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Can Corruption Be Measured? Comparing Global Versus Local Perceptions of Corruption in East and Southeast Asia

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ABSTRACT *Since Transparency International first released its annual Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) in 1995, the CPI has quickly become the best known corruption indicator worldwide. The CPI has been widely credited with making comparative and large-N studies of corruption possible, as well as putting the issue of corruption squarely in the international policy agenda. Despite its enormous influence on both academic and policy fronts, the CPI is not without critics. One often noted critique is that the CPI relies solely on surveys of foreign business people and the expert assessments of cross-national analysts; as such, the CPI mainly reflects international experts' perceptions, not the perceptions of each country's citizens. This study examines the above critique in closer detail. Data from the Asian Barometer Survey is employed to analyze whether international experts' corruption perceptions were similar to those of domestic citizens. The Asian Barometer Survey is a public opinion survey on issues related to political values, democracy, and public reform in 13 different areas around East and Southeast Asia (Cambodia, China, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, Mongolia, the Philippines, Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand, and Vietnam). Data analysis indicates that global and local perspectives are only moderately aligned in the 13 areas studied. International experts and domestic citizens differ, to varying degrees, in their evaluation of the extent of public sector corruption in several areas, suggesting the presence of a corruption perception gap. Four implications about the existence of this gap can be drawn for future corruption measurement.*

Keywords: corruption; measurement; perceptions; East Asia; Southeast Asia; global; local

Introduction

Corruption is increasingly regarded as a major challenge for many countries in Asia (and indeed much of the developing world) and is one of the foremost obstacles to Asia's political, economic, and social development (Diamond 1999; Bhargava and Bolongaita 2004). Despite Asian economies having rebounded from the late 1990s financial crisis,

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Quah (2006) argues that the problem of corruption remains symptomatic throughout the region, “significantly cramping the extent and potential of Asia’s ‘rise’”.

One widely used measure of the severity of corruption is provided by Transparency International’s (TI) Corruption Perception Index (CPI). The CPI ranks countries and territories around the world based on international experts’ and business people’s perceptions of the level of public sector corruption. Table 1 depicts the 2005–2011 CPI scores for 17 countries/territories located in East and Southeast Asia. CPI scores range from 0 (highly corrupt) to 10 (very clean). As seen in Table 1, Asia is home to countries perceived to be highly corrupt (e.g. North Korea and Myanmar), and countries that are seen as very clean (e.g. Singapore). The CPI scores from 2005–2011 reveal that a given country/territory’s scores typically do not vary much year to year. Generally, TI considers a CPI score of 5 to be the transition point differentiating countries that do and do not have a serious corruption problem. In the 2011 CPI, 11 of the 17 countries/territories listed fail to score above 5.

The CPI data reported in Table 1 indicates that the perceived level of public sector corruption is relatively high for a majority of East and Southeast Asian countries/territories. A fundamental, but seldom addressed, question is whether the domestic population of these countries/territories hold views corresponding with the CPI scores. As often noted by critics, because the CPI is an aggregate index constructed predominantly from international expert assessments and opinion surveys of business executives, it represents only a very narrow range of perceptions.

Table 1. Performance of East and Southeast Asian areas on the CPI, 2005–2011

Country/territory	2005 score (rank)	2006 score (rank)	2007 score (rank)	2008 score (rank)	2009 score (rank)	2010 score (rank)	2011 score (rank)
Cambodia	2.3 (130)	2.1 (151)	2.0 (162)	1.8 (166)	2.0 (158)	2.1 (154)	2.1 (164)
China	3.2 (78)	3.3 (70)	3.5 (72)	3.6 (72)	3.6 (79)	3.5 (78)	3.6 (75)
Hong Kong	8.3 (15)	8.3 (15)	8.3 (14)	8.1 (12)	8.2 (12)	8.4 (13)	8.4 (12)
Indonesia	2.2 (137)	2.4 (130)	2.3 (143)	2.6 (126)	2.8 (111)	2.8 (110)	3.0 (100)
Japan	7.3 (21)	7.6 (17)	7.5 (17)	7.3 (18)	7.7 (17)	7.8 (17)	8.0 (14)
Korea (North)	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA (182)
Korea (South)	5.0 (40)	5.1 (42)	5.1 (43)	5.6 (40)	5.5 (39)	5.4 (39)	5.4 (43)
Laos	3.3 (77)	2.6 (111)	1.9 (168)	2.0 (151)	2.0 (158)	2.1 (154)	2.2 (154)
Macau	NA	6.6 (26)	5.7 (34)	5.4 (43)	5.3 (43)	5.0 (46)	5.1 (46)
Malaysia	5.1 (39)	5.0 (44)	5.1 (43)	5.1 (47)	4.5 (56)	4.4 (56)	4.3 (60)
Mongolia	3.0 (85)	2.8 (99)	3.0 (99)	3.0 (102)	2.7 (120)	2.7 (116)	2.7 (120)
Myanmar	1.8 (155)	1.9 (160)	1.4 (179)	1.3 (178)	1.4 (178)	1.4 (176)	1.5 (180)
Philippines	2.5 (117)	2.5 (121)	2.5 (131)	2.3 (141)	2.4 (139)	2.4 (134)	2.6 (129)
Singapore	9.4 (5)	9.4 (5)	9.3 (4)	9.2 (4)	9.2 (3)	9.3 (1)	9.2 (5)
Taiwan	5.9 (32)	5.9 (34)	5.7 (34)	5.7 (39)	5.6 (37)	5.8 (33)	6.1 (32)
Thailand	3.8 (59)	3.6 (63)	3.3 (84)	3.5 (80)	3.4 (84)	3.5 (78)	3.4 (80)
Vietnam	2.6 (107)	2.6 (111)	2.6 (123)	2.7 (121)	2.7 (120)	2.7 (116)	2.9 (112)
Regional average	4.38	4.48	4.33	4.33	4.31	4.33	4.21
Number of countries and territories surveyed	159	163	180	180	180	178	183

Source: Transparency International’s Corruption Perception Index, 2005–2011. CPI scores are scaled from 0 (highly corrupt) to 10 (very clean). A country or territory’s rank indicates its position relative to the other countries and territories included in the index. A useful heuristic is that an index score below five indicates the presence of a serious corruption problem.

To shed light on the above question, this study examines domestic citizens' and international experts' perceptions of corruption in East and Southeast Asia. For local perspectives on corruption, data from the 2005–2008 Asian Barometer Survey (ABS) was utilized. The ABS was a regional, applied research program based at National Taiwan University that investigated the politically relevant attitudes and behaviors of Asian citizens. For the current study, public opinion data was extracted from ABS results for 13 different areas in East and Southeast Asia: Cambodia, China, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, Mongolia, the Philippines, Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand, and Vietnam. Data on global perspectives of corruption in these 13 areas, on the other hand, was taken from TI's Corruption Perception Index. Before presenting data analysis results, an overview of the relevant literature on corruption measurement is provided in the next section.

Measuring Corruption

Developing Indicators/Indices of Corruption

While there is general consensus about the threat corruption poses to the effectiveness of national governance, understanding corruption's true patterns, causes, and consequences has been hampered by the twin fundamental problems of definition (Johnston 1996, 2001, 2005; Brown 2006; Philp 2006) and measurement (Jain 2001; Kurer 2005; Miller 2006; Sampford et al. 2006; UNDP 2008). The process of either defining or measuring corruption is notoriously difficult, largely because (a) corruption is usually illicit and concealed, and (b) what constitutes corrupt or unethical behavior varies according to cultural, legal, and other factors (Svensson 2005). Caiden (2001), for instance, has attempted to identify the 19 "most commonly recognized forms of corruption", but these efforts have not closed the definitions debate since there is simply no universal consensus on the meaning of corruption (UNDP 2008). In fact, the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) has deliberately steered clear of defining corruption explicitly or comprehensively, relying instead on enumerated acts to characterize the different types of corruption.

Even if substantial issues over the definition of corruption remain unsettled, scholars and practitioners interested in the multi-faceted and complex phenomenon of corruption have not been deterred from attempting to measure it. Early efforts were based on obtaining objective (or hard) measurements such as number of arrests and convictions for corruption, counts of newspaper stories on corruption, and other official records and statistics. The main difficulty with this approach is that such hard empirical evidence is often a sign of an effective criminal justice system (i.e. anti-corruption agencies, prosecutors, and judges) or the presence of a free and independent press to investigate and expose corruption, rather than a reflection of the actual corruption levels. In highly corrupt countries, there may be virtually no arrests for or media reports on serious corruption, whereas in very clean countries, there may be frequent arrests and convictions for relatively minor offenses.

As a result of these inherent deficiencies in using objective indicators, much research over the past 20 years has focused on utilizing subjective measures of corruption as a substitute. Two main types of subjective measures have been developed – perception-based and experience-based measures. Broadly speaking, perception-based measures are indicators based on the subjective opinions of experts and/or citizens about the extent of corruption in a country, whereas experience-based indicators attempt to measure the

citizens' and firms' actual experiences with corruption (such as whether they have paid or been solicited for a bribe in exchange for a public service).¹

The most widely used perception-based measure of corruption is the Corruption Perception Index, produced annually by Transparency International, a non-governmental organization based in Berlin dedicated to raising public awareness about the severity of the worldwide corruption problem. First released in 1995, the CPI has quickly become the best known of TI's corruption measurement tools. The CPI is a composite index (a survey of surveys) that draws on existing global expert evaluations and business opinion surveys from a variety of third party sources, including commercial risk rating agencies, think tanks, NGOs, and international organizations. Under the working definition of corruption being "the abuse of entrusted power for private gain", the CPI ranks countries and territories around the world yearly according to the perceived level of public sector corruption as determined by experts, business people, and analysts (Heinrich and Hodess 2011). The main rationale for combining and aggregating measures from several data sources is to attenuate concerns about potential measurement errors and biases arising from a single source (Lambsdorff 2007).

After TI's introduction of the CPI, researchers at the World Bank also began publishing an international index of corruption as part of its Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI) project, which was an elaborate effort to measure, compare, and rank the governance of countries/territories around the world. This indicator, known as Control of Corruption (CC), is one of the six dimensions of governance, defined broadly as "the traditions and institutions by which authority in a country is exercised" (Kaufmann et al. 1999). The CC governance indicator shares some of the same primary sources as the CPI, although it uses slightly different estimation and aggregation procedures (Kaufmann et al. 2010). However, unlike the CPI, the World Bank's CC governance indicator employs a more heterogeneous set of questions about the different types of corruption and incorporates a few data sources that survey ordinary citizens' perceptions of corruption.²

The wide accessibility of these two perception-based corruption indices have thus stimulated a substantial amount of academic research on corruption and advanced its study over the past two decades (for excellent reviews, see Svensson 2005; Lambsdorff 2006, 2007; Treisman 2007). Since both the CPI and World Bank's CC governance indicator cover a large number of countries and territories, they have not only made large-*N* studies of the causes and consequences of corruption possible, but have also placed the issues of combating corruption and improving governance squarely on the international policy agenda of governments and private enterprises. Nevertheless, while these composite indices represent a major step forward in understanding and measuring corruption, strong concerns about the adequacy, validity, reliability, and ultimate usefulness of these perceptual measures persist (for a partial list of critiques, see Lancaster and Montinola 2001; Sik 2002; Arndt and Oman 2006; Galtung 2006; Soreide 2006; Knack 2007; Andersson and Heywood 2009; Langbein and Knack 2010; Pollitt 2010; Razafindrakoto and Roubaud 2010; Hawken and Munck 2011). It is not the intention of the present paper to defend the use of global perception-based corruption indices, or to provide yet another critique on their numerous inherent conceptual and methodological shortcomings. Rather, the purpose of the paper is to address a more mundane, but critical question: Do citizens' perceptions of corruption differ from the experts' perceptions, and, if so, to what extent are they different?

Whose Perceptions Count: Experts or Citizens?

As noted earlier, one often-cited weakness of aggregate indicators of corruption such as the CPI or the Control of Corruption governance indicator is that they give greater weight to the opinions of international business executives and the expert assessment of cross-national analysts. As such, both indices primarily reflect the opinions of mostly foreign experts and business elites, which may be disconnected from the views of the general public in each country under evaluation.

To address such shortcomings, beginning in 2003 TI supplemented the CPI with the Global Corruption Barometer (GCB), a large worldwide survey across dozens of countries that investigates and tracks ordinary people's views toward, and experience of, corruption. TI's own analysis of the GCB and CPI data indicates that, contrary to the above criticism, there is indeed a statistically significant correlation between citizens' and international experts' assessments of the extent of public sector corruption across all countries (Transparency International 2010).³ Moreover, international experts' general opinions on corruption were also found to align strongly with the local public's specific experiences with bribery – in countries or territories where the experts perceive corruption to be rampant, a higher proportion of citizens reported paying bribes in the past year (Transparency International 2010).⁴ The message from TI thus seems clear; since the CPI and the GCB correlate, expert perceptions of corruption were arguably not too dissimilar from average citizens' perceptions, thereby establishing the validity for each of these indicators.

In the literature, a number of studies using other international public opinion surveys have corroborated TI's findings, although none focused on East or Southeast Asia specifically. In a review of major international corruption indices, Ko and Samajdar (2010) compared the CPI with public opinion data taken from two multi-region surveys: the World Values Survey (WVS) and the International Crime Victimization Survey (ICVS). Their analyses show that CPI scores are highly correlated with local people's responses to the bribery questions respectively found in the WVS ($r = -0.86$) and in the ICVS ($r = -0.75$). The authors thereby concluded that, as far as petty bribery is concerned, international corruption indices "can reflect [a] significant variation of domestic perceptions". Also, in a study of the level of government corruption in seven Latin American countries, Canache and Allison (2005) found that there was a similar high degree of correspondence between expert and local judgments.

A recent innovative study conducted by Razafindrakoto and Roubaud (2010) in eight African countries, however, has produced findings that directly challenge the above studies. Surveying both the general public and the so-called experts of those countries, they found that the expert perceptions did not correlate with the ordinary citizens' views at all, but instead were more closely associated with international corruption indicators such as the CPI and the CC governance indicator.⁵ More importantly, the authors found that experts – whether domestic or foreign – systematically overestimated the actual extent of, and the local population's tolerance for, corrupt practices. Based on these results, Razafindrakoto and Roubaud posit that most experts were basing their assessments on an erroneous cultural model of "how Africa operates" and/or acting on their personal ideological inclinations.

Moreover, in an analysis of evaluator characteristics within the various data sources of the Worldwide Governance Indicators, Hawken and Munck (2011) discovered that different classes of evaluators systematically generate higher or lower estimates of the level of corruption in countries around the world. For example, they found that experts from commercial risk assessment agencies generally provide stricter assessments of the extent

of corruption in a country than those from non-governmental organizations and that only expert ratings from the multilateral development banks can be considered indistinguishable from general public opinion. Hawken and Munck also detected important evaluator differences in regional comparisons as well. For instance, Southeast Asia as a whole received relatively unfavorable assessments from experts in commercial risk rating agencies and in surveys of business executives, but more favorable assessments from surveys of the public. East Asian countries, on the other hand, were favored by experts from multilateral development banks, but disfavored by other business executives and by the citizens at large. The main reason for differences in expert ratings within or between regions is unclear, but the implication is that in most geographical areas, expert and common citizen's perceptions differ, and noticeable variations exist among different classes of experts.

That a discrepancy may exist between expert and the general public's judgments is neither new nor exclusive to studies of corruption. For some time now, it has been well known in environmental policy and the sociology of risk literature that, for whatever reason, experts and lay people frequently disagree on risk perceptions and risk assessments (Bostrom 1997; Sjoberg 1999). The most illustrative example is the case of nuclear power in the 1960s. Scientific opinion at the time declared the risks of nuclear energy to be low, but the general public was alarmed about the safety of this new technology, perceiving the risks of a nuclear disaster to be high. Risk managers and theorists have since been preoccupied with explaining this gap between expert and lay perceptions, and also finding avenues to bridge it. In the policy arena, citizens also frequently disagree with policy experts on important public issues quite frequently, even though the latter is presumed to have the best-informed opinion (Darmofal 2005).

There are common-sense reasons to trust expert assessments. By definition, experts are individuals who, through education, training, and experience, possess extensive specialized knowledge or skills in a particular subject, and thus can act as a reliable information source or adviser. Kaufmann and Kraay (2008) provide three advantages that expert assessments offer over public opinion when measuring multifaceted concepts such as governance or corruption: (1) lower costs (i.e. no need to carry out surveys of individuals or firms across 100 or more countries and territories); (2) the ability to tailor assessments for cross-national comparability; and (3), given the complexity of the concept in question, experts can be more readily called upon to provide technical or specialized information.

Still, expert assessments do have their fair share of important limitations. One is that expert assessments (and the experts themselves) are subject to ideological, cultural, institutional, and other biases. The CPI, for instance, has been severely criticized for relying on data sources whose samples were disproportionately pro-business and male, thereby overlooking the perspectives of most women, the poor, and the disenfranchised (Galtung 2006). Donchev and Ujhelyi (2013) found evidence that, for a given level of corruption, corruption indices based on expert perceptions were not only systematically biased in favor of more economically developed and traditional Protestant countries, but they also tended to penalize larger countries. The second concern is that experts, being a small and relatively homogeneous group, may lack familiarity with the local customs and language, or worse, may only have a superficial knowledge of them (Sik 2002), particularly for smaller countries (Knack 2007). The third issue with expert assessments (and to a lesser extent with citizens' subjective evaluations) is a danger of the echo chamber problem. Individuals assessing corruption levels end up simply repeating conventional wisdom, thus reinforcing a vicious cycle of prior (mis)conceptions (Johnston 2002). Knack (2007) also claimed that, rather

than being independent evaluations, expert judgments are often based on experts from different institutions consulting with one another, reading each other's reports, and possibly being influenced by each other's ratings.

By contrast, there are three main reasons local citizen surveys may provide superior indications of corruption levels. One is that citizen opinions are extremely valuable because they represent internal stakeholders who may choose to act upon those views (Kaufmann and Kraay 2008), and governments are less likely to dismiss the views of their citizens (as opposed to external expert assessments, which are often ignored). Second, the views of randomly chosen members of the general public – unlike expert opinions – are more likely to be independent from, and uncontaminated by, other types of judgments (Knack 2007). Third, household surveys of citizens are extremely helpful for assessing the prevalence of petty or low-level corruption (UNDP 2008).

Yet cross-national surveys of citizens face several potential problems that threaten their validity and reliability. First, since most forms of corruption are illegal, some respondents may not answer questions truthfully, especially those in authoritarian countries or in societies where the public acceptance of corruption is low (Mishler and Rose 2008). Second, the general public is also more prone than experts to be influenced by the media and the country's overall political and economic climate (Galtung 2006). The possibility of a home country bias is one of the justifications for using international experts, on the premise that outside reviewers can be expected to act in a more neutral and competent way when evaluating many different countries according to a set of universal standards (Lambsdorff 2007). Third, like all empirical social science research based on subjective data, surveys of citizens are subject to three forms of systematic measurement error: respondents' cognitive problems in understanding/answering questions, respondents' inclination to give socially desirable responses to sensitive questions, and respondents' lack of an informed opinion on a particular issue (Bertrand and Mullainathan 2001).

Nevertheless, scholars and practitioners alike will continue debating over whose perceptions, the global experts or the local citizens, better capture the actual level of corruption in a country. Each has its own strengths and weaknesses for certain purposes. Moving forward, more restraint will be needed when using these two forms of perceptions in academic or policy contexts. In the next section, the central question of the present study is considered: do East and Southeast Asian citizens' perceived levels of corruption mirror those of the global experts?

Perceptions of Corruption in East and Southeast Asia

To gauge individual citizens' perceptions of corruption in society, the Asian Barometer Survey⁶ asked respondents the following two questions:

1. How widespread do you think corruption and bribe-taking are in the national government [in the capital city]?
2. How widespread do you think corruption and bribe-taking are in your local/municipal government?

For both questions, respondents were presented with four choices: "hardly anyone is involved", "not a lot of officials are corrupt", "most officials are corrupt", and "almost everyone is corrupt". The original coding scheme was retained, so that higher values would indicate higher levels of perceived corruption. Table 2 presents the data on the

Table 2. Citizens' perceptions of corruption and bribe-taking in the national government

Country/territory	How widespread is corruption and bribe-taking in the national government? (1 to 4 scale)					Valid respondents Total
	Hardly anyone is involved	Not a lot of officials are corrupt	Most officials are corrupt	Almost everyone is corrupt		
Cambodia (Year: 2008; $n = 1000$; percentage missing = 22.4%)	11 (1.4%)	251 (32.3%)	348 (44.9%)	166 (21.4%)		776
China (Year: 2007–2008; $n = 5098$; percentage missing = 60.8%)	816 (40.9%)	893 (44.7%)	229 (11.5%)	58 (2.9%)		1996
Indonesia (Year: 2006; $n = 1598$; percentage missing = 12.5%)	94 (6.7%)	616 (44.0%)	489 (35.0%)	200 (14.3%)		1399
Japan (Year: 2007; $n = 1067$; percentage missing = 10.3%)	11 (1.1%)	529 (55.3%)	367 (38.3%)	50 (5.2%)		957
South Korea (Year: 2006; $n = 1212$; percentage missing = 5.3%)	15 (1.3%)	585 (51.0%)	410 (35.7%)	138 (12.0%)		1148
Malaysia (Year: 2007; $n = 1218$; percentage missing = 10.0%)	47 (4.3%)	561 (51.2%)	356 (32.5%)	132 (12.0%)		1096
Mongolia (Year: 2006; $n = 1211$; percentage missing = 7.3%)	31 (2.8%)	251 (22.4%)	482 (42.9%)	359 (32.0%)		1123
Philippines (Year: 2005; $n = 1200$; percentage missing = 6.2%)	103 (9.1%)	276 (24.5%)	457 (40.6%)	290 (25.8%)		1126
Singapore (Year: 2006; $n = 1012$; percentage missing = 13.6%)	443 (50.7%)	416 (47.6%)	11 (1.3%)	4 (0.5%)		874
Taiwan (Year: 2006; $n = 1587$; percentage missing = 13.3%)	43 (3.1%)	411 (29.9%)	763 (55.5%)	159 (11.6%)		1376
Thailand (Year: 2006; $n = 1546$; percentage missing = 15.8%)	193 (14.8%)	725 (55.7%)	280 (21.3%)	103 (7.9%)		1301
Vietnam (Year: 2005; $n = 1200$; percentage missing = 19.3%)	115 (11.9%)	688 (71.0%)	143 (14.8%)	23 (2.4%)		969

Source: Asian Barometer Survey, 2005–2008.

Note: Cell entries are frequencies, and numbers in parenthesis are percentages. The largest group of responses for each country is highlighted in bold. Because of rounding, percentages may not add up to 100. Data was not available for Hong Kong. n = country/territory sample size.

distribution of individual responses to the question about corruption in the national government, disaggregated by country, with the largest share of responses highlighted in bold.

Most local citizens surveyed in the ABS did not think that corruption was widespread in their respective national governments. As depicted in Table 2, a majority of respondents in China, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam believed that few national government officials were involved in corruption. Expectedly, Singapore was the only country where more than half of respondents felt that hardly any government official was engaged in corrupt behavior. Conversely, over 66 per cent of the respondents in Cambodia, Mongolia, the Philippines, and Taiwan believe that most or almost all government officials are corrupt. Although no country had the “almost everyone is corrupt” as the most popular response, Mongolia came closest with 32 per cent, followed by the Philippines at 26 per cent). Indonesia was interesting because its citizens were the most evenly split between those who perceived corruption in the national government to be high and those who deemed it to be low (49 per cent versus 51 per cent).

The distribution of individual responses for each country on this corruption perception question nevertheless produced some interesting and unexpected results, especially when compared to the CPI scores (from Table 1) or conventional wisdom. For instance, the percentage of Chinese, Thai, and Vietnamese respondents who believed that corruption is *not* pervasive in their national governments were all above 70 per cent. Additionally, a large majority of Taiwanese citizens (approximately 67 per cent) perceived that most or almost all national government officials *are* corrupt. These two sets of findings certainly defy these countries’ performance and placements in the CPI. In the ensuing discussion, these four countries will be used as illustrative cases in the current study’s attempt to explore why experts’ and citizens’ perceptions differ.

What factors explain the perplexing percentages above? While ensuring that underlying data met the necessary research requirements, the problem of missing data as triggered by nonresponses to questionnaire items was noticed. An inspection showed that only 39 per cent ($n = 1996$) of China’s respondents provided useful answers to the question regarding corruption in the national government. Assuming that data collection was conducted properly and data entry errors were kept at a minimum, this means that as much as 61 per cent of Chinese respondents – the highest percentage of abstainers in the ABS – did not answer the question. Those that responded provided mostly favorable assessments of their national government officials. Missing information makes Chinese responses on corruption problematic, and any analysis using this questionnaire item must be treated with caution.⁷ Item nonresponse because of respondent error or reticence to answer was less of an issue for Taiwan, Thailand, and Vietnam. Missing values accounted for less than 20 per cent in these countries’ surveys.⁸

One explanation that may have impacted the overall pattern of responses was the time period during which the ABS was implemented in each country. This factor partly explains why in the 2006 ABS Survey, two out of three Taiwanese respondents felt their national government was overrun by corrupt officials. There was severe political turmoil in Taiwan during 2006, with a series of corruption scandals involving then President Chen Shui-bian and his close associates being uncovered. As a result, people’s indignation toward the Chen administration lingered for months (for more information, see Chu 2007; Yu et al. 2008).

In Thailand, the ABS was conducted a few months before the Thai military staged a successful coup to overthrow Prime Minister Thaksin Sinawatra, a lightning-rod politician who, despite enormous popularity in rural areas, was intensely distrusted by opposition leaders, academics, journalists, and middle-class Bangkok residents. They saw Thaksin as gradually undermining Thailand's democratic institutions, weakening media independence, and establishing a regime extensively fueled by corruption (Ockey 2007). However, without additional context, the events of 2006 do not fully explain why Thai respondents believed that corruption was not a serious public concern and yet ousted Thaksin's administration in 2006, at least partly over corruption. According to a Thai author, this was precisely the source of the problem: it was not the acts of corruption themselves, but the fact that tolerance of corruption was "too deeply ingrained" in Thailand, permeating all sectors of Thai society, as citizens were "easily bored and indifferent toward corruption by politicians and bureaucrats" (Hengkietisak 2010). People's greater acceptance of corruption may constitute another explanation for the difference in perceptions between experts and average citizens.

As for Vietnamese perceptions that corruption was not widespread in the national government, the timing of the survey appears to have been a critical factor. For most of 2005, Vietnam continued its push toward greater economic growth, improved its governance, and intensified the dialogue between the state and society concerning global integration (Luong 2006). In that particular year, there was extensive coverage of major corruption cases by the media, and the Vietnamese authoritarian state toughened its anti-corruption and anti-waste stance by passing the country's first comprehensive anti-corruption legislation (Fritzen 2006). These developments, arguably, provided the Vietnamese ABS respondents with reason to perceive their government leaders as committed to cracking down on graft. Under this scenario, Vietnamese citizens are perhaps more trusting of their government's anti-corruption efforts than the external experts.

Table 2 contains a mixture of both anticipated and unanticipated results. Being cautious, it remains unclear whether the unexpected results should be labeled as citizens' perceptual errors, or as indications of something else, such as wider tolerance of corruption or greater faith in government. In Table 3, the distribution of citizen responses about the existence of widespread corruption in local or municipal governments is reported. Here the data from Hong Kong is included but not Singapore's (the question was omitted from the Singaporean survey due to the country's small size). The percentages in Table 3 closely resemble those in Table 2. First, contrary to perceptions of government corruption at the national level, most Cambodian and Mongolian citizens believed corruption was less rampant at the local level. Second, there were considerably more Chinese respondents believing corruption and bribery to be prevalent in local governments (although item nonresponse was still a problem). On the other hand, citizens of Taiwan and the Philippines carried over their perceptions that corruption and bribe-taking behavior by public officials was just as prevalent in local as in national government.

Citizens' perceptions of corruption in both national and local governments can be aggregated and then averaged to form a measure that captures the citizen's overall evaluation of the severity of public sector corruption in a particular country/territory. This mean perceived corruption from the ABS data can then be compared with expert-based indices of corruption such as the CPI (Table 4). Because countries were surveyed at different times, this study calculates their CPI value as the average of their CPI scores for the two years immediately following their ABS implementation year.⁹ The correlation

Table 3. Citizens' perceptions of corruption and bribe-taking in the local/municipal government

Country/territory	How widespread is corruption and bribe-taking in your local/municipal government? (1 to 4 scale)					Valid respondents Total
	Hardly anyone is involved	Not a lot of officials are corrupt	Most officials are corrupt	Almost everyone is corrupt		
Cambodia (Year: 2008; <i>n</i> = 1000; percentage missing = 6.0%)	65 (6.9%)	420 (44.7%)	320 (34.0%)	135 (14.4%)	940	
China (Year: 2007–2008; <i>n</i> = 5098; percentage missing = 39.5%)	372 (12.1%)	1226 (39.7%)	1143 (37.1%)	344 (11.2%)	3085	
Hong Kong (Year: 2007; <i>n</i> = 849; percentage missing = 16.0%)	139 (19.5%)	486 (68.2%)	83 (11.6%)	5 (0.7%)	713	
Indonesia (Year: 2006; <i>n</i> = 1598; percentage missing = 12.4%)	228 (16.3%)	620 (44.3%)	388 (27.7%)	164 (11.7%)	1400	
Japan (Year: 2007; <i>n</i> = 1067; percentage missing = 8.2%)	20 (2.0%)	554 (56.5%)	366 (37.3%)	40 (4.1%)	980	
South Korea (Year: 2006; <i>n</i> = 1212; percentage missing = 5.1%)	35 (3.0%)	626 (54.4%)	377 (32.8%)	112 (9.7%)	1150	
Malaysia (Year: 2007; <i>n</i> = 1218; percentage missing = 10.0%)	63 (5.7%)	567 (51.1%)	342 (30.8%)	137 (12.4%)	1096	
Mongolia (Year: 2006; <i>n</i> = 1211; percentage missing = 8.4%)	161 (14.3%)	438 (39.0%)	351 (31.3%)	173 (15.4%)	1109	
Philippines (Year: 2005; <i>n</i> = 1200; percentage missing = 6.4%)	161 (14.2%)	294 (26.0%)	451 (39.9%)	224 (19.8%)	1123	
Taiwan (Year: 2006; <i>n</i> = 1587; percentage missing = 10.6%)	56 (3.9%)	423 (29.8%)	822 (57.9%)	118 (8.3%)	1419	
Thailand (Year: 2006; <i>n</i> = 1546; percentage missing = 15.7%)	358 (27.5%)	684 (52.5%)	199 (15.3%)	63 (4.8%)	1304	
Vietnam (Year: 2005; <i>n</i> = 1200; percentage missing = 17.8%)	385 (39.0%)	539 (54.6%)	54 (5.5%)	9 (0.9%)	987	

Notes: Cell entries are frequencies, and numbers in parenthesis are percentages. The largest group of responses for each country or territory highlighted in **bold**. Because of rounding, percentages may not add up to 100. Data was not available for Singapore. *n* = country/territory sample size.

Source: Asian Barometer Survey, 2005–2008.

Table 4. Analysis of perception differences in the ABS and CPI data using z-scores

Country/territory	Mean perceived corruption (ABS)	ABSZ	CPI score (2-year average)	CPIZ	CPIZ' = -1 × CPIZ	ABSZ - CPIZ'	Absolute value of (ABSZ - CPIZ')
Philippines	2.74	1.05	2.50	-0.93	0.93	0.12	0.12
Singapore	1.51	-2.25	9.25	2.00	-2.00	-0.25	0.25
Cambodia	2.66	0.85	2.05	-1.12	1.12	-0.28	0.28
Mongolia	2.76	1.10	3.00	-0.71	0.71	0.38	0.38
Hong Kong	1.94	-1.11	8.15	1.52	-1.52	0.41	0.41
Malaysia	2.51	0.42	4.80	0.07	-0.07	0.49	0.49
China	2.28	-0.19	3.55	-0.47	0.47	-0.66	0.66
Indonesia	2.45	0.28	2.45	-0.95	0.95	-0.67	0.67
South Korea	2.54	0.52	5.35	0.31	-0.31	0.82	0.82
Thailand	2.10	-0.66	3.40	-0.54	0.54	-1.19	1.19
Taiwan	2.72	1.00	5.70	0.46	-0.46	1.46	1.46
Japan	2.45	0.28	7.50	1.24	-1.24	1.52	1.52
Vietnam	1.87	-1.28	2.60	-0.88	0.88	-2.17	2.17
Regional mean (μ)	2.35		4.64				
Standard deviation (σ)	0.37		2.30				

Notes: ABSZ and CPIZ are the respective z-scores calculated from the ABS and CPI values. The CPIZ was then reversed to produce CPIZ' so that higher values indicate more corruption. In the table, countries are ordered from low to high according to the absolute value of the difference between their ABS and CPI z-scores. The closer the absolute value of the difference in z-scores is to zero (= more congruence), the smaller the perception gap between citizens and experts.

Source: Transparency International; Asian Barometer Survey, 2005–2008.

coefficient between ABS's mean perceived corruption and the CPI values equaled -0.507 , suggesting a medium level of perceptual correspondence between the two. However, ABS/CPI correlation was not statistically significant at the usual 0.05 level ($p < 0.077$).

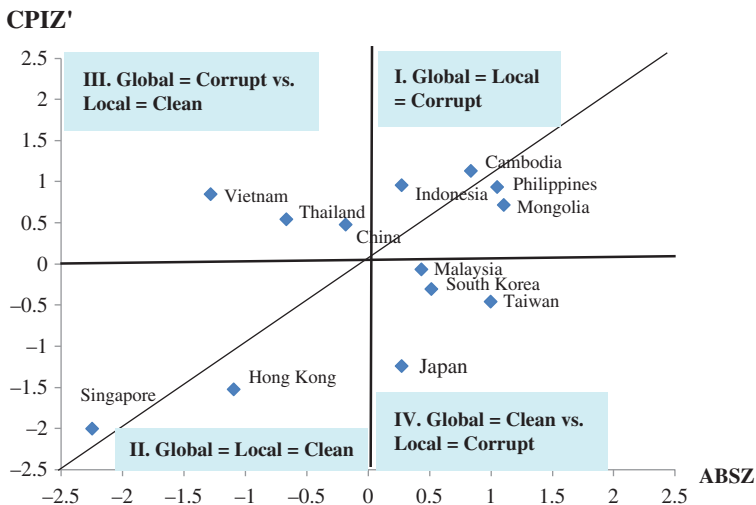
To understand how each country compares to others in the region, standard z-scores were computed for all countries (labeled ABSZ and CPIZ in Table 4).¹⁰ After a few elementary math operations to get the correct signs, the two z-scores were subtracted from one another to obtain an estimate of the corruption perception gap between citizens and experts. For easier interpretation, the absolute value of the differences in z-scores was taken. These results are listed in the rightmost column of Table 4.

As can be seen from the table, the Philippines, Singapore, and Cambodia have the smallest values when the two z-scores were subtracted from one another, indicating a greater congruence in corruption perception between the citizens and experts. The countries where experts and citizens most diverged were Thailand, Taiwan, Japan, and Vietnam – they all had z-score differences greater than one standard deviation.

Results show that only *some* commonality between local people's aggregate perceptions of corruption and global experts' views as provided by the CPI. The lack of a direct, strong correspondence between the two is displayed in Figure 1, where countries' ABS z-scores are plotted against their CPI z-scores. The 45 degree diagonal in the figure is used to indicate perfect congruence between ABS and CPI.

As can be seen from the figure, four types of combinations between (global) expert and (local) citizen perceptions can be identified: (1) both groups perceived corruption in the country to be high (quadrant I); (2) both groups perceived corruption to be low (quadrant II); (3) experts, but not the citizens, perceived corruption to be high (quadrant III), and (4) citizens, but not the experts, perceived corruption in the country to be high (quadrant IV). The distribution of Asian countries across the four quadrants is telling.

Figure 1. A typology of perception differences.



Source: Transparency International; Asian Barometer Survey, 2005–2008.

Note: ABSZ and CPIZ are the respective z-scores calculated from the ABS and CPI values. The CPIZ was then reversed to produce the CPIZ' so that higher values indicate greater corruption.

Asian citizens' aggregate perceived corruption aligned with the expert (CPI) view in only half of the countries (quadrants I and II). Among the countries that performed more poorly in the CPI rankings, only citizens from four countries (the Philippines, Cambodia, Mongolia, and Indonesia) agreed with the experts that corruption was rampant in their governments. Among places that score high on the CPI (lower perceived corruption), citizens from Singapore and Hong Kong also collectively perceived the level of public corruption to be low. For quadrants III and IV, on the other hand, global and local perspectives disagreed, sometimes sharply. In quadrant III are the countries that performed poorly in the CPI rankings (Vietnam, Thailand, and China), while citizens perceived their government to be relatively clean. In quadrant IV, citizens in Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, and Malaysia viewed their government to be relatively corrupt, but the experts believe otherwise. This typology of perception differences between global experts and local citizens should be useful for future research, and the reasons for the existence of or lack of perception gaps for these countries deserves further investigation.

Conclusions

Increasing worldwide concerns about reducing corruption in the public sector give considerable impetus to the search for a reliable measurement of, normally hidden, corruption. So far, aggregate indices based primarily on international expert assessments are the best known and most widely used measurement tools, but validity concerns persist. Critics charge that global corruption indices do not necessarily reflect local views. Although aware of the problem, academic literature has only recently paid attention to the existence, causes, and consequences of a perception gap between international experts and the local citizens concerning corruption in a country (Roca 2010).

This study's objective is to compare international experts' and domestic citizens' perceptions of corruption in East and Southeast Asia and develop a typology of perception differences for future research. Using Asian Barometer Survey data for 13 countries/territories in the region, local citizens' responses to questions about the prevalence of corruption in their national and local government were examined. The study found the correlation between citizens' perceptions and experts' assessments in these selected Asian countries/territories to be only moderately strong. The result is consistent with previous studies using the Latinobarometro or Afrobarometer to test the congruity between expert ratings and mass perceptions of government effectiveness in Latin American and African countries (Kurtz and Schrank 2007). The observed perceptual disparity between the two perspectives did not always have the same direction: in some countries the international experts reported higher levels of corruption, while in others local citizens rated corruption higher. Given these results, a different question naturally emerged: why don't global experts and local citizens agree (more often) in their corruption perceptions?

ABS data limitations do not allow a more in-depth investigation of the factors causing the incongruity between global and local perceptions of corruption; thus, there are more questions than answers. It is fair to say that just as global expert assessments have their particular predispositions and idiosyncrasies, local perceptions have their own dynamics as well. A few possible reasons for the divergence were derived from the extant literature: personal ideology, cultural bias, and the echo chamber problem on the international experts' side; respondent reticence (to give truthful answers to sensitive questions), the effect of media or government influence, and greater tolerance for corruption on the

domestic citizens' side. Clearly, this list of explanations is neither definitive nor exhaustive. A more immediate challenge would be finding ways to disentangle and later test these various factors. The result would be a better understanding about the perceptions of corruption itself, and a narrowing of the chasm between international expert and domestic citizen corruption assessments.

In conclusion, four implications can be drawn regarding the future of corruption measurement. First, a multi-measure of corruption that incorporates both global (expert-based) and local (citizen-based) perspectives is necessary. A measure that includes the views of different groups and stakeholders would better approximate the actual levels and trends of corruption in a country. Second, future corruption measures need to be ongoing, not one-shot studies. By having time-series data, scholars and officials can be more confident in measuring corruption and in suggesting anti-corruption initiatives. Time-series data would also allow one to test for the presence of time period-related variables. Third, to the extent that local perspectives are valuable in and of themselves, these perspectives cannot simply be added onto existing corruption indices such as CPI for cross-national comparisons without reasonable adjustments, because (a) practices and behaviors that are acceptable in one country may be viewed as corrupt in another (problem of definition), and (b) the quality and validity of local surveys may be difficult to control over a large number of countries and territories (problem of data collection). Finally, if local perspectives of corruption are to be taken into account for global comparison, they should be entered as *relative changes* to enhance cross-national comparability, in order to reduce potential confounding factors.¹¹ Although no measure of corruption currently features all of the above requirements, the creation of a more inclusive measure of corruption is a goal that should be supported and encouraged by both academic and practitioner communities.

Notes

1. In all fairness, just as corruption perception indices became popular and near-permanent fixtures in cross-national studies of corruption in the late 1990s and early 2000s, researchers began to argue about the need to go beyond perception-based measures and people's impressions. One approach is to examine the actual experience of people exposed to bribery and corruption, as mentioned in the text. However, some scholars contend that even these experience-based measures of corruption may not be accurate enough (see Johnston 2010; Hawken and Munck 2011). They suggest taking steps to develop more sophisticated objective measures of corruption, such as the time required to obtain permits and licenses, the amount of funds leakage in public works projects, and whether prices paid to suppliers and charged to the public for basic services are reasonable (Johnston 2010). Viewed in this manner, corruption measurement research has indeed nearly come full circle.
2. In the most recent update (2011) of World Bank's CC governance indicator, five out of its 30 sources were surveys of individual citizens: Afrobarometer, Latinobarometro, Vanderbilt University's AmericasBarometer, Gallup World Poll, and TI's Global Corruption Barometer.
3. To be specific, the Pearson's correlation coefficient (r) between global expert evaluations in the 2009 CPI and the local people's perception scores in the 2010 GCB was 0.54 ($p < 0.01$).
4. The Pearson's correlation coefficient between the 2009 CPI scores and the percentage of local citizens who report paying bribes was -0.66 ($p < 0.01$). The coefficient has a negative sign because CPI scores are scaled from 10 (very clean) to 0 (highly corrupt).
5. These experts include, "researchers, development workers, decision-makers, high-ranking public officials, politicians, etc." (Razafindrakoto and Roubaud 2010: 1062).
6. The ABS is a collaborative effort encompassing research teams from 13 political systems in East and Southeast Asia. Each administering team was responsible for survey sampling and implementation in its

area. Most individual national surveys used a variation of multi-stage cluster sampling design (sometimes in combination with probability-proportional-to-size sampling) to select the primary geographic sampling units, households, and respondents, except for four areas which used multi-stage random sampling (Japan, Hong Kong, Mongolia, and Singapore), and mainland China, which used multi-stage stratified area sampling methods. In all countries, target respondents represented a cross-section of voting-age adult citizens, and all interviews were conducted face-to-face by trained fieldworkers in the language of the respondent's choice. The ABS uses a standard questionnaire with identical or functionally equivalent questions, which made comparison of results possible across different areas.

7. While there exist several modern remedies for missing data problems (such as multiple imputation techniques), these approaches were ultimately not considered here because a key assumption of those models – that the data was missing completely at random – was probably not met in the China ABS survey.
8. Although there is no consensus in the literature regarding at what point the amount of missing information becomes problematic for inference and estimation, researchers have suggested that a cutoff point between 5 and 20 per cent is acceptable (see Schlomer et al. 2010).
9. The CPI used data from the previous two years to calculate a country's or territory's annual corruption perception score. As such, the CPI is a lagged index, which may not reflect the most recent developments or situations in a country/territory. To correct for this lag, the subsequent two-year average CPI score was compared with the ABS scores.
10. The formula for computing z -scores is $z = \frac{X_i - \mu}{\sigma}$, where μ is the mean and σ is the standard deviation.
11. The formula for computing relative change is: $\frac{\text{this year's score} - \text{last year's score}}{\text{last year's score}}$.

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