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**DO VOTERS HAVE DIFFERENT ATTITUDES  
TOWARD CORRUPTION? THE SOURCES  
AND IMPLICATIONS OF POPULAR  
PERCEPTIONS AND TOLERANCE OF  
POLITICAL CORRUPTION.**

*by Eric C. C. Chang and Nicholas N. Kerr*

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## **Do Voters Have Different Attitudes toward Corruption? The Sources and Implications of Popular Perceptions and Tolerance of Political Corruption.<sup>1</sup>**

### **Abstract**

Political tolerance and political perceptions are analytically indistinguishable in current literature. In reality, however, individual attitudes toward political corruption are complicated and contingent on myriad factors. This paper makes an important conceptual distinction between perceptions and tolerance of corruption, and argues that voters form their attitudes toward corruption based upon their insider or outsider status. More specifically, we draw the distinction between insiders and outsiders along two dimensions: cost-benefit instrumentality and affective identity. The former refers to whether a voter belongs to the patronage network of the incumbent, and we posit that a patronage-insider is more tolerant of corruption and perceives corruption at a higher level compared to patronage outsiders. On the other hand, affective identity involves whether one shares a partisan or ethnic affiliation with the incumbent. Importantly, we argue that voters view corruption through the lens of identity, and that partisan and ethnic insiders are more likely to turn a blind eye to corruption. Finally, we argue that insiders' electoral support of the incumbent is less affected by the consequences of corruption. We test our insider-outsider framework, as well as its implications for voting behavior, using recent Afrobarometer data on 18 sub-Saharan African democracies and find fairly strong evidence to support our hypotheses.

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## Introduction

This paper attempts to account for heterogeneity in voters' attitudes toward political corruption in developing democracies. In particular, it makes a theoretical distinction between two parallel yet conceptually different public opinions of corruption: one of perception, and one of tolerance. We define perceptions of corruption as the degree to which citizens believe that a political actor is engaged in corrupt practices. Corruption tolerance, on the other hand, denotes citizens' proclivity to condone political actors' engagement in corruption.

This conceptual distinction is useful for a number of reasons. At the most intuitive level, it seems plausible that the effect of corruption might depend on the extent to which voters tolerate or even sympathize with corrupt actors. Therefore, by highlighting the distinction between voters' perceptions and tolerance of corruption, this paper helps us reevaluate the validity of current empirical research that focuses mainly on the consequences of corruption perceptions. Secondly, we argue that corruption tolerance represents a distinct dimension of citizens' attitudes toward corruption, and it does not necessarily overlap with corruption perceptions as commonly assumed. Therefore, what explains variation in corruption perceptions does not necessarily account for variation in corruption tolerance. One result from our analysis below indicates that recipients of particularistic benefits—patronage insiders—actually portray more corruption tolerance despite perceiving higher levels of corruption, relative to those without access to these benefits.

A more ambitious goal of this paper is to systematically explore whether and why voters' perceptions of corruption vary in developing countries and to account for differing levels of corruption tolerance amongst individuals. Through these inquiries, we seek to make both empirical and theoretical contributions to the continuously growing literature on corruption. At the empirical level, probing the sources of voters' perceptions and tolerance of corruption not only helps us understand how individuals form their attitudes toward corruption, it also highlights the potential bias embedded in the perception-based corruption measures that are widely employed in the empirical corruption literature. At a broader theoretical level, understanding heterogeneity in voters' attitudes toward corruption also bears important implications. As we shall demonstrate, our results provide useful leverage for disentangling the puzzle of high reelection rates of corrupt politicians around the world. They may also assist in advancing anti-corruption policy initiatives being undertaken in developing democracies.

Toward these goals, this paper proposes an insider-outsider framework and argues that the way in which voters form their attitudes toward corruption depends critically upon their insider or outsider status. More specifically, we draw the distinction between insiders and outsiders along two dimensions: cost-benefit instrumentality and affective identity. The former refers to whether one belongs to the patronage network of the incumbent. We posit that a beneficiary of patronage is more likely to tolerate corruption since a patronage insider fully monopolizes the benefits while only partially internalizing the costs of corruption. On the other hand, affective identity involves whether one has a partisan or ethnic affiliation with the incumbent. We argue that voters view corruption through the lens of identity, and that partisan and ethnic insiders are more likely to turn a blind eye to corruption.

We test our insider-outsider theory using recent Afrobarometer data, and find fairly strong evidence to support our hypotheses. Our results indicate that patronage insiders, although perceiving more corruption, ironically are more forgiving about it. Meanwhile, partisan and ethnic insiders tend to perceive less corruption. We further demonstrate the implications of our theory by showing how our insider-outsider framework sheds light on the conundrum of corrupt incumbents who enjoy high reelection rates. Specifically, we suggest that instrumental voters are less likely to base their vote on corruption as long as the incumbent "brings home the bacon". Also, the identity insider status matters because the in-group bias of insiders attenuates the corruption-vote link. Taken together, we show that insiders' electoral support of the incumbent is less affected by the consequences of corruption, when compared to their outsider counterparts.

In the next section, we highlight the conceptual difference between corruption perceptions and corruption tolerance. Section 3 provides a brief review of the usage of perception-based corruption measures in the empirical literature, and we argue for the importance of accounting for the dynamic process in which voters form their attitudes toward political corruption in developing democracies. Section 4 articulates the concept of insider-outsider status and lays out our theoretical framework. In the process, we review several important studies of clientelism and identity politics, and draw from them a set of hypotheses. Section 5 tests these hypotheses and presents the empirical results. Section 6 discusses the implications of the results and shows why under certain circumstances voters can be apathetic to corruption and fail to throw the rascals out. The final section concludes.

### **Corruption Perceptions vs. Corruption Tolerance**

Corruption perceptions and corruption tolerance have traditionally been viewed as analogous, and this conceptual confounding can largely be attributed to the way corruption perception has been defined. Conventional wisdom relates an individual's perception of corruption to her conception of the acts that warrant formal punishment. For instance, Heidenheimer (2002) describes a corrupt action as one that warrants punishment. He uses variation in citizens' willingness to sanction perpetrators as an indication of the acts that are considered tolerable in certain contexts. Therefore, it is assumed to be self-evident that actions that are perceived as corrupt are also less tolerated.

We disagree with this conventional wisdom, and we strive to conceptually distinguish corruption perception from corruption tolerance. We define perceptions of corruption as the degree to which citizens believe that a political actor or entity is involved in corrupt practices. Corruption tolerance, on the other hand, denotes citizens' proclivity to condone a political actor's engagement in corrupt transactions. Our conceptualization of corruption tolerance is adapted from research on political tolerance that describes tolerance generally "as a willingness to 'put up with' those things that one rejects" (Sullivan et al. 1979). Inherent to this conceptualization, are notions of resistance and objection; without which individuals have no basis for deciding whether or not to make a compromise. Importantly, we posit that corruption tolerance represents a distinct dimension of citizens' attitudes toward corruption, and it may or may not overlap with corruption perceptions depending on the prevailing context. In other words, we argue that citizens' conception of what is judged to be corrupt do not necessarily constrain their willingness to tolerate it.

Distinguishing between perceptions and tolerance of corruption is not only conceptually useful but also theoretically important. First, due to their conceptual differences, the factors that explain variation in tolerance are not necessarily those that explain variation in perceptions. It may be the case that both attitudes are determined by different causal factors or they are influenced by similar factors that have divergent causal effects. This paper illustrates this point explicitly. Intuitively, we would expect that both attitudes are negatively associated; in that citizens who perceive high levels of corruption should demonstrate lower tolerance. But our empirical results highlight a unique phenomenon: patronage insiders, who have the inside track to enjoy looted benefits, exhibit higher levels of tolerance for their corrupt patrons despite perceiving corruption as being widespread.

Another reason for highlighting the differences between perceptions and tolerance of corruption is that they may have different political consequences. Hence, making this distinction can help us reevaluate existing studies that disproportionately rely on the use of corruption perceptions to explain political attitudes and behaviors. For instance, while many studies have convincingly documented the poisonous effect of citizens' perceptions of corruption on their support for democracy,<sup>2</sup> it might also seem plausible that the effect of perceptions might depend on the extent to which voters tolerate corruption. Put differently, while for some citizens corruption considerably undermines their support for democracy, for other citizens, with high levels

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<sup>2</sup> We focus on popular support for democracy as an example because of its paramount importance in democratic consolidation, as many have forcefully argued that democratic systems thrive on popular commitments and wither in their absence (Linz and Stepan 1996)

of tolerance, corruption might simply matter much less. We test these propositions empirically and our results strongly substantiate our conjectures.<sup>3</sup> In this respect, the distinction between corruption perceptions and tolerance adds another layer to the causal complexity that the literature has not fully explored.

Lastly, an exploration of the differences between perceptions and tolerance will allow for a more comprehensive understanding of the conditions under which perceptions influence tolerance or vice versa. Although we do not directly address this here, probing the causal relationship between the two dimensions of corruption attitudes can augment our understanding of how attitudes toward corruption are developed, provide a more nuanced analysis of their political consequences, and guide the development of more effective anti-corruption policy. For instance, anti-corruption policies can be most successful if geared toward removing institutions that induce corruption tolerance. These may include dissolving clientelistic networks and replacing them with a professionalized bureaucracy. It might also be desirable to reform electoral systems to reduce incentives of using targeted resource distribution to enhance political survival of politicians.

### **Perception-based Measurements of Political Corruption**

During the past decade, the scholarly community has made a significant breakthrough in our empirical capacity to gauge corruption by constructing various corruption indexes on the basis of perceptions of country experts or ordinary citizens. As a consequence, empirical research on corruption has grown exponentially.

Particularly, since the emergence of the Corruption Perceptions Index, the ability of perception-based indicators to systematically make cross-national comparisons of political corruption has greatly advanced our understanding of the causes and consequences of political corruption from a comparative perspective.<sup>4</sup> Beyond this glorious progress, however, we should nevertheless keep in mind that perception-based measurements of corruption, by construction, reflect only the perception of corruption rather than the fact of it. As several recent studies rightfully note, there is no evidence whatsoever that persuasively links perceptions of corruption to its reality (Seligson 2002; Treisman 2007). Worse yet, the subjective nature of perception-based measurements inevitably invites the possibility of systematic measurement error and bias, casting doubt on the degree to which we can actually attribute the political or economic outcomes to corruption *per se* as opposed to other potential confounding factors. Golden and Picci (2005) take the issue one step further and argue that reliability is the key weakness of the survey-based measurements of corruption. In particular, since corrupt acts typically take place in secret, respondents directly associated with corruption are unlikely to report such malfeasances, and those not involved typically do not have accurate information. Moreover, the bias of the subjective corruption data is likely to be systematic since these indices are more reliable in countries with less corruption than in countries with more corruption. Put differently, the inherent difficulties of measuring political corruption, combined with the limitations of survey techniques, have raised flags about the reliability of the subjective indices of corruption.

To address the issue of potential bias that likely plagues the quality of subjective indices of corruption, it is thus critical to understand how individuals form their attitudes toward corruption. Yet, surprisingly, this critical issue has received little scholarly attention to date. In the literature, one group of scholars admits that the bias might exist in the perception-based corruption measurements, but argues that despite the bias we can rest assured of the measurement validity because different data sources are highly correlated. In addition,

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<sup>3</sup> Specifically, we examine whether corruption tolerance conditions the effect of corruption perceptions on citizens' commitment for democracy. The coefficient of the interaction term is highly significant, indicating that the corrosive effect of perceived corruption on popular support for democracy is attenuated by corruption tolerance. We fully document our operationalization of corruption perceptions and corruption tolerance below, and following the standard practice, we measure popular support for democratic ideals by exploring whether citizens consider democracy always preferable to any other kind of government. The results are not reported here in the interest of space, but are available upon requests.

<sup>4</sup> See Lambsdorff (2005) for a detailed review on the causes and consequences of corruption.

they believe that the bias at the individual level will eventually be averaged out during the aggregation process (Lambsdorff 2006).<sup>5</sup> By contrast, we argue that the mere existence of high correlation between various surveys should not lessen the importance of the bias, or prohibit a more nuanced inquiry into its causes. As Duch et al. (2000) have demonstrated the aggregation process provides no guarantee that the bias will be averaged out. Instead, they indicate that when individual-level attitudes are systematically shaped by respondents' characteristics, aggregation will manifest rather than remove these systematic influences.

We expect these findings to be replicated with respect to subjective measures of corruption, in that when the non-random bias underlying citizens' attitudes toward corruption exists, we should remain cautious in our interpretation of the effect of corruption. Specifically, we argue that popular corruption evaluations are systematically and heavily driven by an individual's status as an insider or outsider. We further demonstrate the importance of taking into account how voters form their attitudes toward corruption when analyzing the consequence of corruption perceptions by using the previous example of popular support for democratic principles. We first replicate the conventional wisdom and find that citizens who perceive higher levels of corruption also tend to show less support for democratic ideals. However, once we control for and partial out the effect of citizens' insider-outsider status, we find that the marginal effect of perceived corruption on support for democratic ideals drops by almost 30%, and the level of significance is also substantially reduced. Hence, we highlight the instrumental and subjective bias embedded in the perception-based corruption measurements. In sum, we see popular attitudes toward corruption as being shaped by contextual and relational considerations; that is, whether or not an individual shares an essential or instrumental bond with the political actor they evaluate. However, without tracing the causal process during which corruption attitudes are developed, we are likely to exaggerate the effect of corruption perceptions and draw biased inferences.

### **Insider-Outsider Theory**

This paper proposes an insider-outsider theory to account for how voters form their attitudes toward corruption. Essentially, we emphasize the heterogeneity among voters, arguing that voters are likely to construct different attitudes of corruption depending on their relative positions in the political and economic structure. We are certainly not the first to highlight the insider-outsider status, as research in democratic transitions (Bratton and van de Walle 1997), political economy (Rueda 2005) and labor market economics (Lindbeck and Snower 1998) have focused on the difference among political actors as a principal framework for assessing a substantive problem. The insider-outsider dichotomy is particularly salient in the context of developing countries. Bratton and van de Walle (1997) argue that splits within elites during democratic transitions in Africa are driven primarily by an insider and outsider dynamic based on some elites — insiders — gaining access to patronage benefits and government positions while other elites — outsiders — are excluded from these privileges. An important consequence of the disparity is that outsiders are more likely to oppose the incumbent regime. Logan *et al.*, (2003) distinguish between insiders and outsiders with respect to citizens' partisan affiliation with incumbent and their region of birth in Uganda. They find that outsiders are more discontented with the political and economic systems relative to insiders.

At the core of the insider-outsider distinction is that the notion that insider status provides preferential access to the incumbent and a range of excludable goods. The preferential access in turn structures insiders' preferences, attitudes, and behaviors in a way that differs from outsiders. In this paper we focus on citizens' association with the incumbent as an important source of their attitudes toward political corruption. Specifically, we highlight two dimensions through which voters identify with the incumbent: cost-benefit instrumentality and affective identity. The cost-benefit instrumentality involves whether voters are included

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<sup>5</sup> A second group takes a more positive approach towards the potential bias and has attempted to resolve it by concentrating on micro-level factors that impact individuals' evaluation of political corruption, such as access to information on corruption (Davies *et al.*, 2004; Bratton *et al.*, 2005), experience with corruption (Miller 2006; Seligson 2002), and societal norms (Heidenheimer and Johnston 2002). However, this second group focuses on individual causes of systematic bias without attempting to develop a framework to comprehensively address these biases.



within the patronage network of the incumbent, whereas affective identity refers to whether voters share a partisan or ethnic affiliation with the incumbent. As a result, we identify three types of insiders — patronage, partisan, and ethnic — that are pertinent to understanding how voters form their opinions about corruption.

### ***Patronage Insider: Recipient of Patronage***

In general, voters espouse a normative aversion to political corruption because of the associated welfare costs. However, popular distaste of corruption may be neutralized when voters benefit (or expect to benefit) from the actions of corrupt politicians. One such possibility is when voters receive particularistic benefits because of their inclusion in a clientelistic network. Under such circumstances, recipients of patronage are likely to possess a bipolar belief system toward political corruption: on the one hand, they may perceive higher levels of corruption due to their access to information on the intricacies of patronage transactions; on the other hand, they may find corruption more acceptable since they directly benefit from particularistic handouts.

Following the conventional wisdom, we regard clientelism as the informal, mutually beneficial exchange relationship in which a patron offers material benefits in return for the electoral support, deference, or allegiance of a client (Stokes 2007). Clientelism tends to be persistent, and the literature attributes the stability of clientelistic relationships to two dominant explanations (Stokes 2005; Brusco *et al.* 2004). The first approach identifies the development of a “norm of reciprocity”, whereby the client, after receiving some benefit from the patron, feels obliged to reciprocate the deed (Lemarchand 1972). The second approach advocates an explanation based on threats of defection in which citizens remain committed to their patronage relationships due to the fear that their benefits will be revoked (Stokes 2005). In what Stokes refers to as “perverse accountability”, clientelistic parties with the capacity to monitor voters are able to punish those voters that renege on their electoral commitments while rewarding loyal followers.

We incorporate both the reciprocity-based and defection-based explanations for clientelistic linkages to understand how citizens formulate their perceptions of corruption and the extent to which they are willing to tolerate it. First, the potential of losing patronage benefits motivates individuals to weigh the costs and benefits of corruption. Both insiders and outsiders conduct a cost-benefit assessment of political corruption: the costs of corruption are equally borne by both insiders and outsiders, but patronage insiders can at least enjoy proceeds from the corrupt practices of their political patrons. On the other hand, patronage outsiders have nothing to gain from corruption while being forced to bear the costs of corruption on their personal welfare. Under such circumstances, patronage-insiders are more likely to tolerate their corrupt patrons because they monopolize the benefits and only partially internalize the costs of corruption.<sup>6</sup> Second, inclusion within the clientelistic network may also foster the development of norms that structure corruption evaluations. When citizens’ sense of reciprocity becomes a norm and is generalized in all aspects of their relationship with the patron, they feel obligated to support the patron in spite of the illegality of his/her actions. Notably, norms of reciprocity are based on the exchange of material benefits for electoral support; yet it highlights a slightly different mechanism through which citizens’ attitudes towards the incumbent become enduring and may even have a greater influence on their tolerance for political corruption. By combining the threats of defection and norms of reciprocity explanations, we propose the following hypothesis:

H<sub>1</sub>: Patronage insiders, due to the consideration of patronage benefits and the norms of reciprocity, are more likely to tolerate corruption.

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<sup>6</sup> Kurer (2001) argues that the size of clientelistic networks makes it improbable for patronage insiders to receive sufficient benefits to outweigh the costs. Although we agree that a pervasive patronage network would decrease the share of insider’s benefits and thereby reduce the benefit-cost differential, recipients of patronage benefits, by construction, are hardly universal. In fact, research on clientelism reveals that patronage recipients represent a small proportion of the population. Based on their survey research in Argentina, Brusco *et al.* (2004) find that only 12% of low-income respondents received particularistic benefits from a candidate or a party.

The distinct effect of citizens' bonds within the patronage network may also be of consequence to the formulation of popular perceptions of corruption. We propose two competing explanations to investigate how access to particularized benefits can influence citizens' perception of the level of government corruption.

The first extends the discussion concerning norms of reciprocity. We posit that patronage insiders, who have developed a sense of loyalty to the patron, will tend to allow this bond to shape their cognitive processing of information. Consequently, they may have lower perceptions of the level of government involvement in corruption, as they are not keen to accept information that may implicate the patron in corruption. This logic is parallel to theories that demonstrate how individuals' emotive bonds can influence how they process political information; especially information that challenges existing predispositions (Zaller 1992). Conversely, we presume that patronage-outsiders would perceive higher levels of government corruption than insiders, since their lack of affective bonds to the incumbent makes them more inclined to embrace information linking the government to corruption.

The second explanation has to do with voters' ability to draw information on politicians' corrupt practices from their reception of targeted benefits. Generally, information about corruption transactions is limited because of the normative and legal ramifications that would follow, if the information were exposed. Apart from information on official charges against corrupt politicians, and allegations of graft exposed by the media, there are few sources of corruption information. Be that as it may, voters in many societies make the link between corrupt practices committed by politicians and the doling out of particularized goods. Bratton (2007), in his analysis of voters in Africa, implies that citizens are in many cases aware of the corruption-clientelism nexus. According to him,

“Clientelism and corruption are best viewed as two sides of the same coin of distributive politics: Citizens defer to authority when they benefit materially, but question and condemn their leaders when benefits accrue to others, especially political elites” (2007:108).

This insight suggests that both insiders and outsiders regard patronage as a form of corruption, but their level of tolerance for it differs with respect to access to payoffs. Additionally, it may also be the case that disparities in perceptions of corruption are caused by the degree to which citizens are familiar with the internal dynamics of the patronage network. Chandra (2007) explains how voters have an incentive to gather in-depth knowledge of the history of patronage transactions. According to her, retrospective evaluations provide a potential mechanism for citizens to evaluate the credibility of candidates' future distributive promises. Yet, because information about patronage transactions is not readily available, voters have to employ various techniques to identify the past recipients of patronage distribution. Chandra's theory indicates that patronage insiders have an incentive to monitor patronage transactions as a way of evaluating the credibility of future handouts. Therefore, patronage insiders should have a slightly better grasp of the dynamics of the clientelistic network than their outsider counterparts. In short, insiders who make a normative link between corruption and patronage, and have relatively more information about the distribution of benefits to various members of the network, should perceive higher levels of corruption. In other words, patronage insiders who are more cognizant of the myriad ways in which political actors utilize resources to ensure the compliance of voters are potentially in a better position to overcome the informational constraints and have the inside track to form a better understanding of the extent of graft.

In sum, we formulate two competing hypotheses to account for the divergent perceptions of government corruption among citizens with and without access to clientelistic networks.

H<sub>2a</sub>: Patronage insiders, due to the norms of reciprocity, are more likely to perceive lower levels of corruption.

H<sub>2b</sub>: Patronage insiders, due to their familiarity and knowledge of patronage network operations, are more likely to perceive higher levels of corruption.

***Partisan Insider: Co-partisan of the Incumbent***

Popular attitudes towards corruption are not only shaped by the expectation of material benefits, but also by citizens' affective loyalty to a political or ethnic identity. Partisan affiliation highlights one mechanism through which affective identity shapes mass attitudes of corruption. Generally, partisanship represents an ingrained personal, psychological attachment to a political party that is based on a sense of shared identity with social groups affiliated with the political party (Campbell et al. 1960). Essentially, partisan identification is based on two conceptual attributes: social identification and partisan affect, in that "people decide which party (if any) they identify with based on how they feel about the social groups that comprise the party base" (Goren 2005: 882). Here we define partisan insiders as voters with an allegiance to the incumbent government, while partisan outsiders maintain an affiliation with the opposition. We expect that partisan insiders perceive lower levels of government involvement in corruption, relative to their outsider counterparts. Moreover, we also expect that partisan insiders exhibit higher levels of tolerance of political corruption.

Campbell et al. (1960) explain that party identification provides a perceptual frame through which voter's process political information. As a result, citizens usually interpret information in ways that are consistent with their partisan orientation. In another seminal study, Zaller (1992) provides a more in-depth explanation of how partisanship affects individuals' cognitive processing of political information in two stages. During the first stage, citizens' reception of information is largely driven by their political awareness and their willingness to seek out political information. Importantly, in the second stage, the extent to which individuals accept or reject political information is a function of 1) their partisan evaluation of the reliability of the source; 2) the implications that specific information has on the values of the groups they are associated with; and, 3) the strength of their partisan affiliation.

Extending the existing research to attitudes toward corruption, we argue that partisan insiders tend to perceive lower levels of corruption. The mechanism underlying this cognitive process is twofold. First, partisan insiders are less inclined to search for information on corruption involving the government, because such information may produce a discrepancy between perceived government actions and individual values on corruption. Secondly, when partisan-insiders are exposed to information that implicates the government, they are less willing to accept it. Instead, they would rather challenge the reliability of the information source because the information would undermine the positive-distinctiveness of the government or the social groups they identify with. Thus:

H<sub>3</sub>: Partisan insiders are more likely to perceive lower levels of corruption.

Not only does party affiliation affect political perceptions but it can also structure the political values of citizens. Goren (2005) finds a strong impact of party identification on several important core political values, including equal opportunity, limited government, and moral tolerance. Goren's focus on moral tolerance is especially relevant to our study on tolerance of corruption, as both concepts explore citizens' acceptance of individuals whose actions they do not necessarily approve of.<sup>7</sup> Goren's findings on the strong partisan influence on core political values lend credence to the notion that individuals' political affiliation can have important consequences for their tolerance of corruption. We suggest that political elites can assuage citizens' normative aversion to corruption by framing it as a natural and expected aspect of politics; an activity that is necessary to the preservation of the social groups that underpin the ruling government. As a consequence, we would expect partisan-insiders to display higher tolerance for acts of malfeasance committed by the incumbent government as their values vis-à-vis corruption have been altered by their affiliation with the ruling government.

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<sup>7</sup> In estimating the influence of citizens' partisan status on moral tolerance, he finds that strong Republicans are significantly more intolerant than strong Democrats.

H<sub>4</sub>: Partisan insiders are more likely to tolerate corruption.

Our hypothesis is in accordance with McCann and Redlawsk (2006), who find strong empirical support for the influence of party identification on corruption tolerance. In an experimental survey on popular attitudes of corruption conducted in the 2004 U.S. Presidential elections, the authors indicate that “actions that Democrats condemn as corrupt may be viewed as nearly aboveboard by Republicans if incumbent Republican officeholders are linked at the time to such behaviors”. More generally, they argue that “mass dispositions regarding integrity and corruption in American politics are actually somewhat flexible, and may partly reflect partisan rationalizations” (2006: 801).

### ***Ethnic Insiders: Co-ethnics of the Incumbent***

Our approach also distinguishes between insiders and outsiders on the basis of their ethnicity, or more specifically, on whether voters belong to the same ethnic group or ethnic coalition as the incumbent. In countries where ethnic cleavages are especially salient, voters derive psychic satisfaction from supporting leaders who share a common ethnic identity or political parties that represent their ethnic group (Horowitz 1985). As a consequence, voters’ status as an ethnic insider or outsider can condition their evaluation of political corruption. In particular, we argue that ethnicity engenders the development of an intra-ethnic bias, and as a result, ethnic-insiders tend to report lower levels of corruption and are also more forgiving of their co-ethnic leaders’ involvement in graft relative to ethnic-outsiders.

There are three dominant approaches that probe the formation process of ethnic identity and group membership. Primordialism is based on the notion that individuals coalesce within ethnic groups because they share essential characteristics such as culture, descent, language, and shared history (Horowitz 1985). Constructivism relies on the belief that ethnic identity is formed within a social context and not merely based on ascriptive qualities (Fearon and Laitin 2003). Lastly, instrumentalism focuses on the deliberate and strategic manipulation of ethnic identities for political and economic gain (Posner 2005). Despite subtle differences among these perspectives, contemporary scholars agree that ethnic identity formation is a dynamic process, in which the size and composition of ethnic groups is based on certain innate characteristics as well as the influence of social, economic and political factors. More integral to our discussion, however, is the impact of ethnic identity on citizens’ political attitudes and behaviors.

Ethnicity encourages variation in political attitudes toward government because co-ethnics treat members of their own ethnic group more favorably than outsiders. Ethnic favoritism operates in two ways. First, citizens engage in the cognitive process of social-categorization that forms the basis of self-identification, and social identity arises out of membership in a group and the emotional value associated with membership (Gibson and Gouws 2000). Particularly, through evaluative comparisons, citizens attempt to distinguish between the characteristics of in-groups and out-groups by striving for their groups’ positive distinctiveness. This drive to establish the superiority of the in-group can lead to out-group discrimination, hatred and potentially to conflict.

Second, scholars also attribute ethnic bias to the development of particularized trust between members of the same ethnic group (Uslaner and Conley 2003). Particularized trust refers to the formation of close relational ties between people sharing common backgrounds, and it develops at the expense of more generalized trust that promotes cooperation with various groups within the society. Ethnic group members are particularly prone to develop particularized trust since their social interactions are generally limited to members of that ethnic group, or they face systematic discrimination from other ethnic groups. In many instances, particularized trust within co-ethnics tends to breed out-group mistrust (Bahry et al. 2005).

Regardless of how the ethnic bias develops—either through a psychological process of group differentiation, or through particularized trust of co-ethnics—ethnic identity is likely to have direct implications on individuals’ political attitudes toward corruption. Especially in countries where citizens can differentiate the ethnic identity of political actors and those in which ethnicity provides a guide for citizens’ political

affiliations, we argue that ethnicity represents a schema for processing political information and making political judgments about the incumbent government. Ethnic-insiders, due to their intense commitment to the ethnic group, are predisposed to searching for information that confirms the positive attributes of their co-ethnic leaders. At the same time, ethnic insiders are also likely to be critical of the source and content of information that implicates their co-ethnic leaders in corruption. Consequently, we expect ethnic insiders to maintain lower perceptions of corruption.

H<sub>5</sub>: Ethnic insiders are more likely to perceive lower levels of corruption.

The current literature also highlights an explicit link between ethnic identity and popular acceptance of corrupt practices. It has focused primarily on the instrumental side of the equation, in which co-ethnics who gain access to patronage are more likely to tolerate political corruption involving their co-ethnic leaders (Posner 2005; Chandra 2007). For instance, in their analysis of corruption in ethnically divided societies, Glaeser and Saks (2006) suggest

“If an area is torn apart by ethnic divisions and leaders tend to allocate resources towards backers of their own ethnicity, then members of one ethnic group might continue to support a leader of their own ethnic group, even if he is known to be corrupt” (1058).

In addition to the prominence of the instrumental rationale, which we addressed previously, we argue that ethnic identity also explains variation in corruption tolerance. There are numerous ways in which emotional considerations influence citizens' levels of tolerance. One such possibility is the psychic benefits such as security, importance or self-esteem (Gibson and Gouws 2000) that are derived from membership within ethnic groups. These benefits are distinct from the material benefits associated with the distribution of patronage or the provision of public goods. Horowitz's theory on the relationship between ethnic-identity and political support of co-ethnic parties substantiates our argument (1985). He explains that members of an ethnic group generate psychic satisfaction by throwing their weight behind an ethnic party. Chandra also alludes to the psychic benefits that co-ethnics derive from sharing the ethnic-identity of a political leader (2007).<sup>8</sup> On this basis, we contend that ethnic insiders may be more understanding of political malfeasance involving a co-ethnic leader. More simply, ethnic-insiders employ different evaluative criteria in judging the acceptability of their ethnic-leaders actions due to the emotional benefits that they derive from their ethnic-kin being in power.

H<sub>6</sub>: Ethnic insiders are more likely to tolerate corruption.

## **Empirical Analysis**

### ***Description of the Data***

We utilize data on 18 sub-Saharan countries from Round 3 (2005-2006) of the Afrobarometer survey (AB) to test these hypotheses.<sup>9</sup> AB is a cross-national public opinion survey that measures individual attitudes and behaviors in response to a wide-range of topics such as democracy, market reform and civil society. AB is ideal for conducting cross-country analysis because it employs a standard questionnaire with identically or functionally equivalent terms.<sup>10</sup>

Our decision to test the insider-outsider theory on attitudes towards corruption in the context of sub-Saharan Africa is guided by the following considerations. Scholars of African politics argue that clientelism and

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<sup>8</sup> Chandra notes that voters only enjoy an emotional boost from their affiliation with the co-ethnic leaders when informational constraints prevent other forms of group affiliation to become salient (2007).

<sup>9</sup> These countries include: Benin, Botswana, Cape Verde, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Madagascar, Mali, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

<sup>10</sup> AB employs national probability surveys obtained using stratified, multi-stage, area probability samples. With sample sizes between 1,200 and 2,400 the survey yields margin of errors between 2.5 and 2 percent at the 95% confidence interval. For further information visit: [www.afrobarometer.org](http://www.afrobarometer.org).

systematic corruption are informal institutions present within many sub-Saharan African polities (Bratton 2007). Additionally, ethnicity is perhaps one of the most salient social cleavages within the region and its politicization is manifested in the large numbers of ethnically based parties and coalitions, as well as the high rate of ethnic voting (Posner 2005). The confluence of high rates of corruption, clientelism and politicized ethnicity presents an ideal context for the evaluation of our hypotheses.

### ***Dependent Variable I: Corruption Perception***

This paper first follows the standard approach in survey research and measures citizens' levels of perceived corruption. We focus specifically on high-level corruption as opposed to petty corruption, and we employ the question from AB that asks respondents to evaluate the extent to which they think the President, officials in his office, and national government officials are involved in corruption. The response to each item is scaled to a metric of 1-4, where 1 means "not at all" and 4 indicates "a lot." We then create a composite index of corruption perception by taking the average across these items. Preliminary analysis shows that the variable of corruption perception exhibits substantial variation within individual countries, and this result further emphasizes the necessity to understand why voters' perceptions of corruption differ within the same country.

### ***Dependent Variable II: Corruption Tolerance***

The second dependent variable, on the other hand, taps into the notion of corruption tolerance. Unlike the previous variable of corruption perception, AB does not ask respondents directly about their levels of tolerance for corruption; but we can nevertheless construct an innovative indicator of corruption tolerance by basing our measurement on the standard definition of political corruption—the misuse of public office for personal benefits. Specifically, AB provides respondents a set of scenarios involving politicians' abuse of their power for personal enrichment,<sup>11</sup> and asks respondents whether such action is not wrong at all, wrong but understandable, or wrong and punishable. For each scenario, we consider respondents tolerant for corruption if the respondent answers, "not wrong at all" or "wrong but understandable" since we are ultimately concerned with tolerance rather than moral judgment. To ensure our results are not driven by the arbitrary choice of the scenario, we construct a composite variable of corruption tolerance by taking the average of all items. Again, our preliminary analysis also finds massive within-country variation for the variable of corruption tolerance.

### ***Independent Variables***

To explicitly account for variation in both corruption perception and corruption tolerance indicators, our next task is to operationalize our insider-outsider framework. We start our effort with the notion of patronage insider, which is perhaps the most difficult concept to capture empirically. AB does not provide any direct question to identify whether a respondent is a beneficiary of patronage spoils. Even if it did, the response is likely to be unreliable since one has an incentive to underreport her involvement in patronage transactions. Being aware of the inherent problems, however, we utilize an effective proxy provided by AB to measure if a respondent is a patronage insider. The questions asked by AB allow us to measure this phenomenon without triggering defensive reactions from respondents.

Specifically, AB asks respondents what, if anything, they would do to try and resolve various kinds of bureaucratic red-tape and governmental harassment, including waiting for a government permit but kept encountering delays, family member being wrongly arrested by the police, and family's land being wrongly seized. AB then provides the following options for respondents to choose from, including "don't worry, things will be resolved given enough time," "lodge complaint through proper channels or procedures", "use connections with influential people", "offer tip or bribe", "join in public protest", "other", or simply "nothing". While this set of questions does not seem directly relevant, we argue that this information gives us unique empirical leverage to identify the potential patronage insiders since the only people that can use connections with influential people are the ones that actually have connections. In other words, those who

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<sup>11</sup> For instance, a government official demands a favor or an additional payment for some service that is part of his job or gives a job to his family member who does not have adequate qualifications.

choose to “use connections with influential people” to solve problems are likely to belong to the patronage network and hence have strings to pull. Therefore, we take advantage of backward induction from these questions and create a dummy variable of patronage insider, which adopts the value of one if a respondent chooses “use connections with influential people.”

Clearly, there are weaknesses with this indicator. Most notably, it is indirect, reflective of individuals’ attitudes to hypothetical situations, may privilege certain individuals with higher socio-economic status, and does not specify an actual political actor. Despite these limitations, we are confident that our measure of clientelism improves upon the dominant approaches in the extant literature that have struggled to measure this phenomenon. One dominant approach narrows the concept of clientelism to vote buying and assesses voters’ actual experience with being offered a benefit in return for electoral support (Brusco *et al.* 2004; Stokes 2005). While this measure captures the potential exchange between patrons and clients, there remains a significant conceptual gap between clientelism and vote buying. Additionally, in light of the insights contributed by the redistributive politics literature which argues that politicians have incentives to pour resources into swing voters instead of their core supporters during elections, one might counter argue that being approached with material benefits during election indicates that the targeted voter does not belong to the clientelism network. Less problematically, using vote buying can be questionable because of respondents’ reluctance to acknowledge their compliance with the practice. We believe that our measure guards against the problem of underreporting because of the innocuous nature of the question. A second approach offers an attitudinal measure of clientelism (Bratton 2007). By contrast, our measure improves upon the existing approach by considering citizens responses to a more comprehensive range of hypothetical yet plausible situations, thereby increasing its reliability. Finally, to ensure the validity of our seemingly arbitrary measure, we test whether patronage insiders tend to express more loyalty to their patron and are more likely to form favorable attitudes toward clientelism. We find that our measure and the attitudinal measure correlate strongly. For instance, in comparison to their outsider counterparts, patronage insiders tend to agree more with the statement that “Once in office, leaders are obliged to help their home community” as opposed to “Since leaders represent everyone, leaders should not favor their own family or group.” In light of these supplemental findings, we remain confident that our coding has indirectly yet effectively captured the gist of patronage insiders.

The variable construction of partisan and ethnic insiders is more straightforward. For partisan insider, the AB asks respondents which political party, and to what extent, they feel close with, and we identify those partisan insiders by constructing a dummy variable that takes the value of one if respondents feel somewhat or very close to the incumbent party. For ethnic insiders, the AB asks respondents’ ethnic affiliation and we consider a respondent an ethnic insider if she is from the same ethnic group as the president of her country.<sup>12</sup>

In addition to our main insider-outsider theory, we also control for various factors proposed in the extant literature that might also shape individuals’ attitudes toward political corruption. First, political sophistication, or the quantity and organization of a person’s political cognitions, is argued to affect virtually every dimension of public opinion (Zaller 1992). As Dalton (2000) succinctly summarizes, theories of public opinion and political behavior are premised on voters’ mental capacity for understanding political issues. MacDonald *et al.* (1995) also show that sophisticated voters are more sensitive to issue information and are also more likely to act upon information during elections. To a certain extent, we can also interpret the effect of political sophistication as the factual foundation of corruption attitude formation, since sophisticated voters are more aware of the existence of corruption and are also less likely to tolerate it.

To tap into the notion of political sophistication, the current approach focuses on gauging respondents’ political awareness and knowledge, or in general, the quality of political information a voter possesses (Zaller 1992). This knowledge-based approach also seems ideal for measuring political sophistication in emerging democracies since it demands less complexity, and has effectively been adopted in the context of

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<sup>12</sup> Note that AB does not provide relevant information for us to construct ethnic insider variable in Cape Verde, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe.

African countries (Bratton *et al.* 2005). Following this approach, this paper uses an additive scale constructed from counts of correct answers to several political knowledge items. The scale is then normalized to range from zero to one, where one indicates that a respondent answered all questions correctly.

Next, existing research posits that citizens' attitudes toward corruption are heavily influenced by their media exposure (Davis *et al.* 2004; Bratton *et al.* 2005; Miller 2006). However, the scholarship on media exposure is not conclusive on whether greater access to information increases citizens' perceptions about government corruption. On the one hand, scholars claim that greater exposure to information will increase voters' ability to find out about allegations of official graft and the prosecution of politicians charged with corruption. On the other hand, greater access to information may also mean that voters will seek out media sources that confirm their existing partiality. We control for the potential influence of media exposure by examining how often respondents get news from radio.

In addition, we also control for respondents' direct experience with political corruption. Recent studies have shown that experience with corruption figures prominently in individuals' perceptions of corruption. In most cases, individuals who experience corruption negatively evaluate those involved in the practice. Citizens are more likely to gain first hand experience with graft involving lower level government officials and civil servants and use these experiences to gauge the degree of elite corruption (Seligson 2002; Bratton *et al.* 2005; Miller 2006). AB measures citizens' experiences with corruption by asking how often respondents had to pay a bribe to receive basic government services, such as getting a document or a permit, getting a child into school, getting a household service, getting medicine or medical attention, or simply avoiding problem with police. Building upon these questions we construct a composite index of corruption experience, and we expect those who have direct experience with corruption to perceive higher levels of corruption and be less likely to tolerate it.

Finally, it seems plausible that those who feel deprived socio-economically might be more doubtful about the integrity of political elites and more resentful of official misconducts. Hence, we take into account the possibility that citizens' personal economic evaluations might affect their attitudes toward corruption, and we include a variable which measures their assessment of their relative living conditions compared to others. We expect the coefficient of the personal economic evaluation variable to be negative for both models of corruption perception and tolerance.

### ***Empirical Results***

As a first cut, we construct a baseline model to test our insider-outsider theory by relating corruption perception to patronage, partisan, and ethnic insider. The results, shown in Model 1 of Table 1, strongly confirm our preliminary impressions.<sup>13</sup> We find that partisan and ethnic insiders consistently choose to overlook the presence of corruption and perceive less corruption. What is more interesting is that patronage insiders actually perceive higher levels of corruption than those who do not belong to the patronage network. We interpret this finding to signify that patronage insiders develop a more accurate understanding about incidences of elite corruption through frequent interactions with their patrons. Because of this direct contact, insiders are privy to information on corrupt practices that their patrons are engaged in, such as vote buying, the distribution of public employment and state contracts. Patronage outsiders, on the other hand, may have a general awareness of these practices, yet not comparable to the in-depth knowledge that insider access affords.

We next incorporate all of the control variables described earlier into the model. As the Model 2 indicates, our results lend decent support to our conjectures: all of the variables except political sophistication register a significant impact on the perception of corruption as expected. Put differently, citizens who are more exposed to media information, who have direct corruption experience, and who hold negative personal

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<sup>13</sup> Diagnostic analysis, not reported here but available upon request, suggests that the model provides a reasonably good fit to the data.



economic evaluations tend to perceive higher levels of corruption. Most importantly, all of our insider variables remain significant, reinforcing the robustness of the previous results.

**Table 1: Determinants of Corruption Attitudes Formation**

Dependent Variable	Model 1 Perception	Model 2 Perception	Model 3 Perception	Model 4 Tolerance
<b>Individual Level</b>				
Patronage Insider	.064* (.036)	.048* (.026)	.033* (.019)	.038*** (.012)
Partisan Insider	-.283*** (.055)	-.274*** (.053)	-.176*** (.036)	-.005 (.007)
Ethnic Insider	-.150** (.057)	-.136** (.052)	-.113* (.059)	-.023 (.015)
Information Exposure		.120** (.053)	.064*** (.019)	-.020** (.009)
Political Sophistication		.055 (.064)	.108*** (.037)	-.037** (.018)
Corruption Experience		.568*** (.092)	.480*** (.067)	.045** (.020)
Personal Economic Evaluation		-.047** (.019)	-.044*** (.014)	.011* (.006)
Constant	1.382*** (.089)	1.314*** (.142)	1.867*** (.345)	.706*** (.213)
<b>Country Level</b>				
log GDP per capita			-.081* (.043)	-.057** (.027)
N	17819	17215	17215	19401

*Robust standard errors in parentheses. \*  $p < .1$ ; \*\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .01$ . Two-tailed test*

Note that in both Model 1 and Model 2, we account for potential clustering within countries to avoid overly optimistic inferences, since it is highly likely that observations within a country are more similar than ones across countries. But, rather than treating the dependence among observations within the same country as a nuisance and estimating the standard errors conservatively, we take an aggressive step to model the dependence explicitly by constructing a random-intercept model in Model 3. Another theoretical advantage of Model 3 is that it allows us to incorporate the contextual effects at the country level into the analysis. Among the various potential contextual factors, we are mostly interested in a country's level of economic development as commonly measured by the log of GDP per capita.<sup>14</sup> Our basic intuition is that voters should perceive less corruption (and dislike it more) in richer countries. Therefore, we assume that country intercepts vary as a function of the economic development plus random noise, and we examine whether the perception of corruption at the individual level is shaped by contextual economic influences. The results show that empirically it is indeed the case. The negative coefficient of the economic development at the country level suggests that in countries with higher levels of development citizens are less likely to perceive corruption.

Finally, we repeat the multilevel modeling setup used in Model 3 to examine the determinants of tolerance for corruption. The results in Model 4 show that patronage insiders, as we previously speculated, exhibit significantly higher tolerance for corruption. We interpret this result as corroboration that individuals who benefit materially through their association with the incumbent government are likely to be more understanding of political corruption. Meanwhile, consistent with our prior expectation, we find that those

<sup>14</sup> We choose the year of 2005 to match the timeframe that the Round 3 of the AB was conducted.

who are more sophisticated, those who are more exposed to media, and those with negative personal economic evaluations tend to resent corruption. What is more surprising to us is that those who have been the victims of corruption actually tend to accept corruption. While we cannot think of any reasonable explanation for this, we are not alone in identifying this perplexing empirical relationship. Bratton (2006), for instance, finds that in sub-Saharan African countries where the provision of health care services are limited, citizens who pay bribes to health care officials actually experience greater satisfaction from being able to gain access to the service. Arguably, when bribe giving opens the door to limited state services that individuals otherwise would not have had, they are more willing to view corruption as an acceptable practice. Finally, the results reveal that an individual's status as an ethnic or partisan insider has no recognizable effects on their tolerance of corruption.

### **Implications of High Reelection Rates of Corrupt Incumbent**

In sum, our empirical analysis finds supportive evidence for our insider-outsider theory. With respect to perceptions of corruption, the results corroborate our expectations that identity insiders were more likely to turn a blind eye to corruption. This was not the case, however, for patronage insiders whose perceptions of corruption were higher than citizens outside of the patronage network. Meanwhile, patronage-insiders are significantly more forgiving of corruption committed by their patrons.

Most importantly, these findings provide us with the theoretical leverage to disentangle an interesting paradox — the coexistence of public disdain for corruption and popular corrupt politicians — in the corruption literature (Kurer 2001). Indeed, one peculiar and normatively disturbing phenomenon is that corrupt incumbents actually enjoy relatively high reelection rates, even in the context of advanced democracies. Perhaps one of the most illustrative examples of this paradox is Tanaka Kakuei. The then Japanese prime minister, despite being tried in court for bribery during the infamous Lockheed scandal, collected his career high votes from his constituency and was re-elected to the Diet for fifteen consecutive times after the 1983 “Tanaka Verdict Election” (Johnson 1986). Mr. Tanaka is well accompanied by Italy's Silvio Berlusconi, who, despite his alleged links to the Mafia and being put on trial multiple times for a variety of corruption and malfeasance charges, has served as prime minister in Italy three times since the mid-1990s. Other members in this corruption elite squad include Edwin Edwards in the U.S., and Thaksin in Thailand, just to name a few.

These corrupt political figures do not appear to be exceptions. In a systematic study, Reed (2005) finds that legislators in Japan who are convicted of corruption charges actually enjoy increases in their vote shares. Moreover, sixty-two percent of Japanese legislators convicted of corruption between 1947 and 1993 were subsequently reelected. Similarly, Peters and Welch (1980) find that in the U.S. House of Representatives elections, corruption charges only reduce candidates' vote share by 6 to 11 percent and are inadequate for deterring corrupt candidates from electoral victories. In a subsequent analysis, Welch and Hibbing (1997) show that from 1982 to 1990, charges of corruption affected U.S. House reelection probabilities more severely, but again those charged were more likely than not to be reelected. Finally, in a recent study, Chang *et al.* (2007) show that in post-war Italy, judicial investigation of political malfeasance, while slightly reducing the probability of achieving reelection, did not effectively discourage deputies from standing for reelection at all. Importantly, they find that judicial inquiry damages the electoral fortunes of legislators in only the Eleventh legislature, while in the first ten legislatures, Italian voters failed to penalize legislators even in light of evidence of political corruption. In addition, parallel to Welsh and Hibbing's findings, Chang *et al.* show that when a legislator is under judicial investigation for political malfeasance, his reelection probability is still over fifty percent.<sup>15</sup>

The high reelection rates of corrupt incumbents in these highly developed democratic countries directly challenge the principles of democracy. After all, the most compelling justification for democracy is that

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<sup>15</sup> Legislators who are charged with serious political malfeasance actually see increases of 14 percent in the number of individual preference votes they receive in the subsequent election.

public officials can be held accountable for their misbehaviors. Needless to say, democratic ideals and practices can be severely undermined when politicians remain untouchable and are free from electoral retribution even after betraying the public's trust by extracting excessive rents. Therefore, the puzzle of why voters do not bother to throw the rascals out has attracted growing attention.

In a nutshell, the conventional wisdom attributes the electoral success of corrupt politicians to three informational dilemmas faced by the electorate: the information deficiency, the coordination problem induced by information asymmetry, and ignorance. In the first account, voters are argued to support corrupt politicians simply because they are poorly informed and hence unable to accurately observe politicians' true type. For instance, in their study of Brazil's municipal elections, Ferraz and Finan (2008) initially find that incumbent mayors subject to anti-corruption audit before elections did not suffer from significant electoral penalty. But once they account for the level of corruption that was revealed in the audit, they find that corruption audit strongly reduces the incumbent's likelihood of reelection. Moreover, they show that the effect of information disclosure on the incumbent's reelection odds is even more pronounced in municipalities with local radio stations.

In the second perspective, voters' support of corrupt politicians is a strategic response to a collective action dilemma. The intuition is that due to the uncertainty of other voters' voting intention, a rational voter reluctantly supports the corrupt politician out of fear that she might be defecting alone, and that once unsuccessful, the reigning corrupt incumbent will retaliate by cutting off particularistic benefits (Kurer 2001). Finally, some scholars suggest that the key to solving this paradox lies in a simple answer: voters' ignorance. Kurer, for instance, suggests that "...ignorance about the effects of corruption, about the alternatives available, and about the intentions of those standing for election are possible reasons for voters to support corrupt politics" (2001: 79). Olken (2009) explicitly examines the extent of information contained in Indonesian villagers' beliefs about the likelihood of corruption in their villages, and he finds that while villagers' beliefs do contain information about corruption, the magnitude of their information, however, is very small.

In short, these informational approaches assume that voters genuinely dislike corruption, and that they support corrupt politicians either because they are kept in the dark without information or they are trapped in sub-optimal equilibrium due to the difficulty of coordination. Importantly, the conventional wisdom posits that once empowered with the necessary information, voters will be able to either see the light or solve the coordination problem, and consequently punish corrupt politicians. However, this informational account is not as theoretically persuasive as it is normatively appealing. In particular, this informational thesis is incapable of explaining the puzzle of high reelection rates of corrupt incumbents in the context of advanced democracy where there is no shortage of information supply. For instance, in a country like Japan where the freedom of press is sound and citizens are highly educated, it is hard to imagine that voters were brutally denied information access to Mr. Tanaka's involvement in corruption scandals or simply were too ignorant to understand it. It is also more reasonable to assume that when an incumbent is implicated in corruption scandals in advanced democracies the opposition party would capitalize on the opportunity and provide a focal point to help solve the coordination problem for voters during electoral campaigns.

The theoretical deficiency of the informational thesis leads to a new wave of research. In this renewed scholarly attempt, supporting corrupt government can be regarded as a rational decision chosen by well-informed voters. Manzetti and Wilson (2007) argue that corrupt politicians in weakly institutionalized systems are able to remain electorally viable because of their capacity to exploit government resources for patrimonial purposes. In other words, when the government is weakly institutionalized and unable to deliver public goods, voters will support corrupt politicians in exchange for private benefits, since they perceive clientelism as the most effective mechanism of distributing state resources. Other scholars argue that corruption can arise even in a well-functioning democracy. In a recent study, Pani (2009) shows that corruption not only distorts the allocation of state resources between public and private spending, but also diverts the policy spending preferences of politicians away from voters. Under such circumstances,

corruption will result in the reduction of public spending and taxes.<sup>16</sup> Importantly, because corruption involves redistributive consequences, Pani shows that certain citizens can benefit indirectly from corruption and have an incentive to support a corrupt political system.

This paper builds upon the extant literature and shows how our insider-outsider framework bears greatly on elucidating the puzzle of unpopular yet successful corrupt politicians. We concur that the conventional information thesis might have only limited explanatory power. Specifically, we argue that being an identity insider, be it based on partisan or ethnic affiliation, inevitably clouds one's judgment of the incumbent regardless of relevant information that might be abundantly available. As a result, the in-group bias can substantially attenuate the negative corruption-vote link that is initially established by most citizens. Our insider-outsider framework, to a certain extent, also extends the rational corruption perspective and emphasizes the importance of instrumentality in voters' electoral behavior. We argue that corrupt incumbents can maintain substantial electoral advantages even when corrupt activities are patently disliked by the public. Importantly, we suggest that insiders — particularly, the beneficiaries of patronage spoils — may be willing to cut corrupt politicians some slack as long as they bring home the bacon. In sum, one important implication derived from our insider-outsider framework is that insiders' support of the incumbent, when compared to outsiders, is less affected by corruption. Note that we do not argue that insiders will *reward* corruption, instead, our hypothesis is that corruption matters less for insiders' support of the incumbent.

While this paper empirically addresses a similar question on why voters support corrupt politicians, it takes a unique approach that differs from that of Kurer (2001) and Manzetti and Wilson (2007). In particular, unlike Kurer (2001) who usefully surveys the literature and provides a list of potential explanations, this paper goes another step further by attempting to disentangle this daunting puzzle empirically. Although Manzetti and Wilson (2007) also attempt this goal, their analysis is unfortunately restricted by data constraints. As they acknowledge themselves, the difficulty in testing their argument is that "...there are simply no data to directly measure, in any cross-national fashion, the level of patronage provided by politicians (956)." As a second-best solution, they execute a country-level analysis with the satisfaction of government as the dependent variable and they relate it to an indicator of democratic institutional strength, an indicator of citizens' perceived levels of corruption, and the interaction term between the above two. By contrast, this paper chooses an alternative research design that can arguably offer better empirical leverage to solve this puzzle. Specifically, we employ an individual level analysis and examine whether a voter's voting intention is affected by her insider-outsider status and her personal experience with corruption. Through this individual level research framework, we are at a better vantage point to directly examine the causal dynamics of *why voters support corrupt politicians*. Without having to draw inferences about the electoral behaviors of individual voters on the basis of aggregate data, we can also avoid the dangers of ecological fallacy. To explicitly test for this hypothesis, we turn to AB data and examine information on respondents' voting record. The dependent variable is whether a respondent intends to vote for the incumbent if a presidential election were held tomorrow, and it takes the value of one if she does. The key independent variable is respondents' experience with corruption. Obviously, the coefficient is expected to be negative. More importantly, to examine whether the insider-outsider status lessens the corruption-vote link, we construct a composite index for insider status. Specifically, to ensure that our newly constructed variable efficiently and equitably captures both the instrumentality and identity components of the insider-outsider distinction, we create a binary variable that takes the value of one if a respondent is both a patronage insider and a partisan or ethnic insider. Then we create an interaction term between our measure of corruption experience and the composite insider variable. If our expectation that corruption has less of a negative impact on insider's support for the incumbent is correct, the coefficient of the interaction term should be positive.

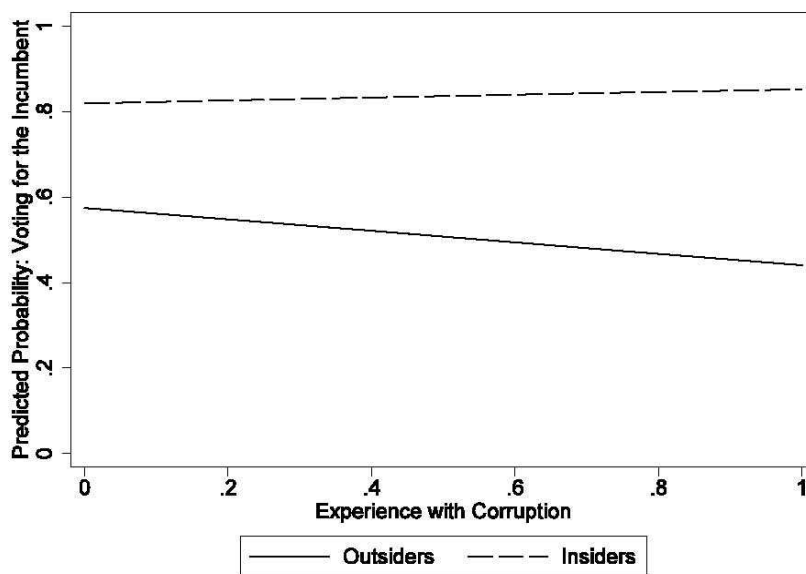
The results show just that. Figure 1 further illustrates graphically that insiders are less inclined to punish corrupt incumbents for their corrupt acts at the polls. As we can see, the downward slope for outsiders suggests that corruption experience indeed reduces outsiders' electoral support for the incumbent. However,

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<sup>16</sup> This result holds when the median voter's demand for public goods is sufficiently elastic.

the downward slope for insiders is actually flat (more precisely, upward but insignificant). In other words, corruption experience matters less electorally for insiders as opposed to outsiders. We also find that insiders, due to either affective identity or material considerations, are much more supportive of the incumbent at the polls. In sum, these findings provide compelling rationale for the paradox of corrupt politicians who enjoy repeated electoral success in countries that citizens have high perceptions of political corruption. Notably, our results challenge the exclusivity of informational theories of corruption that predicate citizens' ability to sanction corrupt politicians upon the availability of information on corruption. Instead, we arrive at a more nuanced explanation for the paradox, on the basis that even when citizens are sufficiently informed of the incidence of corruption, their likelihood to use this information depends critically on the existence of an affiliation with the incumbent; be it of an instrumental or an affective nature. Furthermore, the results reinforce the analytical disparity between perceptions and tolerance by demonstrating that citizens who benefit from corruption might choose to turn a blind eye to it, even when information about corruption is abundantly available.

**Figure 1: Insiders, Outsiders, and Support for Corrupt Politicians**



## Conclusion

This paper makes a crucial theoretical distinction between perceptions and tolerance of corruption, on the basis that they are shaped by different factors and have different political consequences. We then separate insiders from outsiders along the dimensions of cost benefit instrumentality—individuals' inclusion within a patronage network—and affective identity—individuals' ethnic or partisan affiliation to the incumbent. As we demonstrated in our analysis, patronage insiders display higher levels of tolerance for political malfeasance involving the patron, while perceiving corruption as ubiquitous. Meanwhile, both partisan and ethnic insiders were less likely to consider corruption to be widespread. Our insider-outsider framework also provides penetrating insight into the puzzle of why corrupt political actors continue to command substantial electoral support, as we show that insiders' support for the incumbent is less likely to be affected by the incumbents' record on corruption. Taken together, the main upshot of this paper is that citizens' status as an insider or outsider has significant implications on how they form their attitudes towards political corruption and how they use these attitudes to make electoral judgments.

The main limitation of this paper relates to our measure of clientelism. Being aware of the inherent problems that scholars have traditionally encountered in measuring this concept, we approach the measurement of clientelism from a different angle by considering the extent to which voters rely on connections with

influential people to resolve bureaucratic red tape and governmental harassment. Clearly, there are weaknesses with using this indicator, however, we are confident that we offer a previously unavailable operationalization of clientelism and arguably moderate improvements over the dominant approaches in the extant literature.

Another limitation has to do with the generalizability of our theory. To a great extent, we believe that the results derived from data on sub-Saharan Africa are applicable to other developing democracies where ethnic identities and partisan cleavages are salient and clientelism is the most dominant linkage between citizens. On the other hand, however, the generalizability of our insider-outsider framework possibly reaches the limit in established democracies in which formal institutions outweigh informal ones (for instance, the informal practice of clientelism has been replaced with programmatic redistributive politics).

Finally, one might reasonably question our theoretical focus on partisanship as an explanation for corruption attitude formation especially in Africa where party systems are generally considered weakly institutionalized and not embraced by ordinary citizens.<sup>17</sup> Despite the distinct differences in the nature of partisanship within sub-Saharan Africa, we argue that partisanship remains useful in distinguishing between insiders and outsiders and unearthing the variation in voters' attitudes towards corruption in sub-Saharan Africa. First, in some sub-Saharan African countries competitive multi-party competition has become the norm: they contain stable party systems, experience alternation of power and parties frequently differentiate themselves on policy issues, and consequently, voters have been more inclined to develop enduring partisan attachments<sup>18</sup> Secondly, scholars addressing partisanship comparatively have modified the concept of partisanship to emphasize voters' support for the winning parties of the last elections (Anderson and Tverdova 2003; Bratton et al. 2005). Although this conceptualization removes many of complexities of partisan allegiance, it usefully distinguishes voters based on their allegiance the incumbent party or opposition parties. We borrow this insight and approach partisan identification in terms of affiliation with the incumbent government versus the opposition, and our empirical results show that voters' status as a supporter of the electoral winner or loser is important in shaping their perception of corruption.

Lastly, many salient remaining issues await future research. The first research opportunity is the connection between affective identity and cost-benefit instrumentality. Our research clearly indicates how instrumental and affective bonds separately account for the heterogeneity in voters' corruption tolerance and perceptions. In actuality, however, the distinction between these two dimensions is not as unambiguous as we suggest. Absent from our analysis is a theoretical and empirical assessment of the extent to which these various insiders overlap each other.

Another potential research agenda involves the reevaluation of existing studies that disproportionately rely on the use of corruption perceptions to examine how corruption affects political attitudes and behaviors. Since tolerance and perceptions are analytically distinct, conventional wisdom might be inadequate to shed full light on the consequences of corruption and might possibly arrive at inaccurate conclusions. Therefore, it could be rewarding to take into consideration the multi-dimensionality of corruption attitudes in subsequent research and examine the causal impact of corruption perceptions and tolerance simultaneously.

Finally, our research provides crucial theoretical and empirical insight as to why voters continue to support corrupt political leaders, by identifying the sub-sections of the society that are most likely to tolerate corruption or maintain muted perceptions of its existence. These findings might be useful for the continuing efforts to develop anti-corruption policies. By being more attuned to the individual-level determinants of

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<sup>17</sup> Studies have shown that African party systems are generally characterized by a dominant party with plethora of small, volatile parties that are incapable of forming a cohesive opposition (van de Walle 2003). Also, African parties rarely differentiate themselves on programmatic policy, but instead establish social bases of support through ethnic and clientelistic networks (Norris and Mattes 2003).

<sup>18</sup> According to Round 3 of AB, in 12 of 18 countries over 60% of respondents display some degree of partisan attachments. These countries include Botswana, Ghana, Kenya Lesotho, Mali, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda and Zimbabwe.

heterogeneity in corruption attitudes, our framework may contribute to the development of initiatives that are tailored to the contextual dynamics of a specific country or region.

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