This article discusses the effects of standard corruption measurement used in comparative research for accuracy in estimating and understanding corruption. Implicitly, these measurements treat corruption as a one-dimensional phenomenon (measured by a single score) that can vary in incidence between countries (or other geographical entities), but not in form. They also tend to equate corruption with bribery. This article argues that the degree to which such one-dimensional and bribery focused measurements constitutes a suitable proxy for corruption differs across countries (i.e. the measurement discrepancy is not random across countries). In particular, these measurements are ill suited to capture corruption in established democracies with highly developed economies, where corruption is expected to centre around gaining access to and influence within strong state institutions rather than bribery. Sweden, a “least corrupt” case, is used to illustrate the effects of relying on such measurements in such setting, and to show that bribery might be a relatively rare event, while undue influence and interest conflicts can be a frequent occurrence.
Title: Beyond Unidimensional Measurement of Corruption

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Beyond Unidimensional Measurement of Corruption

Access to empirical data in the form of country-level corruption rankings and indices that can be used for large-N analysis is one of the main explanations for the rapid growth of corruption research over the past twenty years or so. This literature has contributed to knowledge of the causes and effects of corruption and its relationship with democracy, institutions, trust, economic development, etc. (e.g. Collier, 2002; Kaufmann, Kraay, & Mastruzzi, 2010; Lambsdorff, 2007; Mauro, 1995; Stockemer, LaMontagne, & Scruggs, 2013; Tanzi, 1998; Treisman, 2000; Uslaner, 2005).

However, relying on single number country-level measurements, where a single score is indicating the overall corruption level for a given country (Johnston, 2010, p. 127), that became standard for cross-national research on corruption also create some problems. Notable examples of such measurements are composite corruption indices such as Transparency International’s (2015b) Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) and the Control of Corruption variable in the World Bank Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI) (Kaufmann, et al., 2010).

One could point to problems related to their empirical foundations (e.g. Andvig, 2005; Søreide, 2006), the drawbacks if using perceptions to measure actual levels of corruption (e.g. Arndt & Oman, 2006; Heywood & Rose, 2014), and the varying congruence of perceptions and experience based measurements (e.g. Andvig, 2005; Groop, 2013; Miller, Grødeland, & Koshechkina, 2001; Weber Abramo, 2007). Also, and more related to the purpose of this article, actual instances of corruption might vary spatially, i.e. subnationally (e.g. Charron, Lapuente, & Rothstein, 2013) and across government levels and sectors (e.g. Alam, 1995),
something that is not detected by studies relying on single country-level scores. Linde and Erlingsson (2013) have for example pointed out the limited ability of country indices to grasp the nature and extent of corruption in countries with strong local self-government, and where much of the corrupt activities are expected to take place at the local level. Moreover, concerning the lack of empirical attention to spatial variation within countries (Bland, 2015, p. 266) the contribution of Charon et al. (2013) is important as it shows the salience of sub-national variation of quality of government\textsuperscript{1} and corruption in Europe, and also how in some countries it is insignificant (e.g. Sweden) while big in others (Charron, 2013b, pp. 106-107).

Yet, in spite of the merits of this literature identifying these problems (above), the key issue to be addressed in this article is the effect on the accuracy of corruption measurement, especially for countries with low-corruption and established democracy, of corruption being treated as a single-dimension phenomenon. The literature often treats corruption as if it consists of one thing regardless of where or how it occurs. As noted above, this is not always true of all the literature. There are insightful comparative contributions that use a broader corruption concept, and that look at forms, public sector fairness and impartiality, and variation (e.g. Dahlström & Sundell, 2013; Charron et al., 2013; Linde & Erlingsson, 2013; World Bank, 2013).\textsuperscript{2} Yet, as noted by Johnston (2010, p. 129, 2015, p. 282), striving for causal explanations the tendency in the literature is to emphasize variation in quantity rather than in form. In fact, the literature still often treats corruption as unidimensional and often as synonymous to bribery (see also Philp, 2015, p. 19).

In fact, as corruption is multifaceted there are many types of corruption, and the form it takes varies among different kinds of societies and communities, with particular patterns of corruption being characteristic of specific societal types (Heidenheimer, 1989; Johnston,
2005). This is often masked in research that compresses all corruption into one dimension, both composite measures and measures directly focused on bribery. Employing a one-dimensional view of corruption therefore has potentially negative implications for the accuracy of the understanding of corruption both within and across countries, and therefore also affects how it is dealt with.

Corruption is often equated with bribery, and bribery is certainly a core indicator of corruption. Theoretically though, there are good reasons to believe that the incidence of bribery in relation to the incidence of all corruption occurrences, including other corruption types, can be expected to vary across both countries and sectors within countries. Moreover, it is argued that it is likely that the expected measurement discrepancy does not vary randomly across countries. Rather, whether or not bribery is a good proxy for overall corruption in a country depends upon the type of country/society, and how prominent a role this type of corruption plays in that particular country/society. In countries placed as “low-corruption countries” in rankings such as the one by Transparency International, namely established democracies and highly developed market economies, types of corruption other than bribery can be expected (Johnston, 2005). In these contexts, the standard measurements might therefore lead to faulty conclusions, thus missing an important piece of the corruption puzzle. In addition, the types of corruption that predominantly fall under the heading of conflict of interest are expected to be a frequent and key feature in such least-corrupt countries. If corruption measures ignore this form of the phenomenon, research might fail to identify corruption, hence draw incorrect conclusions about the magnitude of the problem.

So, as the single score standard measurements of corruption in these low-corruption cases are expected to generate a significant discrepancy between overall corruption and what is
measured, this article argues that this problem is particularly important to discuss in relation to these countries. One way forward is to increase the available data for various corruption types. But as changes in governance alter the relationship between public and private actors in public administration, the way public and private interest is perceived is also affected, and consequently also the understanding of corruption. Hence, there is a need for qualitative studies that add nuance to the understanding of corruption, and take into account the various types of corruption that exist, and the variation that can occur within countries and across levels and sectors of government. Thus, first in-depth, qualitative case studies should be conducted. Such studies should aim to capture and analyse the role of conflicts of interest and how they are treated. Conflicts of interest are of particular importance because of the blurred boundary between public and private interest (e.g. Hood, 1991; Hood & Dixon, 2015).

Corruption is now as likely to take the form of conflict of interest, abuse of office or inappropriate use of official information, and lobbying by former public officials, as it is to appear in the more traditional forms of bribery and embezzlement. Thus, interest conflicts are a key issue for the understanding of corruption in such states and because, as this article will show, it is difficult to capture using the standard measurements. Such research should include a consideration of how conflicts of interest have been affected by the changing relations of interaction between the public sector and business, as well as how this change has impacted on how conflicts of interest are manifest and dealt with (e.g. Andersson & Anechiarico, 2015; Heywood, 2015a; O’Brien, 2003).

The argument is illustrated by the least corrupt case of Sweden (e.g. Bull & Newell, 2003; Charron et al., 2013; Heidenheimer, 1996; Rothstein, 2011). A single case is used to allow an in-depth exploration of the pattern of corruption and hence a clearer illustration of the effects of using standard measurements. One would, given the theoretical assumptions made here,
expect a pattern of corruption in this type of case where conflict of interest is important. But as the exploration of the Swedish case indicates, this is difficult to capture using the standard measurements and legal data.

The following section elaborates on why the importance of adopting a nuanced view of corruption is likely to be particularly well illustrated by focusing on least-corrupt countries in general and Sweden in particular. The article then uses standard and other indicators to look at the overall level of corruption, types of corruption, and spatial variation across sectors and levels of government in Sweden.

**Studying Varieties of Corruption in Established Democracies**

Johnston (2005, p. 39) has explored how different societies develop different patterns of corruption. These corruption patterns, or syndromes of corruption, reflect combinations of political participation and the strength of institutions in society. Most Western industrialised countries, in particular Northern European ones, come out well in studies using standard corruption measures. In such settings, i.e. “influence markets”, mature open market economies and strong political institutions, legitimate constitutional frameworks, political competition, free news media, and strong civil societies help to check abuses, but as they developed these characteristics, powerful wealth interests were accommodated. Consequently, the corruption syndrome in these settings could be expected to consist of sophisticated forms of dealing in access to and influence within strong state institutions, rather than deals and connections circumventing them and high-level bribery. Influence market corruption is rendered “invisible” (Johnston, 2005, pp. 42-57).
The consensus that emerged during the 1990s treats corruption as almost synonymous with bribery and as both cause and effect of incomplete, uneven, or ineffective economic liberalization. Although the focus on bribery might be justified in influence markets, it is only the tip of the iceberg (Johnston, 2005, p. 6). Moreover, rules are adapted to fit wealth interests in mature, market-orientated democracies (see also Heidenheimer, 1989, p. 161; Lessig, 2013) and, as noted above, the public-private divide in public administration are increasingly blurred. This highlights the importance of examining how countries deal with conflict of interest situations and their changing nature, i.e. what is regarded as a conflict and how conflicts are sanctioned.

Conflicts of interest generally involve situations in which officials have an outside interest that could influence the way he/she carries out his/ her public duties, while corruption concerns situations in which an official abuses trust or power for illicit gain. But interest conflicts might not always primarily be understood in terms of individual officials as the cause of violations; the concept of systemic conflict of interest rather emphasizes how in many high income countries structural changes to public life and public service (i.e. privatization and outsourcing of public sector activities and the increase in financialization of national economies) can lead to conflict of interest. And as these conditions change, the way public officials pursue their interests will be affected too. There is clearly a strong connection between the concepts of corruption and conflict of interest. Hence, interest conflicts are a key issue to consider in corruption discussions in mature democracies. How conflicts of interest between officials’ private interests and their public duties are dealt with has a direct effect on corruption control (Andersson & Anechiaricho, 2015).

A Further Conceptual Discussion of Corruption
This discussion will, given the purpose of the article and the way definitions influence the understanding of corruption, as a start first derive a broad outlook on corruption, that then allows the development of an empirically employable typology encompassing various corruption types. As the main interest is public corruption rather than private, the focus of the article is on corruption in the public sphere or at the interface between the private and public spheres, i.e. political corruption (Heywood, 1997, p. 421), and to a democratic context. Concerning corruption in a democracy, Warren (2015, pp. 48-49) views its normative core as when institutions and practices that should enable democratic inclusion instead are duplicitly undermined for the purpose of exclusion. But he also stresses how the meaning of corruption in practice depends on which institutional sphere (e.g legislative or executive) is concerned and its norms of inclusion. There is thus not one corruption problem; instead institutions are susceptible to different kinds of corruption that hurt their specific democratic functions.

So along these lines, this section first defines corruption using a broad behaviour based definition (cf. Heidenheimer, 1970, p. 4). Next, it allows elaborating a typology with focus on different types of corrupt behaviour that is needed to be considered in the empirical section. Corruption could then be defined as abuse of public power in the interest of illicit gain (cf. Andersson & Heywood, 2009, p. 748). This definition is applicable to different settings, it is not restricted to law breaking and it does cover corruption where public power involves private entities or for purposes other than individual gain (e.g. to benefit political parties).

In societies where norms and roles are relatively settled and tolerance for corruption in general is low, substantial grey areas are to be expected regarding what behaviours are considered to be corrupt. Tolerance will also depend on type of corruption, especially when...
moving from clear-cut cases of bribery to different forms of nepotism and less crude manifestations of conflict of interest (Gibbons, 1989; Johnston, 1996).

Naturally, an act that is breaking both legal and moral norms is clearly corrupt, while acts that are perceived as breaking moral but not legal norms represent a grey zone. Moreover, a narrow legal definition (as in Sweden, see below) potentially implies a greater distance between the legal definition, and what is socially and morally considered as corruption. Consequently, there is not just a distance between legal and moral/ethical understandings of corruption, but the size of this difference might also vary across countries.

Thus, corrupt practices may not be restricted to what is stipulated by penal laws. In general, direct forms of corruption (e.g. bribery, embezzlement) are rather easy to grasp, but also more subtle, less clear-cut forms need to be considered (Willbern, 2001, pp. 118-119) in order not to exclude precisely those forms of concern, for example conflict of interest situations or undue influence on policy making (cf. Kaufmann, 2005, p. 82). Sticking to a strictly legal understanding of corruption might indeed, in some cases, lead us away from practice that corrupts government (Ghere, 2013, p. 6; Jos, 1993, p. 371; Kaufmann, 2011, pp. 195). Also, the complexity of deviant practices (e.g. favouritism, improper interference, and interest conflicts) considered ethically wrong cannot easily be made to fit penal categories and might not transgress the political order despite causing objections (e.g. Johnston, 2015, p. 277; Mény, 1996, p. 311; Neshkova & Rosenbaum, 2015, pp. 97-98). The importance of their inclusion is further exacerbated, given the centrality of impartiality for how actions in public administration are defined and perceived by the public (Rothstein & Teorell, 2008).
So, given the generic understanding of corruption (with focus on public power and illicit gain), the discussion about different types of corruption, and how legal definitions correspond to broader social definitions, the concluding typology (cf. Bergh, Erlingsson, Sjölin, & Öhrvall, 2013, pp. 40-42; Huberts, 2010, p. 148) includes Bribery and also: Favouritism, i.e. abuse of public authority to favour family, friends or party; Embezzlement and fraud, i.e. undue private gain from the organization or citizens by misleading others or disregarding professional responsibilities; and, Conflict of interest. The focus of this typology and the above discussion is on the type of corrupt behaviour, but the following analysis will also consider and discuss other factors, such as the spatial distribution of corruption between sectors and levels of government and actors involved (cf. Andersson 2002, p. 33; Punch, 1985).

**Extent, Types, and Variation of Corruption in Sweden**

First, looking at country level comparisons by using perceptions-based indicators, Sweden ranks among the most fortunate countries. In Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index, which is often used as a proxy for real levels of corruption (but note criticism of this e.g. Andvig, 2005; Heywood & Rose, 2014), Sweden has never had a score below 9 (out of ten) since 2000, and after the introduction of the 0-100 scale not below 88 (Transparency International , 2015b). This has strengthened the impression of Sweden as one of the least corrupt countries in the world. Other similar measures such as the WGI (control of corruption) also present a similar view of Sweden (World Bank, 2012). Accordingly, based on these indicators corruption is a rare phenomenon in Sweden.
Turning from perceptions to people’s own experiences of corruption, one available indicator used to measure this concerns experience of bribery in contacts with public authorities.

According to the Global Corruption Barometer, one per cent of respondents in Sweden in 2006 and 2007 responded yes to the question of whether they had paid a bribe in their contact with a public institution in the last 12 months (Western Europe and EU average was two per cent in 2006 and five per cent in 2007) (Transparency International, 2006, 2007). Several other surveys have then reported similar results of less or around one per cent (Bergh et al., 2013; Charron et al., 2013; European Commission, 2014; Oscarsson, 2010)

Thus, these experience-based data on bribery place Sweden among low-corruption countries, as do perceptions-based corruption measurements. However, this conclusion might also be a result of the fact that perception-based measures tend to capture bribes better than other forms of corruption, therefore indicating the same focus as experience-measures of bribery. Also, the perceptions-based measures above tend not to pick up official misconduct at the local level (Linde & Erlingsson, 2013).

In contrast to the above country-level results for bribery, Linde and Erlingsson (2013, pp. 591-592) show that Swedes perceive corruption as rather widespread (also compared to results for their Nordic counterparts). This finding holds regardless of whether respondents are asked what per cent of politicians and civil servants they think are involved in corruption (only 11 and 8 per cent respectively believed them not at all to be involved in corruption), or if they are asked about the impartiality of civil servants. Regarding the latter, 41 per cent of respondents thought that the treatment one gets from civil servants definitely depends on personal contacts. Similarly, the European Commission (2014, p. 6) reported that 44 per cent
of respondents in Sweden view corruption as widespread (which still is lower than the EU average of 74).

So, although large-N country level corruption indices (e.g. CPI and WGI) point to very limited levels of corruption, there are other data that give a different impression. Next, the article looks at some data on possible spatial distribution of corruption.

**Variation Across Sectors and Levels of Government**

Turning to indications of sectorial and level-of-government variation, few people perceive various spheres of society as corruption-free; rather, responses tend to lie in the middle of the scale. Respondents (in 2011) rated the extent to which groups of professionals are involved in any type of corruption (scale from 1 “not at all” to 7 “to a very large degree”) as follows (mean values): politicians 4.0, public servants 4.1 and businesspeople 4.5 (Bauhr & Färdigh, 2012, p. 184; similar results in Bauhr & Oscarsson, 2011, p. 86; Linde & Erlingsson, 2013, p. 591; Transparency International, 2006, p. 23).

In terms of citizens’ perceptions of which institutions are more affected by corruption, results are similar to those found in other EU countries (i.e. political parties, the media and business) (Table 1), though institutions in general have better scores in Sweden.

**TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE**

Table 2 also include perceptions about corruption (measured as bribes and favouritism) across level of government. Corruption is perceived as least common in state institutions (migration
board and police), followed by trade unions, and then subnational government (county
councils and municipalities), while most common in business.

TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

Thus, these perception measures show corruption to vary across sectors and levels of
government and in the public sector, to be most common in municipalities (which have
suffered from many revelations). Interestingly, 92.4 of top politicians and public servants in
municipalities have never experienced offers of money or favours in exchange for preferential
decisions, which still leaves a substantial number with such experience (although this does not
say to which extent these offers were accepted). Moreover, they perceive corruption to vary
within municipalities across activities (with technical and construction sectors at the top)
(Bergh et al., 2013, p. 90).

So far, mainly perception data have been relied on, and to lesser extent experience data. One
way to add to this picture is to examine corruption cases reported to and investigated by legal
authorities. The advantage of such hard data is that it is based on actual cases of corruption;
however, there are drawbacks. In cross-country comparisons, the number of legal cases might
compare the effectiveness of legal authorities in bringing offenders to justice rather than the
incidence of corruption across countries. Within-country comparison (the case here) is
affected by the fact that cases reported to legal authorities might not mirror the true level or
distribution of corruption. Penal data in Sweden are heavily focused on bribes, and the
distribution of bribes across sectors and levels of government might not the same as for the
distribution of other types of corruption. Selection effects are also likely, because some types
of corruption might be easier to hide (Hols Salén & Korsell, 2013), and the propensity to
report cases might vary across organisations. Nonetheless, for the purpose of investigating
whether different types of measurements reveal different pictures of corruption, these data are
very useful.

The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention has looked at all alleged cases of
corruption reported to the Anti-Corruption Unit at the Swedish Prosecution Authority 2003-
2011 – a total of 684 investigated cases and 1,248 (reduced below due to certain data being
invalid) alleged offenders (Hols Salén & Korsell, 2013, p. 7). Cases of alleged corruption,
which almost entirely concerned bribery, were rather evenly distributed among state
government (27 per cent), local and regional government (26 per cent), and the private sector
(34 per cent) (Table 3). Those alleged of bribe-giving were mainly from the private sector,
while the vast majority of alleged bribe-takers were from the public sector.

TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

If these figures are compared with the number of convictions, the relationship between state
government and local and regional government changes significantly. The share of state
government offenders increases, while local and regional government offenders drop to just
10 per cent. So here, local government does not stand out as more corruption prone.
Consequently it is interesting to note that the Swedish Public Employment Act (section 22)
requires state agencies to report for prosecution employees who are reasonably suspected of
offences, including bribery and misuse of office (in cases when the offences are assumed to
result in other sanctions than fines). But these requirements do not apply to county councils
and municipalities, which in general is considered as more vulnerable than national
government (Andersson, 2002; Andersson & Erlingsson, 2012; Bergh et al., 2013; Erlingsson,
2006; Erlingsson, Bergh, & Sjölin, 2008), thereby implying a risk that cases in these authorities to a greater extent are handled internally and fewer cases being reported (Falk, 2015, p. 60).

**Corruption Types and Variation**

Let us now continue with how convictions are distributed according to different types of corruption cross sectors and levels of government (Table 4). The vast majority concern bribe offences and only a few concern local government.

**TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE**

For non-bribery offences the per cent committed by persons working for the state government is also higher than for local government, although not to the same extent. However, cases are too few for generalizing. So, let us see whether the same distribution for non-bribery offences remains if looking at alleged offences rather than just convictions. As the number of offences is still relatively small, however, even here caution is needed in terms of drawing conclusions.

In Table 5, instances of alleged breach of faith against one’s principal are almost evenly divided between the public and private sector, in contrast to conviction figures in Table 4, where no case involved the public sector. Results for misuse of office and fraud are though quite similar whether looking at convictions or alleged cases.

**TABLE 5 ABOUT HERE**
But what are corruption offences (reported to the Anti-Corruption Unit) concretely about? The majority of bribe-givers are suspected of trying to get recipients to make or abstain from particular decisions, to disclose information or to strengthen relations (Hols Salén & Korsell, 2013). Overwhelmingly, cases concern attempts to influence sales and procurement/purchases (61%), followed by attempts to influence legal processes, inspections and the issuance of permits (Brå, 2007, p. 52). A common denominator among actors involved is close ties between public servants and the business sector, especially in local and regional government (Hols Salén & Korsell, 2013). Hence, conflicts of interest are created.

Many cases concern lower-level positions and simple exchanges. As higher positions were subject to less monitoring (Hols Salén & Korsell, 2013, p. 68), and sophisticated forms of dealing in access and influence may take other forms than breaking legal rules, their scarcity is not unexpected. Moreover, overall cases concern public servants rather than politicians (in state government 75 and 8 per cent respectively with similar local and regional government figures) (Hols Salén & Korsell, 2013, p. 52). This could be contrasted by alleged cases in a national daily where public servants and politicians figured to about the same extent (the latter naturally having high news value). These cases concerned violation of ethical norms as much as legal rules and many of them concerned whether public funds had been used for private matters (Andersson, 2002, pp. 236-37).

Survey 2012 (see Hagevi 2014), provides further information about the frequency of various corruption types. Citizens were asked to what extent (from “own experience” to “just having heard of it”) they had knowledge about whether elected or appointed officials in the public sector, or anyone in contact with the public sector, had offered or been offered money, expensive gifts, expensive trips, or someone getting a job due to contacts or kin. In general,
respondents had less experience of the three bribery situations than the nepotism situation about getting a job (Andersson & Babajan, 2014).

Dahlström & Sundell (2013) present interesting results on the extent of various instances of corruption and impartiality in municipalities based on perceptions of politicians, from a survey of all politicians in Swedish municipalities (Gilljam & Karlsson, 2013). Concerning corruption, in terms of mean values (scale from 1 Not at all, to 7 To a very large extent), local politicians perceived bribe-giving in terms of a businessperson offering gifts or services to a civil servant in procurement, (1.82) and bribe-taking when an employee asking for a bribe for performing regular public service (1.59), at the lower end of the scale and as less common than corruption concerning recruitment processes: a civil servant is employed despite not being the most qualified candidate (3.45) and a former politician being employed in a leading position in a local government owned company (2.63). Also, in terms of rating of to what extent various government services handle matters impartially (from 1 very little to 5 very large), recruitment (3.33) was perceived as least impartial followed by procurements (3.70), then housing (3.71), building permits (3.85), and environmental permits (3.89) (Dahlström & Sundell, 2013, p. 9 and appendix)

So, citizens and politicians alike rate non-bribery situations as more common. This is interesting given that penal sanctions for conflict of interest violations concerning appointments and procurement in the public sector are weak, despite being areas potentially vulnerable to corrupt influence and being regarded as serious violations by citizens. It is known from studies presenting respondents with various types of corruption situations, that citizens do differentiate in their judgement of various actions, that they associate some actions as likelier to occur at the local government level and others at national level, and that some
situations of favouritism and conflict of interest (e.g. civil servants offering relatives without proper qualifications a job) are judged clearly as corrupt and almost on par with bribery (Andersson, 2002, pp. 111-118 and appendix III, IV; Bauhr & Färdigh, 2012; Bauhr & Oscarsson, 2011).

The Legal Definition of Corruption and Conflict of Interest Issues

In Sweden, the legal definition of what constitutes corruption in the penal code focuses on bribery (the term corruption is not used). Thus, some activities and behaviours defined as corruption in the conceptual discussion (above) are not legally so. However, they are often still illegal but defined as other offences. This is true for cases of corruption that would legally be classified as, for example, breach of faith committed by an agent against his principal, misuse of office, fraud or embezzlement. Bribery offences concern giving and taking bribes (Penal Code, chapter 10, section 5a-c), and since 2012 (Regeringens proposition, 2011/12:79, p.1) trading in influence (Penal Code, chapter 10, section 5d) and negligent financing of bribery (chapter 10, section 5e), which somewhat widened the penal code definition of corruption.

The way in which corruption is legally dealt with in Sweden is also illuminated by how the anti-corruption unit of the Swedish Prosecution Authority deals with corruption; its remit is to handle cases of corruption laid down in the penal code as well as other cases “closely related to these crimes” (Åklagarmyndigheten, 2012). In practise, “closely related” concerns different aspects of abuses of power that have the potential to affect the population’s confidence in how authorities carry out their responsibilities (Stetler, 2012). But most corrupt acts reported as misuse of office, fraud and breach of trust are dealt with by Local Public Prosecution Offices
and are therefore not part of the Anti Corruption Unit figures (Falk, 2015, p. 17). As shown in
tables 4 and 5, reported alleged offences were limited, and convictions few.

Another indicator of the legal definition of corruption is actions and opinions expressed by
other state authorities. The basic foundation of their stance is, of course, the penal code
definition, but sometimes a state authority manifests an interest in the issue in a broader sense.
For example, the government, when commissioning the Agency for Public Management to
study corruption, stipulated the use of Transparency International’s definition of corruption
(i.e. using a position of power to benefit of oneself or a closely related interest) (Statskontoret,
2012, p. 249).

These observations indicate that over the last fifteen years, what legally constitutes corruption
in Sweden has broadened somewhat, although bribery is still emphasized.

Looking to the legal framework to ensure impartiality and integrity in public administration, a
natural starting point is the principle of professional impartiality of public administration. The
Instrument of Government (chapter 1, article 9) stipulates that “Courts of law, administrative
authorities and others performing public administration functions shall pay regard in their
work to the equality of all before the law and shall observe objectivity and impartiality”.

While the most obvious conflict of interest violations, e.g. accepting bribes and embezzlement
(Willbern, 2001, pp. 118-119), are regulated in the penal code, other, more subtle expressions
of disqualification and incompatible interests are not. Conflict of interest situations
(disqualification) in the public sphere are defined and guided by the Administrative Procedure
Act. It sets out instances that are considered to be conflicts (section 11) and prohibits a civil
servant with a conflict of interest from processing a case, and requires him/her to give notice
about a conflict (section 12). Rules in the Riksdag Act (chapter 2, article 11) and the Local
Government Act (chapter 5, article 20; chapter 6, article 24) apply to elected members of
assemblies. Hence, members are not to deal with matters that concern themselves or people
close to them. Moreover, the Public Employment Act (section 7) prohibits extra-occupational
activities that could harm confidence in the impartiality of public officials or the reputation of
the agency. (This rule applies to all levels of government.)

But there are also areas without general regulation. There is no general, civil service code of
conduct. For staff in the public sector, there are rules about conflicts of interest and upholding
objectivity, but no specific disclosure requirements concerning assets and financial interests.
Post-employment work restrictions against high-level public servants moving to other jobs in
the private sector are limited, e.g. a minister can leave cabinet for a job in a lobbying firm.8

Moreover, the existing conflict of interest regulation provides only limited possibilities to
impose penal sanctions for conflict of interest violations involving appointments, sales and
procurement9 in the public sector – all functions which potentially are vulnerable to corrupt
influence. These activities are not considered to be an exercise of public authority, which is a
prerequisite for prosecution under the Criminal Code’s rules on professional misconduct, i.e.
misuse of office. In practice, individuals are not punished in such cases unless other articles in
the penal code are violated, e.g. bribe-taking.10 Numerous irregularities can occur in
connection with these activities, e.g. actions that advantage one’s own or another person’s
interests, and yet fall short of being actual bribes (Falk, 2009; Molander, 2009). Hence, this
might disguise some of the problems of corruption, and also help explain the low number of
corruption cases concerning these matters and the few convictions for misuse of office (see Table 5).

**Conclusion**

Standard corruption measurement implicitly treats corruption as a one-dimensional phenomenon (measured by a single score) that can vary in incidence between countries or other geographical entities, but not in form. In practice, they also tend to substitute corruption for bribery. Empirical accuracy then hinges upon whether or not bribery is a good proxy for corruption, i.e. that bribery is the dominant and characteristic form of corruption in all countries, or that, at a minimum, it represents corruption equally well (or poorly) in different countries. However, because forms of corruption are theoretically expected to vary across countries (as well as within them), this article argues that the degree to which bribery constitutes a suitable proxy for corruption differs across countries (i.e. it is more accurate for some countries than others).

So what do we learn from the Swedish case? Our view of corruption, its forms and variation does indeed depend on how corruption is defined and measured. Types of corruption other than bribery are important, yet the standard measurements used in comparative research do not capture them.

One example of how the estimate of corruption depends on what is measured is citizens’ perception of corruption in the public sector as a substantial problem, despite indicating that they themselves seldom pay bribes. One interpretation of this could be that respondents are dishonest about their own behaviour, while media revelations about corruption scandals may
lead them to overestimate public sector corruption among politicians and public officials (or simply being dissatisfied with public service might have an effect) in comparison with Sweden’s standard low-corruption position. Another plausible interpretation is that bribery indeed is an infrequent phenomenon, but this does not automatically mean that other types of corruption are equally uncommon. Apparently, citizens understand that corruption is more than bribery and includes interest conflicts, undue influence and favouritism.

Moreover, legal regulations hardly capture the types of corruption that Swedish citizens consider to be important. The legal definition of corruption (which, in Sweden, is basically bribery) influences what type of corruption is exposed and penalised, and therefore also the assessment of how much corruption there is in various sectors and at different levels of government.

But as noted in relation to some of the vulnerabilities (procurement, sales and appointments) pertinent for the Swedish case, criminal sanctions are relatively weak and particularly so for the forms of corruption that are most expected to occur, e.g. conflicts of interest and undue influence. This is also likely to have consequences for the number of corruption cases that are reported.

There are two significant implications of the foregoing discussion:

- Unidimensional definitions and measures of corruption are of limited help in understanding corruption in a particular country, as they fail to recognise that corruption varies in form, across sectors, and across levels of government. This can lead to misinterpretation of the prevalence and nature of corruption in that setting, and a focus on corruption types/problems that are not the most pressing. This might also
have policy implications if measures are adopted that overlook important
vulnerabilities and the corruption that actually exists.

- There is a discrepancy in how well unidimensional measures and definitions capture
corruption across national settings that is not expected to be randomly distributed. This
is because bribery tends to be captured better than other forms of corruption, and the
degree to which bribery can serve as a proxy for overall corruption varies depending
on type of society and the corruption syndrome distinctive of it. In established
democracies with highly developed economy and low corruption, such as Sweden,
where the “influence market” corruption syndrome is a characteristic, their accuracy is
particularly poor. In such settings, bribery is more likely only the tip of the corruption
ice berg, and undue influence and conflicts of interest are more frequent occurrences.

After having identified the problems with the use of single-score standard measurements,
particularly with regard to low-corruption countries, the way forward is a multi-dimensional
approach. This involves increasing the set of available quantitative data on various corruption
types and even more so, given the way changes in governance and public administration
affects the public-private boundary and the understanding of corruption, to conduct further in-
depth and largely qualitative case studies (e.g. vulnerability analysis and ethnographic studies
of corruption) that nuance the understanding of corruption. Such studies should aim to capture
and discuss the role of conflicts of interest and how these are treated by the political and the
legal systems.

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References

Administrative Procedure Act. Förvaltningslagen (SFS 1986:223)


Stetler, G. 2012. Director of the National Anti-Corruption Unit at the Swedish Prosecution Authority, telephone interview conducted by the author 2012-12-18.


**Notes**

1 Conceptually, Rothstein (2013, p. 16) defines quality of government broadly as “having impartial government institutions for the exercise of public power”. For empirical applications see Charron (2013a, 2013b).

2 There are also alternative indicators without focus on corruption per se, e.g. comparing vulnerability for and institutional strength to resist corruption and expenditure tracking where money is followed to see how much is siphoned off (e.g. Transparency International, 2015a, Golden & Picci, 2005). To go deeper into the drawbacks and advantages of using data based on perceptions, experience, public opinion, expert views, hard data etc. is outside the scope of this article (for this see e.g. Reinikka & Svensson, 2003; UNDP, 2008; Heywood, 2015b; Torsello, 2015).

3 The European Commission (2014, p. 12) found conflicts of interest in decision-making, allocation of public funds and public procurement to be common in many EU states.

4 For an extensive overview (in Swedish) of corruption in Sweden, see Bergh, Erlingsson, Sjölin, and Öhrvall (2013).

5 Concerning the importance of distinguishing between different types for the understanding of corruption (e.g. Alatas, 1990: 3), it has for example been shown that bureaucratic organisation (e.g. recruitment procedures and wages) affects grand and petty corruption differently (Dahlström, 2015, pp. 111, 114-117).

6 In Sweden 97 per cent judged it as wrong/completely wrong for a public official to ask for a favour or bribe in exchange for his/her service (Bergh et al., 2013, p. 85).

7 The Swedish Penal Code defines Breach of faith as when someone abuses a position of trust managing financial matters or matters requiring technical expertise, causing the principal harm (Penal Code, chapter 10, section 5). Misuse of office is when a person who, by action or commission, intentionally or through carelessness, disregards the duties of his office (chapter 20, section 1). Embezzlement is the disregarding of professional responsibilities connected with the handling of assets belonging to another, for the purpose of obtaining material gain or receiving some advantage (chapter 10, section 1-3). Fraud involves misleading another party to engage in action that is advantageous for the initiator and harmful for the other person (chapter 9, sections 1, 3, 11). One should keep in mind that the legal definition of these offences might not correspond with the definition and typology of corruption developed above, in terms of abusing public power for illicit gain.

8 GRECO (2009, pp. 2-3) has criticized this regulative paucity but Sweden has defended its position stressing the positive effects of having a flexible labour market allowing movement between the public and private sector. Corruption has traditionally been low on the agenda and the government has also referred to the country’s favourable position on the CPI and paucity of legal cases responding to such international peer review (Andersson, 2012, pp. 99-102).

9 In Sweden 28 per cent (EU average 33) of respondent companies that had taken part in public procurement thought that corruption had prevented them from winning contracts (European Commission, 2014, p. 25).

10 Public authority is exercised when a public authority is in a position of authority in which it wields decision-making power on another person’s benefits, rights, obligations, disciplinary punishment or other similar condition (Falk, 2009, p. 29). But appointments, sales and public procurement are regarded as agreements/contracts between two equal parties, rather than such a situation of power. Concerning punishment, labour laws (above) might imply disciplinary sanctions if regulations such as the Public Employment Act’s requirement to maintain impartiality are violated. The Public Procurement Act gives suppliers the right to appeal contract decisions made by authorities. Authorities may pay damages if found to have acted improperly.
Table 1. Perceived corruption in various sectors, 2007 (mean values)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sectors</th>
<th>Political parties</th>
<th>Parliament</th>
<th>Private sector</th>
<th>Media</th>
<th>CSOs</th>
<th>Religious bodies</th>
<th>Legal system/ Judiciary</th>
<th>Medical services</th>
<th>Police</th>
<th>Permit</th>
<th>Registry and Permit and Tax Revenue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU/WE</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Number of survey respondents: Sweden = 1,000; EU/WE = 21,352. Question: To what extent do you perceive the following sectors in this country to be affected by corruption? (from 1 – “not at all corrupt” – to 5 – “extremely corrupt”).

Table 2. Perceptions of corruption by sector, Sweden, 2012, per cent* and balance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Companies</th>
<th>Trade unions</th>
<th>Municipalities</th>
<th>County councils</th>
<th>Migration Board</th>
<th>Police</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very common</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quite common</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quite rare</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very rare</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No reply</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Balance</strong></td>
<td><strong>63</strong></td>
<td><strong>30</strong></td>
<td><strong>49</strong></td>
<td><strong>35</strong></td>
<td><strong>12</strong></td>
<td><strong>9</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Due to rounding, the sum of the per cent scores is not always equal to 100.

Note: Number of respondents = 1,544. Question: How common do you think corruption, such as bribes, favouritism and nepotism, is in the following institutions and organisations?
Balance is calculated as follows: (Very common + Quite common) – (Quite rare + Very rare).
Source: Survey 2012 (Hagevi 2014).
Table 3. Reported cases of corruption 2003-2011 by sector (per cent)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>State government</th>
<th>Local &amp; regional govt</th>
<th>Private sector</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alleged offenders</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=1211)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convicted persons*</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=267)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Due to rounding, the sum of the per cent scores is not equal to 100.

Note: Other includes private persons and associations not belonging to the other categories.
Source: based on data of alleged corruption reported to the Anti-Corruption Unit 2003-2011 as reported in Hols Salén and Korsell 2013: 26-27.
Table 4. Number of convictions, by type of corruption and sector, 2003-2011, in per cent (and absolute numbers).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>State govt</th>
<th>Local &amp; regional govt</th>
<th>Private sector</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Convictions, total* (267)</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving a bribe (84)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking a bribe (138)</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misuse of office (5)</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breach of faith committed by an agent against one’s principal (10)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fraud* (11)</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other crime* (19)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Due to rounding, the sum of the per cent scores is not equal to 100.

Note: Other includes private persons and associations not belonging to the other three categories. Other crime includes document forgery, lying about the accuracy of information in a document/statement/etc., obstruction of justice in tax cases, embezzlement, industrial espionage, and crimes against the Law On Certain International Sanctions.

Source: based on data in Hols Salén and Korsell 2013: 27.
Table 5. Alleged instances of non-bribery corruption offences, by type and sector, 2003-2011, per cent (and absolute numbers).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Non-bribery corruption offences, total (137)</th>
<th>State govt</th>
<th>Local &amp; regional govt</th>
<th>Private sector</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Breath of faith committed by an agent against ones principal (77)</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misuse of office (25)</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fraud (19)</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other crime (16)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Other includes private persons and associations not belonging to the other three categories. Other crime includes document forgery, lying about the accuracy of information in a document/statement/etc., obstruction of justice in tax cases, embezzlement, industrial espionage, and crimes against the Law on Certain International Sanctions.