

The perception of corruption in Spain is above the European average: study

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According to a study by the Rey Juan Carlos University, data on objective corruption in Spain are higher in politics than in administrative-official institutions. However, the perception of Spaniards is a lot higher.

Researchers at the Rey Juan Carlos University (URJC) have analysed how corruption is perceived in Spain. They believe that the "echo phenomenon" is fundamental when trying to understand the origin of corruption because it creates [social attitudes](#) which lead to the unfulfillment of civic duties.

"As [citizens](#) not only do we act according to our own interests, dogmas and ideas but also depending on how we believe other people act. If we feel that nobody is abiding by the law, we have no incentive to do so ourselves. This brings about the problem of [collective action](#)," as explained to SINC by Manuel Villoria, researcher at the URJC and lead author of the study published in the *Revista Española de Investigaciones Sociológicas* journal.

For the purposes of their research they analysed statistics, courts records, media news and information from various sources such as the Global Corruption Barometer, the Corruption Perceptions Index, the Eurobarometer surveys, surveys from Spain's Centre for Sociological Research (CIS) and their own surveys.

"The key of this study is to make an attempt at demonstrating that objective data is hard to come by. In the majority of cases they show in

greater detail the quality of the legal system rather than the reality of objective corruption," states Villoria.

Data show that objective corruption in Spain is higher in politics but not within administrative-official institutions. The researcher points out that "if the system were to work better there would probably be more cases of this kind", who then goes on to defend the notion that detection and investigation problems are evident.

Victimisation scales, like Transparency International's Global Corruption Barometer, shows the evolution of percentages of Spaniards who admit to having paid a bribe: between 2% and 5% from 2004 to 2010 in public administration and between 3% and 6% in town planning. However, according to the researchers, "data is not consistent with the [perception](#) of corruption in Spain, which is much higher. This suggests that answers are culturally rooted and are linked to institutional disaffection".

The [researcher](#) analysed the most important corruption cases in terms of quality and quantity from the last six years. They state that "it is clear that official implication is minimal." Instances of Public Administration crimes clearly related to corruption that have or will be called for hearing in the last six years do not exceed 400.

In any case, the gap between the political class's perception of corruption and the objective data offer even more extreme examples. The CIS's 2826 survey asked participants "Please tell us to what extent you feel that corruption is widespread in politics: very, quite, not very, not at all". The response showed that 79% thought it was very or quite widespread and a mere 6.5% thought that it was not very or not at all widespread.

This data worsen those from 2671 survey from 2007 where 51.9% of those surveyed responded with 'quite' or that nearly all politicians were involved in corruption. This being the case, this is moderate compared to

the data from the CIS's June 2011 barometer (Survey 2905) where the "very or quite widespread" figure reaches 86.6%.

Local corruption is more frequent than national corruption

On the other hand, according to the 2005 and 2008 Eurobarometers, national institutions are believed to be the most corrupt in the majority of EU countries. This is also reflected in the 2009 and 2010 CIS surveys in the case of Spain.

However, another study recently published in *Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy*, in which Villoria was involved, analyses the causes of the Spanish property model and its territorial, social and political consequences. Its results show the contrary.

The leading conclusion of this study is that the excessive dependence on economic activity and employment in the construction industry has caused political corruption more so on a local and regional level. As the experts outline "practically all significant cases of corruption in recent years are linked with town-planning corruption."

This can be explained by the competition that exists on the matter, which is mainly on a regional and local level. Furthermore, this supports the theory that corruption linked to the speculative bubble is the main cause of political crime in [Spain](#).

The Spanish researchers conclude that "this long process has given rise to [corruption](#) in town planning and an increase in low quality political decision, which, in turn, is greatly damaging the image of our country."

More information: Manuel Villoria, Fernando Jiménez "La

corrupción en España (2004-2010): datos, percepción y efectos", *REIS* 138:109-134, abril-junio 2012 [doi: 10.5477/cis/reis.138.109](https://doi.org/10.5477/cis/reis.138.109)

Joan Romero, Fernando Jiménez y Manuel Villoria. "(Un)sustainable territories. Causes of the speculative bubble in Spain and its territorial, environmental and sociopolitical consequences". *Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy* 2012, 30 (3): 467 – 486.

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