

# What is the opposite of corruption?

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## The Quality of Government Institute

- Started in 2004 (minor grant to build database)
- Independent academic research institute
- "Center of excellence" funding in 2007, 2009 and 2012
- About 25 researchers + 8 research assistants
- Aim: To carry out and promote research about the importance of trustworthy, reliable, competent, non-corrupt, non-discriminatory government institutions = QoG
- Four open access over time comparative databases
- Main dependent variable is not politics but human well-being

## Companion articles:

- Rothstein, Bo and Davide Torsello. 2014. "Bribery in pre-industrial societies: Understanding the universalism-particularism puzzle." *Journal of Anthropological Research* 70:263-282.
- Persson, Anna and Bo Rothstein. 2015. "It's My Money: Why Big Government May Be Good Government." *Comparative Politics* (forthcoming).
- Persson, Anna, Bo Rothstein, and Jan Teorell. 2013. "Why Anticorruption Reforms Fails: Systemic Corruption as a Collective Action Problem." *Governance-an International Journal of Policy Administration and Institutions* 26:449-471.
- Rothstein, Bo. 2015. "The Chinese Paradox of High Growth and Low Quality of Government: The Cadre Organization meets Max Weber" *Governance* (forthcoming)

# The problem with existing definitions of corruption

- "Abuse of public power for private gain"
- An empty definition since what should count as "abuse" is not specified
- Invites relativism
- Makes it impossible to measure levels of corruption in different countries (regions, cities)

## How should we define the opposite of corruption?

- **(Good) Governance?**
- **Democratic governance?**
- **State Capacity?**
- **Bureaucratic autonomy?**
- **Rule of Law?**

## Choices that have to be made

- Should the definition of QoG be:
- Normative or empirical?
- Political procedures or policy substance?
- Multi- or unidimensional?
- Universal or relativistic?

## Normative vs. empirical?

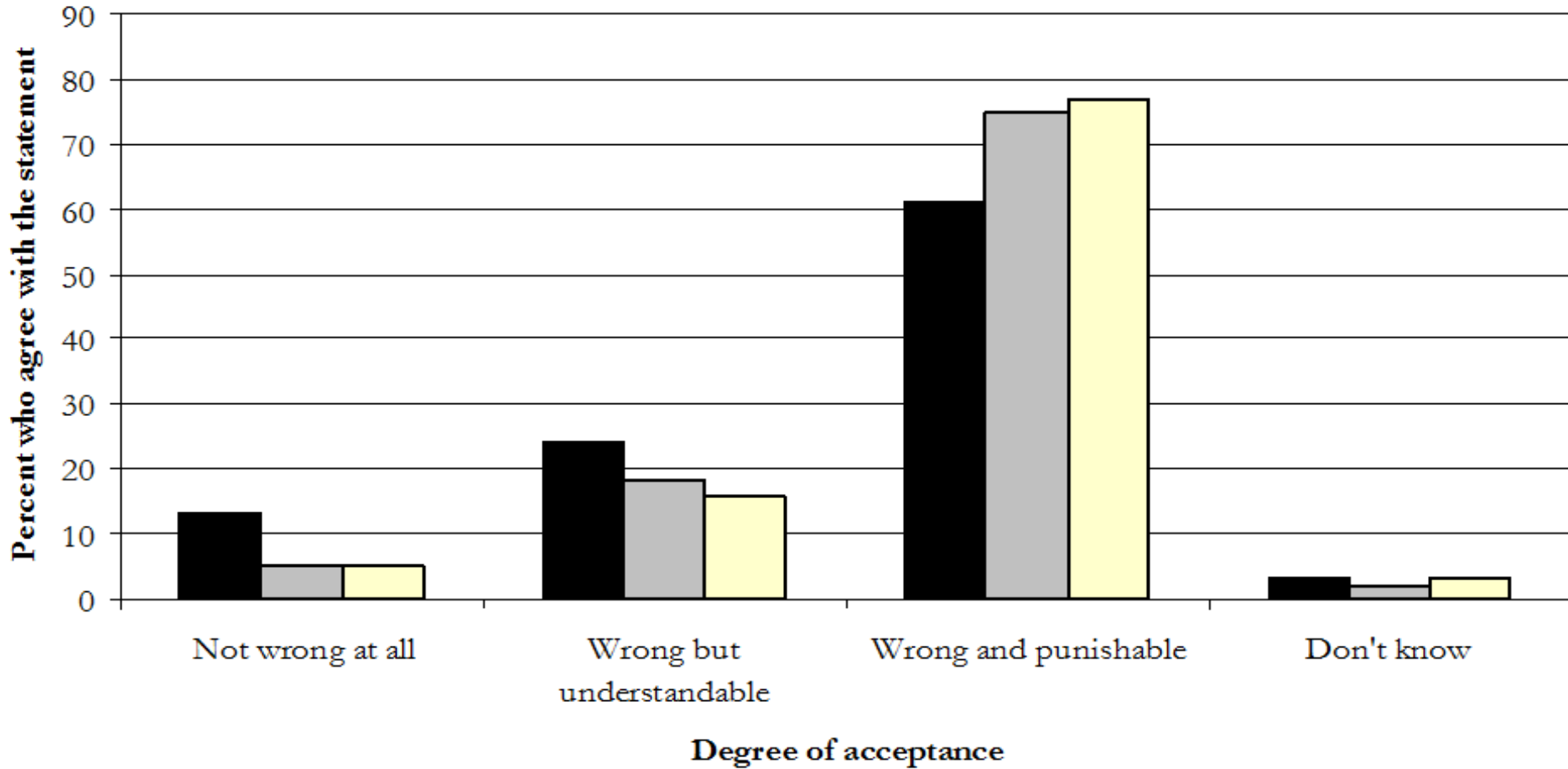
- Using terms like "good" or "quality" makes a non-normative definition impossible
- If QoG causes political legitimacy, it has to be a normative concept
- Empirical definitions easily become tautologies
- Acemoglu & Robinson: Institutions that "allow and encourage participation by the great mass of people in economic activities that make best use of their talents and skill and enable them to make the choices they wish"
- Big surprise: the "good society" produces the "good society"
- Fukuyama: Bureaucratic autonomy – but this can go astray

## Universal or relativistic?

- A relativistic definition makes comparative empirical studies of QoG impossible
- Defining central concepts about political justice (like democracy, human rights, gender equality) in a relativistic manner is not a very good idea.
- The empirical support for a relativistic, culture specific understanding of e.g., corruption is very thin
- Historical accounts of what has counted as corruption as far back as the 13th century seem surprisingly modern
- Anthropologists have found instances of corruption in many pre-industrial and also indigenous societies
- This paradoxical result can be explained by a "public goods" approach to QoG



# Is Africa that different?



- A public official decides to locate a development project in an area where his friends and supporters lived
- A government official gives a job to someone from his family who does not have adequate qualifications
- A government official demands a favor or an additional payment for some service that is part of his job

## Is QoG about procedures or policies?

- World Bank: "Sound Policies"
- Agnafors: "Morality of the laws"
- First problem: Do the experts really know what is "sound policies" or "morality of laws". If so, why do we at all need democracy. Let the experts rule!
- Second problem: Policy based definitions cannot reach the Rawlsian "overlapping consensus".
- Representative democracy is therefore usually defined as a set of procedures and the same should be the case for QoG.

## Multi- or unidimensional?

- World Bank: accountability, representation, effective policy formulation, sound policies, and good implementation.
- Agnafors: morality of the laws, stability, efficiency, reason giving, principle of beneficence, and rule of law
- Fukuyama: Good procedures, capacity, outputs, bureaucratic autonomy
- What to do with a country with very high morality of the laws but with a complete lack of rule of law?
- These complex measures cannot be operationalized.
- Van Parijs: “it is sound intellectual policy... not to make our concepts too fat” .... “fat concepts hinder clear thinking and foster wishful thinking”
- This conceptual obesity leads to explanatory impotence resulting in policy uselessness

## Fair procedures or good outcomes

- The procedural strategy rests on the Rawlsian assumption that fair systems for collective decision-making is likely to result in "valued outcomes"
- John Rawls: .. "substantive and formal justice tend to go together and therefore that at least grossly unjust institutions are never, or at any rate rarely, impartial and consistently administered",
- "Thus it is maintained that where we find formal justice, the rule of law and honoring of legitimate expectations, we are likely to find substantive justice as well",
- But ....there can be no guarantees, only a probability

# Conclusion:

- We should strive for a normative, procedural, universal and parsimonious definition of QoG that can be operationalized and measured. The definition should not include the system of access to power (e.g., representative democracy) since we want to be able to explain the relation between representative democracy and quality of government. It should also not include things like implementation efficiency and capacity since we want to know if good procedures produces these good outcomes

## QoG as **Impartiality** in the Exercise of Public Power

- QOG: When implementing laws and policies, government officials shall not take anything into consideration about the citizen/case that is not beforehand stipulated in the policy or the law
- Basic norm for democracy: **Political Equality**
- Basic norm for quality of government: **Impartiality**
- Rules out corruption but also other forms of favoritisms such as nepotism, clientelism, patrimonialism and discrimination

## Practical implications

- Achieving development through increased quality of government is not dependent on exporting as specific institutional configuration
- Good democracies comes with a great many very different sets of institutional configurations
- High QoG countries also vary a lot in their specific institutional configurations
- Exporting institutions runs the risk "isomorphic mimicry"
- It is the "basic norm" under which the institutions operate that is important – and this norm is impartiality

## Does it work in practice?

- Recent publications from the QoG institute show that this conceptualization of QoG can be operationalized and measured
- Neither experts nor ordinary people have problems answering survey questions about degrees or forms of QoG impartiality
- The results correlate as expected with almost all "valued outcomes"
- QoG as impartiality is thus no longer "simply asserted" but empirically grounded. Simply put, it works.