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Measuring Public Corruption in the American States: A Survey of State House Reporters

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ABSTRACT

We use a survey of State House reporters to measure corruption in state government and assess the priority federal prosecutors place on corruption investigations. The reliability and validity of the corruption measures are assessed, as are the relationships among corruption level, federal prosecutorial effort, and the number of federal prosecutions. Federal corruption prosecutions are positively correlated with both corruption and prosecutorial effort. Hence, we argue that federal prosecution data provide a potentially biased and unreliable measure of state public corruption.

RESEARCH ON STATE GOVERNMENT CORRUPTION has long faced a crucial measurement problem: How do we measure corruption? Cross-national studies of the relationships among corruption, economic development, and political structures typically use opinions of experts to measure the level of corruption.[1] Reliable expert opinion data on public corruption has been in short supply at the state level, so scholars typically have used the number of public officials indicted for corruption by federal prosecutors to assess corruption levels (Meier and Holbrook 1992; Goel and Nelson 1998).[2] While such data are objective, the number of corruption prosecutions may be an inaccurate indicator of public corruption in a state. Prosecutors who put more effort into investigating public corruption may bring more indictments than prosecutors in comparable states even if their actual corruption levels are lower.

To improve our measurement of public corruption and to understand better its relationship with prosecutorial effort, we surveyed State House reporters to compare corruption across the American states. In addition to

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questions about public corruption, respondents were also asked about prosecutorial effort, that is, the extent to which investigation of corruption is a high priority for federal prosecutors in the state. In this article, we describe measures based on this survey and argue for their validity. These measures provide new opportunity for studying the causes and effects of public corruption in the United States and for understanding this elusive phenomenon around the world. Furthermore, we analyze our survey data to show that the number of federal corruption prosecutions is determined not only by the level of corruption in a state, but also by the level of prosecutorial effort. In this way, we show that prosecution data alone are a flawed measure for the level of corruption.

In the next section, we review the literature on public corruption and outline problems with existing measures of it at the state level. We then describe the survey, with a focus on controlling two important sources of error: noncoverage and nonresponse.[3] The survey results are then presented, followed by a comparison of our new corruption measures with existing measures and an analysis of the relationships among corruption prosecution, corruption, and prosecutorial effort. Appendix A contains the questionnaire used in the survey, and Appendix B provides definitions and data sources for the main variables used throughout the article.

PROBLEMS WITH MEASURING PUBLIC CORRUPTION IN THE STATES

Since public corruption is an activity that those who engage in strive to hide, measuring it is inherently problematic. Public corruption is defined as the abuse of public office for private gain. It may seem reasonable to use indictments for such acts as a surrogate for corruption (Meier and Holbrook 1992; Goel and Nelson 1998). Peters and Welch (1978) provide a justification for this approach with a survey of state legislators' assessments of the frequency of improper or corrupt acts. The responses to the questionnaires correlated positively with the frequency of indictments. However, there are two problems with the Peters and Welch analysis. First, state legislators were asked to report the level of corruption of state legislators, while the criminal prosecution data reported indictments of all public officials by federal prosecutors.[4] Second, Peters and Welch did not normalize the number of indictments by the number of public officials in a state. Hence, one possible interpretation of their results is that in larger states, state legislators are more corrupt.

An alternative approach is taken by Meier and Holbrook (1992), Goel and Nelson (1998), and Schlesinger and Meier (2002) who all measure corrup-

tion as the ratio of public officials convicted by federal prosecutors over the total number of federal, state, and local public officials in a state. However, these studies use data compiled by the Public Integrity Section of the United States Department of Justice that looks at federal investigations against public officials for "abuses of the public trust" (Public Integrity Section 1991,1). For instance, one case examined by the Public Integrity Section involved a former assistant to a state attorney general indicted for the use and possession of cocaine. Hence, this dataset includes activities that scholars do not necessarily think of as constituting corruption. For instance, none of the 10 questions depicting scenarios of corrupt acts used in the Peters and Welch (1978) survey included activities such as drug abuse.

Two other problems exist with using federal prosecution data to measure public corruption in the states. First, prosecutors have considerable discretion over how much effort to put into public corruption investigations (Meier and Holbrook 1992, 149). Hence, the number of corruption indictments depends both on the level of corruption and the level of prosecutorial effort. As a result, to measure corruption validly using indictment data, one must control for the level of prosecutorial effort in such matters. Second, federal prosecution may be influenced by state-level prosecutions. In states that are too poor to pay for expensive corruption investigations, there may be fewer state prosecutions and more federal prosecutions of public corruption. Hence, the number of federal prosecutions may also reflect the resources a state has available to prosecute corruption.

A SURVEY OF STATE HOUSE REPORTERS' PERCEPTIONS OF PUBLIC CORRUPTION

Thus, the number of federal corruption prosecutions may not accurately measure public corruption. To do so, other information sources are needed. The international political corruption literature uses surveys of experts to construct such measures (Ades and Di Tella 1999; Fisman and Gatti 2002; Johnson, Kaufmann, and Zoido-Lobaton 1998; Mauro 1995, 1998; Treisman 2000). We adopt this approach to measure corruption in the American states.

In choosing which experts to survey about public corruption, we must take into consideration that the salience of the topic and how well the surveyed population understands the issue have important effects on both the survey response rate and accuracy (Scott 1961; Heberlein and Baumgartner 1978). We chose as our expert respondents State House reporters from the 50 states. State House reporters are members of the press who cover state government and, therefore, are in an ideal position to answer questions about public cor-

ruption. In the words of one state public information officer, "The reporter ... in many cases has a broader and deeper knowledge of state government than many of his sources" (Weber 2000). Indeed, compared to the experts surveyed about corruption in cross-national studies, State House reporters are in a much better position to assess it because they spend a great deal of time observing and interacting with public officials, and they also have a more common set of expectations about what constitutes corrupt activities. Another advantage of surveying these reporters is that since they are a relatively homogeneous group, it is relatively easy to design the questionnaire and choose the most suitable survey techniques for them (Dillman 1978, 1991).

To minimize noncoverage error (Dillman 1978, 1991), we put great effort into obtaining the complete list of names and addresses of State House reporters from each state using the following procedures:

1) The names and contact information of Associated Press (AP) chief reporters in all 50 states were obtained from the AP, and a letter was sent to each chief reporter requesting a list of all (not only AP reporters) State House reporters in that state.
2) Contact information for each State House was obtained from the *1997 Government Phone Book USA* (Omnigraphics 1997), and letters addressed to the communications director or press secretary of the governor in each state were sent requesting a list of State House reporters there.
3) In states where we received no response from steps 1 and 2, the AP chief reporter and gubernatorial press secretary were again contacted by mail, fax, or telephone.
4) The governors' offices in three states were contacted directly when all other attempts failed to yield a list of State House reporters.
5) State House reporters from radio and television stations were also identified through an extensive search of the Internet and the published reference sources *SRDS Radio Advertising Source* (SRDS 1998a) and *SRDS TV and Cable Source* (SRDS 1998b).

After a year-long effort (March 1998 to March 1999), we obtained the names and mailing addresses of 834 State House reporters. Our success in this effort varied substantially across the states, as discussed below.

The procedures for designing and distributing our questionnaires closely followed the recommendations made in previous studies for maximizing response rates.[5] We also consulted on our questionnaire design with researchers and reporters at Transparency International, the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch,* and *Governing* magazine who had been working on the issue of public cor-

ruption recently. A pilot survey was conducted to assess and improve the questionnaire in May 1998; managing editors and investigative reporters were surveyed to avoid contaminating the target pool of State House reporters. The final, onepage mail questionnaire consisted of eight questions addressing the issue of public corruption from various perspectives. Appendix A contains the questionnaire.

We sent the questionnaire to our list of 834 State House reporters on March 17, 1999 and April 29, 1999. We received a total of 293 usable questionnaires, 257 (88 percent) from the first mailing and 36 (12 percent) from the second mailing. Outdated contact information caused 35 questionnaires to be returned unopened, so these respondents were considered ineligible. Thus, our overall response rate was 36.7 percent, computed as the number of usable responses (293) divided by the number of eligible respondents (834 – 35 = 799).

Two issues that may introduce bias into our data merit discussion. First, consider nonresponse error. Although a response rate of 36.7 percent is higher than in other surveys of corruption,[6] it is less than ideal. If the reporters who responded to the survey were not representative of the population of State House reporters in their perceptions of public corruption, our measures will be biased. Specifically, reporters who think that corruption is more prevalent may have been more likely to respond. This selection bias could have two effects. First, these respondents could exaggerate the prevalence of corruption equally in all states. If so, the percentage of state legislators who are corrupt may be lower than the 6.0–10.0 percent reported by our respondents. Second, reporters who responded from states with fewer respondents may feel especially strongly about corruption, and, therefore, our measure of corruption in these states may be biased upward. If so, our corruption measure would be correlated negatively with the response rate in a state. However, statistical tests conducted to detect such a correlation failed to reject the null hypothesis of no correlation for each of our corruption questions.

The second general area of potential bias in our data that merits some discussion is noncoverage. There are two potential problems here, relating to undeliverable questionnaires and the number of responses from each state. Among the 35 undeliverable questionnaires, 30 were due to inaccurate addresses, and five were addressed to people who had changed jobs. Fortunately, most of these were addressed to people in large states with many State House reporters in our sample, so this did not substantially reduce the size of our respondent pool in these states. The other problem is the small number of responses in several states for other, unknown reasons. We received no responses from Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and New Jersey, and only one

response each from Hawaii and Oregon. There are two reasons for these small numbers. First, some small states, such as Hawaii, simply do not have many State House reporters, thus limiting our respondent pool. Second, our sources in some states were not very cooperative in furnishing the addresses of State House reporters. Thus, caution is called for in interpreting the results for Hawaii and Oregon, and no measure of corruption could be made at all for Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and New Jersey.

SURVEY RESULTS

In this section, we summarize the survey responses and provide statistical tests of the quality of the data. Of the eight questions in the survey, Question 1 is about media coverage of public corruption (news coverage), Question 2 is about how high a priority corruption investigation is for federal prosecutors (prosecutorial effort), and Questions 3–8 are designed to obtain information on a respondent's perception of the current corruption level in state government. Specifically, Question 3 asks for an estimate of the percentage of government employees submitting fraudulent expense reports (fraudulent expense report); Question 4, of the probability of firms getting similar tax breaks as those giving campaign contributions to state legislators (bribery); Question 5, of government employee corruption (government employee corruption); Question 6, of the level of overall public corruption in the state (overall corruption); Question 7, of the percentage of government employees who are corrupt (% corrupt employees); and Question 8, of the percentage of state legislators who are corrupt (% corrupt legislators). The list of the exact questions in the survey is in Appendix A.

A major concern for the reliability of any survey is whether respondents read the questions carefully before answering them. To assess this, the questionnaires were written so that the answer to Question 4 would be negatively correlated with the answers to Questions 3 and 5–8 if the respondents answered reliably. Table 1 gives the correlations between reporters' answers to these questions. The response to Question 4 is in fact correlated negatively with the answers to all the other questions on corruption level (Questions 3 and 5–8). Furthermore, the answers to Questions 3 and 5–8 are positively correlated with one another, also consistent with the careful reading of these questions and reliable responses. Finally, all these correlation coefficients are statistically significant (except for the correlation between Questions 3 and 4, which falls just below the $p < 0.10$ statistical significance level).

Cronbach's alpha measures the reliability of survey questions assessing the same concept by averaging the correlation coefficients among their re-

Table 1. Correlations between Answers to Corruption Survey Questions

	News coverage (Q1)	Prosecutorial effort (Q2)	Fraudulent expense report (Q3)	Bribery (Q4)	Government employee corruption (Q5)	Overall corruption (Q6)	% corrupt employees (Q7)
Prosecutorial effort (Q2)	−0.017	1.000	—	—	—	—	—
	(0.779)						
Fraudulent expense report (Q3)	0.153	-0.001	1.000	—	—	—	—
	(0.011)	(0.996)					
Bribery (Q4)	−0.024	−0.016	−0.088	1.000	—	—	—
	(0.688)	(0.786)	(0.124)				
Government employee corruption (Q5)	0.351	0.092	0.525	−0.256	1.000	—	—
	(< 0.001)	(0.122)	(< 0.001)	(< 0.001)			
Overall corruption (Q6)	0.281	0.064	0.344	−0.267	0.651	1.000	—
	(< 0.001)	(0.287)	(< 0.001)	(< 0.001)	(< 0.001)		
% corrupt employees (Q7)	0.246	−0.136	0.376	−0.132	0.437	0.397	1.000
	(< 0.001)	(0.024)	(< 0.001)	(0.031)	(< 0.001)	(< 0.001)	
% corrupt legislators (Q8)	0.247	−0.074	0.345	−0.197	0.513	0.436	0.613
	(< 0.001)	(0.217)	(< 0.001)	(< 0.001)	(< 0.001)	(< 0.001)	(< 0.001)

Note: The number in each cell is the correlation coefficient, while the number in parentheses is its p-value. The total number of responses = 293.

sponses (Cronbach 1951). In this context, Cronbach's alpha is an average of the absolute value of the correlations between Questions 3–8. A value of alpha over 0.70 indicates high reliability among the survey questions (Nunnally and Bernstein 1994, 265). For Questions 3–8, Cronbach's alpha is 0.78 in our dataset, thus providing additional evidence of the reliability of these journalists' answers to our questions.

We obtain further information about the survey's reliability and validity from the average within-state variation of the responses to each question. We computed the variance for each question for states receiving four or more responses. These variances ranged from 1.38 (Question 7) to 2.31 (Question 1). These variances are relatively small given that the mean responses for the questions range from 3.00 (Question 1) to 3.74 (Question 3). Cronbach's alpha can also be used to examine the reliability of the average responses for each state. For the state averages of Questions 3–8, Cronbach's alpha is 0.82. This provides additional evidence of the reliability of the average state responses.

Because Question 6 explicitly asks the reporters to rank their state on overall corruption and because there is a high level of agreement in the responses to this question among reporters in the same state, we use the state averages for this question to construct our measure of state corruption.[7] For each reporter responding to the survey, we assign a score of 1 if the first response is chosen, 2 if the second response, and so on. An individual score of 1 on this question means that the State House reporter responding to the survey perceived the government employees in that state to be the least corrupt among all states, while a score of 7 means that the reporter perceived these government employees to be the most corrupt. We computed the state score as the average of these individual scores in a state, and we ranked states 1 through 47 on these mean scores. (Because we did not receive any responses for three states, the highest rank is 47 instead of 50.) The first three columns in Table 2 report how each state ranked on this question and its corresponding score.

Using the mean response of an ordinal measure can lead to a loss of information contained in individual data and, thus, there is the potential for lack of precision in the measure. As shown in Table 2, there are multiple ties among states on the average Question 6 score. Pairs, triplets, and quadruples on this scale involve 20 states. To address this concern, we develop a second corruption measure in columns 4–6 of Table 2. This scale is computed by normalizing, and then averaging, the responses to Questions 3–8. The value of Cronbach's alpha (0.82) for this scale shows that it is also reliable and robust. Furthermore, there is high and statistically significant correlation

Table 2. State Rankings in Public Corruption, as Perceived by State House Reporters

Q6 Ranking	State	Q6 Score	Scale Ranking	State	Corruption Scale
1	ND	1.500	1	SD	–1.897
1	SD	1.500	2	VT	–1.414
1	CO	1.500	3	CO	–1.242
4	ME	1.667	4	IA	–1.214
5	MN	2.000	5	ND	–1.082
5	VT	2.000	6	ME	–0.964
5	OR	2.000	7	AK	–0.750
8	MT	2.143	8	OR	–0.665
9	IA	2.250	9	MN	–0.571
10	KS	2.429	10	TN	–0.487
11	ID	2.500	11	SC	–0.418
12	WI	2.600	12	VA	–0.407
13	VA	2.667	13	WI	–0.392
13	NE	2.667	14	NV	–0.346
15	MI	2.958	15	ID	–0.305
16	TX	3.000	16	MI	–0.254
16	AK	3.000	17	MT	–0.193
16	WY	3.000	18	WY	–0.148
16	WA	3.000	19	TX	–0.130
20	TN	3.250	20	AR	–0.116
21	CA	3.333	21	NE	–0.105
22	NC	3.471	22	AZ	–0.072
23	GA	3.500	23	NC	–0.054
23	SC	3.500	24	NY	0.029
23	NV	3.500	25	UT	0.050
23	FL	3.500	26	KS	0.118
27	AR	3.667	27	IN	0.193
28	MO	3.692	28	WA	0.197
29	HI	4.000	29	HI	0.248
29	IN	4.000	30	WV	0.263
29	MS	4.000	31	MO	0.302
29	NY	4.000	32	OK	0.310
33	MD	4.052	33	CA	0.322
34	UT	4.333	34	PA	0.364
35	PA	4.455	35	GA	0.421
36	CT	4.500	36	CT	0.459
37	IL	4.667	37	KY	0.480
37	OH	4.667	38	MD	0.507
39	AZ	4.714	39	MS	0.632
39	WV	4.714	40	OH	0.721
41	KY	4.857	41	AL	0.832
42	AL	4.909	42	LA	0.838
43	OK	5.000	43	FL	0.877
43	DE	5.000	44	DE	1.072
45	NM	5.333	45	IL	1.101
46	LA	5.400	46	RI	1.360
47	RI	5.500	47	NM	1.611

Note: Q6 Score is computed as the mean of all the answers to Question 6 from the state, with a score of 1 for responses with the first answer, a score of 2 for responses with the second answer, and so on. The Corruption Scale is computed as the normalized and average response to Questions 3–8.

between this measure and the Question 6 measure (0.853; $p < 0.001$), suggesting consistency between them. Of course, because of our differing success in identifying State House reporters across states, researchers using these scales need to take into consideration the small number of responses for several states.

COMPARISON OF OUR NEW MEASURES WITH PUBLIC CORRUPTION PROSECUTION DATA

In this section, we compare our new corruption measures with corruption measures based on prosecution data that have been used in previous research. Meier and Holbrook (1992) and Schlesinger and Meier (2002) use data compiled by the Public Integrity Section to compute the ratio of public officials indicted by federal prosecutors over the number of public officials in a state, and then they use this ratio as a corruption measure to study the sources of public corruption in American states. Table 3 shows the correlations between our survey-based corruption measures reported in Table 2 and prosecution-based corruption indices for 1982 and 1995 used by Meier and Holbrook (1992) and Schlesinger and Meier (2002). All four measures are positively correlated with one another, to a statistically significant degree. Not surprisingly, our two survey-based measures are highly correlated (0.853), and the two prosecution-based measures are highly correlated (0.775). However, the correlation between any pair of measures from different sources is much lower. Thus, the correlation matrix in Table 3 suggests that a substantial amount of variation exists between the two sets of corruption measures.

As discussed above, an important measurement problem with federal

Table 3. Correlation between Survey and Prosecution-Based Corruption Measures

	Q6 Score	Corruption Scale	Prosecution Measure, 1982
Corruption scale	0.853	1.000	—
	(0.000)		
Prosecution	0.437	0.355	1.000
measure, 1982	(0.003)	(0.015)	
Prosecution	0.259	0.333	0.775
measure, 1995	(0.082)	(0.024)	(< 0.001)

Note: The number in each cell is the correlation coefficient, while the number in parentheses is its p-value. The prosecution measures are the ratio of public officials indicted by federal prosecutors over the number of public officials for 1982 and 1995 in each state, (Meier and Holbrook 1992; Schlesinger and Meier 2002). The Q6 score and corruption scale measures are from Table 2.

prosecution data is that the number of prosecutions is affected by prosecutorial effort as well as by the prevalence of corruption in a state. But because our survey included a question about federal prosecutorial effort, we can examine empirically the relationship between prosecutorial effort and the number of prosecutions.

We collected objective data on two variables to assess federal prosecutions. The first variable is based on data provided by the Federal Justice Statistics Resource Center (FJSRC). The FJSRC data files cover exhaustively all the matters and cases that go through the federal judicial system in the relevant years, including public corruption prosecutions.[8] From this, we compute the average number of federal corruption prosecutions per thousand government employees in each state for 1993–96, following Meier and Holbrook (1992) and Schlesinger and Meier (2002). The other objective data on the effort federal prosecutors put into public corruption cases that we use is the proportion of prosecution time they allocate to corruption investigations. We obtained this information from the Executive Office of United States Attorneys by a Freedom of Information Act request, and we averaged these proportions for each state over 1993–96. To our knowledge, we are the first researchers to use these data. We also measure federal prosecutorial effort subjectively through our survey of State House reporters (Question 2 in Appendix A). To assess state-level corruption prosecution, we collected data on the number of individuals entering state prisons in each state for bribery convictions. Again, to our knowledge, we are the first researchers to measure state-level corruption prosecutions. Summary statistics of all the variables used in the regressions in Table 5 are shown in Table 4, with their definitions and data sources in Appendix B.

Table 4. Summary Statistics and Data Sources on Corruption Measures

Variable	N	Mean	Standard deviation	Minimum	Maximum	Data source
Average number of prosecutions	50	0.154	0.107	5.22e-3	0.508	FJSRC/SPPQ
% of prosecution time	50	0.015	0.019	0.000	0.086	EOUSA-FOIA
Corruption level (Q6)	47	3.487	1.144	1.500	5.500	Survey
Corruption scale	47	1.76e-03	0.731	–1.897	1.611	Survey
Federal prosecutorial effort	47	3.392	0.991	1.000	5.600	Survey
Average state prosecutions	38	5.93e-03	0.011	0.000	0.060	NCRP

Note: See Appendix B for definitions of these variables and descriptions of the data sources.

We ran ordinary least squares regression (OLS) models to assess the relationship between prosecution, public corruption, and prosecutorial effort. In Model 1 of Table 5, the dependent variable is the number of federal public corruption prosecutions, 1993–96, divided by the number of public officials (in thousands). The explanatory variables include the survey proxy for federal prosecutorial effort (Question 2), the survey proxy for the corruption level (Question 6), and the number of people entering state prisons convicted of bribery divided by the number of public officials in that state (in thousands) as a proxy for state prosecutorial effort. In Model 2, the explanatory variables remain the same, but the dependent variable is the percentage of federal prosecution time allocated to public corruption prosecutions (see Appendix B for a full description of these variables' definitions and data sources).

As shown in Table 5, both corruption level and federal prosecutorial effort are estimated to have independent, positive, and statistically significant effects on the number of federal prosecutions per thousand of public officials (Model 1). These two factors also have independent, positive, and statistically significant effects on the percentage of federal prosecution time allocated to the prosecution of public corruption (Model 2). These results suggest that the number of federal prosecutions alone may be a poor surrogate measure of state-level corruption because prosecutions are affected by both corruption and prosecutorial effort, not just corruption. An idiosyncratically aggressive federal prosecutor could skew such a measure.[9] The effects of state-level prosecution on these two measures of federal prosecution are negative as expected, but not statistically significant. This lack of statistical significance may be due to small sample size (data on the number of state prisoners were available for only 35 states), the fact that the number of state convictions for public bribery may be a poor proxy for state prosecution of corruption, or simply the fact that state and federal prosecution efforts are unrelated.

To test the robustness of our results, we ran Models 3 and 4 using the corruption scale from Table 2 as the corruption measure. We also ran models without the state prosecution variable (Models 5–8). All of the substantive conclusions drawn from these models were the same as those drawn from Models 1 and 2.

In each of these models, experts' opinions were assumed to be exogenous, consistent with the methodology used in the international public corruption literature. It would be helpful to develop a model for how experts form their opinions and use such a model to endogenize the survey responses. Such a model might allow us to solve simultaneously for the experts' opinions and the number of prosecutions. This study represents a first step in such an analysis, by providing the data necessary for it.

Table 5. Determinants of Federal Prosecutions for Public Corruption in a State, 1993–96

Model number	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Dependent variable	Average number of prosecutions	% of prosecution time	Average number of prosecutions	% of prosecution time	Average number of prosecutions	% of prosecution time	Average number of prosecutions	% of prosecution time
Corruption scale	0.053**	0.006*			0.039**	0.004**		
	(0.016)	(0.002)			(0.012)	(0.002)		
Corruption level (alpha)			0.056*	0.009**			0.048**	0.007**
			(0.025)	(0.003)			(0.019)	(0.002)
Federal prosecutorial effort	0.053**	0.005*	0.058**	0.005*	0.044**	0.005**	0.045**	0.005**
	(0.013)	(0.002)	(0.018)	(0.002)	(0.013)	(0.002)	(0.014)	(0.002)
Average state prosecutions	−1.396	−0.129	−1.011	−0.978				
	(1.309)	(2.006)	(1.478)	(1.942)				
Intercept	−1997e-04**	−0.022*	0.035	−0.002	−0.131*	−0.021**	−1.03e-06	−0.006
	(0.613e-04)	(0.009)	(0.066)	(0.009)	(0.056)	(0.008)	(0.049)	(0.006)
Adjusted R-squared	0.514	0.291	0.376	0.330	0.354	0.300	0.294	0.291
N	35	35	35	35	47	47	47	47

Note: The definitions and the data sources of the variables are found in Appendix B. The standard error for each OLS regression coefficient is in parentheses.
**$p < 0.05$; *$p < 0.10$

CONCLUSION

Our survey of State House reporters provides the state politics scholarly community with new measures of public corruption and the extent to which the prosecution of corruption is a priority for the federal prosecutors in the states. While survey results are always difficult to interpret, especially those on sensitive topics such as public corruption, our careful survey procedures and subsequent analyses lead us to believe that our measures of state-level corruption are valid and reliable.[10] Accordingly, we believe we have provided a useful new tool for studying public corruption in the United States. For instance, our data could be used to examine theories of public corruption prosecution, such as political and racial targeting (Meier and Holbrook 1992; Schlesinger and Meier 2002). A better understanding of corruption in the United States also has broader implications. For instance, analyses with our new measures may allow researchers to examine whether conclusions drawn in the international corruption literature apply to the United States, such as whether corruption has a significant impact on economic growth (Mauro 1995, 1998). Furthermore, causes of corruption found in the United States may help shed light on how corruption can be combated more effectively, both in the United States and abroad.

APPENDIX A: QUESTION WORDING FOR STATE HOUSE REPORTER SURVEY

There were 293 returned questionnaires, but not all respondents answered every question. For each of the questions, the number of responses is as follows: Q1: 289, Q2: 285, Q3: 281, Q4: 285, Q5: 291, Q6: 286, Q7: 283, and Q8: 287. Questions 2–6 use the following scale: –3 and –2 for lower than average values; –1, 0, and 1 for average values; and 2 and 3 for higher than average values.

Survey Question Wording:

1. Approximately how many stories dealing with government corruption in your state have you read over the past three months? (Mark the appropriate answer with an 'x')

0 1–5 6–10 11–15 16–20 21–25 26–30 31 or more

2. How high a priority for the federal prosecutors in your state is it to investigate and prosecute government corruption (including corruption of elected officials, political appointees, and civil servants) compared to investigating and prosecuting other crimes?

Much lower:	–3	–2	
About the same:	–1	0	1
Much higher:	2	3	

3. What is your best guess of the percentage of government employees (including elected officials, political appointees, and civil servants) in your state submitting fraudulent expense reports compared to that in other states?

Very low:	–3	–2	
Moderate:	–1	0	1
Very high:	2	3	

4. Imagine the following scenario. A new firm is interested in obtaining a tax break from the state legislature in your state. This firm and its owners and employees do not give any campaign contributions or gifts to members of the state legislature. What is the probability that this firm will be treated in the same way as a firm that wanted a similar tax break but gives campaign contributions and gifts?

Very low:	–3	–2	
Moderate:	–1	0	1
Very high:	2	3	

5. How common do you think is corruption of government employees (including elected officials, political appointees, and civil servants) in your state?

Very rare:	–3	–2	
Moderate:	–1	0	1
Very common:	2	3	

6. Suppose you were to rank all states in terms of level of corruption of their government employees (including elected officials, political appointees, and civil servants). Where would your state rank?

Least corrupt:	–3	–2	
Average:	–1	0	1
Corrupt:	2	3	

7. What is your best guess of the percentage of government employees (including elected officials, political appointees, and civil servants) in your state who are corrupt?

0% 1–5% 6–10% 11–15% 16–20% 21–25% 26–30% 31% or more

Now, before answering the next question, we would like you to think of state legislators only.

8. What is your best guess of the percentage of state legislators in your state who are corrupt?

0% 1–5% 6–10% 11–15% 16–20% 21–25% 26–30% 31% or more

APPENDIX B: DEFINITIONS AND DATA SOURCES OF VARIABLES IN TABLE 4

Average number of prosecutions: Number of federal corruption prosecutions (FJSRC) divided by number of government employees for each state (SPPQ), per thousand of employees, averaged over 1993–96.

% of prosecution time: Federal public corruption prosecution time divided by total federal prosecution time for each state, averaged over 1993–96.

Corruption level (Q6): The mean of all the answers from reporters in the same state to Question 6 in our survey (scored 1 for responses with the first answer, 2 for responses with the second answer, and so on). See Appendix A and Table 2.

Corruption scale: The corruption scale computed from our survey as the normalized and average response to Questions 3–8. See Appendix A and Table 2.

Federal prosecutorial effort: The mean of all the answers from reporters in the same state to Question 2 in our survey (scored 1 for responses with the first answer, 2 for responses with the second answer, and so on). See Appendix A.

Average state prosecutions: Total number of individuals entering state prison for bribery conviction divided by number of government employees, per thousand of employees, averaged over 1993–96. These are individuals who were not convicted by federal prosecutors.

Data Sources:

FJSRC: Federal Justice Statistics Resource Center (http://fjsrc.urban.org/)
SPPQ: State Politics and Policy Quarterly Data Resource (http://www.unl.edu/SPPQ/datasets.html)
EOUSA-FOIA: Executive Office of United States Attorneys, through a Freedom of Information Act request
Survey: Survey of State House Reporters' Perceptions of Public Corruption, administered by the authors
NCRP: United States Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics (2000).

ENDNOTES

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1. For instance, Mauro (1995, 683) uses the *Business International* index, which is generated by *Business International*'s network of correspondents who grade "the degree to which business transactions involve corrupt payments."

2. Alternatively, Peters and Welch (1978) surveyed state legislators about the frequency of certain improper or corrupt acts. However, they did not compare corruption across states.

3. Another important source of error in survey research is in sampling. Because mail surveys present few, if any, special sampling error problems (Dillman 1991), and because our survey was targeted at the entire population, we do not discuss this source of error.

4. Although the correlation between the answers to our Question 7 (corruption of government employees) and those to our Question 8 (corruption of state legislators) in our survey is a moderately high 0.61 (Table 1), using a variable that is conceptually different from what is being measured adds an additional source of error.

5. The questionnaire was printed on a single page of beige paper (Grembowski 1985); a cover letter was personally addressed, signed, and printed on university letterhead (Scott 1961; Dillman and Frey 1974; Fox, Crask, and Kim 1988); the cover letter explained the importance of the study and the procedures by which the respondent had been chosen and emphasized that the survey was sponsored by the university and that anonymity was guaranteed (Scott 1961; Dillman 1978); and respondents were offered a small financial payment for participation in the survey (Armstrong 1975; James and Bolstein 1992).

6. For instance, the response rate for a commonly used data source, the World Development Report survey conducted by Brunetti, Kisunko, and Weder (1997), was lower than 30 percent.

7. We computed the variances of the answers given by journalists in each state. Only the answer to Question 8 had an average variance smaller than that of Question 6. Furthermore, before giving the survey to State House reporters, we sent a similar survey to managing editors and investigative reporters in the states. Because the number of responses and the response rate in the earlier survey was quite low, we are reticent about drawing conclusions from it. However, for Question 6, there was a strong correlation between the responses of these respondents and those of the State House reporters in the same state. Specifically, the correlation coefficient was 0.59; only Question 1 (with a correlation of 0.65) had a higher correlation between these two surveys.

8. Hence, the FJSRC data are based on the actual case files. Previous studies have used the Public Integrity Section data, which is based on a survey of federal prosecutors (Public Integrity Section 1991, 21).

9. Of course, the relationship between corruption and prosecutorial effort may be strong and positive, too. Future research is needed to sort out these undoubtedly complicated causal relationships. The critical point for this article is that federal prosecutions are unlikely to be an unbiased, reliable surrogate measure for public corruption in a state.

10. Our survey has recently been used by Alt, Lassen, and Skilling (2002) and Alt and Lassen (2002).

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