Corruption and Political Participation: Testing Models of Voting and Protesting

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Abstract: Political corruption has been known for its damaging effects on countries’ economic growth, ability to attract investment, and citizen trust in democratic institutions. These negative impacts are even more devastating in countries transitioning from a totalitarian system to democracy. When governments are dishonest, ordinary people may easily lose faith in the new system as well suited to respond to their needs. While extant research relates corruption to public disengagement with politics, less has been done to study the resistance capacity of societies toward the harmful impact of malfeasance. In this paper I explore the probability of a mobilization effect of corruption in Eastern European new democracies. In particular, I assess the extent to which perceptions of widespread corruption among the ruling elite (1) encourage voting for opposition parties, and (2) motivate citizens to protest against the misuse of public office. For the analysis, I use multivariate regression techniques and survey data from post-Communist countries, gathered through the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems project and the World Values Survey.
Does corruption mobilize people to participate in politics? If yes, does it propel some forms of political action more than other? Political corruption has been known for its damaging effects on countries’ economic growth, the ability to attract investment, and on citizen trust in democratic institutions. These negative impacts are even more devastating in countries transitioning from a totalitarian system to democracy. When governments are dishonest, ordinary people may easily lose faith in the new system as well suited to adequately respond to their needs.

Widespread malfeasance in Eastern Europe after Communism may have caused too much disappointment in the hearts of those who protested and voted with much enthusiasm in 1989-1990. Rates of membership in political parties and voluntary citizen organizations remain low and public demonstrations are fewer and less attended (Howard 2003). Withdrawal from voting continued in the years following the founding elections (Kostadinova 2003). The reasons for the declining rates in participation can be multiple, including a mere loss of interest, a realization that participation is not mandatory anymore, and overwhelming economic problems in the lives of many. At the same time, however, popular disgust with dishonest politicians and state institutions has kept growing. It remains unclear whether the accumulated anger with unfair governance carries a potential to alter established patterns of behavior, in both traditional and less common forms of political activity.

Extant research relates convincingly corruption to public disengagement with politics but less has been done to study its capacity to stimulate citizen action. Empirical evidence provided so far is mixed. Using experimental data, Inman and Andrews (2009) find that corruption perceptions increase the likelihood of voting and protesting in
Senegal. Yet McCann and Dominguez (1998) establish that suspicions of electoral fraud depressed participation in Mexican elections between 1986 and 1995. Their finding is supported by Chong and his team (2011) who specify that depressed participation in Mexico affects the fortunes of both the incumbents and the opposition. In a similar vein, Davis et al. (1998) argue that awareness of corruption depressed political engagement but had no impact on voting for the opposition in Costa Rica, Chile, and Mexico. Research on Brazil points at the possibility that sitting mayors may not get re-elected if information on them being corrupt is released, but this might happen only in extreme cases of office abuse (Ferraz and Finan 2008). Scholars analyzing the US and Britain also find that incumbent vote shrinks as a result of corruption scandals but it is not certain that politicians with good behavior would benefit from this (Bowler and Karp 2004).

Research of this sort on Eastern Europe is even more scarce and less conclusive. The few studies devoted to the role of corruption on political behavior focus on links between voting and malfeasance. With regard to electoral behavior, corruption perceptions are found to alienate some people from voting but to mobilize others to cast ballots (Kostadinova 2009). Exploring survey data from Poland, Slomczynski and Shabad (2009) argue that beliefs that political parties are not equally corrupt stimulate participation. Their study also shows that support for particular parties is affected by voters’ assessment of the extent of malfeasance. Work on two other post-Communist countries, Bulgaria and Romania, concludes that citizens blame governing parties for the spread of corruption and may switch to another party if a “credible, untainted alternative” becomes available (Chiru and Gherrghina 2012). With regard to a possible mobilization
effect of corruption on other forms of political participation, there is a lacuna in existing research that still needs to be filled.

This paper undertakes an empirical investigation attempting to establish whether corruption perceptions have stimulated citizens in Eastern Europe to more actively participate in politics. In particular, the study focuses on the potential of perceived lack of elite integrity to alter individuals’ choices of political action. The decision to vote (versus to abstain) has been studied more than any other form of activity, therefore I choose to analyze corruption as a predictor of switching from abstention to support for non-incumbent parties, switching from supporting the party currently in government to another party, and taking part in non-electoral protest activities. The rationale behind the former two is that votes who assess corruption as too extensive will have an incentive to re-enter the electoral arena or to re-direct their support to the benefit of a party different from the perceived as corrupt incumbents. Disenchanted citizens with little faith in the efficacy of the electoral process will search for other ways to express their anger with the practice of corrupt policies.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. In the next section I explore theoretically the link between corruption perceptions and political action. Then the paper goes on to formulate expectations for changes in electoral and non-electoral political participation in the post-Communist context. The following section operationalizes variables and specifies measurement procedures. Then I test the proposed effects of corruption using data from the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) and the World Values Survey (WVS). The final section summarizes the findings and outlines avenues for future research.
The Mobilizing Effect of Corruption

There are two basic models developed in the literature which attempt at explaining citizen participation in politics. The standard socio-economic status (SES) model emphasizes the importance of personal resources and psychological motivations (Verba and Nie 1972, Barnes and Kaase 1979, Leighley 1995). The central argument advanced by the SES proponents is that people participate in politics when they have available finances, skills, and time, as well as when driven by strong civic orientations which stimulate them to act. The second school of thought advances a framework in which mobilization factors play a central role. Even if personal resources are available, the argument goes, there should exist opportunities for participation offered by parties, candidates for office, or organized groups (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993, 25). In other words, opportunity structures embedded in the political context shape incentives for individuals to take part in social activities or to stay passive.

Which one of the above described approaches is better equipped to help us understand if corruption triggers desire to participate in politics? Within the SES framework, individuals will be stimulated to act when they hold negative opinions about the integrity of politicians and public officials. Corruption scandals and encounters with corrupt bureaucrats generate disappointment and anger, which in turn lead to higher participation levels. The “mobilization argument” in its original form seems less helpful to explain a possible corruption-participation link, for it focuses on politicians who target particular groups by creating incentives for voting, signing petitions, or else (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993, 25). From a broader perspective, however, it can be argued that
malfeasance does have a mobilizing force. Not politicians or activists, but perceptions of endemic corruption activate ordinary citizens who otherwise would not get involved. In such terms, the mobilizing effect of corrupt behavior is in creating psychological motivations to expose bribers, sanction the betayers of public trust, or march together against malfeasance.

Could corruption demobilize citizens? Corrupt practices have been found to exercise a negative effect on regime legitimacy in Latin American societies (Seligson 2002). Perceptions of widespread malfeasance erode citizen approval of government and its institutions in transitional democracies at a significantly higher rate than in consolidated democracies (Anderson and Tverdova 2003). Consequently, disappointment and disillusionment make many question the idea that citizens may influence politics by voting or engaging in other activities. In a country deeply penetrated by corruption, people are less optimistic and many of them may think of participation in voluntary associations as meaningless (Uslaner 2003). Moreover, scholars have argued that support for corrupt governments can be sustained in places with weak institutions and existing patron-client relationships, something to which transitional democracies are especially vulnerable (Manzetti and Wilson 2007). In brief, deep disappointment with corrupt practices could discourage participation in any form of organized action if clientelistic relationships prevail, political efficacy is low, and legitimacy is damaged.

The central argument advanced in this paper is that corruption perceptions create incentives for citizens to participate in politics. That disgust with corrupt government officials does carry a potential for civic apathy has already been confirmed by extant scholarship. This study does not argue against such a possibility. Rather, it asserts that
perceived corruption may also mobilize citizens to engage in politics in particular ways. In Verba and Nie’s (1992) terms, individuals choose how to act on the basis of their own preferences and taste for competition. From electoral activities to non-electoral forms of engagement, the mobilization effect of corruption can manifest itself in a variety of ways. In these instances citizens affected by what they perceive as an endemic problem for their country, get motivated to switch from their usual choice to an alternative form of behavior in the public arena.

**Electoral Behavior: Corruption and Voting for the Opposition**

The logic behind the “mobilization” thesis suggests behavioral changes as a result of perceived malfeasance. When it comes to participation in elections, distress over corruption is expected to trigger voter flows inconsistent with the preceding election. Electoral volatility in post-Communist states has been extremely high (Birch 2003, 124-5; Tavits 2005). Some of this scholarship explains instability in Eastern European voting preferences at the macro level. For example, Birch (2003, 131-4) finds that features of the electoral system (PR in particular), post-Soviet legacies, and economic crisis enhance the replacement of governing parties. Tavits (2005) concurs that institutions and economic performance matter for the resulting level of electoral volatility and identifies a beginning trend towards stabilization after a decade of transition. A somewhat different approach is applied by Pop-Eleches (2010) who focuses on the phenomenon of “protest” vote as an explanation of the successful performance of “unorthodox” parties in the third generation (1998-2006) of post-Communist elections. This latter study shifts the attention to the
impact of more traditional party politics during the 1990s on the surge of voting for alternative options.

If unstable electoral behavior is significant, are there indications which would justify an expected switch in allegiance among Eastern European voters for the reason of alleged corruption? It was argued above that those deeply troubled by the spread of corruption among the elite can get motivated to punish incumbents and support the opposition. By the late 1990s, malfeasance had become a salient issue in post-Communist countries which were ranked by Transparency International and the World Bank as considerably more corrupt than the western consolidated democracies (Earle 2000, Grigorescu 2006). New opportunities for embezzlement had opened after privatization was launched, while older practices of office abuse managed to survive and adapt (Schmidt 2007). Disappointment with the fast enrichment by a few while society as a whole carried the burden of economic transformation, eroded public trust in the state and its institutions (Mishler and Rose 2001, Anderson and Tverdova 2003, Kostadinova 2012). As Catterberg and Moreno (2006) put it, citizens in young democracies distrust institutions for reasons of “disillusionment and disaffection.”

Changes in individual voter behavior which can be attributed to corruption perceptions can best be observed when citizens alter their choices of participation across elections. For example, angered by news about cases of embezzlement, hidden from the public deals, and fraud, previously abstaining voters may decide to participate in the upcoming election. An even clearer form of behavioral change activated by disgust with dishonest elites occurs when voters originally in favor of the winner of the previous election switch to an alternative. These two groups will be more likely to cast ballots for
non-governing parties, because corruption is being associated primarily with the ruling elite. The latter may lose a significant amount of votes, if not even their seats, as a result of the “electoral retribution” (Peters and Welch 1980). At the same time, these shifts in voter choices will benefit mostly the main opposition party which is broadly anticipated to replace the incumbents in government.

There are at least two challenges to this argument. First, corruption may have countervailing effects on voter turnout. Previous research finds that in Eastern Europe perceptions of public office abuse mobilize some voters to remove the “rascals” from office and de-mobilize others who do not believe that who they vote for matters (Kostadinova 2009). Interestingly, scholarship on US congressional elections reaches a similar conclusion about little net effect of the two opposite incentives as generated by charges of corruption (Peters and Welch 1980). The argument for widespread malfeasance generating both apathy and mobilization remains valid. In fact, such a possibility remains to be empirically verified for consistency in voter abstention from election to election. What the mobilization thesis proposes is that those who previously abstained but returned to vote, were more likely to cast ballots for the opposition rather than for the incumbents.

Second, those who previously supported the current incumbents may simply punish their favorite party for allowing corruption by abstaining, rather than by casting ballots for the opposition. No doubt, this might be happening but along with it, others may choose a more radical sanction, i.e. switch their vote in favor of the political rivals of the governing coalition. A “betrayal” of this kind is more likely to occur when the intensity of voters’ sense of party identification is weaker. Yet, the argument advanced in
this paper suggests an independent effect of corruption. Regardless of partisanship, voters who desert the winners of previous elections are likely influenced by perceptions of widespread practices of office abuse.

To summarize, perceived widespread corruption is expected to affect the behavior of voters across elections. In particular, (1) previously abstaining voters who return to vote are more likely to support non-governing parties; and (2) voters originally in favor of the incumbent party are likely to defect to the allegedly uncorrupt opposition. The main opposition party is anticipated to benefit the most from these shifts in voter flows.

**Non-Electoral Participation: Corruption, Petitions, and Demonstrations**

There are two mechanisms through which perceived corruption may mobilize people to participate in politics beyond elections. Citizens may feel a psychological need to express their outrage over greedy public officials, an act that generates individual emotional benefits (Leighley 1995). Anger over elite’s behavior may create more instrumental incentives for individuals to sign petitions and to protest, activities that develop a sense of public good achievement (Opp 1990). Thus, widespread office abuse may stimulate citizens to go out into the streets and demonstrate for the moral purpose of rejecting corruption. It could be, however, that petitioning and protesting are hoped to help clean up politics. Disappointed with instances of pre-election manipulations and electoral fraud, some citizens may become active in the non-electoral arena believing that this will trigger change for the better.

The strongest challenge to such a way of theorizing on the link between perceived corruption and citizen activism is the “collective action problem,” as defined by Olson
(1970). Similar to the case of voting, individual benefits from participation in other political activities are too small compared to the costs. In fact, organizing a petition or a street protest is more demanding in time and resources than is casting a ballot. Moreover, joining a boycott or rallying in an unlawful demonstration can incur fees, salary loss, and even arrest. Yet, people may still choose to engage in protest actions if they value highly the expression of views on politics and policy (Leighley 1995). Has this been happening in Eastern Europe?

Experts have observed that after the initial wave of mass protests in 1989-1990, the political life in Eastern Europe was less violent and more stable than expected for a region undergoing radical neo-liberal reform (Greskovits 1998, 178-9). The reasons for this almost lack of violent collective action are multiple and often attributed to structural characteristics inherited from the previous regime. Scholars point at certain social and demographic specifics, as well as the absence (with the exception of Poland) of credible labor organizations. Ironically, they argue, the legacies of Communism appear to have had a “politically stabilizing effect” (Greskovits 1998, 179). It is worth noting, however, that past legacies have also impeded civic engagement in Eastern Europe. Chronic ethnic tension, weak sense of belonging to a community, and poor quality journalism all have been significant “obstacles to social interaction” (Mondak and Gearing 1998).

Despite this unfavorable background, citizens in several countries have come out in the streets to protest against corrupt regimes and to demand more transparent and accountable government. In Bulgaria, demonstrators held rallies and occupied roads and buildings in early 1997 demanding the resignation of the Socialist government of Zhan Videnov which had led the country to a financial collapse amidst flourishing corruption.
Hungary experienced a series of anti-government protests in the fall of 2006 in response to the release of a tape in which Prime Minister Ferenz Gyurczany was recorded admitting to having lied about the actual state of the economy in order his party to win re-election (Schopflin 2006). Protests against high-level political corruption broke out in Bratislava and seven other Slovak cities in January-February of 2012, condemning malfeasance and calling on public officials who had misused their position in power to resign.¹

Drawing upon the discussion above, we can provisionally expect that perceptions of corrupt politics can drive participation in non-electoral forms of civic engagement. The less conventional among these activities incur higher costs but some citizens might resort to them because of a loss of belief in the democratic channels of representation. Therefore, I anticipate that the effect of corruption on various forms of non-electoral political behavior will vary depending on the conventionality of involvement.

Variables and Measurement

To test the theoretically proposed mobilization impact of corruption perceptions on political participation, I use two sets of data: from the Comparative Survey of Electoral Systems (Module 2, 2001-2006) for the effect on voting choices and from the World Values Survey (Wave 3, 1994-1999) for the effect on non-electoral activities.² For

¹ These rallies in Slovakia were sparked by news released through the Internet on a file known as “Gorilla.” The information in the file had allegedly been gathered by the SIS spy agency. According to it, the financial group Penta had won lucrative privatization bids by bribing politicians from both government and opposition parties (The Slovak Spectator 2012).
² CSES questions about participation in various activities were formulated in a way that one cannot be certain in the timing of the cause and effect occurrence. In particular, respondents were asked if they signed
consistency, my two datasets contain data from the same seven countries: Albania, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Slovenia. Below I discuss the operationalization of the variables and their measurement using the two survey instruments.

**Dependent variables**

The first set of indicators of political participation reflects voter choices which are expected to have been shaped by corruption perceptions. As explained earlier, I am interested in voting for the opposition because the public associates corruption mainly with the ruling elite. If people are troubled because malfeasance is immense, they would be stimulated to act and consequently, support the non-incumbents. Thus, I select four scenarios that indicate such participation: (i) voters cast ballots for opposition parties, (ii) previous abstainers choose to participate in the current election, (iii) previous abstainers choose to support opposition parties in the current election, and (iv) voters who supported the incumbent party/parties in the previous election, switch to the opposition in the current election.

Table 1 provides evidence for the gains of the non-incumbent parties in the seven post-Communist nations. According to the survey results, in four out of all countries in the analysis a majority of the voters cast ballots for parties not engaged in government. Among those who abstained in the previous election, between 22.7% (Poland) and 82.7% (Albania) chose to participate. Almost 59% of those who returned to the poling stations in Albania voted against the ruling Socialists.\(^3\) Significant majorities of previously petitions, demonstrated, or took part in boycotts in the last five years, which might have happened before the last election and the formation of perceptions of corrupt politics. \(^3\) Although, the Socialist Party of Albania won again despite with a smaller percent of the popular vote than in 1997.
abstained voters chose to participate in Bulgaria and Romania, 53.8% and 58.1% respectively. Similarly, the rate of voting for non-ruling parties was relatively higher there compared to the Czech Republic and Slovenia which experienced both fewer returning to vote and fewer supporting the opposition.

The CSES data reveal quite a significant flow of votes from incumbent to opposition parties. The magnitude of this phenomenon was remarkable in Poland, over 91%, and Bulgaria, over 74%. Also, more than half of those who supported the current incumbent party in the past, switched to the opposition in Albania and Romania. Again, the lowest amount of re-direction of electoral support happened among Czech voters; just a quarter of the governing CSSD’s followers withdrew their support to favor another party. Overall, voters in Albania, Bulgaria, and Romania exhibit more unstable patterns of participation and party loyalty as shown by the rates of returning to vote and switching between political rivals. Much less dramatic changes in voting choices and preferences happened in Slovenia and the Czech Republic.

{Table 1 about here}

The second set of indicators of political participation includes four non-electoral activities as reported by respondents to the WVS. I select signing of petitions, participation in official (lawful) demonstrations, participation in unlawful strikes, and participation in occupation of buildings and factories. These activities vary with regards to how conventional they are and how costly it is for citizens to engage in them. For example, signing of petitions is more common and requires less time while occupying buildings is more radical and could lead to violence and arrest.
Table 2 reveals rates of participation by form and across countries. Among the four non-electoral activities, signing of a petition and attending lawful demonstrations were the most popular on the average. Petitions were favored by significant majorities in all seven countries, while in Albania, Bulgaria, and Romania participation in peaceful protests was the most preferred form of expression of political demands (79, 52, and 70% respectively). Not surprisingly, unlawful actions associated with higher costs for participants were joined or considered by smaller groups in all seven nations. Especially low are these numbers in Albania (around 2 to 4%) and somewhat higher in Bulgaria (22 to 37%) and the Czech Republic (14 to 36%).

**Independent variable**

Theoretically, variations in political participation (illustrated in Tables 1 and 2) can be explained by the way people assess how corrupt politics in their country is. Thus, the central independent variable is corruption perceptions. If the argument for a mobilization effect of malfeasance holds, citizen choices for political action should be prompted by beliefs that corruption is prevalent. These perceptions vary in Eastern Europe, although overall larger groups of citizens think of their politicians as dishonest and taking advantage when in power. The majority of respondents in both CSES and WVS assessed that corruption is practiced by most or almost all public officials.

Corruption is a categorical variable, coded with higher values given to perceptions of very wide spread corruption. Questions E196 in the WVS and B3044 in the CSES are used to measure individuals’ assessment of the degree of corruption on a four-category
scale. The former reflects frequency of public officials’ engagement in bribe-taking, while the latter - the extent of spread of corrupt behavior.

**Control variables**

There are several rival explanations of political engagement that may challenge findings about corruption stimulating participation. The first is the so called “resource model” which claims that money, time, and skills are necessary prerequisites for taking part in politics (Brady, et al 1995). In the following regression analysis I control for the possible impact of education, economic situation, and employment status of the individuals. Better educated and more affluent citizens are expected to be more active in politics. Education is measured on an eight-category scale, from “none” to “university completed” in the CSES data (B2003) and from “incomplete elementary” to “university with a degree” in the WVS data (X025). Economic situation is a five-category variable ranging from lowest to highest quintile of household income in the CSES tests (B2020) and from “lower class” to “upper class” in the WVS tests (X045). Also, individuals with no job have more time but less other resources for political participation. I control for this possible effect through a dummy variable coded as 1 for the ones unemployed (WVS X028).

Demographic characteristics such as age and gender may also be related to participation. Younger people vote at lower rates but they are more likely to participate in non-conventional activities such as demonstrations and occupations than older citizens. Men are more likely to recognize the importance of vote choices and to protest and take part in strikes and boycotts than women. In the regression analysis below, age is a
measured in years (CSES, B001 and WVS, X003) and gender is coded as a dummy variable that assigns 1 to males (CSES, B002 and WVS X001).

Vote choices in particular can be also influenced by party preference, intensity of party identification, and political efficacy. Individuals who voted for parties different from the incumbents are more likely to repeat their choice in the current election. A dummy variable is constructed to account for this possibility which scored 1 for previous opposition voters (using CSES B3018_1). Next, the closer people feel to a party the less likely it is to abandon it. This is particularly important in scenarios assuming change in behavior, from abstaining to participating and from voting for one to supporting another, different party. Party ID is coded as 1 for those feeling close to a particular party and 0 for the rest (CSES B3028). Political efficacy is operationalized as individual beliefs that elections matter. To control for this alternative reason for electoral participation, I code a dummy variable as 1 for respondents who agreed that “who people vote for makes a difference” (CSES B3014) and 0 for those who do not believe this.

**Regression Analysis**

In the empirical tests of the proposed mobilization impact of perceived corruption, the indicators of political behavior are coded as binary variables. Therefore, I use logit regression to estimate the effect of the central independent variable and isolate this impact from the workings of other determinants of political participation. The first series of tests includes vote choices argued to have been stimulated by corruption perceptions. The results are reported in Table 3 below.
The regression tests offer strong support for the mobilization effect of perceptions that malfeasance is widespread. As anticipated, beliefs of deeper penetration of corruption in politics increase the likelihood of voting for opposition parties in general and for opposition parties after previous abstention and previous voting for current incumbents. These impacts are illustrated by the positive, statistically significant coefficients of corruption perceptions in models 1, 3, and 4. With regard to casting a ballot after previous abstention, the test produced a negative and not significant parameter suggesting that corruption may not matter. It is political efficacy that explains much of the variation in the participation decision. These results for the second model are in agreement with previous research that showed how corruption may exert two countervailing effects on voter turnout, a mobilizing one and a depressing one (Peters and Welch 1980, Kostadinova 2009).

The findings can be accepted as even more meaningful when one considers that the regression tests account for a series of alternative explanations. After controlling for preference for opposition parties in the previous election, the stimulating impact of corruption perceptions is still supported by the data. Also, feeling close to a party matters: it makes those who previously abstained more likely to go cast a ballot (model 2) and less likely for previous supporters of the incumbents to currently switch to the opposition (model 4). The “resource” model control variables receive less support from the data. The estimated coefficients suggest that older voters are less likely to vote for the opposition

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4 Additional tests, not reported here, revealed that corruption perceptions increased the likelihood of voting for the main opposition parties. Especially strong this effect was in Albania (the Democratic Party of Albania), Bulgaria (National Movement Simeon II), Hungary (the Hungarian Socialist Party) and Romania (Justice and Truth). In Poland, corruption perceptions did not have an impact on voting for the Socialists but did facilitate support for Law and Justice.
and to withdraw previous support for the governing party, but more likely to cast a ballot for the opposition party after abstaining at the last election. It appears that education stimulates voting after previous abstention and discourages voters to switch their support. Gender is confirmed to influence only the decision to return to voting.

{Table 3 about here}

The tests of the models of non-electoral activities offer mixed but quite interesting results for the hypothesized effect of perceived corruption. After controlling for demographic characteristics and social status, I obtain statistically significant parameters for petition signing (but with an opposite sign) and participation in unofficial strikes and occupation of buildings or factories. No sufficient evidence is offered for attending lawful demonstrations being affected by assessments of the spread of malfeasance in either direction. What do these estimates suggest? The negative coefficient in the petition signing model means that perceptions of widespread corruption depress people’s motivations to support initiatives through the established channels of influence. At the same time, participation in more non-conventional and radical forms, unofficial strikes and occupation of buildings, is likely to be stimulated by individual feelings that corruption is prevalent. This is suggested by the positive coefficients of perceived corruption, significant at the 0.1 level of confidence.

The effects of most of the remaining variables are supported by the data. Males and younger people are more likely to engage in the analyzed non-electoral activities. The better educated sign petitions, attend peaceful demonstrations, and join unauthorized strikes more often, but it is not certain if they are also more active in occupying buildings. Finally, economic resources are confirmed to increase the odds only in the case of
petition signing and they almost do not matter for the other three forms of civic engagement.

\{Table 4 about here\}

**Conclusion**

The few attempts in extant scholarship to explore a possible connection between corruption and civic engagement have produced conflicting results. As public office abuse has been turning into a major problem for contemporary democratic transitions, research in this area is much warranted. The models developed here are based on a basic argument that the more citizens perceive corruption as widespread in their country, the more likely they are to get engaged into politics. The findings derived from Eastern European survey data demonstrate that the stimulation produced by perceived malfeasance is effective with regard to particular activities. Thus, the study specifies a set of participatory choices that are shaped, among other factors, by the extent of penetration of corrupt practices.

The empirical evidence allows us to infer that there are certain electoral benefits for the opposition from voters’ anger with dirty politics. This does not automatically mean that incumbents should be expected to loose. As previous studies have shown, on the aggregate level a mobilization impact of corruption on some voters may be canceled out by a depressing effect on other voters. The analyses in this study demonstrate that perceived malfeasance can produce significant changes in individual citizen patterns of behavior. Examples of such shifts in choices include passive voters getting mobilized,
passive voters choosing to cast a ballot and supporting the non-incumbents, and previous followers of the incumbent party switching to allegedly non-corrupt opposition parties.

Distress over political corruption in Eastern Europe is found to have impacted individual participation in non-electoral activities differently. On the one hand, more intensely perceived malfeasance has discouraged petition signing and has had no impact on attending peaceful protests. On the other hand, the more concerned the Eastern Europeans are with corruption, the more likely they have been to engage into unauthorized strikes and occupations of public buildings. While in the first decade of post-Communist transition those actions expressed a common sense of disappointment with unfair government policies of reform, more recently street demonstrations in Hungary, Bulgaria, and Slovakia directly condemned corruption among the ruling elite.

The analyses in this study relied on data from the late 1990s (WVS) and the first half of the 2000s (CSES). The next step will be to explore the proposed mobilizing effect of perceived malfeasance with recent data and in a larger number of countries. Corruption continues to be a major challenge facing the post-Communist societies and its impact on how people connect to politics may intensify over time. Second, the study linking civic engagement to perceptions of corruption would benefit if future research specifies and analyzes other forms of political activity. As this paper suggests, the proposed mobilization effect varies in direction and strength across forms of political participation. It is the type of activity and how people perceive its potential to change the way politics is run, that also makes a difference.
References


*The Slovak Spectator.* 2012 (4 February). “Gorilla Protests against Political Corruption Spread around Slovakia” available online at [http://spectator.ame.sk/articles/view/45253/10/gorilla_against_political_corruption_spread_around_slovakia.html](http://spectator.ame.sk/articles/view/45253/10/gorilla_against_political_corruption_spread_around_slovakia.html), accessed 10 February 2012.


Table 1. Voter flows towards opposition parties from previous to current elections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Voted for the opposition (% of total vote)</th>
<th>Chose to vote (% of all prev. abstained)</th>
<th>Supported the opposition (% of prev. abstained)</th>
<th>Supported the opposition (% of prev. vote for curr. incumbents)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Albania</td>
<td>407 (53.6)</td>
<td>206 (82.7)</td>
<td>146 (58.6)</td>
<td>203 (57.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulgaria</td>
<td>448 (44.0)</td>
<td>220 (53.8)</td>
<td>188 (46.0)</td>
<td>424 (74.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czech Rep.</td>
<td>400 (74.5)</td>
<td>70 (35.2)</td>
<td>35 (17.6)</td>
<td>35 (25.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>431 (51.7)</td>
<td>124 (53.2)</td>
<td>60 (25.8)</td>
<td>146 (36.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>599 (65.9)</td>
<td>82 (22.7)</td>
<td>75 (20.7)</td>
<td>285 (91.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>326 (33.3)</td>
<td>264 (58.1)</td>
<td>153 (33.7)</td>
<td>338 (51.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovenia</td>
<td>184 (39.1)</td>
<td>62 (35.0)</td>
<td>25 (14.1)</td>
<td>109 (38.0)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES Module 2, June 27, 2007 version). Flows were identified based on answers to questions B3006_1 (vote choice in current election, lower house), B3016 (cast a ballot in previous election), and B3018_1 (vote choice in previous election, lower house).
Table 2. Participation rates by form of political activity (% of all answered)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Signing a petition</th>
<th>Attending lawful protests</th>
<th>Joining unofficial strikes</th>
<th>Occupation of buildings or factories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Albania</td>
<td>60.8</td>
<td>79.0</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulgaria</td>
<td>49.4</td>
<td>51.9</td>
<td>36.9</td>
<td>22.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
<td>80.2</td>
<td>63.9</td>
<td>36.4</td>
<td>14.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>74.7</td>
<td>50.5</td>
<td>22.7</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>61.8</td>
<td>44.0</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>15.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>63.2</td>
<td>70.4</td>
<td>28.2</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovenia</td>
<td>66.4</td>
<td>61.8</td>
<td>33.4</td>
<td>26.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average (N)</td>
<td>65.3 (4,169)</td>
<td>60.5 (3,968)</td>
<td>25.7 (1,637)</td>
<td>14.3 (906)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: World Values Survey, Wave 1995-1998, answers to questions E025 (signing a petition), E027 (attending lawful demonstrations), E028 (joining unofficial strikes), and E029 (occupying buildings or factories). Entries represent the percent of those who answered either “have done” or “might do,” while the rest responded “would never do.”
Table 3. Logit Regression Results: Voting for the Opposition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Opposition vote</th>
<th>Previously abstained, currently vote</th>
<th>Previously abstained, currently vote for opposition</th>
<th>Winner voters, currently vote for opposition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corruption perceptions</td>
<td>.58*** (.07)</td>
<td>-.07 (.10)</td>
<td>.72*** (.17)</td>
<td>.52*** (.08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous opp. voter</td>
<td>2.96*** (.12)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Efficacy</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.34*** (.05)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party ID</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1.05*** (.14)</td>
<td>-.10 (.23)</td>
<td>-1.06*** (.13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.13 (.09)</td>
<td>.21* (.13)</td>
<td>.00 (.21)</td>
<td>.12 (.11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-.01** (.00)</td>
<td>-.00 (.00)</td>
<td>.01* (.01)</td>
<td>-.01** (.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>-.04 (.03)</td>
<td>.09* (.05)</td>
<td>.01 (.08)</td>
<td>-.11** (.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>.00 (.04)</td>
<td>-.06 (.05)</td>
<td>.12 (.08)</td>
<td>.00 (.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>.76*** (.41)</td>
<td>-1.66*** (.51)</td>
<td>-2.89*** (.90)</td>
<td>-1.86* (.48)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-2LL</td>
<td>2,951.32</td>
<td>1,517.44</td>
<td>598.17</td>
<td>1,935.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NagelkerkeR²</td>
<td>.46</td>
<td>.30</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>3,751</td>
<td>1,348</td>
<td>651</td>
<td>1,797</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Models include country dummies for Albania, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Romania (Slovenia as reference category). Entries are unstandardized regression coefficients, standard errors in parentheses. * p<.1, ** p<.05, *** p<.001
Table 4. Logit Regression Results: Participation in non-electoral activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sign petitions 1</th>
<th>Lawful protest 2</th>
<th>Unofficial strike 3</th>
<th>Occupation of buildings 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Corruption perceptions</td>
<td>-.09** (.04)</td>
<td>-.02 (.04)</td>
<td>.07* (.04)</td>
<td>.09* (.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>-.11 (.13)</td>
<td>-.21* (.12)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.18 (.16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.37*** (.07)</td>
<td>.45*** (.07)</td>
<td>.45*** (.07)</td>
<td>.56*** (.09)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-.01** (.00)</td>
<td>-.01*** (.00)</td>
<td>-.02*** (.00)</td>
<td>-.02*** (.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>.20*** (.02)</td>
<td>.18*** (.02)</td>
<td>.13*** (.02)</td>
<td>.02 (.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>.10** (.04)</td>
<td>-.03 (.04)</td>
<td>-.05 (.04)</td>
<td>-.01 (.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>.10 (.22)</td>
<td>.47** (.21)</td>
<td>-.54 (.21)</td>
<td>-.73** (.29)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

-2LL                    | 5,120.04         | 5,484.67         | 5,536.65            | 3,256.20                 |
Nagelkerke $R^2$         | .13              | .12              | .17                 | .15                      |
N                       | 4,467            | 4,592            | 5,349               | 4,397                    |

Notes: Models include country dummies for Albania, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Romania (Slovenia as reference category). Entries are unstandardized regression coefficients, standard errors in parentheses. * p<.1, ** p<.05, *** p<.001