**Normative power of punishment: Can information about a prospective punishment change perception of corruption?**

Keywords: corruption, social norms, persuasion, survey experiment, content analysis

Corruption is a pervasive social phenomenon with grave effects. When reporting about corrupt practices news media not only provide information, but can also shape public perceptions in an unintended way: presenting readers information about unresolved and unpunished corruption cases may lead to increasing their skepticism about the overall state of corruption in the state, leading to a vicious circle of pessimism - fatalism - mistrust to political elites.

Using a quantitative content analysis, this paper first looks at a news coverage of corruption in Slovakia. Two teams of two coders evaluated 1425 media outputs from 8 randomly selected weeks from May 2016 to May 2017 period. The analysis covered print dailies, weeklies, monthlies, TV and radio news shows, as well as online news portals. Results show that approx. 80 % of outputs that fulfill inclusion criteria do not explicitly mention real or prospective punishment and 19 % of the outputs explicitly describe corruption as widespread in Slovakia. Consumers of the Slovak media therefore typically read about corruption cases not being solved and punished and their fellow countryman and woman not being very vocal in their rejection of corruption as an unacceptable practice.

The second part of the paper uses two pre-registered population-based survey experiments on a representative Slovak population to examine how information about a prospective punishment for a corruption crime influence perception of corruption. We test an assumption that respondents who receive a message about unpunished corruption (descriptive normative information) are more likely to be more negative in their evaluation of the overall state of corruption in Slovakia (injunctive normative information). Drawing on literature about anchoring effects, we also expect an effect of reading an article mentioning only upper limit of a prospective punishment, compared to an article giving a range of prospective punishment. Experiment A uses a corruption case involving a doctor, while Experiment B uses a corruption case involving public official. In both experiment 250 participants per group will participate in the study. Data collection for both experiments is currently ongoing, data will be available to researchers during the first week of March.

Literature:

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