Experiencing corruption makes you more likely to protest against it… up to a point

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Why do some people take to the streets to protest against corruption in their society.. and others don't? Researchers from the Centre for the Study of Corruption at the University of Sussex have found that people who experience corruption first hand are more likely to protest, but only up to the point where it becomes routine.

For the research, published in the *Commonwealth and Comparative*

Politics journal, the team looked at existing data from Africa, because research by Transparency International reveals that there are considerable levels of corruption in some African countries. Across the 49 African states, this year's average Corruption Perceptions Index score was 32 out of 100. This indicates serious, even endemic corruption across many African counties. By contrast Denmark, at the top of the table, scored 88. Of course, corruption occurs all over the world: the United States saw its ranking drop four points in the last year.

Problematically, in places where corruption becomes common place, the practice of bribery can become an organic part of the 'way things work." For example people might choose to pay a bribe to secure a medical appointment, or to get a place at a good local school. But many people in Africa take to the streets to protest about corruption, as we've seen recently in Zimbabwe, Malawi, South Africa and Morocco.

But who protests, and what prompts them to? To answer the question, the authors analyzed data from the Afrobarometer surveys covering over 30 African countries taken in 2005-2006 and 2014-2016.

Professor Dan Hough from the Centre for the Study of Corruption at the University of Sussex said:

"We found that the more you bribe, the more you want to protest about having to bribe. But, interestingly, the more you bribe, the more it becomes just another tool for getting what you want. We therefore find that once you go beyond a certain point, the willingness to protest tapers off markedly.

"We can predict that a person who has the highest experience of paying bribes will have a 40% probability of taking part in anti-corruption demonstrations. The same person, however, has a less than five percent chance of choosing to report the bribe to the authorities, and also to say

that they feel that nothing can be done about corruption. What we didn't expect to find was that a person who has paid bribes is more likely to be willing to rely on bribes to solve public sector problems."

The results show that while people are more likely to want to protest against corruption if they themselves have been made to pay bribes, this effect only works up to a point. The authors suggest this may mark the point at which corruption becomes normalized for an individual. Professor Hough continued:

"It's quite plausible that individuals for whom corruption has become most routine are likely to be less willing to participate in dissent.

"These are important findings for the team at the Centre for the Study of Corruption at the University of Sussex. We work in the UK, in Qatar and with students online and this kind of research allows us to understand how to address corruption worldwide. If we know what makes people more likely to protest against corruption in their own country, perhaps we can find ways to tackle it."

More information: Moletsane Monyake et al. Citizens, bribery and the propensity to protest, *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics* (2019). DOI: 10.1080/14662043.2019.1621040

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