

How Does Perceived Political Corruption Affect Public Political Participation? Evidence from Ukraine

Olena Hlushchenko, Guanghua Han*

School of International and Public Affairs, Shanghai Jiao Tong University, Shanghai 200030, China

*Corresponding author email: hanguanghua@sjtu.edu.cn

Abstract

Perceptions of corruption may drive non-traditional political involvement but don't necessarily affect traditional modes of participation. This study explores how perceived corruption influences political engagement among Ukrainian citizens, revealing the complex interplay between corruption, social status, and political participation. Understanding these dynamic aids in comprehending the impact of perceived corruption on political engagement in the Ukrainian context. This study is committed to examining the intricate interplay between perceived political corruption and public political engagement in Ukraine. By unraveling this complex relationship, we aim to shed light on the motivations and behaviors of Ukrainian citizens in the face of corruption, ultimately contributing to the ongoing efforts to strengthen democracy, uphold the rule of law, and foster a more accountable political environment.

Keywords

Corruption, Ukraine, Political participation, Non-conventional political participation.

1. Introduction

Political corruption remains a prevalent issue in many nations globally, posing significant threats to democracy, economic advancement, and societal progress. The repercussions of perceived political corruption have widespread effects, influencing public trust in governance, levels of political involvement, and overall civic participation. Ukraine, in particular, grapples with this intricate problem, where political corruption casts a long-standing shadow over the country's political landscape. With a history marked by prominent scandals involving leaders, bribery, nepotism, and a lack of transparency and accountability, Ukraine has confronted the detrimental impacts of political corruption for an extended period.

This raises crucial inquiries: How does alleged political corruption impact the willingness of Ukrainian citizens to partake in politics? Does it deter active engagement or act as a catalyst for mobilization, urging individuals to demand change and reform? To address these pivotal questions and offer insights for crafting anti-corruption legislation and democratic reforms, this study is dedicated to examining the complex relationship between perceived political corruption and public political engagement in Ukraine.

Rational choice theory is a cornerstone of economics and social sciences, emphasizing the maximization of self-interest by rational actors [1]. The theory suggests that individuals weigh the costs and benefits of political participation, and if they perceive that their efforts outweigh the benefits gained, they may choose to withdraw. This theory examines the association between active political engagement and perceptions of political corruption, indicating that individuals may opt out of participation if they doubt the system's ability to bring about change. Social capital theory offers an alternative perspective on the relationship between perceived political corruption and political participation, highlighting trust and social networks as crucial

factors [2]. Unlike rational choice theory, which focuses on balancing costs and benefits in political participation, social capital theory emphasizes the impact of strong social connections and trust on participation. Within this theoretical framework, perceived political corruption is viewed as a common factor that can influence political engagement across various social classes. However, the impact of perceived corruption may vary depending on individuals' social classes. Therefore, social classes are considered as a moderating variable.

Numerous studies indicate that the perceived corruption significantly reduces individuals' willingness to engage in established political activities [3], highlighting the negative impact of residents' corruption perceptions on political participation. Due to the erosion of trust, these notions often diminish residents' confidence in government institutions [4]. Perceptions of political corruption not only affect traditional political participation but also drive non-traditional participation. Ongoing research consistently supports this connection, demonstrating that individuals perceiving high-level corruption tend to engage in non-traditional political participation activities. Therefore, the first hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 1a: Perceived political corruption negatively influences individuals' traditional political participation.

Hypothesis 1b: Perceived political corruption positively influences individuals' non-traditional political participation.

An individual's social class, whether subjective or objective, significantly affects their involvement in traditional politics. Research consistently indicates a correlation between higher socioeconomic status and increased involvement in traditional political activities, as they are more likely to access resources and opportunities for political engagement [5]. Social class may mediate the impact of perceived corruption on traditional political participation. Higher class might engage more actively, while lower class might choose to withdraw due to perceiving inefficiency within the system. Thus, the second research hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 2a: Social class (subjective and objective) directly influence individuals' traditional political participation.

Hypothesis 2b: Social class (subjective and objective) moderate the relationship between perceived political corruption and traditional political participation.

Individuals from different social statuses engage in politics differently. Many studies suggest that individuals with lower social status often struggle to access political participation opportunities and tend to opt for non-traditional political actions [6]. Socioeconomic status may alter the connection between perceived political corruption and non-traditional political participation. This mediating effect emphasizes the importance of considering social classes when assessing how corruption influences traditional political participation. Therefore, the third research hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 3a: Social class (subjective and objective) directly influence individuals' non-traditional political participation.

Hypothesis 3b: Social class (subjective and objective) moderate the relationship between perceived political corruption and non-traditional political participation.

2. Method

The present study employed data from the World Values Survey Association (WVSA) and the European Values Study (EVS) for the purposes of conducting empirical research. The total number of interviews which were held in Ukraine included in the survey sample was 1289 (maximum sampling error of 2.7%, probability of 0.95, design impact not accounted for).

Conventional and unconventional participation are the study's dependent variable. Drawing on relevant scholarly studies [7], this study investigates the complexity of political activism,

including conventional and unconventional methods. The study examines traditional and unconventional involvement. The study measured unusual political activity by asking about petitions, boycotts, peaceful demonstrations, and strikes (Q209, Q210, Q211, Q212).

This study formalized and quantified corruption perceptions as an independent variable. This approach makes corruption perceptions a quantitative component in our research rather than a theoretical one. Question 112 from the World Values Survey (WVS) Wave 7 in Ukraine served this purpose. During the study, respondents were asked about corruption, "the practice of offering improper compensation to obtain goods, services, or advantages" [8]. Interviewees rated corruption in their country from 10 (severe) to 1 (no corruption).

This study required social class determination. To get reliable results, we had to assess the individuals' objective and subjective social classes. The subjective aspect of social class was examined using question Q287 and relevant scholarly literature [7]. The Q287 question asked about social class opinions. People were asked to choose "Upper class," "Upper middle class," "Lower middle class," "Working class," or "Lower class."

A linear regression method was employed, controlling for demographic factors, with perceived corruption as the independent variable and conventional and unconventional participation as dependent variables. This methodology forms a comprehensive framework for examining corruption's impact on political engagement.

Table 1. Direct affects to unconventional political participation

	Dependent variable: unconventional Political Participation				
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Gender	-0.56 (0.078)	-0.60 (0.78)	-0.060 (0.076)	-0.036 (0.077)	-0.042 (0.076)
Marriage	0.81 (0.087)	0.72 (0.087)	0.009 (0.085)	0.017 (0.086)	-0.020 (0.085)
Job	0.2* (0.082)	0.195* (0.082)	0.120 (0.081)	0.139 (0.081)	0.096 (0.080)
Children	-0.077 (0.044)	-0.076 (0.043)	-0.052 (0.043)	-0.065 (0.043)	-0.049 (0.042)
Age	-0.004 (0.003)	-0.004 (0.003)	-0.001 (0.003)	0.000 (0.003)	0.001 (0.003)
Local	0.274 (0.200)	0.280 (0.200)	0.259 (0.195)	0.306 (0.196)	0.278 (0.193)
Perception of Corruption		-0.086* (0.038)	-0.096* (0.037)	-0.068 (0.038)	-0.081* (0.037)
Objective Social class: Education			0.205*** (0.040)		0.150*** (0.042)
Objective Social Class: Income			-1.107* (0.037)		-0.123** (0.037)
Subjective social class				0.206*** (0.041)	0.165*** (0.043)
Intercept	-0.004 (0.268)	0.002 (0.267)	-0.085 (0.261)	-0.216 (0.266)	-0.224 (0.261)
R ²	0.023	0.030	0.081	0.066	0.102
Adjusted R ²	0.014	0.020	0.069	0.055	0.088
N	960				

Note: Standard errors are in parentheses.

*p<0.05; **p<0.01; *** p<0.001, two-tailed test.

3. Results

The study's key findings from Table 1 reveal coefficients indicating the relationship between corruption perception and various factors affecting political engagement. The Perception of Corruption variable showed significance (-0.086*, -0.096*, -0.068, -0.081*) across Models 1, 2, 3, and 5, denoted by asterisks. Gender consistently displayed negative coefficients (-0.56 to -0.042), suggesting lower inclination toward non-conventional political activities among women. Job and education exhibited significance in specific models, indicating their influence on unconventional political engagement. Parents' interest in politics beyond voting appeared reduced (-0.049 to -0.077), linked to the "Children" variable. Income negatively impacted unconventional political engagement in Models 3 and 5, while subjective social class showed a positive influence in these models, see Table 1.

Table 2 Direct affects to conventional political participation

	Dependent variable: conventional Political Participation				
	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9	Model 10
Gender	0.111 (0.075)	0.114 (0.075)	0.116 (0.075)	0.114 (0.075)	0.115 (0.075)
Marriage	0.169* (0.083)	0.175* (0.083)	0.172* (0.084)	0.175* (0.084)	0.175* (0.084)
Job	0.132 (0.078)	0.134 (0.078)	0.127 (0.080)	0.135 (0.079)	0.129 (0.080)
Children	0.083* (0.042)	0.083* (0.042)	0.084* (0.042)	0.083* (0.042)	0.084* (0.042)
Age	0.016*** (0.003)	0.016*** (0.003)	0.017*** (0.003)	0.016*** (0.003)	0.016*** (0.003)
Local	-0.199 (0.192)	-0.203 (0.191)	-0.196 (0.192)	-0.203 (0.192)	-0.197 (0.192)
Perception of Corruption		0.057 (0.037)	0.058 (0.037)	0.057 (0.037)	0.057 (0.037)
Objective Social class:			0.017 (0.039)		0.021 (0.042)
Education					
Objective Social Class:			0.046 (0.037)		0.047 (0.037)
Income					
Subjective social class				-0.001 (0.040)	-0.012 (0.042)
Intercept	-1.019*** (0.256)	-1.023*** (0.255)	-1.045*** (0.257)	-1.022*** (0.259)	-1.034*** (0.259)
R ²	0.108	0.111	0.113	0.111	0.113
Adjusted R ²	0.100	0.102	0.101	0.100	0.100
N	960				

Note: Standard errors are in parentheses.

*p<0.05; **p<0.01; *** p<0.001, two-tailed test.

Table 2 presents regression findings on "Conventional Political Participation." Marriage consistently shows a positive impact (0.169* to 0.175*) across Models 6 to 10, indicating a higher inclination for political engagement among married individuals. Similarly, parenthood positively affects voting behavior (0.083*). Age exhibits a significant positive relationship (0.016***) across all models, indicating higher engagement in conventional political activities among older individuals. However, the Perception of Corruption doesn't notably boost civic engagement. Objective Social Class variables related to education and income don't directly influence political participation. Subjective Social Class displays a sporadic negative impact in

some models but doesn't strongly affect the outcome. In summary, factors like marriage, having children, and aging positively impact conventional political participation. Yet, perceptions of corruption and objective/subjective social class have limited influence on traditional political activities, see Table 2.

Table 3. Moderating affects to political participation

	Dependent variable:	
	Unconventional Political Participation	Conventional Political Participation
	Model 11	Model 12
Gender	-0.026 (0.076)	0.116 (0.076)
Marriage	-0.028 (0.085)	0.173* (0.084)
Job	0.094 (0.081)	0.126 (0.080)
Children	-0.052 (0.042)	0.080 (0.042)
Age	0.001 (0.003)	0.017*** (0.003)
Local	0.255 (0.194)	-0.205 (0.193)
Perception of Corruption	-0.082* (0.037)	0.055 (0.037)
Objective Social class:	0.148***	0.020
Education	(0.042)	(0.042)
Objective Social Class:	-0.123**	0.047
Income	(0.037)	(0.037)
Subjective social class	0.167*** (0.043)	-0.013 (0.043)
Education x Perception of Corruption	-0.034 (0.041)	-0.010 (0.041)
Income x Perception of Corruption	0.070 (0.037)	-0.021 (0.037)
Subjective social class x Perception of Corruption	0.000 (0.040)	-0.019 (0.040)
Intercept	-0.223 (0.261)	-1.030*** (0.260)
R ²	0.108	0.115
Adjusted R ²	0.091	0.097
N	960	

Note: Standard errors are in parentheses.

*p<0.05; **p<0.01; *** p<0.001, two-tailed test.

Table 3 outlines Moderating Effects on Political Participation. "Marriage" positively influences voting frequency (0.173*), indicating married individuals lean towards traditional political activities. Regarding age, Models 11 and 12 reveal an increased tendency for conventional political engagement as individuals grow older. Comparing Model 11 and Model 12 for "Perception of Corruption," social class doesn't impact traditional political participation. This suggests diverse social classes engage legally despite perceiving corruption. However, social class negatively mediates unconventional participation. "Objective Social Class: Education"

significantly influences non-traditional political behavior (0.148***), emphasizing education's impact. "Income" discourages non-traditional political activities. "Subjective Social Class" positively influences (0.167***) non-traditional political inclinations. Notably, Education x Perception of Corruption, Income x Perception of Corruption, and Subjective Social Class x Perception of Corruption showed no significant associations, see Table 3.

4. Discussion

The study results revealed that the perception of corruption doesn't significantly affect traditional political engagement, contradicting Hypothesis 1a. Essentially, when Ukrainians believe their government is corrupt, they're less inclined to participate in conventional political activities. This suggests that corruption perceptions trigger disillusionment, leading people to question the effectiveness of established political avenues like voting or supporting mainstream parties.

The study revealed an unexpected result: the perception of political corruption negatively affects non-traditional political engagement in Ukraine, contradicting Hypothesis 1b. Essentially, individuals who perceive high corruption in their government are less likely to participate in unconventional political activities. This link could stem from a sense of disillusionment and skepticism, making unconventional means seem ineffective. Additionally, perceived risks associated with such actions might also deter involvement.

The study uncovered an intriguing link between subjective social class and unconventional political engagement, indicating a positive relationship. Those perceiving themselves in a higher social class are more inclined to participate in unconventional political activities. This association is driven by a sense of personal empowerment and belief in their ability to effect change through unconventional means. Their perceived influence and societal standing likely fuel their willingness to challenge norms and pursue unconventional routes for instigating change.

The study unveils an interesting aspect of subjective social class concerning conventional political engagement. Unlike its impact on unconventional participation, subjective social class seems not to notably influence individuals' involvement in traditional political activities. This prompts intriguing reflections on how people perceive their civic role and obligations within the political system. It suggests that those who view themselves in a higher social position may not alter their actions regarding essential citizen duties, like voting or participating in established political processes.

The study highlights that objective social class doesn't directly influence conventional political participation. This implies that in traditional political engagement, the sense of civic duty seems to surpass social class differences. Despite varied social statuses and perceptions of government corruption, individuals from diverse classes commonly engage in established political activities like voting, viewing it as an essential aspect of citizenship.

5. Conclusion

This study's findings reveal that when residents of Ukraine perceive their government as corrupt, they are less inclined to engage in both traditional and non-traditional political activities. The research uncovers intriguing connections between the subjective social class in Ukraine and unconventional political participation, indicating a positive correlation. It suggests that those considering themselves in higher social strata are more inclined to engage in non-traditional political activities. Overall, this study delves into how residents' assessment of corruption levels affects political participation in Ukraine, emphasizing the importance of citizen engagement in shaping governance and societal progress. However, given Ukraine's

unique regional and social management characteristics, this study merely showcases the political participation of its residents.

Acknowledgments

Sincere gratitude to National Social Science Fund of China (21BGL219) and Humanities and Social Science Fund of Ministry of Education of China (20YJC630033).

References

- [1] Scott, J.: Understanding contemporary society: Theories of the present (2000). *Rational Choice Theory*, vol. 129 (2000) p. 126-138.
- [2] Aldrich, J. H.: Rational choice and turnout. *American Journal of Political Science*, vol. 37 (Feb., 1993) No. 1, pp. 246-278.
- [3] Sofyani, H., Yaya, R., & Saleh, Z.: Transparency and community trust in village government: Does corruption perception matter? *Financial Accountability & Management*, vol. 39 (2023) No. 2, p. 355-374.
- [4] Thanetsunthorn, N.: Corruption and social trust: The role of corporate social responsibility. *Business Ethics, the Environment & Responsibility*, vol. 31 (2022) No.1, p. 49-79.
- [5] Campbell, D. E.: Social networks and political participation. *Annual Review of Political Science*, vol. 16 (2013) p. 33-48.
- [6] Bourne, P. A.: Unconventional political participation in a middle-income developing country. *Current Research Journal of Social Sciences*, vol. 2 (2010) No.2, p. 196-203.
- [7] Cicatiello, L., Ercolano, S., & Gaeta, G. L.: Income distribution and political participation: A multilevel analysis. *Empirica*, vol. 42 (2015) p. 447-479.
- [8] Canache, D., & Allison, M. E.: Perceptions of political corruption in Latin American democracies. *Latin American Politics and Society*, vol. 47 (2005) No.3, p. 91-111.
- [9] Thiel, M., Fiocchetto, E., & Maslanik, J. D.: Identity Politics, Political Mobilization, and Social In/Exclusions in the EU (Cham: Springer International Publishing, Switzerland 2023), pp. 39-59.
- [10] Piškur, B., Daniēls, R., Jongmans, M. J., Ketelaar, M., Smeets, R. J., Norton, M., & Beurskens, A. J.: Participation and social participation: Are they distinct concepts? *Clinical Rehabilitation*, vol. 28 (2014) No.3, p. 211-220.
- [11] Van Deth, J. W.: A conceptual map of political participation. *Acta Politica*, vol. 49 (2014) p. 349-367.
- [12] Gerber, A. S., & Rogers, T.: Descriptive social norms and motivation to vote: Everybody's voting and so should you. *The Journal of Politics*, vol. 71 (2009) No.1, p. 178-191.
- [13] Caiden, G. E.: Toward a general theory of official corruption. *Asian Journal of Public Administration*, vol. 10 (1988) No.1, p. 3-26.
- [14] Jackman, M. R., & Jackman, R. W.: An interpretation of the relation between objective and subjective social status. *American Sociological Review*, vol. 38 (Oct., 1973) No. 5, pp. 569-582.
- [15] Hooghe, & Quintelier, E.: Political participation in European countries: The effect of authoritarian rule, corruption, lack of good governance, and economic downturn. *Comparative European Politics*, vol. 12 (2014) p. 209-232.