

Sources of tolerance towards corrupted politicians in Greece: the role of trade offs and individual benefits

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Abstract Reelection of corrupted politicians points to a problem of democratic accountability. Voters do have the chance to ‘throw the rascals out’, but they do not take it. Employing a survey experiment, we test two popular explanations of why Greek voters fail to effectively sanction corrupt politicians. One is related to the distorting effects of psychological attachment to parties and the second to tradeoffs that seem to come into play when voters weigh the prevalence of corruption against other tangible benefits that they receive from governments and parties, such as lower taxes or clientelistic exchanges. Our findings suggest that collective benefits, such as cutting taxes, outweigh the costs of tolerating political corruption. On the contrary, exclusive provision of goods to specific voters, such as in the case of clientelistic exchanges, seems to be negatively related to support for a corrupt politician and therefore should rather not be regarded as a source of tolerance to corruption, at least not in present time Greece.

Introduction

The adverse consequences of corruption are well documented: corruption stifles economic growth, it undermines trust in institutions and in others and thwarts economic, social and democratic development (Holmberg and Rothstein [1, 2]). Corruption also spans countries with a diverse set of political institutions, ranging from authoritarian regimes to fully fledged democracies [3]. The latter finding has been extensively addressed in various publications (see among others, [4–7]). While the aforementioned scholars, and others, have offered convincing accounts of why this is the case, it is still a troubling finding that democratic institutions can offer such poor Quality of Government outcomes such as a corrupt political elite, bureaucracy and public service.

The recent debt crisis in Europe has sparked a large debate regarding causes and potential solutions to the ‘good governance’ issue. A third wave democracy, a

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