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# Criminology in Action: Examining Corruption in Russia Under the Lens of Criminological Theories

## **Abstract**

The purpose of this research paper is to investigate whether there exist alternative methods of examining the widespread nature of corruption in Russia. According to Transparency International's most recently published Corruption Perceptions Index 2012, Russia ranks 133 out of 176 countries and territories, indicating that Russia's public sector is perceived to be as corrupt as those of the Comoros, Guyana, Honduras, Iran, and Kazakhstan. This paper advocates the view that what is currently needed most is not solutions or prescriptive measures to curb such high levels of reported corruption in Russia. Rather, this paper seeks to ultimately gain a better understanding of the conditions behind Russia's consistently low-ranking with regards to its high levels of perceived corruption. To achieve this aim, a method of examining corruption under the lens of criminological theories is proposed. Corruption is defined as the acceptance of bribes in Russia's civil service system. Based on a review of relevant criminological theories and an examination of the supporting body of academic literature, criminological theories deemed most applicable to the study of corruption in Russia's civil service system are rational choice theory, social control theory, and strain theory. In contrast, theories requiring further research before any direct applications can be established include critical theory, biological theory, and labeling theory. The paper ends by highlighting several areas that deserve further study in order to advance with this newly proposed method of examining corruption in Russia.

## **Keywords**

corruption, criminology, Russia

## **Disciplines**

Business

***Criminology in Action:***  
**Examining Corruption in Russia Under the Lens of Criminological Theories**

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Under the Guidance of Dr. Philip M. Nichols  
Wharton Research Scholars  
April 17, 2013

### *Abstract*

The purpose of this research paper is to investigate whether there exist alternative methods of examining the widespread nature of corruption in Russia. According to Transparency International's most recently published Corruption Perceptions Index 2012, Russia ranks 133 out of 176 countries and territories, indicating that Russia's public sector is perceived to be as corrupt as those of the Comoros, Guyana, Honduras, Iran, and Kazakhstan. This paper advocates the view that what is currently needed most is not solutions or prescriptive measures to curb such high levels of reported corruption in Russia. Rather, this paper seeks to ultimately gain a better understanding of the conditions behind Russia's consistently low-ranking with regards to its high levels of perceived corruption. To achieve this aim, a method of examining corruption under the lens of criminological theories is proposed. Corruption is defined as the acceptance of bribes in Russia's civil service system. Based on a review of relevant criminological theories and an examination of the supporting body of academic literature, criminological theories deemed most applicable to the study of corruption in Russia's civil service system are rational choice theory, social control theory, and strain theory. In contrast, theories requiring further research before any direct applications can be established include critical theory, biological theory, and labeling theory. The paper ends by highlighting several areas that deserve further study in order to advance with this newly proposed method of examining corruption in Russia.

## ***I. Introduction***

“Corruption in Russia is so pervasive that the whole society accepts the unacceptable as normal, as the only way of survival, as the way things ‘just are.’”<sup>1</sup> As the aforementioned quote suggests, those who harbor the view that corruption is entrenched in Russia that many of its citizens have become so accustomed to a certain lawless way of life, certainly do not constitute a minority. According to Transparency International’s most recently published Corruption Perceptions Index 2012, Russia ranks 133 out of 176 countries and territories, scoring a mere 28 points out of a total possible 100 points (with 0 meaning that a country is perceived to be highly corrupt and 100 indicating that a country is perceived to be very clean).<sup>2</sup> Transparency International’s ranking signals that Russia’s public sector is perceived to be as corrupt as those of the Comoros, Guyana, Honduras, Iran, and Kazakhstan.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, with Russia’s National Anti-Corruption Committee estimating the nation’s corruption market to add up to approximately US\$ 300 billion per year (excluding distorted incentives and lost investments resulting from side effects<sup>4</sup>), with most of this money circulating in the public finance, natural resource, and state property industries, as put by Yelena Panfilova of Transparency International of Russia, “corruption is systematic, with plenty of unpunished criminals.”<sup>5</sup>

Nonetheless, this is not to say that the nation has been largely inattentive with regards to alleviating such highly reported levels of perceived corruption within its borders. Recently,

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<sup>1</sup> Friedman, Misha. (2012), For Russians, Corruption Is Just A Way of Life. *The New York Times*.

[http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/19/opinion/sunday/for-russians-corruption-is-just-a-way-of-life.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/19/opinion/sunday/for-russians-corruption-is-just-a-way-of-life.html?_r=0)

<sup>2</sup> Transparency International. (2012). Corruption Perceptions Index 2012.

<http://www.transparency.org/cpi2012/results>

<sup>3</sup> Transparency International. (2012). Corruption Perceptions Index 2012.

<http://www.transparency.org/cpi2012/results>

<sup>4</sup> Editors. (2013). Strongman Putin Is No Match for Corruption. *Bloomberg*. <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2013-05-07/strongman-putin-is-no-match-for-corruption.html>

<sup>5</sup> Zagorodnov, Artem. (2013). Will Russia’s Anti-Corruption Campaign Improve the Business Climate? *Russia Beyond The Headlines*. [http://rbth.ru/society/2013/04/10/kickbacks\\_down\\_future\\_uncertain\\_24879.html](http://rbth.ru/society/2013/04/10/kickbacks_down_future_uncertain_24879.html)

Russia implemented an amendment to Federal Law 273-FZ “On Counteracting Corruption” (or “the Anticorruption Law”) which it enacted in 2009, such that the legislation now requires affirmative anti-corruption compliance measures from all corporations organized in Russia.<sup>6</sup> In effect, the amendment surpasses the reach and extent of both the U.S. Foreign Corrupt Practices Act and the U.K. Bribery Act in the sense that it requires all corporations to implement preventive measures that prohibit commercial bribery.<sup>7</sup> The Russian government has also thus far implemented 15 of the 26 recommendations that the Council of Europe recommended in 2008, a feat that has been praised by the Council’s Group of States Against Corruption (or “GRECO”).<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, President Vladimir Putin has devoted much effort in advocating his anti-corruption campaign, commonly referred to as the “nationalization of the elite”, through which he is requiring state officials to submit their income and expenditure declarations, as well as divest their ownership of foreign shares, bank accounts, and other assets, giving bureaucrats a clear signal of new expectations and policies that ultimately require greater transparency.<sup>9</sup>

Despite such well-intentioned initiatives, Russia has yet to produce tangible improvements. Aside from its steadily decreasing ranks on Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index since 1980, especially in comparison to its Socialist neighbors, recent poll results indicate otherwise.<sup>10</sup> While the efficacy ratings for Putin and his anti-corruption campaign have risen to 31 percent from 12 percent six years ago, with the ratings for the National Anti-Corruption Committee up to nine percent from three percent, and that for law

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<sup>6</sup> Semins, William, & Yasinow, Denise N. (2013). Russia Amends Anti-Corruption Law to Require Affirmative Anti-Corruption Compliance Measures. *K&L Gates LLC*. <http://www.klgates.com/russia-amends-anti-corruption-law-to-require-affirmative-anti-corruption-compliance-measures-05-02-2013/>

<sup>7</sup> Brooks, Patricia J., & Trifonov, Ivan A. (2012). *Anticorruption Laws of Russia*. Retrieved from [http://www.squiresanders.com/russias\\_antikorruption\\_laws\\_overview/](http://www.squiresanders.com/russias_antikorruption_laws_overview/)

<sup>8</sup> Editors. (2013). Strongman Putin Is No Match for Corruption. *Bloomberg*. <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2013-05-07/strongman-putin-is-no-match-for-corruption.html>

<sup>9</sup> Bovt, Georgy. (2013). Putin’s Anti-Corruption Campaign: The Public Can Help. *Telegraph*. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/sponsored/russianow/10028934/putin-anti-corruption-campaign.html>

<sup>10</sup> Kleiner, V. (2012). Anticorruption Strategy of Business in Russia. *Problems of Economic Transition*, 55(2), 3-20.

enforcement agencies up to 17 percent from 12 percent, 38 percent of those polled have indicated that the campaign has not yet produced any significantly meaningful results.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, 13 percent of those polled said that the level and extent of corruption have even worsened.<sup>12</sup>

With such a context in mind, this paper advocates the view that what is currently needed most is not to come up with solutions or prescriptive measures to curb the high level of reported corruption in Russia. Rather, this paper takes a retrospective step backward and seeks to ultimately gain a better understanding of the conditions behind Russia's consistently low-ranking with regards to its high levels of perceived corruption. To achieve this aim, a method of examining corruption under the lens of criminological theories is proposed, the details and results of which will be discussed throughout the later portions of this paper.

## ***II. The Perception of Corruption as a Crime***

There exist various definitions of corruption, but one of the more widely accepted definitions is as follows: the abuse or misuse of public office or trust for personal rather than public benefit.<sup>13</sup> This definition by Nye is most apt as it includes the abuse of political, legal, and/or social power (as in holding a position in the civil service system) for personal, not public, gain.

More specifically, the aforementioned Russia's Anticorruption Legislation defines "corruption as a detriment to the lawful interests of the state and society, stemming from the following four dimensions:

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<sup>11</sup> Ankov, Vitali. (2012). No Success Stories in Anti-Corruption Drive-Poll. Rianovosti. <http://en.rian.ru/russia/20121204/177909138.html>

<sup>12</sup> Ankov, Vitali. (2012). No Success Stories in Anti-Corruption Drive-Poll. Rianovosti. <http://en.rian.ru/russia/20121204/177909138.html>

<sup>13</sup> Nye, Joseph S. (1967). Corruption and Political Development: A Cost-Benefit Analysis. *American Political Science Review*, 61, 417-419.

1. An abuse of power or position of authority with respect both to public servants and government officials (Public Officials) and to officers holding a management position in a commercial or other private entity (a Corporate Officer);
2. Giving a bribe to, or receiving a bribe by, a Public Official or a foreign official/official of a public international organization (a Foreign Public Official);
3. Engaging in commercial bribery—i.e., giving a bribe to, or receiving a bribe by, a Corporate Officer; or
4. Facilitating a bribe.”<sup>14</sup>

The perception of corruption as a crime is certainly not new as well. Corruption has generally been recognized as a crime against greater society, otherwise known as white-collar crime. The United Nations Convention against Corruption, first initiated in 2000, makes this aforementioned point clear, acknowledging that corruption “undermines democracy and the rule of law, leads to violations of human rights, distorts markets, erodes the quality of life, and allows organized crime, terrorism, and other threats to human security to flourish”.<sup>15</sup>

### ***III. The Importance of Russia’s Civil Service System***

Whereas in Western countries the permanent personnel of the State are referred to as “civil servants”, those who primarily function as servants of the state and permanently remain so in service in Russia are referred to as “cadre”.<sup>16</sup> Unlike ordinary civil servants, these personnel of

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<sup>14</sup> Brooks, Patricia J., & Trifonov, Ivan A. (2012). *Anticorruption Laws of Russia*. Retrieved from [http://www.squiresanders.com/russias\\_anticorruption\\_laws\\_overview/](http://www.squiresanders.com/russias_anticorruption_laws_overview/)

<sup>15</sup> Please refer to [http://www.unodc.org/documents/treaties/UNCAC/Publications/Convention/08-50026\\_E.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/documents/treaties/UNCAC/Publications/Convention/08-50026_E.pdf) for the full text of the UN Convention against Corruption.

<sup>16</sup> Aarrevaara, Timo. (1999). Restructuring Civil Service in Russian Public Administration. *Helsinki Ministry of Finance: Public Management Department*. 17(99), 1-59.



the Russian State are entitled to powers that far exceed the scope of their formal position, as an individual within a cadre has obligations inherent not only to his position at work, but also in his family life as well as when he is off duty.<sup>17</sup>

As its Constitution calls for, there has been widespread support for a less centralized system in Russia. Russian society initially resembled more of a unified federalist system, in which the national bodies wield main power over the country's strategic decisions relating to the economy, foreign policy, and defense and education.<sup>18</sup> Eastern Europe's gradual transition away from such a centralized model meant more power being granted to other levels of administration. Towards the end of the Soviet era, Russia's administrative system was close to the district model, with the responsibility for basic services—particularly political and administrative potential—being largely dependent on the regional level and the city districts.<sup>19</sup> In effect, civil servants became more crucial players in the country's public sphere as administrative links between the national and local levels became weaker.

Especially regarding public administration systems such as that present in Russia in which civil servants wield considerable power, this paper makes the argument that the starting point for an honest system is the individual public servant. There “cannot be high-integrity organizations without high-integrity individuals”, and this means that public servants need to do the “right” thing, before the country's civil service system and ultimately the nation itself, can become less contaminated by widespread levels of corruption.<sup>20</sup> Hence, the examination of corruption for the purpose of this paper will center around Russia's civil service system, and will

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<sup>17</sup> Ohotsky, E.V. Lukyanenko, V.I. - Sulemov, V.A.: Gosudarstvennaya kadrovaya politika i mehanizm ee realizatsii. Izdatelstvo RAGS. Moskva, 1998.

<sup>18</sup> Evans, Alfred B., & Gel'man, Vladimir. (2004). *The Politics of Local Government in Russia*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

<sup>19</sup> Aarrevaara, Timo. (1999). Restructuring Civil Service in Russian Public Administration. *Helsinki Ministry of Finance: Public Management Department*. 17(99), 1-59.

<sup>20</sup> Dess, Gregory G., Theodore Peridis, and G. T. Lumpkin. 2006. *Strategic Management: Creating Competitive Advantages*, Canadian ed. Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson.

be conducted from the perspective that each civil servant has the potential to act as an agent of corruption. As elaborated under the principal-agent model of corruption, the individual provides an apt starting point as corruption stems from the decisions that which individuals make.<sup>21</sup>

#### ***IV. Purpose***

Unlike the majority of scholarly works published with regards to corruption, the purpose of our paper is not to attempt at coming up with potential solutions and policy recommendations that may help combat widespread corruption in Russia. We are not seeking to identify the specific causes of corruption in Russia, what has accounted for their persistent, more rapid growth relative to its peers in the Soviet bloc, and why this obstacle has proven to be so difficult to overcome. Although many papers have explored such areas, if we knew the correct answers to these questions, Russia would not have been attained such consistently low rankings on Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index. Further, polls would not have published fairly disappointing results, such as 38 percent admitting that Russia's anti-corruption campaigns have yet to produce "meaningful" outcomes, and 13 percent pointing that "corruption keeps getting worse".<sup>22</sup>

Rather, the focus of this paper is to examine how criminological theories can be used to provide scholars with a new lens to studying corruption. Hopefully, the application of such theories will help scholars and policymakers better identify and understand more deeply the "real" causes of corruption in Russia, ultimately leading to more comprehensive, proactive, and effective policy changes and solutions.

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<sup>21</sup> Groenendijk, Nico. (1997). A Principal-Agent Model of Corruption. *Crime, Law & Social Change*, 27, 207-229.

<sup>22</sup> Ankov, Vitali. (2012). No Success Stories in Anti-Corruption Drive-Poll. Rianovosti. <http://en.rian.ru/russia/20121204/177909138.html>

## ***V. Question***

Given criminology's long-standing history, the field encompasses a myriad of relevant criminological theories. Based on the existing academic literature published regarding this subject area, six most commonly mentioned and discussed criminological theories were identified, which are as follows (in no particularly significant order):

- Biological theory
- Critical theory
- Labeling theory
- Rational choice theory
- Social control theory
- Strain theory

Hence, the main question driving this paper ultimately becomes the following: "Which of the six common criminological theories can be utilized to better understand for the widespread and entrenched nature of corruption in Russia, and to what extent?"

## ***VI. Methodology***

Considering the purpose of this research, it will inherently be more qualitative than quantitative, referencing published scholars' works and determining which of the aforementioned six common criminological theories are most applicable to examining corruption in Russia. Hypothesis testing will take the form of "testing" each criminological theory and examining the relevant literature. Again, this paper will not take a normative approach in providing possible suggestions for policy implementations, but will instead provide the knowledge basis from which such policy solutions can hopefully, and ultimately, be derived. In effect, the paper will be a synthesis of various criminological theories, relevant scholarly articles, and a review of which theories might be most applicable. The paper will also end by suggesting

potential areas that deserve further study for the advancement of the proposed academic approach.

## ***VII. Application of Criminological Theories and Review of Relevant Findings***

### Rational choice theory

Rational choice theory, developed by Cornish and Clarke, stems from the “classical” ideas of Cesare Beccaria and Jeremy Bentham, who believed that humans based their decisions primarily on the search for pleasure and in ways to best leverage utility maximization, avoiding pain.<sup>23</sup> Further elaborating on this idea is the viewpoint that crime is a choice that is influenced by a comparison and weighing of the costs and benefits associated with undertaking the criminal act—it’s “rationality”—hence the name of this theoretical approach.<sup>24</sup> The decision to commit a crime will more likely be deterred if its costs are immediate, salient, and certain, with examples being subject to a greater degree punishment that would normally be expected to be imposed under such a situation, more effort being required, and being presented with increased chances of detection by regulatory authorities. This notion of comparing the relative merits of benefits versus costs has been detailed as a model by Dr. Nichols in “The Perverse Effect of Campaign Contribution Limits”, in which he presents the following model:

$$nC_{con} > C_{psy} + p(C_{crim} + C_{soc}) + C_{fav}^{25}$$

where  $nC_{con}$  represents benefit gained,  $C_{psy}$  represents psychic costs,  $p$  represents the perceived probability of detection,  $C_{crim}$  represents the criminal sanctions,  $C_{soc}$  represents the social

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<sup>23</sup> Hayward, Keith. Situational Crime Prevention and its Discontents: Rational Choice Theory versus the ‘Culture of Now’. (2007). *Social Policy & Administration*, 41(3), 232-250.

<sup>24</sup> Agnew, Robert, & Cullen, Francis T. (2006). *Criminological Theory: Past to Present*. Los Angeles: Roxbury Publishing Company.

<sup>25</sup> Nichols, Philip M. (2011). The Perverse Effect of Campaign Contribution Limits: Reducing the Allowable Amounts Increases the Likelihood of Corruption in the Federal Legislature. *American Business Law Journal* 48(1), 77-118.

sanctions, and  $C_{fav}$  represents the cost of the favor. In other words, if the amount saved is greater than the cost, then the legislator will accept the bribe and act corruptly.

Rational choice theory can be applied to civil servants in the aforementioned Russia's cadre system. Corruption can be seen as an economic problem, as civil servants view bribes as an economic decision and use their full discretion to weigh the pros and cons, hence acting as potential agents of corruption.<sup>26</sup> Particularly in Russia, the benefits of accepting a bribe outweigh its costs, taking into consideration the relative lack of punishments that would be imposed upon detected bribe takers. Although measures such as banning officials from owning foreign bank accounts or shares, or requiring top officials to declare their personal incomes have been proposed recently, the civil service system currently functions without an intensive system of checks and controls.<sup>27</sup> Partially owing to the gaps in the Russian legislation and regulatory framework that still allow much leeway for the courts when defining the term "corruption", in cases where officials are convicted of accepting bribes, they tend to receive only conditional sentences as the severe sentences are usually reserved for those officials who have openly criticized the authorities.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, although civil servants are strongly advised against accepting gifts that cost more than 3,000 roubles, equivalent to approximately US\$ 100, the law that prohibits servants from doing so has not yet led to any preventive results because the equivalent government resolution specifying what is a gift, how they should be handled, and by what authority, has not been detailed yet.<sup>29</sup> Law enforcement efforts are crucial, since based on greater levels of perceived costs, more highly expected punishments should deter corruption, but

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<sup>26</sup> Rose-Ackerman, Susan. (1999). *Corruption and Government*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>27</sup> Fedorenko, Vladimir. (2013). Corrupting Language: Russian Officials Banned from Bribe-inducing Phrases. *RIA Novosti*. <http://rt.com/politics/russia-bans-corrupt-language-893/>

<sup>28</sup> IM Russia. (2013). Corruption in Russia as a Business. *Institute of Modern Russia*. <http://imrussia.org/en/society/376-corruption-in-russia-as-a-business>

<sup>29</sup> Alexandrova, Lyudmila. (2013). Russian Civil Servants Taught to Be Honest. *Russia & India Report*. [http://indrus.in/politics/2013/03/14/russian\\_civil\\_servants\\_taught\\_to\\_be\\_honest\\_22915.html](http://indrus.in/politics/2013/03/14/russian_civil_servants_taught_to_be_honest_22915.html)

this high probability of detection can only be accomplished if these penalties are guaranteed, established, and promised.<sup>30</sup> Combined with low basic salary levels, Russia's civil service system not only limits the entry of young professionals into the nation's civil service, but also significantly increases the range and magnitude of benefits that civil servants can expect to derive from accepting bribes when they compare the benefits and costs of their action as per the rational choice theory.<sup>31</sup> Such is the case to the extent where one of the more commonly proposed solutions to curbing corruption Russia is to increase the salaries of civil servants, so that the potential "profit margin" that civil servants can derive from accepting bribes is effectively reduced, meaning that the benefits will less likely outweigh the costs in the civil servant's rational thinking process.<sup>32</sup>

### Social control theory

Social control theory focuses on the strategies and institutions that control the scope of behavior, such as the influence of families, schools, and moral systems that lead to compliance with the rules of society.<sup>33</sup> In other words, individuals are less likely to commit crimes if it were not for the controls and restrictions that society places on them. As once expressed by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the weakness, inefficiency, and corruption of all branches of government are the most important obstacles to further progress in

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<sup>30</sup> Rose-Ackerman, Susan. (1999). *Corruption and Government*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>31</sup> Hardt, John P. (2002). *Russia's Uncertain Economic Future: With a Comprehensive Subject Index*. M.E. Sharpe, Inc.

<sup>32</sup> Petro, Nicolai N. (2013). Open Government Initiatives and Increasing Civil Servants Salaries Will Help Fight Corruption in Russia-Expert. *The Voice of Russia*. [http://english.ruvr.ru/2013\\_02\\_12/Open-government-initiatives-and-increasing-civil-servants-salaries-will-help-fight-corruption-in-Russia-expert/](http://english.ruvr.ru/2013_02_12/Open-government-initiatives-and-increasing-civil-servants-salaries-will-help-fight-corruption-in-Russia-expert/)

<sup>33</sup> Agnew, Robert, & Cullen, Francis T. (2006). *Criminological Theory: Past to Present*. Los Angeles: Roxbury Publishing Company.

reforming Russia.<sup>34</sup> Social control theory can be applied in coordination with the view that the chief obstacle barring Russia from achieving similar levels of success with the highly developed nations of the West is its criminally corrupt state system, in which vital resources have been reallocated from groups supportive of the modernization of society to those in the conservative higher ranks prioritizing personal enrichment.<sup>35</sup> Additionally, the recent period of change in Eastern Europe has led to the disintegration of formal structures, and the lack of understanding of public administration principles has hindered bureaucratic development in post-Soviet societies. This has resulted in loyalty to other members of the organization being as important, or more important, than good administration.<sup>36</sup>

As was briefly alluded to when discussing rational choice theory, the influential control imposed by relevant legislative frameworks cannot be ignored. The deterrent effect of anticorruption laws is potentially unbounded, as the prevention of criminal behavior can be seen as a function of the probability of detection of the criminal act of paying and/or accepting a bribe, as well as the intensity of the punishment and penalties, particularly those imposed by the legal system.<sup>37</sup> Again, strong law enforcement can exist only if there is a substantial legislative framework that supports such efforts. Gaps in the Russian legislation and regulatory framework allow much freedom for the courts when defining the term “corruption”, and in cases where officials are convicted of accepting bribes, they tend to receive only conditional sentences as the severe sentences are usually reserved for those officials who have openly criticized the

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<sup>34</sup> Myers, Stephen Lee. (2005). In Russia, Bribery is the Cost of Business. *The New York Times*.

[http://www.nytimes.com/2005/08/09/world/europe/09iht-russia.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=1&](http://www.nytimes.com/2005/08/09/world/europe/09iht-russia.html?pagewanted=all&_r=1&)

<sup>35</sup> Zaslavskaja, T.I. (2012). On the Social Actors in the Modernization of Russia. *Sociological Research*, 51(3), 71-92.

<sup>36</sup> Rose-Ackerman, Susan. (1999). *Corruption and Government*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>37</sup> Becker, Gary S. (1968). Crime and Punishment: An Economic Approach. *Journal of Political Economy*, 76(2), 169-217.

authorities.<sup>38</sup> This relatively “soft” approach to punishing those to accept bribes is similar to those countries in which the briber is viewed as the “active” party and the public official as “passive”, whereby bribe recipients are treated more leniently than bribe payers.<sup>39</sup> Law enforcement efforts are crucial, since based on the higher level of perceived costs, more highly expected punishments should to deter corruption, but this high probability of detection can only be accomplished if these penalties are guaranteed, established, and promised via an effective and imposing social control infrastructure.<sup>40</sup>

### Strain theory

General strain theory posits that individuals experience strain when they cannot obtain success goals such as respected status in society and/or money, and that under certain conditions they are likely to respond to such cases of strain with criminal behavior, especially when the strain results in a negative effect as anger and frustration.<sup>41</sup> According to Robert Agnew, who founded general strain theory by addressing weaknesses in the prior approaches to strain theory undertaken by scholars such as Cohen, Coward, and Olin, there are three types of strain, which he outlines as follows<sup>42</sup>:

1. Failure to achieve positively valued stimuli
2. Loss of a positively valued stimuli
3. Presentation of a negative stimuli

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<sup>38</sup> IM Russia. (2013). Corruption in Russia as a Business. *Institute of Modern Russia*.  
<http://imrussia.org/en/society/376-corruption-in-russia-as-a-business>

<sup>39</sup> Vermeulen, Gert. (1997). “The Fight Against International Corruption in the European Union,” in Barry Rider, ed., *Corruption: The Enemy Within*. The Hague: Kluwer.

<sup>40</sup> Rose-Ackerman, Susan. (1999). *Corruption and Government*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>41</sup> Agnew, Robert, & Cullen, Francis T. (2006). *Criminological Theory: Past to Present*. Los Angeles: Roxbury Publishing Company.

<sup>42</sup> Agnew, Robert. (1992). Foundation for a General Strain Theory of Crime and Delinquency. *Criminology*, 30(1), 47-88.



The failure of achieve positively valued stimuli include an individual's inability to secure positively favored goals which members of society strive, which Agnew points out are money, status and respect, and autonomy.<sup>43</sup> Examples of loss of positively valued stimuli include broken relationships with a partner, or the theft of valued object; similarly, examples of presentation of negative stimuli encompass homelessness, negative school experiences, and adverse relations with peers.<sup>44</sup>

Strain theory may prove to be especially useful when examining the inner workings of Russia's civil service system. Strain theory assumes that most individuals have similar aspirations as determined by societal norms of values, but unfortunately enough, not everyone is exposed to the same set of opportunities or abilities. When people fail to achieve society's expectations through normally approved means such as hard work and good work ethic, they may attempt to achieve success through crime. Truly qualified civil servants may fail to achieve society's expectations—which, in this case, would be money—through means such as hard work and good work ethic stemming from innate intelligence and a morally virtuous mindset. However, despite their efforts, such individuals may still feel inferior to those who are less qualified but receive better end results through the acceptance of bribes and other shortcuts. Pay for civil servants has fallen in many countries relative not only to private sector wages but also to civil service pay in the past, a pattern which prevails in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union.<sup>45</sup> If public sector pay is low, corruption is a survival strategy, as in such cases officials

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<sup>43</sup> Agnew, Robert. (1992). Foundation for a General Strain Theory of Crime and Delinquency. *Criminology*, 30(1), 47-88.

<sup>44</sup> Agnew, Robert. (1992). Foundation for a General Strain Theory of Crime and Delinquency. *Criminology*, 30(1), 47-88.

<sup>45</sup> Haque, Nadeem UI, & Sahay, Ratna. (1996). *Do Government Wage Cuts Close Budget Deficits? – A Conceptual Framework for Developing Countries and Transition Economies*, IMF Working Paper WP/96/19. Washington DC: International Monetary Fund.

are more likely to accept payoffs as salary supplements.<sup>46</sup> According to strain theory, this will lead to a sort of chain reaction in which more and more civil servants are inclined to resort to bribery to get ahead of the game as they see their peers succeeding more in achieving “positively valued stimuli” as money, independent of their qualifications and work ethic. If government-determined pay scales do not reward those with the necessary qualifications through a justified salary, skilled servants will resort to accepting bribes to cope with this strain and discrepancy in pay level. At the same time, as the skilled workers who choose to leave the well-faring but less qualified civil servants behind, a labor market equilibrium emerges in which those who possess low skills will be concentrated in low-paid government jobs that they are not qualified to perform.<sup>47</sup>

### ***VIII. Discussion of Findings***

Again, the purpose of this paper is not to provide solutions, but rather to provide scholars with a new lens through which they can study corruption. Based on the findings above, three out of the aforementioned six commonly discussed criminological theories are deemed to be most applicable to the study of corruption in Russia’s civil service system:

- Rational choice theory
- Social control theory
- Strain theory

In contrast, less emphasis is given to the following three remaining theories:

- Biological theory
- Critical theory
- Labeling theory

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<sup>46</sup> Rose-Ackerman, Susan. (1999). *Corruption and Government*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>47</sup> Rose-Ackerman, Susan. (1999). *Corruption and Government*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Biological theories trace back to Lombroso, who posited that the “Atavistic man”, or the “born criminal”, would encounter frictions against civilized society. In short, the biological theory of criminology views criminal behavior as a result of a defect in the individual’s genetic makeup.<sup>48</sup> The body of influential research on the biological bases of criminal behavior has grown rapidly, with substantial relationships being established between crime and psychopathology.<sup>49</sup> Nonetheless, the existence of evidence that extends this relationship directly to the behavior of civil servants in Russia has yet to exist.

Critical theory posits that inequality in material well-being and power leads to conditions that ultimately result in crime. Much of the theory centers around the viewpoint that capitalism and the market economy have created many sources of inequality that have provided opportunities for the powerful to exploit the less-privileged and impoverished.<sup>50</sup> While this theory may not pose any obviously direct applications to the rationale behind why Russian civil servants choose to accept bribes as do the rational choice, social control, and strain theories well explain, critical theory does bring up a few interesting areas of thought with respect to the market economy’s role in providing a basis upon which corruption spread in Russia.

When the Soviet Union collapsed in the early 1990s, most Western economists expected a relatively quick transition from central planning to a market-based economy via the standard prescription known as the “shock therapy”, which consisted of four central components—“price decontrol, a stable currency, hard budget constraints on state-owned firms, and the rapid

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<sup>48</sup> Agnew, Robert, & Cullen, Francis T. (2006). *Criminological Theory: Past to Present*. Los Angeles: Roxbury Publishing Company.

<sup>49</sup> Raine, Adrian. (1993). *The Psychopathology of Crime: Criminal Behavior as a Clinical Disorder*. San Diego: Elsevier.

<sup>50</sup> Agnew, Robert, & Cullen, Francis T. (2006). *Criminological Theory: Past to Present*. Los Angeles: Roxbury Publishing Company.

privatization of state-owned enterprises.”<sup>51</sup> However, the transition had been much slower than expected, and with disappointing results—Russia’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) dropped between 1991 and 1998, with the nation’s GDP in 2000 being at only 64 percent of its level in 1990; income inequality as measured by the Gini coefficient increased from 0.26 to 0.47; and around US\$ 200 worth of capital fled, and investment in Russia plummeted.<sup>52</sup> Such outcomes are not entirely surprising, as Soviet market conditions are inherently different from the economic management systems of the Western countries, with regards to elements such as extent of administrative regulation of economic activity and the degree of restriction placed on non-state economic activity.<sup>53</sup> The Russian economy can be characterized by a mixed system with both market and bureaucratic elements, which has led to regional protectionism and localism.<sup>54</sup> Hence, values of the Soviet Economy entail views such as protecting family and friends, avoiding risk from strangers, relying on personal trust, and relying on the government for jobs, which starkly contrast from market economy values, which include protecting and facilitating transactions with strangers, relying on generalized trust that involves interaction with foreign institutions and strangers, and relying on the private sector for jobs.<sup>55</sup> Trying to implement a market-oriented economy, without the necessary social infrastructure thoroughly developed and implemented, especially when the values upheld by the Russians differ from those that constitute the typical Western market economy, may have possibly led to the spread of corruption and the prevalence of bribery in a market economy that has literally gone wild.

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<sup>51</sup> Black, Bernard S., & Tarassova, Anna S. (2003). Institutional Reform in Transition: A Case Study of Russia. *Supreme Court Economic Review*, 10, 211-278.

<sup>52</sup> Pradeep, Mitra K., & Selowsky, Marcelo. (2002). *Transition: The First Ten Years: Analysis and Lessons for Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union*. Washington, D.C.: The World Bank.

<sup>53</sup> Naishul, V.A. (1990). Can the Soviet Economy Stay Left of the American? On the Limits of the Market in Soviet Conditions. *Communist Economies*, 2(4), 481-497.

<sup>54</sup> Naishul, V.A. (1990). Problems of Creating a Market in the USSR. *Communist Economies*, 2(3), 275-290.

<sup>55</sup> Dowden, Patricia. (2013). *Market Economy Values: How to Get There?* Presentation to St. Petersburg Finance and Economics University.

Not much substantial evidence exists to support the application of labeling theory to examining corruption in Russia's civil service system. Labeling theory explains that individuals are more likely to engage themselves in criminal behavior and become "stabilized" in criminal roles when they are labeled as a criminal, are sent to prison, become stigmatized, and are excluded from participating in conventional roles that would commonly be expected in society.<sup>56</sup> If labeling theory were to be applicable to our situation of interest, there needs to exist evidence that a substantial proportion of bribe acceptors are indeed being labeled as criminals and are becoming stigmatized, and that such convicted civil servants have chosen to accept bribes constantly again because they now see themselves as criminals. However, as alluded to earlier, such a scenario cannot be true, as the prevalence of civil servants' accepting bribes may be attributed to the current *lack* of imposing punishments and social controls, which has actually resulted in a smaller number of such individuals being sentenced under severe sentences.<sup>57</sup>

### ***IX. Areas Deserving Further Study***

As much as the application of criminological theories may prove to be a novel way of studying corruption in Russia's civil service system, there exist several key areas that deserve further attention.

Most notable is the phenomenon known as the "Putin team". Putin has allegedly selected those in his vicinity to be included in his inner circle of policymakers and influential power holders. A study conducted in last year suggests that several of Putin's friends have succeeded in becoming wealthy in recent years, having made their fortunes through deals that have involved state-controlled companies that were meant to be operated directly by the president and his

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<sup>56</sup> Agnew, Robert, & Cullen, Francis T. (2006). *Criminological Theory: Past to Present*. Los Angeles: Roxbury Publishing Company.

<sup>57</sup> Rose-Ackerman, Susan. (1999). *Corruption and Government*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

government.<sup>58</sup> A plausible argument that can be withdrawn from this “Putin effect” is that an expectation of corruption, and hence an evasive culture that deems corrupt acts acceptable, spreads throughout Russia’s political system as the nation’s own President does not denounce such acts himself. Based on this entrenched culture of corruption, individuals placed in the lower ranks of the nation’s social ladder, such as civil servants, are provided with no reason on which to act morally otherwise, illustrating a top-down diffusion of corruption throughout the nation’s societal sphere. Whilst criminologists may argue that crime and corruption tend to spread in a top-down vertical manner, it is yet unclear as to which of the aforementioned six common criminological theories can fully account for this “Putin effect”.

Another consideration is that this paper has examined how *individual* criminological theories can be applied to study the widespread nature of corruption Russia’s civil service system, in effect assuming that such theories act in a sort of mutually exclusive manner. However, it is indeed possible that the phenomenon can also be examined from the interaction of multiple such criminological theories. Which theories, and to which extent their interaction, account for corruption in Russia, poses an interesting area for further research and exploration.

On a broader level, it is also worth considering whether it is appropriate to be applying these Western-based criminological theories, to describe a phenomenon that belongs to a foreign country. A country’s unique system of values are so deeply ingrained that any foreign disruption is likely to result in an inharmonious clash of ideals and the renouncement to let go of one’s own beliefs. Hence, it is possible that some may question the feasibility of applying the aforementioned six criminological theories to elements of Russia’s own civil service system, and

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<sup>58</sup> Herszenhorn, David M., & Kramer, Andrew E. (2012). Midas Touch in St. Petersburg: Friends of Putin Glow Brightly. *The New York Times*. [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/02/world/europe/ties-to-vladimir-putin-generate-fabulous-wealth-for-a-select-few-in-russia.html?hp&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/02/world/europe/ties-to-vladimir-putin-generate-fabulous-wealth-for-a-select-few-in-russia.html?hp&_r=0)

the occurrence of corruption within that nation only.

## *X. Conclusion*

Corruption is a widely studied topic, yet solutions that have been proposed in the past have yet to achieve much tangible, progressive reform in Russia. By applying criminological theories to this area of study, it is hoped that this complex issue will be made more understandable and easier to approach, thereby effectively providing an unprecedented lens through which scholars and policymakers can examine corruption in Russia. More importantly, the results of such an approach will entail crucial implications for policymaking, particularly with regards to the nation's civil service system and the role of the cadre acting as potential agents for corruption within the State. The application of criminological theories may not necessarily lead to immediate solutions. However, the proposed methodology, in conjunction with the aforementioned areas that at this point deserve further study, will nevertheless prove to be a progressive start.