



**Working Paper No. 69**

**CORRUPTION AND THE  
INEQUALITY TRAP IN AFRICA**

by Eric Uslaner

**A comparative series of national public  
attitude surveys on democracy, markets  
and civil society in Africa.**



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**AFROBAROMETER WORKING PAPERS**

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INEQUALITY TRAP IN AFRICA**

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## **Corruption and the Inequality Trap in Africa**

### *Abstract*

In this paper I offer an argument I call the “inequality trap”—how high inequality leads to low trust in out-groups and then to high levels of corruption—and back to higher levels of corruption. I present the analyses for Africa using Afrobarometer data—the full cross-national surveys for Round 2 (2002), the Round 2 data for Mali (which have questions on trust and on limiting the incomes of the rich), and the Round 3 data for Nigeria (which have the most comprehensive data to test my claim that people see corruption as stemming from inequality—and leading to greater income disparities between the rich and the poor, between the powerful and the powerless. The fairness of the legal system is the central factor shaping people’s views of how equally people are treated.

## Introduction

Successful (or “well-ordered”) democracies are marked by high levels of trust in other people and in government, low levels of economic inequality, and honesty and fairness in the public sphere. Trust in people, as the literature on social capital has shown, is essential for forming bonds among diverse groups in society (see Uslaner, 2002). Trust in government is essential for political stability and compliance with the law. Corruption robs the economy of funds and leads to less faith in government (perhaps also to less faith in fellow citizens) and thus lower compliance with the law. And institutions seen as biased (unfair) cannot secure compliance and may exacerbate inequalities in society.

I argue for the latter: The roots of corruption lie in the unequal distribution of resources in a society. Corruption thrives on economic inequality. Economic inequality provides a fertile breeding ground for corruption—and, in turn, it leads to further inequalities. The connection between inequality and the quality of government is not necessarily so simple: As the former Communist nations of Central and Eastern Europe show, you can have plenty of corruption without economic inequality. The path from inequality to corruption may be indirect—through generalized trust—but the connection is key to understanding why some societies are more corrupt than others.

In my book manuscript in progress, I offer an argument I call the “inequality trap”—how high inequality leads to low trust in out-groups and then to high levels of corruption—and back to higher levels of corruption (available at <http://www.bsos.umd.edu/gvpt/uslaner/corruption.html>). I present a theoretical argument about why institutions matter less than economic conditions and social values (summarized briefly below) and then test the argument in aggregate cross-national analyses across a wide range of countries—and also for transition countries, Hong Kong and Singapore, the United States, the Nordic countries, and African nations. The transition countries present cases where there has been traditionally low inequality—but rising, often sharply increasing, inequality, as well as low levels of trust and considerable corruption. Hong Kong and Singapore have relatively high levels of inequality and lower levels of trust, but have “conquered” corruption—which many attribute to the establishment of anticorruption commissions.

Corruption in the United States varies significantly across states—and it is states with higher inequality and lower trust that are the most corrupt. The Nordic countries and the African states generally stand at the poles. The Nordic countries have low levels of inequality, high trust, and low corruption, while most African states (with Botswana a notable exception) have high levels of inequality, low out-group trust and high in-group trust, and high rates of corruption (as measured by the Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index).

In this paper, excerpted from Chapter 7 of *The Bulging Pocket and the Rule of Law: Corruption, Inequality, and Trust*, I present the analyses for Africa using Afrobarometer data—the full cross-national surveys for Round 2 (2002), the Round 2 data for Mali (which have questions on trust and on limiting the incomes of the rich), and the Round 3 data for Nigeria (which have the most comprehensive data to test my claim that people see corruption as stemming from inequality—and leading to greater income disparities between the rich and the poor, between the powerful and the powerless).

The argument from inequality to low trust to corruption—and back again both to low trust and greater inequality—stands in contrast to the more common approach to explaining corruption as stemming from deficient institutions. I shall argue that the roots of corruption are largely *not* institutional, but rather stem from economic inequality and a mistrusting culture, which itself stems from an unequal distribution of wealth. However, there is one key institutional structure that I posit to affect corruption: the *fairness of the legal system*. Second is the *orientation of the party system*. The fairness of the legal system is distinct from the *efficiency* of the legal system (Rothstein and Stolle, 2002).

The link between inequality and corruption seems compelling. Corruption is exploitive. Defining corruption is tricky, but it seems reasonable to argue that the core of “grand” corruption is giving some people advantages that are not available to others—and that these advantages are seen as unfair. A biased system is an inequitable one.

Not all corruption is linked to inequality. “Grand” corruption refers to malfeasance of considerable magnitude by people who exploit their positions to get rich (or become richer)—political or business leaders. So grand corruption is all about extending the advantages of those already well endowed. “Petty corruption,” small scale payoffs to doctors, police officers, and even university professors, very common in the formerly Communist nations of Central and Eastern Europe (and many poor countries) is different in kind, if not in spirit. Petty corruption, or “honest graft” as New York City political boss George Washington Plunkitt called it (Riordan, 1948), does not enrich those who practice it. It may *depend upon* an inequitable distribution of wealth—there should be no need to make “gift” payments in a properly functioning market economy. It does not exacerbate the gap between the rich and the poor—and may actually narrow it by providing some small benefits to the middle class bureaucrats, teachers, and doctors who benefit from it.

Unequal wealth leads people to feel less constrained about cheating others (Mauro, 1998, 12) and about evading taxes (Oswiak, 2003, 73; Uslaner, 2003). Where corruption is widespread, people realize that they are not the masters of their own fate—and they lose faith that their future will be bright. People become resigned to their fate. The fairness of the legal system is critical *because no other political institution is predicated upon equality to such an extent*. Elections are formally about equal access and power: Each of us has one vote. But many people do not vote, at least in some countries, and the distribution of participation is not equal across the population. Even more critically, elections are not determined by atomized individuals casting ballots in isolation. Elections require mobilization and in many parts of the world lots of money—and certainly neither of these are distributed equitably (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, 1995, 190-192). When people have little faith in the fairness of the legal system, there are few incentives to obey the law.

Inequality leads to corruption because it leads to resentment of out-groups and enhanced in-group identity. Generalized trust, the value that is predicated upon the belief that many others are part of your moral community, is the foundation of the “well-ordered society.” When we believe that “most people can be trusted,” we are more likely to give of ourselves and to look out for the welfare of others. When we believe that “you can’t be too careful in dealing with people,” we are likely to be on our guard and to feel little compunction in taking advantage of others who may not have our best interests in mind.

Generalized trust is predicated on the notion of a common bond between classes and races and on egalitarian values (Putnam, 1993, 88, 174; Seligman, 1997, 36-37, 41).<sup>1</sup> Faith in others leads to empathy for those who do not fare well, and ultimately to a redistribution of resources from the well-off to the poor. If we believe that we have a shared fate with others, and especially with people who are different from ourselves, then gross inequalities in wealth and status will seem to violate norms of fairness. Generalized trust rests upon the psychological foundations of optimism and control and the economic foundation of an equitable distribution of resources. Optimism and control lead people to believe that the world is a good place, it is going to get better, and that you can make it better. Economic equality promotes both optimism and the belief that we all have a shared fate, across races, ethnic groups, and *classes*.

Corruption, of course, depends upon trust—or honor among thieves. As it takes two to tango, it takes *at least two to bribe*. Corrupt officials need to be sure that their “partners” *will deliver* on their promises (Lambsdorff, 2002a, 2002b). Lambsdorf (2002a) argues: “...if corrupt deals cannot be enforced, this can act as a deterrent to corruption itself.” Corruption thrives upon trust, but it cannot be based upon the notion of widespread goodwill and common interests in a society underlying generalized trust. If you believe that the world is a good place and we should do our best to help those with less, we shouldn’t be willing to exploit others through corrupt deals. Entrance into a corruption network is not easy. Members of a conspiracy of graft cannot simply assume that others are trustworthy (as generalized trusters do). Treating strangers *as if* they were trustworthy (also as trusters do) can be hazardous at best. And believing that people without any ties to the conspiracy are trustworthy (as generalized trusters do) threatens the integrity of the cabal.

Instead, corruption thrives on *particularized trust*, where people only have faith in their own kind (or their own small circle of malefactors). Particularized trusters strongly distrust outsiders. They fear that people of different backgrounds will exploit them—and in a dog-eat-dog world, you have little choice to strike first before someone exploits you. Gambetta (1993) argued that the Mafia took root in Southern Italy because there were strong in-group ties and weak generalized trust there.

Inequality leads to low levels of trust in strangers. What trust remains is entirely within your group, so there are few moral sanctions for cheating people of a different background. Inequality thus breeds corruption indirectly—by turning people inward and reducing the sanctions, both external and internal, of taking advantage of others. So I posit an indirect link from inequality to corruption: inequality → low generalized trust & high in-group trust → corruption. There is strong support in my book manuscript for this linkage at the aggregate level and in surveys among transition countries, especially Romania. The survey data for transition countries also indicate a strong direct link from perceptions of inequality to beliefs about corruption (especially for grand corruption), so I expect to find strong links for Africa as well—except for Botswana. Botswana has relatively low corruption so the inequality trap argument should not apply there as it does to other countries, notably Nigeria.

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<sup>1</sup> The following section is derived from Uslaner (2004), which in turn summarizes Uslaner (2002).

My account downplays the role of institutions because corruption, inequality, and trust are all “sticky” over time. They don’t change much, so the persistence of the inequality trap is well explained by the strong continuities in corruption and its determinants. On the other hand, as I show in my book manuscript (chapters 2 and 3), structures do change more readily—and the change in democratization from the 1970s and 1980s to 2005 has an almost zero correlation with changes in corruption. Nevertheless, many people in Africa do link government performance and the quality of democracy to perceived corruption.

### **The Inequality Trap and Africa**

African states largely, though hardly universally, meet all three conditions: high levels of corruption and inequality and low generalized trust. Such settings might qualify as a critical test of the framework. Strong support for the argument would bolster my account significantly while negative results would call it into question. African leaders after independence became all-powerful and all-grabbing, turning their new states into kleptocracies (Mbaku, 1998a, 249).

The “nanny state” is not, in and of itself, either the purloiner or the enforcer of morality. The inequality trap seems a more likely explanation. There is clear evidence in the Afrobarometer surveys that Africans see a clear link between inequality—both economic and legal—and corruption (though the connection to trust is less well supported). I will present models for how well the government handles corruption and how frequently people are treated unfairly from the 2002 (Round 2) Afrobarometer across the 14 countries surveyed.<sup>2</sup>

The data show strong support for linkages between perceptions of corruption and inequality across the 14 countries. A separate analysis of data for Mali in 2002 shows strong linkages between whether corruption is increasing or decreasing and perceptions of inequality, on the one hand, and support for restricting incomes of the rich and high-level corruption on the other hand. I use the Round 2 survey for Mali because it has a broader range of questions than the full Afrobarometer. Mali is hardly the most corrupt country—it is tied with eight other countries for 88 place out of 160 nations in the 2005 TI rankings—but its “raw” score of 2.9 indicates that it has quite a way to go to achieve transparency. I then focus on the 2005 (Round 3) data for Nigeria—tied with the Cote d’Ivoire and Equatorial Guinea in 153 place in the 2005 TI rankings, clearly establishing it as one of the most corrupt countries in the world. This is hardly surprising: Nigeria is often cited in the popular media as a font of corruption. Nigerians recognize that corruption is an exploitative relationship. Market women turn aside when they see men who are well-spoken: “You use plenty grammar to cheat,” they say. Rich men with impeccable English often come to the marketplace believing that they can cheat the less educated market women, who nevertheless recognize that they are vulnerable.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The data are available at [www.afrobarometer.org](http://www.afrobarometer.org). Several of the key questions in my models were not asked in Zimbabwe, so I exclude Zimbabwe’s respondents from this analysis. I am grateful to Michael Bratton of Michigan State University and Director of the Afrobarometer and Tetsuya Fujiwara, Data Manager of the Afrobarometer, for providing me with advance access to the Round 3 data on Nigeria.

<sup>3</sup> I owe this quote to Kems O. Adu-Gyan, Assistant Researcher, School of Business, Economics, and Law, Department of Business Administration, Goteborg University, private discussion at the Conference on “Measuring Diversity,” Milan, Italy, January 27, 2006.



The data from the Round 3 Afrobarometer indicate that people see a tight connection between how well the government handles corruption and whether they see more equitable treatment for all people than in the past: I estimate a simultaneous equation model for these two key components of the inequality trap. Measures of equality are among the most important determinants of whether people approve of the government's handling of corruption. Legal fairness is by far the most important factor shaping perceptions of equal treatment, though government handling of corruption is also important. So are democratic rights (free speech), which suggests that at least in Nigeria the inequality trap *is connected to democratic governance and institutional structures*. The tight ties between inequality and corruption come through loud and clear in Nigeria and any account of corruption that focuses primarily on institutional factors will miss the larger story.

As with transition countries (see chapters 4, 5, and 6 of *The Bulging Pocket and the Rule of Law*), not all African countries are alike. Estonia and Slovenia stand out among former Communist countries as having relatively clean governments; in Africa, the “honesty leader” is Botswana, tied for 32 place on the 2005 TI Corruption Perceptions Index with Qatar, Taiwan, and Uruguay with a raw score of 5.9 (slightly worse than Slovenia's 6.1). The next highest African countries are South Africa and Namibia, with scores of 4.5 and 4.3, respectively, considerably below Botswana's score but also above the mean for all 160 countries rated (4.07) and tied (in the case of Namibia) with Greece and Slovakia. While some African countries have lower levels of corruption than others, I shall first examine all countries in similar models as I constructed for surveys throughout the world (see Chapter 3 of the book manuscript) and in transition countries (Chapter 4 of the manuscript). While cross-national data are not sufficiently available to do hierarchical linear models, I control for country-level effects (recognizing that countries are not all the same) by clustering the standard errors at the country level. I then turn to the least corrupt nation, Botswana, and find little support for the inequality trap when I analyze the Afrobarometer data for that country by itself.

Botswana in several key respects resembles Hong Kong and Singapore: It has a strikingly high level of inequality (with a Gini coefficient of .63 from the United Nations Development Program) and very low out-group trust (14 percent believe that “most people can be trusted,” see Bratton, Mattes, and Gyimah-Boadi, 2005, 194).<sup>4</sup> It is, to be sure, a democracy. In 2003, its scores on the political and civil rights indices of Freedom House are 2, indicating a well-functioning, if imperfect, representative government. Yet Mali has identical scores from Freedom House (though Nigeria fares worse with scores of 4 on each measure). Yet, despite the high level of inequality and the low generalized trust, Botswana has a relatively honest government. And when I estimate the full model for Round 2 just for Africa, very few of the measures for government handling corruption in the all-Africa model are significant for Botswana, especially those focusing on inequality.

*If anti-corruption commissions are the key to reducing malfeasance in office, we need not worry about deeper structural problems such as high levels of inequality and less tractable issues such as raising out-group trust.* What we need is elite political will and while this may

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<sup>4</sup> The Gini indices for Africa can be found at: [http://hdr.undp.org/reports/global/2005/pdf/hdr05\\_HDI.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/reports/global/2005/pdf/hdr05_HDI.pdf), 271-273, accessed December 2, 2006.

not be in abundant supply, surely it offers a more manageable solution to the problem of corruption than redressing what are likely long-standing grievances about economic and legal inequality.

One widely heralded strategy for reducing malfeasance is creating an anti-corruption agency. It is not so clear that establishing an anti-corruption agency will be sufficient to reduce malfeasance to any significant degree, *in and of itself*. Nigeria has established an Independent Corrupt Practices Commission and an Economic and Financial Crimes Commission. Yet there is little evidence that either has reduced corruption and more than half of the respondents to the 2005 Nigeria Afrobarometer disapproved of the performance of the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission. Approval of the commission's performance is not simply a reflection of overall attitudes toward corruption. Instead, it reflects other conflicts in society, including trust in both other people and institutions and on economic fairness.

Many of the reasons for the success of anti-corruption efforts in Singapore and Hong Kong also apply to Botswana, especially the need to develop a robust economy to fend off external threats by opening markets and inviting foreign investment. Also, size matters. Each of the three nations found it easier to initiate anti-corruption campaigns because they have small populations. Singapore and Hong Kong are also island nations. Finally, even though each of the three states ranks low on generalized trust, all have strong government policies designed to produce greater social solidarity across groups, thereby reducing the tendency of strong in-group trust to support corruption.

### **Corruption, Inequality, and Low Trust in Africa**

Africa is an ideal case study for the inequality trap thesis. The 37 black African countries rated in the 2005 TI Corruption Perceptions Index had the lowest mean score (2.79) and the smallest standard deviation (.88) of any region. The mean Gini index for 14 African nations for which there are data is 50.3 compared to 39.7 for non-African states; black African nations have a mean score of 7.96 on the Failed States uneven economic development index, compared to 6.56 for other countries. And trust is considerably lower in Africa, with a mean of 18.5 compared to 31.8 elsewhere.<sup>5</sup>

Many Africans see corruption everywhere in their society. They view it as troublesome, enriching the elite, and perpetuating economic, legal, and political inequality. Yet they also see it as unavoidable and ineradicable. The story of corruption as Africans express it and in the literature on corruption on the continent is very much that of the inequality trap. Few people more than the Nigerians see themselves enmeshed in this economic and moral quicksand.

Nigerians, like many people in high inequality/low trust societies, “view participation in politics as an investment, similar to putting money in the bank or buying stock in a firm” and “capturing an important political position is like winning the lottery: the new political office can be used to amass wealth for oneself and also reward one's supporters” (Mbaku, 1998b, 59). Nigeria's oil wealth should have made its citizens wealthy, but most of the income disappeared to the West “to establish comfortable retirement positions for the crooks who were busy cheating

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<sup>5</sup> The African data come from Bratton, Mattes, and Gyimah-Boadi (2005, 194). Non-African data come from the imputed trust values reported in Chapter 4.

present and future Nigerians” or to providing “privileges...for a bloated, inefficient, and parasitic and corrupt bureaucracy” (Mbaku, 1998b, 69)—even as the country’s per capita income fell to \$240 US a year, making it one of the world’s twenty poorest countries (Riley, 2000, 148).

Similarly, in Kenya, income from sugar production was diverted to political leaders and their friends in the private sector. Over two-thirds of the civil service roster of Zaire (now once again the Democratic Republic of the Congo) in the late 1970s was said to be fictitious, yet comprising almost half of the country’s annual budget. Cameroon’s President Ahmadou Ahidjo made the civil service, the military, labor unions, and universities his personal fiefdom, appointing and dismissing employees at will and enriching himself in the process (Mbaku, 1998b, 43, 61-62; Riley, 2000, 148).

Corruption in Africa, as elsewhere, has enriched the political elite, especially heads of state. Africans see corruption as tightly connected to inequality. As the fortunes of leaders such as Zaire’s “kleptocrat” Mobutu Sese Seko—who had mansions in Belgium, France, Morocco, Spain, and Switzerland (Riley, 2000, 149)-- ordinary people saw their incomes plummet. African states had a score of 7.03 on the State Failure project’s measure of sharp and severe economic decline compared to 4.86 for other countries. The Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mali had among the highest scores (above 8.0), while citizens of Botswana, with cleaner government (and especially South Africa and Mauritius) fared far better economically.

Mbaku (1998b, 27) points to the connection between corruption and inequality in Africa:  
...corruption has allowed some groups to enrich themselves at the expense of the rest of the people, and, as a result, has been quite instrumental in exacerbating inequalities in the distribution of income and wealth.

Williams (1987, 130) is even more emphatic: “In the conditions of underdevelopment, with their attendant shortages and paucity of resources, corruption tends mostly to accentuate and aggravate the political and economic inequalities which have characterized so many African states for so long.”

Ordinary citizens see the link clearly. In Lagos, Nigeria (Packer, 2006, 69, 70) people talk of the prevalence of corruption and the hierarchical economy that shapes all transactions, from the oil industry to the street merchant:

[A young itinerant trader said]: "Most of the people who lead us embezzle instead of using that money to create factories," he said. "Our parents' generation was O.K. But this generation is a wasted generation--unless God comes to the aid. Because we know there is money in Nigeria."  
...almost no one works for himself. Everyone occupies a place in an economic hierarchy and owes fealty, as well as cash, to the person above him—known as an *oga*, or master—who, in turn, provides help or protection. Every group of workers—even at the stolen-goods market in the Ijora district—has a union that amounts to an extortion racket. The teen-ager hawking sunglasses in traffic receives the merchandise from a wholesaler, to whom he turns over ninety per cent of his earnings; if he tries to cheat or cut out, his guarantor—an authority figure such as a relative or a man from his home town, known to the vendor and the wholesaler alike—has to make up the loss, then hunt down his wayward charge. The

patronage system helps the megacity absorb the continual influx of newcomers for whom the formal economy has no use. Wealth accrues not to the most imaginative or industrious but to those who rise up through the chain of patronage. It amounts to a predatory system of obligation, set down in no laws, enforced by implied threat.

Clarno and Falola (1998, 175) summarize the effects of this patron-client system: “Thus develops a system of two distinct classes working with and against each other in order to make the most of the situation. Though they support each other, it is an inherently unequal relationship that reinforces the division between classes.” Much as the young man on the tram in Zagreb, Croatia told me about power relations in transition countries, the rich justify their misdeeds as a legitimate perquisite of power (or *kom-yan*) while similar behavior by the poor is called “theft, cheating, and shameful sneaking around” or *zey-yan* (Olivier de Sardan, 1999, 42). The elite not only justify their own misdeeds, but often point to petty corruption as society’s scourge. Nigerian General Sani Abacha, one of the more corrupt recent leaders, waged many campaigns against street-level corruption to deflect attention from his own misdeeds (Smith, 2006, 31).

This tight link between inequality and corruption leads to both pessimism and to low levels of trust outside of one’s own circle. The sign as you enter Lagos simply says, “This is Lagos” and a sawmill worker said, “We understand this as ‘Nobody will care for you, and you have to struggle to survive” (Packer, 2006, 64). Packer’s (2006, 71) description of Lagos as a failed city with dispirited inhabitants echoes the gloom one sees in the subways in Russia, where people spend their days playing the slot machines because they have lost faith that hard work will bring economic success and that corruption or connections were the only way to get rich:

Folarin Gbadebo-Smith, the chairman of a district on Lagos Island [said]: “The work ethic was...substituted by a lottery mentality. You were going to make it, not because you put in all this work but because you were lucky. You knew someone, or your ticket came in.”

Patron-client relations reflect strong in-group ties. Those at the top of the economic pyramid have an obligation to support his clan, tribe, religious group, family, and his circle more generally. Africans don’t identify with the larger society as readily as do people in other societies, especially in the West or in Asia. National boundaries are largely the creation of colonial powers, so loyalty to “the state” or the “society” of a country is weaker. The obligation of patrons to support their own kind further divides the society between in-groups and out-groups, who do not benefit from the largesse of a patron (Clarno and Falola, 1998, 175; Mbaku, 1998b, 65). Your obligations to your extended in-group mean that you must do whatever you must to get by.

Clients also have a responsibility to support their in-groups and this makes corruption seem less troublesome. Smith (2006, 217, 219) argues: “In a society where so many people suffer and struggle in order to survive, it is hard to begrudge people anything that offers help, hope, and solace....Nigerians perceive the world of politics and the realm of the state as operating without morality.” People see themselves as the victims of a corrupt system where everyone is forced into corrupt behavior in order to survive (Olivier de Sardan, 1999, 35). Your obligation to the *oga* (as Nigerians call the “master”) reinforces strong in-group ties and a lack of concern for out-groups.

John Githongo, formerly head of Kenya's anticorruption agency and now in exile at St. Antony's College at the University of Oxford after exposing graft at the highest levels, sees a direct link between corruption and inequality: "What's special about Africa's corruption is the starkness of the inequality....That is unique—just how extreme the divide between those who have and those who don't is" (Cowell, 2006, A4). And he links corruption to inequality *among ethnic groups* in his native Kenya (Githongo, 2006, 20-21, emphasis in original):

...the post-independence patrimonial state has disbursed resources to favour a ruling 'minority.' When the political traumas of the post-independence era are overlaid on these economic realities driven by patronage it creates particularly potent perceptions of inequality among ethnic groups...it's not the corruption in itself that people object to but the fact that it is perpetrated predominantly by an elite from one ethnic group to the exclusion of others, *especially theirs.*"

Below, I provide strong empirical support for Githongo's argument. People in Africa (though Botswana is an exception) clearly link corruption and inequality to each other. In the one survey (for Mali)—the only country where this question is posed so starkly--people who say that the President favors his own region in providing services are considerably more likely to say that corruption has been increasing.

As Russian mobsters take over control of legitimate businesses by brute force, Nigerian con artists engage in a wide range of scams (including many of those e-mail messages we get promising us riches if we send back our bank account details) under the rubric of "419" (four-one-nine), from the Nigerian criminal code on financial fraud. The poor may find their humble houses sold from under them by "419" scammers and they paint "This House Not for Sale: Beware of 419" on their outside walls (Packer, 2006, 72). As in Russia, there is little recourse. The police are not the purveyors of justice, but rather are complicit in illicit deals (Mbaku, 1998a, 258, 274-275). In the Afrobarometer, the police are considered to be the most corrupt public officials, with judges in third place behind customs officials (Bratton, Mattes, and Gyimah-Boadi, 2005, 233). The Economist Intelligence Unit legal fairness (imputed) measure indicates that African nations have a less fair legal system, with an average score of 2.0 on the five point scale, compared to 3.06 for all other countries. In a 1992 survey in Sierra Leone 80 percent of the respondents believed that "there are two interpretations of the law in Sierra Leone— one for the rich and one for the poor" (Kpundeh, 1998, 129).<sup>6</sup> The partiality of the justice system makes ordinary people especially upset because the police are often very highly paid, so extortion by officers is not simply a matter of supplementing meager salaries with small bribes (Fombad, 2000, 245).

Nor is seeking redress through media exposure a likely means to end corruption. Fombad (2000, 248-249) argues that journalists who try to expose corruption face intimidation, torture, and jail. Newspaper stories about corrupt officials are often politically inspired, designed to score political points against public officials and most of all to sell newspapers (much as in Romania). The press is often less of a watchdog than a participant in the great game of corruption.

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<sup>6</sup> The sample only had 300 respondents, but the results seem realistic.

Many Africans see themselves as trapped in a system of corruption that they acknowledge is wrong (Smith, 2006, 65), but envelopes their lives. Smith (2006, 65, 217) argues: “Although Nigerians recognize and condemn, in the abstract, the system of patronage that dominates the allocation of government resources, in practice people feel locked in...In a society where so many people suffer and struggle in order to survive, it is hard to begrudge people anything that offers help, hope, and solace.” Nigerians “tap into electrical lines, causing blackouts and fires; they pay off local gangs to provide security, which means that justice in the slums is vigilante justice” (Packer, 2006, 71).

The inequality trap begins with a highly inequitable distribution of wealth throughout the continent. The most “equal” countries, Tanzania and Mozambique, are slightly above the international average on the Gini index. Comparable levels of inequality are only found in Latin America. This inequality helps to solidify the strong in-group trust that has played such a powerful role in African cultures. Attachment to your ethnic, religious, clan, tribal, or family group is not necessarily inimical to a larger, more generalized sense of trust (Uslaner, 2002, 26-32). When people feel strongly bound *only* to their own group and believe that outsiders may be responsible for their economic plight and that they will not be treated fairly throughout society’s institutions, they will be more likely to mistrust out-groups. Cheating them loses some of its moral force, especially if it is necessary to get by and especially if it is ordered by the leaders of their in-group. Group loyalty and the struggle for basic survival will overwhelm concerns about the rights and wrongs about corrupt behavior. Ordinary people confront petty thievery, not grand corruption, so their ethical dilemma is not as stark, especially if believe that: (1) their leaders, from the *oga* to the President, steal large amounts of money and get away with it; (2) the perpetrators of grand corruption are far less likely to face justice than they are; and (3) playing at the edge of moral acceptability is the only way to survive.

African corruption, some argue ultimately rests upon a foundation of a grabbing state. On the other hand, Olivier de Sardan (1999, 42) argues that democratic governments in Africa are not barriers to corruption. Githongo (2006, 22) agrees, arguing that democratization “has not disrupted the corrupt networks established in the one-party era” and corrupt elites gather support from their own ethnic groups by dispensing patronage (cf. Mbaku, 1998, 274-275). Initially, there is some support for the claim that democratization leads to less corruption: The correlation between the Freedom House measure of political rights in 2003 and the 2005 TI Corruption Perceptions Index for 2005 is  $-.678$  ( $N = 35$ ), where high values on the Freedom House measure indicate lack of democratic rights. There is less evidence that *change in political rights* from 1973 to 2003 leads to less corruption; the correlation is only  $-.319$  ( $N = 30$ ) and the change in corruption from 1996 to 2005 is barely related to changes in democratization ( $r = .076$ ,  $N = 13$ ), with the correlation not in the expected direction. So while there is support for the claim that institutions matter in the cross-sectional data, there is less backing for the idea that *democratizing government* will lead to more honesty.

Sindzingre (2002, 453) makes an alternative argument about how the state promotes corruption: “The lack of state welfare schemes forces individuals into a perpetual quest for resources to protect themselves in case of adversity, which always looms on the horizon.” This is a compelling argument and is consistent with the inequality trap argument. While there is no direct

way to test the claim without better data on welfare policies, my analysis of Afrobarometer data strongly supports the claim that government performance on policies, especially welfare policies, shapes attitudes to both corruption and inequality.

Despite the uncertainty about institutional effects across countries, it may well be the case that *people's attitudes toward their institutions* tell us much about how they judge corruption in their societies. In the analyses of survey data below, I thus include measures of how satisfied people are with democracy, freedom of speech, trust in government and independent newspapers, trust in government institutions such as the courts and the police, how secure people believe that property rights are, and, following Sindzingre, how satisfied people are with social welfare—if not social welfare policies more specifically.

It would hardly be surprising to find evaluations of institutional performance also shapes approval of how the government is handling corruption.<sup>7</sup> However, I expect that perceptions of inequality will have greater effects on evaluations of how well government is handling corruption than will attitudes toward institutions. I move now to the models for how well the government handles corruption and whether groups are treated equally in a society.

### **Testing the Inequality Trap in Africa**

The Afrobarometer is a face-to-face survey based upon national probability samples in 15 African countries in 2002.<sup>8</sup> I use respondents from 14 nations in this analysis (see n. 2) initially and then move to separate analyses for Mali and Nigeria (Round 3 data for 2005). For the 14 countries I estimate ordered probit models of how well the government handles corruption and how frequently people are treated unequally. These estimations ideally should be estimated by simultaneous equation models since I posit that these two variables jointly shape each other. However, estimating such a model without controlling for variations within countries would lead to overestimating the significance of many, if not all, of the variables in the model. So I decided to use ordered probit analysis with robust standard errors, clustered across the 14 countries.<sup>9</sup> For Mali, I focus on whether people believe that corruption has been increasing since one-party rule and for support for limiting the incomes of the wealthy. For Nigeria, I estimate a simultaneous equation model for how well the government is handling corruption and whether equal treatment for all is better now. Since this is a single-country survey, a two-stage least squares model does not risk overestimating significance levels.

For the ordered probit analyses, the “effects” are more complicated than for ordinary probit analyses. For a dichotomous probit, the effect is simply the change in probability of the

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<sup>7</sup> Bratton, Mattes, and Gyimah-Boadi (2005, 232-233) argue that perceptions of corruption shape institutional trust and are often the strongest determinants of such confidence. This approach is similar to mine in Chapters 5 and 6, but here I focus on approval of government handling of corruption. I focus on trust in only specific institutions of justice.

<sup>8</sup> For the properties of the survey methodology, see <http://www.afrobarometer.org/methods.html>, the full list of countries is available at <http://www.afrobarometer.org/countries.newmap.html>, and a summary of results is available at <http://www.afrobarometer.org/results.html>.

<sup>9</sup> I also tried estimating fixed-effects models with dummy variables for the countries, but this still led to far higher significance levels than using robust standard errors with clustering.

dependent variable from the lowest to the highest level of a predictor. Such an interpretation makes little sense for ordered probit, since the dependent variable is not a simple dichotomy but a categorical (four or five category) variable. The effect in the tables is the *average* change in probability across the categories of the dependent variable. So for a four category variable, the effect is the average change in probability from category 1 to 2, 2 to 3, and 3 to 4. The sign reflects the same direction as the ordered probit coefficient.<sup>10</sup>

The models I formulate focus on variables most clearly connected to the inequality trap argument and how well the economy is performing more generally and whether the government is delivering services to the people (rather than simply pocketing state revenue). I also include variables that test, as in transition countries, whether grand corruption has a greater impact on how well the government handles corruption than does petty corruption, as well as attitudes toward the police, the legal system, the press, democracy, property rights, and measures of trust.

I present the results of the 14 country estimations in Tables 1 and 2. As in previous chapters, I focus on the key variables of interest to the inequality trap argument, as well as those that reflect attitudes toward institutions, and leave discussion of other variables (especially demographics) to notes. The simple story of these two estimations is: (1) Government performance matters most for attitudes about corruption, but perceptions of equal treatment matter and rank very highly on statistical significance; (2) Approval of how well the government handles corruption depend on perceptions of grand corruption and not petty corruption (as in transition countries); (3) Perceptions of government performance also strongly shape attitudes toward how well the government handles corruption; (4) Perceptions of grand corruption, though not petty corruption in general, shape beliefs on how frequently people are treated unfairly.

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<sup>10</sup> The estimations were carried out using the `prchange` command in the `spost` routine for Stata 9, from J. Scott Long and Jeremy Freese, at [www.indiana.edu/~jslsoc/spost.htm](http://www.indiana.edu/~jslsoc/spost.htm). The `prchange` for ordered probit reports these average changes as absolute values.



Table 1  
Ordered Probit Analysis of How Well Government Handles Corruption: 2002 Afrobarometer

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	MLE/SE	Effect
How frequently people treated unequally	-.046***	.015	-3.00	-.028
Equal treatment for all: better now than under military	.042**	.024	1.73	.033
President is corrupt	-.184****	.030	-5.97	-.108
Teachers are corrupt	-.010	.028	-.37	-.006
Pay bribe to get place in school	.038*	.026	1.49	.030
Pay bribe to avoid problem with police	.005	.016	.32	.004
Pay bribe to get document or permit	.015	.032	.45	.009
Poverty/inequality country's most important problem	-.003	.028	-.10	-.002
Government manage economy well	.381****	.035	10.79	.216
Government manages service delivery better than past	.063***	.023	2.75	.050
Satisfied with democracy	.067***	.025	2.66	.053
Trust courts	.084***	.032	2.64	.050
Safer from crime and violence than under military	.101****	.028	3.65	.079
Property rights more secure than under military	.057**	.030	1.92	.045
Trust government newspapers	.062	.053	1.17	.085
Read newspapers frequently	.019	.017	1.10	.015
One's identity group treated unfairly	-.032**	.019	-1.69	-.019
Particularized trust	-.007	.058	-.13	.001
Age+	-.007	.008	-.85	-.018
Education	-.012	.024	-.51	-.019
Income	-.0004	.001	-.56	-.008
Gender	.033	.031	1.07	.006

Cut points not reported. Effects are average changes in probabilities across the five categories of trust in government. The effects represent the changes from each value to *the next higher value*. Standard errors are robust, clustered across the 14 countries in the sample. Effects calculated at +/- one standard deviation.

\* p < .10 \*\* p < .05 \*\*\* p < .01 \*\*\*\* p < .0001

Estimated R = .123 -2\*Log Likelihood Ratio = 18019.13 N=7709

Table 2  
Ordered Probit Analysis of How Frequently People are Treated Unequally: 2002 Afrobarometer

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	M LE/SE	Effect
Government handles corruption well	-.050**	.028	-1.82	-.030
President is corrupt	.147****	.024	5.99	.087
Police are corrupt	.029	.030	.97	.017
Teachers are corrupt	-.0002	.029	-.01	.0002
Pay bribe to get place in school	-.019	.047	-.40	-.015
Pay bribe to avoid problem with police	.016	.024	.65	.013
Pay bribe to get document or permit	.046**	.025	1.86	.037
Poverty/inequality country's most important problem	-.018	.032	-.53	-.010
Corruption country's most important problem	.052	.050	1.05	.010
Government manage economy well	-.082**	.037	-2.24	-.049
Government manages reducing income gap well	-.071**	.033	-2.15	-.042
Government provides food for all well	-.045	.037	-1.22	-.027
Schools should be free for all	.009	.011	.83	.007
Violent conflicts between groups in the country	.098****	.026	3.83	.078
Country's economic position very good	-.040*	.028	-1.42	.032
Own living condition very good	-.007	.019	-.37	-.006
One's identity group treated unfairly	.084***	.033	2.55	.050
Particularized trust	.125****	.041	3.06	.025
Trust traditional leaders	-.014	.021	-.66	.009
Age+	.001	.006	.19	.003
Education	-.021**	.012	-1.80	.034
Income	.001	.001	1.03	.011
Gender	.021	.022	.94	.004

Cut points not reported. Effects are average changes in probabilities across the five categories of trust in government. The effects represent the changes from each value to *the next higher value*. Standard errors are robust, clustered across the 14 countries in the sample Effects calculated at +/- one standard deviation.

\* p < .10 \*\* p < .05 \*\*\* p < .01 \*\*\*\* p < .0001

Estimated R = .039 -2\*Log Likelihood Ratio = 275510.51 N = 10,486

Overall, 46.8 percent of the sample used for the estimation believe that government is handling corruption well or very well and 48.5 percent say that people are treated unequally either often or always. Both figures are greater than one might expect given the severity of corruption and inequality among African countries. Yet, people see corruption and inequality as strongly interrelated.

How well the government handles corruption depends most strongly on government performance: A government that delivers the goods (specifically handling the economy) is perceived to be more honest and no other variable comes close to the effect of this one. For each increment in how well the government manages the economy, a respondent will have a .216 unit increase in her probability of approving handling of corruption. Approval of service delivery, as Sindzingre argues, also makes people more positive toward governmental honesty (an average of .05 increase). The significant variable with the third largest effect (eight percent) is whether people feel safer from crime and violence than under the previous regime. Performance matters most of all.

If people believe that they are treated unequally, they will be less likely to approve of the government's handling of corruption. Both how frequently people are treated unequally and whether equal treatment is better now than under the previous regime lead to significant increments in perceptions of government honesty. While the effects are not large, the significance of how frequently people are treated unequally is the fourth greatest in the model.<sup>11</sup> Unequal treatment does lead to greater dissatisfaction with government performance on curbing corruption. If better service delivery leads to less inequality, there is additional support for the inequality trap argument. If you believe that your identity group is treated unfairly, you will also be less likely to approve of government handling of corruption (though the effect is small). Particularized trust, as estimated by whether people identify more with their tribe or clan than with the country, is not significant. And whether people see poverty and inequality as the most important problem also does not shape attitudes toward corruption (perhaps because such a large share of the sample, over 72 percent, see these problems as critical).

A key result from transition countries that underlies the inequality trap receives striking confirmation in the Afrobarometer data: It is grand corruption, not petty corruption, that shapes whether people think that the government is handling corruption well. The second biggest effect in the model (with an average change in probability of .108) is whether people think that the President is corrupt. Now this is hardly surprising, except that perceptions of low level corruption (whether teachers are corrupt) or demands for bribes for the police or to get documents are insignificant. Paying a bribe to get into school is significant, but barely so (at  $p < .10$ ). Petty corruption doesn't bother people as much as high-level corruption, indeed corruption at the very top matters most.

Attitudes toward institutions matter as well. People who are satisfied with democracy are, on average, five percent more likely (for each category) to approve of government handling

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<sup>11</sup> As determined by the MLE/SE (maximum likelihood estimate—or ordered probit coefficient divided by its standard error), which is analogous to a t-test in regression.

of corruption. There are similar effects for trusting the courts and for believing that property rights are more secure. The other variables in the model—both demographics and attention to the media—are all insignificant.

People believe that strong institutions such as democracy, the courts, and secure property rights will lead to less corruption. But they also believe that malfeasance has a strong basis in inequality—in unfair treatment of groups and individuals and in misdeeds committed by the powerful rather than by ordinary people. Government performance seems the key (which is not surprising since the corruption question available asks about how well government handles malfeasance)—but even here there is a tie between economic performance and less inequality: The correlation (tau-c) between government management of the economy and whether equal treatment for all is better now is .327. Improved service delivery is also linked to more equal treatment (tau-c = .297). And trust in the police is at least modestly related to progress in equal treatment (tau-c = .190). So good government occurs when the state helps the most vulnerable and seems serious about reducing economic disparities and making people less dependent upon their *oga*.

Support for the inequality trap argument is even more powerful in the equation for how frequently people are treated unequally. By far the strongest predictor of unequal treatment is the belief that the President is corrupt (with an average effect of 8.7 percent). Believing that the government is handling corruption well is also significant, though only one measure of lower-level corruption (paying a bribe to get a document) increases inequality. Corrupt police or teachers and bribes to get into school or to avoid a problem with the police don't matter. Nor, perhaps surprisingly, is whether corruption is the country's most important problem—perhaps because only 10.5 percent of the sample said so. But social inequality seems to matter mightily. If you believe that there are violent conflicts between groups in the country, you will be 8 percent more likely across each category to say that people are treated unequally—and this variable ranks second in statistical significance in the model. Right behind is particularized trust—identification with your in-group rather than with the nation and belief that your identity group is treated unfairly. Government performance matters as well, though not everywhere. Management of the economy and of the income gap are significant, though not whether government provides food for all.<sup>12</sup>

Perceptions of inequality thus reflect social tensions and government performance, but most of all the belief that the President is corrupt. Almost three quarters believe that some or all of the people in the office of the President are corrupt—and high-level corruption means grand theft, not petty larceny. Grand corruption makes the rich richer and the poor poorer—and gives the government fewer resources and less will to redress economic inequality. It creates more social tensions—and these strains in turn lead to greater perceptions of unequal treatment and to a belief (albeit not that substantial) that the government is not handling corruption well.

In many African countries the inequality trap thesis receives strong support. Inequality

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<sup>12</sup> Personal living condition, age, income, and gender are not significant, while the country's overall economic position was barely significant (at  $p < .10$ ). Whether the poverty is the country's most important problem and whether schools should be free for all are also insignificant. More highly educated people are less likely to say that people are treated unequally—perhaps reflecting the higher status of people with education (though income is not significant).

leads to higher levels of grand corruption and high-level corruption leads to a more inequitable distribution of wealth. Africans (as people in transition countries) clearly see this logic. They believe that good institutions can limit corruption, but they do so at least in part by narrowing the gap between income groups.

Corruption is widespread but not endemic in Africa. Botswana has a relatively clean government and there is little support for the inequality trap thesis there. I estimated the same ordered probit model for government handling of corruption for Botswana as I did for the full set of 14 countries in Table 1.<sup>13</sup> The model is striking for how few of the variables in this model are significant. The only exceptions, in order of their significance, are trust in the courts, the security of property rights, whether poverty and inequality are the most important problems, how well the government manages the economy, and particularized trust. Overall, the model—except for poverty as a problem—approximates what one might expect for a developed democracy. The rule of law and government performance dominate the few significant predictors. For the unequal treatment model, the only variables that are significant are unfair group treatment, particularized trust, how well the government is handling the economy, and whether people believe that schools should be free for all. All of these relate to economic and social tensions. None of the corruption variables predicts attitudes toward equal treatment significantly. Even though Botswana has a high degree of economic inequality, it has much lower corruption than other African countries. So it does not succumb to the inequality trap.

Botswana are more concerned about progress on inequality than are people in any other country other than Nigeria in the 2002 Afrobarometer. Yet, Botswana are less likely to make a link between corruption and inequality than are people in most other countries. The simple correlation between perceptions of how well the government handles corruption and rising inequality is twice as high in Nigeria ( $r = .340$ ) as it is in Botswana ( $r = .177$ ).

Why does Botswana escape this trap? Botswana is a vibrant democracy with an active civil society (Holm, 2000, 290). But so is Mali, to which I turn next, which does not escape the inequality trap. Botswana has tremendous mineral wealth, but so does Nigeria. It also has a government committed to economic growth and foreign investment (Guest, 2003, 26; Riley, 2000, 153). Its economy has one of the world's highest growth rates, averaging between 8 and 10 percent a year (Holm, 2000, 295-296). It is landlocked, surrounded by Namibia, Zimbabwe, and South Africa—all of which were in the early years of Botswana's independence (1966) run by white racist regimes. So Botswana was rather vulnerable and its free market policies that relied heavily upon foreign investment served to bolster its economic and institutional security.

As a country with a very small population, “less than the population of a single slum in Lagos” (Guest, 2003, 26), its economic growth was more manageable. Botswana has a clean government because it could not afford corruption. Foreign investors would not put their resources into a country where corruption ran rampant and Botswana would be vulnerable, because of its location (landlocked) and its size, without a strong economy. This story is remarkably similar to the cases of Singapore and Hong Kong (see Chapter 7 of the book manuscript). (Economic) Necessity may be the mother of (moral) subvention.

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<sup>13</sup> I do not present the estimates here. They are available upon request.

## **Corruption and Inequality in Mali and Nigeria**

I turn now to an examination of the linkage between corruption and inequality in Mali in Round 2 of the Afrobarometer and between how well the government is handling corruption and perceptions that the government is handling corruption well and whether equal treatment for all is better now than under military rule in Round 3 (2005) for Nigeria.

I focus on Mali because the 2002 survey there included several questions not available in other countries in the Round 2 surveys, most notably limitations on incomes of the wealthy, the generalized trust question, trusting members of other tribes, perceptions of corrupt behavior among other people in the country, and beliefs about who should have access to or own resources such as education and public land. I focus on Nigeria in part for similar reasons—the 2005 survey included the generalized trust question as well as a much wider range of questions about petty corruption and questions on legal fairness. Most critically, Nigeria may be the classic case of the inequality trap—ranking as tied for the sixth most corrupt country in the world in the 2005 TI index as well as having very high levels of inequality and low levels of trust (a Gini of 50.5 and only 15 percent agreeing that “most people can be trusted”).

I examine whether people see corruption increasing or decreasing since the period of one-party rule and whether the government should limit incomes of the rich among Malians. In Romania, I found support for a linkage between perceptions of rising inequality and disapproval of government handling of corruption and between perceived high levels of malfeasance and demands for limiting the incomes of the rich (see Chapter 5 of the manuscript). People link corruption to inequality and in Romania (and other transition countries) say that the only way to get rich is to be corrupt, so many people demand the state limit the incomes of the (corrupt) rich. While there are no similar questions in Afrobarometer surveys, much of the literature on corruption in Africa points to a similar line of thought. Mali, with a relatively high level of corruption (2.9 on the TI 2005 index), considerable inequality (a Gini index of 50.5), as well as low generalized trust (.13) should be a good case to test this dynamic in Africa. In Mali, 60.6 percent believe that there has been an increase in corruption since the end of one party rule following a 1991 coup, but surprisingly only 14 percent favor limiting the incomes of the rich.

Mali is a multiparty democracy with generally good relations among its ethnic groups, but it is one of the world’s ten poorest countries with a per capita income of just \$250 US a year. Democratic elections were held in 1992 although the 1997 elections were annulled by the courts; in 2002 General Amadou Toumani Toure, the former head of state during the 1991-92 transition following the coup, was elected in a multiparty election for a five year term.<sup>14</sup> Almost two-thirds of its land is either desert or semidesert, 10 percent of its population is nomadic, and 80 percent subsists on farming or fishing.<sup>15</sup>

Mali’s poverty and great inequality suggest that there should be a strong connection between inequality and corruption—and between corruption and demands to limit wealth, even though only a small share of Malians favor restricting the incomes of the rich. And Malians do

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<sup>14</sup> <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2828.htm>, accessed December 31, 2006.

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/ml.html>, accessed December 31, 2006.

think about corruption, inequality, and limiting the incomes of the rich as the inequality trap would suggest—and in ways similar to Romanians. I present the ordered probit analyses for perceptions of increasing corruption and for supporting limiting incomes of the rich in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3

Ordered Probit Analysis of Corruption Increasing Since Period of One-Party Rule: 2002 Afrobarometer in Mali

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	MLE/SE	Effect
Equal treatment for all: better now than under military	-.120***	.039	-3.10	-.091
Government policies hurt or help most people	-.084**	.037	-2.24	-.063
President favors own region in providing services	.080**	.045	1.76	.045
Electricity difficult to get because of high cost	.393****	.097	4.05	.074
Elected leaders corrupt	.162***	.055	2.96	.089
Police corrupt	.230***	.079	2.91	.125
Civil servants corrupt	.120**	.061	1.97	.066
Business people corrupt	.066	.073	.91	.037
Teachers corrupt	-.023	.043	-.55	-.013
Customs officers corrupt	-.109	.084	-1.30	-.063
Bribery is rare among public officials	-.086**	.047	-1.82	-.048
Need to bribe to get services entitled to	-.044	.049	-.89	-.025
Can get cash through illicit sources	.301***	.094	3.22	.056
How often Malians get services without paying	.095**	.037	2.02	.054
Trust courts	.036	.039	.92	.020
Generalized trust	.024	.133	.18	.005

Cut points not reported. Effects are average changes in probabilities across the five categories of trust in government. The effects represent the changes from each value to *the next higher value*.

\* p < .10 \*\* p < .05 \*\*\* p < .01 \*\*\*\* p < .0001

Estimated R = .100 -2\*Log Likelihood Ratio = 1512.49 N = 618



Table 4

## Ordered Probit Analysis of Limiting Incomes of the Wealthy: 2002 Afrobarometer in Mali

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	MLE/SE	Effect
Government manages reducing income gap well	-.077**	.037	-2.06	-.035
Equal treatment for all: better now than under military	-.047*	.033	-1.43	-.029
Important education provided free for everyone	.162***	.052	3.14	.075
Individuals / community should own land	.077***	.032	2.42	.047
Government / people responsible for economy	.081****	.024	3.39	.049
Bribery is rare among public officials	-.069**	.041	-1.70	.032
Need to bribe to get services entitled to	-.044	.042	-1.05	-.020
Government handles corruption well	-.090**	.038	-2.34	-.042
Teachers are corrupt	-.013	.037	-.35	-.006
Elected leaders corrupt	.020	.049	.42	.009
Police corrupt	.064	.055	.98	.029
Civil servants corrupt	.027	.053	.50	.012
Foreign businesspeople corrupt	-.119	.056	-2.10	-.035
How often do Malians evade taxes	-.060	.054	-1.11	-.028
How often Malians get services without paying	.151***	.056	2.68	.069
Trust courts	.011	.035	.32	.005
Trust members of other tribes	-.105***	.036	2.91	-.049
How safe walking alone	-.066**	.030	-2.19	-.041
Self, family member, or friend attacked in year	.068	.082	.84	.010
How satisfied with life expectations next year	-.027	.036	-.76	-.017

Cut points not reported. Effects are average changes in probabilities across the five categories of trust in government.

The effects represent the changes from each value to the next higher value. \* p < .10 \*\* p < .05 \*\*\* p < .01 \*\*\*\* p < .0001

Estimated R = .050 -2\*Log Likelihood Ratio = 2153.83 N = 842

Issues of inequality and access to basic needs such as electricity are, together with beliefs about specific forms of corruption, the strongest determinants of perceptions of increasing corruption (see Table 3). The effect for more equal treatment (nine percent) is the second strongest in the model, following police corruption. Believing that government policies hurt most people (six percent) and that electricity is difficult to get because it is too expensive (seven percent) are among the strongest determinants of corruption perceptions. Malians clearly make the link between malfeasance and inequality.

Of course, perceptions about whether specific actors are corrupt lead to beliefs about rising malfeasance. The greatest impact is for police corruption (with an effect of .125), even more than believing that elected leaders or civil servants are corrupt (effects of .089 and .066). People who say that the President favors his own region in providing services are also more likely to say that corruption has been increasing—as are respondents who say that bribery is common among public officials (by average effects of about .05 for both). But there is no effect for businesspeople, teachers, customs officers, or for having to make a small bribe to get routine services. Malians, like Africans more generally as well as people in transition countries, seem concerned more by high-level, high-cost corruption than by petty dishonesty.

Even for variables reflecting institutional positions, there is evidence of an inequality trap. The police in many African nations earn far more than many ordinary people even before extortion—so constant harassment for “extra fees” may seem particularly offensive. Presidential favoritism also contributes to inequality by favoring some Malians over others. The strong effects on corruption perceptions for high-level malfeasance compared to petty bribery adds support to the inequality trap thesis.

So do two other variables with strong impacts. If you believe fellow citizens can get services without paying, you are acknowledging that some people have privileged access—and this leads to perceptions of increasing corruption. And if you can get cash through illicit sources, you either acknowledge your own favored position or admit that going outside normal channels is the only way to get by. Generalized trust doesn’t matter nor does trust in the courts. Generalized trust may not matter because it is so low in Mali—and the courts may seem less biased to average Malians than do the courts.

Support for limiting the incomes of the wealthy (see Table 7-4) predominantly reflect perceptions of government performance in helping the poor as well as values for who should benefit from government policies. However, believing that bribery is frequent and that government is not handling corruption well are significant factors shaping demands to limit the incomes of the rich. No specific types of corruption—neither police, elected leaders, police, foreign businesspeople, or teachers—have significant impacts on limiting incomes. Nor does petty bribery, trust in the courts, or even tax evasion. However, when Malians get services without paying, they are violating norms of fairness and this leads to demands for redistribution (by an average effect of seven percent, the second largest effect in the model).

The most important determinants of demands for limiting income are preferences for who should benefit from government policies: Believing that education should be free for everyone leads to an average effect of 7.5 percent, while holding that the community rather than

individuals should own land increases support for redistribution by about 5 percent on average—about the same effect for respondents who say that government, rather than individuals, is responsible for the health of the economy. How well the government seems to reduce the income gap and whether equal treatment has improved since military rule lead to less support for redistribution.

These effects are similar to the model for limiting incomes for Romania in Chapter 5. In Romania, the most important factor shaping support for redistribution is the belief that people don't get sufficient support from the state. High-level corruption also makes people more sympathetic to limiting incomes. In Romania, wealth and the ability to afford “luxuries” such as a cellular telephone and a vacation away from home also shape support for limiting incomes—but they do not do so in Mali. Expectations for the next year or personal attacks do not lead to harsher judgments against others. But feeling safe makes people less likely to demand redistribution as does a sense of generalized trust—trust in members of other tribes. If you express faith in people unlike yourself, you will also be more willing to put faith in people with higher incomes. And if you feel safe walking alone, you may have a more positive view of human nature and find it easier to resist demands for retribution.

Malians do link corruption and inequality and those most concerned with corruption are also more likely to demand limiting the incomes of the rich. While most Malians oppose such mandatory redistribution, there are clear links as my argument suggests.

I turn now to the model for Nigeria. Corruption is “endemic in Nigeria,” Dike (2005) argues. “Nigeria is a society where national priorities are turned upside down; hard work is not rewarded, but rogues are often glorified in Nigeria....In Nigeria, you can hardly enter an office and get your 'file signed except you drop' some money. Even the security personnel at the door of every office will ask for (bribe) tip.” Despite Nigeria's status as a major oil exporter and an official unemployment rate of only 2.9 percent, per capita GDP in 2005 was just \$1400, 60 percent of the population lives below the poverty line.<sup>16</sup>

The first factor Dike (2005) cites as a cause of corruption is the “great inequality in distribution of wealth....The brazen display of wealth by public officials, which they are unable to explain the source, points to how bad corruption has reached in the society. Many of these officials before being elected or appointed into offices had little or modest income.”

Former President Sani Abacha reportedly stole as much as \$1 billion from the country's treasury (Dike, 2005). Abacha's successor, Olusegun Obasanjo, promised a strong anti-corruption effort. Yet, his administration has also fallen prey to dishonest dealings. In 1999, Senators extorted approximately \$6,000 in exchange for votes for Evan Enwerem's nomination as Senate President. Four years later, ministerial nominee Mallam Nasir el-Rufai claimed that 54 senators demanded almost \$400,000 to back his appointment. Despite President Obasanjo's promise to clean up the government, he has failed to order investigations into charges that state governors and the Inspector General of the Police have skimmed millions of dollars of public funds into their own pockets (Odunlami, 2005).

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<sup>16</sup> <https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/ni.html>, accessed January 1, 2007.

Nigeria has been marked by ethnic conflict—there was a civil war in the late 1960s when Christians in the East, the Ibos, tried to secede as an independent nation (Biafra). After that failed attempt, Nigeria has been wracked by sporadic, often very deadly, inter-ethnic and inter-religious violence spurred on at least in part by jealousy over economic status and sectarian conflicts. These conflicts have contributed to Nigeria’s low out-group trust and strong in-group identification—as well as jealousy over group economic and political success.

I estimate a simultaneous equation model (using two-stage least squares) for how well the government is handling corruption and whether equal treatment for all is better than under military rule. The Round 3 Afrobarometer for Nigeria includes the generalized trust question—however, it was insignificant and led to a loss of cases. Instead, I use the measure of particularized trust that I used in the all-Africa model in Table 2 (whether a respondent identified more with her tribe than with the nation). The Round 3 data has a much wider battery of questions on petty corruption: whether people made bribes to obtain a public document, a school placement, a household service, medicine, or police protection. I constructed a bribe index by factor analysis of these questions. The survey also contained questions on how likely people believed the law would be enforced if they or high officials were charged with a serious crime. I constructed a measure of law enforcement bias from these two measures, ranging from seeing yourself as less likely to be prosecuted to equal likelihoods of prosecution or evading the law to believing that high officials would be less likely than yourself to face the wrath of the law.

The Round 3 survey for Nigeria asks the usual questions on how well the government is handling inequality and the economy. It also has a question on how well the government is handling the AIDS crisis. Since AIDS primarily affects poor people and its devastating effects can rob a family of its breadwinner and leave it even more vulnerable (McGeary, 2001; AVERT, 2006), dealing with AIDS fundamentally affects the level of economic inequality in Africa (as elsewhere). How a government chooses to respond to this health crisis tells us much about who benefits from government policies.

I present the model in Table 5. Nigerians see clear linkages between corruption and inequality. By far the strongest factor shaping views of how well the government is handling corruption is government performance on AIDS. At the bivariate level, 38 percent of Nigerians say that the government is handling corruption very badly (and 20 percent say that it handles the AIDS crisis very poorly); 82 percent who say that the government is handling AIDS badly also say that it is doing very poorly on corruption. Only 4.5 percent say that the government is handling the AIDS crisis badly and corruption well. The next two variables, by levels of significance, are how well the government handles the economy and whether equal treatment for all is better than under military rule. Right behind equal treatment is whether local government does a good job in collecting taxes—which is also likely to reflect attitudes toward inequality, since evading taxes is far more consequential (and perhaps frequent) among the wealthy. Another measure of inequality—whether the government is handling it well—also is a strongly significant predictor of approval of government efforts on corruption.

Table 5  
Simultaneous Equation Model for Government Handling Corruption and Changes in Inequality: Afrobarometer in Nigeria 2005

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	t Ratio
<b>Government Handles Corruption Well</b>			
<b>Equal treatment for all better now</b>	.201****	.033	6.00
President is corrupt	-.108****	.025	-4.34
Teachers are corrupt	.052	.025	2.07
Make bribes factor score	-.004	.021	-.02
Provide favors for services: right or wrong	.023	.042	.41
Law enforcement bias	.078	.027	2.8
Local government handles tax collection	.106****	.020	5.35
Government handles AIDS	.292****	0.020	14.33
Government handle economy	.201****	.028	7.24
Government handle inequality	.105****	.030	3.47
Trust government media	.091****	.022	4.08
Political knowledge	.022**	.013	1.68
Constant	-.187	.145	-1.29
<i>Equal treatment for all better now</i>			
<b>Government handles corruption well</b>			
Unjust arrest less frequent now	.273****	.025	11.01
President is corrupt	-.044*	.031	-1.43
Teachers are corrupt	.040	.038	1.06
Health care workers are corrupt	-.038	.039	-.97
Trust police	.111****	.029	3.83
Government handles inequality	.096***	.037	2.64
Availability of goods better now	.051**	.022	2.25
National economy better next year	.079****	.019	4.19
Free speech more respected now	.145****	.023	6.21
Particularized trust	-.034*	.024	-1.42
No cash income	-.057***	.019	-3.08
Constant	.250*	.147	1.70

\* p < .10 \*\* p < .05 \*\*\* p < .01 \*\*\*\* p < .0001 N= 1681

Table 7-5 (continued)

RMSE (R ) by equation: Government handle corruption: .378 (.753); Equal treatment better: .336 (.912)

Endogenous variables in **bold**; endogenous dependent variables in **bold italics**.

Exogenous variables: Gender, age, education, trust in the courts, trust other ethnic groups, discrimination against religion better now, police are corrupt, belief that people are obligated to pay taxes, listen to radio news often, discuss politics frequently.

Nigerians who do not believe that the government is working hard enough to combat inequality overwhelmingly say that the state is corrupt. And they put the blame at the top—with the President ( $p < .0001$ ) and not with teachers, whether they are forced to make bribes, or even whether providing favors for services is wrong. Surprisingly, law enforcement bias *has the wrong sign*—indicating that people who believe that high officials would be treated more leniently than they would are more likely to approve government performance on corruption.<sup>17</sup>

The equal treatment equation just as dramatically supports the inequality trap argument. Two of the three variables with the strongest impacts on whether equal treatment for all is better now than under the military regime relate to the fairness of the legal system and to government handling of corruption. People who believe that there are fewer unjust arrests are far more likely to say that equal treatment for all is better now. At the bivariate level 21 percent believe that unjust arrests are now far *more frequent* than under military governments and 19 percent say that inequality has gotten much worse under the democratic regime. Half of the people who say that unjust arrests have increased a lot also say that inequality has gotten much worse. Of the three percent who say that there are far fewer unjust arrests, 28 percent say that equality has gotten much better (compared to an overall share of four percent).

The fairness of the legal system is the central factor shaping people's views of how equally people are treated. Trust in the police is also strongly related to perceptions of equal treatment ( $p < .0001$ ). Also significant is whether the government is handling corruption well ( $p < .0001$ ). When people believe that the police are a law unto themselves and can arrest anyone for any reason (including shaking them down for bribes), where people don't trust the police, and where they believe the political system is corrupt, they see unequal treatment. Again, petty corruption (from teachers and health care workers) doesn't matter, but higher-level malfeasance, in the office of the President, is significant (though only at  $p < .10$ ).

Institutions matter as well. The second most important factor shaping equal treatment is whether free speech is more respected now. Also significant are government performance on the economy—whether people expect the economy to be better next year, whether more goods are available now, and whether people have no cash income. Identity with one's own tribe rather than with Nigerians more generally also leads people to say that equal treatment has worsened. Particularized trust is based upon—and leads to—envy of groups that may fare better than your own—and this mistrust of out-groups is a central part of the inequality trap.

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<sup>17</sup>I thought that this unusual result might stem from multicollinearity, but checks indicated otherwise—and the relationship holds at the bivariate level. Also in the model and significant are whether people trust government media (the source of much information about corruption) and how knowledgeable they are (the more knowledgeable would be more likely to be aware of anti-corruption efforts). Both are significant.

Nigeria may be one of the strongest cases for the inequality trap among African nations—and there is clear evidence for my thesis here. The Nigerian evidence is even more dramatically supportive than the all-Africa models or those for Mali. The evidence for African nations is in many ways similar to that for transition countries, which have much lower levels of inequality and generally less corruption. There are, of course, exceptions, as the case of Botswana clearly shows. It is relatively clean politically and even though it has low levels of trust and high inequality, it seems to escape the inequality trap.

### **Reprise**

Institutions matter in Africa. In many African countries, weak institutions are part of the inequality trap, not alternative ways to combat corruption. The legal system and the police are key sources of corruption and when Presidents steal, they exacerbate beliefs that those at the top exploit the poor. They are only part of the problem, but often the most visible part.

In many African countries, weak institutions and high inequality contribute to the grabbing state. Yet, as countries democratize, they still have to confront the problems of both inequality and corruption. Stronger institutions may be an important step, but they are only the first step. The really hard work, more fundamental adjustment of economic and power relationships, remains to be done.

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