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Source: *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 71, No. 3 (Sep., 1977), pp. 954-963

Published by: American Political Science Association

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1960100>

Accessed: 08-03-2019 20:36 UTC

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Corrupt Politicians and Their Electoral Support: Some Experimental Observations*

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A venerable tradition of scholarship in American politics is concerned with the nature of "political corruption."¹ The consensus in this work seems to be that governmental

officials can be expected to engage in corrupt or illegal activities for a variety of reasons. James Q. Wilson summarizes three: (1) the needs and values of particular ethnic groups lead officials identifying with those groups to use their offices illegally to benefit group members with lucrative contracts, jobs, and the like;² (2) "Because each branch can and sometimes does paralyze the other, American government is so constituted that it cannot be carried on without corruption. The boss, the machine, the political party, the bagmen — all these operate . . . to concert the action of legally independent branches of government through the exchange of favors";³ and (3)

*An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Chicago, Illinois, September, 1974. The authors would like to thank John Ferejohn, John Gardiner, Susan Hansen, Lyman Kellstedt, Benjamin Page, Harry Scoble, Lester Seligman, Donley Studlar, Beatrice Villar, and Susan Welch for critical comments and suggestions relevant to drafts of this paper.

¹For a useful collection of some of this work, see Arnold J. Heidenheimer, ed., *Political Corruption: Readings in Comparative Analysis* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970), especially Chapters 6 and 9, and John A. Gardiner and David J. Olson, eds., *Theft of the City* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1974).

There is no consensus in this literature on the standards appropriate to determining which political acts are "corrupt." For some, political acts which violate the *public interest* for private interest or gain are corrupt. See, for instance, Arnold A. Rogow and Harold D. Lasswell, *Power, Corruption, and Rectitude* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963), pp. 132–134. In a similar manner, Berg, Hahn, and Schmidhauser define political corruption as a process which "violates and undermines the norms of the system of public order which is deemed indispensable for the maintenance of political democracy." See Larry L. Berg, Harlan Hahn, and John R. Schmidhauser, *Corruption in the American Political System* (Morristown, New Jersey: General Learning Press, 1976), p. 3. Other authors hold that a political act is corrupt if the public deems it so. See, for example, Arnold J. Heidenheimer's typology of corrupt acts based on this "public opinion" criterion, *Political Corruption*, pp. 26–28. A third standard for assessing corrupt acts relies predominantly on legal norms: those acts are corrupt which violate the rules or norms of public-office holding for personal or private gain. See J. S. Nye, "Corruption and Political

Development: A Cost-Benefit Analysis," *American Political Science Review*, 61 (June, 1967), 417–427, and James C. Scott, *Comparative Political Corruption* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1972), pp. 3–5 for an excellent discussion of the definitions of political corruption. In this paper we have chosen this latter criterion and define political corruption as engaging in illegal activity for personal or special interest gain.

²James Q. Wilson, "Corruption: The Shame of the States," *The Public Interest*, 2 (Winter, 1966), 28–38, at p. 30, also reprinted in Heidenheimer, pp. 298–306.

³Wilson, p. 31. Here Wilson is referring to an argument made in 1904 by Henry Jones Ford in his "Municipal Corruption," *Political Science Quarterly*, 19 (December, 1904), pp. 673–686. This same theme is developed by Edward M. Sait in "Machine, Political," *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, IX (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1933), 657–661; by Arthur F. Bentley, *The Process of Government*, ed. Peter H. Odegard (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1967), Chapter II; and by Robert K. Merton, *Social Structure and Social Theory*, 2nd ed. (New York: The Free Press, 1968), p. 73.

"men steal when there is a lot of money lying around loose and no one is watching."⁴

Scholars also seem to agree that officials can often engage in illegal activities without being reprimanded at the polls. Two basic explanations are offered for this. The first claims that public officials can usually conceal their involvement in illegal activities.⁵ Moreover, even when they cannot, the contentiousness of American elections is such that voters discount reports that one or more of the candidates are corrupt, assuming instead that allegations of corruption are merely partisan tricks.⁶ The other explanation is that officials can trade material benefits (e.g., patronage jobs, the opportunity to gamble) or even appeals to group identification in return for votes.⁷

What these explanations ignore, and in fact direct attention away from, is whether people would support corrupt politicians if they knew they were corrupt or if they were not themselves benefited materially. How, in other words, would voters weight a candidate's corruption along with other things they know about the candidates in an election? In this paper we identify several conditions under which people will knowingly vote for a corrupt candidate, report some experimental results regarding their operation, and suggest some avenues for additional research. This research does not address the frequency of official corruption, nor does it contest the conclusion that politicians are under no electoral constraint to avoid illegal activities except in the sense that a felony conviction deprives them of

office.⁸ Rather, our focus is on electoral support for corrupt politicians.

nomenon of electoral support for corrupt politicians.

The Ignorant Voter Explanation

There are, of course, reasons why voters would be ignorant or at least uncertain about a candidate's illegal activities. The corrupt candidate usually seeks to conceal this datum from his constituents. Moreover, to the extent that citizens are repelled by political corruption, both candidates in a two-candidate race have similar incentives to accuse each other of being corrupt — even if the charge is false.⁹ Because this situation is understood by voters, the credibility of corruption messages during an election — even if true — will normally be quite low. Only when the corruption message comes from a source outside the electoral setting is it likely to be given credibility. For example, Gardiner found that reports by federal law-enforcement agencies about local corruption in one eastern city had a clear impact on three city elections, but similar reporting by local newspapers was discounted in other elections.¹⁰

This explanation implies that people would oppose corrupt candidates if they knew they were corrupt. Without this assumption, any case in which a voter supports a corrupt politician could be explained in one of two ways. Either the voter is in fact ignorant, or he knows the candidate is corrupt and votes for him anyway. Given no *a priori* reason for assuming that voters always oppose corrupt candidates, and in the absence of independent evidence to that effect, the voter ignorance explanation cannot be accepted as the only possible explanation for voting for a corrupt candidate.

⁴Wilson, "Corruption," p. 31.

⁵James Bryce, in analyzing the incidence of corruption in the nineteenth-century Congress, claimed that the "opportunities for private gain are large, the chances of detection small," and because of the relatively short tenure of most members, "the temptation to make hay while the sun shines is all the stronger." See James Bryce, *The American Commonwealth*, Louis M. Hacker, ed. (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1959), Vol. I, p. 221.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 197.

⁷For the typology of incentives alluded to here, see Peter B. Clark and James Q. Wilson, "Incentive Systems: A Theory of Organizations," *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 6 (September, 1961), 129–166. Solidary inducements are intangible rewards which accrue from socializing or group identification. Banfield and Wilson, for instance, refer to a precinct captain who offers "personal friendship" in return for a vote. See Edward C. Banfield and James Q. Wilson, *City Politics* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1963), p. 117. On the use of material incentives to induce electoral support, see Harold F. Gosnell, *Machine Politics: Chicago Model*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1967), chapter IV.

⁸Of course, in principle, politicians, like other citizens, are subject to prosecution for breaking laws, and this threat would seem to constrain their participation in illegal activities. This is not an issue here, since our focus is on the electoral rather than the legal constraint. For a journalistic treatment of the former point, see Jethro K. Liberman, *How the Government Breaks the Law* (New York: Stein and Day, 1974).

⁹This argument follows from the familiar logic of rational party behavior. See Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), chapter 3.

¹⁰John A. Gardiner, *The Politics of Corruption: Organized Crime in an American City* (New York: Russell Sage, 1970).

The Material Inducement Explanation

The material inducement explanation suggests an incentive that seems sufficient to produce corruption voting. The problem is that in numerous real-world situations, people seem to support corrupt politicians even when material inducements are absent. A voter may be willing to trade his vote to improve his material well being, but whether or not he does so is contingent upon an explicit exchange between the candidate (or his associates) and the voter. For example, a precinct worker would have to arrange the *quid pro quo* with the voter, or at least the voter would have to understand that he would be rewarded if he voted for the corrupt candidate. Moreover, the inducement would have to be sufficient to change the voter's behavior. The numerous explicit exchanges that would be necessary to control elections would require the presence of large and complex organizations with quite centralized authority structures centered on the corrupt candidates. In this century, such organizations are increasingly rare, not only because people are less willing to respond to material inducements, but because it is expensive for an organization to provide material inducements that are sufficient to change their voting behavior.¹¹ Inducements based on appeals to common interests are also less effective in providing votes for corrupt politicians than they once were. Banfield and Wilson maintain that television and the changing ethnic character of the inner city have made "friendship" harder to give to prospective voters.¹² For example, precinct captains have to compete with the evening television viewing habits of citizens for their attention, while white representatives of the political machine find it difficult to become "friends" with the increasing proportion of nonwhites in their precincts.¹³

One should not construe from what has been said that voters do not support corrupt politicians — rather, in the absence of sufficient organization the material inducement explanation is insufficient to account for why they do so.

Implicit Trading

If the above explanations do not account for corruption voting, what does? The literature on

rational voting in two-candidate elections suggests that whether someone votes for one or the other of the candidates is a function of what he cares about, the intensity of his concern, and whether the candidates take different stands on the things he cares about. Voters may be thought of as evaluating the candidates' positions on items of concern to them, weighting their evaluations according to the strength of their preferences, adding up these weighted evaluations, and then voting for the candidate who receives the highest score.¹⁴

If candidate corruption is treated like any other component in the voter's choice between two candidates, it follows that there are conditions under which a rational voter would knowingly support corrupt candidates. He would do so if he perceives both candidates as corrupt, or if he decides that a corrupt candidate who is closer to his own preferences on other issues is preferable to a "clean" candidate who is not. In either case, he would vote for the corrupt candidate because the candidate shares or is closer to his own political preferences. This explanation differs from the material inducement theory in that the inducement (the candidate's positions) need not be material, and the exchange between the candidate and the voter may be implicit in the sense that no interpersonal negotiations are necessary. The candidate simply takes positions on things and the voter decides those positions weigh more heavily in the candidate's favor than the

¹⁴This formulation of rational choice is based on similar models developed by economists and psychologists. An early version of the economic model can be found in Otto A. Davis and Melvin J. Hinich, "A Mathematical Model of Policy Formation in a Democratic Society," in *Mathematical Applications in Political Science II*, ed. J. L. Bernd (Dallas: Arnold Foundation, Southern Methodist University Press, 1966), 175–205, see also, Otto A. Davis, Melvin J. Hinich and Peter C. Ordeshook, "An Expository Development of a Mathematical Model of the Electoral Process," *American Political Science Review*, 64 (June, 1970), 426–448. For the psychological formulation, see Martin Fishbein, "A Behavior Theory Approach to the Relations between Beliefs About an Object and the Attitude toward the Object," in *Readings in Attitude Theory and Measurement*, ed. Martin Fishbein (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1967), pp. 389–400. This approach is applied to voting behavior in Martin Fishbein and Fred S. Coombs, "Basis for Decision: An Attitudinal Approach toward an Understanding of Voting Behavior," paper presented at the sixty-seventh Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Chicago, Illinois, 1971. A useful synthesis of the economic and psychological choice models is presented in Michael J. Shapiro, "Rational Political Man: A Synthesis of Economic and Social-Psychological Perspectives," *American Political Science Review*, 63 (December, 1969), 1106–1119.

¹¹Fred I. Greenstein, *The American Party System and the American People* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963), pp. 47–49.

¹²Banfield and Wilson, p. 122.

¹³*Ibid.*

knowledge that the candidate is corrupt weighs against him.¹⁵ A corrupt candidate's strategy, therefore, would be to take distinct positions on things many voters care about and thereby arrange as many implicit trades as possible. Hence we refer to this theory as the trading theory of corruption voting.¹⁶

Some Experimental Findings

In order to assess the validity of the above reasoning, we constructed a computer-based experiment to determine whether people always oppose corrupt politicians when they know they are corrupt, and if they do not, whether this reflects implicit trading between candidates and voters. Accomplishing these ends required controlling for the credibility of the corruption message and insuring that only one candidate was viewed as corrupt. We also had to insure the absence of material inducements and the presence of differences between the candidates on items of most concern to the subjects. Our sample was composed of undergraduate students enrolled in introductory political science courses at the University of Illinois during 1972–1973.

In our experiment, subjects received different kinds of information about two candidates in a hypothetical congressional elec-

tion.¹⁷ On each piece of information, the candidates held opposite positions. The information concerned the candidate's party (Democrat vs. Republican), position on local domestic issues (pro vs. antibusiness), position on President Nixon's Vietnamization policy (hawkish vs. dovish), and relative standing in the polls (ahead, behind). Our subjects were asked to choose between the candidates on the basis of this information in a simulated "opinion poll" (this was not the final vote). Then they were informed that a prominent member of their candidate's own party had withdrawn his endorsement from the subject's most preferred candidate because of alleged illegal activities by the candidate while holding a previous elected position. The message read: "While in the state assembly [their preferred candidate] is alleged to have used his position as chairman of the Public Roads Committee to authorize construction on the new State Route 54 through property his family owned downstate. The sale of the land to the state reportedly brought \$1.3 million." Finally, all subjects were asked to "vote" for one or the other of the two candidates. The purpose of the experiment, conducted during the fall and winter of 1972–1973, was to determine whether or not our subjects would switch from the corrupt candidate. (A detailed description of the experiment is included in the Appendix.)

To determine the extent to which our subjects remained with the corrupt candidate, we utilized generalized least squares regression analysis to estimate the following equation:

$$(1) \quad Y = A + b_1X_1 + b_2X_2 + b_3X_3 + b_4X_4 + b_5(X_1X_2) + b_6(X_1X_3) + b_7(X_1X_2X_4) + b_8(X_1X_3X_4) + U,$$

where:

$Y = 1$ if subject remained with the corrupt candidate,
0 otherwise;

$X_1 = 1$ if subject received the party affiliation of the candidates,
0 otherwise;

$X_2 = 1$ if subject received the Vietnam positions of the candidates,
0 otherwise;

¹⁷The experiment was conducted on the PLATO III computer-based education system at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. A description of this system and the experiment is contained in the Appendix. For a more detailed description of the PLATO system, see D. Alpert and D. Bitzer, "Advances in Computer-Based Education," *Science*, 167 (March, 1970), 1582–1590.

¹⁵At a more general level, James C. Scott's theory of the relationship between changing loyalty patterns and the type of inducements political parties must offer for support fit as well with our own notions of individual candidate and voter choice. For instance, Scott suggests that, as the process of economic growth forges new occupational and class loyalties among former supporters, the political party must change the nature of its inducements "to stress policy concerns or ideology." See James C. Scott, "Corruption, Machine Politics, and Political Change," *American Political Science Review*, 63 (December, 1969), 1142–1158, at p. 1146.

¹⁶Our distinction between implicit and explicit trading is analogous to that between implicit and explicit logrolling suggested by Buchanan and Tullock. Regarding implicit logrolling, they say:

Here there is no formal trading of votes, but an analogous process takes place. The political "entrepreneurs" who offer candidates or programs to the voters make up a complex mixture of policies designed to attract support. In so doing, they keep firmly in mind the fact that the single voter may be so interested in the outcome of a particular issue that he will vote for the one party that supports their issue, although he may be opposed to the party stand on all other issues.

James M. Buchanan and Gordon Tullock, *The Calculus of Consent: Logical Foundations of Constitutional Democracy* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1962), pp. 134–135.

$X_3 = 1$ if subject received the domestic policy positions of the candidates,
0 otherwise;

$X_4 = 1$ if subject received the public opinion polls,
0 otherwise;

and where $X_2X_3 = 0$ and where U is an error term with $E(U) = 0$ by assumption.¹⁸ Estimation of this equation yields a conditional probability model in which, for example, the probability of remaining with the corrupt candidate for subjects who received only the party affiliations of the candidates is $A + b$ (i.e., $X_1 = 1$; $X_2 = X_3 = X_4 = 0$).

The estimated coefficients are presented in Table 1 with the conditional probabilities of remaining with the corrupt candidate derived from these coefficients presented in Table 2.¹⁹ In examining Table 2, two results are apparent:

¹⁸For descriptions of generalized least squares regression, especially with dummy variables and limited dependent variables, see J. Johnston, *Econometric Methods*, 2nd ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1972), pp. 208–242 and 176–186; and Arthur S. Goldberger, *Econometric Theory* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1964), pp. 251–255.

¹⁹Initially there were 217 subjects in our experiment but nine were dropped because of missing data on one or more of the questionnaire items. Also, note that the F-levels reported in Table 1 as well as those in

(1) information about the candidates does make a difference in the probability of remaining with the corrupt candidate, and (2) all types of information are not equal; certain kinds of information induce more voting for the corrupt candidate than do other kinds of information. In particular, we note that the single most powerful piece of information was that on the candidates' Vietnam positions; subjects who received this information had a probability of .44 of voting for the corrupt candidate whereas subjects who received no information had a zero probability of voting for the corrupt candidate. Also note the minimal effect of party information. For subjects who received only the party affiliations of the candidates, the probability of voting for the corrupt candidate was .18, even lower than the probability for those who only received poll information. Moreover, neither party nor domestic policy information seems to make much difference when the two are combined; subjects receiving

Tables 3 and 5 indicate that each variable makes a significant contribution to the explanatory power of the estimated equations. However, as is evident, from an examination of the standard errors reported in these tables, several of the estimated coefficients are not significantly different from zero. Hence, care must be taken not to attribute too much to the exact values of the coefficients.

Table 1. Estimated Coefficients for Initial Conditional Probability Model

Term	Coefficient	Standard Error	F Level
A (Constant)	.00	.09	
b ₁ (Party)	.18	.13	4.51
b ₂ (Vietnam)	.44	.14	16.00
b ₃ (Domestic)	.37	.13	11.08
b ₄ (Poll)	.20	.14	8.02
b ₅ (Party-Vietnam)	-.12	.19	3.43
b ₆ (Party-Domestic)	-.37	.18	6.35
b ₇ (Party-Vietnam-Poll)	-.17	.18	3.92
b ₈ (Party-Domestic-Poll)	.03	.19	5.28

(N = 208)

Note: Multiple R = .37

Table 2. Conditional Probabilities of Remaining with the Corrupt Candidate Estimated from Table 1

Item	
P (Remain/No Information)	= .00 = A
P (Remain/Party Information)	= .18 = A + b ₁
P (Remain/Party, Domestic Information)	= .18 = A + b ₁ + b ₃ + b ₆
P (Remain/Poll Information)	= .20 = A + b ₄
P (Remain/Party, Domestic, Poll Information)	= .35 = A + b ₁ + b ₃ + b ₄ + b ₆ + b ₈
P (Remain/Domestic Information)	= .37 = A + b ₃
P (Remain/Vietnam Information)	= .44 = A + b ₂
p (Remain/Party, Vietnam Information)	= .50 = A + b ₁ + b ₂ + b ₅
P (Remain/Party, Vietnam, Poll Information)	= .53 = A + b ₁ + b ₂ + b ₄ + b ₅ + b ₇

the combination package voted similarly to subjects who received only party information. Interestingly, however, when poll information is added to this combination, our subjects, for some reason, acted much like those who received only domestic policy information.

In constructing Tables 1 and 2 and in estimating the previous regression equation, we have implicitly assumed that all our subjects would attach identical importance to each of the pieces of information they encountered in the experiment. This assumption is inappropriate, however, since the implicit trading theory assumes that people are likely to feel more strongly about some things than about others. We thus ask: "Does the intensity with which our subjects hold their positions affect their tendency to vote for corrupt politicians?" To answer this question, we asked our subjects to indicate, on a paper-and-pencil questionnaire administered about two weeks before they participated in the experiment, how strongly they felt about President Nixon's Vietnamization policy, about their own party identification, and about local zoning policies. In each case their preferences were registered on a seven-point scale ranging from "strongly favor" to "indifferent" to "strongly oppose." (The party identification item asked whether they were Democrats, Republicans or Independents; and if they were partisan identifiers, how strongly they identified with their party. Independents were asked if they were closer to the Republican or Democratic party.)²⁰ Consistent with the implicit trading theory, we hypothesized that subjects who felt strongly about party, Vietnam, and local zoning policies (i.e., those in scale positions "1," "2," "6," and "7" on the seven-point scales) would be more likely to stick with the candidate who was closer to their position even if he was corrupt.²¹

To test this hypothesis, we estimated the following equation:

²⁰This is the standard party identification item used by the Survey Research Center, University of Michigan, for their Presidential Election Studies.

²¹For the purposes of our experiment, we have called respondents "intense" when they recorded their feelings in position 1, 2, 6, or 7 on our seven-point scales:

Strongly favor												Strongly oppose
1	2	3	4	5	6	7						
"Intense"			"Indifferent"			"Intense"						

This measurement technique is very similar to the one employed by Martin Fishbein to measure the "evaluative aspects of belief statements." See, Fishbein and Coombs, "Basis for Decision," p. 12.

$$(2) \quad Y = A + b_1X_1 + b_2X_2 + b_3X_3 + b_4X_4 + b_5(X_1X_2) + b_6(X_1X_3) + b_7(X_1X_2X_4) + b_8(X_1X_3X_4) + b_9(X_1X_5) + b_{10}(X_2X_6) + b_{11}(X_3X_7) + b_{12}(X_1X_2X_5X_6) + b_{13}(X_1X_3X_5X_7) + U,$$

where Y , X_1 , X_2 , X_3 , X_4 , and U are identical to those in equation (1), and where:

$X_5 = 1$ if subject had an intense party preference,
0 otherwise;

$X_6 = 1$ if subject had an intense position on Vietnam,
0 otherwise;

$X_7 = 1$ if subject had an intense position on domestic policy (local zoning),
0 otherwise.

The estimated parameters for this equation, again using the generalized least squares procedure, are presented in Table 3, and the conditional probabilities derived from these parameters are presented in Table 4. Unfortunately, none of our subjects was intensely concerned about local zoning (our domestic policy information), and hence no b_{11} or b_{13} appear in Table 3 and no conditional probabilities are given in Table 4.

As hypothesized, the conditional probabilities of voting for the corrupt candidate were much larger for those who felt intensely about Vietnam than for those who were indifferent on this issue dimension. In particular, those who were intense about Vietnam had a conditional probability of voting for the corrupt candidate that was .34 larger than that for those indifferent on Vietnam. Interestingly, however, intense party identifiers had a *lower* probability of voting for the corrupt candidate than did those without a strong party identification. Party identifiers were more likely to switch and vote for the "clean" candidate when they were informed that their initial choice was corrupt, while independents tended to remain with the corrupt candidate.

Finally, it follows from the implicit trading theory that, if voters have an intense preference for honesty in government, they will be more likely to switch from the corrupt candidate than if this is not the case. Accordingly, we asked our subjects to indicate how intensely they valued the concept of "honesty in government" on a seven-point scale from "strongly for" to "strongly opposed."²² We then con-

²²For the "Honesty in Government" question, a respondent was called "intense" if a 6 or 7 was marked on the item.

Table 3. Estimated Coefficients for the Preference Intensity Model

Term	Coefficient	Standard Error	F Level
A (Constant)	.00	.09	
b ₁ (Party)	.21	.14	5.83
b ₂ (Vietnam)	.29	.15	11.43
b ₃ (Domestic)	.37	.12	13.94
b ₄ (Poll)	.20	.13	9.12
b ₅ (Party-Vietnam)	-.14	.19	4.30
b ₆ (Party-Domestic)	-.37	.18	7.60
b ₇ (Party-Vietnam-Poll)	-.14	.18	5.24
b ₈ (Party-Domestic-Poll)	.04	.18	3.89
b ₉ (Party Identifier)	-.08	.09	4.71
b ₁₀ (Vietnam Intense)	.34	.12	24.34
b ₁₁ (Party Identifier and Vietnam Intense)	-.10	.18	6.59

Note: Multiple R = .43

Table 4. Conditional Probability of Voting for a Corrupt Candidate^a

	Nonintense on Either Party or Vietnam	Intense on Party	Intense on Vietnam	Intense on Both Party and Vietnam
P (Remain/No Information)	.00 (.00) ^b			
P (Remain/Party, Domestic, Poll)	.17 (.18)	.09		
P (Remain/Poll)	.20 (.20)			
P (Remain/Party)	.21 (.18)	.13		
P (Remain/Party, Domestic)	.21 (.18)	.13		
P (Remain/Vietnam)	.29 (.44)		.63	
P (Remain/Party, Vietnam)	.36 (.50)	.38	.70	.63
P (Remain/Domestic)	.37 (.37)			
P (Remain/Party, Vietnam, Poll)	.42 (.52)	.34	.76	.68

^aSubjects who did not receive a particular piece of information are considered nonintense on that information on the assumption that what they did not know could not affect their behavior.

^bFor comparative purposes, the conditional probabilities of Table 2 are repeated here in parentheses.

structed the following variable:

$X_8 = 1$ if subject is strongly for honesty in government,
0 otherwise;

and re-estimated equation 2 (with b_{14} being the coefficient for X_8). The estimated coefficients are presented in Table 5.

Table 5 shows that, under all of the various information conditions, subjects who intensely preferred honesty in government were less likely to vote for the corrupt candidate. Those with intense preferences for honesty in government had a .08 smaller probability of voting for the corrupt candidate than did subjects who expressed indifference about this concept.

The relatively small number of subjects in this exploratory experiment renders these findings tentative and precludes more detailed analysis. The present findings do seem to lend support, however, to the implicit trading explanation of voting for corrupt politicians. Es-

pecially noteworthy is the effect of knowledge of the candidates' issue positions. Information on both the Vietnam and the domestic policy positions of the candidates affected voting for corrupt politicians, while information on the candidates' party seems to have had little effect.

Finally, we should note what happens when the two major assumptions built into our experiment are relaxed. Our theory suggests that an incentive exists for voters to support corrupt politicians even when the message that they are corrupt is credible. If it is not credible, voters should be even more likely to support corrupt politicians, as long as there remains a difference in the candidates' policy positions. But if these latter differences disappear, then even an uncertain corruption message should produce disaffection from the culprit, because the costs to the voter of switching from a "maybe corrupt" candidate to one without the taint of corruption would be minimal. The

Table 5. Estimated Coefficients for Honesty in Government Model

Term	Coefficient	Standard Error	F Level
A (Constant)	.11	.11	
b ₁ (Party)	.14	.14	4.89
b ₂ (Vietnam)	.24	.15	9.81
b ₃ (Domestic)	.31	.13	8.22
b ₄ (Poll)	.14	.14	4.42
b ₅ (Party-Vietnam)	-.07	.20	3.36
b ₆ (Party-Domestic)	-.30	.18	7.06
b ₇ (Party-Vietnam-Poll)	-.08	.18	3.64
b ₈ (Party-Domestic-Poll)	.11	.19	13.25
b ₉ (Party ID)	-.08	.09	5.46
b ₁₀ (Vietnam Intense)	.32	.12	23.34
b ₁₂ (Party ID and Vietnam Intense)	-.10	.18	4.01
b ₁₄ (Intense on Honesty)	-.08	.07	6.22

(N = 208)

Note: Multiple R = .44

extent of defection in this case should be a function of how strongly the voter values honesty in government.

Discussion

One implication of the theory that voters trade implicitly with corrupt politicians is that the pool of people with whom corrupt politicians can at least potentially trade is much larger than the number who would vote for them because of material inducement(s). Using only explicit trading and material inducements, corrupt politicians would be restricted to the number of people with whom they could barter, either directly or through lieutenants. Since such trading is costly in organizational resources, this number would be relatively small. Through implicit trading of nonmaterial inducements, however, corrupt politicians can trade with everyone who is aware of the election, has one or more intense preferences and/or is not especially enthusiastic about honesty in government. In the United States, with its practically universal literacy and well-developed media, this would effectively mean most voters. While the number of attempted trades would probably be restricted for strategic reasons (e.g., to form minimum winning coalitions), it would seem that there are so many potential voters with whom corrupt politicians could trade that the latter need not fear electoral reprisal for their indiscretions.

A second implication concerns the conventional wisdom that political machines flourish or perish as a function of the political utility of material inducements. The present analysis suggests that machine politicians who are corrupt may owe their re-election to implicit trading as much as or more than to the distribution of

material inducements among voters. Moreover, to the extent that machine politicians rely on implicit trading, they are no different from nonmachine corrupt politicians – an assertion which runs counter to the Progressives’ assumption that abolishing machines would decrease the likelihood of corrupt officials being re-elected.²³

A third inference of the implicit trading theory is that corrupt candidates have even more incentive to take distinct issue positions than do noncorrupt candidates. Contrary to the theory that candidates converge on the issue position occupied by the largest number of voters, the exigencies of American elections (such as the need to amass financial contributions and to obtain primary as well as general election victories) apparently lead candidates to move somewhat away from the modal position. Corruption would seem to accentuate this divergence.²⁴

Finally, at least on the surface, the implicit trading theory seems to account for the tendency of voters and others to focus on official corruption during periods of economic problems. When voters’ expectations of policy satisfaction are low, office holders are more likely to be held accountable for illegal activity (e.g.,

²³For related speculation, see Edward Banfield, *Political Influence* (New York: The Free Press, 1961), p. 259.

²⁴The best statement of the convergence model is given by Downs, *Economic Theory of Democracy*. Multidimensional versions of this model are presented in Otto Davis et al., “Development of a Mathematical Model.” For a demonstration of divergence in the 1968 presidential election, see Benjamin I. Page, “Presidential Campaigning, Party Cleavage, and Responsible Parties,” unpublished paper, University of Chicago, 1974.

the recent ousters of national leaders in Japan, England, West Germany, Italy, and the United States) – albeit not always at the polls.

Conclusions

Our purpose has been to examine the notion of electoral support for corrupt politicians. We have isolated three different, though not mutually exclusive, explanations of why people would vote for corrupt politicians and have suggested that the implicit trading explanation accounts for large-scale corruption voting under modern conditions, whereas the other two could not.

In conclusion, this paper is only a first step. The implicit trading theory simply rescues for research the role of political corruption as a component in individual voting decisions, a subject that the ignorant voter theory and the material inducement theory tend to conceal. We leave for future research a host of additional questions about this subject. For example, would some kinds of candidate corruption be weighted more or less heavily than our illegal land sale case? Are people with relatively sophisticated political attitudes (e.g., those with much political information and/or ideologies which link policy, institutional, and candidate information in causal patterns) more likely than others to devalue official corruption? Or do the politically sophisticated value honesty in government more highly or weight this value more heavily in making voting decisions than other people?²⁵

In addition, we suggest that these and other questions about the role of candidate corruption in the voters' choice can fruitfully be studied in experimental as well as natural research settings.²⁶ The exploratory experiment reported on here only begins to tap the full power of this research procedure.

²⁵James Q. Wilson and Edward Banfield, "Political Ethos Revisited," *American Political Science Review*, 65 (December, 1971), 1048–1062. See also, Herbert McClosky, "Consensus and Ideology in American Politics," *American Political Science Review*, 58 (June, 1964), 361–382, showing that more political leaders than followers advocate clean government.

On the relationship between economic conditions and voting, see Gerald K. Kramer, "Short-Term Fluctuations in U.S. Voting Behavior, 1896–1964," *American Political Science Review*, 65 (March, 1971), 131–143.

²⁶For attempts to explain recent trends concerning trust in government, see Arthur H. Miller, "Political Issues and Trust in Government: 1964–1970," *American Political Science Review*, 68 (September, 1974), 951–972, and Jack Citrin, "Comment: The Political Relevance of Trust in Government," *American Political Science Review*, 68 (September, 1974), 973–988.

Appendix

To better explain the procedure employed, let us take the fourth treatment (Vietnam Policy/Party Identification/Opinion Poll-Preference/Corruption-Vote) and follow it through the election, displaying the experiment information as it appeared on the subject's TV monitor. After the introductory material and random respondent assignment to the fourth experimental group, the student was introduced to the election and the candidates.

Screen 1:

THE TWO CANDIDATES IN OUR VOTING SIMULATION ARE RUNNING FOR THIS DISTRICT'S SEAT IN THE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, NEITHER CANDIDATE IS THE INCUMBENT, i.e., NEITHER HOLDS THIS OFFICE TODAY.

Screen 2:

CANDIDATE JONES IS NOW A LAWYER IN UNIVERSITY TOWN AND IS ON THE GOVERNOR'S COMMITTEE ON THE STATE'S ECONOMY.

CANDIDATE BROWN IS ALSO A LAWYER IN UNIVERSITY TOWN AND SERVES AS SPECIAL LEGAL COUNSEL FOR THE STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION.

Care was taken in designing the information contained in Screens 1 and 2 to control any independent effects the information might have on the results. Neutral candidate names, "Jones" and "Brown," were used to control any identification with a "real world" politician. The automatic advantage an incumbent enjoys was neutralized, while differences in candidate career and background information were minimized.

The Vietnam policy message was the next manipulation our respondent received:

Screen 3:

CANDIDATE JONES WAS A VOCAL OPPONENT OF THE VIETNAMESE WAR SINCE 1966. CANDIDATE BROWN SUPPORTED PRESIDENT NIXON'S VIETNAMIZATION POLICY SINCE 1968.

Policy positions on Vietnamization were chosen for the foreign policy manipulation because of its obvious saliency among the intended audience, college undergraduates, and because of its potential impact on attitude change.

Following the Vietnam policy statements, the respondent received the political party affiliations of the candidates.

Screen 4:

CANDIDATE JONES IS A DEMOCRAT.
CANDIDATE BROWN IS A REPUBLICAN.

Next the respondent received information in the form of an opinion poll.

Screen 5:

THE INDIVIDUALS WHO PRECEDED YOU IN THIS EXPERIMENT GAVE THE FOLLOWING INDICATION OF THEIR CANDIDATE PREFERENCE AT THIS POINT:

CANDIDATE BROWN	45%
CANDIDATE JONES	55%

Although the students were told that the poll results were based on the responses of previous subjects, in fact the percentages reported for the two candidates were randomly generated with the only constraints being that each respondent viewed different percentages and that they add to 100%.

The presentation of the opinion poll results concluded the "information" component of the experiment. On the basis of this information, subjects assigned to experimental route 4 were then asked which of the two candidates they preferred so far in the election.

Screen 6:

TO UPDATE OUR OPINION POLL, PLEASE INDICATE YOUR PREFERENCE OF THE TWO CANDIDATES AT THIS POINT IN THE ELECTION.

CANDIDATE JONES CANDIDATE BROWN
PLEASE TYPE IN THE LAST NAME OF THE
CANDIDATE OF YOUR CHOICE.

Whichever candidate was preferred by the subject, he was informed of that choice's corrupt behavior. Let us assume that in Screen 6 above, our student preferred Candidate Jones.

Screen 7:

THE DEMOCRATIC SENATOR FROM THE STATE HAS JUST ANNOUNCED THAT HE IS WITHDRAWING HIS ENDORSEMENT FOR CANDIDATE JONES. HE EXPLAINED HIS ACTIONS AS FOLLOWS: "ALTHOUGH CANDIDATE JONES SHOULD BE PRESUMED TO BE INNOCENT UNTIL THE CRIMINAL SUIT BROUGHT AGAINST HIM HAS BEEN TRIED IN A COURT OF LAW, I FEEL IT IS IN THE BEST INTERESTS OF THIS STATE THAT CANDIDATE JONES TERMINATE HIS STATE RELATED ACTIVITIES."

Screen 8:

WHILE IN THE STATE ASSEMBLY, CANDIDATE JONES IS ALLEGED TO HAVE USED HIS POSITION AS CHAIRMAN OF THE PUBLIC ROADS COMMITTEE TO AUTHORIZE CONSTRUCTION OF THE NEW STATE ROUTE 54 THROUGH PROPERTY HIS FAMILY OWNED DOWNSTATE. THE SALE OF THE LAND TO THE STATE REPORTEDLY BROUGHT 1.5 MILLION DOLLARS.

If Candidate Brown was chosen, the source was a Republican governor; otherwise the message was the same. After receipt of the information that his preferred candidate was corrupt, the respondent was asked to cast his final ballot. This concluded the experiment.

Screen 9:

OFFICIAL BALLOT

PLEASE VOTE FOR THE CANDIDATE OF YOUR CHOICE BY TYPING IN HIS LAST NAME.

CANDIDATE JONES (D)CANDIDATE BROWN (R)