
Social Attitudes towards the Phenomenon of Corruption in Poland

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Abstract:

Purpose: The paper explains to what extent selected sociodemographic, psychographic and economic factors differentiate attitudes of Poles towards corruption.

Design/Methodology/Approach: The results come from an empirical study based on a representative sample of adult Poles conducted by computer-assisted telephone interviews (CATI). The subject of statistical analysis were the following three complementary issues, the scale of corruption in the opinion and common experience of Poles, moral attitudes of Poles towards the phenomenon of corruption and sociodemographic predictors of the corruption phenomenon. Additionally, we measured the scale of corruption in the opinion and common experience of Poles. At the stage of data analysis, multi-dimensional modeling with the use of optimal scaling (CATREG) was selected and descriptive and inductive statistics were used.

Findings: The regression model for qualitative variables revealed an increased consent to the phenomenon of corruption in such groups as, age (the youngest respondents 18-24), occupation (industrial workers and craftsmen, school and university students, office workers) and political self-identification on the left-right scale. The greatest tolerance towards corruption – according to their declarations – have far right-wing and left-wing people, as well as those without specific views. The remaining components of the model, such as place of residence (voivodship), marital status and total crimes per 100,000 inhabitants, are of secondary importance.

Practical implications: The results of the research made possible to make two other important conclusions. Firstly, according to Poles, the phenomenon of corruption has significantly decreased over the last few years. The respondents estimated that it is now much smaller than in 2017. Secondly, we compared the obtained results with other global studies.

Originality value: We noticed that there is a gap between the opinions of experts (Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index) and the opinions of ordinary people about the size and dynamics of corruption in Poland. We have given plausible explanations for these phenomena. This is the first study of this type conducted in Poland since 2017 (not including the Transparency International's Corruption Barometer, which, however, pursued different goals).

Keywords: Corruption determinants, psychographic, demographic and economic factors.

JEL classification: K49, C51, Z00.

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1. Introduction

The phenomenon of corruption accompanies mankind from the very beginning of life in state communities (Buchan and Hill, 2014). It is assessed negatively and fought as a pathology of economic and political reality (Kroeze, Vitoria, and Geltner, 2018). This phenomenon has attracted the attention of sociologists, political scientists, legal scholars, and economists for several decades (Farrales, 2005; Heidenheimer and Johnston, 2002). In recent years, corruption has been extensively researched both globally (Bibliography on Corruption and Anticorruption Professor Matthew C. Stephenson Harvard Law School) and locally - in Poland (Archives of the Ministry of Interior and Administration, Reports, Announcements, Bibliography on Corruption).

Empirical research is of particular importance in the context of this article. Since 1991, the Public Opinion Research Center has been conducting cyclical research on the perception of corruption in Poland (Centre for Public Opinion Research - CBOS). However, since 2017, these surveys have been carried out in a limited form when examining attitudes towards a wider spectrum of public affairs. From an international perspective, the research carried out by Transparency International is of the greatest importance. These are the 'Corruption Perceptions Index' and 'The Global Corruption Barometer'.

Perceptions and attitudes towards corruption should be viewed in terms of a phenomenon that is both cultural, social and economic. Corruption is about how members of society and the elite understand rules and what behavior they consider as deviation. The understanding of the phenomenon of corruption is highly diversified both at the level of human beings (different propensity of individual people to corruption, despite the prevailing uniform moral standard) and of entire societies - in social norms, and all this can be perceived separately from legal regulations. As a result, there may be a discrepancy, the so-called axiological gap between individual and general moral norms – form the one side, and legal regulations – form other side.

Therefore, if the attitudes of people (individual and general) towards corruption differ in legal regulations, this alone is enough to cause negative effects in the economy through an increase in institutional instability and individuals with institutions, a decrease in the capital of mutual social trust. This study was designed to answer the question of whether such differences exist. The focus was on the social, demographic and economic predicates of attitudes (positive or negative) towards corruption. The degree of heterogeneity of Poles' attitudes towards the phenomenon of corruption was measured and the groups that exhibit a particularly large axiological gap between their own attitudes and the dictates of the law were indicated. It should be emphasized that moral judgments significantly influence the decision to engage in corruption activities or to refrain from them (Bicchieri and Ganegoda, 2017).

It should be highlighted that corruption is a socially learned behavior, and most people engaging in it do not consider this behavior in terms of "ethical or unethical", but other benefits or necessities (Tavits, 2010). The results of this study can be used to undertake remedial and educational actions in selected social groups.

In the light of Polish law, fully compliant with European Union law in this respect, corruption (bribery) is an intentional crime and is prosecuted *ex officio*. The understanding of corruption in Polish law is governed by §1 Art. 229 of the Criminal Code: "Who grants or promises to provide material or personal benefits to a person performing a public function in connection with the performance of this function". It is an offense punishable by a penalty from 6 months (basic type) to 12 years imprisonment (qualified type).

2. Materials and Methods

The study was conducted on a sample of N=1000 adults (18+ y.o.) Poles in December 2020 (during the partial lockdown). The data used is based on quantitative empirical study financed by the Justice Fund, managed by the Minister of Justice, and conducted by the University of Warsaw Political Science Graduates Association. This subject of research was undertaken in Poland for the first time in many years. The research was carried out using the technique of Computer Assisted Telephone Interviews (CATI), which has a number of positive organizational, methodological and technical features; guarantee higher data quality, precision, accuracy, low error rate, credibility, validity.

Most importantly, CATI research has the ability to generalize the results from a sample to a higher population than other available research methods and a higher percentage of people agreeing to participate in the study compared to other research methods (higher response rate) is obtained. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the CATI method is the method of choice. The sample selection has statistical representativeness and was carried out using a method called *Random Digit Dialing* (RDD) (Mitofsky, 1970; Wakesberg, 1978). This method is considered optimal and classic by researchers (Potthoff, 1987). It is constantly modernized in research practice (Tucker *et al.*, 1992), new phenomena such as the impact of the development of mobile telephony are taken into account (Brick *et al.*, 2007; Keeter *et al.*, 2008). This method will enable the random selection of the sampling frame and, as a result, obtain representativeness in terms of socio-demographic features crucial for research purposes.

Statistical analysis was based on three tools, multi-dimensional modeling and descriptive and inductive statistics and Categorical Regression (CATREG)/Optimal Scaling, in order to measure the cumulative impact of variables. The source of this method is correspondence analysis (Greenacre, 1984) and multidimensional scaling (MDS) (Guttman, 1968). The central concept of this method is nonlinear regression with categorical variables by optimally scaling categories in categorical data. The

purpose of using this method is to quantify the relationships between multiple independent variables and the one dependent variable. The fundamental advantage of optimal scaling is the ability to discover interactions, i.e. the combined effect of selected independent variables on the dependent variable. It is a comprehensive data mining technique which the fundamental advantage is the ability to discover interactions (the combined effect of selected independent variables on the dependent variable).

3. Results

The subject of statistical analyzes were the following three complementary issues: the scale of corruption in the opinion and common experience of Poles, moral attitudes of Poles towards the phenomenon of corruption and sociodemographic predictors of the corruption phenomenon.

3.1 The Scale of Corruption in the Opinion and Common Experience of Poles

More than half of the respondents estimate that corruption is a "rather big" (45.7%) or "very large" (14.2%) problem in Poland. About one third of respondents consider this problem to be insignificant (29.6%). The respondents assessed the scale of corruption in the last five years – in general and in such professional groups as: public officials, politicians, teachers, private entrepreneurs, managers in state-owned enterprises, judges and prosecutors and in the health service (doctors, nurses and medical technicians). According to Poles, the level of corruption has remained the same for five years (38.4%), has decreased (29.4% is of the opinion) or increased (17.7% of responses).

According to the respondents, the scale of corruption has increased mainly in the group of politicians (33.3% believe that there has been an increase) and managers of state-owned enterprises (19.3% indicate that there has been an increase). Corruption remains unchanged among other groups (i.e., public officials, judges and prosecutors, health workers and teachers). This opinion is expressed by nearly half of the respondents. The scale of Poles' personal experiences was measured using the question "How many times (if so) in the last five years that you have been asked to do so, it was suggested that you give a bribe or you made the decision to give it yourself". Three-fourths of Poles have not been in a corruption situation in the last five years. Every tenth respondent experienced such an event only once, and only 7.6% submitted or received such an offer more than once.

3.2 Moral Attitudes of Poles towards the Phenomenon of Corruption

More than two-thirds of Poles (69.1%) condemn taking bribes in exchange for a favorable resolution of an official matter. "Rather condemns" - a quarter of the respondents (24.5%), while about 4% considers corruption to be morally indifferent. Corruption is condemned to the greatest extent in three social groups, politicians,

judges and prosecutors, and managers in state-owned enterprises ($p \leq 0.05$). The least degree of condemned are corrupt private entrepreneurs and teachers (however, in these two groups the grades are different - the highest standard deviation was noted). Poles are extremely negative about giving bribes to anyone in exchange for a favorable outcome. The most severely assessed is granting financial benefits to managers in state-owned enterprises, judges and prosecutors and politicians.

3.3 Sociodemographic Predictors of the Corruption Phenomenon

During the analyzes, the hypothesis of the combined effect of features (which is called interaction in the statistical literature) was also verified. The top-down method was used in CATREG. The dependent variable was the moral assessment of the corruption phenomenon – on a five-point ordinal scale from "strongly condemn" to "not condemn at all". The model turned out to be statistically significant at the level of $p \leq 0.001$. The fit of the optimal scaling model expressed with multiple R was 0.341, which is considered a low or moderate (significant) relationship. The sum of the variability of the dependent variable explained by the combined influence of the independent variables was 0.116 (so the model explains 11.6% of the variability of the condemnation factor or approval of the corruption phenomenon). However, a large number of factors in the model (7) reduces the coefficient to only 7%, which makes the result borderline significant.

Table 1. Categorical regression top-down CATREG model

Name of the model component (predictor)	Beta coefficient	Degrees of freedom (df)	F	Significance	Zero-order	Partial correlation	Part correlation	Importance
Age of the respondent	-.191	1	8.585	$p \leq 0.01$	-.199	-.196	-.188	.327
Occupation	.168	14	25.267	$p \leq 0.001$	.166	.174	.166	.240
Political self-identification (left-right scale)	.121	8	15.930	$p \leq 0.001$	.162	.126	.119	.169
Attitude towards religion	.104	4	8.336	$p \leq 0.001$	.118	.109	.103	.105
Place of residence (voivodship)	.091	15	6.628	$p \leq 0.001$	.095	.097	.091	.075
Marital status	.075	4	6.518	$p \leq 0.001$	.075	.079	.074	.048
Total crimes per 100,000 inhabitants (in the voivodeship, for 2019)	.072	4	3.946	$p \leq 0.01$	.059	.076	.072	.036

Source: Own study.

The three key variables determining attitudes towards corruption in the regression model are, respondent's age (33% of importance), occupation (24% of importance)

and political self-identification on a left-right scale (17% of importance). The remaining components of the model, such as place of residence (voivodship), marital status and total crimes per 100.000 inhabitants, received less than 10% rank in the constructed model; are of secondary importance.

The relationship between condemning corruption and the *age of the respondent* is non-linear. The following three age groups condemn corruption the most: aged over 65, aged 45-54 and aged 25-34. The premise of such an assessment may be the fact of entering the labor market in the youngest group, the fact of leaving it in the oldest group, and the dominant position in the labor market of the group in the 45-54 age group. Young people aged 18-24 years old, among whom we also note the highest indifference to this phenomenon - 11% of responses, condemn corruption the least. The observed differences between the groups are statistically significant at the level of $p \leq 0.001$.

Occupational groups differ statistically significantly at the level of $p \leq 0.001$. The slightest approval of corruption is observed among representatives of the armed forces and uniformed services, representatives of public authorities, senior officials and managers, as well as among technicians and the so-called middle staff. The highest percentage of morally indifferent people (less often) accepting can be found among: industrial workers and craftsmen (15.4% consider corruption to be morally indifferent, do not judge it), workers (14.3%), students (13%) and office workers (9 percent). The average acceptance for the general public is 6%.

Self-identification in terms of the political world view on the left-right scale is also an element that differentiates moral attitudes towards the phenomenon of corruption. The greatest opponents of corruption are people who define themselves as the extreme left, who declare to leave the left-right wing (libertarians, distanced from politics) and the broadly understood center (including the center-left and center-right). The percentage of their responses "rather condemn" and "strongly condemn", when combined, is close to 100%. The highest consent to corruption ("it is morally indifferent to me") is expressed by extreme right-wing persons (13% of responses) and left-wing persons (10% of responses), as well as those without specific views (9%).

Attitudes towards religion correlate poorly with condemnation of corruption. There is a noticeable greater tendency to condemn corruption among believers (practicing and non-practicing) and those who refused to answer the question about matters of faith.

The *inhabitants* of Podkarpackie and Podlaskie, as well as Dolnośląskie and Lubelskie voivodships condemn the phenomenon of corruption to the greatest extent. The phenomenon of corruption is considered morally neutral in the Warmińsko-Mazurskie (11%) and Kujawsko-Pomorskie (9%) voivodships.

Differences in the *marital status* of the respondents turned out to be significant at the level of $p \leq 0.05$. The differences in absolute percentages are small, but statistically significant. Single men and women have the least negative assessment of corruption, which correlates with the age variable (category 18-25 years).

The last of the variable included in the model is *total crimes per 100,000 inhabitants* (in the voivodship, for 2019). It is not known to be positively correlated with the consent to corruption. It is important to indicate that a number of tested variables like gender, education level, size of the place of residence (including the dichotomous division into rural and urban areas), objective and subjective household income index, divorce rate, unemployment rate, and crime detection rate turned out to be insignificant.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

Attempts to understand the relationship between the micro sphere (Sung, 2003; Stensöta, Wängnerud, and Svensson 2014; Rosenblatt, 2012) i.e., the socio-demographic and psychographic traits of members of society, and the tendency to corruption have been made. It has been stated that these features significantly differentiate people's views on corruption and actually performed actions (Aquino and Reed, 2002). Research conducted for 35 countries reveal differences between Poland and other countries (Gatti, Paternostro, and Rigolini, 2003). In a cross-sectional international study, gender, occupation, poverty and age were indicated as predictors of a reluctant attitude towards corruption.

In the study conducted by the authors regarding gender and poverty (women and people with lower incomes as more often condemning corruption), no differences were found. Confirmed as a predictor of aversion to corruption professional status and age (partially compatible) (Gatti, Paternostro, and Rigolini, 2003). The differences between the various communities are not unique, they are noted in studies of corruption (Barr and Serra, 2010).

The leading global comparative indicator of the analyzed phenomena is the Corruption Perception Index. In it, Poland is invariably above the world average (with 56 score), but below the European Union average (index value 66) and Eastern Europe (64). The index value has fallen by 7 points since 2015. It is worth noting that the index is calculated on the basis of surveys conducted among international experts in economic and political risk assessment.

However, the feelings of Poles are opposite - *vox populi* is different from the experts' opinion. According to the respondents, corruption has to a large extent ceased to be a problem compared to previous years. Research shows that the perception of corruption as a problem has significantly decreased in recent years in Poland. Corruption was considered a big problem in 2013 – 87% (CBOS, 2013), while in 2017 – 76% (CBOS, 2017). In the authors' measurement, it was only 60%.

These results lead to the conclusion that corruption is a phenomenon that is systematically declining in Poland and polemics with the thesis made a decade ago that "Poles define corruption quite mildly and are even willing to accept minor forms of corruption, e.g. small bribes, protectionism or not entirely legal transactions" (Boćwińska-Kiluk, 2009).

The Corruption Barometer is Transparency International's cyclical global public opinion poll. Globally, 62% of respondents consider corruption to be a „big problem”, while 33% believes that corruption is „little problem” or „no problem”. In Poland, according to Barometer, as many as 72% of people in November-December 2020 considered corruption to be a „big problem” (Transparency International, 2021).

However, our research less than a month later gives a significantly more optimistic result – 60%. According to the Corruption Barometer, corruption in Poland has increased by 37% in the last 12 months. This is significantly above the European average of 32%. The corruption dynamics measured in the authors' own study (however, over a five-year period) is as follows: 18% of respondents said that corruption had increased, 38% believed that corruption remained at the same level, and 29% stated that it has decreased. In addition, 15% respondents had no opinion on this subject.

Such results may lead to a cautious conclusion that corruption in Poland is declining in the long term. The differences in the results may also be caused by the differences in the formulated questions, separating Poles from offices and politics in December-January due to the pre-holiday season.

The discrepancy between the opinions of ordinary people and the opinions of experts can be explained in three following ways. First of all, the actual and effective elimination of this pathology from the public life of Poles. Secondly, the phenomenon of corruption may be concentrated in areas not noticed by most people (at the interface between business and politics, tenders). Thirdly, the phenomenon of normalization of deviant acts (Vaughan, 1997), as the years of corruption could have made society insensitive to this phenomenon and not perceived it as a "big" problem.

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