

**Vice or Virtue?**  
**The electoral evaluation of different forms of corruption**

September 4th, 2017

Isabela Mares  
Columbia University

Giancarlo Visconti  
Columbia University

**Abstract**

Why do politicians tend to pay a low electoral cost for corruption? There is consistent evidence worldwide that candidates facing allegations or charges for different forms of malfeasance are often reelected. We argue that different forms of political corruption may act as signals about candidates' competencies. Economic and political forms of corruption embody and signal different competencies. While economic corruption signals managerial capacity, political corruption signals distributive competence. We implement a conjoint experiment in Romania to study voters' preferences towards corruption. We find that higher income voters evaluate economic corruption less stringently than political corruption. We also find that lower income voters are more tolerant of political corruption than higher-income voters.

**Keywords:** Political corruption, Economic corruption, Political preferences, Conjoint experiment, Romania.