ROBA PERO HACE?

An experimental test of the competence-corruption tradeoff hypothesis in Spain and Sweden

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ABSTRACT

From previous research it is known that one of the main mechanisms that limits the ability of elections to be effective in controlling corruption has to do with a sort of implicit exchange of transparency for competence, as summarized by the Latin-American saying 'roba pero hace'. However, we do not know how this mechanism travels across contexts, and especially whether it also operates in low corruption situations. In this paper we conduct a full factorial 2x2 survey-embedded experiment in which we manipulate 'competence' and 'corruption' of an incumbent mayoral candidate to estimate the effect of competence on the electoral cost of corruption. We replicate the experiment in a context with low level of corruption (Sweden) and another one with a medium level of prevalence (Spain). Results show clear evidence of such an exchange in both national contexts, and point to a mechanism of dissonance reduction as one of its drivers.

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La Vall d'Alba is a small municipality in the Spanish autonomous community of Valencia. In 2007, the mayor Francisco Martínez was involved in an alleged corruption scandal. During his time in office, Martinez' neighbours donated him 13 estate properties. Following a change in their qualification from agricultural to residential or industrial soil, Martinez sold some of these properties for a large sum of money. In tandem, Martínez was using his position as vice president in the provincial government to attract investments to the municipality. Over a short period of years, a school, a high school, a medical centre, a chapel, an industrial area, an indoor swimming pool, a senior's centre, a new police station, and even a bullfighting arena were built in the municipality of 3,000 inhabitants. In the ensuing election, Martinez and his party increased their electoral support, reaching an all-time high of 71 percent of the vote.

As described here, the Martinez-case suggests an answer to the longstanding question why voters frequently forgive corrupt politicians: because they deliver public goods. In the scientific literature this answer is linked to the 'competence-corruption tradeoff hypothesis', originally proposed by Rundquist and colleagues in the 1970's (1977). Outside academia, it embodies the Latin American saying 'roba pero hace' (he steals but he delivers) often used to express voters' preference for high-performing but corrupt politicians.[1]

The competence-corruption tradeoff hypothesis has been examined in recent survey experimental research. Studying Brazil, a high corruption national context, Winters and Weitz-Shapiro (2013) failed to corroborate the hypothesis. In a carefully designed experiment they found little evidence that voters are willing to overlook corruption in exchange for public goods delivery when provided specific and accessible information about corrupt behaviour. Similarly, in a study comparing a low corruption country (Sweden) and a high corruption country (Moldova), Klasjna and Tucker (2013) found that voters in the former country punished corruption regardless of the state of the economy. However, adding complexity to the picture, Moldovan voters were willing to support corrupt politicians when economic conditions were good.

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[1] The corresponding expression in Portuguese, very popular in Brazil, is 'rouba, mas faz'.

In this paper we report findings from further comparative survey experiments on the competence-corruption tradeoff hypothesis. To help identify boundary conditions for voluntary corruption voting, we model our experiments on the Brazilian study but provide participants with less specific and accessible information about corrupt behaviour. While Winters and Weitz-Shapiro (as did Klasjna and Tucker) made corruption voting costly – for instance by using the normatively charged term "bribery" to describe politicians' wrongdoings – we rely on a more neutrally worded description of corrupt behaviour. Moreover, to examine the extent to which voters' sensitivity to corruption information varies between national contexts, we run the experiments in two OECD-countries, the one with low level of corruption (Sweden), and the other with a medium level of prevalence (Spain).

A further contribution of the paper is to explore a psychological mechanism that might lower the costs of corruption voting for the individual. According to the original tradeoff hypothesis (Rundquist et al. 1977), voters engage in a rational calculation of costs and gains. We argue that the implicit trade between competence and corruption is facilitated by dissonance reduction as well (Festinger 1957; Aronson 1969; Stone 2000). Precisely, we suggest that citizens reduce the psychological strain associated with voting for a corrupt but efficient politician by downplaying the severity of wrongdoing.

In contrast to the Brazilian study and the previous study on the Swedish case, results support the competence-corruption tradeoff hypothesis in both national contexts: when corruption voting is made less costly – for instance by describing wrongdoings in neutral terms – respondents prefer a corrupt but competent candidate over an honest but less competent one. Moreover, we find support for that corruption voting is facilitated by dissonance reduction: in both countries respondents judged the corruption case as less severe when the candidate was presented as competent for the office, and these severity judgments mediate the effects of politicians' behaviour on the reported likelihood of voter support.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. The first two sections review the literature and develop our theoretical arguments. Following brief descriptions of country context, the next section lays

out experimental design and measurements. We then move on to presenting our empirical results, before a final section concludes and discusses implications of our findings.

Corruption voting in the literature

According to democratic theory, elections are expected to work as a mechanism to hold incumbents accountable for their performance in office (see, for example, Downs 1957; Fiorina 1981). Being involved in corruption should bear severe punishment, given its widely recognized negative economic and social consequences (e.g. Mauro 1995; Nye 1967; Seligson 2002; Anderson & Tverdova 2003; Kumlin & Esaiasson 2012). If that were the case, democratic politics would be an efficient tool for corruption control since corrupt incumbents would not be re-elected, and since elected officials would be discouraged of incurring in such practices out of fear of electoral punishment.

However, the persistence of substantial levels of corruption in many democratic countries challenges theoretical expectations. As noted by Kurer (2001, 63), unpopular corruption and popular corrupt politicians is "a widely observed paradox". Although corruption tends to bear an electoral cost for incumbents (Chong et al. 2011; Davis et al. 2004; McCann & Dominguez 1998), the cost is modest and does not preclude re-election. The pattern of modest punishment and high re-election rates is found in several national contexts: the U.S. (Peters & Welch 1980; Welch & Hibbing 1987), the UK (Eggers & Fisher 2011), Poland (Slomczynski & Shabad 2011), Japan (Reed 1999), Italy (Chang et al. 2010), Spain (Costas-Perez et al. 2012, Rivero & Fernandez-Vazquez 2011), and comparatively across European countries (Bågenholm 2013).

How is that possible? If voters disdain corruption, why do they keep voting corrupt politicians into office? The literature suggests different reasons for why corruption often does not bear the expected electoral punishment.

One prominent hypothesis has to do with information: only if sufficiently informed, voters will be able to incorporate the issue of corruption to their voting decision. In support of the information

hypothesis, Klasnja (2011) shows how political awareness significantly depresses the likelihood of voting for incumbents in the U.S. House and Senate elections following investigating actions from government authorities. Blais et al. (2005) showed, for Canada, how in the wake of a big corruption scandal uninformed voters were, on average, less likely to perceive high levels of corruption. Moving from individual level awareness to informational context, Chang et al. (2010) argue that the media had a key impact on the relatively high punishment rates in the 11th legislature in Italy. Exploiting randomized federal audits on Brazilian municipalities, Ferraz and Finan (2008) find significant negative effects on the electoral fate of the incumbent mayors of the public disclosure of information on their corrupt activities, especially in those municipalities with local radio stations. Similarly, Winters and Weitz-Shapiro (2013) find that Brazilian voters are unwilling to support incumbents when they are provided unequivocal and accessible information about wrongdoings.

However, other studies are less supportive of the information hypothesis. In a lab experiment, de Figueiredo et al. (2010) finds that information enhances accountability by a modest three percent of the vote. Moreover, this happens only in some cases (when a left party is affected) and information about corruption also reduces electoral turnout. As discussed in the introduction, Klasjna and Tucker (2013) finds that Moldovan respondents in a survey experiment did not punish incumbents for taking bribes when economic conditions were good. Similarly, in a cross-national study Zechmeister and Zizumbo-Colunga (2013) also find that the effect of corruption concerns on presidential approval is conditional upon the state of the economy. Studying Mexican local elections, Chong et al. (2011) finds that information about corruption reduces incumbent vote, but also turnout. Thus, information alone does not guarantee accountability, as voters may respond by withdrawing from the political process.

Another explanation for corruption voting has to do with clientelism. Manzetti and Wilson (2007) argue that people vote for corrupt politicians where clientelism is widespread and institutions are weak, because they are able to secure the delivery of public goods by voting for the incumbent. Politicians maintain electoral support by manipulating government institutions to benefit their clientelistic networks and, therefore, the support they can gather depends on the ability to distribute this patronage. In line with this reasoning, Chang and Kerr (2009) find evidence of higher corruption tolerance among 'patronage insiders' in the African context.

Overall, while relevant, the clientelism hypothesis has an obvious limit: it would only predict support for corrupt politicians when a clientelistic linkage between parties and voters prevails over programmatic or identity-based appeals, which does not seem to apply to many of the aforementioned cases, and certainly not to our cases of study. Indeed, even when targeting Greece – a most likely case in the European context – a survey experiment by Konstantinidis and Xezonakis (2013) fail to corrobate that clientelism mitigates the electoral cost of corruption.

However, exchange of support for benefits might operate in less direct ways than in clientelistic relationships. In an influential article, Rundquist et al. (1977) develop the idea of an 'implicit' trading that involves ideological values and issue positions that are relevant for the voter. According to their argument, a rational voter might knowingly support a corrupt candidate if the candidate is close to his or her political preferences on important political issues. Ideological proximity, therefore, might compensate for corruption among incumbents. Moreover, later research suggests that partisanship might function in a similar way as ideological proximity. Partisan links can be strong enough to compensate for the negative evaluation of corruption and to keep voters loyal to their parties (Anderson& Tverdova 2003; Davis et al. 2004;).

The competence-corruption tradeoff hypothesis

The competence-corruption tradeoff hypothesis follows the logic of the original tradeoff hypothesis but focuses a different commodity. Rather than ideological proximity and shared partisanship, it emphasizes politicians' competence for office as demonstrated in output performance. It is indeed the idea expressed by the Latin-American saying '*roba pero hace*' discussed in the introduction.

The hypothesis implies that perception of the incumbent as a competent politician who is able to attract investments and foster economic development to his/her constituency will limit the electoral punishment for corruption. Fernández-Vázquez et al. (2013) report findings of this purport in a study on local Spanish elections. In corruption cases that could reasonably be described as 'wel-

fare enhancing' (for example, because they imply an increased economic activity) incumbents where not punished at the polls, whereas cases in which corruption clearly decreased welfare led to substantial losses in the upcoming election. Correspondingly, in their survey experiment of Greek voters Konstantinidis and Xezonakis (2013) finds that reducing council taxes increases support for a corrupt mayor by eight percentage points.

As discussed above, Winters and Weitz-Shapiro (2013) test support for the competence-corruption tradeoff hypothesis in a survey experiment run in Brazil, a high corruption country and therefore a most likely context. Contrary to the hypothesis, they find no evidence of implicit trading among participants when they were provided specific and accessible information about an incumbent mayor's wrongdoings (only the wealthiest participants showed some willingness to tolerate corrupt behaviour). It is clear from their study that voters under some conditions punish corrupt politicians.

However, given the mixed findings in the literature a key question that follows from their study is to identify precisely what those conditions are: How should we reasonably model the boundaries in which voters willingly trade competence for corruption? Drawing on the literature on corruption voting we suggest here that the variables of interest includes the scale and nature of corrupt behaviour; specificity, credibility and accessibility of information about wrongdoings; expectations about politicians' behaviour; the supply of alternative candidates; and the type of benefits delivered in return for voter support. Knowing how these (and other) variables jointly and independently affect the likelihood that voters will trade competence for corruption will generate a fuller understanding of voluntary corruption voting.

In their study, Winters and Weitz-Shapiro informed participants that an incumbent mayor was known to frequently take bribes when giving out government contracts, presumably for personal gain. The type of benefits delivered in return for voter support – the demonstrated competence for office – was that the mayor had completed many public work projects during his term in office (Winters & Weitz-Shapiro 2013, 423). Overall, the conditions described in the experiment make corruption voting costly: there is little doubt that allegations are substantiated, the wrongdoings are made for the sake of personal greed (Bauhr 2012) and are described using the normatively charged

term 'bribery'', and the benefits offered in return for support are rather vague.

To begin searching for boundary conditions, we study a situation in which corruption voting is less costly. For this purpose, the treatment in our experiment does not explicitly mention illegal acts such as bribery. Rather it describes a situation in which the incumbent mayor is accused for favouring local developers that are closely connected to his party. If substantiated, these acts are clear examples of abuse of public office for private gain, but the treatment does not rely on terms that mention illegalities. Furthermore, we are referring to party-related illicit activities rather than to wrongdoings for personal gain. Moreover, the benefits delivered in return for support are plentiful; during the mayor's term in office, public services' performance has greatly improved, many public works have been completed, and the quality of life and economic prospects of the municipality has improved.

To enhance generalizability of findings, we conduct our experiment in country contexts less favourable to corruption voting than Brazil – Sweden and Spain. As a low corruption country, Sweden can be classified as highly unfavourable for corruption voting. For instance, the likelihood of finding a clean alternative candidate is very high (Kurer 2001; Caselli & Morelli 2004). With regard to level of corruption, Spain falls between Sweden and Brazil, and the comparison between Sweden and Spain will thus help to assess the extent to which the corruption-competence tradeoff is contingent upon country levels of corruption.

Our interest in the tradeoff hypothesis extends to alternative causal mechanisms as well. In the previous literature a strict rational choice mechanism underlies the tradeoff: voters weigh several considerations when deciding how to vote; in this calculus competence and performance can outweigh negative evaluations related to corruption and result in a continued electoral support (cf. Rundquist et al. 1977). Conceived as a standard multiple criteria decision-making problem, it is straightforward to conclude that, depending on their evaluations and saliency attached to each consideration, voters might end up voting corrupt but efficient or ideologically close candidates.

While relevant, this might not be the full story. When voters are confronted with a corruption case

affecting an incumbent that is otherwise regarded as competent, they face a situation of cognitive dissonance. According to the classical theory of cognitive dissonance (Festinger et al. 1956; Aronson 1969) people prefer their cognitions to be compatible, and when dissonance arises there is a natural tendency to reduce it by adapting evaluations of the relevant object.

Respondents exposed to a vignette about a candidate that is portrayed as corrupt but competent face a situation in which positive and negative information about the same object is presented simultaneously. According to cognitive dissonance theory, this might cause discomfort and lead them to adapt their evaluation of the pieces of information received to make them less dissonant. One way to dissonance reduction in the context of the 'corrupt but competent' candidate is to evaluate the misbehaviour less severely than in a case of a 'corrupt and incompetent' incumbent, which does not pose the same kind of dissonance problems and therefore can easily be judged more severely. This psychological mechanism has been shown to apply for corruption and partisanship (Anduiza et al.2014; cf. Gonzales et al. 1995), and in this paper we explore whether it is also the case for corruption and competence.

From the discussion above we derive a set of hypotheses for empirical evaluation. To evaluate support for the competence-corruption tradeoff hypothesis we specify two testable propositions:

H1a: Incompetence has a stronger negative effect on voter support than corruption (a candidate perceived as honest but incompetent will gather less support than a corrupt but competent one).

H1b: Competence will dampen the negative effect of corruption on voter support.

To test for the presence of dissonance reduction we specify the following proposition:

H2a: A given corruption allegation will be judged more severely when the candidate is perceived as incompetent than when he/she is perceived as competent. Furthermore, in the presence of corruption, severity judgments will mediate the effect of competence on voter support.

Country context: corruption and voting in Spain and Sweden

According to standard indicators, Spain is a mid-corruption country. It ranks 30th in the Transparency International 2012 CPI index, right below Cyprus and Botswana, and right above Estonia. In contrast, Sweden is ranked as one of the least corrupt countries in the world.

Illustrating contextual differences, several waves of corruption scandals have affected the major Spanish parties since the restoration of democracy in 1978. During the roughly ten years of housing bubble from the late 1990's to the late 2000's, many local scandals erupted in Spain, most of which were linked to the construction industry. Bribe payments to local authorities in exchange for permission to develop housing projects in non-residential soil were probably the most common pattern of corrupt practices in those years (Jiménez 2009). Illegal funding of political parties linked to all sorts of public tenders is also a major source of scandals in the Spanish democracy, and has affected with more or less intensity a majority of the incumbent parties at the national and subnational levels. More traditional cases of misappropriation of public funds or nepotism in the allocation of public jobs are also relatively common.

While Sweden enjoys the reputation of being low in corruption, scandals involving waste of public funding have occurred regularly in the country during the past decades, most often in local politics. Moreover, several recent scandals involving local and national bureaucracies have made corruption a more salient issue among the general public. Furthermore, compared to Scandinavian neighbour countries, Swedish citizens perceive that the level of corruption is relatively widespread among public officials (Linde & Erlingsson 2013).

With regard to corruption voting, common wisdom in Spain states that corruption is often not punished at the polls. This commonly held view is supported by frequent examples of incumbents getting re-elected despite being under investigation after corruption allegations. Indeed, systematic evidence points to a lack of punishment (Rivero & Fernández 2010) or, at best, to a modest 4 percent loss of mayors involved in corruption (Costas-Pérez et al. 2012). Reflecting a lagging scholarly interest, corresponding systematic information is lacking for Sweden. However, casual observations

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suggest that local parties whose leadership have been involved in spending scandals may lose substantial electoral support. In line with this expectation, Klasnja and Tucker (2013) found that Swedish voters were highly intolerant of corrupt behaviour.

Experimental design and measurements

We have conducted identical population based survey-experiments in Spain and Sweden. In a 2x2 full factorial design, respondents were presented with a brief vignette describing a mayor belonging to their preferred party (or bloc of parties in the Swedish case). The mayor was described as (1) having a good (or bad) management records, and (2) being accused of giving contracts to developers with close connections to the party (or being generally regarded as very honest). The design mirrors Winters and Weitz-Shapiro's (2013) experiment in Brazil although with a simpler setup: our 2x2 factorial design matches respondents' preferred party with the party of the mayor.

Matching the party of the mayor with respondents' partisanship increases the realism of the decision: if the mayor belongs to an outparty (or an outparty block), punishment becomes costless and we could severely overestimate it. Moreover, matching increases precision since we gain full control of a major characteristic of the politician that has been shown to matter for punishment of wrongdoings.

Before reading the vignette, respondents were prompted to think of a friend with similar political views as themselves and who is living in a town similar to theirs. The third-person strategy is intended to reduce social desirability biases. Table 1 presents the four vignettes.

TABLE 1: EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN AND VIGNETTES

	Honest (H)	Corrupt (C)
Competent (C)	**A MAYOR [FROM PARTY X], REGARDED AS VERY HONEST AND WELL-KNOWN FOR A GOOD MAN-AGEMENT RECORD** The mayor of that city, belonging to the party XXX, is regarded as a very honest politician, and is also well known for an impressive management record. During his terms in office, public services' performance greatly improved and many public works were completed improving the quality of life and economic prospects of the municipality	**A MAYOR [FROM PARTY X], WELL-KNOWN FOR A GOOD MANAGEMENT RECORD, ACCUSED OF GIVING CONTRACTS TO DEVELOPERS CLOSE TO HIS PARTY** The mayor of that city, belonging to the party XXX, has been accused of giving contracts to developers with close connections to the party, but is also well known for an impressive management record. During his terms in office, public services' performance greatly improved and many public works were completed improving the quality of life and economic prospects of the municipality
Incompetent (I)	**A MAYOR [FROM PARTY X], REGARDED AS VERY HONEST BUT WELL-KNOWN FOR A POOR MAN-AGEMENT RECORD** The mayor of that city, belonging to the party XXX, is regarded as a very honest politician, but is also well known for poor management record. During his terms in office, public services' performance greatly wors-ened and very few public works were completed, so the quality of life and economic prospects of the municipality did not improve	**A MAYOR [FROM PARTY X], WELL-KNOWN FOR A POOR MANAGEMENT RECORD, ACCUSED OF GIVING CONTRACTS TO DEVELOPERS CLOSE TO HIS PARTY** The mayor of that city, belonging to the party XXX, has been accused of giving contracts to developers with close connections to the party, and is also well known for a poor management record. During his terms in office, public services' performance greatly worsened and very few public works were completed, so the quality of life and economic prospects of the municipality did not improve

After being exposed to the vignette, we asked whether respondents thought that their close friend would vote for such a mayor in the next election, and they were instructed to rate the probability on a 0-10 scale. This is the main outcome variable of the experiment.[2] Moreover, to capture disso-nance reduction we probed participants about the perceived severity of the practices described in the 'corrupt' conditions (responses were recorded on a corresponding 0-10 scale). We refer to the Appendix for precise question wordings for this and other key indicators.

We can now derive observable implications of our three research hypotheses. H1a about the tradeoff hypothesis is corroborated if support of the competent but corrupt candidate (CC) is high-er than support of the incompetent but honest candidate (IH): *CC>IH*. H1b about the dampening effect of competence on corruption voting is corroborated if the corruption effect on support is weaker when competence is high: *(CH-CC)<(IH-IC)*. H2 about dissonance reduction is corroborat-

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[2] Following this, respondents were asked how likely they were themselves to vote for the candidate. The two indicators yield almost identical results.

ed if the alleged corrupt practice is judged more severely in the IC situation than in the CC condition, and if severity judgments mediate the effect of competence on support.

Data collection

Data from Spain are from an online survey conducted by the commercial firm Netquest on commission (n = 973). The sample is selected from an on-line pool of respondents. Respondents are recruited among the registered users of the main, most massive commercial websites. Only those citizens that receive an invitation from the polling company can join the respondents' pool. Thus, self-registering is not allowed, so the problems of self-selection are more limited. The sample was designed using gender, age, education and size of habitat quotas: while it is not a probability sample of the population, this sampling procedure provides variety in key demographics that minimize the risk of the results being driven by heterogeneous effects of the stimuli on a specific group of the population.

The data for the Swedish case was collected by the Laboratory of Opinion Research at University of Gothenburg (LORE) as part of a continuous series of population based survey experiments (study n = 2,468). The sample in this seventh round of the "Swedish Citizen Panel" is self-selected but diverse (Martinsson et al. 2013). While, predictably, younger, male, educated and politically interested respondents are over-represented, the sample is sufficiently diverse for our purposes, and as part of a university run standing panel its quality is systematically monitored (e.g., Dahlberg et al. 2012).[3]

Results

Figure 1 and Table 2 presents the main results of the experiment in respective national context. As expected if respondents interpret the treatment as intended, support for the candidate who is both competent and honest is high in both studies. Using a 0-10 scale, the likelihood that a close friend will support the competent and honest candidate is 7.8 in Spain and 8.2 in Sweden. Equally expected, support for the preferred party's candidate who is neither competent nor honest is low in both country context (1,6 in Spain and 2,9 in Sweden). However, the main analytical interest is with the relative support for the ambivalent candidate who has one of the two coveted characteristics.

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[3] Klasnja and Tucker (2013) rely on data from a previous wave of LORE's citizen panel.

Different from the Brazilian comparison study, both experiments register a preference for a corrupt but competent mayoral candidate over an honest but incompetent candidate (CC>IH). In the Spanish study, the average reported likelihood for supporting the competent but corrupt incumbent (CC) is 4,9 as compared to 3,3 for the incompetent but honest candidate (IH). The difference of 1,6 units reaches well beyond the confidence intervals. In the Swedish study the difference between CC and IH is smaller (0,5 units) but still statistically significant at the .05-level (the likelihood to support respective type of incumbent mayoral candidate was 5,1 and 4,6). These results provide support for H1a.

FIGURE 1: PROBABILITY OF CLOSE FRIEND VOTING FOR INCUMBENT MAYOR IN TWO NATIONAL CONTEXTS
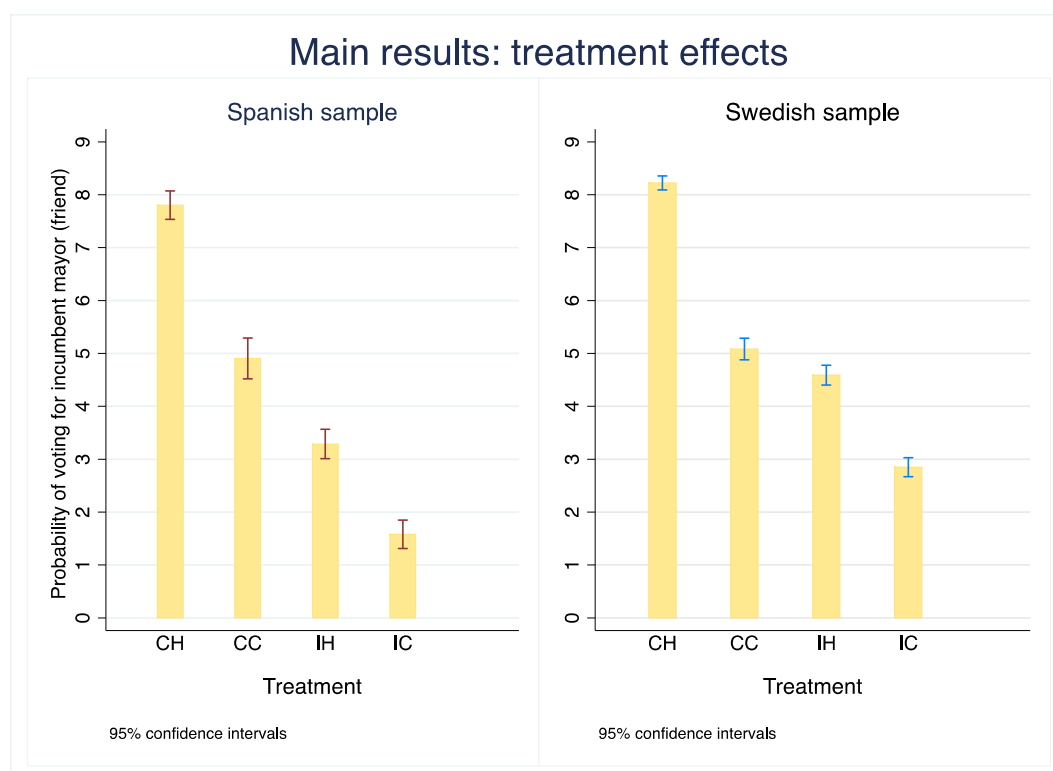
TABLE 2: PROBABILITY OF CLOSE FRIEND VOTING FOR INCUMBENT MAYOR ACROSS TREATMENT GROUPS (MAIN STATISTICS)

			Spain		Sweden	
Competent/Honest (CH)	*Mean Error*	*Std.* *n*	7,8	(0,14)	8,2	(0,07)
			249		615	
Competent/Corrupt (CC)	*Mean Error*	*Std.* *n*	4,9	(0,20)	5,1	(0,10)
			225		631	
Incompetent/Honest (IH)	*Mean Error*	*Std.* *n*	3,3	(0,14)	4,6	(0,10)
			247		615	
Incompetent/Corrupt (IC)	*Mean Error*	*Std.* *n*	1,6	(0,14)	2,9	(0,06)
			252		607	
Total	Mean Error	Std. *n*	4,4	(0,11)	5,2	(0,06)
			973		2,468	
Anova/F-test	**F/p**		**310,2 (p<0,001)**		**605,5 (p<0,001)**	

Variance analysis offers another way to estimate support for the tradeoff hypothesis. Within this framework, the primary prediction that follows from H1a is that both competence and corruption will affect probability of voting for the incumbent mayor (in other words, the corruption effect will not dwarf the competence effect). Results clearly concur with this prediction. For Spain, a two-way ANOVA yields statistically significant and substantially strong main effects of both corruption ($F(1, 969)=228$, $p<0.01$, partial $\eta^2 =0.19$) and competence ($F(1, 969)=661$, $p<0.01$, partial $\eta^2=0.40$). A similar set of results emerges in Sweden, with the main effect of corruption ($F(1, 2464)=724$, $p<0.01$, partial $\eta2 =0.23$) being similar and that of competence ($F(1, 2464)=1046$, $p<0.01$, partial $\eta2 =0.30$) weaker than in Spain. Thus, there is strong support for the competence-corruption tradeoff hypothesis in both national contexts.

Turning to H1b and the expectation that corruption will matter less for voters when the candidate is competent for the office, results come out differently. As expected, there is a statistically significant interaction between corruption and competence in both country contexts (in Spain, $F(1, 969)=15$, $p<0.01$, partial $\eta2=0.015$; in Sweden, $F(1, 2464)=59$, $p<0.01$, partial $\eta2 =0.02$). However, the interaction effect is substantially weak and run in the opposite direction than hypothesized: corruption is somewhat more costly for competent candidates than for incompetent candidates,

that is (CH-CC)>(IH-IC). Thus, rather than dampening the support undermining effect of corruption for competent candidates, competence somewhat amplifies the effect.

Given the strong competence effect in both country contexts, it appears that a floor effect is driving this result. In those treatment conditions representing the incumbent as incompetent, the recorded probability of support is really low, so it can hardly fall beyond a certain point. This is especially so considering that the mayors' partisanship was matched with that of the respondent.

Causal mechanism: dissonance reduction

The first step in our evaluation of H2 about dissonance reduction is to explore whether alleged wrongdoings are judged as less severe in the competence condition than in the incompetence condition. Figure 2 and Table 3 presents key statistics.

FIGURE 2: ASSESSED SEVERITY OF CORRUPT PRACTICES IN TWO NATIONAL CONTEXTS
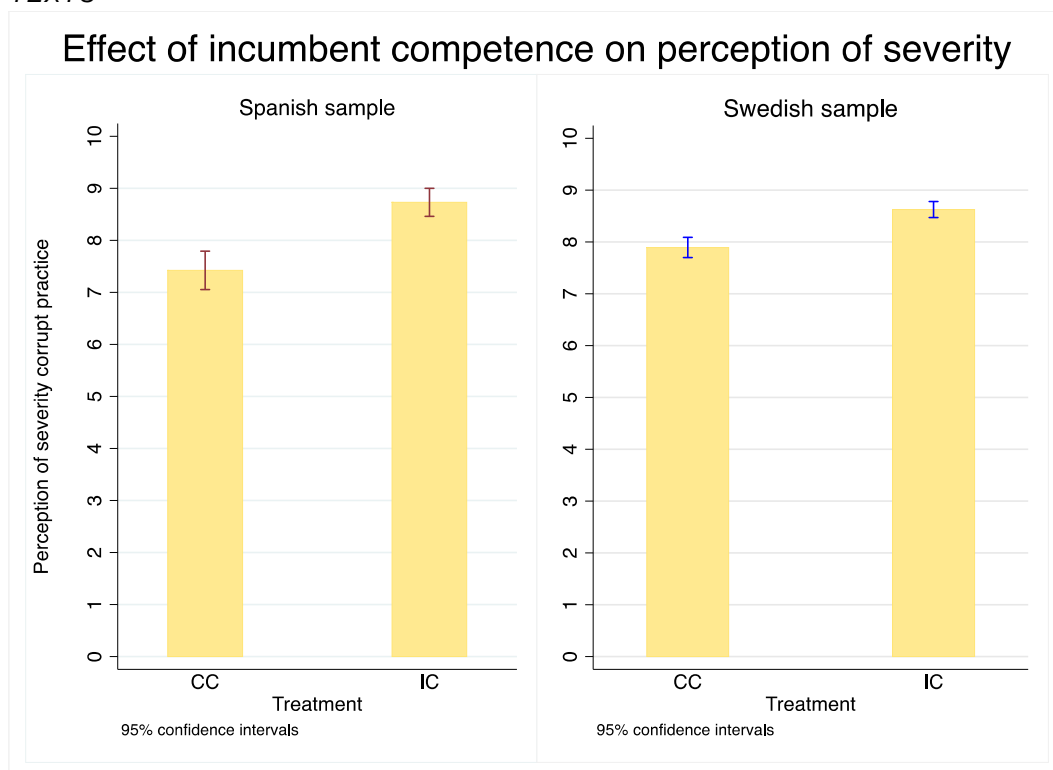
TABLE 3: ASSESSED SEVERITY OF CORRUPT PRACTICE (KEY STATISTICS)

			Spain		Sweden
Competent/Corrupt (CC)	*Mean* *Std.* *Error* *n*	7,4	225	(0,19)	7,9 (0,10) 632
Incompetent/Corrupt (IC)	*Mean* *Std.* *Error* *n*	8,7	252	(0,14)	8,6 (0,08) 609
Total	Mean Std. Error n	8,1	477	(0,12)	8,2 (0,06) 1,241
Anova/T-test	F/t		-5,72 (p<0,001)		33,4 (p<0,001)

In accordance with theoretical expectations, this pattern is found in both national contexts. Using a 0-10 scale, the practice of giving contracts to developers close to the party is graded as a more severe wrongdoing in the incompetence conditions (8,7 in Spain and 8,6 in Sweden) than in the competence conditions (7,4 in Spain and 7,9 in Sweden). Both differences are statistically significant at the .001-level. Further supporting H2, dissonance reduction is stronger in the Spanish study, which shows the largest advantage for the competent but corrupt mayoral candidate over the incompetent but honest mayoral candidate.

Having established that the treatment (competence) does affect the proposed mediator (severity judgment), the remaining question is whether the mediator links the treatment to the relevant outcome (probability of voting for the incumbent mayor). For an empirical test, we estimate the average causal mediation effect (ACME) using the procedure suggested by Imai et al. (2011). The procedure decomposes the treatment effect in two components: the direct effect and the mediated effect.[4]

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[4] However, in this case, since both the outcome and the mediator are 0-10 scales treated as continuous variables, the result is equivalent to the so-called product of coefficients method based on estimating the effect of the treatment with and without the mediation in the model and taking the difference between both coefficients or, alternatively, multiplying

A key assumption for estimation of ACME is 'sequential ignorability', which means that there are no unaccounted confounders affecting both the mediator and the outcome. To get closer to this requirement, the estimation model includes a vector of controls that might be affecting both the mediator and the outcome: political knowledge; political trust; internal political efficacy; partisanship strength; education; size of habitat; gender; and age. Table 3 reports key statistics.[5]

TABLE 4: CAUSAL MEDIATION EFFECT OF PERCEPTION OF SEVERITY

Effect	Spain			Sweden		
	Mean	[95 percent CI]		Mean	[95 percent CI]	
ACME	-0,34	-0,53	-0,20	-0,31	-0,43	-0,20
Direct Effect	-3,03	-3,48	-2,56	-1,92	-2,17	-1,66
Total Effect	-3,37	-3,81	-2,90	-2,23	-2,51	-1,95
Prop. of total effect mediated	0,10	0,09	0,12	0,14	0,12	0,16

Looking first at the Spanish case, the mediation effect of dissonance reduction, as estimated by variations in severity judgment across competent and incompetent corrupt incumbents, is about -0,34, which equals to about 10 percent of the total effect of the treatment. In the Swedish case, the direct effect is smaller and therefore the mediation effect of severity judgment (-0,31) accounts for 14 percent of the total effect of the treatment.

Overall, thus, the mediation test comes out in support of H2. There is evidence that voters lower the psychological cost of voluntary corruption voting by mitigating the importance of wrongdoings when the candidate is regarded as competent for the office. However, as the dissonance reduction

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the effect of the treatment on the mediator by the effect of the mediator on the outcome net of the direct effect of the treatment (Imai et al. 2011: 773).

[5] As proposed by Imai et al. (2011) we have performed a complementary sensitivity analysis to see to what extent the estimated mediation effect is robust to violation of the sequential ignorability assumption. Results of the sensitivity analysis indicate that, for the ACME to be zero, the unobserved confounders should make the correlation between the error term of the mediator and the outcome models smaller than -0,26 in the case of Spain and -0,38 in Sweden.

explains only a limited portion of the competence effect, it should be emphasized that psychology matters to a degree only. In accordance with the original tradeoff hypothesis, results suggest that the trading of competence for honesty first and foremost is driven by a rational calculation.

Conclusions and discussion

This paper demonstrates that under some conditions voters in OECD countries are willing to support candidates from their own preferred party who are corrupt but otherwise competent for office. In accordance with the competence-corruption tradeoff hypothesis, survey experiments in Sweden (a low corruption national context) and Spain (a medium level corruption national context) document that participants prefer a corrupt candidate with a successful term in office over a clean but unsuccessful candidate. Moreover, the paper shows that voluntary corruption voting is facilitated by dissonance reduction; voters lower the psychological costs of supporting a morally questionable candidate with a proven capacity for performance by mitigating the perceived severity of his/her wrongdoings. However, we also find that psychological dissonance reduction accounts for a relatively small portion of variations in corruption voting, which suggests that trading is primarily driven by rational calculations (Rundquist et al. 1977).

These findings contrasts with those from our primary comparison study on Brazil (a high corruption national context). In a similarly designed survey experiment, Winters and Weitz-Shapiro (2013) found that Brazilian voters – especially those in the lower classes – reacted strongly against corruption and did prefer a poorly performing but honest mayoral candidate over a competent but corrupt one. Likewise, a previous survey experiment on Sweden detected a strong willingness among voters to punish corrupt politicians even under good economic conditions (Klasjna& Tucker 2013).

The unexpected finding that Brazilian voters punish corruption whereas Swedish and Spanish voters do not, raises the question of boundary conditions for voluntary corruption voting. What factors lowered the cost of corruption voting in our experiment to a level where participants were willing to trade competence for corruption among their preferred party's incumbent mayoral candidates? Although sharing basic design features, our experimental treatments differ from the Winters

and Weitz-Shapiro experiment with regard to information about wrongdoings of politicians, and to the type of benefit offered in return for voter support. Regarding wrongdoings, our treatment does not explicitly mention illegalities, and it refers to party-related illicit activities rather than to activities undertaken for the personal gain of the candidate. Regarding the type of benefit provided by the candidate, the treatment mentions not only completed public work projects (as did the Brazilian study), but also improved public services, and economically prosperous times. Clearly, while the country-contexts in our study are generally less conducive for the corruption-competence tradeoff hypothesis than is Brazil, these treatment variables manage to substantially reduce the costs of corruption voting.

Given the widely recognized detrimental effects of corruption, it stands out as an important analytical challenge to systematically identify the conditions under which voters are, and are not, willing to support wrongdoing candidates from their own preferred party. Knowing the precise condition under which voters voluntarily trade competence for corruption will help to make the accountability mechanisms of electoral democracy more effective. Our study suggests that type of wrongdoing, type of competent performance, and the use of emotionally charged terms like bribery are part of the picture. Other important factors highlighted in the corruption voting literature include expectations about politicians' behaviour and the supply of alternative candidates (Kurer 2001; Caselli & Morelli 2004; Bågenholm 2011).

Population-based survey experiments can contribute to a better understanding of the factors that condition voluntary corruption voting. A fruitful way forward would be to conduct a series of studies that follows a standardized design, that makes incremental changes in treatments, and that are run in several different country contexts. There are many practical obstacles to a concerted scholarly effort of this kind, but there is also much to gain.

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APPENDIX: *question wording*

Third-person prompt:
Now think about a friend of yours, with your same political ideas who lives in a city or town like yours.

Dependent Variables:

In your opinion, how likely is it that your friend would vote for such a mayor in the next election?

He/she would not vote for such a   I am sure he/she would vote for such
mayor under any circumstance   a mayor
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

And what would you personally do? How likely is it that you would vote for such a mayor in the next election?

I would not vote for such a mayor un-   I am sure I would vote for such a
der any circumstance   mayor
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

And how serious do you think the practice of giving contracts to developers with close connections with the mayor's party is? *Filter: only administered to treatments "Competent/Corrupt" and "Incompetent/Corrupt".*

I do not think this is serious   I think this is extremely serious
at all
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10