

The Cost of Repression: Bribery, Competence, and Informational Autocrats

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Research Question

- ▶ Modern autocracies use different methods to maintain power.
- ▶ The appearance of competence is a key component—how do they create this image?
- ▶ What is the relationship between the cost of repression and low-level bribery?

Theory

- ▶ Informational autocracy (Guriev and Treisman 2019) leads to subtle means of repression, smart tactics to pre-empt dissent.
- ▶ Corruption unpacked: Bribery and embezzlement/theft as separate concepts.
- ▶ Petty bribery (e.g., traffic police, DMV clerk) impacts citizen perceptions severely.
- ▶ Autocrats who cannot repress will seek to decrease low-level bribery as a means of creating an image of competence.

Hypotheses

- ▶ As cost of repression rises, low-level bribery will decrease.
- ▶ As regime legitimation on performance grounds rises, low-level bribery will decrease.

Data and Design

- ▶ Primarily Varieties of Democracy (Coppedge et al. 2023) data, some reinforcement with other data sets.

	Mean	SD	Max	Min	N
Low-level bribery	-0.09	1.35	4.13	-3.21	20014
Physical violence index	0.42	0.26	0.98	0.01	20244
Performance legitimation	-0.41	1.39	3.18	-4.29	13014
Electoral democracy index	0.14	0.11	0.42	0.01	20334
GDP per capita	3.94	8.77	156.63	0.29	15977
Time required to open business (days)	38.43	38.74	260.00	1.50	979
Natural resource income as % of GDP	0.12	0.14	0.88	0.00	3741

- ▶ Sample is formed from all autocracies, defined by their “electoral democracy index” score (less than 0.42).
- ▶ Unit of analysis is the country.
- ▶ Linear regressions, clustered standard errors to correct for autocorrelation between country-units.

Findings

- ▶ Statistically significant relationship between political violence and low-level bribery.
- ▶ Less significant relationship between performance legitimation and low-level bribery.
- ▶ Null for H_1 rejected; null for H_2 is more difficult to reject.

Results and Tables

Table 1: Basic Models

	Low-level bribery			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Physical violence index	2.209*** (0.266)	1.681*** (0.330)	1.762*** (0.346)	2.196*** (0.341)
Performance legitimation		0.128** (0.053)	0.026 (0.059)	-0.027 (0.060)
Logged GDP per capita			0.132* (0.079)	0.152* (0.082)
Electoral democracy index				2.575*** (0.624)
Intercept	-0.255 (0.175)	0.163 (0.212)	0.083 (0.241)	-0.649** (0.284)
Num.Obs.	20003	12907	9873	9873
R2	0.183	0.108	0.106	0.141
R2 Adj.	0.183	0.108	0.105	0.141
AIC	84693.0	54269.5	43364.8	43696.2

* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Standard errors clustered by country.

Bibliography

- Coppedge, Michael, John Gerring, Carl Henrik Knutsen, Staffan I. Lindberg, Jan Teorell, David Altman, Michael Bernhard, et al. 2023. "V-Dem Country-Year/Country-Date Dataset v13." Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Project. <https://doi.org/10.23696/vdemds22>.
- Guriev, Sergei, and Daniel Treisman. 2019. "Informational Autocrats." *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 33 (4): 100-127. <https://doi.org/10.1257/jep.33.4.100>.