A Scoping Review on Perception-based Definitions and Measurements of Corruption

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Abstract – Studies on perceptions of corruption have grown in recent years but are still struggling with several conceptual and measurement issues. This scoping review provides an analytical of the peer-reviewed literature on perception-based corruption. From a total of 1,374 articles surveyed, ninety ultimately met inclusion criteria. We found two main quantifiable trends when exploring our sample: publications in high-impact journals were slow in addressing perception-based corruption; and perceptions of corruption are of interest not only to political science and sociology but to other disciplinary traditions. In more qualitative terms, we observe that the explicit or implicit definitions of "corruption" behind these studies tend to fall into two categories: corruption as a 'Deviant Process' or as a 'Deviant Outcome', while measurements can be typified in a two-dimensional scheme: 'Sociotropic' vs 'Egocentric' and 'Generic' vs 'Specific'. Most measurement approaches surveyed tend to use a 'deviant process' definition, whereas the measurement of corruption as a 'deviant outcome' still lacks development. This might represent a challenge for future research focusing on the social understandings of corruption in various contexts (administrative, organizational, political, economic, legal, etc.).

Introduction

Few concepts are as hard to define and measure as corruption. Knowledge on the topic has derived from different academic traditions, often in an unsystematic manner. Qualitative approaches have a longer tradition, but are constantly dueling with national idiosyncrasies (Mény & de Sousa, 2001). Quantitative approaches have proliferated since the 1990s, but they still have difficulties finding suitable indicators that can travel in space and time to effectively gauge the phenomenon (Galtung, 2006; Lambsdorff, 2006). Notwithstanding the significant progress made, we are still unable to give a straightforward answer to Scott's (1972, p. 3) fundamental question: "corruption, we would all agree, involves a deviation from certain standards of behavior [, but] what criteria shall we use to establish these standards?"

One approach to the problem is to embrace the notion that such standards are not universal and are instead defined by socially determined norms (Heidenheimer, 1970; Truman, 1971). Taking this into account, it follows that corruption can be profitably studied by accessing social understandings regarding its salience and prevalence (or not), acknowledging that those standards vary between individuals and are internalized by in different ways (D. Jackson & Köbis, 2018; Klašnja et al., 2014; Klašnja & Tucker, 2013; Köbis et al., 2018). Indeed, much of the empirical research in recent years has been devoted to developing instruments to obtain *perception-based* measures of corruption from different population groups and strata (Wysmułek, 2019). However, this does not preclude the fact that both the definition and the instruments employed remain problematic. Either implicitly or explicitly, the instruments devised to capture perceptions of corruption contain an underlying definition of the phenomenon, which has direct implications not only to what ends up being measured but also to any analysis of the causes and/or consequences of (perceived) corruption (Treisman, 2007).

By performing a *scoping review* (Dacombe, 2018), a method-driven research synthesis to examine "the extent, range and nature" of a literature on a particular topic or field of study , we aim at distilling the core elements of perception-based definitions and measures of corruption across different disciplines, as well as to identify gaps in this research program. In doing so, we attempt to contribute to the ongoing debate on how to expand knowledge on people's perceptions, attitudes, and experiences of corruption, and to facilitate innovation in the use of survey-based corruption indicators. Scoping reviews of this kind are useful to map fields of study where the range of material available is dispersed into several disciplinary areas (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005) and to help researchers familiarizing themselves with the core conceptual and theoretical debates in the field.

In the following section, we start by explaining the motivation behind such an exercise of systematization. We then describe and justify the method developed and implemented to compile only high-quality peer-reviewed publications dealing with perceptions of corruption from multiple scientific traditions. Starting from 1,374 articles surveyed, ninety ultimately met our inclusion criteria and were analyzed as a single set of information. In the fourth section, we discuss the main results. Previewing them, we found that most of the existing research on corruption perceptions tends to conceive and define corruption as consisting of a deviation from 'due process', employing a *deontological* ethics lens, de-emphasizing a *consequentialist* ethics lens — corruption as a deviation from expected positive social, economic, administrative, or even democratic outcomes (Alexander & Moore, 2007). Furthermore, we identify two dimensions along which perception-based measures of corruption tend to vary. The first dimension distinguishes *egocentric* from *sociotropic* (perceived) corruption: while the former captures self-reported personal experiences, the other captures perceptions of society-

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wide phenomena (Gouvêa Maciel & de Sousa, 2018). The second dimension distinguishes *specific* from *generic* measures, depending on whether the occurrence or prevalence of given conducts, practices, or behaviors is specified or not. In the final section, we derive general conclusions and recommendations for future research.

Overall, we provide an overview of the distribution of the publications across time and disciplinary provenance to situate the developments of the research at hand, and qualitatively examine what they offer in terms of perception-oriented properties and attributes related to types of definitions and measurements of corruption. By confronting our results with what has been traditionally debated in the literature, we aim at deriving pertinent implications for future studies that need to deal with those theoretical dilemmas in any social context of interest.

Motivation

The literature on corruption has grown considerably in the past decades. Survey methods applied to this field of study have become increasingly popular as the issue gained salience in public opinion and the international agenda. Specialized research kept expanding while new interdisciplinary and multi-methods approaches were developed and incorporated to gauge how people express their opinions, make judgements, report their experiences, and voice their concerns about the social impact corruption may have on their lives, institutions, and/or organizations.

Scientific advancement in corruption studies has taken place through a non-linear process of accumulated information. It is known that the development of a solid literature review to critically consolidate existing knowledge on a topic is a crucial step to avoid the trap of 'theoretical chaos' in any discipline (Baumeister & Leary, 1997; Schwarz et al., 2007; Winchester & Salji, 2016). However, the growing number of

academic publications, combined with the emergence of new technologies that have facilitated access to information and communication among scholars (Borges, 2003; Hurd, 2002; Kling & McKim, 1999; Tenopir et al., 2011), makes it hard for researchers to discern what publications to take into consideration to ensure that a review truly captures multiple academic perspectives regarding a given phenomenon. Furthermore, social scientists "tend to read a different range of journals, and hence, by implication, to become familiar with a different literature, theoretical discourse, and research agenda" (Norris, 1997, p. 24). This, in turn, can result in a biased selection of research references according to the researcher's theoretical preferences, needs, or beliefs.

Systematic and scoping literature reviews address these issues by helping scholars structure and conduct their 'state-of-the-art' assessments with more adequate mechanisms to evaluate publication suitability and quality (Snyder, 2019). Common in the clinical and health sciences and increasingly popular in the social sciences (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005; Dacombe, 2018; Petticrew & Roberts, 2006), they have been recently adapted to corruption studies.

Indeed, few studies tried to organize the literature on corruption using systematic or scoping procedures. Most of them focused on a causal-oriented approach to the problem, giving more importance to the understanding of the specific factors that drive corruption and the fight against it than to conceptual aspects (Cintra et al., 2018; DFID, 2015; Doorenspleet, 2019; Gans-Morse et al., 2018; Hanna et al., 2011; Judge et al., 2011; Kouznetsov et al., 2018; Lyrio et al., 2018; Molina et al., 2017; Ugur & Dasgupta, 2011). Albeit extremely relevant, those studies tend to take for granted a relative consensus about what corruption is and how to measure its prevalence.

Recent works have tried to address this issue. For example, while searching for a concept of corruption in the field of public administration, Jancsics (2019, p. 534)

concluded that "it is crucial that researchers and practitioners develop better ways to study and explain its major forms". When exploring the concept of corruption prevention, Bautista-Beauchesne and Garzon (2019) added to the debate that it is necessary to promote multidisciplinarity to improve theory. Regarding definition and measurement, Prasad et al. (2019) concluded that defining corruption still represents a real challenge, while Pozsgai-Alvarez and Pastor Sanz (2021) found, through machine learning methods, that measurement is central to anti-corruption research and needs to be better explored.

Through the use of the scoping review technique, we expect to contribute to these and other existing efforts to systematize the knowledge on the subject. Our main objective was to identify theoretical building blocks of perception-based definitions and measurements of corruption. We employed a transparent protocol – respecting a set of clear and explicit rules and procedures established before the content review was conducted (Campbell Collaboration, 2019; Cooper et al., 2009) – inspired by the PRISMA-P checklist (Moher et al., 2009; Shamseer et al., 2015). We do so with the intent of assessing a relevant sample of publications – that met high levels of academic peer-review quality – focusing on how definitions and measurements of corruption based on perceptions have been discussed from a multidisciplinary perspective.

This approach offers essential advantages that are suitable to the pursuit of our objective: instead of converting the procedure of systematization into a search for causal validations, it offers new entry points to empirical research – complementary to conventional literature reviews –, and highlights main findings of a more conceptual literature in a structured and transparent manner (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005; Hiebl, 2021; Levac et al., 2010; van Bergeijk & Lazzaroni, 2015).Specifically, we try to answer two main questions with this exercise: (1) 'Is it possible to discern a set of

common properties/attributes that definitions of corruption share, irrespective of research traditions?' and (2) 'Is it possible to identify different types of perception-based measurements of corruption?'.

Methodology and data

A concern with multidisciplinarity has permeated the entire design of this scoping review, meaning that procedures were structured to foment scientific pluralism and inclusion. We started by holding a deliberative meeting with a group of eighteen scholars with different disciplinary backgrounds (comparative politics, public policy, sociology, social psychology, economics, communication, foreign affairs, law, and history), methodological skills (behavioral, econometric, experimental, institutional, normative, and journalistic), and work practices (academic teaching/research, independent consulting, and political activism) to collect their views on terms they associate to perception-based definitions and measurements of corruption.[1]

This exercise, designed to enhance disciplinary diversity and reduce initial selection bias (Beratšová et al., 2018; Jansen, 2017; Winchester & Salji, 2016), resulted in a consensual final list of corruption-related terminology. The terms 'Abuse', 'Bribery', 'Egotropic', 'Embezzlement', 'Ethics', 'Extortion', 'Fraud', 'Graft', 'Illegal', 'Influence', 'Institution', 'Integrity', 'Legal', 'Lobby', 'Malfeasance', 'Moral', 'Permissiveness', 'Pocketbook', 'Sociotropic', 'Systemic', 'Tolerance', 'Wrong', and their respective declensions were considered for systematization.

We then developed an online search protocol considering such terminology to find peer-reviewed articles that dealt with the definition and/or measurement of corruption through perceptions.[2] Based on recommendations from Curtin University (2019), Winchester and Salji (2016), Lockwood et al. (2015), and Stern et al. (2014),

this protocol adopted concept-oriented inclusion criteria as a point of departure for article selection. It placed the term 'corruption' at the center of the automated search mechanism and correlated it with a series of keywords based on (a) the corruption-related terminology that emerged from the group deliberation; (b) expressions related to definition/measurement; and (c) expressions related to perceptions.

The rationale behind the protocol developed was used to run queries on both *Elsevier B.V.*[©] *Scopus*[®] and *Clarivate*[©] *Web of Science* on February 28, 2020 – a "selection of (…) major databases (…) ideal to navigate between the different social science disciplines which study corruption" (Bautista-Beauchesne & Garzon, 2019, p. 722).[3] We searched for articles published in scholarly journals, since the peer review processes ensure high-quality standards for what is accepted for publication (Bautista-Beauchesne & Garzon, 2019; Jancsics, 2019; Rowley & Slack, 2004; vom Brocke et al., 2009).

Books, chapters, working papers, dissertations, theses, and reports – albeit relevant – were not object of analysis. To be sure, we are aware that this decision may lead, for example, to the underrepresentation of specific disciplinary fields (Mongeon & Paul-Hus, 2016), particularly in law, which tends to favor different publication outlets, such as monographs (Doyle, 2009; Trautman, 2018). Furthermore, regardless of any disciplinary biases, such exclusion also leaves out important works where issues of definition and measurement are explicitly discussed (e.g., Della Porta & Vannucci, 1999 or Johnston, 2005). However, the alternative of adding relevant literature manually would assume access to all available published materials on the subject and the ability to properly compare their quality and pertinence, an assumption whose likely violation would introduce other biases, besides hurting the ability to compile publications in a structured, replicable, and transparent way (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005, p. 21).

The initial search resulted in 2,021 articles, but we ended up with 1,374 peer-reviewed publications catalogued after disregarding duplicated entries.[4] After reading abstracts, coder One cleaned the dataset, eliminating 993 articles not explicitly referring to corruption in social terms (more specifically, those mentioning 'computational', 'religious', 'body', and 'artistic' corruption) or not even approaching corruption as a central aspect. These were coded as 'off-topic'. After that, all articles not published in journals of the top-ranked Q1 or Q2 quartiles of the 2017 *Scimago Journal and Country Ranking* (SJR) were also excluded to increase the probability that the sample was relevant and of high quality.[5]

A blind double-check on the remaining 272 article abstracts was carried out by coders One and Two, in order to determine whether each publication referred or not to perception-based definitions and/or measurements of corruption. Coder Two was offered the possibility of coding entries as 'off-topic' too. When both coders disagreed on classification, abstracts were sent to coder Three, who has excellent technical and academic expertise on (anti)corruption issues and had decisional priority over previous classifications. This approach was similar to what Schreier (2012) recommended when dealing with discordance in qualitative content. A particularity of systematizing a concept not yet fully developed or that is constantly challenged (such as 'corruption') is the fact that any objective orientation as to 'how coders should code definitions and measurements similarly' would make results less representative of the diversity of traditions that have been studying corruption.

175 articles were considered for preliminary reading. Articles were read by all the first three coders and by a fourth additional coder. Again, those articles remained in the scoping review only after all coders reached consensus through motivated deliberation. In the end, a total of ninety articles were considered for a comprehensive

qualitative analysis, with twenty-one coded as pertaining only to 'definition', twenty-seven only to 'measurement', and forty-two to both 'definition' and 'measurement' of perception-based corruption. Table 1 lists exclusion criteria used, while Figure 1 summarizes the article selection process as described in this section.[6]

All four coders fully read those ninety articles, resulting in an overarching qualitative description of transversal narratives and arguments about how definitions and measurements of perceptions of corruption have been typified. The 'Qualitative description' subsection of this paper represents the joint result of the interpretations of all coders – involved in this process – of that emerged from the consolidation of what was discussed in the articles surveyed. It does not constitute an attempt to summarize how questions/items about corruption have been applied in different surveys, since the idea was to decode the arguments that may influence the design of those social research instruments. Data processing and the qualitative analysis took place from October 2018 to May 2020.

[Table 1 about here]

[Figure 1 about here]

Results

Quantifiable trends

A growing but belated interest

Considering the great impact of two very relevant mid-1990s initiatives – the Transparency International's *Corruption Perception Inde*x (TI's CPI) and the *Control of Corruption* dimension of the *Worldwide Governance Indicators* (CC-WGI) (Kaufmann et al., 2010) – based on perceptions of corruption collected through surveys of large populations, experts, or the business community, one might expect a flourishing industry of articles in highly-cited peer-reviewed journals addressing issues related to the definition and measurement of corruption. However, this is not the case, as Figure 2 shows.

It was only in 2008 that publications started to gain traction in our dataset. It is worth mentioning that both 2008 and 2015 constituted years of atypical growth in publication in the field of Political Science (PS) as a whole.[7] The scoping data revealed that – despite the continuous explosion of corruption scandals in many advanced democracies and the inclusion of corruption in the international agenda during the 1990s (de Sousa et al., 2012) – academic interest was slow to respond to the growing social challenge imposed by corruption and to the increasing amount of data generated by large-scale projects designed to measure perceptions of corruption. Such post-2008 emergent interest in the topic is compatible with the argument that associates the unfolding of the economic crisis with the spread of publications on the topic, mainly due to what research has found: crises reinforce the salience of corruption and its implications for society (Choi & Woo, 2010; Doorenspleet, 2019, pp. 186–188; Zechmeister & Zizumbo-Colunga, 2013).

[Figure 2 about here]

A sociopolitical problem but of multidisciplinary interest

Figure 3 shows how articles were distributed in our dataset in terms of journals' field of

publication. Journals in Political Science and Sociology were the most frequent outlets,

followed at a greater distance by Business and Management, Law, International

Relations, Public Administration, and Economics. All other fields in which we found

articles published were below 10%. Contrary to Cartier-Bresson's (1992, pp. 583–584),

expectations that corruption is a phenomenon at the intersection of law, economics, and

politics, when our peer-reviewed literature was dissected, corruption emerged more as a

sociopolitical process with economic and legal implications for both private and public

sectors in a comparative global scale (but with a proviso that History and Law are less

article-oriented).

 We also identified that the study of corruption perceptions has become of

growing interest to fields such as Management Studies, Anthropology, and Psychology,

thus contributing to the richness of disciplinary perspectives and methodological

approaches found in this thematic area. In our dataset, we found experimental studies

exploring causal mechanisms of corruption (Birch et al., 2017; Birch & Allen, 2015;

Rosid et al., 2018; Rothstein & Eek, 2009; Tan et al., 2016; Zhao et al., 2019), in-depth

interviews (Brown & Loosemore, 2015; Campbell & Göritz, 2014; Ferreira et al., 2012;

Frost & Tischer, 2014; M. Jackson & Smith, 1996), focus groups (Burduja & Zaharia,

2019; Grødeland, 2013; Walton, 2015), and ethnographies (Ferreyra-Orozco, 2010),

which constitute examples of investigation of how corruption has been perceived within

and across cultures and in multiple contexts (administrative, organizational, political,

economic, legal, etc.).

Five journals, in particular, concentrated the largest amount of published articles

(with three or more articles in our database): *Crime, Law and Social Change* and *Public*

Integrity with six articles each, *Governance*, the *Journal of Business Ethics*, and

Political Studies with three articles each. However, it must be highlighted that there was

significant diversification in terms of publication venues too: a total of sixty-seven

different scientific journals, meaning that three out of four articles in our dataset were

published in different outlets.

[Figure 3 about here]

Qualitative description

Types of definitions

Only twenty-one out of ninety articles in our database were classified as being explicitly

concerned with discussing definitions of corruption as gauged through perceptions.

Many discussed the concept, embedding it in a broader context of interest (a specific

region, sector, or institution), and then applying one of the different forms that the

standard definition of corruption ('the abuse of entrusted power for private benefit')

may assume.

While such an approach offered a higher level of abstraction, enabling comparison across countries, it has been put under fire for various reasons. The major criticism is that it covers a limited number of attributes/properties intrinsic to corruption, i.e. it fails to capture variations in kind, offering only a broad-brush conceptual framework (Andersson & Heywood, 2009, p. 749). Other studies followed different paths and tried to incorporate different gradients of corruption beyond this standard definition. But what do they all have in common, and what differentiates them as potential definitions in our database?

According to Sartori (1970), a social phenomenon needs a core (set of) characteristic(s) to be classified under a given label at the highest level of abstraction. In our case, the core of all definitions collected referred to actions (or omissions) or intentions that *deviate* from "the manner in which things should be done" (Ledeneva, 2009, p. 71) or from "some basic shared understanding about the common good" (Etzioni, 2014, p. 143). Other variations include deviations from "a naturally sound condition of politics" (Philp, 1997), "democratic norms" (Warren, 2004), or "democratic ideals and principles (…) historically embodied in the institutions through successive generations" (Beetham, 1994), or as "the 'uncorrupt' state of affairs in whatever area we are discussing" (Andersson & Heywood, 2009, p. 750), which undermine the institution's capacity to deliver "by diverting it from its purpose or weakening its ability to achieve its purpose" (Lessig, 2013, p. 553).

But what kind of *deviations* are these? Here, definitions of perceived corruption in our dataset fork in opposing normative theories. Since perceptions of corruption hinge "primarily upon which value systems underpin the evaluator's conceptualization of ethics" (J. Rose, 2018, p. 223), some individuals may express their concern about any form of deviation from established legal norms or accustomed or expected ways of

behaving in the exercise of duties and the discharge of responsibilities from a deontological perspective. Others, however, may evoke a notion of perceived negative externalities caused by actions, omissions, or intentions committed by natural or legal persons with entrusted authority, from a more consequentialist perspective (Philp & Dávid-Barrett, 2015; J. Rose, 2018; van Halderen & Kolthoff, 2017). In a nutshell, while the first dimension of perceived corruption leads to a definition focused on the 'Deviant Process', the second points to a definition targeted to the 'Deviant Outcome'.

In terms of 'Deviant Process' – by far, the most common way in which corruption is conceptualized in our sample of works – most definitions implied some form of abuse/violation/infringement/breach of norms regulating an office of entrusted power embedded in a society's normative system. A good example would be Aguilera and Vadera's (2008, pp. 441–442) notion of 'procedural corruption', resulting "from either the lack of formalized procedures or formal 'rules' of business conduct in the organization or from the violation of existing formal procedures for personal gain". Johnston (1996) provides another influential formulation of process-oriented definition: corruption represents a departure from the legal norms regulating the social interactions between officeholders and end-users in an institutional setting, as well as from the expectations about institutional duties. Andersson (2017, p. 60) suggests an 'influence-market corruption', which goes beyond bribery and related criminal offences and includes a series of other deviant processes, such as "conflict of interest, abuse of office, or inappropriate use of official information, and lobbying by former public officials".

There is agreement that corruption cannot be defined only as a law-breaking conduct/practice and should include a series of other instances perceived as ethically wrong, whether they fitted or not standard legal categories. So, from this viewpoint, corruption is seen as an action (or omission) or intention in breach of duties,

encompassing both legal/formal and social/cultural norms governing an office of entrusted power. Other elements associated with corruption, such as personal motivations, resources mobilized, types of inducements and payoffs promised or exchanged, strategic trust between the parties to the exchange, the risks of exposure and punishment involved, etc., were also identified in several articles (Kominis & Dudau, 2018), but did not constitute a general conceptual thread.

In contrast, other less common definitions place emphasis on 'Deviant Outcome'(s). This means that they encompass outputs or outcomes that could be evaluated as unfavorable, depending on whether they produced costs to society as a whole or to third parties who had no control over the deviant conduct or process that generated them. Such externalities could be even regarded as positive or, at least, not sufficiently harmful under certain circumstances – an argument connected to the functionalist approach towards corruption (Bayley, 1966; Ford, 1904; Huntington, 1968; Leff, 1964; Sajó, 2003; Scott, 1972).

For example, Birch and Allen (2015) conclude that individuals often judge corruption through the lenses of the public benefit that derives from those conducts/actions in office. This assertion symbolizes this connotation of corruption as an objective calculation of opportunity costs. Hence, in this case, corruption is defined in terms of the tangible or intangible implications the action (or omission) of an office of entrusted authority might have to third parties ('private externality') with a claim in that process or to the society as a whole ('social externality'), beyond the benefits that it might bring to natural or legal persons valued by the parties to the exchange. In other words, the focus shifts from the description of the procedural nuances of corruption to its effects. In some cases, however, the outcome of corruption is explicitly treated as potentially beneficial (van Halderen & Kolthoff, 2017, p. 274) – or at least as not

harmful (Sajó, 2003, p. 177) – to the social well-being or democracy (Navot, 2014, pp. 360–361), regardless of whether it was a breach of duties or not.

Meanwhile, how did these two different types of definitions link to perceptions? Some articles bring in perceptions and value judgements when discussing conceptual dimensions or attributes or trying to capture different gradients of the phenomenon (Birch et al., 2017; Birch & Allen, 2015; Burduja & Zaharia, 2019; Grødeland, 2013; M. Jackson & Smith, 1996; Klašnja et al., 2014), albeit not thoroughly discussing a possible tension between perceived 'Deviant Process' and 'Deviant Outcome'. Others capture this normative tension in value judgements about corruption. Cardenas Cardenas et al. (2018, p. 196) uses the term 'comparative grievance' to entail externalities to third parties – "failure to comply with these rules creates a grievance to third parties, for having granted benefits to some to the detriment of others". This definition identified both dimensions – process and outcome – as cumulative This normative tension was described under different labels: 'noble cause' corruption (Crank & Caldero, 2000), 'Robin Hood' corruption (de Sousa, 2008), or 'useful illegality' (Klinkhammer, 2013).

Likewise, other authors identified that there are processes that follow prescribed duties but are still regarded as having a negative externality, therefore making society morally worse in the eyes of the beholder. Sophisticated forms of influencing policy and regulatory processes within a context of strong state institutions (Andersson, 2017, pp. 60–61) often do not configure a breach of the law but are still beneficial to powerful groups in society at the expense of the majority, as put by Gouvêa Maciel and de Sousa (2018, p. 657). Beetham's (2015, p. 41) definition of corruption as the systematic preferential treatment given to "a limited set of special interests at the expense of more general ones", or Lessig's (2013, p. 553) notion of 'institutional corruption' as "a

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systemic and strategic influence which is legal, or even currently ethical, that undermines the institution's effectiveness by diverting it from its purpose or weakening its ability to achieve its purpose" fitted this outcome-oriented label too.

Types of measurements

Of the ninety articles in the final dataset, sixty-nine employed or discussed the measurement of perceptions of corruption (coming from surveys, interviews, and experiments near citizens in general, experts, business leaders, politicians, or public officials). Apart from the relevance of the empirical results those studies provided us, it is possible to find different arguments used to substantiate the measurement of perception-based corruption. We identify four main types in which those perceptions of corruption could be grounded (Figure 4 presents a schematic overview of those types).

[Figure 4 about here]

We name the first type 'Egocentric-Generic' (Figure 4a). 'Egocentric' because what is measured is eyed to the respondents' experience – to what they did and to what was done to them. They were closer to a factual report of something experienced than to a perceptual evaluation. However, at the same time, they are 'Generic' in the sense that questions employed did not specify any concrete conduct, practice, or behavior. It was possible to find this type of measurement recurrently in the articles contained in the dataset, mostly in studies concerned with the relationship between different perceptions

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of corruption and reported experiences or other social constructs. Some survey questions that exemplify such combination between a 'reported-experience' approach with generic allusions to deviant conducts: "Have you ever come across corruption in [sector]?" (Brown & Loosemore, 2015) or, more indirectly, "In your dealings with the public sector, how important are personal contacts and relationships to get things done?" (R. Rose & Peiffer, 2016). Overall, studies that employed this measurement strategy aim at understanding the symbolic distortions (Becquart-Leclercq, 1984) corruption may provide to a process or an outcome through the lenses of the individual experiences.

A second type can be called 'Egocentric-Specific' (Figure 4b). Rather than exploring whether respondents or interviewees witnessed or experienced a 'generic' pre-conceived act or context of corruption, they describe 'specific' conducts/behaviors the respondent may have witnessed, engaged in, or been the object of. Bribe-taking/giving was the most usual dimension used to make the perception of corruption more tangible. However, other aspects – e.g., kickbacks, gifts, extortion, fraud, conflicts of interest, nepotism, and money laundering – also appear as possible instruments (Burduja & Zaharia, 2019; de Graaf et al., 2018). Since the aim here was to present corruption in concrete terms, those who employ this type of measurement tend to define corruption as something irrefutably illicit or illegal to see how harmful (or not) it may become to a given process.

We also find attempts to capture perceptions of corruption irrespective of personal experiences. 'Sociotropic-Generic' (Figure 4c) configured our third type. 'Sociotropic' – a term employed mainly in studies on economic voting (Kinder & Kiewiet, 1981) that has been applied to corruption (Klašnja et al., 2014) – refers to perceptions and evaluations about people, groups, or contexts other than the respondents

themselves. 'Generic', as put before, is used in the sense that those measurements were devised to elicit pre-conceived perceptions of a symbolic corruption. Typically, from this point of view, corruption perceptions are approached by gauging the extent to which 'corruption' is thought to prevail (or increase/decrease) in a variety of actors/contexts (among politicians, public officials, in economic sectors, institutions – national parliament, central or local government –, in society, or in the country). We found this type of measurement employed, e.g., in the *Afrobarometer* item "How many of the following [office holders] do you think are involved in corruption?" (see Chang & Kerr, 2017, p. 83) or in the *Latinobarómetro* item "How many public employees [out of 100] would you say are corrupt?" (see Ruhl, 2011, p. 41). Inserted into cross-national surveys primarily tailored to approach broader social issues, this type of perception-based 'Sociotropic-Generic' measurement focuses on the symbolic expressions of corruption that may distort procedures and results and bypasses the perspective of the personal impacts corruption may produce in many contexts. Not also how this type of measurement is compatible with both deviant 'process' and 'outcome' definitions of corruption. By leaving entirely to the respondent the responsibility of filling the 'floating' or 'empty signifier' provided by the term 'corruption' in an impersonal perspective, measurements of such kind appeared to adjust to any context corruption may emerge.

The 'Sociotropic-Specific' (Figure 4d) type configures our last type. In a nutshell, this type of measurement approach mainly explores what respondents or interviewees perceive as socially prevalent in terms of corruption but anchored on concrete dimensions of what constitutes corruption (again in multiple contexts). This included studies that examined subjects' perceptions of the prevalence of 'abuse of power for private gain' in different contexts (Rosid et al., 2018) or explored levels of

'honesty' and 'integrity' of particular agents (Birch et al., 2017; Redlawsk & McCann, 2005). However, most were even more specific by typifying conducts. Bribe-taking/giving was the most common conduct employed – e.g., "How widespread do you think corruption such as bribe-taking is amongst politicians in [country]?" (McManus-Czubińska et al., 2004). Other practices such as private use of public funds, vote-selling by legislators, extorsion, illegal payments in exchange for favorable decisions, and personal favors in exchange for public contracts are also used. Two purposes typically guided the use of a 'Sociotropic-Specific' type. In some cases, respondents were asked about their perceptions of the pervasiveness of various specific behaviors with the primary objective of developing a catch-all 'generic' measurement. In other cases, this strategy was applied to make it possible to distinguish between the perceived prevalence of different types of corruption and correlated behaviors (Barker, 1977; Peters & Welch, 1978; Rosid et al., 2018).

General discussion and future steps

Corruption has been a topic of interest for both private and public sectors in multiple contexts, and has been examined through its different forms and expressions. Surveys – a limited yet efficient means to capture social understandings, perceptions, attitudes, and self-reported experiences of corruption – have been extensively applied since the 1960s. Early studies devoted a good deal of effort in trying to establish by what standards different publics judge a given conduct/practice as corrupt or non-corrupt. From mid-1990s onwards, important public and expert opinion cross-national barometers have been published on a regular basis, laying the foundations for a growing debate on the validity and precision of methods to measure corruption. Surveys have targeted different publics, used different samples, developed different measures of

corruption based on different definitions of the same phenomenon. As the field of study expanded and surveys started to proliferate across different disciplinary areas, mimicking corruption indicators from one questionnaire to another, the need for some degree of clarification and systematisation of the key perception-based definitions and measures employed became more pressing. Hence, the reason for this scoping review. It aims at providing new insights into how perceptions of corruption have been studied in the specialized peer-reviewed literature.

What does this research synthesis tell us? In quantitative terms, we found a belated but growing interest in examining the core elements of perception-based definitions and measurements of corruption in the literature, which is also more multidisciplinary than might be expected. However, despite all the developments in the field, and the growing interest in the use of surveys to approach corruption, a detailed discussion of the perception-based definitions and measurement used is required. Perception-based definitions and measures of corruption have been repeatedly used without clarifying what they cover and what is missing. Through our scoping review we were able to distil the core (set of) characteristic(s) of perception-based definitions and measurements of corruption that have been debated in the dedicated literature. We identified two emerging types of perception-based definitions of corruption: as a 'Deviant Process' or as a 'Deviant Outcome'. Each of them represents contrasting normative theories associated with a social system of public order: deontological and consequentialist ethics, respectively. At the same time, we detected a two-dimensional measurement pattern: corruption has been operationalized to capture 'Sociotropic' vs 'Egocentric' and 'Generic' vs 'Specific' dimensions.

This suggests two main implications for reflection for future research. The first concerns the frequent use of Generic (Sociotropic or Egocentric) measures. Such

measures imply the use of the term 'corruption' as a 'floating signifier' that could mean very different things to different people. While it is tempting to accommodate multiple subjective understandings into one label, this also makes it difficult to distinguish such generic definitions and measurements of corruption from other correlated phenomena– i.e. quality of governance, impartial governance, government effectiveness, democracy, or even economic development (Donchev & Ujhelyi, 2014). This suggests that, even if the ultimate goal is to produce some broad measure of the (perceived) prevalence of corruption, *greater specificity may have important advantages in terms of reliability and validity*. For example, rather than asking respondents about the prevalence of "corruption" in Estonia, Tavits (2010) presented respondents with a list of eight different practices and asked respondents about how common they were perceived to be. This allowed her to compare between different (corrupt) practices while not preventing the construction of a general "corruption" measure that avoided conceptual overstretching, by anchoring it on pre-defined and categorized behaviors (see also Rosid et al., 2018, for example). Furthermore, generic measures, while reflecting undoubtedly relevant social attitudes and/or experiences, are of limited use in what concerns the design of anti-corruption strategies.

Second, some definitions of corruption encompass not only violations of norms but also deviations from desirable outcomes. Particularly in the political realm, some practices can be conceived as 'corrupt' even when they abide by legal or even social norms but produce undue benefits for the powerful or damages for the society as a whole (Gouvêa Maciel & de Sousa, 2018; Navot, 2016; Sajó, 2003). However, in practice, measurements of perceived prevalence of (or direct experience with) such practices tend only to be assessed by those same 'generic' measures that allow respondents to project whatever meaning of corruption they may have in mind, while

existing 'specific' measures are typically restricted to manifestations of 'Deviant Process' corruption. Therefore, the call for greater "specificity" seems particularly relevant – and challenging – in what concerns 'Deviant Outcome' conceptions. If the definition of "corruption" is to include practices such as regulatory distortion, influence peddling, policy capture, or favoritism, concretizing those phenomena into practices and behaviors and assessing people's experience of them or their perceived prevalence seems crucial to avoiding mismatches between definitions and measures.

To be sure, there is still much to be done when it comes to improving the measurement of corruption and, especially, to determine what dimensions of the phenomena are captured by different indicators (subjective and objective) and the extent to which they travel across contexts for comparative purposes. We hope this scoping review and the patterns it uncovered will serve as a useful point of departure for further efforts in this regard.

Declaration

The authors have no competing interests to declare that are relevant to the content of this article and are solely responsible for the contents and any errors and omissions that may be detected in the article.

Supplemental material

- Online Resource 1: Methodological information (.pdf format)

- Online Resource 2: Final list of the ninety articles considered for qualitative description (.pdf format)

Notes

1. This meeting took place at the Institute of Social Sciences of the University of Lisbon on November 9, 2018.
2. This protocol was developed to search in English only.
3. Protocols used can be found in Table S1 of the Online Resource 1.
4. Duplicated entries were eliminated using *JabRef* version 4.3.1.
5. Articles published in *Public Integrity* were considered for analysis due to the relevance of the journal to the dedicated research on corruption issues and because the journal has appeared at the top-ranked quartiles of the SJR since 2019.
6. Table S2 of the Online Resource 1 presents the codebook used to catalogue articles. The final list of all ninety articles considered for qualitative description is also available for consultation (Online Resource 2).
7. Considering the annual volume of PS peer-reviewed publications in the *Web of Science* (2019) for the period 1978-2018. Two waves of atypical increase were identified: one high publication growth rate of 15.87% in 2008; and another high growth rate of 33.34% in 2015.

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Table 1. Exclusion criteria for the scoping review.

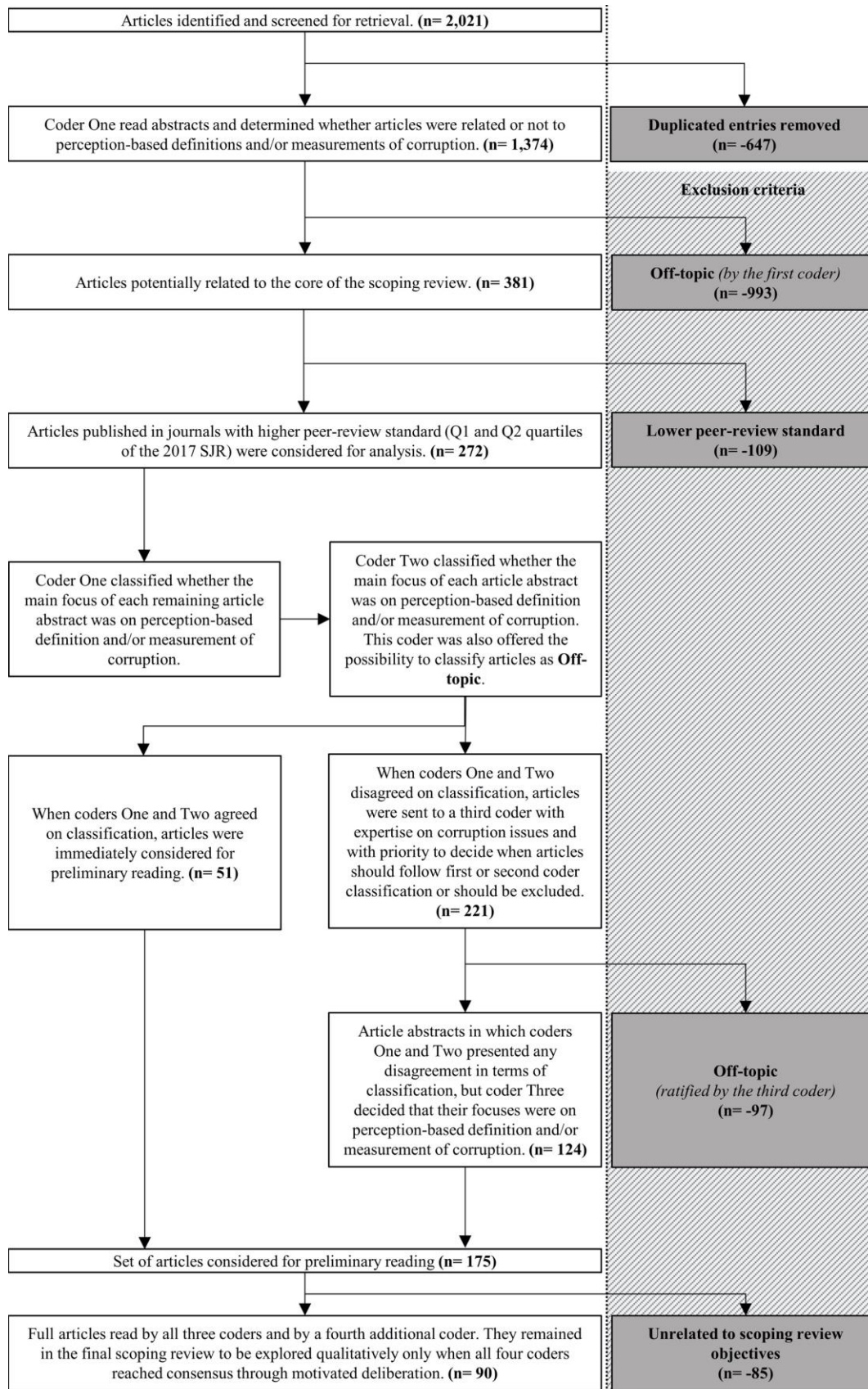| Exclusion criteria	
Off-topic	• Not focusing on corruption as main topic; • Not addressing corruption in social terms.
Lower peer review standard	• Not published in Q1 and Q2 quartiles of 2017 SJR.
Unrelated to research objectives	• Not discussing perception-based definitions; and/or • Not discussing perception-based measurements.

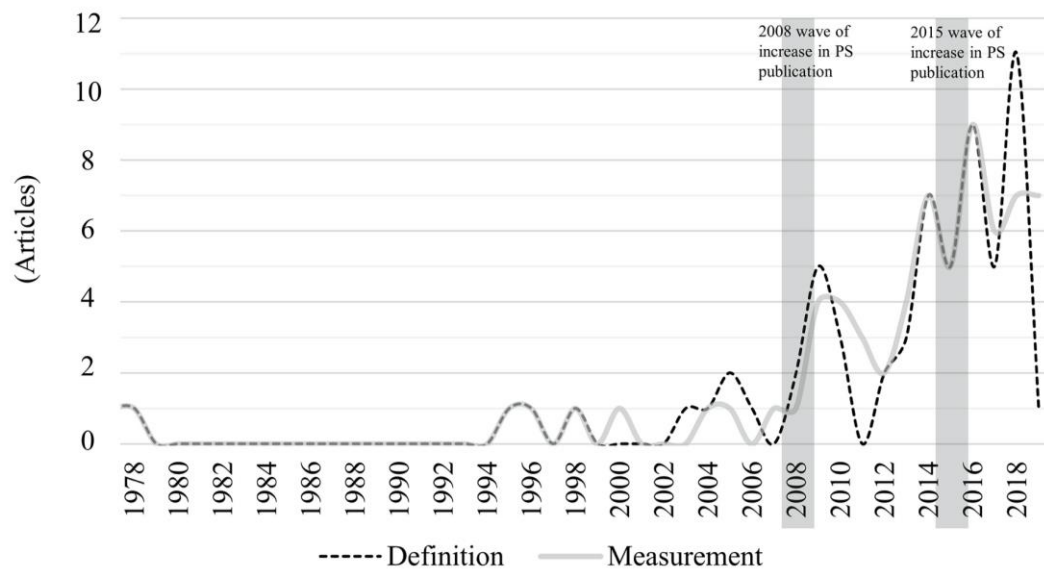Figure 1. Flow diagram of article selection process.

Figure 2. Evolution of articles on perception-based definitions and measurements of corruption published in Q1 and Q2 peer-reviewed journals.
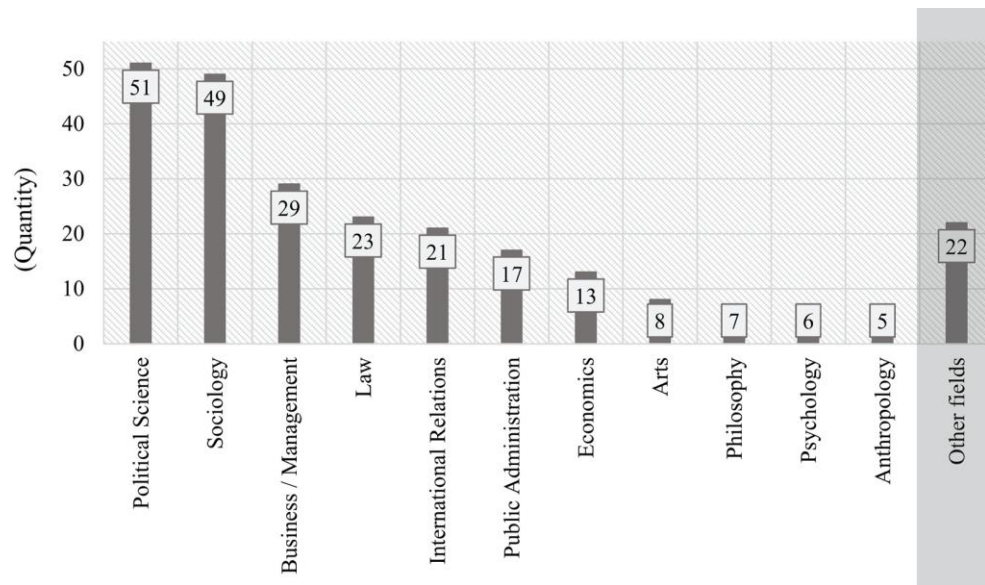
Figure 3. Articles related to perceptions of corruption in the scoping review by journals' fields of publication.

(a)	(c)
EGOCENTRIC --» *self-reported personal experience*	**SOCIOTROPIC** --» *society-wide incidence (as referring to people, groups, or situations other than the respondents themselves)*
and **GENERIC** --» *do not specify any conduct, practice, or behavior that may be classified as corruption*	and **GENERIC** --» *do not specify any conduct, practice, or behavior that may be classified as corruption*
Ex.: Have you ever had to act in a corrupt way?	Ex.: How widespread is corruption in your country?
(b)	(d)
EGOCENTRIC --» *self-reported personal experience*	**SOCIOTROPIC** --» *society-wide incidence (as referring to people, groups, or situations other than the respondents themselves)*
and **ESPECIFIC** --» *specify conducts, practices, or behaviors that may be classified as corruption*	and **SPECIFIC** --» *specify conducts, practices, or behaviors that may be classified as corruption*
Ex.: Have you ever been asked to pay a bribe?	Ex.: How widespread is bribery in your country?

Figure 4. Four main types of perception-based measurement of corruption.