

## **Prosocial Behavior and its Impact on Corruption and State Capacity**

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### **Abstract**

This paper considers individual and social factors influencing an individual's willingness to condone cheating on taxes by examining country- and individual-level data. Corruption appears to have a positive effect on tax evasion, which hinders a country's state administrative capacity by restricting available resources. Furthermore, an individual's prosocial attributes tend to encourage their opposition to cheating on taxes. By bringing these two outcomes together, the resulting implication is that by reducing a country's corruption and increasing community-focused characteristics in individuals, probability of tax evasion may decrease, leading to improved state capacity and social capital.

## Introduction

Recent scholarship has highlighted various aspects of taxation, state capacity, and corruption (Timmons & Garfias; Baum, Gupta, Kimani, & Tapsoba) and the way these variables interact with each other. This paper seeks to contribute an individual-level analysis alongside country-level variables to further the discussion of the aforementioned relationships by analyzing two primary questions: 1) To what extent does corruption influence an individual's view of whether it is acceptable to cheat on taxes, and 2) to what extent do individual and social factors influence one's willingness to condone cheating on taxes? By combining individual- and country-level data, I hope to create a clearer picture of how these variables affect each other.

The results indicate that corruption increases individuals' willingness to condone tax evasion. This suggests that corruption reduces a government's ability to increase or maintain its tax base, which can negatively impact its state capacity. Moreover, an individual's self-seeking (individualistic) versus other-seeking (prosocial) attributes affect their view of tax evasion, which could mean that the degree to which one feels a part of the social bargain in a country affects tax compliance, and subsequently state capacity. Thus, policies that promote social cohesion could reduce tendencies to cheat on taxes.

According to Walder (1995), modern political systems depend on four state capacities:

“the capacity to mobilize financial resources from the society to pursue what the central policymakers perceive as the "national interest" (extractive capacity); the capacity to guide national socioeconomic development (steering capacity); the capacity to dominate by using

symbols and creating consensus (legitimation capacity); and the capacity to dominate by the use or threat of force (coercive capacity).”

Of these four state capacities, this paper will focus on countries’ extractive capacity and citizens’ potential perceptions of its performance. According to Besley and Persson (2009), policy choices resulting in effective economic institutions cannot be assumed to exist in government when conducting analysis. After a cross-country analysis, they found that “common interest public goods, such as fighting external wars, as well as political stability and inclusive political institutions, are conducive to building state capacity” (Besley & Persson, 2009).

In an analysis of democracy and state capacity, Bäck and Hadenius found that when examining the “effect of democratization on the state’s administrative capacity” there is a “curvilinear (j-shaped) relationship.” Strong democracy inflicts a positive effect on state capacity, and when democracy is weak there is a negative relationship with capacity. Median values did not have a significant effect. These are important relationships because “only the state, with its regulatory capacity, can furnish a number of services in general demand” (Bäck & Hadenius, 2008). They concluded that combining democracy, press circulation, and electoral participation is the most effective way to improve state administrative capacity (Bäck & Hadenius, 2008).

In their paper examining gender and attitudes toward tax evasion and corruption, Torgler and Valev found that women are consistently much more likely to be legally compliant than men. They compared France, Great Britain, Italy, the Netherlands, Denmark, Belgium, Ireland, and Spain using the World Values Survey and European Values Survey over 20 years. Their aim was to investigate gender’s role in illegal activity, “and whether a decrease of gender differences with greater equality of status and better opportunities” could potentially result in a decrease in

white-collar crimes such as tax evasion and corruption (Torgler & Valev, 2010). Women being less likely to commit tax fraud, among other white-collar crimes, was unchanging across two decades, spanning periods of improvement in gender equality. Observing and explaining gender differences is important because it could contribute to potentially less obvious policy solutions regarding crime and corruption.

Having an organized, well-coordinated state and strong democracy may influence healthier social trust. Paldam describes social capital as the “‘glue’ generating excess cooperation” between individuals. Such glue should not necessarily exist according to standard rationality assumptions of individual interest, yet society would not function in many ways without it. Without social capital, third party intervention is the only way to enforce cooperation (Paldam, 2008).

Further investigating social trust, Molyneux’s 2002 paper examines “gendered assumptions” of social capital and the presence of women in Latin America. Consistent with Paldam’s claims, Molyneux points out that social capital is “difficult to operationalize in research and policy settings” but there “are reasons to applaud the interest in social capital by development agencies” (Molyneux, 2002). Social capital may be an important factor to forming solidarity and a sense of community, which would directly affect society’s attitudes toward taxes and corruption. Molyneux comments on the reticence of gender in discussions of social capital, particularly with the example of the World Bank’s Gender Unit, whose Policy Research Report “does not discuss social capital, and there is not even an index entry on the subject” (Molyneux, 2002). If gender is as strong of a factor in issues of corruption and tax evasion, as claimed by Torgler and Valev, it should be more seriously considered in discussions of improving social capital.

Molyneux claims that Latin America has a “comparatively resilient” degree of social capital compared to others in the development field. In their 2008 research, Canache and Allison used the World Values Survey to examine corruption in Latin America and its effect on citizens’ outlook of politicians and institutions. They define political corruption “at its most basic” as “the abuse of public power for private benefit” (Canache & Allison, 2008). Latin America is no stranger to political corruption, and “Latin Americans are quite aware of the seriousness of corruption in their countries” (Canache & Allison, 2008). This observation aids in the characterization of many Latin American countries as “fragile democracies,” where “democratic roots are not well entrenched, and therefore significant levels of uncertainty about the sustainability of democracy exist” (Canache & Allison, 2008). Corruption and the struggle for democracy in Former Soviet Countries, as discussed by Bowser (2001), is not just a problem of “developing a comprehensive program to fight corruption but in examining its causes and effects as well.” Reliable data can be hard to obtain, which complicates the issue further. Bowser observes the “anti-modern” tendencies of Former Soviet Countries as well as the relationship of social capital between citizens and government. The difference between these two regions could lie in their citizens’ ability and willingness to acknowledge the persistence of political corruption and its effect on state capacity. Given these findings in the literature, it will be important to control for these two regions in the empirical analysis. And, as will be discussed shortly, it does appear that Latin American and the Former Soviet countries are the only two regions with statistically significant higher levels of condoning cheating on taxes in my analysis. This is consistent with the literature and both regions’ historically corrupt tendencies.

These earlier papers support my research questions in their analysis of corruption, state capacity, and social bargaining. They illustrate the role played by corruption and prosocial preferences in government taxation policy.

## **Research and Methods**

There are two research questions addressed here. The first is how corruption impacts the willingness of a citizen in a country to cheat on their taxes, which is an important question in the state capacity literature. It is often the case that countries with low state capacity also have problems with corruption (Canache & Allison, 2008). If corruption encourages cheating on taxes, then a country should have a greater incentive to combat corruption as this is hindering the ability of that state to function. The simple linear regression model used to investigate this question is as follows:

$$(1) \text{ No Tax Cheating}_{ij} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{ Less Corruption}_j + \beta_2 X_i + \beta_3 Z_j + u_i$$

The dependent variable is whether individual  $i$  in country  $j$  condones cheating on taxes. The primary independent variable is the Transparency International measure of corruption, or more correctly, the lack thereof. The variable  $X_i$  contains all of the individual level control variables such as gender, age, employment status, marital status, etc. The variable  $Z_j$  contains the country level control variables such as language and ethnic fractionalization and regional dummy variables. The final term is the error term.

The second research question is how individual preferences vs. prosocial preferences affect an individual's willingness to condone cheating on taxes. Prosocial preferences for the purpose of this paper are defined as an individual placing a high value on the welfare of others in relation to their own. If tax revenue is used to provide various public goods then taxes may be

perceived as an aspect of a social bargain in a country. Consequently, an individual's outlook regarding a preference for individuality over more prosocial preferences could also impact one's willingness to condone cheating on taxes. Equation 2 below shows the regression model used to address this question.

$$(2) \text{ No Tax Cheating}_{ij} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Indiv. Pref}_i + \beta_2 \text{Prosocial Pref}_i + \beta_3 X_i + \beta_4 Z_j + u_i$$

Again,  $X_i$  and  $Z_j$  represent individual controls and country level controls, respectively.

The variable  $\text{Indiv. Pref}_i$  represents responses to questions from the WVS that are more individual focused while  $\text{Prosocial Pref}_i$  represents responses from questions that elicit prosocial preferences.

## Data

The individual data comes from the World Values Survey (WVS) (Inglehart et al. 2014) and the European Values Survey (EVS) (2011). These cross-country surveys ask an individual a collection of questions relating to personal characteristics, beliefs, values, and outlook. In general, approximately 1,000 to 1,500 individuals are surveyed in a country when the survey is conducted. Each "wave" of the WVS and the EVS includes a limited number of countries. The first wave of the WVS included only 8 countries, but subsequent waves have considerably expanded the number of countries surveyed. The EVS was primarily conducted in European countries with a few exceptions.

Although the two surveys are not identical, the WVS and EVS are extremely similar and can be combined into a single data set. Six waves of the WVS were conducted in the years 1981-1984, 1989-1991, 1994-1999, 1999-2004, 2004-2009, and 2010-2014. In total, 97 countries were included at least once in the WVS. Four waves of the EVS were conducted over the following

waves: 1981-1984, 1990-1993, 1999-2001, and 2008-2009. A total of 46 countries were included at least once in the EVS. Once the two datasets are combined, and after accounting for missing individual data and country level data, there are a total of 287,668 unique individuals from 94 countries included in the analysis. Analysis that examines the impact of individual preferences vs. prosocial preferences used a smaller subset of the data. These questions were only asked in the last two waves of the WVS and EVS. Thus, up to 77,897 individuals from 57 countries were included in this subset.

For the purposes of this project, waves 2-6 of the WVS and waves 3-4 of the EVS are included. The exclusion of several waves is due to the absence of several key questions from the survey in those years. It should be noted that each individual is interviewed only once. Thus, the data are not panel data.

The analysis controls for each individual's characteristics using data contained in the combined WVS/EVS dataset. An individual's employment status is included and is broken down into the following categories: employed, unemployed, retired, student, or stay at home spouse. Individuals placed themselves into their corresponding country's income decile. The exception is in wave 4 of the EVS, where 12 income groups are used rather than 10. A binary variable for gender is also included. The age variable groups people according to three categories: young (age 18-29), prime working age (age 30-60), and old (age 61+). An individual's marital status is also included, and is broken down into four groups: married, divorced, widowed, and single. As mentioned above, the WVS question on social trust is included as well as years of schooling and the religious faith of the individual. Two questions pertaining to nationalism/importance of politics are included to control for the impact of patriotism.



The WVS/EVS dataset set contains eight questions pertaining to individual and prosocial preferences. They are worded as concern for or importance of different levels of relationships to gauge an individual's degree of social preferences. The questions that address individualistic values are personal vs government responsibility and concern for immediate family. The prosocial questions are as follows: good relationships from understanding others, important to help those nearby, important to do things for good of society, concerned with neighbors, concerned about those in region, concerned with countrymen, and concern about unemployed. These variables are listed, along with their summary statistics in Table 1.

## **Results**

Table 2 contains the regression results addressing the first question on the impact of corruption. The initial variables listed are those that control for individual and country level variables. There are some interesting individual characteristics that are associated with a higher willingness to cheat on taxes, i.e. negative coefficients. Men and the young are more likely to condone cheating. Women and older people are much less likely to condone cheating. In conjunction, individuals who are retired are also less prone to condone cheating, most likely because they see it as reducing the funding available for state run pension programs. Interestingly, unemployed individuals tend to be more likely to condone cheating. This could be due to a worry over whether that individual will have a enough money to survive. However, presumably this individual would receive funds from a social employment insurance program, i.e. unemployment funds, which one would think would be more associated with a tendency to not condone cheating.

Those who are married tend to be less supportive of cheating on taxes, while those who are divorced tend to be more willing to justify cheating. Individuals in higher income brackets tend to condone cheating, while those with a higher education level tend to not support cheating. Of the religion variables, only those who are Protestant and Muslim tend to think cheating on taxes is not justified. Of the fractionalization variables, only language fractionalization appears to be statistically significant. Individuals in countries with higher levels of language fractionalization tend to condone cheating on taxes to a larger degree than those who live in countries where language is more homogeneous. This suggests that the degree to which one feels a part of the country's culture influences one's views of taxation, which is a topic we will examine in table 3.

Table 2 also indicates that those who are more patriotic, as measured by politics being important and pride in nationality, tend to oppose cheating on taxes. It is also interesting that a related variable, social trust, appears to have no impact in these regressions. Recent research by Bjørnskov (2008, 2010, 2012) has indicated that this social trust variable matters a great deal for economic outcomes and it is surprising that it appears not to matter here. One possible explanation for this is that there is a relationship between social trust and corruption and including corruption (or the regional variables) in the analysis reduces the explanatory power of the social trust variable.

Turning to the topic of corruption, the first regression of Table 2 excludes the level of corruption, but includes regional dummies for Latin American and the former Soviet countries. In both regions, individuals appear to have a high level of willingness to condone cheating on taxes. However, in the second regression it appears that this willingness is driven by the level of corruption that is present in Latin America. When corruption is included the dummy variable for

Latin America is no longer significant. The corruption variable remains significant in the third regression, which excludes all regional variables. However, the corruption variable is no longer significant in the final regression. This regression includes only the regional variable for the former Soviet countries. This suggests that corruption is a significant problem throughout the former Soviet countries and reduces the ability of those countries to generate revenue for the provision of public goods.

Table 3 contains the results that address the question of how individual preferences vs. prosocial preferences affect one's attitudes of taxation. The individual and country level control variables are again listed at the top of the table and the results are identical to those of Table 2. The bottom portion of the table contains the variables addressing the individual vs. prosocial preferences. The first of these variables deals with whether individuals ought to take more responsibility for providing for themselves or whether governments should. This variable is insignificant in regressions 1, 2, and 5-8, but is negative and significant in regressions 3 and 4. Thus, those who expressed a preference for individual responsibility over government responsibility are marginally more prone to condoning cheating on taxes, but this result is not very strong. The question addressing whether one is very much concerned with the needs of their immediate family is also insignificant. This variable was insignificant in all regressions, thus, it was only included in one of the regressions of Table 3.

However, the variables that relate to one's prosocial preferences are much more significant. A preference for understanding the needs of others over one's own, placing a high priority of helping people nearby, viewing the good of society as highly important, having a high concern for one's neighbors, one's region, one's countrymen, and for the unemployed all appear to have a significant impact on one's preferences for taxation. Each of these variables is positive

and significant at the one percent level in regressions 2-8 indicating that individuals who are more community-focused are much less likely to condone cheating on taxes. This suggests that individuals with prosocial preferences are more likely to view cheating on taxes as being contrary to a country's social goals.

Each regression of table 2 and 3 controlled for the time period of the question (WVS/EVS wave) and computed the standard errors based on clusters of countries and waves. An additional aspect of these regressions is the low explanatory power. In table 2, the regressions explained approximately five percent of the overall variation in one's preferences on taxation. The regressions of table 3 have slightly higher explanatory power (as much as 7.7 percent), but overall, the explanatory power is lower. This is to be expected as these regressions involve individuals throughout the world with different backgrounds, cultures, and governments. Despite the low explanatory power, the consistency of the results regarding corruption and prosocial preferences suggests that these factors may play an important role in one's view of taxation and tax policy in general.

## **Conclusion**

The data in this research indicates that individuals in countries with higher levels of corruption tend to condone cheating on taxes. This implies that anti-corruption policies could result in increased tax revenues, which, if aided by effective government agencies and programs, could improve state capacity and its efficiency in providing public goods. At the individual level, prosocial tendencies were shown to decrease acceptance of tax evasion, which suggests that taxation and its corresponding state capacity are viewed as part of a country's social bargain. If

these assertions hold true, then policies that promote social capital and prosocial inclinations could reduce tax evasion and ultimately improve state efficiency and capacity.

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## Tables

Table 1: Summary statistics

<b>Individual variables</b>	<b>No. of obs.</b>	<b>mean</b>	<b>std. dev.</b>	<b>min</b>	<b>max</b>
Not justified cheating taxes	287,668	8.71	2.18	1	10
Male	287,668	0.48	0.50	0	1
Age 13-29	287,668	0.27	0.44	0	1
Age 30-60	287,668	0.56	0.50	0	1
Age 60+	287,668	0.17	0.38	0	1
Retired	287,668	0.15	0.36	0	1
Student	287,668	0.07	0.26	0	1
Stay at home spouse	287,668	0.13	0.33	0	1
Unemployed	287,668	0.09	0.29	0	1
Employed	287,668	0.54	0.50	0	1
Married/Living together	287,668	0.62	0.48	0	1
Divorced/Separated	287,668	0.06	0.24	0	1
Widowed	287,668	0.07	0.25	0	1
Single	287,668	0.25	0.43	0	1
Income decile	273,760	4.72	2.39	1	12
Social trust	287,668	0.27	0.45	0	1
Years of schooling	287,668	11.02	3.59	0	16
Catholic	287,668	0.24	0.43	0	1
Orthodox	287,668	0.12	0.33	0	1
Protestant	287,668	0.13	0.34	0	1
Muslim	287,668	0.17	0.38	0	1
Other faith	287,668	0.11	0.32	0	1
Athiest	287,668	0.22	0.41	0	1
Personal vs government responsibility	287,668	5.11	2.96	1	10
Politics is important	287,668	2.31	0.96	1	4
Proud of nationality	287,668	3.42	0.75	1	4
Concern for immediate family	70,795	4.40	0.98	1	5
Good relationships from understanding others	73,761	1.63	0.48	1	2
Important to help those nearby	79,819	4.69	1.15	1	6
Important to do things for the good of society	63,371	4.54	1.22	1	6
Concerned with neighbors	70,717	3.12	1.08	1	5
Concerned about those in region	70,506	2.92	1.03	1	5
Concerned with countrymen	70,388	3.02	1.01	1	5
Concern about unemployed	70,616	3.44	1.05	1	5
	<b>No. of</b>				
<b>Country variables</b>	<b>countries</b>	<b>mean</b>	<b>std. dev.</b>	<b>min</b>	<b>max</b>
Less corruption	94	4.82	2.33	0.4	10
Ethnic fractionalization	94	0.37	0.23	0.002	0.930
Language fractionalization	94	0.34	0.26	0.002	0.923
Religious fractionalization	94	0.45	0.24	0.003	0.860

Table 2: Determinants of view regarding cheating on taxes

<b>Dependent variable: Not acceptable to cheat on taxes</b>				
Independent variables	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Male	-0.210***	-0.198***	-0.199***	-0.209***
Age 13-29	-0.225***	-0.215***	-0.217***	-0.222***
Age 60+	0.244***	0.236***	0.236***	0.236***
Retired	0.186***	0.153***	0.157***	0.188***
Student	0.027	0.036	0.037	0.033
Stay at home spouse	0.03	0.057	0.055	0.03
Unemployed	-0.101*	-0.102**	-0.102**	-0.097*
Married/Living together	0.131***	0.115***	0.115***	0.134***
Divorced/Separated	-0.092**	-0.121***	-0.123***	-0.103***
Widowed	0.087***	0.065**	0.065**	0.091***
Income decile	-0.036***	-0.032***	-0.032***	-0.036***
Social trust	0.01	0.005	0.007	0.007
Years of schooling	0.016***	0.009	0.010*	0.015***
Catholic	0.009	0.014	0.003	-0.014
Orthodox	0.045	-0.025	-0.016	0.075
Protestant	0.170***	0.215***	0.216***	0.172***
Muslim	0.377***	0.462***	0.488***	0.472***
Other faith	0.07	0.114	0.118	0.099
Ethnic fractionalization	0.215	0.244	0.178	0.125
Language fractionalization	-0.815***	-0.718***	-0.656**	-0.667**
Religious fractionalization	0.04	-0.083	-0.051	0.06
Politics is important	0.037***	0.052***	0.052***	0.040***
Proud of nationality	0.294***	0.309***	0.308***	0.296***
Intercept	7.667***	7.192***	7.176***	7.441***
Control for WVS/EVS waves?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Less corruption		0.052***	0.052***	0.027
Latin America	-0.246*	-0.097		
Former Soviet	-0.388***			-0.299***
Number of obs.	279,492	278,601	278,601	278,601
Adjusted R-squared	0.049	0.047	0.047	0.049

Table 3: The impact of individual versus prosocial attributes for tax compliance

<b>Dependent variable: Not acceptable to cheat on taxes</b>								
Independent variables	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Less Corruption	0.072**	0.031	0.091**	0.122***	0.069**	0.072**	0.072**	0.077***
Male	-0.311***	-0.185***	-0.152***	-0.125***	-0.314***	-0.314***	-0.314***	-0.300***
Age 13-29	-0.326***	-0.228***	-0.141***	-0.147***	-0.315***	-0.311***	-0.310***	-0.298***
Age 60+	0.205***	0.206***	0.278***	0.233***	0.201***	0.196***	0.194***	0.198***
Retired	0.280***	0.161**	-0.054	0.032	0.279***	0.280***	0.277***	0.262***
Student	0.063	0.1	-0.066	0.045	0.064	0.058	0.053	0.053
Stay at home spouse	0.086*	0.136**	-0.043	-0.035	0.07	0.071	0.079	0.072
Unemployed	0.028	-0.051	-0.199**	-0.246**	0.02	0.02	0.019	-0.031
Married/Living together	0.188***	0.116***	0.079	0.153***	0.185***	0.188***	0.190***	0.185***
Divorced/Separated	-0.113**	-0.099	-0.123**	-0.026	-0.104*	-0.109**	-0.110**	-0.110**
Widowed	0.113**	0.092	0.011	0.053	0.109**	0.116**	0.121***	0.118**
Income decile	-0.026**	0.01	-0.060***	-0.059***	-0.024*	-0.025**	-0.025**	-0.023*
Years of schooling	0	-0.005	0.018*	0.026***	0.002	0.002	0	0.001
Catholic	0.143**	0.048	-0.182**	-0.116	0.121*	0.129*	0.135**	0.134**
Orthodox	0.08	-0.381	0.183	0.196	0.06	0.057	0.056	0.039
Protestant	0.210***	0.286***	0.034	0.210*	0.211***	0.209***	0.205***	0.202***
Muslim	1.070***	0.476**	0.349	0.33	0.982***	0.986***	0.985***	0.961***
Other faith	0.018	0.326	-0.039	-0.012	0.018	0.015	0.009	0.009
Ethnic fractionalization	0.463	0.231	0.414	0.704*	0.448	0.417	0.445	0.353
Language fractionalization	-1.269**	-0.326	-0.913**	-1.635***	-1.271***	-1.244**	-1.249**	-1.092**
Religious fractionalization	0.577*	-0.07	-0.271	0.101	0.564*	0.570*	0.589*	0.592**
Politics is important	0.113***	0.068***	0.046	-0.017	0.102***	0.097***	0.096***	0.091***
Proud of nationality	0.277***	0.362***	0.280***	0.263***	0.272***	0.270***	0.267***	0.267***
Social trust	0.013	0.019	0.057	-0.033	0.001	-0.001	0.001	0
Intercept	6.928***	7.558***	7.836***	7.956***	6.760***	6.723***	6.717***	6.410***
Control for WVS/EVS waves?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Personal vs. gov. responsibility	0.000	-0.001	-0.023**	-0.033***	0.000	0.001	0.002	0.005
Concern for immediate family	0.017							
Understanding others		0.117***						
Important to help nearby			0.122***					
The good of society is important				0.143***				
Concern for neighbors					0.096***			
Concern for region						0.113***		
Concern countrymen							0.118***	
Concern for unemployed								0.174***
Number of obs.	69,819	68,485	77,897	61,944	69,752	69,560	69,457	69,658
Adjusted R-squared	0.065	0.062	0.053	0.077	0.067	0.068	0.068	0.071