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Ideology, Party Systems and Corruption Voting in European Democracies

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Abstract: What is the impact of corruption on citizens' voting behavior? There is a growing literature on an increasingly ubiquitous puzzle in many democratic countries: that corrupt officials continue to be re-elected by voters. In this study we address this issue with a novel theory and newly collected original survey data for 24 European countries. The crux of the argument is that voters' ideology is a salient factor in explaining why citizens would continue voting for their preferred party despite the fact that it has been involved in a corruption scandal. Developing a theory of supply (number of effective parties) and demand (voters must have acceptable ideological alternatives to their preferred party), we posit that there is a U-shaped relationship between the likelihood of corruption voting and where voters place themselves on the left/right spectrum. The further to the fringes, the more likely the voters are to neglect corruption charges and continue to support their party. However, as the number of viable party alternatives increases, the effect of ideology is expected to play a smaller role. In systems with a large number of effective parties, the curve is expected to be flat, as the likelihood that the fringe voters also have a clean and reasonably ideologically close alternative to switch to. The hypothesis implies a cross level interaction for which we find strong and robust empirical evidence using hierarchical modeling. In addition, we provide empirical insights about how individual level ideology and country level party systems - among other factors - impact a voter's decision to switch parties or stay home in the face of their party being involved in a corruption scandal

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