



UNIVERSITY OF
GOTHENBURG

THE **QOG** INSTITUTE

QUALITY OF GOVERNMENT

Perceptions of Corruption in Sweden

Monika Bauhr

Naghmeh Nasiritousi

Henrik Oscarsson

Anna Persson

QoG WORKING PAPER SERIES 2010:8

THE QUALITY OF GOVERNMENT INSTITUTE
Department of Political Science
University of Gothenburg
Box 711
SE 405 30 GÖTEBORG

April 2010

ISSN 1653-8919

Perceptions of Corruption in Sweden
Monika Bauhr
NaghmeH Nasiritousi
Henrik Oscarsson
Anna Persson
QoG Working Paper Series 2010:8
April 2010
ISSN 1653-8919

Monika Bauhr
The Quality of Government Institute
Department of Political Science
University of Gothenburg
monika.bauhr@pol.gu.se

Henrik Oscarsson
The Quality of Government Institute
Department of Political Science
University of Gothenburg
henrik.oscarsson@pol.gu.se

NaghmeH Nasiritousi
The Quality of Government Institute
Department of Political Science
University of Gothenburg
naghmeH.nasiritousi@pol.gu.se

Anna Persson
The Quality of Government Institute
Department of Political Science
University of Gothenburg
anna.persson@pol.gu.se

I. Introduction

Sweden consistently ranks at the bottom of world corruption leagues (Transparency International CPI 2009; Transparency International Global Corruption Barometer 2007). In 2009, Sweden was - jointly with Singapore - ranked the third least corrupt country in the world by Transparency International. Only New Zealand and Denmark were being ranked as less corrupt countries. In addition, the World Bank (2009) ranks Sweden among the countries with comparatively high control of corruption. Yet, the literature has been slow to further explore the perceptions of corruption among ordinary citizens in Sweden and other countries with low levels of corruption. Instead, the existing research focuses primarily on perceptions of corruption in countries with high levels of corruption. For example, for a couple of years now, the Afro Barometer has captured perceptions of corruption among the African citizenry. In a similar vein, the Latino Barometer has been concerned with how corruption is perceived among Latin American citizens. In an attempt to fill this empirical gap – and in order to provide much-needed comparative data on how corruption is perceived by ordinary citizens in low-corruption countries - this paper explores the perceptions and attitudes towards corruption among Swedish citizens. Particularly, we are interested in how citizens in societies with low levels of corruption define corruption, how widespread corruption is perceived to be, and the extent to which citizens morally approve of corruption. Important to say, is that the aim of the paper is not to test or develop any theories on why corruption tends to be less widespread in

some countries than in others, but to provide some data useful to test and develop such theories in line with the data provided by, for example, the Afro and Latino Barometers.

The paper is structured as follows. In section II we present our measurements. In section III, we begin the empirical analyses with a thick description of Swedish citizens' definitions of corruption based on the open-ended answers from the recently concluded SNES Internet panel. Thereafter, we explore respondents' perceptions of how frequent different types of malpractices are (Section IV), and to what extent they are perceived as morally justifiable (V). Our findings are summarized in section VI.

The survey reveals that Swedish people generally condemn corruption as being morally wrong. However, some forms of corruption are still more accepted than others. In addition, the results reveal that most people in Sweden perceive the level of corruption to be relatively low. Yet, also in terms of this result, some variations can be found. More specifically, the results reveal that there are reasons to consider the existence of other forms of corruption than the illegal ones.

II. Measuring Perceptions of Corruption

This article examines new data collected in Sweden on perceptions of corruption. The analyzed data was collected in October 2009 using a web questionnaire with 1 452 participants of the Swedish National Election Study Internet Panel (SNES Internet Panel). This standing panel of respondents was recruited in the summer of 2006 before the Swedish National election (September 17th). We programmed the web survey so that the respondents were automatically randomized into four groups that were asked different sets of questions (see table 1) about their perceptions of corruption. All four sets comprised both open-ended and closed-ended questions of corruption, designed to tap respondents' definitions and perceptions of corruption in Sweden (see Appendix for printouts of the original web questionnaire).

The open-ended questions were also specifically designed to capture understandings and perceptions of corruption that lie outside the range of standard conceptualizations. While corruption is a broad and multifaceted term, most academic scholars and international organizations define corruption as something similar to *the abuse of power for private gain*. This definition of corruption covers both bureaucratic and political corruption in forms of, among other things, bribery, fraud, extortion, clientelism, and nepotism. However, although this definition of corruption is pretty straightforward, its application to real life situations is not always clear-cut. Imagine for example the following scenarios: campaign financing, employment of family or friends, politicians who listen to a lobby group against the wishes of their voters, politicians or bureaucrats who decide on matters in which they may have an (economic) interest. In each of these cases, arguments can be made both for and against these acts being corrupt. In fact, views about whether these cases are considered to be various forms of corruption are likely to differ across time and space, and should thus be part of any study concerning perceptions of corruption.

Table 1

Overview of Study Design and Survey Questions asked in the SNES Internet Panel Study

QA1: "In your opinion, about how many politicians/public employees/businessmen in Sweden are involved in corruption?" Closed-end response alternatives were used for each of the three categories: [Almost none/A Few/Some/Quite Many/Almost Everybody/Don't know]

QA2: "How would you define the concept of corruption? Please give examples of behavior that you would define as corrupt among politicians/public officials/businessmen in Sweden?" Open-ended answers were registered for each of the three categories.

QA3: "If you have any other thoughts on corruption in Sweden, you are welcome to write them down here." Open-ended answers were registered.

QB1: "How would you like to define the concept of corruption?" Open-ended answers were registered.

QB2: "If you have any other thoughts about corruption in Sweden, you are welcome to write them down here." Open-ended answers were registered.

QC1: "In your opinion, how often does it happen in Sweden that...?" List of eight examples given. Closed-end response categories: [Never/Seldom/Quite Often/Very Often/ Don't Know]. In addition, two of the rows were left empty in order for the respondents to provide their own examples of corrupt behavior.

QC2: "How would you like to define the concept of corruption?" Open-ended answers were registered.

QC3: "If you have any other thoughts about corruption in Sweden, you are welcome to write them down here." Open-ended answers were registered.

QD1: "In your opinion, to what extent can the following actions be justified?" A seven-point scale was provided for each example given, ranging from 1="Never justifiable" to 7="Always justifiable".

QD2: "How would you like to define the concept of corruption?" Open-ended answers were registered.

QD3: "If you have any other thoughts about corruption in Sweden, you are welcome to write them down here." Open-ended answers were registered.

Although the SNES Internet panel is not a representative sample of the Swedish electorate, for the purpose of this particular study, a self recruited sample of respondents will suffice given that there is enough variation in key variables¹. Moreover, the analyses of the open-ended

¹ The SNES Internet panel consists of participants that were self recruited during the election campaign of the Swedish National Election in 2006. Compared to the electorate, the panel participants are younger, more educated, more politically interested and knowledgeable, have more trust in politicians, have a stronger party identification and tend to lean towards the ideological right. About 65 percent of the panel participants are male. Evaluations have shown that the respondents in the SNES Internet panel quite well mirror the "broad band citizenry" in Sweden at that time, i.e. the subpopulation that have access to broad band Internet connection in their households (Nilsson et al. 2007). At the time of the election in 2006, sixty percent of Swedish households had access to a high speed broad band connection and more than seventy percent of the households had Internet access. In addition, the panel offers surprisingly good variation in potentially important variables like political interest, media exposure, trust in politicians, left-right ideology, and party sympathy.

answers do not suffer from the lack of a representative sample, since the main purpose is simply to come up with an empirically saturated list of ways in which ordinary people define or think about corruption as a phenomenon.

As far as the quantitative analyses are concerned, one should not pay too much attention to the absolute estimates provided in the tables, since they are only representative for the participants of the Internet panel. Under no circumstances should inferences be made to the Swedish public. However, having said that, we also know from experience that, for instance, the rank orderings of the items provided and the correlations of the measurements tend to be more robust than merely estimates. We believe that the results of the SNES Internet Panel will be able to give us information regarding how well different question formats work. In addition, the SNES Internet Panel has the potential to provide us with good ideas about the kinds of results that would be generated should the questions be asked to a representative sample of Swedes at a later stage. Thus, the information provided by this pilot study will put us in a better position to develop new question formats. In spite of the limits of generalization, we believe the data gives an indication about how the scope and width of the corruption problem is perceived in Sweden, including which categories of corruption that citizens view as important in Sweden.

The Swedish data is interesting for three reasons. Firstly, because experts rank Sweden as one of the least corrupt countries in the world (Corruption Perceptions Index), an analysis of whether Swedish citizens agree with this view in their experiences of corruption is relevant for anti-corruption work. Does the Corruption Perceptions Index give an accurate picture of the corruption situation in different countries?

Secondly, in the SNES Internet Panel, we ask participants to offer their own definition of corruption. These views are expected to be closely linked to the definitions offered by the international organizations (often Western) that carry out anti-corruption work in member countries. However, they may also reveal views of corruption that are different from the focus of many corruption indices. This, due to the fact that even countries with high quality of government face incidences of corruption, albeit they may look different from those definitions of corruption that are most common.

Thirdly, the data can be analyzed in future studies to explore if perceptions of the scope, as well as the rights and wrongs, of corruption presented in a low-corruption country like Sweden markedly differ from those found in high corruption countries. This, in turn, could help us further test and advance various types of micro- and meso-level theories concerned with why some countries are more corrupt than others, in the end providing important insights that could be used to combat corruption. In fact, there is now a general consensus holding that corruption is the key reason for under-development and poverty (Transparency International 2006; World Bank 2007). Reducing corruption is thus not just a moral but also an economic imperative. However, before we can successfully fight corruption, we need to know more about the character of the problem in different contexts. In the next three sections, we provide a deeper understanding of the problem of corruption in Sweden.

III. Swedish conceptualizations of corruption

In much of the anti-corruption literature, the term corruption is associated with kleptocratic governments or bribe-taking civil servants. In fact, many anti-corruption strategies focus on reforming public sector systems in order to provide incentives against taking bribes and kickbacks. This focus on public sector incentives can be explained by the reported frequency of bribe-taking among public officials in developing countries and the large costs that are associated with such practices. In other words, fighting corruption is a means for achieving better economic development in developing countries. One of the founders of Transparency International, Jeremy Pope (1999:97), summarizes the objective of anti-corruption policies as follows: "Combating corruption is not an end in itself; it is not a blinkered crusade to right all the wrongs of the world. Rather, it is instrumental to the broader goal of more effective, fair and efficient government".

However, the way in which this objective has been implemented has been criticized by a number of observers who argue that only practices that are associated with economic underdevelopment attract the attention of international organizations (Khan 2000; Hanlon 2004). Khan (2000) for example, argues that corruption is a convenient scapegoat when the economy is underperforming. He illustrates this point using the reactions of international organizations after the Asian financial crisis at the end of the 1990s. Practices that had previously generated economic growth in these countries were now identified as corrupt and were blamed for the financial crisis. Thus, there is a risk that international organizations only launch anti-corruption campaigns in countries with economic difficulties. That is, corruption is only seen as corruption insofar as it leads to underdevelopment, potentially excluding a large number of acts that could also be argued to be corrupt.

Hanlon (2004) offers a similar criticism by noting how international organizations do not take corruption allegations seriously in countries that are experiencing rapid economic growth. Using the case of Mozambique, he argues that international organizations may even promote corruption by supporting governments that are corrupt but are advancing economically. Moreover, in the strive to promote market economies in developing countries, international organizations may increase corruption in countries through privatizations or the downsizing of governments that deepen the problems of low pay and reproduce "informal payment systems and other forms of corruption" (Shepherd 2000:282).

In fact, our Swedish survey participants note that there are types of practices also in advanced economies that can be viewed as corruption other than the usual suspects. The practices they refer to have recently been discussed in the literature as "influence" or "legal corruption". Hellmann et al. (2000) define influence occurring "when firms are able to affect the formation of laws in order to derive rents without recourse to illicit private payments to public officials". Similarly, legal corruption "involves the manipulation of formal legal processes to produce laws (and thus legally sanctioned rules) that benefit private interests at huge expense to the general public" (Campos & Pradhan 2007:9). Daniel Kaufmann (2008), for example, writes that:

”Corruption ought to also encompass some acts that may be legal in a strict narrow sense, but where the rules of the game and the state laws, policies, regulations and institutions may have been shaped in part by undue influence of certain vested interests for their own private benefit (and not for the benefit of the public at large). It may not be strictly illegal, but unethical and extra-legal”

Examples of the occurrence of legal corruption in Sweden are, according to our survey respondents, politicians that favor certain large companies, lobby groups that dictate policies, and the appointment of high-level positions based on political color rather than merit.

Some politicians might favor a few big companies.

Politicians let themselves be flattered in different ways by lobby groups.

Economic corruption, fiddling with taxes etc.

Our justice system is thoroughly corrupted by the industry. Look at the copyright trials, it is a total parody of justice when the members of the court are members of organizations that want to work FOR copyrights and who are actively supported by those who gain advantages from it!! Then the Minister of Culture attends a dinner party hosted by the same industry, gets drunk and makes a complimentary speech about unfinished legal processes and her behavior does not even cause a scandal!

The judicial system in today’s Sweden is, to put it bluntly, ridiculous. For instance, the Pirate Bay trials, where people even publically say that they are corrupt and proud of being so.... The time when impartiality in legal cases was a virtue is over. Now the judiciary should improve itself by being a member of different interest groups that represent one of the parties, or at least being best friends with that party.... All of this to get an outcome as fair as possible.

Several respondents point to the practice of bending the rules for individuals with high positions in society, such as politicians or celebrities:

There is a more favorable reading of the rules and guidelines when it comes to ‘VIPs’ than applied for ‘normal’ Swedes and there exists a lack of respect for the intentions and the strict meaning of the law.

Building permits for celebrities are more easily approved... Local business people receive building permits in their municipality.... This also applies for local politicians... Regional politicians and business people get the same advantages over a bigger area... The same of course goes for other celebrities... Truly big celebrities can almost do as they please... For instance, Stenmark, Borg, Sundin and so on....This is no criticism against the mentioned celebrities (they are not the ones doing anything wrong)... Rather, corrupt local politicians and/or civil servants responsible for building permits... Everyone is not equal before the law... . Marianne Samuelson was probably not right when she said that business people should have additional advantages... But jobs are important... It is however the way it works - something that not all those who are in a position to gain let on.... I hate hypocrisy and double standards...

Thus, there is a perception that the definition of corruption should include such practices that are not strictly illegal, but which could lead to undue influence by working around the rules.

I have experienced how it is possible, with the help of lawyers, to influence weak and stressed civil servants to make decisions that go against common conceptions of justice and ethics.

One writes laws and gives privileges to interest groups, who in return "reward" this by supporting the party in propaganda and elections.

Some express that certain practices that can amount to corruption are "inbuilt in the system" and mention the close relationship between certain interest groups and labor organizations and political parties.

We do not have a tradition in our country with open bribes, but we have practices that border on corruption that are built into the system. My answer follows from this. Interest organizations, associations, unions and so on are closely connected to above all the Social Democrats and support the party in a fairly undemocratic way, which we are so used to that we do not define it as corruption, but logically and objectively that is certainly the case.

Others point out bonus systems, cartels, monopolies, and gift cultures that circumvent democratic principles as signs of corrupt practices that are tolerated by society.

Appointments to higher posts, bonuses and "fringe benefits" in the moral grey zone for those who move in the right circles. Far away from the average Swede's reality.

Members of parliament should have to show their share holdings and all incomes on the side.

In the East, open corruption reflects "give me something and I will do it". In Sweden, there exists some sort of hidden corruption. For example, getting advantages through bonuses, cartel creations, monopolies, point systems, gift systems, discounts and so on.

Often it seems to be about back scratching and prestige and less about "money under the table". Unconditional bonus agreements for people in leading positions are also examples of a type of corruption that is taking place more or less openly, with other people's consent – however, without having support from the majority or being treated according to democratic rules.

Sweden has a fairly low level of corruption. But there are instances of corruption in Sweden that do not violate the law. When certain organizations finance political parties and expect to gain influence over politics, it is corruption. The same goes for when the state falls into the hands of a single political party, which was the case during the Social Democratic era.

Although these examples may seem insignificant in comparison to the problems caused by kleptocratic governments and corrupt civil-servants, legal corruption has been identified by some researchers as a major problem. Kaufmann (2009), former Director of the World Bank Institute working on governance and anti-corruption issues, has for example argued that the current financial crisis has its roots in legal corruption. Furthermore, many Swedish survey

participants noted that the type of corruption seen in Sweden may not be costly in terms of money, but can be damaging in terms of undermining trust in government and weakening democratic principles. In other words, a tolerance for some acts that sum up to corruption threatens to disturb the low-corruption equilibrium in society by undermining the institutions that uphold the system.

When private interests manipulate public decisions in the direction of the private interest. In those cases, the exercise of public authority is not impartial and equal for all.

When money and contacts come before the idea of equal treatment for all.

Having explored how Swedes conceptualize corruption, in the next section we turn to the question of how widespread corruption is perceived to be in Sweden. As highlighted in the introductory section of this paper, Sweden is constantly ranked among the least corrupt countries in the world. However, these rankings are based on expert surveys and do not include legal forms of corruption.

IV. The incidence of corruption

Given the ranking of Sweden as a country with very low levels of corruption by international organizations, game-theoretic scholars would probably argue that Sweden is stuck in a low-corruption equilibrium in which mutual expectations about other players in the game being honest bring about a virtuous circle of non-corrupt behavior. However, few empirical studies have so far been conducted which confirm the view of Swedish people expecting other Swedish people to be honest. This section aims to fill this gap.

Much earlier research on perceptions of corruption are based on quite simple and straight forward country comparisons of citizens' opinions of the frequency of corrupt behavior, typically among politicians and public employees (see for example Holmberg 2009). These indicators work well to tap perceptions of how widespread corruption generally is in the respondents' country. Aggregated estimates have been shown to be highly (but not perfectly) correlated with the country's score on popular corruption indices that are based on expert judgments.

However, to allow for more nuanced responses, we developed a new question format that provides a wide range of examples of corrupt behavior to respondents – a format which allows us to map perceptions of the grey zones of corruption. We tried to find examples that vary along legal/moral dimensions, ranging from perfectly illegal activities such as monetary exchanges “under the table”, to activities that are perfectly aligned with fundamental principles of representative democracy (Manin 1997), such as national politicians acting to promote the interests of their home constituency. We also formulated examples that described the exact same behavior but with different actors (public sector doctor versus private doctor).

In our version of the question concerning the general occurrence of corruption, we also included businessmen as a specific group alongside the politicians and public employees (see table

2). Results show that about one fifth of the respondents said “quite many” and “almost everybody” among politicians were involved in corruption (19 percent). The corresponding figures for *public employees* are about the same (17 percent), and for the category *businessmen* somewhat higher (26 percent). In addition, our Internet panel respondents perceive corrupt behavior to be more frequent among businessmen than among politicians and public employees.

Table 2
SNES Internet Panel Participants’ Perceptions of the occurrence of corruption among politicians, public employees and businessmen in Sweden and the correlations of Political Trust (Percentages, tau b).

	Almost None	A Few	Some	Quite Many	Almost Everybody	Don’t Know	Sum	n	Incidence x political trust
Politicians	14	36	29	16	3	2	100	353	-.40
Public Employees	11	36	33	16	1	3	100	353	-.33
Businessmen	6	23	40	22	4	5	100	351	-.14

Note: Results are from the SNES Internet Panel October 2009. Question wording for occurrence of Corruption: “In your opinion, about how many politicians/public employees/businessmen in Sweden is involved in corruption?”. Question wording for political trust: “To what extent do you trust Swedish politicians?”.

As mentioned earlier, raw estimates from the self-recruited respondents in the SNES campaign panel cannot be used to make inferences regarding Swedish citizens in general. However, for evaluation purposes, we also analyzed co-variations with potentially important micro-level characteristics such as for example age, political trust, political knowledge, and left-right ideology. As expected, and most notably, we find negative relationships between general trust in politicians and the perceptions of the incidence of corrupt behavior, in particular for the assessment of incidence of corruption among politicians (see table 2).

To a second group of respondents, we asked a more detailed question where we provided examples of activities which might generate greater variation in judgments (see table 3). According to our panel respondents, the most frequent event is when a private doctor allows a friend or relative to advance in the health care queue. Thirty-seven percent say this occurs “very often”. Interestingly, the exact same nepotistic action taken by a doctor employed in the public sector is perceived to be more infrequent (16 percent saying “very often”).

We also learn that perfectly illegal actions such as bribe taking by public sector employees are not perceived as non-existing in Sweden. Four percent of the respondents answered “very often” regarding the occurrence of a public sector employee asking for a fee to carry out a service that already is a part of his/her job description. The corresponding figure for “offer to speed up the administrative process in exchange for a fee or a return of favor” is 3 percent.

Table 3

SNES Internet Panel participants' perceptions of the occurrence of specific actions (Percentages).

	Never	Seldom	Rather often	Very often	DK	Sum	n
A private doctor allows a friend or close relative to advance in the health care queue	1	16	34	37	12	100	360
A national politician makes a decision that is favorable for the development in his/her constituency	0	17	50	29	4	100	359
A politician uses his/her influence so that his/her family members are given priority to good child care, schooling and health care	6	38	27	20	9	100	361
A business man offers a gift or a favor to a public sector employee to win a contract	3	36	34	19	8	100	360
A public sector employee offers a job to a close relative although the formal qualifications are missing	4	41	32	16	7	100	361
A public sector doctor allows a friend or close relative to advance in the health care queue	5	32	35	16	12	100	361
A public sector employee asks for a fee to carry out a service that already is a part of his/her job description	24	49	11	4	12	100	360
A public sector employee offers to speed up the administrative process in exchange for a fee or a return of favor	22	49	12	3	14	100	362

Note: Results are taken from the SNES Internet Panel, October 2009. Question wording: "In your opinion, how often does it happen in Sweden that...?". Items have been ranked according to the proportion of respondents saying "very often".

When given the opportunity to express themselves more freely, most respondents witness that they personally have had very little experience of corruption in Sweden. Many quote international studies, which show that Sweden has relatively low levels of corruption.

I don't think that is very widespread in Sweden.

It is rather low compared to other countries.

I think that in an international comparison, Sweden has been pretty spared.

After all, I think Sweden is among the countries with the lowest levels of corruption. I don't feel that it is a big, or even medium-sized, problem in Sweden.

Sweden is one of the least corrupt countries in the world as far as I know.
I think Sweden is one of the least corrupt countries in the world.

I don't think Sweden is very corrupt in comparison to many other countries. I have, for instance, experiences from Norway and I think already our neighboring country is more corrupt.

Several responses indicate that Swedes are proud of living in a country with a very low level of corruption. There is a view that the bureaucracy and the tax system work because bribery is such a rare phenomenon.

I am happy to be living in a country where corruption among politicians and civil servants is so low. That means that the tax system works rather well and that many of us want to pay taxes.

Others answer that if there is corruption, it is not visible as money is rarely traded:

I don't think we have any 'expensive' types of corruption, rather it is more about dinners etc that are perceived as something different but provide an indirect position of influence in the decision-making

According to all surveys being conducted, we have been pretty spared from corruption in Sweden, but of course it exists. Perhaps not in the form of pure bribes, but more in the way of certain people exploiting their position, power and contacts.

Thus, a frequent opinion is that Sweden is relatively spared from corruption in its traditional sense, but, trading favors is a form of hidden corruption that is comparatively difficult to capture in the statistics on corruption.

I think that the corruption that exists in Sweden is pretty harmless and in many cases people do not consider themselves to be corrupt since they do not accept lasting things such as money or things with a high value.

For me, corruption is pretty much about MONEY. Sometimes friendships, contacts and perhaps lobby activities could also be included. That would of course change the statistics...

It is fairly widespread, but not as "powerful" as in for example Italy. However, there is a lot of "palm greasing", which has an effect on decisions and prioritizations.

I think the corruption that exists in Sweden is more about providing others with advantages rather than pure money. This fact can make it easier to hide the bribe.

Not very visible – but that does not mean it does not exist..

Finally, while there is some variation in how widespread corruption is perceived to be depending on the type, the general finding is that corruption is not the expected behavior in Sweden such as in many developing countries. Especially forms of corruption which involve monetary transactions are perceived to be rare. However, forms of corruption which do not necessarily involve monetary transactions are typically perceived to be more widespread. In the next section, we explore the extent to which corruption is morally approved in a low-corruption country like Sweden.

V. The moral aspects of corruption

According to Heidenheimer (1978), corruption can be categorized into different shades – white, grey, and black – depending on the extent of what is morally approved of and accepted. Whereas white corruption are acts that a majority of citizens would not find worthy of punishment, black corruption are acts that a majority of people would argue are wrong and should be punishable. Grey acts are those that fall in between white and black corruption. Heidenheimer argues that these categories are flexible and that different behaviors may move from one category to another as countries modernize. In other words, citizens may view the nature of corruption differently in different societies.

We begin the analysis of the moral aspects of corruption in Sweden by looking at general patterns in the data. Respondents in group 3 were provided the same examples as the ones above concerned with the incidences of corruption, but instead, we asked them to assess to what extent the actions can be justified (see table 4). The two examples of illegal bribe-taking were considered “never justifiable” by about ninety percent of the respondents. Other examples of malpractice or misuse of power all scored lower than 2 on a seven-point scale from 1 to 7. This particular set of examples seems to provide a small variance in responses as most of them turn out to be judged as never justifiable. The exception is the assessment of the national politician making a decision that is favorable for the development in his/her constituency, which is perceived as considerably more justifiable than the other actions (mean=3.25). That is, although several respondents argue that the use of public taxes by Swedish politicians to favor their own voter base amounts to corruption, many still saw nothing wrong in this behavior. Participants with this view explained that the action would not be corrupt as long as the decision favoring the politician’s local constituency did not disadvantage other communities. Or in the view of another respondent: “the misuse of ones power cannot always be considered as corruption when politicians favor their constituencies, as it is from them that they received their mandate and thereby partly their tasks”. The two open-ended answers below confirm this view:

My answers have very much been provided on the basis of my hope, sine I believe that Sweden is a country that does not have any large problems of corruption. I do not see any problems with the question regarding national politicians making decisions that favor their home municipality, as long as it does not disadvantage any other municipality since that has not been mentioned in the question. I would rather consider it to be awful if decisions that favor the municipalities were not taken.

In the examples above, I think that the example about the Member of Parliament who favors developments in his/her home municipality is the most difficult one, since such a decision normally also would favor other municipalities and it would therefore be difficult to say that it concerns corruption. In addition, the fact that it benefits many people also makes it harder to regard as corruption, since the politician, his/her relatives and friends, might not directly gain anything from the decision... There is a grey zone for when a civil servant is involved in corruption. It is incredibly important to draw up as clear boundaries as possible, not least for the sake of the civil servant, but also to create a society based on law and order.

Nevertheless, I think (and hope) that Sweden has a very low level of corruption in comparison to many other countries.

Still, a majority of the respondents do not agree that national politicians acting in the interest of the home constituency is a justifiable action. The respondents display an interesting ambivalent attitude towards a fundamental principle of representative democracy: the type of “regional nepotism” that is inherent in most democratic states and a feature that seems to be built into the election system itself.

Table 4
SNES Internet Panel participants’ assessments of to what extent specific actions can be justified (Percentages, Mean).

	Never justifiable				Always justifiable			Sum	n	Mean
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7			
A national politician makes a decision that is favorable for the development in his/her constituency	20	16	21	19	12	8	4	100	373	3.25
A private doctor allows a friend or close relative to advance in the health care queue	46	14	12	12	8	6	2	100	373	1.74
A public sector doctor allows a friend or close relative to advance in the health care queue	68	18	7	5	2	0	0	100	372	1.54
A public sector employee offers a job to a close relative although the formal qualifications are missing	73	16	5	4	1	1	0	100	373	1.46
A business man offers a gift or a favor to a public sector employee to win a contract	85	10	4	1	1	1	1	100	371	1.28
A politician uses his/her influence so that his/her family members are given priority to good child care, schooling and health care	86	10	3	1	0	0	0	100	373	1.22
A public sector employee offers to speed up the administrative process in exchange for a fee or a return of favor	91	6	1	1	1	0	0	100	372	1.15
A public sector employee asks for a fee to carry out a service that already is a part of his/her job description	90	7	2	0	1	0	0	100	373	1.14

Note: Results are taken from the SNES Internet Panel, October 2009. Question wording: “In your opinion, to what extent can the following actions be justified?”. Items are ranked according to respondents’ mean perceptions.

Table 4 shows that the action to allow relatives and friends to advance in the health care queue is perceived to be more justifiable if the action is taken by a private doctor (mean=1.74) than when the action is taken by a doctor in the public sector (mean=1.54). Thus, in the end, even though some forms of corruption seem to be perceived as more acceptable than others, most Swedes seem to agree that most forms of corruption are seldom justifiable.

VI. Summary and conclusion

How do citizens in an internationally conceived low-corruption country perceive the problem of corruption? In this study, we have explored the views of Swedes related to the concept, frequency, as well as the moral justifications of corruption.

As previously argued, Sweden is considered to be one of the least corrupt countries in international comparisons. Yet, few studies have looked at Swedish perspectives on the prevalence and acceptability of corruption. This is significant not only from an academic point of view but also because such studies can be used to inform countries' anti-corruption work. If we know little regarding what type of corruption could be expected in a country like Sweden, and how citizens perceive the level and acceptability of corruption, we have limited knowledge about how well expert indices reflect public perceptions of corruption, what forms of corruption that can coexist with strong economic development, and what types of corruption that can be difficult to eradicate in low corruption countries. The SNES Internet panel is an attempt to begin to address these questions.

Lastly, most of our findings confirm the often highlighted view of Sweden as a country where corruption is rare and morally condemned. In other words, our study reveals that people in Sweden perceive the levels of corruption to be quite low overall, even though some differences can be discerned between different forms of corruption. Businessmen stand out as the group in society being perceived to be the most corrupt, a total of 26 percent of the respondents believed that quite many or all of them engage in corrupt practices. In terms of the occurrence of different types of corrupt acts, the act that was perceived to be most common is a private doctor allowing a friend or close relative to advance in the health care queue. 37 percent perceived this to happen very often. Even the act regarding a national politician making a decision that is favorable for the development of his or her constituency is believed to happen relatively often. 29 percent believed it to take place very often. Outright bribery is, on the other hand, expected to occur very seldom. Only 4 percent of the respondents believe that the scenario of a public sector employee asking for a fee to carry out a service that is already part of his or her job description occurs very often. In a similar vein, a mere 3 percent of the respondents believe that the occurrence of a public sector employee offering to speed up the administrative process in exchange for a fee or in return for a favor happens very often.

When it comes to the degree of the moral approval of corruption, in general, the respondents reveal that the moral acceptance of corruption in Sweden is low. However, even in terms of this factor, there is some variation to be discerned. The corrupt practice that is to the greatest extent morally approved of are instances where national politicians make decisions favoring the development in his or her constituency. 24 percent consider such behavior close to always justifiable. The least accepted behavior are instances where public sector employees ask for a fee to carry out a service that is already part of his or her job description. Only 1 percent of the respondents find such behavior almost always justifiable.

In sum, the results reveal a picture of perceptions of and attitudes towards corruption that we should expect in a country like Sweden, given its rank as one of the least corrupt countries in the world. However, the design of the study offers interesting material, not least since participants provide open-ended answers regarding corruption issues. Thereby, a richer set of definitions of corruption and perceptions of hidden forms of corruption can be gauged among survey participants. The study reveals interesting variations that will benefit from comparisons with countries having other experiences of corruption.

References

Bratton, Michael & van de Walle, Nicolas. (1994). Neopatrimonial regimes and political transitions in Africa. *World Politics*, 46(July), 453-489.

Brusco, Valeria, Nazareno, Marcelo, & Stokes, Susan C. (2004). Vote buying in Argentina. *Latin American Research Review*, 39(2), 66-88

Campos, J. Edgardo and Sanjay Pradhan, "Introduction: Tackling a Social Pandemic", in ed. J. Edgardo Campos and Sanjay Pradhan, *The Many Faces of Corruption Tracking Vulnerabilities at the Sector Level*, (Washington DC: World Bank Publications, 2007)

Grødeland, Åse B., Tatyana Y. Koshechkina, and William L. Miller. "Foolish to Give and Yet More Foolish Not to Take' – In-Depth Interviews with Post-Communist Citizens on Their Everyday Use of Bribes and Contacts'. *Europe-Asia Studies* 50, no. 4 (1998): 651–677.

Heidenheimer, Arnold J. 1978. Political corruption in America: Is it comparable? In Eisenstadt, AJ. et al. *Before Watergate; problem of corruption in American Society*. New York: Brooklyn College

Holmberg, Sören (2009). Perceptions of Corruption in Mass Publics. QoG Working paper Series 2009:24. University of Gothenburg: the Quality of Government Institute (www.qog.pol.gu.se)

Daniel Kaufmann, Mad Money, Legal Corruption, and the Financial Crisis, *The Kaufmann Governance Post*, March 15, 2009, <http://thekaufmannpost.net/mad-money-legal-corruption-and-the-financial-crisis-cramer-vs-stewart-in-comedy-central/>

Kaufmann, Daniel, Capture and the Financial Crisis: An Elephant forcing a rethink of Corruption?, *The Kaufmann Governance Post*, November 3, 2008, <http://thekaufmannpost.net/capture-and-the-financial-crisis-an-elephant-forcing-a-rethink-of-corruption/>

Khan, Mushtaq H. 1998. 'Patron-Client networks and the economic effects of corruption in Asia', *The European Journal of Development Research*, 10: 1, 15 — 39

Khan, Mushtaq, *Rents, Rent-Seeking and Economic Development: Theory and Evidence in Asia*. (ed with Jomo, K.S.) Cambridge : Cambridge University Press 2000. 338pp.

Kitschelt, Herbert (2000). Linkages between citizens and politicians in democratic polities. *Comparative Political Studies*, 33(6/7), 845-879.

Lambsdorff, J. G. (2007). *The New Institutional Economics of Corruption and Reform. Theory, Evidence and Policy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Linde, Jonas (2009). Why feed the hand that bites you? Quality of government and system support in the post-communist EU member states. (forthcoming).

Pope, Jeremy. 1999. "Elements of a Successful Anticorruption Strategy" in Rick Stapenhurst, Sahr John Kpundeh, Curbing corruption: toward a model for building national integrity, Washington DC: The World Bank

Rothstein, Bo (2009) Anti-Corruption: A Big-Bang Theory. QoG Working Paper No. 2007:3. Available at SSRN: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1338614>

Transparency International CPI-report (2009) Ranking of countries according to the Corruption Perception Index. http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi/2009/cpi_2009_table

Transparency International Global Corruption Barometer (2007). http://www.transparency.org/content/download/27256/410704/file/GCB_2007_report_en_02-12-2007.pdf

World Bank report. 2007 <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/NEWS/Resources/Star-report-full.pdf>

Worldwide Governance Indicators, 1996-2008, Washington DC: World Bank, <http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/index.asp>