

Title: *Why People Vote for Corrupt Politicians in Afghanistan*

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Short summary paragraphs:

I. Policy Motivation for Research: *the policy and research question(s) addressed by this project, and a brief explanation of why they are crucial for policy-making in targeted countries*

If voters dislike corruption, why does it exist amongst politicians, even in societies characterized by strong institutions and high accountability? A possible, understudied reason for this phenomenon is that, sometimes, voters might knowingly vote for corrupt politicians. Understanding this potential cause of corruption is important since corruption is thought to be a significant barrier to economic growth and democratization, and these are central concerns for social scientists and policy makers. Understanding the electoral roots of corruption should also help policy makers design suitable remedies for the problem. In this research agenda, we aim to answer three important and related questions about corruption and voting behavior, using data from Afghanistan. First, to what degree do voters support corrupt politicians? Second, why do voters support corrupt politicians? Third, how, and to what degree, can voters be persuaded to penalize corrupt politicians?

II. Policy Impact: *what decision or policy will be shaped as a result of this work*

Answers to these three questions promise to enhance our theoretical and practical understanding of voting behavior with regard to corruption, and could also suggest possible remedies for the presence of corruption. In particular, our early IGC-funded research suggests that programs designed to identify for voters the existence of political corruption may not always reduce electoral support for corrupt politicians. Under certain conditions – which we are in the process of investigating – voters may support corruption in exchange for other benefits, and so transparency programs that clarify those trade-offs for voters actually could exacerbate the problem. We hope that our research will inform the design of transparency-enhancing anti-corruption programs, by identifying the conditions under which they are likely to be helpful or not.

III. Audience: *the audience or key decision makers targeted by this brief*

Academics who study institutions and governance in developing and post-conflict countries, and policy makers responsible for instituting electoral reform and discouraging corruption among politicians.

Main sections:

IV. Policy Implications: *Identify the key messages on the policy implications of your research in bullet point form. Please use one sentence providing a brief description of each bullet together with one paragraph that accompanies each bullet to substantiate or explain further the bullet.*

- *Voters sometimes knowingly vote for politically corrupt candidates, implying that making voters aware of political corruption is not always an effective strategy for disincentivizing political corruption.* Figure 1 illustrates cross-national variance in the degree to which voters support or penalize corrupt politicians. It plots, for 1984-2003 and for 123 countries across the world, the number of major changes in government cabinets on the y-axis, and a corruption measure from the International Country Risk Guide on the x-axis.¹ While the raw data plotted on the left hand side suggest that corruption is positively associated with cabinet turnover, thereby suggesting the presence of a corruption penalty, controlling for cross-country heterogeneity by including country fixed effects (these data are plotted on the right hand side) causes this association to disappear. This rudimentary exercise suggests that

¹ Cabinet turnover data are from Banks (2011). Corruption data are from the International Country Risk Guide dataset (PRS Group 2004).

there is substantial variance in the cross-national relationship between corruption and voting behaviour.

- *IGC-funded data collection efforts show that these patterns exist in Afghanistan, too.* To examine the relationship between corruption and voting in Afghanistan, we used IGC funding to ask 255 of the country's journalists to rate the MPs from their provinces (for a total of 249 MPs) in terms of how corrupt they are perceived to be. While imperfect, corruption perception measures have been shown to be correlated with evidence of actual corruption in other contexts. We combine these data with vote tallies from the 2005 and 2010 national parliamentary elections to estimate the degree to which being perceived as corrupt is associated with a vote penalty, or a decrease in vote shares between elections. Figure 2 summarizes our findings, suggesting that corruption perceptions are associated with a small vote penalty of approximately 1 percentage point of the vote for corruption scores of 3 (out of 5) and higher.² There remains substantial variation in the degree to which corruption is penalized, however.³

V. **Implementation:** *Please provide guidance for policymakers as to how to implement policy measures based on the implications of your research by devising a number of 'action points'. Please discuss constraints that could arise in the implementation of these 'actions points' and suggest ideas on how to confront those. If applicable, please also discuss issues in replication of results, or in scaling up, or any cross-country experience, that arise in thinking about implementing decisions that would be influenced by your research.*

- We stress that our research is extremely preliminary and our experimental investigation of the causes of voting for corrupt politicians has not been done. Our observational analysis of data cross-nationally and in Afghanistan underlines that even if voters are aware of corruption in a context, they do not always punish it. This raises the very real possibility that transparency and accountability programs—which form the cornerstone of many an anti-corruption strategy—might not work by themselves to attenuate corruption. Other factors, such as a lack of ethnic voting or low levels of pork might be needed as well. In fact, if corruption “pays” in the sense that under certain conditions and for various reasons voters prefer it to an honest alternative, increasing transparency might not only fail to have an effect, but might worsen the problem. The latter could occur since transparency will make the trade-offs that voters face clearer, thereby enabling them—in some circumstances, which we aim to investigate—to make better educated choices to vote for corrupt politicians. Future work should therefore help us understand when transparency-enhancing reforms are likely to work, and when they are unlikely to do so.
- Although the theories of voting and corruption that we employ to structure our investigation of the corruption penalty are general, in that they are unconstrained by geography, culture, or other such factors, our results are particularly likely to hold in post-conflict societies.

VI. **Dissemination:** *Please suggest individuals or institutions, along with emails and/or postal addresses that you would like the IGC to send soft and hard copies of your final working paper and policy brief. Ideally, we would like to disseminate IGC findings to those in the policymaking community in developing countries in Africa and South Africa.*

VII. **Further Readings:** *a brief (non-technical) list of related writing.*

Carter, Sara A. “Graft Undermines Support for Karzai.” *Washington Times* (September 11, 2008).

² A candidate with a corruption score of 3 sometimes takes a bribe, a candidate with a corruption score of 4 takes a lot of bribes, and a candidate with a corruption score of 5 always takes a bribe.

³ One might think that features of the Afghan electoral system (e.g., its single non-transferable voting system prioritizing representation over accountability, or the legislature's impotence relative to the executive branch), rather than our individual-level factors, imply a lack of a vote penalty for corruption because voters do not know who to hold to account for bad behavior. The secondary survey data we collected show that there is, in fact, a small corruption penalty with considerable unexplained variation.

Chaudhuri, Rudra and Theo Farrell. 2011. "Campaign Disconnect: Operational Progress and Strategic Obstacles in Afghanistan, 2009-2011." *International Affairs* 87, no. 2: 271-96.

Habib, Mina. "Missing in Action: Afghan Lawmakers." *JuneauEmpire.com* (June 26, 2012). Available from <http://m.juneauempire.com/opinion/2012-06-26/missing-action-afghan-lawmakers>. Accessed August 2, 2012.

High Office of Oversight and Anti-Corruption, "About Corruption." Available from: <http://anti-corruption.gov.af/en/page/1736>. Accessed August 2, 2012.

Holmberg, Sören, Bo Rothstein, and Naghmeh Nasiritousi. 2009. "Quality of Government: What You Get." *Annual Review of Political Science* 12: 135-161.

Jones, Seth G. 2008. *Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND.

Krauss, Clifford. "Was Canada Too Good to Be True?" *New York Times* (May 25, 2005).

Meldrum, Andrew. "40 accused in South African MPs' fraud case." *Guardian* (January 23, 2005).

"Mr Fix-it in a fix." *Economist* (February 18, 2010).

Mullen, Rani D. 2009. "Afghanistan in 2008: State Building at the Precipice." *Asian Survey* 49, no. 1 (January/February): 28-38.

PRS Group, Inc. 2004. "International country risk guide (ICRG) researchers' dataset." The PRS Group, Inc.

Shane, Scott, Mark Mazzetti, and Dexter Filkins. "Afghan Corruption Undercuts U.S. Efforts." *International Herald Tribune* (December 4, 2010).

Shenon, Philip. "5 Senators Struggle to Avoid Keating Inquiry Fallout." *New York Times* (November 22, 1989).

"Suspended Liberia speaker defiant." *BBC News* (March 15, 2005).

Torabi, Yama and Lorenzo Delesgues. 2008. "Afghanistan: Bringing Accountability Back In: From Subjects of Aid to Citizens of the State." Kabul: Integrity Watch Afghanistan. Available from: http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/4B61D4642FC36F2C4925746A000520E0-Full_Report.pdf.

Transparency International. 2009. "Corruption Perceptions Index."

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). January 2010. "Corruption in Afghanistan: bribery as reported by the victims." New York: UNODC.

VII. **Figures and Tables**

Figure 1. Governmental Turnover and Corruption, 1984-2003

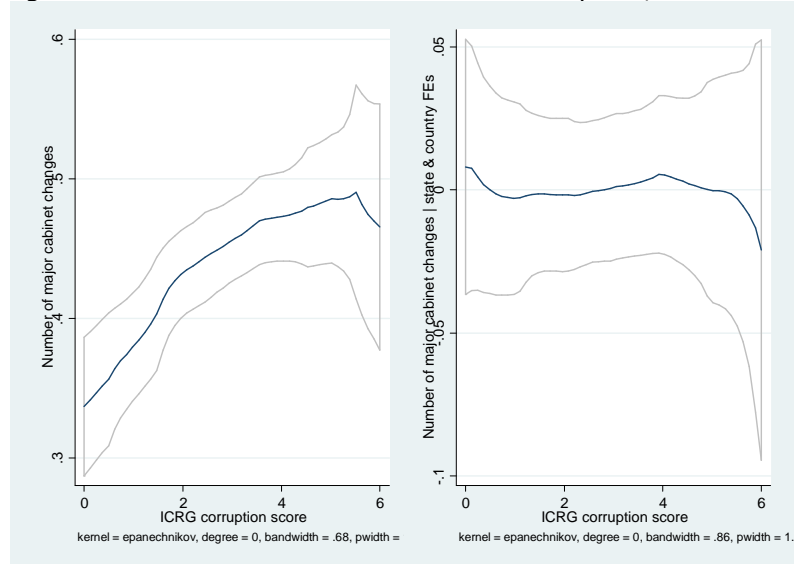


Figure 2. Change in candidate vote % and corruption perceptions for Afghanistan's MPs

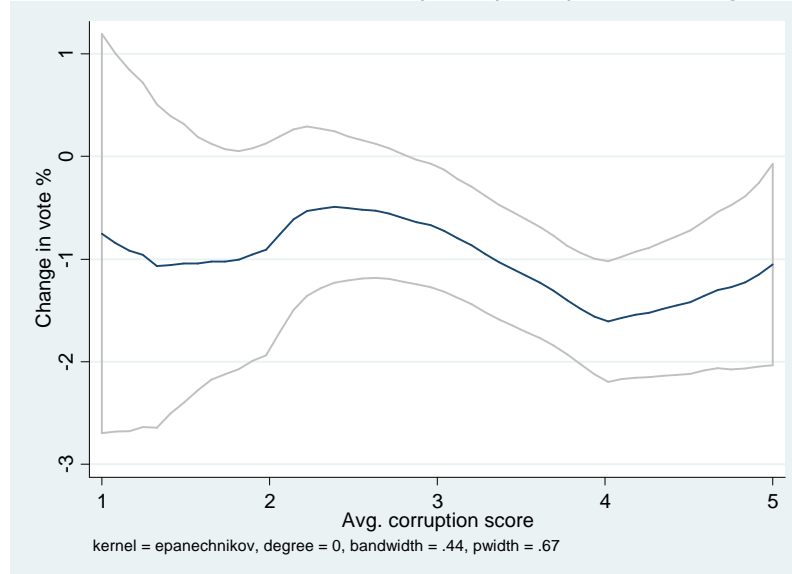


Table 1. Top reasons why Afghan journalists' think that voters tolerate corruption

Voters tolerate corruption because ...	% respondents
they are promised private goods	36.0
corrupt politicians are coethnics	30.9
they lack information	12.7
corrupt politicians threaten voters	12.3
corrupt politicians are copartisans	4.7
they are promised help with the bureaucracy	1.3
they are promised public goods	0.8