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Getting the (right) message across: How to encourage citizens to report corruption

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Summary

Motivation: Anti-corruption campaigns often include an awareness-raising component that stress the consequences of corruption. Indeed, governments and international donors have spent millions on promoting the evils of corruption. Experience suggests, however, that messages that highlight the prevalence of corruption may backfire by adding to the belief that corruption is normal.

Purpose: The article examines the impacts of anti-corruption messages on citizens' willingness to report corruption in Papua New Guinea (PNG).

Methods and approach: We present findings from a survey-experiment conducted with over 1,500 respondents in Port Moresby to understand how Papua New Guineans might respond to different messages about corruption and anti-corruption. The messages tested emphasized the legal, moral, and communal aspects of corruption and anti-corruption in PNG, as well as its ubiquity.

Findings: Respondents were more likely to be favourable about reporting corruption when they were exposed to anti-corruption messages that emphasized the impacts on their local kinship groups. Messages that emphasized that corruption is widespread, illegal or immoral did not affect respondents' willingness to do something about it.

Policy implications: Findings suggest that policymakers must be careful in framing anti-corruption messages, which need to be carefully adapted to the local context and tested before they are deployed. Targeted campaigns can help motivate anti-corruption action if messages focus on the impact of corruption on what matters most to citizens. In the case of PNG, anti-corruption messages should emphasize how corruption has an impact on citizens' family and local community.

KEYWORDS

anti-corruption, corruption, messaging, Papua New Guinea

1 | INTRODUCTION

Awareness-raising efforts are a key feature of most anti-corruption strategies. In practice, these efforts include posters, billboards, television programmes, plays and radio shows that aim to raise public awareness about the ills of corruption and how to resist or report it. Advocates of these efforts often assume that anti-corruption messages will lead to citizens being more willing to act against corruption, and some messaging explicitly calls for citizens to resist or report it. Recently, however, some have questioned this assumption. Scholars have raised concerns about the efficacy and reach of these interventions, with some suggesting anti-corruption messaging campaigns often fail to reach out to enough people to ensure widespread change, and that such messages will not be noticed among all the other kinds of information that people receive (Camargo, 2017; Hoffman & Patel, 2017).

A more serious concern suggests that awareness-raising may be doing more harm than good. Critical voices emerging from a nascent literature suggest that systemic corruption is most appropriately cast as a "collective action problem" (Bauhr & Grimes, 2014; Bauhr & Nasiritousi, 2011; Dong et al., 2012; Marquette, 2012; Mungiu-Pippidi, 2011; Persson et al., 2013; Rothstein, 2011). From this perspective, when corruption is widely perceived to be systemic, people are more likely to continue to support those who engage in it and, importantly for our study, be less likely to report. This has profound implications for those seeking to raise awareness about corruption. By priming the issue of widespread corruption, well-intentioned messaging campaigns may be encouraging an "anti-corruption collective action problem," making citizens less likely to want to fight it.

Despite this hypothesizing, very little is known about the impact of anti-corruption awareness-raising on citizens' willingness to report. Only a handful of studies have scrutinized anti-corruption messaging, and almost all of them have focused on its impact on corrupt behaviour (Agerberg, 2021; Cheeseman & Peiffer, 2020; Corbacho et al., 2016; Kobis et al., 2019) or on perceptions of corruption (Chong et al., 2015; Peiffer, 2018), rather than on how messages impact reporting. This is surprising because many anti-corruption awareness campaigns aim to encourage citizens to get involved in the fight against corruption and, in particular, to report it to the authorities. The only study to date that examines how corruption messaging influences reporting showed that messaging either did little to influence, or *reduced*, willingness to report corruption (Peiffer, 2017). These findings suggest that, at best, anti-corruption awareness-raising may be ineffective at inspiring citizens to report corruption and therefore a waste of money; at worst, these messages risk backfiring altogether by dissuading citizens from reporting corruption.

Given the millions of dollars devoted to promoting the importance of reporting corruption, these results should be of great concern to policymakers. However, the link between messaging and reporting is still too under-researched to draw definitive conclusions: there is a need for more research in different contexts. In addition, researchers have thus far tested only a few types of anti-corruption messages. Most of the studies in this literature have aimed to raise awareness of events and trends; for example, previous research has focused on a corruption scandal (Chong et al., 2015), the widespread nature of corruption (Cheeseman & Peiffer, 2020; Peiffer, 2017, 2018), that corruption is increasing (Corbacho et al., 2016) and that bribery is decreasing (Kobis et al., 2019). Insights from the policy literature on anti-corruption suggest that different types of messaging may be more likely to have the intended impacts (e.g. Gezelius & Hauck, 2011; Jones, 2011; Laver, 2014; Michael, 2004). This literature suggests that perhaps the problem is not with anti-corruption awareness-raising efforts as such, but with the types of messages that scholars have tested to date. With the "right" types of messages, awareness-raising efforts could increase citizens' willingness to address corruption. Our article tests this hypothesis.

We make three significant contributions to the literature. First, as one of the aims of anti-corruption awareness-raising efforts is to motivate the public to report corruption, we focus on the impact that exposure to anti-corruption messages has on citizens' willingness to report corruption. In doing so, we contribute to the current narrow understanding of the relationship between messaging about and reporting corruption. Second, we test the impact of four different types of messages, three of which, at the time of our survey-experiment, had yet to be examined in previous research. All four of these messages draw on themes the literature suggests could

encourage citizens to report corruption. Specifically, the messages we test emphasize (1) that corruption is a moral issue, which influential religious leaders oppose (*moral*); (2) that corruption has impacts on local communities and should be fought locally (*local*); (3) that corruption is illegal (*illegal*); and (4) that corruption is widely practised in society (*widespread*). Each of these messages was designed to resonate in the context of our case study, Papua New Guinea (PNG). Finally, we contribute to understandings about attitudes to reporting corruption in PNG by examining findings from the first survey-experiment on corruption—involving over 1,500 people in the capital, Port Moresby—conducted in the country.

Promisingly, the results of our analyses suggest that certain, contextually tailored, messages may be useful in encouraging citizens to fight corruption. Findings show that messaging that highlights the impact of corruption on local communities improved respondents' attitudes towards and willingness to report corruption. In contrast, the other three messages tested were less influential. Given these findings, we suggest that policymakers should be careful about framing anti-corruption messages, which need to be adapted for the local context and tested before they are deployed. We find that targeted campaigns can help motivate anti-corruption action and are likely do so when messaging focuses on how corruption has an impact on what most matters to citizens. In the case of PNG, anti-corruption messages should emphasize how corruption has impacts on citizens' family and local community.

The article first examines the literature on corruption messaging in section 2, and then in section 3 provides a brief background on the case study, PNG. Section 4 outlines the methodology and the key findings are presented in section 5, before the concluding section 6 discusses what these findings mean for improving anti-corruption efforts in PNG and beyond.

2 | RESEARCH ON ANTI-CORRUPTION MESSAGING

The literature on the impact of anti-corruption messaging falls into two categories. The bulk of this literature, drawing on experimental research designs, has examined whether messages about corruption change political behaviour and, specifically, whether it provokes citizens to punish the politicians implicated in corruption scandals at the polls (e.g. Arias et al., 2018; Banerjee et al., 2011; Boas et al., 2019; Chong et al., 2015; Weitz-Shapiro & Winters, 2017; Winters & Weitz-Shapiro, 2020). A recent exhaustive review describes a lack of consensus among this literature's findings and concludes that the impact of anti-corruption messages on political behaviour is likely "to be small in magnitude" (Incerti, 2020, p. 761). This certainly does not provide overwhelming confidence in the notion that anti-corruption messaging will be universally effective, but these mixed findings do not undermine all hope that messages could work as intended in some contexts.

A much smaller literature focuses on the impact that messages about corruption have on beliefs and behaviour about corruption and efforts to combat it. To date, six studies have directly assessed the influence of anti-corruption messaging on beliefs about corruption, anti-corruption, and to a more limited extent, "corrupt" behaviour (Agerberg, 2021; Cheeseman & Peiffer, 2020; Chong et al., 2015; Corbacho et al., 2016; Kobis et al., 2019; Peiffer, 2017, 2018). Unlike the literature on messaging and voting behaviour, the findings from these studies are more consistent, with most suggesting that messages about corruption and anti-corruption are at best an ineffective tool with which to fight corruption, or are at worst backfiring to some extent.

Three of these studies have tested a single message, each of which emphasized the level of corruption. Drawing on their field experiment in Mexico, Chong et al. (2015) found that exposure to a message which reported the amount of resources a mayor spent in a "corrupt manner" had no discernible impact on perceptions of the level of corruption. The survey-experiment conducted by Corbacho et al. (2016) in Costa Rica similarly exposed participants to a message that reported that an increasing rate of Costa Ricans were practising bribery and found that exposure encouraged self-reported willingness to pay a bribe. More recently, the lab-in-the-field experiment conducted by Kobis et al. (2019) in South Africa, found that posters noting that bribery had declined had no effect on respondents' willingness to pay a bribe when they played the role of a "citizen" in a simulated bribery game.

Most recently, in their survey-experiment in Nigeria, Cheeseman and Peiffer (2020) tested whether exposure to five messages influenced respondents' decision to bribe in a simulated bribery game. The messages respectively framed corruption as being widespread, a moral and religious issue, about stealing tax money, and impacting on local communities; a final message as well as emphasised the government's successes in fighting corruption. Exposure to these messages did not discourage bribery; indeed;, exposure to the widespread and religious treatment meant participants were more likely to bribe.

Taken together, these studies suggest messaging is ineffectual, or worse, that it may backfire. The field study conducted by Agerberg (2021) in Mexico is the exception to this rule; he found that informing respondents about people's strong anti-corruption attitudes resulted in them being less willing to engage in bribery. Somewhat remarkably, however, none of these studies assesses whether anti-corruption messaging has an impact on the willingness to report corruption—which is a key objective of anti-corruption campaigns around the world.

To date, only one study has examined the impact of anti-corruption messages on willingness to report. Using a survey-experiment, Peiffer's (2017, 2018) study in Jakarta tested whether exposure to four different types of anti-corruption messages influenced attitudes towards corruption and anti-corruption, as well as willingness to report and protest against corruption. The four messages tested respectively emphasized the prevalence of "grand corruption," the prevalence of "petty corruption," the ways in which the government's anti-corruption efforts had been successful, and how citizens could get involved in the fight against corruption. Exposure to these messages had either very little positive influence on willingness to report corruption or otherwise get involved in anti-corruption activities, or a net negative influence. As it is the first to examine the impact of messaging on reporting, Peiffer's study is highly instructive as it suggests anti-corruption messaging might discourage reporting, albeit to a limited extent.

While the number of studies examining the effects of anti-corruption messaging has grown in recent years, we still know little about how these messages shape citizens' willingness to do something about corruption. It is not clear whether the results established in Peiffer's (2017, 2018) study are generalizable outside Jakarta or if different types of messages may have the same lacklustre impact on reporting. Thus far only a few types of anti-corruption messages have been examined. In this article we build on this nascent literature by examining the impact that four under-researched and contextually relevant anti-corruption messages have on reporting. The messages tested were influenced by the existing literature: that is they are messages which the anti-corruption policy literatures suggest could have the intended impact on encouraging reporting. In the following section, we introduce our case study, Papua New Guinea, and then discuss the messages we test and what impact they might have on reporting.

3 | PAPUA NEW GUINEA AND MESSAGES TO ENCOURAGE REPORTING OF CORRUPTION

Papua New Guinea (PNG), with a population of over 9 million, is located in the Pacific Islands region. In 1975, PNG gained its independence from Australia and while the country has faced numerous periods of political instability, it has since maintained an unbroken history of democracy. As in many other low and lower-middle-income countries (L&LMICs), many believe that corruption is acute in PNG. Of the 179 countries assessed in Transparency International's 2021 Corruption Perceptions Index, PNG is ranked 142 for its control of corruption, on a par with Angola and Uganda (Transparency International, 2021). Regular media reports about corruption reinforce this concern (Freedom House, 2021).

While corruption scandals highlighting the prevalence of larger-scale corruption and crime - often involving political and business elites - frequently feature in the media and academic analysis (Walton & Dinnen, 2016), ordinary people also experience corruption on a daily basis. A recent Global Corruption Barometer study conducted across the Pacific by Transparency International found that 54% of public service users in PNG paid a

bribe to select services in the previous 12 months (Transparency International, 2021, p. 24). This was the second worst rate in the 10 countries surveyed, with only Federated States of Micronesia reporting a higher rate (61% said they had paid a bribe) (Transparency International, 2021, p. 24). In PNG's closest neighbour, Solomon Islands, which is also a Melanesian country and shares a similar culture and development challenges, only 21% reported paying a bribe (Transparency International, 2021, p. 24). These findings are in line with previous studies. Another household survey of citizens in five out of 22 provinces found that three-quarters of respondents had personally witnessed corrupt actions (Transparency International Papua New Guinea, 2015, p. 7). Of the 53% of respondents who had paid a bribe, most (22%) had done so for educational services (Transparency International Papua New Guinea, 2015, p. 7).

Given these concerns, PNG is home to a vibrant array of international and local organizations devoted to encouraging its citizens to address corruption (see Walton, 2018). As is the case in several other L&LMICs, anti-corruption organizations encourage the public to unite against corruption by promoting their cause on billboards, television, radio, newspapers, and through social media. To date, however, there have been few formal evaluations of the effectiveness of these anti-corruption messaging campaigns. In their evaluation of the impact of a campaign to encourage public servants to report corruption through a mobile phone text-messaging service, Watson and Wiltshire (2016) offer one of the few exceptions. Through focus group discussions, they found that while the initiative provided greater opportunities for reporting corruption among public servants, there was a concern that investigators would not be able to keep up with reports, and a risk of payback to both those who report and investigate corruption (Watson & Wiltshire, 2016). No research—of which the authors are aware—has attempted to evaluate the effects of anti-corruption messages on the public.

The literature on corruption in PNG and in other contexts around the world, as well as common practice among anti-corruption actors, suggest four different types of anti-corruption messages might encourage the country's citizens to report corruption.

3.1 | Framing Corruption as Widespread

One of the main hopes of anti-corruption advocates in PNG and around the world is that by raising awareness of the extent of the problem, citizens will become inspired to try to do something to counter it. For this reason, policy actors and documents advise that awareness-raising efforts call attention to high-profile scandals (e.g. Jones, 2011), and focus on educating the public about the pervasiveness of corruption (e.g. as in United Nations, 2004). Research from a growing number of academics, however, indicates that by suggesting that corruption is widespread, awareness-raising efforts may inspire cynicism and foster resignation (Bauhr & Grimes, 2014; Bauhr & Nasiritousi, 2011; Persson et al., 2013). Peiffer and Alvarez (2016, p. 354) call this sense of resignation "corruption fatigue," which is when individuals think that corruption is too much of a widespread, intractable problem, and hence believe that efforts to do something about it will be in vain. The worry, as it applies to awareness-raising, is that by highlighting the issue of widespread corruption, awareness-raising efforts may encourage rather than counter "corruption fatigue", thereby reducing citizens' willingness to report it (Cheeseman & Peiffer, 2020; Corbacho et al., 2016; Peiffer, 2017, 2018).

In applying this logic to the context of PNG there may be little optimism about the efficacy of awareness-raising. In 2015 the local branch of Transparency International released findings of a survey in five provinces, which found that 99% of respondents thought corruption was a very big or big problem, and 90% thought the problem had become worse over the past decade (Transparency International Papua New Guinea, 2015). These numbers suggest that most people in PNG may already be fatigued by corruption—as majorities are in other L&LMICs) (see Persson et al., 2013). Instead of encouraging citizens to report corruption, awareness-raising efforts in PNG may simply reinforce notions that corruption is widely practised and that individual efforts to report corruption have little hope of making a difference.

Still, it is important to test the potential impact of messages that emphasize that corruption is widespread for two key reasons. First, because—as discussed—anti-corruption organizations in PNG and around the world often emphasize the ubiquity of corruption in their messaging. Second, because while a single study in another context found that a message emphasizing the widespread nature of corruption did not encourage willingness to report (Peiffer, 2017), in PNG there is still no evidence one way or the other. Given that the impact of messaging depends on the context, in PNG it is important to test how widespread messages shape willingness to report corruption.

3.2 | (Ill)legal Framings

Framing corruption as a legal issue is a key part of international (Kennedy, 1999; World Bank, 2017) and national (Hin, n.d) anti-corruption campaigns. The World Development Report on governance and the law suggests that the law plays a crucial role in shaping preferences and co-ordinating expectations about how others will behave since "... law can act as a signpost—an expression—to guide people on how to act when they have several options ... Law provides a clear reference in the midst of diverging views" (World Bank, 2017, p. 13).

This thinking has long guided anti-corruption activity. In the early 1990s, Reed (1992) argued that it is the structure of laws and rules, more than the values and attributes of individuals, that shapes behaviour, particularly in public services where corruption can be most acute. Scholars have also provided some insights into whether and how legal messages might exert an impact on citizens' attitudes towards corruption and willingness to report it. Some research has found that when there is a credible threat of punishment, citizens are most incentivized to follow laws (Gezelius & Hauck, 2011; Tyler et al., 2007; World Bank, 2017). Others have suggested that laws can motivate citizens when they align to local values and local or organizational culture (Gezelius & Hauck, 2011; Tyler et al., 2007). In this vein, Gezelius and Hauck (2011) suggest that once citizens morally support the content of a law, they are likely to promote compliance through informal social control and socializing others to "internalise group norms that prescribe compliance" (p. 436). The implication here is that in places where anti-corruption law is considered legitimate and punishment is likely, appeals to national laws can reshape citizens' perceptions and actions, potentially encouraging citizens to work together to overcome corruption as a "collective action problem." It is, however, worth noting that the ways in which legal messages have a direct impact on citizens' responses to corruption remains relatively poorly understood, and academics have called for research to better understand these connections (Leszczynska & Falisse, 2016).

In PNG, messages emphasizing the illegality of corruption may be influential because the law is central to narratives about corruption. Many citizens believe that the key reason that corruption persists is due to the inability of the state to enforce existing laws: 65% of respondents in a nine-province survey nominated this as the key cause of corruption (Transparency International Papua New Guinea, 2013, p. 33). Prominent academics and political leaders have also called for stricter enforcement of laws in PNG (May, 2004; Morauta, 1996). Over the past few years, there has been a push to introduce and amend more anti-corruption laws. With the country facing a fiscal crisis, in 2018 the government prioritized legal responses to corruption over funding state-based anti-corruption agencies, which have seen significant reductions in budgetary allocations (Walton & Hushang, 2018). Given the centrality of the law to anti-corruption discourse in the country, messages that stress that corruption is illegal have the potential to encourage citizens to report.

3.3 | Community Framings

Other scholars suggest that incorporating local voices and concerns might make anti-corruption programmes more effective (Bukovansky, 2002; Huffer, 2005). In practice, some anti-corruption programming has become more sensitive to the local context where citizens' social obligations, relationships, values, and cultures are formed.

Such measures sometimes include community programmes to monitor corruption, media-messaging initiatives that shape opinions on corrupt practices, and school programmes that teach appropriate norms (Michael, 2004). Richards calls these "community-based anti-corruption programmes," describing them as "initiatives that are physically and conceptually located in a community to fight and counter corruption" (2006, p. 5).

In line with a broader move to incorporate local voices into anti-corruption programmes (Bukovansky, 2002; Huffer, 2005; Michael, 2004; Véron et al., 2006), studies suggest that better informing citizens about the *localized* impacts of corruption can improve their responses to corruption and mismanagement. Reinikka and Svenson (2011) show that informing citizens about the status of local education funding in Uganda led to increased community monitoring, which improved the funding reaching local schools, student enrolments, and achievement. Tsai (2007) found that rural government officials in China are subject to the local unofficial rules and norms in surrounding communities that establish and enforce their public obligations. This helped improve service delivery: villages where local culture and norms support accountability enjoyed better services from local government. As it relates to reporting corruption, people may be more inclined to do so if they believe it acutely affects their own community.

A message emphasizing a local fight against corruption may be particularly relevant to the PNG context. Many Papua New Guineans—even those in urban areas—are strongly connected to their local kinship groups. Local connections are most often expressed through the *wantok*—which means "same language" or "one talk" in Tok Pisin, PNG's lingua franca—system. The *wantok* system provides connections and obligations within kinship groups, which often means Papua New Guineans are more inclined to trust and display loyalties towards their *wantoks*. In the context of a weak state (Dinnen, 1997), the *wantok* system provides social protection—with kinship groups providing support when their *wantoks* are sick, unemployed, and otherwise in need of assistance. Recent research findings suggest there might be some potential for channelling citizens' localized *wantok* relationships into action against corruption. In a household study on citizens' perceptions of corruption, respondents were more concerned about corruption that occurred locally, even if these acts were of a petty nature (Walton, 2018). This greater sense of concern associated with localized corruption could translate into greater willingness to report corruption, and this notion supports calls for greater engagement with the *wantok* system by those seeking to address corruption in PNG (Okole & Kavanamur, 2003).

3.4 | Religious Framings

The international literature also stresses that corruption can be interpreted as a moral issue (Huffer, 2005; Laver, 2010, 2014; Williams, 2010), and that addressing it requires engaging religious institutions with the requisite moral authority (Laver, 2010, 2014). While some academics suggest that, globally, religious organizations have not been as engaged in anti-corruption efforts as they should be (Browne, 2014; Laver, 2010), religious organizations have and continue to play an important role in fighting corruption. For instance, in 2006 the theme of the Catholic Church's Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace was "The Fight Against Corruption" (Laver, 2010). There are also signs that policymakers increasingly adopt religious messages to help address corruption (Marquette, 2012; Marquette et al., 2014). For example, administrators in the Pakistan province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa—one of the country's four administrative provinces—intended to incorporate anti-corruption slogans from the Holy Quran to help promote integrity and cohesion (Ashfaq, 2014). In Indonesia, Wijaya (2014) reports that an interfaith organization published a handbook for religious leaders to help demonstrate that all religions provide resources for helping their adherents to resist corruption.

Some of the academic research suggests, however, that drawing on religious teachings in the fight against corruption may not be as effective as hoped. This is in part because religious organizations may be perceived as corrupt, thus undermining their messages (Browne, 2014; Marquette, 2012; Yagboyaju, 2017). Likewise, Marquette (2012, p. 24) argues that, ultimately, it is not whether or not individuals are religious, but whether religion is ratified by the social

environment that determines the potential for overcoming problems of collective action on effective anti-corruption. These cautious voices point to the possibility that the impact of religious messaging on corruption is contextual, dependent on citizens' relationships with organized religion and their perceptions of religious institutions.

As religion is a key part of Papua New Guinean life, and has a significant impact on the way corruption is understood and addressed in the country, it may be that in PNG an anti-corruption message making salient the support of religious leaders in the fight against corruption might shape attitudes towards reporting. The majority of PNG citizens identify as Christian, with 96% identifying with this religion in both the 2000 and 2011 census (National Statistical Office, 2015). The churches play a critical role in service delivery by, for example, running approximately half of the nation's primary schools and half of its ambulatory and rural health services.

Churches have also played a crucial role in speaking out about government corruption. Church leaders highlighted grand-scale corruption in 1997 during public protests against the government's attempts to hire foreign mercenaries to quash a civil war in the island of Bougainville. Similarly, in 2005, churches, along with the national chapter of Transparency International, gathered tens of thousands of signatures on a petition and helped to stop a bill to bolster MPs' constituency development funds, much of which has been associated with corruption. More recently, the Catholic Bishop's Conference of PNG and Solomon Islands focused on the impacts of corruption, declaring that "People suffer at the hands of those who misuse power for their selfish needs" (CathNews New Zealand, 2015). Anglican Bishops have called for "responsible honesty" in the fight against corruption (Drake, 2016).

Most people in PNG trust the churches to keep the government accountable. A household study conducted in nine provinces found that 70% thought the churches were totally or mostly effective in ensuring government accountability—the best response to any of the country's key anti-corruption institutions (Transparency International Papua New Guinea, 2013). In a context like PNG, where religious organizations and leaders are active in the fight against corruption and there is a high level of religiosity, a message that frames engaging in the fight against corruption to be a moral issue may be particularly persuasive in encouraging reporting.

4 | METHODOLOGY

This study uses data from an original survey-experiment conducted in Port Moresby, PNG. As noted earlier, PNG provides a good case study because corruption is considered widespread, the state is weak, anti-corruption messages have been deployed to shape citizens' attitudes, and research suggests that citizens might be motivated to report corruption if they encounter the four themes highlighted by the international literature. In other words, the PNG context mirrors that of many L&LMICs that struggle to address corruption.

4.1 | Sampling procedures

The survey-experiment was conducted from January 23 to February 16, 2017. We used a convenience sample of 1,520 adult passers-by in public spaces. Given the context, it was necessary to use a convenience sample. Valid probability sampling is impossible to achieve because there is a lack of detailed up-to-date demographic data for PNG. Security considerations make residential, or household, sampling impractical and potentially dangerous (see Schmidt et al., 2019). The security situation dictates that interviewing must take place during the daytime, which is when workers and students are generally outside their home and more likely to be found in commercial districts. Household surveys are also difficult because many of the city's residents are wary of letting strangers into their compounds and houses due to the security situation.

Working with Anglo Pacific Research (APR), an experienced research firm based in PNG, 75 different public spaces were selected as the primary sampling units (PSUs), which were spread over three Port Moresby districts/ electorates (South, North West, and North East). About 500 participants were recruited from each electorate,

and 20 interviews were conducted at each PSU. As far as possible, the PSUs were selected to represent a range of socio-economic contexts, although potential PSUs were necessarily excluded if they were deemed to be unsafe at the time of the fieldwork. Participants were recruited, with guidance from a quota system that ensured that an equal number of men and women, across age groups, were selected. As corruption is not a social taboo, the vast majority of those approached were interviewed, with many welcoming the chance to express their views about it. Interviews were conducted in Tok Pisin by professional Papua New Guinean enumerators, employed by APR.[1] Specific demographic characteristics of the sample are summarized in Appendix 1.

The sample broadly reflects the demographic profile of Port Moresby's residents. It is evenly split between male and female respondents and the age distribution is very consistent with that of other urbanites in PNG. However, two limitations are worth noting. First, due to the limitations regarding visiting times described above, the sampling method under-represents professional workers. Having said this, the impact of this bias was mitigated by including PSUs where professionals work, smoke, chew *buai* (betel nut), and eat. Second, ensuring these areas were included led to sampled respondents having, on average, higher levels of formal education than other urbanites in PNG. This means that respondents were likely to hold a narrower definition of corruption and be more positively predisposed to reporting it than their rural and less educated compatriots (Walton, 2015; Walton & Peiffer, 2017). While this should be kept in mind when drawing generalizations from this study, there is no expectation that this difference will affect the efficacy of the experiment in the context of PNG. Indeed, one of the advantages of respondents having a narrow definition of corruption is that this reduces the chances of misunderstandings about research questions.

4.2 | Design

Participants were randomly assigned to one of five groups: *control*, *moral duty to fight corruption (moral)*, *corruption should be fought locally (local)*, *corruption is illegal (illegal)*, or *corruption is widespread (widespread)* (n = 301–309 for each group). Enumerators read a short introductory paragraph that described the study's aims as wanting to "learn what citizens think about public services and the experiences they have had with public officials." Enumerators asked respondents their age, recorded their gender and then, if assigned to a treatment group, read the treatments and presented a corresponding picture to reinforce the messages (see Appendix 2). After exposure to the treatment (or not for those in the *control* group, which proceeded immediately to the next set of questions), enumerators asked questions to gauge participants' perceptions of corruption and their own role in the fight against it.

4.3 | Treatments

All four treatments started with the same introduction:

> "Corruption in Papua New Guinea is considered to be widespread throughout society, the private sector and across all public services and agencies. In a recent survey, 99% of respondents in PNG said that in PNG corruption is a very big or big problem. 90% said that corruption had gotten worse over the past decade."

As discussed, previous studies have shown that exposure to messaging about the extent of corruption can encourage willingness to engage in corruption and discourage willingness to report it (Cheeseman & Peiffer, 2020; Corbacho et al., 2016; Peiffer, 2017). We achieve a stricter test of the influence of the messages we examine by exposing almost all

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[1]The survey was piloted with 50 participants, and found that questions were clear; the meanings of the questions appeared to be well understood.

(besides the *widespread message*, which again emphasizes a similar theme to what appears in the introduction) treatment groups to this introduction. By including this introduction, we tested whether an additional message emphasizing corruption's illegality, relationship to religion and morality, and/or impact on local communities, can overcome the influence of the types of messages common in PNG and elsewhere that suggest corruption is widespread (Cheeseman & Peiffer, 2020; Corbacho et al., 2016; Peiffer, 2017).

The *moral* treatment describes the outcry against corruption by religious leaders and groups. It frames corruption as immoral—according to Christian teachings—and argues that Papua New Guineans have a moral duty to fight it. The *local* treatment suggests Papua New Guineans come together with their *wantoks* to fight corruption because local communities suffer acutely from it; it argues that small-scale communal efforts are most effective in addressing corruption. The *illegal* treatment notes that corruption is illegal, undermines PNG's constitution and is harmful. It suggests that citizens have a civic duty to fight against corruption.

The final treatment tested—*widespread*—emphasizes the ubiquitous nature of corruption. It mentions high-profile scandals that have been the subject of front-page news. This treatment was designed to further trigger "corruption fatigue" or the sense of resignation that some believe may occur when people are exposed to anti-corruption messages. It also provides a response to Jones' (2011) call for anti-corruption messages to highlight high-profile corruption scandals. The full text of the treatments is presented in Appendix 2.

Collectively the treatments introduce descriptive norms in that they describe what people do (i.e. engage in corruption), and prescriptive norms, that is they highlight what people ought to do (i.e. report or fight against corruption) (Cialdini et al., 1990). Still, the four messages are substantially different from one another, and thus our research design differs from some messaging experiments (e.g. Brader et al., 2008; Miller & Krosnick, 2004) that test the influence of slightly different (i.e. subtle) messages. Our aim, instead, was to test whether messages capturing very different themes had different impacts on attitudes towards reporting. Because of this, we focus our analyses on comparing the extent to which attitudes about reporting are different among each treatment group compared to that of the control group, rather than on comparisons between treatment groups. Therefore, in the analyses, the baseline group is the control group, and all reported impacts from messages show comparisons between those who were exposed to a message and those who were not.

4.4 | Dependent variable survey questions

Our analyses examine the extent to which exposure to each treatment influenced attitudes towards reporting corruption and willingness to report it. The survey included four questions on reporting corruption. Table 1 displays the exact wording of each of the four questions, the range of response options, and the mean response score given by the full sample of respondents. The first (*nothing useful)* gauges perceptions about the efficacy of reporting corruption, while the three others ask about personal willingness to report corruption. *Report, moral* asks whether respondents agree that they would be willing to report corruption because it is the right thing to do, while *report, day* was designed to get respondents to reflect on a potential trade-off that may come with the decision to report corruption: having to spend a day in court. The final question asked respondents if they would be willing to report corruption only if it had a direct impact on their community (*impact wantok).*

4.5 | Estimation strategy

Pair-wise difference in means (DIM) tests are suitable for examining the impact of messaging in an experiment like this when the only differences between groups of respondents are that they received different treatments, or none at all. To determine if this was the case, we first ran DIM tests on basic demographic indicators. The results revealed that there were discrete significant differences between some of the groups with respect to

TABLE 1 Dependent Variable Questions

Label	Question/Statement	Response Options	Mean Response
Nothing useful	There is no point in reporting corruption because nothing useful will be done about it.	1 strongly disagree to 5 strongly agree	3.3 (closest to "neither agree nor disagree")
Report, moral	I would report corruption to the authorities because it is the morally right thing to do.	1 strongly disagree to 5 strongly agree	4.3 (closest to agree)
Report, day	I would report a case of corruption even if I would have to spend a day in court to give evidence.	1 strongly disagree to 5 strongly agree	3.8 (closest to agree)
Impact wantok	Unless the corruption directly and negatively impacted me or my wantoks, I am unlikely to report it to the authorities.	1 strongly disagree to 5 strongly agree	3.1 (closest to "neither agree nor disagree")

Note: Mean response scores reflect the full sample's mean response.

demographic data collected (gender, age, income, and education).[2] Therefore, instead of using these DIM tests, we draw on ordered logistic regression analyses to determine whether exposure to messages affected attitudes towards reporting corruption. This allows us to control for the potential influence of demographic variables, and doing so means we can confidently conclude that varying responses to the treatments across groups are not due to groups' demographic differences. Ordered logistic analyses were also used because all response options to the dependent-variable survey questions are ordered on five-point scales. Dummy variables were used to represent exposure to each of the four treatment conditions (the baseline is the *control group*). See Appendix 3 for details of how all the control variables are coded.

5 | FINDINGS: SHAPING WILLINGNESS TO REPORT CORRUPTION

In this section we examine whether and to what extent exposure to messaging shaped willingness to report corruption.

Promisingly, one message is influential in encouraging positive attitudes towards reporting corruption. Compared to the control group, respondents exposed to the *local* message were significantly more likely to agree that corruption should be reported because it is the morally right thing to do, and say they would report corruption even if it meant having to spend a day in court. Those exposed to this message were also significantly less likely to agree that there is no point in reporting corruption. Post-estimated analyses were conducted to estimate the size of the impact—i.e. substantive effect—of exposure to the *local* message on these dependent variables.[3] These showed that exposure to the *local* treatment is associated with a 7-percentage point reduction in the probability that a respondent would either "agree" or "strongly agree" that there is no point in reporting corruption. Exposure is also associated with a 7-percentage point increase in the probability that a respondent would either "agree" or "strongly agree" that they would report corruption, even if it meant spending a day in court. In contrast, while still

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[2]These DIM tests revealed that the *control* group's mean age score (3.2) was higher than the other four group's mean ages (2.8–3.0), there was a lower percentage of women in the *control* group (48%) than the *legal* (57%) and *wantok* groups (59%), and the *control* group's mean education (4.2) was higher than the *legal* (4.4) and *widespread* (4.4) group. These differences are significant at the p-value level of <0.05.

[3]Predicted probability shifts were calculated from post-estimated analyses using marginal effects in Stata, with the effects of other variables in models held constant.

significantly associated, exposure to the *local* message is associated with a more modest 2 percentage point in-crease in the probability that a respondent would either "agree" or "strongly agree" they would report corruption because it is the morally right thing to do.

It is important to note that all other studies conducted on this topic have suggested that awareness-raising is either ineffective or will backfire; previous studies have yet to identify a messaging strategy that works as intended (Cheeseman & Peiffer, 2020; Corbacho et al., 2016; Kobis et al., 2019; Peiffer, 2017, 2018). In con-trast, these findings suggest that in contexts where connection to community is strong (as it is in PNG) anti-corruption messages that emphasize the impact of corruption at the local scale could help influence citizens to report corruption. It is also worth reiterating here that, like all of the messages tested, the *local* message contained the same introduction as the other messages (i.e. the introduction to all emphasized the ubiquitous nature of corruption in PNG). The positive and significant impact of the *local* message on reporting can there-fore be interpreted as overcoming the potential impacts that might arise from messaging about the pervasive-ness of corruption.

The results presented in Table 2 also show that the *local* message was not significantly associated with agree-ment that corruption is only worth reporting if it directly harms the local community (*impact wantok*). This suggests that emphasizing localized corruption and responses to it does not necessarily result in people only caring about corruption that has impacts on their own community. In turn, framing corruption as a local issue does not seem to undermine support for national anti-corruption efforts that aim to encourage people across the country to report. This finding makes sense in the context of PNG, a country that epitomizes the idea of "unity through diversity" (the state motto). The country has over 850 different language groups, which are held together by a thin thread of nationalism. If there is one thing that might bring Papua New Guineans together, it is their shared concern for their kin. Some scholars suggest that localism breeds particularist behaviour–behaviour that encourages corruption through distribution of goods to specific groups (Mungiu-Pippidi, 2011; Rothstein, 2011). This finding, however, suggests that in some circumstances emphasizing local issues can lead to a greater willingness to fight corruption *both* locally and nationally.

In contrast, exposure to other treatments is not significantly associated with any of the dependent variables. These null results are instructive, though not entirely surprising. As discussed, Chong et al. (2015), Peiffer (2017), Cheeseman and Peiffer (2020) and Kobis et al. (2019) also found that some of the messages tested in their similar studies failed to change behaviour or attitudes among their respondents. This suggests that messages that frame corruption in these ways may be ineffective in PNG, and perhaps in other contexts too.[4]

Citizens' perceptions about religion, the state, and corruption might explain why these three messages did not influence respondents' attitudes towards corruption. Some Papua New Guineans are concerned with church cor-ruption, for example, and so perhaps a lack of trust in churches meant that the moral message (Walton & Dix, 2013), which emphasized the church and religious leaders, failed to shift willingness to report (Marquette, 2012; Marquette et al., 2014). Respondents provided with the *illegal* message might have been reminded of the state's inability to enforce its own laws (Dinnen, 1997). If citizens do not believe the state will respond to corruption, they are less likely to want to report it (Walton & Peiffer, 2018). And the widespread message may have simply over-whelmed respondents by suggesting that there is too much corruption going on in PNG for any one individual's reporting to make a difference. Given the context-specific nature of these results, all of these new hypotheses should be tested again in future research. It is possible that a moral anti-corruption messaging campaign could work as intended where trust in religious institutions is higher, that messages highlighting the illegality of corrup-tion may be influential where there is a stronger state with the ability to enforce anti-corruption legislation, and a

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[4]Given that each message started with the same introduction about the widespread nature of corruption, the null results associated with exposure to these messages may also be interpreted as these messages not being sufficiently influential to overcome the impact that the introduction had on willingness to report corruption. This seems unlikely, however, because in our study exposure to the widespread message, which also focused solely on describing the widespread nature of corruption, is not influential in shaping reporting attitudes.

TABLE 2 Impact of Messages on Attitudes Towards Fighting Corruption

	Nothing Useful	Report, Moral	Report, Day	Impact Wantok
Treatments				
Local	−0.27*	0.30*	0.36**	−0.08
Moral	−0.09	0.22	0.05	−0.04
Illegal	−0.07	0.11	0.08	0.03
Widespread	−0.08	0.14	−0.02	−0.14
Controls				
Age	−0.08**	0.03	−0.03	−0.09*
Female	1.06***	0.12	0.43***	−0.79***
Education	−0.21***	0.30***	0.26***	−0.04
Income	−0.03	0.12**	0.03	−0.00
Logit Cuts				
Cut 1	−3.33	−2.67	−1.78	−2.03
Cut 2	−1.49	−1.18	−0.81	−0.54
Cut 3	1.05	−0.28	0.60	−0.78
Cut 4	0.62	2.54	2.75	1.03
N	1511	1512	1508	1510
F	26.56	14.77	11.29	9.02
Prob. F	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000

Notes: Coefficients are displayed; significance is indicated by two-tailed *** p-value <0.01, ** p-value <0.05, and * p-value <0.10. Multiple-imputation (MI) estimates are used from an ordered logistic regression. MI was performed to address missingness in the income variable. See Appendix 3. for further details on MI.

widespread message may be influential in contexts where citizens are not constantly reminded of the ubiquitous nature of the problem.[5]

6 | CONCLUSION

Awareness-raising campaigns have become an important way of encouraging citizens to report the corruption they witness. However, the embryonic literature on anti-corruption messages questions whether this approach is worthwhile. While we urge caution in attempting to transfer these results to other contexts, our analysis makes three substantial contributions to understanding the impact of anti-corruption messaging on reporting.

First, our results challenge the notion that awareness-raising efforts lead to "corruption fatigue." None of the messages triggered pessimistic views towards reporting or resulted in respondents being unwilling to report corruption. This suggests that, contrary to the fears articulated by some (e.g. Galtung & Tisné, 2009), efforts that make citizens more aware of corruption will not necessarily trigger resignation. Importantly, this finding holds even in the case of the *widespread* message, which emphasized the pervasiveness of corruption. In contrast to the conclusions drawn by others who examined anti-corruption awareness-raising (Cheeseman & Peiffer, 2020;

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[5]The results reported in Table 2 are robust to a different specification of the model (see Appendix 4.). These results show that the estimated coefficients associated with each treatment are very similar in size and significance if income is not controlled for in the analyses.

Peiffer, 2017, 2018), our findings suggest that, in some contexts at least, awareness-raising efforts may not be doing more harm than good.

More than finding that messaging can "do no harm" to reporting attitudes, this study also demonstrates that messaging could potentially help foster positive views about reporting corruption and develop greater willingness to report it. In line with previous research that finds citizens are more likely to be concerned with corruption that occurs locally (see Walton, 2018), respondents exposed to the *local* message were more willing to report corruption and thought more positively about reporting. These findings are a very important addition to this nascent literature. All other studies conducted on anti-corruption messaging have suggested that awareness-raising is ineffective or, at worst, backfires (Cheeseman & Peiffer, 2020; Corbacho et al., 2016; Kobis et al., 2019; Peiffer, 2017, 2018). For example, messages tested in a similar study conducted by Peiffer (2017) did not encourage Indonesian respondents to report corruption. Reflecting on these results, policymakers might be tempted to give up on communicating with citizens about corruption altogether. Our findings suggest they should not: the right anti-corruption message can positively influence citizens to report corruption. Future research should examine whether messaging that emphasizes the impact corruption has on local communities is effective in other contexts.

Third, we also found that those exposed to the *local* message were not more or less likely to agree that corruption is only worth reporting if it directly harms the local community. This null finding demonstrates that emphasizing the impact of corruption on local communities does not lead to citizens *only* supporting local anti-corruption efforts. This finding is perhaps not surprising in PNG where the *wantok* system is a critical part of social relations. In turn, this suggests that when researching the impact of local messages in other contexts researchers should frame messages in line with prominent informal systems of reciprocity.

Above all, the findings of this and other similar studies highlight the importance of testing messages before they are deployed more widely. Without piloting and testing the impact of messaging, such strategies could do more harm than good. Getting the messaging right through careful testing could, as one of the messages in our study showed, help to overcome the myriad challenges that impede citizens from reporting corruption to authorities.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data available on request from the authors.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

The sample was evenly split between male and female respondents.

Age Breakdown of Sample

Age category (in years)	Percentage of sample
Under 25	8
25–35	32
36–45	26
46–55	18
56–65	16

Education Breakdown of Sample.

Education category (completed)	Percentage of sample
No formal	4
Primary	2
Intermediate	15
High school	32
Technical school	17
Some University	30

Income Breakdown of Sample (in PGK).

Household income category	Percentage of sample
Below 100	6
100–500	19
500–1,000	35
1,000–2,000	19
Over 2,000	12
Refused to answer or don't know	9

Regional Identification Breakdown of Sample.

Region	Percentage of sample
Highlands	34
Papua	45
Momase	12
Island	9

Of the sample, 98% identified as Christian, and 81% reported having personally witnessed an act of corruption in the past year.

To the extent to which they were available, the demographic statistics of the sample can be compared to statistics for all those living in urban areas in PNG (PNG National Statistics Office, 2010).[6] According to these 2010 estimates (the most recent reliable source of national data available), 32% of urban adults are in the 25–35 age group, 24% 36–45, 18% 46–55, 8% 56–65 and only 1% is over the age of 65. Because sampling was conducted purposively with age quotas, this estimated urban age-based population distribution is consistent with the sample of our study participants. Also, according to estimates made from the National Statistics Office (PNG NSO, 2010),

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[6]http://www.spc.int/nmdi/reports/PNG_HIES_2010.pdf

30% of urbanites have completed primary education, 25% have competed secondary education and an additional 20% has completed some form of tertiary education. By comparison, our sample is generally more educated, as a higher percentage have completed tertiary education, and fewer of our participants lack a primary education.
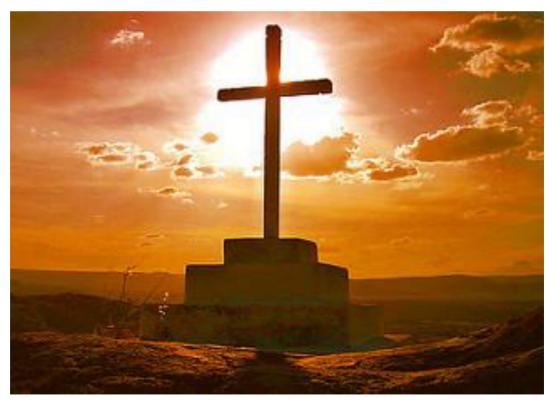
APPENDIX 2: FULL TEXT OF TREATMENTS

INTRODUCTION TO ALL TREATMENTS

Corruption in Papua New Guinea is considered to be widespread throughout society, the private sector and across all public services and agencies. In a recent survey, 99% of respondents in PNG said that in PNG corruption is a very big or big problem. 90% said that corruption had gotten worse over the past decade.

MORAL TREATMENT

The churches in PNG have taken a strong stand against corruption. For example, the Catholic Bishop's conference recently declared that "People suffer at the hands of those who misuse power for their selfish needs." Anglican Bishops have called for "responsible honesty" in the fight against corruption; similarly, a United Church bishop has called for the end of administrative corruption. Many different denominations have banded together to defeat attacks on anti-corruption institutions through the Community Coalition Against Corruption. Corruption is against the word of God; it is against principles set out in the bible. As a Christian country, and in line with our strong cultural traditions, we all have a moral obligation to fight corruption whenever we come across it, no matter if it involves our friends or wantoks. We need more genuine Christians in PNG to stand up against corruption whenever they are able.

Note: This treatment was accompanied by a photo depicting a Christian cross. Photo available on request.
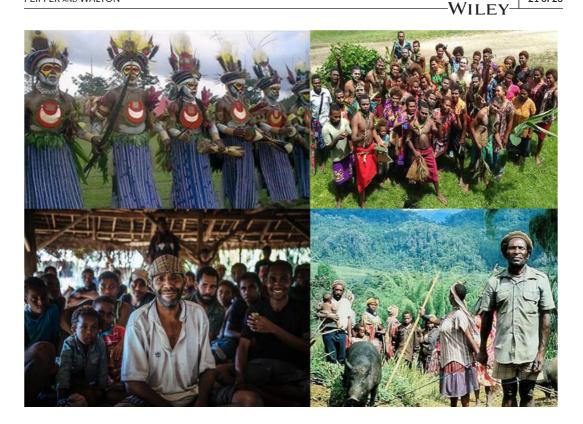
ILLEGAL TREATMENT

There are now many laws in PNG that show that corruption is clearly illegal. Those in positions of power and PNG citizens are bound to obey these laws against corruption. In doing so we honour PNG's Founding Fathers who believed that all Papua New Guineans should fight corruption. Corruption undermines PNG's constitution and the rule of law. Illegal corruption is harmful to all of our fellow Papua New Guinean citizens. Given this, individuals have a legal and patriotic obligation to fight corruption whenever we come across it, no matter if it involves our friends or wantoks. As a citizen of PNG, it is your civic duty to fight corruption. The fight against corruption is a fight for our beloved country.

Note: This treatment was accompanied by a photo depicting a protest held in PNG with people at the front of the crowd holding a banner which stated 'Respect the Constitution, the Silent Majority Speaks'. Photo available on request.

LOCAL TREATMENT

We live in a land that has a diverse array of cultures and tribes. We need to do what is right by the laws and rules of our own communities, before addressing issues that impact the nation as a whole. Corruption is a national issue, but it impacts on our own wantoks and families first and foremost. We must come together with our wantoks to fight corruption because our own communities are the first to suffer from it. The fight against corruption must focus on small-scale communal efforts against the problem. With many communities we need many different responses to the problem of corruption.

Note: This treatment was accompanied by a photo depicting four different communities from across PNG. Photo available on request.

WIDESPREAD TREATMENT

In the same survey almost half of the respondents said they paid a bribe for a service they were entitled to. Many elites have been involved in corruption. In 2014 and 2015 the ex-government Minister, and member for Pomio, Paul Tiensten, was sentenced to a total of 12 years' imprisonment for corruption-related offences. The short-lived anti-corruption agency, Investigation Taskforce Sweep, registered more than 350 cases of corruption since 2011, this included MPs, businessmen and public servants. It seems that corruption infects most if not all sectors of PNG's society, private sector and government.

Note: This treatment was accompanied by a photo depicting two Papua New Guineans exchanging kina (PNG's currency) under a desk. Photo available on request.

APPENDIX 3: CODING AND DETAILS OF CONTROL VARIABLES

Variable	Coding & Range	Mean
Age	1) Under 25; 2) 25–35; 3) 36–45; 4) 46–55; 5) 56+	3.0
Female	0) Male; 1) Female	0.5
Education	1) No formal; 2) Basic (at least 5 years); 3) Intermediate (at least 9 years); 4) High School (at least 12 years); 5) Technical School; 6) College or University; 7) Postgraduate.	4.7
Income	Monthly household income. 1) Less than 100 kina; 2) 100 to 500 kina; 3) 500 to 1,000 kina; 4) 1,000 to 2,000 kina; 5) 2,000 kina or more*	3.1

Notes: Mean response scores reflect the full sample's mean response; *10% of the sample did not answer the survey's income question; multiple imputation was used to address income missingness, 10 imputations were performed for each model, and imputation was based on data from all other control variables, as well as a measure

capturing whether the respondent identifies as Catholic, has witnessed an act of corruption in the last year, and with what region in PNG the respondent most identifies.

APPENDIX 4: ROBUSTNESS CHECK, RUNNING REGRESSION MODELS WHILE NOT CONTROLLING FOR INCOME

	Nothing Useful	Report, Moral	Report, Day	Impact Wantok
Treatments				
Local	−0.28*	0.32**	0.36**	−0.09
Moral	−0.09	0.23	0.06	−0.05
Illegal	−0.07	0.12	0.09	0.03
Widespread	−0.09	0.14	−0.03	−0.14
Controls				
Age	−0.08**	0.02	−0.03	−0.09*
Female	1.08***	0.06	0.41***	−0.79***
Education	−0.21***	0.32***	0.26***	−0.04
Logit Cuts				
Cut 1	−3.25	−2.97	−1.83	−2.03
Cut 2	−1.42	−1.48	−0.86	−0.54
Cut 3	−0.98	−0.58	0.54	−0.08
Cut 4	0.69	2.24	2.69	1.03
N	1513	1514	1510	1512
F	30.84	16.55	13.77	10.47
Prob. F	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000

Notes: Coefficients are displayed; significance is indicated by two-tailed *** p-value <0.01, ** p-value <0.05, and * p-value <0.10. Of treatment groups, the control group is the baseline.