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# Crook!: The impact of perceived corruption on non-electoral forms of political behaviour

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## Abstract

Anti-corruption claims have been at the core of many mass mobilizations worldwide. However, the nexus between corruption and collective action is often overlooked. Bridging social movement and corruption studies, this article contends that believing in extensive corruption has a positive impact on non-electoral forms of participation. But this effect is uneven across the population and contingent upon the individual's political interest and education. Using survey data from 34 countries, the analysis confirms that people prefer non-electoral mobilization when institutions are seemingly captured by vested interests. Moreover, perceiving endemic corruption is likely to breed indignation among lesser-educated and less politically interested citizens, who are keener to embrace anti-elitist arguments and ultimately engage in extra-institutional behaviour. These findings help refine theories of societal accountability, which generally assume that politically sophisticated citizens are the driving force in the fight against corruption.

## Keywords

Non-electoral political participation, political behaviour, corruption, societal accountability, comparative politics

## Introduction

The promise of moral redemption lies at the core of collective action aimed at social change. Not by chance, the revolutionary leader Maximilien Robespierre was nicknamed 'The Incorruptible'. Self-serving, greedy public officials are often the targets of major protest events and anti-corruption campaigns. In the context of late neoliberalism, social movements have expanded the notion

of corruption, framing it as a broader crisis of democratic legitimacy due to the collusion between public and private interests (della Porta, 2015). Corruption often fosters grievances that citizens can seek to voice – and try to mitigate – by engaging in anti-corruption campaigns and general extra-institutional political behaviour.

It is, however, striking that the association between belief in extensive corruption and broader non-electoral participation (NEP) has received little attention. By non-electoral participation we mean engagement in political behaviour other than voting (Vráblíková, 2014); NEP includes activities such as demonstrating, petitioning, boycotting, or donating money to a political cause. Extant literature is scarce and provides only mixed and partial results (Bauhr, 2017; Bauhr and Grimes, 2014; Bernburg, 2015; Boulding, 2014; Cornell and Grimes, 2015; Gingerich, 2009). While some qualitative case studies suggest a positive relationship between corruption and extra-institutional behaviour (Beyerle, 2014; della Porta et al., 2016; Grimes, 2008; Johnston, 2014; Mungiu-Pippidi, 2013; Torsello, 2012), the effect of perceived corruption on electoral turnout is predominantly negative (cf. Stockemer, 2017). This seems to suggest that when conventional channels of mobilization are not credible in the eyes of citizens, they may embrace contentious politics as a way to express political discontent.

In this article we contend that belief in extensive corruption has a positive impact on non-electoral participation. We qualify this argument by specifying that this effect is uneven across the population. The association between perceiving widespread corruption and NEP is not purely additive, but rather contingent upon factors related to the individual's political interest and education. The neglected role of perceived corruption as a determinant of NEP is in part explained by ignored interaction terms. In order to test our hypotheses empirically, we use the ISSP Citizenship 2014 module (ISSP Research Group, 2016), which includes 34 countries around the world.

Our findings not only contribute to the scholarship on political behaviour, but also seek to refine theories of societal accountability, which have generally pointed at the most-educated and politically interested citizens as the societal driving force in the fight against corruption (e.g. Bauhr and Grimes, 2014; Peruzzotti and Smulovitz, 2006). In contrast, we find that perceiving endemic corruption is likely to breed resignation, rather than indignation, across this section of the population. Conversely, identifying corruption as a widespread phenomenon is likely to foster moral outrage among the less resourceful citizens, who are then keener to embrace anti-elitist arguments and ultimately engage in extra-institutional behaviour. This result also echoes more recent studies on the 'demand side' of populism, which find that populist attitudes (and anti-elitism as one of their defining components) can diminish education-based gaps and even reverse income-based inequalities in political participation (Anduiza et al., 2019).

The article is structured as follows. In the next section, we review the state of the art on the relationship between corruption and social movements, and hypothesize an association between belief in extensive corruption and non-electoral mobilization. After that, we substantiate theoretically the need to implement interactive, rather than additive, research designs. We then present the data section. In the fifth section, we report and discuss our empirical findings. We summarize the main results and contributions in the conclusion, and signal some avenues for further inquiry.

## **Social movements and corruption**

The fight against corruption has been at the core of mass protests that occurred across the globe in the last decade, from Romania to France and Brazil,<sup>1</sup> to mention just a few recent examples. Political elites are often targeted for occupying and using state power in their own interests, thus revealing a growing inability or unwillingness to respond to popular demands (Mungiu-Pippidi, 2013).

Corruption indeed refers to the abuse of public power and resources with the purpose of obtaining an illegitimate private benefit (Rose-Ackerman, 1999).

Scholars of corruption recognize the capacity of citizens, movements and the media to fight corruption from below by imposing normative constraints through collective action (Mungiu-Pippidi, 2013: 103). Such bottom-up pressures are referred to as *societal accountability* (Peruzzotti and Smulovitz, 2006), indicating how the role of principals in seeking accountability can be played not only by state authorities and officials, but also by civil society at large, for example through monitoring, denouncing and demanding reforms against the corrupt behaviour of politicians and public servants. As shown by Mungiu-Pippidi (2013), societies whose citizens are able to impose stronger normative constraints are more likely to effectively control corruption. The civic culture of a polity, defined in terms of sustained participation and political engagement, is a crucial component of such normative constraints. Corruption tends to persist until those with a stake in ending it act in ways that cannot be ignored (Johnston, 2014).

Much of the (partial) existing evidence on the corruption-NEP nexus is qualitative and shows that corruption can indeed foster grassroots activism and contention aimed at countering these corrupt practices (Grimes, 2008). Delving deeper into this line of reasoning, della Porta et al. (2016) compare anti-corruption campaigns in three highly corrupt European countries, namely Hungary, Italy and Spain. While Hungary lacked major mobilizations because of the relatively low saliency of the corruption issue, various campaigns unfolded in Italy, which did not converge in an overarching social movement due to different factors, such as partisan interests, lack of coordination among activists and financial co-optation. Spain is, however, the most successful case. The 15M/*Indignados* mobilizations combined moral claims against corruption with criticism of neoliberalism and austerity. This opened a window of opportunity for the foundation of new anti-establishment parties such as *Podemos*. In fact, anti-corruption mobilizations seem particularly successful when their demands are linked to other collateral issues (Beyerle, 2014). This also occurred in instances of mobilization in the environmental sector. In the case of EU-funded structural development projects, environmental activists built anti-corruption frames to promote mass mobilization against supra-local political institutions, which were accused of implementing locally unwanted land policies (Torsello, 2012).

Based on large-*N* quantitative research designs, some pieces of research have found that general belief in widespread corruption tends to mobilize citizens. Focused on the 2009 Icelandic demonstrations (the so-called ‘pots and pans revolution’), Bernburg (2015) finds that perceptions of extensive corruption is a significant predictor of protest participation. The country’s economic recession was interpreted by protesters ‘as a manifestation of the authorities’ unfettered neoliberalism and corruption – thus framing the situation as a moral-democratic crisis’ (Bernburg, 2015: 232). Such framing of collective actions facilitated individuals’ decisions to engage in protest behaviour. Further quantitative contributions zoomed in on Latin America and the Caribbean and present congruent evidence. They show that disruptive and anti-government protests are more likely in contexts where bureaucracies are subject to heavy political control, personal exposure to corruption is intense, democratic institutions are weak, and civil society is strong (Boulding, 2014; Cornell and Grimes, 2015; Gingerich, 2009).

In a nutshell, misconduct in public administrations can fuel grievances and outrage among citizens, who may decide to act collectively in order to demand integrity, accountability and better governance. The characteristics of collective performances and campaigns against corruption – as well as their possible consequences within specific institutional contexts – have been thoroughly studied. While these contributions focus on specific regional areas, they show that a positive relationship between corruption and mobilization might exist generally.

Perceiving corruption as a widespread phenomenon in a polity may not only trigger engagement in anti-corruption campaigns but, we contend, could also foster NEP in general. Non-electoral forms of action can offer an attractive alternative to conventional channels of mobilization, especially when these are perceived as ineffective for reforming the political system (Davis et al., 2004: 681). If an institutional system is widely regarded as 'rigged' and electoral integrity as poor (Norris et al., 2018), the mechanisms that are available within the system for citizens to demand change will hardly be credible. Precisely because institutions are supposed to be captured by vested interests, people may seek to voice their grievances and pursue political aspirations through non-electoral forms of participation. In line with this argument, we will test whether *believing in extensive corruption increases the chances of engaging in non-electoral participation* (H1A).

However, the assumption that those who know of corruption scandals and misbehaviour among public officials will then blame elites and mobilize is questionable. The corrosion of the quality of democracy can easily spread mistrust, apathy and scepticism, with negative consequences for political engagement and participation (della Porta and Vannucci, 2012).

Following this line of reasoning, Bauhr and Grimes (2014) argue that transparency, while commonly assumed to prevent corruption by expanding the possibilities for societal accountability, does not necessarily prompt the decision to engage in collective action. Conversely, the disclosure of information on pervasive corruption can push individuals to believe that most citizens are involved in it, spreading negative emotions for mobilization such as resignation – to the detriment of positive feelings for mobilization such as indignation.<sup>2</sup> Using data from the World Values Survey, the authors indeed find that the implementation of transparency reforms in highly corrupt countries is likely to demobilize the demos. The distinction between indignation and resignation is also used by Bauhr (2017). On the one hand, 'need' corruption – that is, corruption needed to obtain a fair treatment when accessing public services – is likely to breed indignation and mobilization because it concerns the everyday life of citizens. On the other hand, demobilization is more likely when citizens are exposed to 'greed' corruption – that is, corruption aimed at pursuing special illicit benefits. When people become aware of corruption scandals involving political elites, they eventually feel disenchanted by events occurring far from their daily experience. Resignation prevails when one is less directly involved in corruption. In order to test to what extent the effect of perceived corruption on general mobilization is explained by the second mechanism, we will test whether *believing in extensive corruption decreases the chances of engaging in non-electoral participation* (H1B).

## **Corruption, participation and interactive dynamics**

Although perceptions of corruption might be directly associated with NEP, we contend that this association is not purely additive, as the effect of our main predictor (perceived corruption) on NEP is moderated by other factors, including political interest and education. These interactions, omitted in extant literature, imply a profound transformation in the interpretation of the association between perceived widespread corruption and extra-institutional behaviour.

Electoral studies have only recently started to take into account perceived corruption as a predictor of turnout (Stockemer, 2017: 700). Still, this body of literature is much larger than the one focused on NEP. Authors have found that perceived corruption has a negative impact on electoral mobilization due to the erosion of citizens' trust in public officials and democracy *tout court* (e.g. Davis et al., 2004; Kostadinova, 2009; Stockemer et al., 2013). Importantly, electoral studies have also delved deeper into interactive approaches: the relationship between belief in widespread corruption and electoral turnout depends on different contextual and individual factors.

First, the country level of corruption – and its politicization – are considered. The demobilizing effect of corruption on voters can be mitigated in electoral contexts where the issue is politicized (Bågenholm et al., 2016). New, possibly anti-establishment, parties that politicize corruption are particularly successful when the phenomenon in a national polity is widespread or increasing (Hanley and Sikk, 2016). Second, perceived corruption interacts with countries' economic performance. Voters are more likely to punish the 'rascals' under prosperous, rather than meagre, economic circumstances (Hanley and Sikk, 2016). Third, individual characteristics also play a moderating role. When voters and corrupt incumbents are ideologically close, the former are less prone to punish the latter at the ballot box, especially when people locate themselves near the poles of the left-right ideological spectrum (Charron and Bågenholm, 2016). In turn, the mitigating effect of ideology decreases when party competition is more pronounced, as it is easier for a voter to 'cheat' on her preferred party and switch to a competitor that is ideologically attractive (Davis et al., 2004).

As political participation is a continuum that ranges from the most formal and routinized forms of political participation to the most disruptive and extra-conventional actions (Hutter and Kriesi, 2013), we extend this framework to non-electoral behaviour (cf. Kostadinova, 2009: 708). Various factors can interact with individuals' belief in extensive corruption, making its impact on mobilization uneven across the population. Specifically, we argue that political interest and education not only influence non-electoral activities (Schussman and Soule, 2005; Verba et al., 1995), but also moderate the effect of perceived corruption.

Comparative research on advanced industrial democracies typically finds that non-electoral mobilization is more common among the better-educated (Dalton et al., 2010: 58). Education provides citizens with the resources, means and political skills that enable them to be active in politics. Engaging in organizational activity is costly, and usually requires skills that are more common among educated people, such as understanding technical explanations and public speaking (Schlozman et al., 1999). As a result, there exists a positive correlation between the levels of education and political involvement (Braun and Hutter, 2016; Dalton et al., 2010; Schlozman et al., 1999; Verba et al., 1995; Vráblíková, 2014).

Research has found that education-related skills are also critical for countering corruption. Higher-educated citizens have greater capacity to detect misconduct in public administration and – because of their stronger commitment to democratic values – are more likely to be morally troubled by such practices (Hakhverdian and Mayne, 2012). In other words, education provides individuals with both knowledge-enhancing qualities and normative values that play a decisive role for societal accountability. Control of corruption is indeed more effective in better-educated societies (Mungiu-Pippidi, 2013). At the same time, better-educated people suffer more keenly from corrupt habits. When outside of patronage networks, these individuals are especially harmed by the deterioration of working environments, for example in terms of recruitment and career prospects. Such dynamics are likely to beget a 'brain drain' in corrupt societies – that is, higher rates of out-migration among high-skilled professionals (Cooray and Schneider, 2015).

In a nutshell, corruption is more likely to damage, and breed moral outrage among, higher-educated people. Yet these citizens can also rely on greater civil skills to mobilize against it. Educational resources can thus foster indignation – conversely, low education should foster resignation – among those who perceive corruption as a widespread phenomenon, having an impact on mobilization prospects. We are not the first to hypothesize that a higher level of education is a key biographical feature that can activate the mechanism linking perceived corruption and NEP. For instance, Bauhr and Grimes (2014: 311) conclude:



It is plausible to expect, for example, that the negative effects [of transparency on citizens' attitudes and political behavior] . . . are not uniform across a population but instead befall some groups to a greater extent than others. If it were the case that individuals with more education instead became more civically engaged, then the results would be more encouraging in terms of the theory of social accountability.

Accordingly, we test whether *the effect of perceiving extensive corruption on NEP increases upon the level of education* (H 2.1A).

Citizens who report higher levels of political information and interest are more likely to engage in non-electoral behaviour (e.g. Dalton et al., 2010; Hutter and Kriesi, 2013; Norris et al., 2005). These findings resonate with studies on corruption, which stress that the capacity of a polity to impose normative constraints on corrupted public officials depends on the level of individual autonomy and access to transparent information (Mungiu-Pippidi, 2013: 107). Corrupt governments can remain unpunished if outsiders – such as media, movements and individuals – cannot rely on information concerning governmental activities. Mobilization aimed at scrutinizing public officials and possibly punishing the ‘crooks’ is contingent upon the individuals’ interest in political affairs, who act as ‘watchdogs’ of democracy (Rose-Ackerman, 1999: 143–174). This is why scholars point to acts of voicing political claims as belonging ‘to the repertoire of the educated, the informed, the connected, and the relatively well-off’ people (Welzel, 2013: 217).

Hence, similar to education, interest in public affairs can make individuals more sensitive, resourceful and politically sophisticated when it comes to countering corruption. Therefore, political interest could also activate the indignation mechanism (and political disinterest would instead lead to resignation), moderating the impact of belief in widespread corruption on NEP. Therefore, we test whether *the effect of perceiving extensive corruption on NEP increases upon political interest* (H2.2A).

However, the effect of the interaction between belief in extensive corruption and the education-political interest variables on mobilization could flow in the opposing direction. In Mudde’s seminal study on populism, this is defined as ‘an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, “the pure people” versus “the corrupt elite”, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people’ (2004: 543). Similarly, conspiracy theories emphasize the Manichean struggle between evil, oligarchic, often invisible forces against the goodness of the common people (Oliver and Wood, 2014). This dichotomous vision of society, which identifies its enemy in the *corrupt elite*, finds its most fertile ground among the *losers of globalization* (Kriesi et al., 2008). In a context of economic recession, this part of the population feels especially vulnerable and is more prone to support populism in order to counter such threat (Hanley and Sikk, 2016).

Given the growing importance of specialized knowledge in contemporary societies, lesser-educated people are likely to experience frustration and, for this reason, express greater support for populist parties (Spruyt et al., 2016). Moreover, having a lower educational record is positively correlated with a perception of politicians as corrupt, self-serving, and untrustworthy (Bovens and Willie, 2010). Low political interest may also lead to anti-establishment political attitudes and mobilization. In fact, political interest is negatively related to support for populism (Spruyt et al., 2016), and for challenger parties in general (Hernández, 2018).

All in all, low levels of political interest and education may push people to embrace populist arguments, generalizing anti-elite sentiments and increasing grievances that could trigger mobilization. From this perspective, the indignation mechanism will get activated among those who believe in widespread corruption provided that their levels of political interest and/or education are low (conversely, the resignation mechanism will get activated provided that the levels of political interest and/or education are high). Hence, we will test whether *the effect of*

**Table 1.** Tetrachoric correlation matrix of items that capture NEP.

	Demonstrate	Petition	Boycott	Rally	Donate	Contact pol.	Contact med.
Demonstrate	1.000						
Petition	.520	1.000					
Boycott	.423	.576	1.000				
Rally	.683	.389	.326	1.000			
Donate	.390	.426	.534	.416	1.000		
Contact pol.	.471	.423	.401	.637	.492	1.000	
Contact med.	.480	.399	.402	.545	.481	.689	1.000

*perceiving extensive corruption on NEP decreases upon the educational level (H 2.1B) and/or whether the effect of perceiving extensive corruption on NEP decreases upon political interest (Hypothesis 2.2B).*

## Data

The bulk of the empirical analysis here performed rests upon the cross-national ISSP Citizenship 2014 module (ISSP Research Group, 2016). This ambitious survey includes 34 countries across the world.<sup>3</sup> It covers several aspects of citizenship rights and obligations, and also includes a vast amount of individual-level information on biographical attributes, political attitudes, participation and group membership. Specifically for our purposes, the ISSP Citizenship 2014 module has a unique advantage: it combines both invaluable information on NEP and perceptions of political corruption, while not restricting its scope to specific regions (unlike, for example, the European Social Survey). Moreover, it allows us to assess the cross-time consistency of our findings by including information on the 2004 Citizenship wave (ISSP Research Group, 2012).

We implement a large-*N* quantitative study to test our hypotheses in 34 countries. Although we pool cross-country individual level data, country fixed effects are included in all of the statistical models reported in order to account for the specific (institutional, historical, cultural) characteristics of each country that might be correlated with NEP. In addition, we perform a number of robustness checks (Online Appendix 1).

## Dependent variable

There are seven binary items in the ISSP Research Group (2016) data that give information about NEP: taking part in a demonstration, signing a petition, participating in a boycott, attending a political meeting or rally, contacting a politician, contacting the media, and donating money or raising funds for a political cause in the past year (1 = affirmative response; 0 = otherwise). Consistent with extant literature on NEP, these seven items are part of a one-dimensional repertoire of action (cf. Braun and Hutter, 2016: 156; Vráblíková, 2014: 212), which is measured through two alternative indicators that we use as the main dependent variables. On the one hand, we build a simple summated scale, where an affirmative response to every item counts as one unit (range is 0–7) – see the codebook (Online Appendix 4). On the other hand, following standard procedures to deal with dummy variables associated with NEP, we perform an inter-item tetrachoric correlation matrix (Vráblíková, 2014). The output can be observed in Table 1. We then perform a principal component analysis in order to build a rating summated scale.<sup>4</sup>



*Individual-level predictors and controls.* The key predictor of NEP in our models is perception of extensive corruption. This indicator, measured through a 5-point increasing scale (1–5), captures the degree to which public services are believed to be involved in corruption, and ranges from ‘hardly anyone’ to ‘almost everyone is involved’. According to the literature on NEP, certain factors such as biographical features, grievances, political engagement and values, and social capital and network availability might have an impact on political participation beyond the voting booth (e.g. Dalton et al., 2010; Norris et al., 2005; Schussman and Soule, 2005; Verba et al., 1995). We include a number of indicators that capture these aspects in order to weigh our argument against other potentially explanatory factors.

First, we account for the importance of biographical factors for non-electoral participation, such as educational level, marital status, employment status, age, etc. (Schussman and Soule, 2005). A 4-point ordinal scale (1–4) captures the highest level of education attained by the respondent, ranging from ‘primary school or lower’ to ‘university degree or higher’. A continuous predictor measures the age of the respondent, plus we include its squared term to control for plausible quadratic effects.<sup>5</sup> Also, a dummy variable measures the sex of the respondent (1 = male; 0 = otherwise). Another dummy captures whether the respondent is living in a household with a spouse or steady life partner (1 = yes; 0 = otherwise).

Second, we take into account grievances, which might affect non-electoral mobilization (Bernburg, 2015; della Porta, 2015). Perceptions of financial self-sufficiency are measured through bottom-up self-placement across income deciles. In addition, a multinomial indicator captures the main job status (unemployed, student, or other professional situation) relative to the baseline category (being in paid work/retired).

Third, levels of political information and interest are core dimensions of political engagement, which are positively associated with political participation (Verba et al., 1995). We measure the frequency of media use for political purposes through a 5-point decreasing scale, which ranges from ‘everyday’ to ‘never’. A 4-point (1–4) increasing scale measures the level of personal interest in politics, ranging from ‘not at all interested’ to ‘very interested’. Different studies have shown that institutional political mistrust is an important predictor of NEP (Braun and Hutter, 2016), thus a 5-point scale captures the degree of trust in people in the government.<sup>6</sup> An indicator of specific support captures the extent of agreement with the following statement: ‘Political parties do not offer real policy choices’, which is measured on a 5-point scale that ranges from ‘strongly agree’ to ‘strongly disagree’. Also, we include an indicator for political efficacy, which is measured through perceptions of personal influence on what the government does in a 5-point scale.<sup>7</sup>

Finally, another set of variables concerns social capital and network availability. We account for interpersonal trust through the extent of agreement with the following statement: ‘Generally speaking, would you say that people can be trusted or that you can’t be too careful in dealing with people’, which is measured on a 4-point scale. Two separate dummies capture trade union and political party membership (1 = yes; 0 = otherwise). Additional organizational membership is measured through a 4-point simple summated scale that includes status of belonging to professional associations, church, sports/cultural groups or other voluntary associations.<sup>8</sup>

## **Empirical analyses**

We first provide a set of descriptive statistics with the variables used throughout (Table 2). Then, a number of OLS regression analyses are run. The NEP simple summated scale is the dependent variable in models 1–5 (Table 3). Besides the main predictor of perceived corruption, in the first model we introduce individual-level controls related to biographical availability and grievances (model 1, Table 3). On top of these, in model 2 (Table 3) we also take into account political values,

**Table 2.** Descriptive statistics.

	Obs.	Mean	S.D.	Perc.	Min.	Max.
Dependent variables						
NEP_scale	44031	.82	1.26		0	7
NEP_index_PCA	44031	.30	.47		0	2.64
NEP_dummy	44031			21	0	1
Main predictor						
Corruption	44896	3.05	1.09		1	5
Biographical availability						
Sex	49783			47	0	1
Age	49669	48.07	17.65		18	95
Age squared	49669	2622.37	1771.81		324	9025
Education	49332	2.84	.96		1	4
Partner cohabitation	49284	.81	1.22			
Grievances						
Income decile	47857	5.14	2.21		0	10
Job status (ref. paid work/pensioner)						
Unemployed	49160			8	0	1
Student	49160			6	0	1
Others	49160			13	0	1
Political values						
Trust gov	47792	3.23	1.10		1	5
Interest	48533	2.41	.89		1	4
Efficacy	48050	2.83	1.35		1	5
Information	49037	1.68	1.20		1	5
Party policy	44602	2.61	1.04		1	5
Social capital and networks						
Interpersonal trust	48035	2.69	.78	30	1	4
Union membership	47095			19	0	1
Party membership	48644			4	0	1
Organizational membership	45490	.47	.75		0	4

social capital and network exposure, which could have an impact on non-electoral participation. Going beyond a purely additive logic, model 3 (Table 3) includes an interaction between perceived corruption and maximum educational level attained. We then interact perceived corruption and political interest in model 4 (Table 3). Model 5 (Table 3) is the main OLS specification reported throughout, featuring the two interactive terms between perceived corruption and political interest plus perceived corruption-educational level.<sup>9</sup> All specifications include country fixed effects in order to control for the average differences across countries in any observable or unobservable predictors (Table 4, Online Appendix 2).

The OLS results are consistent with hypothesis 1A (and reject H1B): belief in widespread corruption is positively associated with non-electoral participation. On the basis of results from model 2, there appears not to be an association between perceived corruption and non-electoral political behaviour. However, one should not rush to such a conclusion before interaction terms are taken into consideration.<sup>10</sup> In contrast to the purely additive model, the coefficient for belief in extensive corruption on NEP becomes significant when we incorporate the interactions, improving the model's goodness-of-fit. Accordingly, the predicted values vary dramatically depending on whether we

**Table 3.** OLS regressions. DV: NEP simple summated scale.

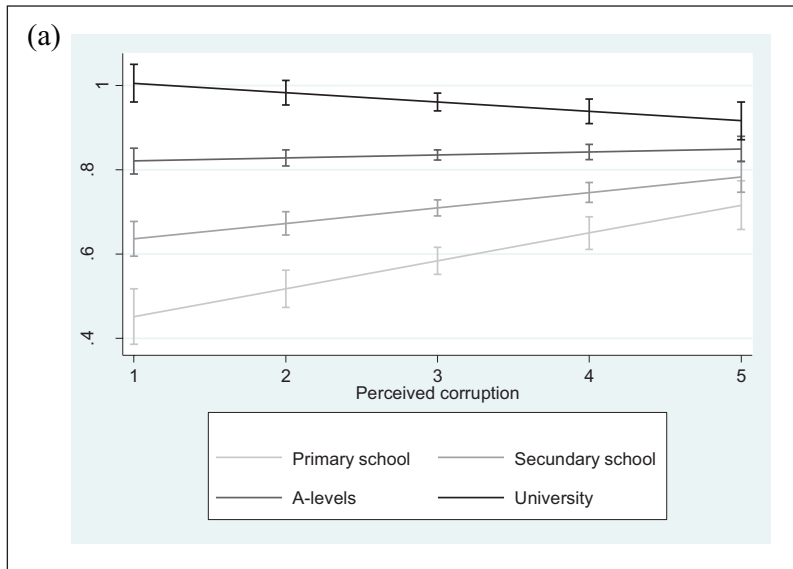
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
	Coef.	S.E.	Coef.	S.E.	Coef.	S.E.	Coef.	S.E.	Coef.	S.E.
Perceived corruption	-.02**	.01	.01	.01	.12***	.02	.16***	.02	.23***	.02
Biographical availability										
Sex	-.04**	.01	-.12***	.01	-.12***	.01	-.12***	.01	-.12***	.01
Age	.02***	.00	.01***	.00	.01***	.00	.01***	.00	.01***	.00
Age squared	-.00***	.00	-.00***	.00	-.00***	.00	-.00***	.00	-.00***	.00
Education	.23***	.01	.12***	.01	.24***	.02	.12***	.01	.21***	.02
Partner cohabitation	-.01	.01	-.04**	.01	-.04**	.01	-.03*	.01	-.04**	.01
Grievances										
Income decile	.02***	.00	-.01	.00	-.01	.00	-.01	.00	-.01	.00
Job status (ref. paid work/pensioner)										
I_Unemployed	.02	.02	.01	.02	.01	.02	.01	.02	.01	.02
I_Student	.15***	.03	.03	.03	.03	.03	.02	.03	.03	.03
I_Others	-.07***	.02	-.03	.02	-.03	.02	-.03	.02	-.03	.02
Political values										
Trust gov			.06***	.01	.06***	.01	.06***	.01	.06***	.01
Interest			.28***	.01	.28***	.01	.48***	.02	.46***	.02
Efficacy			.06***	.01	.06***	.01	.06***	.01	.06***	.01
Information			-.03***	.01	-.03***	.01	-.03***	.01	-.03***	.01
Party policy			-.01	.00	-.02***	.01	-.03***	.01	-.03***	.01
Social capital and networks										
Interpersonal trust			-.10***	.01	-.10***	.01	-.10***	.01	-.09***	.01
Union membership			.10***	.02	.10***	.02	.10***	.02	.10***	.02
Party membership			1.35***	.03	1.35***	.03	1.35***	.03	1.35***	.03
Organizational membership			.30***	.01	.30***	.01	.30***	.01	.30***	.01
Corruption*education					-.04***	.01			-.03***	.01
Corruption*interest							-.06***	.01	-.06***	.01
Constant	.32***	.08	.07	.09	-.25*	.10	-.40***	.10	-.60***	.11
Adjusted R2	.1550		.2790		.2799		.2813		.2818	
Country fixed effects (dummies)	Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes	
N individuals	37,411		30,186		30,186		30,186		30,186	

\* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ . Country fixed effects reported in Table 4 (Appendix 2).

take into consideration the full additive or interactive specifications (models 2 and 5, Table 3). These previously overlooked interactions are crucial for interpreting the effect of perceived corruption on non-electoral political behaviour.

Based on model 5 (Table 3), Figure 1 illustrates the relevance of the interaction terms for the linear model predictions. An increase in perceived corruption translates into different predictions of participation in the NEP simple summated scale depending on the values of political interest and the maximum level of education attained by the respondent. For a person with a low educational level (= 1), perceiving that almost everyone in the public service is involved in corrupt activities (= 5) relative to believing that hardly anyone is involved (= 1) is associated with a 60% increase in

**Figure 1(a).** Predicted values of the NEP simple summated scale across levels of perceived corruption for given levels of education (reference: model 5, Table 3).

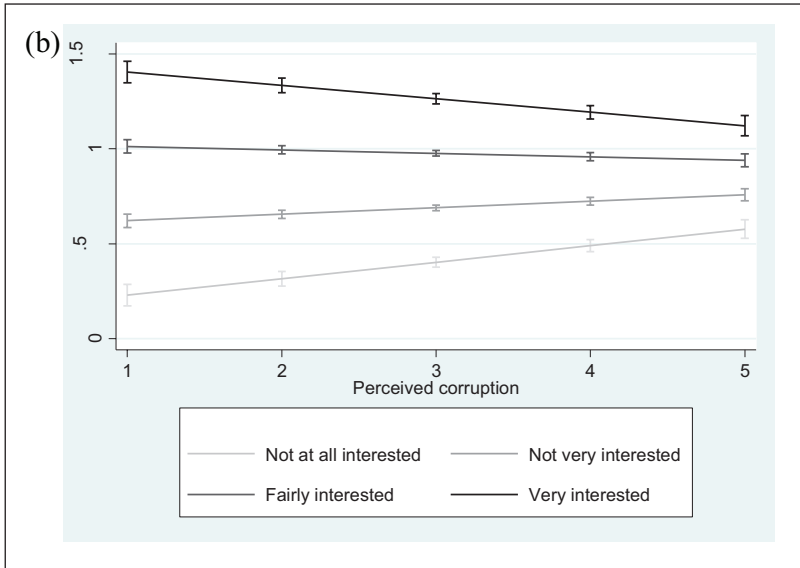


the value of the NEP summated scale – from .45 to .72 (Figure 1.A). However, the importance of corruption as a predictor of NEP decreases as education increases. Those who have a university degree, or higher, engage in non-electoral political behaviour to a greater extent when they perceive corruption is low (= 1) relative to believing in widespread corruption (= 5) – predicted values change from 1.00 to .92. Similarly, changing levels of perceived corruption are important predictors of the NEP scale’s value when the levels of political interest are low (Figure 1.B): a person who is not interested at all in politics but thinks that almost everyone is involved in corruption (= 5) engages more in NEP activities than those who think that almost nobody in the public service is corrupt (= 1) – the value of the NEP scale fluctuating from .23 to .58. Changing values of perceived corruption do not affect substantially the effect of intermediate values of political interest, and the effect of higher values of interest is the opposite: for a very politically interested individual, the predicted value of the NEP scale decreases from 1.41 to 1.12 as the values of perceived corruption change from 1 to 5.

According to the OLS models, the effect of perceived corruption on NEP decreases as education and political interest increase. While believing in extensive corruption increases non-electoral behaviour among people who report low levels of political interest and are poorly educated, it does not mobilize highly educated people and demobilizes highly interested citizens.

This result qualifies previous theories of societal accountability (e.g. Bauhr and Grimes, 2014; Peruzzotti and Smulovitz, 2006). The more politically interested and educated an individual is, the more they get involved in NEP. The more extensive one believes corruption to be, the more one engages in NEP (confirming H1A). However, in line with hypotheses H2.1B/ H2.2B (and in opposition to hypotheses H.2.1A/ H.2.2A), the importance of belief in extensive corruption as a trigger for non-electoral mobilization decreases as political interest and education increase. This suggests that anti-elitist arguments resonate among less politically sophisticated citizens, increasing their perception of how widespread is corruption and letting loose the indignation mechanism, and thus their potential involvement in NEP activities. In fact, perceived corruption decreases as political

**Figure 1(b).** Predicted values of the NEP simple summated scale across levels of perceived corruption for given levels of political interest (reference: model 5, Table 3).



interest and education go up. While 24.7% of the university-educated believe that a lot of people or almost everyone in the public service is involved in corruption, this figure amounts to 48.6% among the poorly educated. The pattern is similar across maximum and minimum levels of political interest, representing 31.2% and 50.3% of the respondents respectively (Tables 9–10, Online Appendix 2).

Going back to the main OLS interactive specification (model 5, Table 3), on top of perceived corruption, political interest and educational level, other controls are associated with NEP. Although grievances do not lead to an increase in the NEP scale, biographical availability, political values, and network availability and social capital aspects do. Being a male, and living with a partner are associated with engaging in non-electoral activities to a smaller degree. However, people who are less trustful of the government, have higher perceptions of political efficacy, are more informed and think that political parties do not offer real policy choices tend to get more involved in non-electoral forms of action. Also, those who report higher standards of interpersonal trust, are members of trade unions and other civil society organizations are more active when it comes to extra-institutional forms of political participation. Finally, we find significant cross-country variation, as our fixed effects estimators suggest (Table 4, Online Appendix 2).

In order to provide sounder empirical evidence for our findings, we perform a number of robustness checks, among which we include model replications with zero inflated negative binomial specifications, analyses of the error terms, cross-country variation of the results and residuals, alternative dependent variables, multi-level regressions with contextual and aggregate variables and longitudinal pooled analyses with the 2004 data (Online Appendix 1).

## Conclusion

This article offers two major contributions to existing knowledge, which help us to qualify and refine the implications of theories of societal accountability for non-electoral political behaviour.

First, contending with comparative research that has hitherto offered partial and mixed evidence, we show there is a strong, robust and positive relationship between perceiving extensive corruption and engagement in non-electoral political activities. The (scarce) existing literature has overlooked this association. The nature of this effect is not additive but interactive, as it is moderated by education and political interest variables. However – and this is the second important contribution of the article – the effect of perceived corruption on NEP decreases with higher levels of education and political interest.

Believing in extensive corruption seems to foster indignation among the general population, which would explain its positive effect on non-electoral engagement. Siding with Bauhr and Grimes (2014), we find that the relationship between belief in extensive corruption and mobilization is not always positive, as the resignation mechanism can be instead activated. In sharp contrast to the expectation that better-educated, politically sophisticated individuals might become more engaged in civic activities (*ibidem*: 311), our analyses imply that resourceful and politically sophisticated citizens who believe in extensive corruption are not more mobilized. Specifically, the empirical findings presented here suggest that resignation may prevail among citizens who simultaneously report very high perceptions of corruption and are politically interested (and educated), decreasing their involvement in non-electoral political activities. To be sure, resourceful and politically sophisticated citizens are more likely to engage in non-electoral political activities. However, considering that belief in extensive corruption within this subset of individuals will trigger mobilization seems more of a normative assumption than a finding based on empirical evidence.

The interactive research design implemented here, which sheds new light on the association between belief in extensive corruption and non-electoral participation, helps us suggest some avenues for further inquiry. First, research could go beyond general NEP. The correlates of non-electoral involvement are highly dependent on the issues at stake (Norris et al., 2005), so the effect of perceptions of corruption are unlikely to be constant across mobilization types. Second, more systematic analyses are necessary to determine whether the effect of perceived corruption on NEP is conditional upon other factors such as economic grievances. Although this is an aspect partially explored by Bernburg (2015), who studies whether the effect of economic grievances on protest likelihood depends on belief in extensive corruption in the specific Icelandic case, it has yielded inconclusive results to date. Since the effect of perceived corruption is stronger among less interested and poorly educated people, it will be worth exploring the interplay between belief in extensive corruption and variables such as levels of income and precarious employment as determinants of political preferences and general political behaviour. Third, scholars must shed light on the twofold indignation vs resignation route that could arise for different sectors of population, and especially the role that political efficacy plays in determining the nature of the two alternative feelings at stake.

These limitations notwithstanding, this article has tried to show that belief in extensive corruption matter for non-electoral participation, but not in the way it is often assumed. Even though there is a positive association between these two factors for the general population, having widespread perceptions of corruption do not lead to indignation – moreover, they can foster resignation, and thus demobilization – among the most-educated and politically interested citizens. However, the lesser-educated and less politically interested citizens are more likely to embrace anti-elitist and populist arguments and identify corruption as a widespread phenomenon, fostering indignation and ultimately leading to mobilization.

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## Notes

1. See, for example, Romero, Simon. 'Thousands in Brazil Protest Gutting of Anticorruption Measures', *New York Times*, 4 Dec. 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/04/world/americas/thousands-in-brazil-protest-gutting-of-anticorruption-measures.html> (accessed 09/10/2018).
2. The reference to indignation/resignation resonates with the work of Jasper (1998, 2014) on emotions as driving forces of collective action. Jasper defines indignation as 'the morally grounded form of anger' (2014: 208), meaning that '[i]nchoate anxieties and fears [are] transformed into moral indignation and outrage toward concrete policies and decision-makers' (1998: 409). On the contrary, resignation 'can dampen perceived possibilities for change' (1998: 406). From this angle, both indignation and resignation are emotional responses to external events or information, such as corruption scandals and practices. The activation of opposite causal mechanisms may let loose divergent processes, which are leading to either mobilization or demobilization.
3. For the list of countries participating in the ISSP Citizenship modules, see Online Appendix 5.
4. Items load strongly on one single dimension, offering a one-component solution (Eigenvalue = 3.90). It accounts for 55.68% of the total variance and meets the minimum reliability threshold (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .66$ ).
5. We also replicated all model specifications with logged age to control for logarithmic effects. No significant effects were reported.
6. As satisfaction with democracy is moderately correlated with both perceived corruption and institutional political trust (Pearson's  $r = -.39$  and  $-.37$ , respectively), we exclude it in the models reported throughout due to multicollinearity and over-specification concerns. No substantially different results are reported.
7. Additionally, as left-wingers tend to disproportionately resort to extra-institutional forms of action (Hutter and Kriesi, 2013), we have replicated all model specifications in Tables 3 and 6 (Online Appendix 2) with ideological self-placement in the Left-Right scale as an additional predictor, where 0 is extreme Left and 10 is far Right. Although the coefficient is statistically significant, it is very small in substantive terms and it neither changes the overall findings nor improves the model's goodness-of-fit. Also, the 2004 questionnaire omits this variable.
8. The level of intercorrelation between our explanatory variables is low ( $-.30 < \text{Pearson's } r < 0.29$ ).
9. The correlation between perceived education and interest is low (Pearson's  $r = .22$ ) and between the corruption-education and perceived corruption-political interest interactions is only moderate (Pearson's  $r = .51$ ).
10. Looking at residuals' patterns, Ramsey's regression specification-error test suggests that model 2 (Table 3) has omitted variables.

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