

# Disaggregating Corruption: A Comparison of Participation and Perceptions in Latin America with a Focus on Mexico<sup>1</sup>

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An abundant empirical literature on corruption relying on survey research has emerged since the mid-1990s. The predominant line of inquiry concerns perceptions of corruption with respect to institutions and processes. Another, separate line of inquiry that has enjoyed less attention concerns reports about individuals' participation in corruption. These two dimensions of corruption, however, are typically conflated, leading to error and confusion. This article explores the relationship between the two and seeks to differentiate the two. Using data at the country and individual levels, analysis shows how the two may be only weakly related to one another – though causality remains unclear – and respond to distinct sets of determinants and generate distinct outcomes. The analysis underlines the need to specify the findings in the literature: that the causes and consequences of corruption relate more to 'perceived' corruption rather than actual corruption.

Keywords: corruption, empirical studies on corruption, Mexico, participation in corruption, perceptions of corruption.

'In politics, perception is everything', or so they say, an assertion that seems particularly valid for empirical analyses of corruption. Long hampered by conceptual, methodological and even political obstacles, attention to corruption has grown tremendously since the mid-1990s. One factor behind this boom has been the elaboration of cross-national measures based on subjective perceptions of corruption by such organisations as the Berlin-based NGO Transparency International (TI). Equipped with this easy-to-use national index, teams of researchers have produced rich and robust cross-sectional empirical findings highlighting many of the determinants of corruption and modelling its toxic effects on the economy and the polity (see, for instance, Mauro, 1995, 1997; Ades and Di Tella, 1997a, 1997b; Lambsdorff, 1999; Treisman, 2000; Montinola and

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Jackman, 2002; Paldam, 2002; Ali and Isse, 2003; Brunetti and Weder, 2003; Gerring and Thacker, 2004; Mocan, 2004; Xin and Rudel, 2004).

As with any empirical study, however, the strength of these results rests on the validity, reliability and precision of the measurements used. But the purpose of this article is not to rehash the methodological problematic associated with perception-based measures of corruption or to question the results of past studies. Del Castillo (2003), Johnston (2000, 2002) and Lancaster and Montinola (2001) offer excellent reviews of such questions. Besides, most researchers tend to preface their analysis by warning readers about the limitations of the data they use. Instead, this article explores differences between perception-based measures of corruption and measures based on more direct experience or participation in corruption, and the possible relationship linking the two. Rather than arguing that one approach is superior, I contend here that the two tap distinct dimensions of corruption, behave largely independently of one another, and that both are important in understanding the nature and impact of corruption. Recognising how the two respond to different sets of determinants helps us come to grips with the possibility that the two may at times move in opposite directions: that it is possible that actual participation in corruption may fall at the same time that corruption is thought to be increasing.

The first of the article's three parts discusses methodological differences between these two approaches and hence the possible theoretical relationships linking participation and perception. This section stresses how the two measures privilege different types of corruption and suffer from distinct validity problems. The second part then briefly examines the empirical relationship at the cross-national, regional level using data from Latin American countries. Attention here centres on the direct bivariate relationship linking participation and perception and their correlates. Though the results show that the two are only weakly related and tend to operate independently, the limited sample size ( $n = 17$ ) renders the results tentative. The last part of the article thus explores the relationship at the individual-level of analysis based on data from Mexico. Here I examine both the direct relationship linking participation in corruption and perceptions of corruption, and disaggregate the two sets of correlates and effects. The results provide further evidence of a weak direct relationship between the two and help differentiate determinants and effects.

## **Measuring Corruption: Perception versus Participation**

For years, the difficulties of measuring corruption stunted our study of it. Obstacles reflected not only the furtive nature of the phenomenon – how do you measure something hidden, illegal, and that no one wants to talk about? – but also a serious definitional quandary.<sup>2</sup> Even so, efforts have been made over the years to quantify

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2 Although most accept straightforward definitions like the one offered by Nye (1967), that corruption involves behaviour by public officials that deviates from the normal duties of public office for personal or pecuniary gain, analysts have never failed to uncover the inadequacies of any definitional formula. For a review of the definitional quandaries see the early chapters in Heidenheimer and Johnston (2002), Heywood (1997) or my discussion in Morris (1991).

corruption and examine it empirically. Objective measures of corruption include the use of press reports (Eker, 1981; Whitehead, 1983; Morris, 1991; Rehren, 1997), conviction rates (Meier and Holbrook, 1992; Schlesinger and Meier, 2002; Hill, 2003), judicial records (Correa, 1985; Della Porta and Vannucci, 1997, 1999), and reports from anticorruption agencies (De Speville, 1997; López Presa, 1998; Spector, Johnston, Dininio, 2005). While these approaches enjoy certain benefits – like the fact that those creating the data are unaware of its future use and are thus unable to be biased – serious problems have been raised. Since objective measures are not systematic, it is difficult to demonstrate their validity and reliability. Press reports can be partial and reflect editorial or public interest rather than the real level of corruption, while the validity of judicial records depends largely on the credibility of that institution, which itself may suffer from extensive corruption (Del Castillo, 2003: 31–32). Due to these concerns, such approaches have not enjoyed much support in the field.

By contrast, subjective measures of corruption have gained substantial scholarly acceptance. Two subjective approaches have been developed, although they have not been utilised equally. The first approach and the one found in almost all the empirical studies on corruption to date, focuses on perceptions of corruption or ‘perceived’ corruption. This approach measures the level or the amount of corruption an individual believes to exist. Samples and questions vary. They may examine the opinion of business executives, country experts, development officials or regular citizens, while the questions can range from the general (i.e. what level or degree of corruption is there in the system, or ‘how corrupt are politicians?’) to more specific institutional levels (i.e. how much corruption is there within the judiciary? the bureaucracy? the police? etc.). The widely used Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) produced by TI (Transparency International, 2002b), for example, draws on a series of polls by various organisations reflecting ‘the perceptions of business people and country analysts, both resident and non-resident’ (Transparency International, 2002a), while measures by such organisations as Latinobarometro, the World Values Survey or the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP; 2004–2008) depict the opinions of citizens.<sup>3</sup>

A second subjective measure of corruption concentrates on people’s direct experience with or participation in corruption. Again, the parameters vary. Seligson (2002, 2004, 2006), for instance, develops what he calls a victimisation scale that draws on a series of questions asking respondents whether they themselves have observed a bribe being paid, paid a bribe, or have been asked to pay a bribe in particular settings. The Latinobarometro polls in Latin America similarly ask respondents whether they have paid a bribe (Lagos, 2003), while the massive *Encuesta de Corrupción y Buen Gobierno* poll assembled by Transparencia Mexicana in the years 2001, 2003 and 2005 delves into this dimension using a series of questions about the use and the payment

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3 Canache and Allison (2005) examine the relationship between the perceptions of corruption by ‘experts’ as measured by the CPI, and those of citizens as measured by the World Values Survey. Generally, they find the two to be more closely linked depending on the level of political interest of the individual. The perception of citizens with an interest in politics, in short, is more likely to coincide with the perceptions of the ‘experts’ than individuals without an interest in politics.

of bribes for 38 different types of public services.<sup>4</sup> This latter poll, for instance, asks respondents whether they have used the service during a specified period of time – six months or a year – and for those who have, whether they had to pay a bribe (and even how much they had to pay).

Although both approaches have been used to measure corruption, conceptually, of course, the two – perception and participation – are not the same: one centres on actual behaviour, or at least direct observation, while the other focuses on general beliefs about the nature of the system and the behaviour of others. Researchers, most of whom use perception-based measures as noted, routinely acknowledge the fact that perception is not the same as actual corruption. And yet, despite drawing this distinction, few have seriously raised the question about how the two may be related (Mocan, 2004; Olkern, 2006). In one of the few cross-national studies, Mocan (2004), using a measure of whether an individual has been asked for a bribe, finds a weak relationship linking the two.

In exploring the relationship between participation and perception, three non-mutually exclusive theoretical possibilities can be identified. The first possible relationship is inductive. It suggests that participation and first-hand or second-hand experience in corruption – experience with paying bribes or knowing about it through real-life experiences – influences a person's perceptions about the nature of corruption in the broader political system. Individuals, in short, generalise based on their own experience and the direct experience of those around them. Based on this perspective, polls tapping perceptions thus represent a proxy measure of the real level of corruption within society. Intuitively, what better way to determine if corruption exists than asking those who deal with the political system on a daily basis? After all, it might be difficult to get those involved to admit to any wrongdoing.

A second theoretical possibility is deductive and reverses the causal arrow. It suggests that general perceptions about the way the political system operates shape individual

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4 Many questions have been raised regarding the validity, reliability and precision of these measures of corruption. Such questions not only help qualify the results of studies using these measures, but are also fundamental to the process of improving the measures. Although outside of the scope of this study, suffice it to say that studies by Del Castillo (2003) and Johnston (2000, 2002) find measures of the perceptions of corruption, exemplified by the CPI, to be largely reliable, though their validity and precision are somewhat questionable. The CPI, for instance, looks at the degree to which public officials accept bribes, receive illegal payments, take public funds and commit similar acts, yet it is never clear what 'degree' means. This, of course, means that it can be interpreted differently by those taking the poll (Del Castillo, 2003: 47). Similar questions can be raised regarding measures of participation. As with perceptions, the questions are often imprecise: to rate something on a scale from 1–10, for example, relies on individual judgment, and different people and different cultures may have different ideas of what 'frequent' means in a question about how frequent bribes are paid. Even the Mexican poll by *Transparencia Mexicana* (2001, 2003, 2005), which looks at how often an individual has had to pay a bribe to receive service in the past twelve months, six months, month or week fails to take into account the fact that some services are used more often than others. One can question the validity of both approaches in the sense that bribes are not the only form of corruption, and the other forms of corruption are not really captured through these types of surveys. Yet designing a survey that could measure all forms of corruption is fraught with difficulties and returns us to the definitional problems noted earlier.

behaviour. This perspective can be incorporated into a simple rational choice, institutionalist perspective wherein perceptions of risks and opportunities within a given setting shape individual behaviour. This also taps the potentially endogenous component inherent in looking at perceptions and even raises the possibility that the diffusion of perception-based measures of corruption may influence the behaviour they seek to measure, or to use a Mexican saying, *crea fama y echate a dormir* [reputations are hard to overcome; lit. create fame and go to sleep]. Formal models by Bardhan (2006) and Mishra (2006) lend some support for this position, showing how individual corrupt activity depends on the level of corrupt activity taking place around them. Using focus groups in Mexico City, Guerrero and Del Castillo (2003) also build a convincing argument for this proposition, offering evidence to show how people's perception of whether a specific institution in Mexico is corrupt influences personal decisions on whether to offer a bribe and their expectations of corrupt conduct by others.

A third theoretical possibility is that the two – participation and perception – are largely unrelated. This possibility rests on the fact that the two tend to reflect different types and patterns of corruption, respond to different determinants and suffer distinct validity problems. Measures of participation or experience in corruption tap real acts of corruption, but refer almost exclusively to petty levels of bureaucratic corruption since it is only at this level where the average citizen might engage in a corrupt act (see Table 1). Gauging participation of high-level corruption is probably impossible, as noted, since politicians and high-level officials are unlikely to admit to any wrongdoing. Measures of perceptions or 'perceived' corruption, by contrast, can focus on high or low levels of corruption, depending on the nature of the question. But by its very nature, perception reflects a much broader range of experiences and sentiments than people's simple interaction with bureaucrats or the government, and the broader the question to gauge perception, the greater the range of experiences and sentiments reflected in the response. Some questions may be more effective at tapping perceptions of low-level corruption by asking respondents specifically about the perceived level of corruption within the bureaucracy or even specific institutions such as the police. I would expect responses to such questions to correlate more strongly with participation measures since both tap low-level corruption. Yet most questions gauging perceptions of corruption incorporate much broader beliefs about corruption among politicians and upper-level officials, thus focusing more on high-level corruption and corruption that occurs in more exclusive domains. Perceptions of high-level corruption in particular

**Table 1.** Focus of Different Measures of Corruption

	Participation	Perception
High-level corruption	Impossible to measure?	CPI, WB, LAPOP (questions on politicians and public servants)
Low-level corruption	LAPOP, Latinobarometro (questions on direct participation)	Latinobarometro (question regarding civil servants)

CPI: Corruption Perception Index (Transparency International, 2002b)

LAPOP: Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP, 2004–2008)

WB: Measure of Control of Corruption (World Bank; cited in Kaufmann, Kraay and Zoido-Lobaton, 2002)

reflect forms of corruption in which few members of society participate in directly, such as corruption related to drug trafficking, campaign financing, unexplained wealth of politicians or nepotism in government.<sup>5</sup>

If few participate in high-level corruption, then by what means do people (or even the experts) come to 'know' of extensive corruption at the top?<sup>6</sup> What factors beyond participation in low-level corruption might forge such perceptions? This certainly raises the question about the validity of the perception measure. Rather than experience, such popular knowledge of high-level corruption arguably reflects the nature, impact and prominence of high-profile cases of corruption. Perception, in short, is probably more sensitive to scandal, press reports, reputation, and even politicians rhetoric, than to low level participation. A recent study on Mexico by Juárez González (2004), for instance, shows a direct link between the ebbs and flows in public opinion on corruption and high-profile scandals. Tracking polling data clearly reveals how the video-scandals of March 2004 (a series of revelations of politicians taking bribes in Mexico City) boosted the perception that corruption and impunity had increased in the country and become more of a political problem.<sup>7</sup> Although such scandals may have some impact on actual behaviour and participation of corruption at the lower levels of the bureaucracy because it confirms certain assumptions about the setting – 'if they are doing it, so should I' – its influence would seem far more remote and indirect than on perceptions about politicians and corruption in the system. In other words, perception may respond more to determinants that have only a minor impact on participation.

The strength or relative balance of accountability mechanisms within the system may also have a more direct impact on perceptions of corruption than on participation levels. If, for instance, of the three stages within the accountability system (monitoring → investigation of allegations → sanctions), there is an emphasis only on the second stage, thereby producing substantial public allegations and even investigations of corruption, but little in the way of monitoring or sanctioning corrupt behaviour, this will tend to bolster the popular conclusion that corruption is widespread and that nothing is really being done about it. Even the anti-corruption posturing of politicians may have an effect on popular perceptions. Seligson (2006: 390) notes, for example, how high-profile efforts to reduce corruption might actually heighten awareness of corruption

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- 5 A separate question raised by this discussion about perception and participation concerns the possible relationship between low and high levels of corruption. Do countries that suffer from one necessarily suffer from the other? Are there shared causal ingredients? Michael Johnston's (2005) elaboration of syndromes of corruption helps address this question somewhat.
  - 6 In one study, Olkem (2006) explores the accuracy of perceptions of corruption in a set of Indian villages. He finds a correlation between missing expenditures in a road building project and public perception of corruption among villagers. He also finds that factors such as ethnic heterogeneity and civic activity influence perceived levels of corruption above and beyond the real levels of corruption.
  - 7 In a study on Canada, Blais, Everitt, Fournier and Gidengil (2005) look at the influence of scandal on voting. They show that scandal had a major impact on the vote in 2004, independent of partisan loyalties. They also show that prior views about politicians strongly affect how an individual perceives the scandal.

and produce an increase in the perception of corruption, though this may have no effect or even the opposite effect on actual corruption.

Moreover, expressions of perceptions of corruption may incorporate beliefs and attitudes only loosely related to corruption itself. John Bailey (2006) argues that in expressing perceptions of corruption, respondents may be conflating the term to include notions about the ineffectiveness of government or simply the government's failure to get things done; that 'blaming corruption', in other words, may be a residual category to account for the failure of politicians and the government to function the way they should, or even the failure of human institutions to attain a certain level of perfection. As such, perceptions may reflect different normative standards of individuals. Overall, this places such responses about perception far from efforts to determine the real level of corrupt activity.

Although questions about participation are certainly more specific and probably do not illicit broad views about politicians or politics generally, they nonetheless suffer from their own set of validity issues. As noted, questions about participation cannot tap high-level corruption, but only low-level corruption. Moreover, such queries relate to a particular form of corruption: bribery. Even here, questions arise as to whether individuals are fully aware of paying bribes and even whether or under what conditions they are willing to admit it. Could a legal fee, for instance, be misinterpreted as a bribe? Could a bribe be misinterpreted as a legal fee? Are individuals more likely to admit to paying a bribe when the bribe is solicited by the official as opposed to when they initiate the transaction?

The importance of exploring this seemingly 'chicken-egg' query should be clear not just from a methodological stance, but also from a theoretical posture because the answer impinges on the nature of dealing with corruption and particularly our study of it. Quite simply, if participation plays a major role in shaping broader perceptions, then it is important to focus on the determinants of participation in order to reduce broader perceptions of corruption. If, by contrast, perceptions dictate behaviour, then analysis should seek to uncover the key determinants shaping perceptions, recognising that addressing popular perceptions will in the end reduce the true level of corruption. More critically, perhaps, if analysis shows that the two are largely independent, stemming from distinct sets of determinants and producing distinct outcomes, then it is important that the study of corruption and anti-corruption strategies disaggregate the two. If participation is indeed distinct from perceptions, drawing conclusions about the causes or the consequences of corruption based on an analysis based on measures of perceptions – as most of our studies have done heretofore – becomes problematic.

## **Participation and Perceptions at the Cross-National Level: Latin America**

Despite the rather extensive methodological debate and the customary acknowledgement that perception is not the same as actual behaviour, few, as noted, have sought to empirically examine the relationship linking participation and perceptions of corruption. This is due in large part to the lack of comparable, cross-national data for

participation levels. With respect to Latin America, Seligson (2002), in an early paper developing his victimisation scale, explores the link for four countries. He finds the levels of corruption based on victimisation (participation) rates to roughly follow the ordinal pattern of the CPI. In a subsequent and more careful analysis looking at six countries in the region, however, Seligson (2006: 390) concludes that ‘perception has only a weak relationship to victimisation levels’.

Our first take on this relationship employs a cross-national data set for seventeen Latin American countries. Three measures of perception of corruption are used: TI’s CPI for 2002, the World Bank’s indicator Control of Corruption for 2001 (Kaufmann, Kraay and Zoido-Lobaton (2002), and Latinobarometro’s question from its 2002 poll asking respondents about the proportion of civil servants they consider corrupt (Lagos, 2003). These measures tap into different constituencies: the first two reflect the opinion of experts, the latter looks at the views of citizens. Participation in corruption, in turn, is measured by Latinobarometro’s question on citizen’s direct experience with corruption (Lagos, 2003).

The pairwise correlation matrix in Table 2 shows, first, that the three measures of perceptions of corruption are strongly interrelated: this finding tends to bolster the reliability of this measure of corruption. Even the Latinobarometro question about the corruption of civil servants is strongly associated with the other two measures of perceptions – all collected independently, reflecting different types of questions, and based on distinct samples. Second, and more to the point of this exercise, the alternative measure of corruption based on participation is unrelated to any of the measures of perception. The relationship is in the expected (positive) direction, but the level of association is weak and statistically insignificant. And contrary to expectation, the correlation between participation and the more specific question about the perception of corruption among civil servants – though both arguably focus on lower level corruption – is smaller than its correlation to the other, broader measures of perception.

Figure 1 helps visualise the regional relationship using the CPI measure of perception and participation. Here we can see that while Chile and Uruguay enjoy the lowest levels of corruption defined as perception and participation, participation in corruption in Costa Rica is actually equal to many countries that are perceived to be far more corrupt. In fact, based on respondents’ experiences with corruption, Paraguay, the country considered the most corrupt based on expert perceptions, exhibits a lower

**Table 2.** Correlation Matrix of Perceptions of and Participation in Corruption in Latin America

<i>n</i> = 17	CPI	CC	CS
CC	0.954***		
CS	-0.774***	-0.803**	
DE	-0.151	-0.182	0.085

\**p* < 0.05 (1-tailed); \*\**p* > 0.01.

CPI: Corruption Perceptions Index (2002) (Transparency International, 2002b; 0 corrupt to 10 not corrupt)

CC: Control of corruption (2001) (World Bank; cited in Kaufmann, Kraay and Zoido-Lobaton, 2002)

CS: Proportion of civil servants perceived to be corrupt (2002) (Latinobarometro, cited in Lagos, 2003)

DE: Direct experience of corruption (2002) (Latinobarometro, cited in Lagos, 2003)

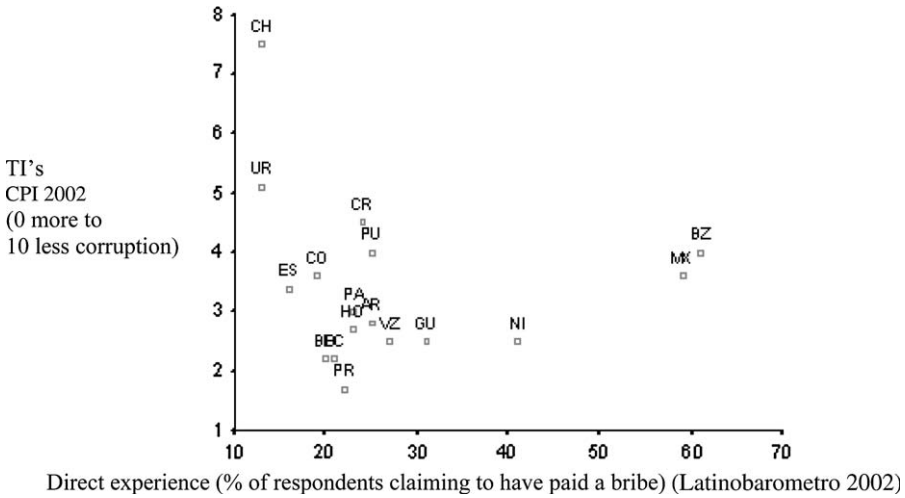


Figure 1. Scatterplot of Participation and Perception of Corruption in Latin America. Key: AR – Argentina, BO – Bolivia, BZ – Brazil, CH – Chile, CO – Colombia, CR – Costa Rica, EC – Ecuador, ES – El Salvador, GU – Guatemala, HO – Honduras, MX – Mexico, NI – Nicaragua, PA – Panama, PR – Paraguay, PU – Peru, UR – Uruguay, VZ – Venezuela.

level of actual corruption than Costa Rica. Seligson (2006: 385) contends that this finding may be because many ‘experts’ whose opinion is recorded by the CPI may in fact know little about Paraguay and assume, based on the country’s low level of economic performance and/or simply based on knowledge about the general relationship linking low levels of development to corruption, that Paraguay ‘must’ suffer high levels of corruption despite the lack of first-hand knowledge. At the other end of the scale, the graph shows Mexico and Brazil, both of which rank at medium levels in the CPI data, to exhibit the highest levels of direct experience in corruption. Perhaps in these cases, the greater likelihood of knowledge among experts and the higher economic levels prompt a more positive assessment. Either way, the lack of a direct relationship between the two variables is clear.

The weak bivariate correlation at the cross-national level suggests that the two dimensions of corruption (participation and perception) may reflect distinct determinants and may produce different and independent effects on the economy and/or the political system. The extensive cross-national (and cross-regional) empirical literature cited earlier confirms a number of correlations tying corruption to a wide range of factors. It is important to stress, of course, that such studies all focus on perceptions of corruption, however, and not participation or actual corruption. Drawing on an earlier analysis by Morris (2004), Table 3 presents simple pairwise correlations using the CPI for 2002 and the Latinobarometro questions on the percentage of civil servants considered to be corrupt as measures of perception, and the Latinobarometro question on direct experience as a measure of participation. Given the limited number of cases, simple pairwise correlations are calculated rather than a regression equation. The analysis is not meant to be exhaustive of all the extensive correlates of corruption

## Disaggregating Corruption

**Table 3.** Bivariate Correlates of Perceptions and Participation at the Cross-National Level

<i>n</i> = 17	Perceptions		Participation
	CPI	CS	DE
<b>Determinants</b>			
GDP pc	0.58**	-0.24	0.06
Rule of law	0.81**	-0.64**	-0.23
Political rights	-0.38	0.38	0.17
Interpersonal trust	0.02	0.10	0.03
Burden of administrative regulations	-0.45*	0.32	0.60**
Economic openness	-0.12	-0.18	-0.20
Inequality	-0.41	0.35	0.35
<b>Effects</b>			
Satisfaction w/democracy	0.32	-0.41	-0.30
Confidence in political institutions	0.71**	-0.82**	-0.26
Voter turnout	0.34	-0.34	0.04
Credit rating	-0.80**	0.55**	-0.02

\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ .

CPI: Corruption Perceptions Index (2002) (Transparency International, 2002b)

CS: Proportion of civil servants perceived to be corrupt (2002) (Latinobarometro, cited in Lagos, 2003)

DE: Direct experience of corruption (2002) (Latinobarometro, cited in Lagos, 2003)

found in the broader cross-regional literature, but simply to test whether factors associated with perception-based measures of corruption also influence participation. The analysis separates the determinants and the effects of corruption. Determinants include: gross domestic product (GDP) per capita for 2000; ‘rule of law’ for 2000–2001 taken from the World Bank data (Kaufmann, Kraay and Zoido-Lobaton, 2002); political rights for the 2001–2002 period as measured by Freedom House (2002); interpersonal trust based on responses in the Latinobarometro polls on trust in others for the 1996–2001 period (cited in Payne, Zovatto, Carrillo Florez and Allamand Zavala, 2002: 40); ‘burden of administrative regulations’, a ranking based on the Executive Opinion Survey conducted by the World Economic Forum (Vial and Cornelius, 2001: 16); economic openness defined as imports/exports as a percentage of GDP for the decade of the 1990s (Vial and Cornelius, 2001: 20); and inequality measured as the percentage of income accruing to the richest 10 per cent of earners (UN Human Development Report, 2001). To explore the effects of corruption, four variables are examined: satisfaction with democracy and confidence in political institutions both from Latinobarometro polls and based on an average for the 1996–2001 period (Payne, Zovatto, Carrillo Florez and Allamand Zavala, 2002); voter turnout measuring the percent of eligible voters who voted in presidential elections from 1998–2000 (Payne, Zovatto, Carrillo Florez and Allamand Zavala, 2002); and a nation’s credit rating for 2002 (Vial and Cornelius, 2001).

As shown in Table 3, even with such a limited number of cases, factors associated with perceptions of corruption are not necessarily related to participation in corruption at the cross-national level. In terms of the list of determinants, whereas the CPI (perception) is inversely related to level of development — a finding repeated in multiple cross-national and cross-regional studies — this is not the case for participation in

corruption.<sup>8</sup> The problem of endogeneity mentioned earlier may be at play here since knowledge of a country's level of development may in some way colour experts' perceptions of corruption in that country. Similarly, rule of law correlates strongly with both measures of perceptions of corruption, but is only weakly tied to participation rates though again the relationship to participation is consistently in the expected direction. Administrative burden, by contrast, correlates more strongly with participation rates than with perceptions. Correlations with the other variables lack statistical significance, but are generally consistent in terms of direction (with the exception of interpersonal trust). Countries with higher levels of political rights as measured by Freedom House (2002), for example, tend to suffer lower levels of perceived corruption and, to a lesser degree, lower levels of direct participation in corruption. In looking at the effects of corruption on the four variables examined, similar differences are apparent. There is a strong relationship linking perceptions of corruption with confidence in political institutions and credit rating, but not to participation rates. Again, despite the lack of statistical significance, the pairwise correlations are all in the expected direction with both measures of perception exhibiting a stronger impact on satisfaction with democracy and voter turnout than does participation.

A part of the distinctive pattern separating the two approaches to corruption in Table 3 may reflect the different dimensions of corruption and the different samples used to gauge corruption. Administrative burden, for instance, tends to focus specifically on the bureaucratic dimension where the low level type of corruption measured by participation is located. Perception of corruption is a broader indicator that conceivably taps into more than simple corruption, as Bailey (2006) contends, and thus would be more likely to influence other broad-based notions like satisfaction with democracy or confidence in political institutions. A nation's credit rating and even perceptions about rule of law are not only also broader indicators of the political system and thus more likely to be associated with the broader notion of perception than participation, but both these weigh heavily on the opinion of expert and business executives as does the CPI measure of corruption.

In sum, the cross-national results suggests that the two measures of corruption – participation and perception – are only weakly related to one another, tap distinct dimensions of corruption, reflect different sets of determinants, and generate distinct outcomes. Despite the limitations of the number of cases used in this section, one implication is clear: much of what empirical studies tell us regarding 'corruption' using cross-national models pertains more to perceptions of corruption than to actual participation in corruption.

## **Participation and Perceptions at the Individual-Level: The Case of Mexico**

As noted, most empirical studies of corruption employ a cross-national approach, converting polling data into national averages and using the country as the unit of analysis. A few individual-based studies have been conducted that highlight important

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<sup>8</sup> Cross-national data for 90 countries using 2001 GDP per capita based on purchasing power parity and the 2001 CPI, for example, reveals a strong correlation of  $r = 0.882$ .

determinants and effects of corruption (Seligson, 1999, 2002, 2004, 2006; Anderson and Tverdova, 2003; Davis, Camp, Coleman, 2004; Moca, 2004; Canache and Allison, 2005). Data for an individual-level analysis of the participation-perception question comes from the 2004 LAPOP poll on Mexico.<sup>9</sup>

Participation in corruption is measured here based on a series of four questions regarding an individual's involvement in corruption: '¿Algún agente de policía le pidió una mordida (soborno) en el último año?' (Has a police requested a bribe from you within the past year?); '¿Ha visto a alguien pagando mordidas (soborno) a un policía en el último año?' (Have you seen someone pay a bribe to a police within the past year?); '¿Ha visto a alguien pagando mordidas (soborno) a un empleado público en el último año por cualquier tipo de favor?' (Have you seen someone pay a bribe to a public employee for any type of favour within the past year?); and '¿Un empleado público le ha solicitado una mordida en el último año?' (Has a public employee requested a bribe from you within the past year?). Responses to these four questions were summed and coded into three categories: (a) respondents with no positive responses for any of the four questions; (b) individuals with a positive response to one of the questions; and (c) respondents responding positively to two or more of the questions. Of the 1,517 total responses, 53.9 per cent of respondents reported no participation in any of the activities, 17.3 per cent answered affirmatively to one of the questions, and 28.9 per cent responded positively to two or more of the questions. To measure perception of corruption, I rely on responses to the following question: 'Teniendo en cuenta su experiencia, ¿la corrupción de los funcionarios públicos esta muy generalizada, algo generalizada, poco generalizada or nada generalizada?' (Taking your experience into account, would you consider corruption of public officials as: Very generalised, somewhat generalised, a little generalised or not generalised?)

As is customary, citizen perceptions of corruption are far more pronounced than actual participation – more so here since the participation questions are temporally limited to just the prior year: 38.6 per cent of respondents considered corruption as *muy generalizada*, 44.2 per cent as *algo generalizada*, 15.2 per cent as *poco generalizada* and only 2 per cent as *nada generalizada*. In contrast to questions used in other polls measuring perceptions of corruption such as the Latinobarometro poll mentioned earlier (Lagos, 2003), it is important to note that the LAPOP question is somewhat leading and actually tries to get respondents to base their perception on their actual experience.

Simple bivariate correlations of the two measures of corruption reveals a weak though significant relationship of .106\*\* (1-tailed) ( $n = 1,333$ ) (Table 4).<sup>10</sup> As expected,

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9 The LAPOP survey 'The Political Culture of Democracy in Mexico, 2004' was conducted in March 2004 by Vanderbilt University and ITAM. The survey is based on a national probability design with a total N of 1556. The sample was stratified by region and by urban/rural. The interviews were conducted in 130 sites distributed in 29 of the 32 federal entities, and in 89 of the 2445 municipalities. The estimated margin of error is  $\pm 2.8$  (see <http://sitemason.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/HOME>). [accessed 25 April 2007].

10 Using the data from the huge 2001 *Encuesta de Corrupción y Buen Gobierno* produces similar results: ( $r = 0.04^{**}$ ). This analysis uses the summation of responses to whether bribes were paid to obtain the 38 public services and the general question of the extent to which politicians are corrupt.

**Table 4.** Crosstabulation of Perceptions of Corruption and Participation in Corruption

		Participation in corruption		
		None (0 of 4)	Medium (1 of 4)	High (2 or more)
Perceptions of corruption	Not generalised	2.4%	2.4%	1.0%
	A little generalised	16.2%	15.5%	13.0%
	Somewhat generalised	47.4%	40.4%	39.5%
	Very generalised	33.9%	42.0%	46.4%

Kenadall's tau-c = .092\*\*.

individuals reporting some direct experience with corruption during the prior year are slightly more likely to consider corruption generalised throughout the system, but the effect of participation on perception is rather small. In fact, over 80 per cent of individuals with no direct experience with corruption during the prior year nonetheless consider corruption to be very or somewhat generalised. Based on the earlier discussion, this high baseline perception clearly reflects more than simple participation in low-level corruption and likely reveals the reputation and pent-up frustrations associated with decades of Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI)-led government.

As posed by the cross-national data earlier, this weak relationship between participation and perception using individual-level data suggests that the two measures of corruption may tap into different dimensions of corruption and thus respond to distinct sets of determinants and generate varied consequences. Given the limited number of individual-based studies on perceptions of corruption or participation, however, we know much less about the determinants or impact of either form of corruption. In the few studies looking at participation (or victimisation) based on a small number of Latin American countries, Seligson (2004, 2006) finds men, the middle-aged and urban residents more likely to participate in corruption. He also finds a positive relationship to income, although this effect tapers off at the highest income levels. Seligson (2006: 398) concludes arguing that 'those who use the public sector more frequently are more likely to be victimised by it'. In looking at perceptions of corruption, by contrast, Canache and Allison (2005) find that women, older respondents and those lacking interpersonal trust tend to perceive higher levels of corruption. In a study focusing on Chile and Mexico, Davis, Camp and Coleman (2004) show that an individual's support for the party in power, a positive economic assessment, and social trust all lower the levels of perceived corruption. In Mexico in particular, they find that supporters of the Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD) perceive the highest levels of corruption.

Looking at the impact of corruption at the micro level, Seligson (2002, 2004, 2006) has repeatedly shown participation in corruption (or victimisation) to reduce an individual's confidence and sense of legitimacy in the government, including their expectations of a fair trial. This linkage is attenuated somewhat by support for the government or the ruling party – supporters of the government express higher levels of legitimacy – but the impact of participation on support remains the same. Looking at perceptions of corruption, studies have uncovered the effects of perceived corruption on voting, evaluations of politicians and institutions, and support for democracy. Analysis on Mexico by Davis, Camp and Coleman (2004), as well as McCann and Dominguez

(1998), found perceived corruption to have no effect on voting for the opposition, but rather on the act of voting itself. Individuals perceiving the electoral system or the political system in general as corrupt are more likely to abstain. Canache and Allison (2005), in turn, find an individual's perception of corruption to lower their opinion of incumbent officials and political institutions, though they find no evidence that perceived corruption undermines support for democracy as a form of government. Adding to this, Anderson and Tverdova's (2003) analysis of individual opinion in 16 countries finds that the negative effect of perceptions of corruption on citizens' attitude toward government largely disappears after controlling for vote for the party in power. This bolsters the finding of Seligson looking at participation. In a similar way, Manzetti and Wilson (2006) show that the impact of individual perceptions of corruption on confidence in government in Argentina is mediated by evaluations of the economy.

Independent variables used here to examine the determinants of participation and perceptions include political interest, social capital, economic evaluation, vote, age, education, income and residence. Political interest is measured based on respondent's frequency of watching news on television and reading the newspaper. Cited often in studies of corruption, social capital, according to Putnam (1995, 2000) and others (Fukuyama, 1995), encompasses two distinct dimensions: civic involvement and interpersonal trust. Community involvement is measured based on responses to a question about whether the respondent had tried to contribute to the solution for a problem in her/his community or with the neighbours within her/his community within the past year, while interpersonal trust is measured by the standard question relating to whether people in the community can or cannot be trusted. Assessment of the economic situation includes both a general assessment of the economy and more specific assessment of the economic situation of the respondent. In the absence of reliable data on partisan identification, I use vote for Vicente Fox in the 2000 election as a measure of support for the government.<sup>11</sup> This, of course, is a retrospective variable and although people do not always adequately recall their past vote, arguably those supporting the government at the time the poll is conducted are more likely to recall having voted for the president than those disappointed by the president's performance. The customary demographic variables – age, education, income and urban/rural residency – are used as controls.

Table 5 presents the ordered probit regression. First, the results further confirm the mutual influence linking perception and participation. Controlling for the influence of other variables, participation does play a small role in feeding perceptions of corruption and vice versa. Second, the results show that the variables significant in shaping participation rates are not necessarily the same ones influencing perceptions of corruption and vice versa. Political interest, community involvement, age, sex and income are all significantly tied to participation levels. Most of these are consistent with Seligson's (2006) conclusion that individuals more active in society are the ones more likely to engage in corrupt exchanges. One would expect political interest, however, defined

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11 It should be noted that a vote for Fox in 2000 may have been as much a vote against the long ruling PRI as a vote for the PAN candidate. For an excellent review of the dynamics of the 2000 election see Domínguez and Lawson (2003).

**Table 5.** Ordered Probit Regression. Determinants of Participation and Perception

Independent variables	Dependent variables	
	Participation	Perception
Political interest – News on TV	0.091 (0.049)	0.068 (0.041)
Political interest – read paper	0.168*** (0.037)	0.044 (0.037)
Community involvement	0.254*** (0.074)	0.046 (0.071)
Interpersonal trust	-0.131*** (0.041)	0.098** (0.037)
Economic situation of country	0.078 (0.049)	-0.158*** (0.044)
Personal economic situation	-0.016 (0.055)	0.009 (0.051)
Urban (dummy)	0.095 (0.081)	0.027 (0.076)
Sex (male)	0.220** (0.070)	0.053 (0.065)
Age	-0.008** (0.003)	0.000 (0.003)
Education	0.021 (0.011)	0.015 (0.011)
Income	0.073*** (0.018)	0.005 (0.017)
Voted for Fox in 2000	-0.005 (0.073)	0.063 (0.068)
<i>Perception</i>	0.106* (0.046)	
<i>Participation</i>	0.100**	(0.040)
N	1208	1208
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.071	0.020

Coefficients are unstandardised. Robust standard error in parenthesis. \*\*\* = < 0.001, \*\* = < 0.01, \* = < 0.05.

basically as watching news, to influence perceptions since such individuals would be more aware of the latest scandals, accusations or anti-corruption rhetoric. Yet none of these factors influences individual perceptions of corruption. Instead, as expected, perceptions of corruption are shaped more by general assessments of the economic situation facing the country. The only variable that significantly impacts both dimensions of corruption is interpersonal trust, but the direction of its influence varies. Trusting others in society tends to lower the level of participation in corruption, but increases the perception of corruption. This contrasts both Olkem's (2006) and Canache and Allison's (2005) findings linking lower levels of interpersonal trust with higher perceptions of corruption. This variation may be because of the differential impact that trust has on one's own behaviour versus one's expectations regarding the behaviour of others. More trusting individuals, in short, may be quicker to condemn the corrupt conduct they find around them. There may also be a powerful interactive effect here whereby trust not only influences the perception of corruption (LaPorta,

Lopez-De Silanes, Hleifer and Ishny, 1997; Xin and Rudel, 2004), but corruption also undermines trust (Rothstein and Stolle, 2002).

Given the variable role of partisanship found by Camp, Coleman and Davis (1999) and Davis, Camp and Coleman (2004), it is worthwhile including some measure of partisan identification to gauge its impact on participation and perceptions of corruption. Unfortunately, many of the respondents failed to provide information on their vote in the 2003 mid-term election, resulting in much missing data. Still, Table 6 presents the simple cross-tabulations for participation and perceptions based on the 2003 vote for the Chamber of Deputies. The vote for parties other than the major three parties is collapsed into a single category. As shown, parties differed very little in terms of their perceptions of corruption, but somewhat with respect to participation in corruption. Though the partisan differences are far less than those found by Davis, Camp and Coleman (2004) using 1998 data, PRD supporters were slightly more likely to consider corruption generalised, although they were more likely to deem the level of generalisation as ‘somewhat’ rather than ‘very generalised’. The few respondents voting for none of the major parties were actually much more likely to perceive the highest levels of corruption. The pattern is more robust in terms of participation. Here, PRD supporters and those voting for other parties were much more likely to have been involved in corrupt exchanges than Partido de Acción Nacional (PAN) and PRI supporters. Even so, the data show the impact of partisanship to be minimal.

Turning now to the consequences of participation in corruption and perceptions of corruption, analysis focuses on the following key variables: satisfaction with democracy, voting, legitimacy and assessment of corruption as a political problem. The question gauging satisfaction with democracy asked respondents how satisfied they were with democracy as it actually functions in the country. Responses included very dissatisfied, dissatisfied, satisfied and very satisfied. To avoid temporal ordering problems in the manipulation of data, voting ideally should occur after the measures for the independent variables, but that is impossible using a single poll. Despite this problem, a simple binary variable for voting in 2000 was constructed. This relies, obviously, on the respondent’s recollection of whether they voted or not four years ago. Governmental

**Table 6.** Crosstabulations for Partisanship and Participation and Perceptions of Corruption

		2003 Vote for Chamber			
		PAN	PRI	PRD	Other
Perception of corruption <sup>a</sup>	Nada generalizada	1.6%	3.2%	1.6%	0%
	Poco generalizada	15.3%	17.8%	9.3%	9.4%
	Algo generalizada	42.8%	43.0%	56.6%	31.3%
	Muy generalizado	40.3%	36.0%	32.6%	59.4%
Totals <i>n</i> =		320	314	129	32
Participation in corruption <sup>b</sup>	None	55.9%	54.0%	53.5%	42.9%
	Some	18.8%	15.6%	11.6%	20.0%
	More	25.3%	30.3%	34.8%	37.1%
Totals <i>n</i> =		356	346	155	35

<sup>a</sup>Kendall’s tau-c -0.001 sig. 0.973.

<sup>b</sup>Kendall’s tau-c 0.048 sig. 0.090.

legitimacy is measured following the profile created by Seligson (2006). This incorporates the sum of responses for five questions and then transforming the data into a scale of 0–100. The five questions used to create the scale of legitimacy include: (a) extent courts guarantee free trial; (b) respect for political institutions; (c) pride in the political system; (d) support for the political system; and (e) trust in the police. The extent corruption is considered a problem in the country is measured based on an open-ended question asking respondents what they consider to be the most important problem facing the country. Like voting, this variable was recorded in binary form with those identifying corruption as the nation’s major problem versus those that identified any other issue. Many of the same variables tested earlier and the customary demographic variables are used here as controls.

The results shown in Table 7 point to a much greater degree of uniformity in the impact of the two dimensions of corruption. This contrasts with the findings earlier when we disaggregated the determinants of perception and participation. As anticipated, we find that higher levels of participation in corruption and perceptions of corruption both tend to reduce one’s satisfaction with democracy and feelings of legitimacy while strengthening the perception of corruption as a national problem. With the exception

**Table 7.** Logit and Probit Regression. Consequences of Participation and Perceptions

Independent variables	Dependent variables			
	Satisfaction with democracy	Voted <sup>a</sup>	Legitimacy	Problem <sup>a</sup>
Participation	-0.073 (0.041)	-0.044 (0.080)	-0.142*** (0.038)	0.173 (0.093)
Perception	-0.083 (0.045)	-0.147 (0.090)	-0.126** (0.044)	0.147 (0.109)
Economic situation	0.239*** (0.048)	0.048 (0.091)	0.158*** (0.045)	0.218* (0.109)
Personal economic	0.134** (0.052)	0.008 (0.102)	0.028 (0.048)	-0.017 (0.122)
Interpersonal trust	0.023 (0.037)	0.215 (0.076)	0.115** (0.037)	0.115 (0.093)
Voted for Fox	0.069 (0.066)	na	0.173** (0.062)	0.147 (0.164)
Income	0.005 (0.017)	0.045 (0.034)	0.014 (0.016)	0.052 (0.040)
Education	-0.028** (0.011)	0.071*** (0.021)	-0.010 (0.010)	0.053* (0.024)
Sex	0.001 (0.066)	0.112 (0.134)	-0.021 (0.062)	0.136 (0.162)
Age	-0.004 (0.003)	0.049*** (0.006)	-0.001 (0.003)	0.003 (0.006)
Urban	-0.017 (0.075)	-0.149 (0.153)	-0.104 (0.072)	0.088 (0.192)
N	1181	1195	1082	1193
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.036	0.066	0.012	0.034

Coefficients are unstandardised. Robust standard error in parenthesis. \*\*\* = < 0.001, \*\* = < 0.01, \* = < 0.05.

<sup>a</sup>Logit regression for binary dependent variables.

of the findings for legitimacy, the relationship for satisfaction and problem ranking falls just shy of statistical significance. Not surprisingly, this is as a result in large part of the impact of assessments of the economic situation on these variables. The findings for legitimacy show both dimensions of corruption to be significant predictors above and beyond the role of economic assessment and vote for Fox. This suggests that lowering either participation in corruption or perceptions of corruption can help bolster legitimacy. Although the effects of the two measures of corruption here are similar and consistent with earlier results, the findings nonetheless support the notion that both are important in understanding the impact of corruption.

The results in Table 7 are consistent with most recent studies regarding the impact of corruption. Yet assessing the effects of corruption on legitimacy and satisfaction with democracy must take into account the endogeneity problem, raising many of the theoretical questions discussed earlier. As noted, perceptions of corruption may tap broad sentiments about politicians, the political system and even human nature, so it is certainly possible that one's satisfaction with democracy and sense of legitimacy influences perceptions of corruption rather than the other way around. Moreover, through a deductive process, such views of the system, particularly the legitimacy of laws and the system, may also influence one's participation in corruption. Again, such a possibility – which can be explored statistically in future research – raises questions about the results of past studies regarding the impact of 'perceived' corruption.

## Conclusion

Empirical analysis of corruption has clearly come a long way in a short period of time. The quantity, quality and availability of cross-national data on corruption have been nothing short of impressive, giving rise to rich and sophisticated studies on the causes and consequences of corruption. But in certain ways, and biased by their methodological ease and focus, the countless studies have presented perhaps just one side of a complex story. In that such studies have relied almost exclusively on measures of perceptions of corruption within a society, what they tell us about the causes or consequences of 'corruption', is really about the causes and consequences of 'perceptions of corruption', not actual corrupt behaviour per se. And while we know much based on numerous cross-national studies about what determines such perceptions, actual participation in corruption, it seems, accounts for very little of it. In exploring this point, this study has described the different approaches in measuring corruption, set out the potential theoretical relationship between the two and examined the relationship at both the national and individual level. At both levels, empirical analyses show that the two are significantly and yet weakly related, though the direction of the causal relationship remains unclear. Results also show that the two dimensions of corruption stem from distinct sets of determinants and yet both significantly and independently shape political outcomes.

This is not to say, of course, that measures of participation of corruption are superior and should replace measures based on perceptions of corruption. As posed earlier, measures of individual participation in corruption also suffer a host of problems relating

to their validity, reliability and precision, as do measures of perception. And as with measures of perception, measures of participation or experience fail to fully capture the breadth and depth of what we mean conceptually by corruption. At best then, the two should be viewed as complementary rather than rival approaches to measuring corruption. Fundamentally, the current analysis points to the importance of disaggregating corruption. Separating these two dimensions helps to pose questions about how they are related to each other, how they reflect distinct determinants and how they independently influence other variables.

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