test of homogeneity of variances ( $p = 0.395$  for politicians,  $p = 0.139$  for public servants) determined and confirmed homogeneity of variances. Regarding perceptions of politicians, the score increased only very slightly from 'bribery' ( $M = 6.74$ ,  $SD = 2.35$ ) to 'corruption simple' ( $M = 6.87$ ,  $SD = 2.19$ ), 'corruption definition' ( $M = 6.88$ ,  $SD = 2.32$ ) and 'corruption examples' ( $M = 7.07$ ,  $SD = 2.22$ ) and the differences between the groups were not statistically significant,  $F(3, 934) = 0.817$ ,  $p = 0.485$ .<sup>17</sup>

For public servants, the score again very slightly increased from 'corruption definition' ( $M = 5.97$ ,  $SD = 2.20$ ) to 'bribery' ( $M = 5.98$ ,  $SD = 2.35$ ), 'corruption simple' ( $M = 6.04$ ,  $SD = 2.25$ ) and 'corruption examples' ( $M = 6.45$ ,  $SD = 2.16$ ) and the differences were not statistically significant,  $F(3, 937) = 2.316$ ,  $p = 0.074$ . For hypothesis H1, H2 and H3, the null hypotheses cannot be rejected.

**Table 4: Public perception of public servants' corruption (survey experiment)**

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Min.	Max.
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Corruption Simple	240	6.04	2.248	.145	5.76	6.33	0	10
Corruption Definition	237	5.97	2.199	.143	5.69	6.25	0	10
Corruption Examples	224	6.45	2.157	.144	6.16	6.73	0	10
Bribery	240	5.98	2.354	.152	5.68	6.28	0	10
Total	941	6.11	2.247	.073	5.96	6.25	0	10

Note: Do not know / Do not want to answer  $n = 60$ .

Source: Own calculations.

<sup>17</sup> In accordance with the prevailing practice, we cite statistical significance, even if we are working with a representative sample of the population.

**Table 5: ANOVA results (2)**

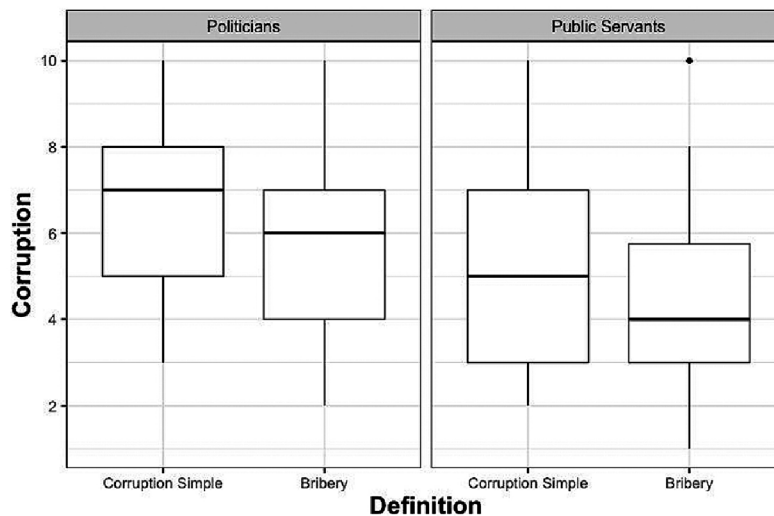
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	34.917	3	11.639	2.316	.074
Within Groups	4709.667	937	5.026		
Total	4744.584	940			

Source: Own calculations.

**Businesspeople’s perception of politicians’ and public servants’ corruption: a survey experiment**

Figure 2 provides two boxplots depicting perceived corruption of politicians and public servants, respectively. In the case of politicians, the size of inter-quartile boxes is identical. On the other hand, there is a difference in their position – we can see that the box of ‘*corruption simple*’ definition is placed exactly one point higher than the box of ‘*bribery*’ definition.

**Figure 2: Boxplots of corruption scores assessed by businesspeople (politicians and public servants)**



Note: The boxplots show distribution of scores provided by the businesspeople, depending on the definition of corruption that was randomly assigned to them. Respondents were to assess the corruption of politicians and public servants.

Source: Own calculations.

The second boxplot (on the right) dealing with corruption of public servants confirms the general trend that middleboxes overlap each other. However, the spread of the scores is different, as the whiskers of ‘*corruption simple*’ group are positioned higher up the graph. In other words, the businesspeople were assessing the situation related to public servants as worse when asked about corruption compared to bribery. Comparing both of the actors that were evalu-

ated (politicians and public servants), the median scores of the groups were always higher for politicians (7 and 6, respectively) than for public servants (5 and 4, respectively) and the level of the median was always higher in the case of 'corruption simple' definition (7 and 5, respectively) than in the 'bribery' definition (6 and 4, respectively).

Two independent-samples t-tests were run to determine if there were differences in assessing corruption or bribery among politicians (Tables 6 and 7) and civil servants (Tables 8 and 9), for two experimental groups, 'corruption simple' and 'bribery'. There was homogeneity of variances in both cases, as assessed by Levene's test for equality of variances ( $p = 0.740$  for politicians,  $p = 0.169$  for civil servants). As expected, the average result was higher for 'corruption simple' ( $M = 6.40$ ,  $SD = 2.32$ ) than 'bribery' ( $M = 5.92$ ,  $SD = 2.30$ ), indicating that businesspeople at least somewhat differentiate between corruption and bribery. However, the test did not find a statistically significant difference,  $M = 0.482$ , 95% CI  $[-0.54, 1.50]$ ,  $t(73.06) = 0.943$ ,  $p = 0.349$ .

**Table 6: Businesspeople's perception of politicians' corruption (survey experiment)**

	group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Politicians	Corruption Simple	35	6.40	2.316	.392
	Bribery	49	5.92	2.299	.328

Note: Do not know / Do not want to answer  $n = 12$ .  
Source: Own calculations.

**Table 7: Independent samples t-test results (1)**

	Levene's Test Equality of Variances			t-test for Equality of Means				
	F	Sig.	T	df	Sig (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	
							Lower	Upper
Politicians	.111	.740	.944	82	.348	.482 (.510)	-.534	1.497
			.943	73.06	.349	.482 (.511)	-.537	1.500

Note: Values in brackets represent Standard Error Difference. In the first row, equal variances are assumed; in the second row, equal variances are not assumed.  
Source: Own calculations.

The results were similar regarding public servants: The assessment was higher for corruption ( $M = 5.03$ ,  $SD = 2.37$ ) than bribery of public servants ( $M = 4.67$ ,  $SD = 2.07$ ), however without a statistically significant difference,  $M = 0.356$ , 95% CI  $[-0.67, 1.38]$ ,  $t(63.171) = 0.696$ ,  $p = 0.489$ . As we have failed to identify significant differences in either of the two survey experiments (one on the public and one on businesspeople), we cannot reject the null hypotheses for hypotheses H4.

**Table 8: Businesspeople's perception of public servants' corruption (survey experiment)**

	group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Public Servants	Corruption Simple	33	5.03	2.365	.412
	Bribery	46	4.67	2.066	.305

Note: Do not know / Do not want to answer  $n = 17$ .

Source: Own calculations.

**Table 9: Independent samples t-test results (2)**

	Levene's Test Equality of Variances			t-test for Equality of Means				
	F	Sig.	T	df	Sig (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	
							Lower	Upper
Public Servants	1.926	.169	.712	77	.479	.356 (.501)	-.641	1.354
			.696	63.171	.489	.356 (.512)	-.667	1.380

Note: Values in brackets represent Standard Error Difference. In the first row, equal variances are assumed; in the second row, equal variances are not assumed.

Source: Own calculations.

### ***A comparison of perceptions of businesspeople and the general public***

The comparison of results from both surveys presented in Table 10 and 11 indicates that businesspeople consistently assessed corruption and bribery as less common compared to the results of the public survey. Moreover (and as expected), they showed a slightly better differentiation between the levels of

bribery and corruption than members of the public<sup>18</sup> – the difference in assessment for businesspeople was 0.48 compared to 0.15 in the evaluation of the public (when speaking about politicians) and 0.36 compared to 0.06 (when talking about public servants).

**Table 10: Comparison of perception results regarding politicians from both surveys (public and businesspeople)**

Respondents	BRIBERY*			CORRUPTION**		
	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	N	Mean	Std. Dev.
Businesspeople	49	5.92	2.299	35	6.40	2.316
Public	237	6.74	2.352	244	6.87	2.186

Note: Do not know / Do not want to answer: \* n = 25; \*\* n = 17.  
Source: Own calculations.

**Table 11: Comparison of perception results regarding public servants from both surveys (public and businesspeople)**

Respondents	BRIBERY*			CORRUPTION**		
	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	N	Mean	Std. Dev.
Businesspeople	46	4.67	2.066	33	5.03	2.365
Public	240	5.98	2.354	240	6.04	2.248

Note: Do not know / Do not want to answer: \* n = 25; \*\* n = 33.  
Source: Own calculations.

## Discussion

Both of the survey experiments conducted produced similar results: although the averages for the individual groups at first glance do confirm our assumptions (lowest average score for questions asking about bribery, highest average score for questions including a definition and examples of corruption), the differences are very small for the general public and businesspeople alike. In no case was the difference statistically significant (again we remind the reader that we worked with a representative sample of the population). None of the first three

<sup>18</sup> As stated earlier, the definition of corruption here is consistent with the condition 'corruption simple' as described above.

hypotheses tested can, therefore, be confirmed. In both of our surveys, the way the questions were formulated had minimal or no influence on the assessment of corruption levels.

Three interpretations can be proposed to explain these results. The first, somewhat unlikely, explanation is that the respondents believed that Czech politicians and public servants were not involved in any form of corruption other than bribery. The second explanation is that the respondents believed bribery to be so widespread a type of corruption that it was committed by (virtually) all politicians and public servants who were involved in corrupt practices. In other words, if people were committing other forms of corruption, such as clientelism, nepotism, etc., they engaged in bribery as well. This too seems rather unlikely, given that most Czech people have relatively little experience of bribery<sup>19</sup>. The third explanation, which we believe to be the most likely, is that respondents' assessments were significantly influenced by their overall (dis-)satisfaction with the work of politicians and public servants, which might have played a more significant role than real information about their corrupt activities. In such a case, how exactly the questions are formulated would not exercise a major influence.

The practical finding of this comparison, therefore, is that in Czechia at least, the citing of a corruption definition, or conversely asking a question focused on bribery, is unlikely to influence the results of the survey (the comparison in the means of most different categories '*corruption examples*' and '*bribery*' was 0.33 points when talking about politicians and 0.47 points for public servants, while using a 10-point scale). Our results also suggest that since the exact wording of questions seems to have little impact, language (specifically, the understanding of corruption that is common in the given language) might not influence the assessments as much as could be expected at first sight.

A theoretically relevant contribution of our study is that it provides further support for the argument that corruption perception is influenced by more factors than just the respondent's knowledge about the level of corruption in the given country. In other words, the use of corruption perception as a proxy variable for the actual level of corruption might often be inevitable, but it is far from an ideal solution.

The survey experiment among businesspeople also failed to prove that the formulation of the question would substantially influence the assessment of the level of corruption. If we accept the premise that other forms of public sector corruption apart from bribery are widespread in the Czech Republic, then our results confirm our doubts that businesspeople can be considered experts on corruption issues. This does not mean, however, that to use them as respond-

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19 During the 2016 GCB survey, 9% of respondents reported that they or somebody in their household had experience with bribery of public officials in the last 12 months (Transparency International 2016).

ents is a misstep. Even if we do not assume that businesspeople understand the problem of corruption better than the general public, we can still argue that, given their more frequent contact with politicians and public servants, they can better assess the incidence of corruption in the public sector. After all, the results (although statistically insignificant) showed that the difference in the evaluation of two categories (corruption simple and bribery) was bigger among businesspeople than it was the public – the average difference in assessment for businesspeople was 0.42 compared to 0.11 for the public. However, we need to be aware of the limitations of this approach. In particular, the level of corruption may differ across sectors, and businesspeople will primarily have an idea about the situation in their industry. This is particularly important in evaluating surveys and sources that are based on evaluations of a relatively small number of ‘experts’ – businesspeople.

It also emerged that businesspeople tended to assess the level of public sector corruption as lower than the general public. Again, there are several possible explanations for this difference, of which only some are mutually exclusive. The first is that businesspeople encounter corrupt action less frequently than the rest of the population. This is rather unlikely, given that businesspeople typically more regularly find themselves in situations where there is a potential for corruption. The second explanation is that, precisely because they are in more frequent contact with politicians and public servants, they have a more accurate view of the level of public sector corruption, which they assess as (somewhat) lower than the population does. In other words, the popular notions of how many politicians and public servants are corrupt are (somewhat) overestimated. Another option is that, compared to the general public, businesspeople are more or less influenced by the overall (dis-)satisfaction with the work of politicians and public servants than the general public. Possibly, they could also be somewhat less dissatisfied with their work than the general public is (for instance, because businesspeople have better knowledge about the level of corruption in other countries). Nor can we exclude the option that businesspeople are more involved in certain forms of corruption (especially bribery) than the rest of the population, which might influence their answers. Socialisation, too, may play a role, making certain types of corrupt behaviour seem common practice and therefore not considered corruption by the participants.

Whatever the causes for the different perceptions of corruption by businesspeople and the general population, it is evident that, in the Czech Republic at least, businesspeople see corruption as less widespread than the general population, though the difference is not great. This confirms the premise of businesspeople’s systemic bias and complicates the use of businesspeople’s perceptions as a proxy indicator for popular perceptions, mainly because we do not know how significant the bias is and which way it is directed in various countries.

## Conclusion: Summing Up and Moving Forward?

The measuring of corruption will always face difficult challenges. This applies to the so far most prevalent, so-called first-generation indicators, of which CPI and CC WGI are perhaps the most influential. One of the challenges is the construct validity problem, consisting of an unclear, conflicting and often missing definition of what the survey authors consider as corruption – the subject on which they are questioning their respondents. However, our study suggests that this might not have as fundamental consequences for the measured perceptions of corruption as one might initially expect. It seems likely that the perceptions tend to reflect overall satisfaction with the work of politicians and public servants rather than respondents' actual awareness of corrupt acts.

Our findings could also support the view professed by many (Arndt – Oman 2006; Andersson – Heywood 2009, Heywood 2017, Heywood – Rose 2014) that attempts to measure corruption often suffer from a construct validity problem. We do not dispute that a large part of the blame rests with how both survey questionnaires and indexes themselves are constructed, often failing to provide a clear definition of corruption. However, if we are right in our supposition that people tend to be influenced by their overall satisfaction (or the lack thereof) with the performance of the political system, then adjusting the questionnaires and providing more comprehensive commentary to the indexes would do little to improve the situation.

Case oriented, psychosocial research is, of course, necessary to explain the lack of differences between our experimental groups. A survey experiment does not provide us with the data needed to explain how people formulate their perceptions of the levels of corruption. At the same time, the findings of our study could be used as the basis for further research focused on the way individuals perceive corruption and establish their perceptions.

It is increasingly disputed whether one-number indicators should continue to be used in academic research. Our results support the view that using the public's perceptions of corruption as proxy indicators of actual levels of corruption is problematic, especially in variable-oriented studies that frequently fail to adequately reflect the limits of their data (see footnote five above). Importantly, this relates not only to first-generation composite indicators such as CPI or CC WGI but also to any survey questions asking respondents about their general perceptions of corruption. These are included in second-generation indicators such as GBC or Eurobarometer too.

A way forward has been suggested by Paul Heywood (2017) in his article 'Rethinking Corruption: Hocus-Pocus, Locus and Focus'. Heywood convincingly argues that we should attempt to disaggregate corruption in more specific types, focus research on particular sectors with specific constellations of actors, distinguish between levels of corruption and start giving more attention to dif-



ferent contests of corruption. This does not necessarily mean that the time of one-number indicators and perception-based survey questions is over. Even if we abandon them as instruments measuring corruption, they can still provide valuable data on public attitudes towards the political system, political elites or even regimes. Rather than being proxy indicators of corruption, perception-based indices could be seen as proxy indicators of institutional trust.

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*Data available at:*

Pinkova, Aneta, 2019, "Replication Data for: Experts and Questions: Exploring Perceptions of Corruption", <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/NJC8VV>, Harvard Dataverse.

*Placeholder:*

Link 1: <http://polit.fss.muni.cz/pinkova-ciirml/>

***Aneta Pinková, PhD.*** works at the Department of Political Science, Faculty of Social Studies, Masaryk University/Czech Republic, E-mail: [pinkova@fss.muni.cz](mailto:pinkova@fss.muni.cz), Researcher ID: S-6850-2019, ORCID: 0000-0003-1921-647X.

***Jakub Jusko, M.A.*** is the PhD. Student at the Department of Political Science, Faculty of Social Studies, Masaryk University/Czech Republic, E-mail: [jakub.jusko@fss.muni.cz](mailto:jakub.jusko@fss.muni.cz), Researcher ID: AAD-2160-2021, ORCID: 0000-0002-8262-2430