Where Have All the Non-Corrupt Civil Servants Gone?
Corruption and Trust in Public Administration in European Countries

Abstract: This article deals with corruption and trust in the public administration of nine countries of the former Western bloc and neutral states, which underwent different institutional development compared to post-communist countries, which were susceptible to corruption due to a strongly centralized public administration with complex decision-making processes and the considerable power of officials. Despite the different institutional development of the public administration in Western countries, these countries are not always perceived by the public as trustworthy and not corrupt. This article reveals that in countries like Switzerland, Norway, and Finland, civil servants are perceived by the public as rather trustworthy and not corrupt, whereas in countries like Spain and France, the opposite is true. Using statistical methods, this article also demonstrates that the perception of the involvement of civil servants in corruption and their unequal treatment of citizens diminishes their trust in the eyes of the public. The experience of respondents with bribery on the part of civil servants reduces confidence in the public administration in only two states. In the other seven, this variable was statistically insignificant.

Keywords: administration, civil servants, corruption, public, trust

Introduction

There are several debates about the possible effects of corruption. The first big debate is about the impact of corruption on the economy. Within this debate, there is discussion about how corruption relates to the international economic system, undermines national economies and public finances, as well as how it can hinder economic development (Bentzen 2012; Blackburn, Bose, & Haque 2006, 2010; Hanousek & Kočenda 2011; Kündig, Okada, & Shibata 2016; Tsaturyan & Bryson 2010). The second debate is the impact of corruption on political participation. Within this debate, there is discussion about whether corruption has a deterrent effect on voters or, on the contrary, whether it mobilizes voters or street protests (Carreras & Vera 2018; Costas-Perez 2014; De Vries & Solaz 2017; Ecker, Glinitzer, & Meyer 2016; Escaleras, Calcagno, & Shughart 2012; Školník 2019, 2020b; Stockemer, LaMontagne, & Scruggs 2013). There is a third debate that revolves around the question of how corruption can affect the quality of democracy in a country (Morales 2009; Schneider 2003; Seligson 2002). A fourth debate considers the relationship between corruption and electoral systems. In other words, this debate looks at which electoral rules and systems are generally beneficial for corrupt candidates and vice versa (Buben & Kouba 2017; Chang & Golgden 2007; Myerson 1993; Persson, Tabellini, &
The list can be extended to a final, fifth debate concerning the relationship between corruption and trust (Babouš 2015; Bowler & Karp 2004; Hetherington 1998; Naxera 2012; Rogge & Kittel 2014; Schneider 2003). Trust is usually distinguished between interpersonal trust and institutional (political) trust (Kubbe 2013; Mueller 2011; Olteanu 2005). More specifically, institutional trust refers to the degree of trust that citizens have in their government, parliament, judicial system, and other elements of the political system (Ares & Hernández 2017; Solé-Ollé & Sorribas-Navarro 2018; Zhang & Kim 2018).

Confidence not only in government but also its representatives working within state offices is important for the functioning of state administration. Citizens must often interact with these officials, and the actions and behavior of these officials can influence the public’s view of the functioning of the state administration as a whole (Houston, Aitalieva, Morelock, & Shults 2016; Mersiyanova, Yaklimets, & Pakhomena 2012; Novelsskaitė & Pučeti 2018; Thomas 1998; Van Ryzin 2011). There is one study that directly addresses the impact of different forms of corruption on trust in civil servants, but it is geographically limited to post-communist Europe (Školník 2020a).

Between the Western bloc and the Eastern bloc, there is a certain contrast in the functioning of the public administration and the potential threat of corruption. While the West was dominated by a rather decentralized public administration, where corruption had a problem to become long-standing and systematic, in the east strong centralization and complex decision-making processes favored the bargaining position of officials with considerable power (Svendsen 2003). After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the former Soviet satellites embarked on a transformation into a market economy system accompanied by the extensive privatization of state property (Dvořáková 2019; Dvořáková & Vymětal 2014; Zagata, Hrabák, & Lošťák 2020). Many civil servants either came from the communist regime or were connected to a new political elite promoting the market economy. The public administration was thus characterized by high politicization, which had to be resolved in the following years, for example, by adopting service laws setting rules for admission to the civil service (Sootla 2001). Prior to these reforms, officials in the inherited public administration were provided favorable conditions to abuse the power entrusted to them for private purposes. This situation still persists within territorial self-government in many post-communist countries. Representatives of local governments have considerable powers, for example, during the implementation of costly investment projects (Čopík, Kopřiva, & Čmejrek 2019; Kopřiva, Čopík, & Čmejrek 2017). It is not surprising that corruption is often in the form of contracts awarded for large-scale investments being purposefully overpriced, which are nevertheless approved by the local authority who receives a bribe from the construction company.

However, the question remains whether corruption has had opportunities to manifest itself in the West and whether civil servants are perceived positively by the public in Western democracies, despite different developments in the functioning of the public administration in the West, compared to post-communist countries. So as not involved in corruption and generally credible.

This article fulfills two goals. The first is to assess the state of corruption among civil servants and the trust in them by citizens in selected European democracies (Former Western-bloc states and neutral European states that were not under Soviet influence).
The second objective is to investigate the relationship between corruption and institutional trust to see whether and, if so, in what direction selected forms of corruption affect the credibility of civil servants from the public perspective.

European democracies are represented by nine countries for which data was available, both for different forms of corruption in public administration and for trust in officials. Specifically, they are the Western-bloc and West-aligned countries of Belgium, France, Iceland, Norway, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom and the neutral European states of Finland and Switzerland.

The article is divided into several parts. First, its theoretical basis is introduced. Corruption is defined. A distinction is made between interpersonal and institutional trust. The possible relationship between corruption and trust is characterized as well as the possible implications of this relationship. In the methodological part data is presented. Lastly, the use of variables in the analysis is explained.

In the analytical part, four graphs concerning the issues of corruption and trust in public administration for each country are interpreted. Finally, the effects of individual corruption variables on trust in public administration, namely on its officials, are verified using statistical methods.

The main source of quantitative data for the analytical chapter comes from the International Social Survey Program (International Social Survey Programme 2016). The research is therefore conducted with data gathered from individuals. The study is unfortunately limited in the number of cases. The ISSP database does not include all European countries. It also does not include all countries from the former Western bloc. However, the aim of the study is not to generalize the results to all European countries, but to capture the specific situation in each country.

Theory

Corruption

Corruption can be defined as “behavior which deviates from the formal duties of a public role because of private regards (personal, close family, private clique) pecuniary or status gains, or violates rules against the exercise of certain types of private influence” (Nye 1967: 419). Alternatively, it has been defined as the “abuse of entrusted power for private gain” (Transparency International 2020). The most frequent and widespread form of corruption is the use of reward to influence a person in a position of trust, in other words, bribery (Amundsen 2019).

Institutional Trust

Corruption is selfish but rational when examined according to different aspects of human nature. The abuse of public power for private purposes is based on the need for personal enrichment and comfort. By contrast, trust expresses the human belief that other people are a part of their moral community. Trust is an essential element of social capital. Many authors have dealt with the issue of social capital (Bourdieu 1986; Coleman 1988; Fukuyama
The most well-known definition of social capital formulated Robert Putnam is “the connections among individuals’ social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them” (Putnam 2000: 19).

Trust is based on the expectation that everyone is behaving as they should (Uslaner 2004). A distinction is made between interpersonal and political (institutional) trust. The second is based on the trust people have in the institutions and the representatives within the institutions that influence their lives. It can be used to assess citizens’ attitudes to the political system on the basis of their normative expectations (Hetherington 1998). This type of vertical trust is one of the key components of social cohesion and ensures the legitimacy of civil servants. The more institutional trust connects citizens with public institutions, the more efficient and legitimate the democratic governance is (Čermák & Stachová 2010).

Institutional trust “is primarily conceptualized as trust in the rules, roles, and norms of an institution independent of the people occupying those roles. It is this institutional arrangement that provides the motivations for those acting out those roles to perform their tasks in an appropriate manner” (Smith 2011: 80). Institutional trust therefore “reflects evaluations of whether or not political authorities and institutions are performing in accordance with the normative expectations held by the public. Citizen expectations of how government should operate include, among other criteria, that it be fair, equitable, honest, efficient, and responsive to society’s needs. An expression of trust in government (or synonymously political confidence and support) is a summary judgment that the system is responsive and will do what is right even in the absence of constant scrutiny” (Miller & Listhaug 1990: 358). Civil servants, the employees of the public administration, are de facto representatives of the state and its will. Therefore, trust for the purposes of the article is perceived at the institutional level. Indeed, the definition of institutional trust can easily be applied to civil servants, that is, they are expected to treat all citizens equally in accordance with the law regardless of their social status, and they are expected to not use their position for private enrichment.

The Link between Trust and Corruption

The impact of corruption on institutional trust is not entirely clear (Zhang & Kim 2018). Corruption can affect trust in both directions. On the one hand, it is argued that corruption helps maintain the stability of the political system in fragile states and developing countries by providing benefits to supporters of the regime (strong and widespread clientelist ties), which of course increases loyalty to the leaders of such a state. Corruption also has the potential to reduce sources of political violence and thus help social integration, a key component of trust (Bayley 1966; Pharr & Putnam 2000). On the other hand, there is the well-known argument that corruption goes against the public interest and reduces the government’s ability to manage public affairs equally, efficiently, and effectively. Corruption also reduces the ability of civil servants to provide public goods and services, leading to the erosion of public trust toward the government and public administration. Corrupt civil servants deliberately exclude citizens from public services and create an environment of their own clientelist networks. However, such an environment results in an inefficient, uncontrollable, and untrustworthy public administration (Warren 2015). To date, research on corruption and institutional trust has argued that corruption negatively affects the credibility
of political institutions and their representatives. Authors working in this area of research have worked with aggregated data from Transparency International and individual data from the Social Survey Program, World Values Survey, and other databases (Anderson & Tverdova 2003; Bauhr & Grimes 2014; Chang & Chu 2006; Habibov, Afandi, & Cheung 2017; Morris & Klesner 2010; Villoria, Van Ryzin, & Lavena 2013).

Methodology and Data

The article works with data from the International Social Survey Program (ISSP). The ISSP is an international program that conducts annual surveys at the individual level. Surveys have been carried out since 1984. Research organizations, universities, and public opinion agencies cooperate on them. All data and related documentation are freely available for professional purposes. Social networks, environment, work orientations, or national identities are just some examples of the areas in which public opinion surveys focus. Each year a different thematic area that returns at regular intervals.

This article works with a dataset “The Role of Government” from 2016. This dataset provides specific data on the perception of corruption among civil servants, on the frequency that officials ask for bribes, and whether they treat all citizens equally in their work. This article tests whether and in what direction corruption variables in nine European democracies affect trust in civil servants.

Models

This research uses Linear regression analysis (Ordinary Least Squares regression). Models were constructed for each country. The aim is to capture specific situations in individual states. The data file was weighed for model build purposes.

Dependent Variable

A variable that aims to be explained with the help of independent variables is trust in civil servants. ISSP interviewers presented participants with the following statement: “Most government administrators can be trusted to do what is best for the country,” from which one of five answers could be selected (1 = Strongly agree to 5 = Strongly disagree).

Independent Variables

How corruption affects the trust of civil servants was tested using three independent variables. The first concerns the perception of corruption: “How many government administrators are involved in corruption?” (1 = Almost none to 5 = Almost all). The second variable is based on direct experience of corruption: “In the last five years, how often have you or a member of your immediate family come across a public official who hinted they wanted, or asked for, a bribe or favor in return for a service?” (1 = Never to 5 = Very often). The last independent variable represents a question that may involve an indirect, potential form of corruption, as well as clientelism: “In general, how often do you think that the tax author-
ities treat everyone in accordance with the law, regardless of their contacts or position in society?” (1 = Almost always up to 4 = Almost never). With reference to the definition of corruption as the misuse of public authority for private purposes, such behavior by a civil servant could evoke the impression that they treat business people or politicians differently than ordinary citizens, as this may provide them with an advantage. This final independent variable further refers to the space created for clientelist ties, where government contracts are awarded based on acquaintances.

Control Variables

The effect of corrupt independent variables on trust in civil servants is controlled using socio-economic variables. These are gender, age, education (which uses a single international scale of education), place of living (from farm to big city), and finally employment. For a more detailed specification of all variables, see Appendix 1.

Results

Four graphs were produced and interpreted in the first part of the analysis. In this section, confidence in civil servants in nine European democracies is compared. Furthermore, the first part examines whether and how much respondents perceive corruption in public administration. Equally, how often they have encountered situations where a civil servant has asked them for a bribe or a favor in return, for example, for performing an official act in a much shorter time than usual. The last graph relates to the potential creation of clientelist networks, in other words, whether the civil servants in the eyes of respondents treat everyone equally, as required by law, regardless of a citizen’s position in society or their contacts.

In the second part of the analysis, nine regression models were compiled. Each model represents a country. It was tested whether and in what direction the selected corruption variables affect citizens’ trust in civil servants.

From the first graph, it is clear that trust in civil servants varies according to each state. Most respondents disagree with the claim that most government administrators can be trusted to do what is best for the country in France and Spain. The values for both the “Strongly disagree” and the “Disagree” are around or above 30%. Thus, in these two countries, citizens have the least confidence in civil servants.

Most respondents with a vague view of government credibility occur in the United Kingdom and Sweden, where the values for the “Neither agree nor disagree” are around 40%. By contrast, in Norway and especially Switzerland the greatest percentage of respondents have confidence in civil servants. Moreover, Switzerland is the only country where the responses represent to one answer represent more than half of all participants to the question. Finland can also be considered a country with relatively high institutional confidence. Belgium and Iceland can be ranked alongside the countries with a rather vague attitude toward the credibility of public administrations, such as the UK and Sweden. Generally
WHERE HAVE ALL THE NON-CORRUPT CIVIL SERVANTS GONE?

Graph 1
Citizens’ Trust in Civil Servants

The graph illustrates the respondents’ response to the statement “Most government administrators can be trusted to do what is best for the country.” The data was collected in 2016. There were five possible answers. The data is given as a percentage of the total number of valid responses.

Source: ISSP. Processing: author.

speaking, among the public administrations of the nine countries, three enjoy credibility in the eyes of the public, two are seen as rather untrustworthy, and the remaining countries are somewhere between trust and mistrust.

The second graph shows that, for each country, a large percentage of respondents believe that “Some,” “Quite a lot,” or “Almost all” officials are involved in corruption compared with those who responded “Almost none” or “A few.” Thus, the public in the examined countries views their government as an organization with a large number of corrupt employees. The only exception was Switzerland. As for the first question, there was a dominant response in excess of 50%, in this case, “A few.” Along with Switzerland, Norway and Finland comprise the countries where the majority of citizens believe only a few officials are involved in corruption. Additionally, there was no Norwegian respondent that believed “Almost all” government administrators are involved in corruption. Spain, by contrast, was the country with the largest percentage of respondents who responded that “Quite a lot” of officials are involved in corruption. Following Spain are France and Belgium. By looking at this graph and the previous graph one may note that the Spanish and French public administrations are perceived not only as untrustworthy, but also as having a greater number of officials involved in corruption.

The third graph shows that, in all selected countries, there are only marginal percentages of respondents who have encountered a situation where a bribe was asked for by a civil servant. Only a minimal number of respondents stated that it happened “Seldom,” “Occa-
The graph shows respondents’ answers to the question “How many government administrators are involved in corruption?” The data was collected in 2016. There were five possible answers. The data is given as a percentage of the total number of valid responses.

Source: ISSP. Processing: author.

sionally,” “Quite often,” or “Very often.” For all countries, the answer “Never” was the most frequent. Thus, within these countries there has been little direct experience of corruption. Over 90% responded “Never” in the United Kingdom, Finland, and Switzerland.

For the latter two countries, a trend may be noted. Both Switzerland and Finland are perceived by respondents as countries with a trustworthy public administration. A minimum number of officials are believed to be involved in corruption and, as this chart suggests, very few officials have openly engaged in the most common form of corruption, bribery. Belgium is the only country where over 20% of respondents claim they (or a family member) have been asked for a bribe by a civil servant. Nevertheless, the other 80% of Belgians have not encounter such a situation.

The last graph demonstrates that the equal treatment of citizens by tax authorities varies across states. In three countries (Norway, Switzerland, and Finland), the largest percentage of respondents chose “Almost Always.” This graph shows these three countries continuing the trend found in the other graphs that their administrations are trustworthy with little corruption, with employees who treat all or nearly all citizens with respect.

For Sweden and Iceland, the most frequent response was “Often.” In the cases of Belgium, France, and the United Kingdom, neither a negative view nor a positive view predominates. On the contrary, Spain continues its negative trend by being the country with the largest percentage of respondents who believe that their tax authorities do not treat everyone in accordance with the law, regardless of the social or other status of the citizen.
The graph shows respondents’ answers to the question “In the last five years, how often have you or a member of your immediate family come across a public official who hinted they wanted, or asked for, a bribe or favor in return for a service?” The data was collected in 2016. There were five possible answers. The data is given as a percentage of the total number of valid responses.

Source: ISSP. Processing: author.

The response “Almost never” represents more than half of the Spanish responses to this question.

The results of the linear regression analysis reveal that there was a statistically significant variable representing the involvement of civil servants in corruption in all nine countries. The same was not the case for the variable that involves the question of how often a civil servant has asked for a bribe. The frequency of bribery was statistically reflected only in two models for the French and the Finnish. The equal treatment of citizens by tax officials variable is statistically significant in all models.

The first variable was shown to have a negative effect on trust in civil servants. In essence, the more civil servants were involved in corruption, as perceived by respondents, the less trust respondents had in them. Since this relationship was found for each model, it can be concluded that the perception of corruption generally negatively affects institutional confidence.

The second variable concerning bribery also negatively impacts institutional trust. In essence, the more often a respondent encountered a situation where a bribe was asked of them, the more likely they were to perceive civil servants as untrustworthy. However, since statistical relevance was only found for Finland and France, it cannot be concluded that the experience of corruption in public administrations in European democracies diminishes the credibility of the public administration.
The third variable, which signals clientelism and, in the long run, potential systematic corruption has a negative effect in all regression models. This means that the more respondents believe civil servants do not treat everyone equally, the less confidence they will have in the public administration in general. This variable negatively correlates with trust for each regression. Consequently, it can be concluded that even clientelism, which can grow into corruption, negatively affects institutional confidence.

Regarding control variables, the gender variable was statistically significant in only two countries, Spain and France. Moreover, these are countries whose public officials are perceived rather negatively. In these countries, men tend to trust civil servants more than women. In general, men are more interested in public affairs than women (Burns, Schlozman, & Verba 1997).

The control variable age was statistically significant in seven models. The two regressions where age was insignificant were those for Spain and Britain. In all cases, greater age correlated with greater trust in civil servants. This result agrees with the theoretical argument that, with increasing age, the belonging to the state, in this case to the civil servants, increases (Steven & Hansen 1993).

The models also show that respondents with higher education have much greater confidence in civil servants than those with less education. However, this was only found significant among the Spanish, the Swedes, and the British.
Table 1
Linear Regression Analysis—Trust in Civil Servants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Belgium</th>
<th>Finland</th>
<th>France</th>
<th>Iceland</th>
<th>Norway</th>
<th>Spain</th>
<th>Sweden</th>
<th>Switzerland</th>
<th>United Kingdom</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>1.995</td>
<td>1.571</td>
<td>2.284</td>
<td>1.517</td>
<td>1.716</td>
<td>2.679</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>1.843</td>
<td>1.715</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.179)</td>
<td>(0.218)</td>
<td>(0.228)</td>
<td>(0.214)</td>
<td>(0.177)</td>
<td>(0.194)</td>
<td>(0.198)</td>
<td>(0.205)</td>
<td>(0.173)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involvement in corruption</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>0.428</td>
<td>0.298</td>
<td>0.486</td>
<td>0.286</td>
<td>0.153</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>0.253</td>
<td>0.357</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.034)</td>
<td>(0.04)</td>
<td>(0.039)</td>
<td>(0.036)</td>
<td>(0.034)</td>
<td>(0.027)</td>
<td>(0.037)</td>
<td>(0.036)</td>
<td>(0.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of bribery</td>
<td>0.084</td>
<td>0.228</td>
<td>0.165</td>
<td>-0.006</td>
<td>0.103</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>0.086</td>
<td>0.037</td>
<td>0.096</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.043)</td>
<td>(0.088)</td>
<td>(0.052)</td>
<td>(0.066)</td>
<td>(0.061)</td>
<td>(0.046)</td>
<td>(0.061)</td>
<td>(0.067)</td>
<td>(0.056)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal treatment</td>
<td>0.173</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>0.244</td>
<td>0.253</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.285</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.131</td>
<td>0.146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.028)</td>
<td>(0.039)</td>
<td>(0.032)</td>
<td>(0.036)</td>
<td>(0.034)</td>
<td>(0.027)</td>
<td>(0.036)</td>
<td>(0.032)</td>
<td>(0.027)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>-0.017</td>
<td>-0.231</td>
<td>0.034</td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td>-0.113</td>
<td>-0.032</td>
<td>0.077</td>
<td>0.033</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.053)</td>
<td>(0.066)</td>
<td>(0.062)</td>
<td>(0.062)</td>
<td>(0.054)</td>
<td>(0.053)</td>
<td>(0.06)</td>
<td>(0.055)</td>
<td>(0.051)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-0.009</td>
<td>-0.009</td>
<td>-0.008</td>
<td>-0.005</td>
<td>-0.005</td>
<td>-0.003</td>
<td>-0.009</td>
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<td>(0.002)</td>
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<td>(0.002)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Education</td>
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<td>-0.044</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>0.012</td>
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<td>-0.06</td>
<td>-0.047</td>
<td>-0.029</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.017)</td>
<td>(0.025)</td>
<td>(0.02)</td>
<td>(0.022)</td>
<td>(0.02)</td>
<td>(0.016)</td>
<td>(0.018)</td>
<td>(0.024)</td>
<td>(0.019)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place of living</td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>0.092</td>
<td>-0.043</td>
<td>-0.017</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.032</td>
<td>0.046</td>
<td>0.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.024)</td>
<td>(0.029)</td>
<td>(0.027)</td>
<td>(0.03)</td>
<td>(0.02)</td>
<td>(0.021)</td>
<td>(0.023)</td>
<td>(0.026)</td>
<td>(0.025)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>-0.09</td>
<td>-0.077</td>
<td>-0.144</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>0.034</td>
<td>-0.025</td>
<td>0.018</td>
<td>0.008</td>
<td>-0.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.059)</td>
<td>(0.069)</td>
<td>(0.069)</td>
<td>(0.07)</td>
<td>(0.061)</td>
<td>(0.058)</td>
<td>(0.07)</td>
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<tr>
<td>N</td>
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<td>834</td>
<td>1179</td>
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<td>987</td>
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<td>842</td>
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<td>1244</td>
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<tr>
<td>R square</td>
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<td>0.322</td>
<td>0.197</td>
<td>0.303</td>
<td>0.209</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.292</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.169</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The table shows the Beta coefficient values. Standard errors in parentheses. The variables in the gray fields were statistically significant (Coefficients p < 0.05); the highest measured value of variance inflation factor (VIF) in all regression models was 1.384. Dataset is weighted by WEIGHT provided by ISSP.

Source: Author’s calculations.
One’s place of living was only found significant for France. French respondents living in rural areas are more likely to not trust civil servants, with trust increasing according to the size of a place, and is therefore highest in large cities. This can be explained by the fact that city dwellers are more often in contact with officials, as the vast majority of state authorities are located in cities. Institutional confidence thus has the opportunity to deepen in a way not possible in rural areas where there are no public administration offices.

The last control variable, employment, was statistically significant in only France and the UK. It was shown in these countries that people in paid work will trust their public administrations less than those who do not work. This could indicate that employees paying taxes do not have confidence in how civil servants deal with them. The unemployed, who do not pay taxes, may not have such doubts.

**Conclusions**

This article had two goals. The first was to assess the state of corruption among civil servants and public trust in them and furthermore, to find out whether and how corruption affects institutional trust.

The first part of the analysis showed that the public perception of civil servants varies considerably in the selected countries of the former Western bloc and neutral states. There are public administrations that are perceived by the public as rather trustworthy (Norway, Finland, and especially Switzerland), public administrations perceived as rather untrustworthy (Spain and France), and others that are generally between trust and distrust.

Switzerland, Norway, and Finland are the countries with the highest number of respondents who perceive their civil servants as being involved in corruption. In contrast, in Spain and France, respondents believe that a substantial proportion of government employees are corrupt.

A positive finding compared with post-communist Europe is that only a marginal percentage of respondents have encountered situations where a civil servant has asked them for bribes. Up to 90% of respondents across the nine countries have not seen bribery in their dealings with public administration in the last five years.

In terms of equal treatment of citizens by tax officials, the public administrations of Norway, Finland, and Switzerland are again viewed most positively. By contrast, Spain continued again had the most negative perception. Among Spaniards, the greatest proportion of respondents answered they do not think civil servants treat everyone equally regardless of their social status.

The second part of the analysis consisted of nine regressions that first tested whether the perceived level of involvement of civil servants in corruption negatively affects their credibility. It was found significant in all nine states. By contrast, the frequency of bribery negatively influenced trust in government employees only in France and Finland. The effect of the last independent variable tested whether increases in perceived unequal treatment by tax officials negatively correlated with a decrease in trust in civil servants. This research has contributed to the debate concerning corruption and its potential negative impact on institutional confidence by investigating hitherto unexplored forms of corruption at the level
of public officials from a public opinion perspective (Anderson & Tverdova 2003; Bauhr & Grimes 2014; Chang & Chu 2006; Habibov et al. 2017; Morris & Klesner 2010; Villoria et al. 2013).

The article could not cover all variables that may or may not affect institutional trust and did not take into account determinants of culture and mentality of the people in individual countries (religion, wealth, climate, history, political situation, etc.). However, socioeconomic and political variables are gaining an importance in a number of studies (Cancela & Geys 2006; Haman & Školník 2020; Pacek, Pop-Eleches, & Tucker 2009; Stockemer 2017), further research should therefore include more of them.

Particular attention needs to be paid to research at the national level, because there are significant differences between states. For example, Swiss civil servants are perceived positively and, on the contrary, Spanish civil servants are viewed negatively. Further research should try to explain these differences.

It is also necessary to compare the career systems, the criteria for recruitment of civil servants, etc. In general, therefore, determine the factors that make an administration trustworthy and not corrupt.

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**References**


WHERE HAVE ALL THE NON-CORRUPT CIVIL SERVANTS GONE?


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### Appendix 1 — Variables in the Models

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Description</th>
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| **Dependent variable**           | **Trust in public servants** Most government administrators can be trusted to do what is best for the country.  
| **Independent variables**        | **Involvement in corruption** In your opinion, about how many government administrators in (selected country) are involved in corruption?  

**Frequency of bribery** In the last five years, how often have you or a member of your immediate family come across a public official who hinted they wanted, or asked for, a bribe or favor in return for a service?  

**Equal treatment** In general, how often do you think that the tax authorities in (selected country) treat everyone in accordance with the law, regardless of their contacts or position in society?  

| **Control variables**            | **Gender** Male 1. Female 2  
**Age** Range between 18–97  
**Education**  
0. No formal education 1. Primary school (elementary education) 2. Lower secondary (secondary completed that does not allow entry to university; end of obligatory school) 3. Upper secondary (programs that allows entry to university) 4. Post secondary, non-tertiary (other upper secondary programs toward the labor market or technical formation) 5. Lower level tertiary, first stage (also technical schools at a tertiary level) 6. Upper level tertiary (Master, Doctor)  
**Place of living**  
1. A big city 2. The suburbs or outskirts of a big city. 3. A town or a small city. 4. A country village. 5. A farm or home in the country  
**Employment** Variable adjusted to: 0. In paid work 1. Unemployed and looking for a job, In education, Apprentice or trainee, Permanently sick or disabled, Retired, Domestic work |