

Indulgent citizens: bribery in Mexico's bureaucratic procedures

Carlos Moreno Jaimes, ITESO

Abstract

This article offers evidence of the embedded nature of bribery in Mexico. Drawing on three theoretical frameworks that deviate from standard individualistic rational-choice approaches, the paper examines a shared assertion: systemic corruption is a regime so deeply engrained in social relationships and norms that prevents people from attributing a moral connotation to their behavior. Based on individual-level data from two waves of a national survey on government performance, I find that users of government procedures in Mexico are indifferent to bribery, as the occurrence of petty corruption acts does not influence their appraisal of various administrative transactions. By demonstrating that everyday acts of bribery are, in general, immune to social disapproval in a setting of high corruption like Mexico, this article contributes to understanding better the complexity of such phenomenon and why anti-corruption policies are not likely to succeed if they do not design ways to cope with the social normalization of corruption.

Keywords: Bribery; petty corruption; bureaucratic procedures; corruption tolerance; Mexico

Introduction

Dealing with corruption in the public sector is one of the most relevant issues for contemporary public governance, as corruption has become one of the main sources of distrust in government and a threat to democracy (Mungiu-Pippidi, 2006; Neshkova & Kalesnikaite, 2019). Yet, developing effective anti-corruption strategies has proven an extremely complex endeavor, particularly in contexts where corruption is not just an isolated distortion practiced by a number of dishonest government officials and agencies, but the predominant way in which collective issues are dealt with (Mungiu-Pippidi, 2020; Persson, et al, 2013). For years, the mainstream anti-corruption policy agenda conceived corruption as resulting from the individual choices of selfish utility-maximizing bureaucrats ready to abuse their formal powers to obtain a private gain, knowing that their actions would hardly be observed by the public eye (Rose-Ackerman, 1975). In consequence, the standard advice to combat corruption consisted in reducing bureaucratic discretion, imposing costly sanctions on corrupt officials, and creating transparency mechanisms to prevent dishonest conduct among public servants (Klitgaard, 1988). Such a view failed to notice that systemic corruption is not simply an individual phenomenon, but a social regime in which illegal exchanges are solidly entrenched in social practices (Blundo, 2006), culturally legitimized (Olivier de Sardan, 1999; Venard & Tshering, 2021) and organizationally normalized (Arellano-Gault, 2017). The sociocultural nature of corruption implies that a purely punitive approach to control corruption would be ineffective unless it is supplemented with carefully designed strategies to change social perceptions of corruption and to modify entrenched social practices.

This article provides evidence of the social embeddedness of a specific type of corruption act: bribery. It focuses on Mexico, a country placed among the countries with higher corruption rates (in 2019 it received a score of 29 out of 100 on Transparency International's corruption perception index) and where recent political corruption scandals led voters to elect a new political movement in 2018 whose principal slogan was putting an end to it. However, my focus is not on political corruption, but

on bribery acts that typically involve the exchange of money, gifts or favors between low-level public servants and citizens during the transactions to obtain public services, permits or to comply with different obligations.

Based on individual-level data from two waves of a national survey on government performance, in this article, I offer evidence that indicates that users of government procedures in Mexico are indifferent to bribery, as their assessment of 19 different administrative transactions is virtually unaffected by the occurrence of petty corruption acts. The analysis is performed at two different points in time, 2015 and 2019, with the aim to demonstrate that the outcome is persistent. Moreover, the selection of these two years intends to capture important political episodes in the country. The first represented a triggering event on public opinion: in November 2014, a leading journalist had revealed that a company associated with the country's first high-speed rail contract owned a mansion, valued at 7 million USD, apparently designed for the family of the Mexican president, a revelation that positioned political corruption as a central issue on Mexico's public agenda (Aristegui Noticias, 2014). A priori, I would expect that the scandal would have generated a feeling of condemnation towards corruption in general, including any bureaucratic bribery. In other terms, data for 2015 serves as a "crucial" case study (Eckstein, 1975): if people revealed that they were indifferent to bribery when the issue of corruption was at the climax of the public discussion, such an attitude would be even more likely to remain under more regular circumstances. The second juncture was the outright electoral victory of Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) in July 2018, an opposition leader who sought to win the presidency for two decades by taking a stand against corruption. However, people's attitudes towards everyday bribery did not change despite the fact that people had already voted for a change of government that promised to end corruption. By showing the stability of this outcome, the article demonstrates that everyday acts of bribery are, in general, immune to social disapproval, since people usually see them as a normal prerequisite to getting things done.

My study attempts to make three contributions. One is to emphasize that, notwithstanding people's disapproval of high-level political corruption, they are extremely tolerant of bribery acts taking place between ordinary citizens and street-level bureaucrats. This apparent contradiction highlights that corruption is a complex phenomenon, particularly in a context where bribery is deeply engrained. The second contribution is to argue that top-down anti-corruption reforms might not be effective if they fail to convince people about the ethical implications of petty corruption acts. Reducing people's tolerance toward bribery, however, requires the adoption of bottom-up strategies actively involving citizens. Finally, the study makes a methodological contribution: instead of directly asking people how tolerant of bribery they are (which is subject to a social desirability bias), my study deduces this information by measuring the impact of people's actual experiences of bribery on their own ratings of government procedures.

Corruption as an embedded social practice: a theoretical discussion

For decades, mainstream anti-corruption policy discourse and advice have defined corruption as the “abuse of public power for private benefit” (Tanzi, 1998; Gray & Kaufman, 1998; Gebel, 2012) and rested upon the assumption that corruption is a purposeful act performed by self-interested individuals whose choices depend on a benefit-cost calculation. From that perspective, offering or accepting a bribe, extorting a person in exchange for private advantage, or colluding with others to embezzle public resources are the natural response of individuals that have determined that the expected benefit of undertaking a corrupt act outweighs its expected cost (Rose-Ackerman, 1975). A particular framework of widespread use to conceptualize corrupt relationships is the principal-agent model (Shleifer & Vishny, 1993), which posits that corruption is the result of the opportunistic behavior of bureaucratic agents that, knowing that their actions will be hidden from the eye of top governmental leaders, will abuse their positions to maximize their private gains. The anti-corruption policies

implied by this framework are to control bureaucratic behavior, mainly by reducing the level of discretion among agents, increasing organizational transparency, and creating accountability mechanisms (Klitgaard, 1988).

However, there is an important theoretical debate arguing that corruption should not be conceived merely as an individual choice, but as a set of practices, strongly rooted in social relationships, that distort the conventional limits between the private and the public spheres. This section presents three strands of literature sharing the notion of corruption as a socially embedded practice: sociocultural approaches, social psychology, and collective action theories.

Sociocultural interpretations

A significant number of studies focus on the role of social norms and social networks in explaining systemic corruption in the developing world. Their premise is that “when certain types of corrupt actions are socially embedded or culturally rooted, it can be said that they have become a feature during the enculturation of individuals, and thereby become collectively reproduced, normalised and reinforced” (Baez-Camargo et al., 2017, p. 2). Local governance has been, in general, the focus of this strand of literature, mainly because the local level is the most visible dimension of the state for ordinary citizens and where petty corruption acts are prevalent in the provision of services such as public procurements, health-care, public transport, among others.

A pioneering work that called attention to this important dimension is Olivier de Sardan’s study on corruption in Africa, where he coined the term “moral economy of corruption”, referring to the value systems and cultural codes that provide a social legitimization to a set of practices affecting the public realm typically considered as corrupt in western countries (Olivier de Sardan, 1999). According to de Sardan, bribing street-level bureaucrats or favoring friends in service provision are generalized routines, frequently stigmatized verbally, but seldom prosecuted or legally sanctioned. Petty corruption acts are largely unpunished mainly because whistleblowers face a strong social

disapproval. Perpetrators always find ways to justify their conduct, mainly by manipulating the borderline between corruption and non-corruption.

Some authors highlight the crucial role of informal brokers in mediating the relationships between service users and authorities, thereby creating a situation of “informal privatization of the state” (Blundo, 2006). These studies, frequently based on ethnographic research methods, claim that the boundaries between the state and civil society, as conceived by western scholars, are blurred when applied to other socio-cultural contexts (Gupta, 1995), and that understanding actual governance processes in those contexts require delving at “practical norms” rather than at official rules (De Herdt & Olivier de Sardan, 2015). These propositions align with the “clashing moral values” theories described in De Graaf (2007), characterized by the tension between western macro morality principles of universal rights and duties and micro morality values grounded more in social norms and relationships.

Some research has even asked whether corruption could have sociocultural roots, and hypothesized that high levels of corruption are positively associated with a system of beliefs based on power-distance, collectivism, masculine cultures, and high-risk aversion (Pena-López & Sánchez Santos, 2014; Husted, 1999). Others have found empirical evidence confirming a positive correlation between social norms and corruption. For example, a study by Fisman and Miguel (2006) observes that diplomats from high corruption countries have significantly more parking violations than diplomats from less corrupt countries, thereby suggesting a cultural tolerance of corruption that people bring to contexts different from their home countries. Other studies, however, have demonstrated that, while cultural practices might well travel across countries, these can be replaced by new social norms if people undergo a process of socialization (Barr and Serra, 2010; Gatti et al., 2003). Gong and Xiao (2017) argue that people’s willingness to report corruption events not only depends on their tolerance for corruption but also on their perception of the efficacy of governments to control that problem.

Moral decision-making: behavioral economics and social psychology

In contradiction of the assumption that human decisions result from purely cost-benefit calculations, behavioral sciences have found that people care about the moral dimension of their actions. According to this view, humans want, in principle, to act honestly (Aquino & Reed, 2002) or at least regard themselves as honest persons according to their internal (although socially learned) moral benchmarks (Mazar & Ariely, 2008). However, several studies, generally based on laboratory experiments, show that even the most morally inclined individuals might fail to do the right thing because their cognitive biases (intrapersonal reasons) and the social environment surrounding their decision-making process affect their choices (interpersonal processes).

Among the most typical cognitive biases that affect moral choices, the literature identifies people's tendency to act under a "moral compensation" logic: a person can feel authorized to act immorally today to compensate for all the good things she did yesterday (Joosten et al., 2014; Sachdeva et al., 2009). In addition, humans suffer from "short-term predispositions" which means that we tend to overestimate the extent to which we will behave morally in the future (Bazerman & Tenbrunsel, 2012). Behavioral predispositions also include "self-serving biases" namely that individuals are likely to be indulgent when judging the actions of their peers (Tarrant et al., 2012) and that they are inclined to rationalize their choices when they depart from ideal moral standards (Shalvi et al., 2015). For example, the study by Nguyen and colleagues shows that government officials experience emotional discomfort in bribery-prone relationships, while at the same time they apply rationalization strategies to initiate and perpetuate them (Nguyen et al., 2021).

Besides cognitive biases, interpersonal interactions are strong predictors of behavior in general but with significant consequences on choices entailing a moral component. Social psychologists emphasize morality's social nature, implying that people tend to let others control their

“moral compass”, leading honorable people to cross ethical boundaries. Some argue, for example, that people neglect the moral implications of their decisions by using social norms or organizational socialization rules as ethical standards (Moore et al., 2013). Others have found evidence that people are more likely to cheat when the benefits are split with other persons (Wiltermuth, 2011). Gino and Bazerman (2009) claim that unethical behavior can become acceptable to external eyes, even to those responsible for overseeing people and organizations' performance, when such behavior erodes gradually rather than abruptly, which leads to a “slippery slope effect”.

Collective action and institutional development

Another strand of literature acknowledges that corruption is a governance order that requires being studied at a societal level rather than at the individual one (Arellano, 2017; Gofen et al., 2022; Meza & Pérez-Chiqués, 2020) and that the control of corruption is “a given society’s capacity to constrain the use of public authority to generate private rents detrimental to overall social welfare” (Mungiu-Pippidi, 2015: 18). Considering that many anti-corruption strategies in different countries, strongly inspired by the economic approach, failed to achieve their goals (Batory, 2012), some have pointed out that such failures have to do with a mistaken conception of the corruption phenomenon. Criticisms have concentrated on the principal-agent framework, particularly on its crucial assumption that principals are committed to preserving the public interest and that bureaucratic agents are mainly responsible for its breakdown. If principals are corrupt themselves, who would be accountable for controlling corruption?

An alternative approach proposes conceptualizing corruption as a collective action problem (Marquette & Peiffer, 2018; Persson et al., 2013). According to this perspective, corruption becomes a severe problem when it becomes a systemic phenomenon rather than a sporadic event. In a context of widespread corruption, many actors participate, directly or indirectly, in corrupt practices, even though they might be fully aware of the social and economic damages caused by their illicit behavior. However, they do not refrain from those practices simply because they do not trust that the others

will also decline to perpetrate corrupt acts. If someone unilaterally chooses to play the game with honesty, she might see that others are profiting from their dishonest behavior, which means she is missing the opportunity to have a personal gain. In addition, her honorable conduct might well be judged negatively by her peers, especially if she dares to denounce the acts of her fellows. In other words, a situation of widespread corruption is maintained by an explicit or implicit pact of reciprocal treatment or “balanced reciprocity” (Putnam et al., 1993), where players have a clear expectation that other actors involved in a corruption act will not betray them.

Although it has been pointed out that reciprocity is one of the bases of corrupt behavior (Lambsdorff, 2012), others like Robert Putnam (1993) have claimed that it can be a crucial ingredient for social cohesion and good governance. The explanation of such discrepancy seems to lie in the extent to which reciprocity promotes trust, which in turn depends on institutional design: “reciprocity tells us that if through the design of institutions we can make people trust that most other agents in their society will behave in a trustworthy and cooperative manner, they themselves will do likewise. If not, they will defect, even if the outcome will be a social trap type of situation and thereby detrimental to their interests” (Rothstein, 2013: 1025-1026). In the case of corruption control, reciprocity norms can contribute to building a situation of generalized social trust in which people are willing to give up the short-term gains of a corrupt deal if and only if they know that others will refrain from participating in corrupt practices as well.

The policy implications derived from this view are that political and administrative institutions should be designed to substitute a governance style based on particularism for another founded on universal and impersonal norms to promote the principles of fairness, integrity, and transparency (Mungiu-Pippidi, 2006). One of the most important institutions to control corruption is creating a merit-based civil service, as it is expected to reduce the excessive influence of politicians in the appointment of public officials and provide screening mechanisms to detect dishonest public servants (Heywood & Meyer-Sahling, 2013). Another institutional factor that the literature regards

as imperative for controlling corruption is inter-party competition, as political incumbents facing a higher risk of being replaced by their rivals in an electoral contest have more incentives to demonstrate better performance and are also willing to delegate power to autonomous accountability institutions (Melo et al., 2009). A third institutional dimension is political decentralization (transferring powers from a higher to a lower level of government), which for a long time was deemed to improve the control of corruption mainly because it was a means to empower citizens. However, it has also been argued that corruption can increase if decentralization creates a problem of uncoordinated rent-seeking (Fan et al., 2009). Recent evidence supports this claim in the case of piped water supply in India (Asthana, 2012).

In summary, the three theoretical perspectives discussed in this section coincide in demonstrating that corrupt behavior is not exclusively driven by individual cost-benefit calculations but also by socially constructed belief systems, cognitive biases, and complex social interactions, all of which contribute to normalizing corruption. Of course, the causal factors explaining people's tolerance toward corruption differ between the three perspectives. As I will describe in the next section, the survey data employed to perform the analysis do not provide sufficient details to test specific underlying mechanisms. Still, they allow investigating the following proposition: in a setting where corruption is a widespread phenomenon, people tend to tolerate bribery when conducting bureaucratic transactions. In other terms, citizens' satisfaction with a government procedure will be unaffected by a public servant asking for a payoff to smooth the transaction's progress, which implies that people do not attach a moral connotation to bribery.

The case of bureaucratic procedures in Mexico

Looking at bureaucratic procedures is ideal for analyzing petty corruption, as they constitute a recurrent window of interaction between governments and citizens. In contrast to public services,

procedures do not generate a tangible benefit, but they are means through which people and businesses comply with fiscal, regulatory or environmental obligations, manage their access to public services, get permits to carry out a variety of activities, to mention a few examples. While the advantages of bureaucratic procedures for people's well-being are ambiguous, their drawbacks are always manifest. Having to wait in lines for hours, receiving confusing information, or being attended to by discourteous desk officers are all important sources of discomfort and distrust (Peeters et al, 2018). Furthermore, procedures bring opportunities to perpetrate bribery acts when their resolution rests on public servants' discretionary powers to obtain an illegitimate profit, often in collaboration with the citizen she is supposed to serve. To what extent do Mexican citizens condemn the occurrence of such acts? This section analyzes this matter.

Data and methods

The following analysis aims to determine to what extent people facing a bribery attempt during the realization of a bureaucratic transaction condemn such an act. The data source is Mexico's *Encuesta Nacional de Calidad e Impacto Gubernamental* (National Survey on Governmental Quality and Impact, NSGQI), a novel dataset representative at the national and state levels (INEGI, 2015, 2019). As mentioned in the introduction, I decided to focus on data for the 2015 and 2019 waves to capture the effect of two political events that were influential on public opinion: the revelation of the former Mexican president's "White House" scandal in November 2014, and the triumph of AMLO in the presidential election of 2018. According to the same data source, the first event placed the issue of corruption as the second most important problem in the perception of citizens (after violence and insecurity). For this article, looking at data from 2015 is critical to measure people's attitudes toward bribery in a moment when corruption was generally condemned. The second event represents, to a large extent, the moment in which voters punished in the ballot box a government that was widely regarded as corrupt. In other words, looking at 2019 allows analyzing whether people's attitudes

towards bribery remained in a context where voters had elected a political candidate widely recognized by his anti-corruption positions.

The NSGQI reports events of bribery that respondents underwent when fulfilling different bureaucratic procedures, such as paying taxes, obtaining various types of permits, managing their access to public services, and others. It adopts a measurement strategy in which respondents are conceived as victims of bribery acts rather than perpetrators or accomplices. By reducing the complicity stigmatization, such a strategy can encourage respondents to report corruption acts. In addition, the NSGQI provides data on people's subjective assessments regarding the quality of each procedure. Individual responses (one per household) are the unit of analysis, and the number of valid observations varies across each procedure: the largest sample comes from people who paid the electric bill (around 16,400 observations in 2015 and 29,800 in 2019), while fiscal procedures had the fewest observations (2,000 in 2015 and 3,742 in 2019)¹. Mexico's Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI) carried out the survey in November and December in both years. The analysis of bureaucratic procedures is based on a set of questions related to a variety of procedures that citizens and businesses carry out regularly, involving interaction with low-level authorities of different levels of government. I identified respondents that reported having conducted personally at least one out of 20 possible procedures during the year.²

To what extent do people disapprove of bribery acts when conducting governmental procedures? To answer this question, a simple linear regression model was performed whose dependent variable is the overall rating (on a scale from 1 to 10) that the survey informants gave to each of the bureaucratic procedures they carried out during the year. Using ordinary least squares with robust standard errors as the estimation method, all models incorporated the following

¹ The sample of the NSGQI was deliberately increased in 2019 to improve the accuracy of estimations.

² If the respondent declares that she used the help of others (such as friends, relatives or a business agent) to conduct the procedure, the survey does not ask her to rate its quality. The 20 procedures are listed in the next tables.

explanatory and control variables (the Appendix presents the survey questions, in English and Spanish, used in the regression model):

- 1) The occurrence of a bribery attempt, represented by a dummy variable taking a value of 1 if the informant reported that, while carrying out the procedure, a public official insinuated that the customer should provide her/him with money, a gift or a favor, or 0 otherwise.
- 2) A procedure quality index based on the non-occurrence of 10 possible problems during the execution of each procedure. Such problems are the following:
 - a) The customer had to wait in line for too long to complete the procedure.
 - b) The requirements to execute the procedure were not displayed.
 - c) The requirements were excessive.
 - d) The customer had to ask at different service desks before she was finally helped.
 - e) The customer received the wrong information.
 - f) The customer faced problems with the telephone assistance system.
 - g) The customer faced problems with the website.
 - h) The customer had to go to a remote place to execute the procedure.
 - i) The monetary costs of the procedure were excessive.
 - j) Opening hours were too restricted.

Therefore, the quality index can take a maximum value of 10 if the informant did not report any of those inconveniences and a value of 0 if all those problems emerged.

- 3) A satisfaction rating of the procedure's completion time (on a scale of 1 to 6).
- 4) A satisfaction rating of the quality of personnel attention (on a scale of 1 to 6).
- 5) A dummy variable measuring the procedure's efficacy, which takes a value of 1 if the customer considers that she obtained what she requested and 0 otherwise.

- 6) A dummy variable indicating whether the informant had any complaint about the procedure (regardless if she officially complained before a formal instance). In case she did, the variable takes a value of 1 and 0 otherwise.
- 7) A socio-demographic status variable taking four ascending values (1 to 4), which is based on 34 indicators that included people's schooling levels, access to education and health care services, employment status, access of houses to essential services, construction materials of dwellings, availability of house supplies, and others.
- 8) Schooling level of the head of the household.

If people disapprove of bribery, its occurrence should negatively affect their rating of the procedure, after controlling for other factors that also influence people's assessments. Note that the model assumes that every person should have the same attitude towards corruption, no matter whether she accepts to pay the bribe or not. A potential objection is that people who accept collaborating in a corrupt exchange implicitly reveal a moral tolerance towards those acts. Therefore, a crucial test would be to analyze the response of people who refused to pay the bribe compared to those who did accept. The NSGQI has a question asking the approximate value (in monetary terms) that the public servant misappropriates for themselves during the procedure. Any amount reported to answer this question implicitly assumes that the respondent agreed to participate in the bribery act. However, it is impossible to know whether their participation was voluntary or forced. I performed a second estimation model only within the sample of respondents who reported being invited to pay a bribe by a public servant. The independent variables are the same as in the previous model, except that, instead of the dummy that identifies the occurrence of a bribe attempt, it introduces an indicator taking a value of 1 if the user rejected to pay the bribe and 0 otherwise. However, nine procedures had to be excluded from the second model for two reasons. First, because the survey lacks data regarding the monetary value of the bribe paid for six procedures: a) payment of property taxes, b) land use and

construction permits, c) housing and social programs, d) electric energy procedures, e) passport application and f) procedures before the public prosecutor's office. Second, because the number of observations available, after applying the sample filter, came to 40 or less, which implied excluding g) fiscal procedures, h) municipal services, and i) local procedures. The existence of a moral sanction against bribery would mean that people rejected collaborate in the corrupt exchange precisely because they deemed it a dishonest practice. Therefore, their overall subjective assessment of the procedure (our dependent variable) should, in principle, be lower compared to others who agreed to pay the bribe.

Results

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of the variables in the model. The four procedures whose corruption incidence rate was the highest in 2015 and 2019 were people's contact with public security authorities (the percentage of respondents that reported having been asked to pay a bribe was 55% in 2015 and 59% in 2019). Bribing experiences were also high in procedures before the public prosecutor (the rates were 23.7% and 24.8%, respectively for each year), procedures carried out in courts or tribunals (21.8% and 24.8%), and those related to the issuing of land use and construction permits, where the rate increased from 16.4% to 25% between the two years. Conversely, procedures where the corruption prevalence rate was the lowest were emergency healthcare services (1.3% and 0.7% each year), the scheduling of regular visits to health clinics (1.2% and 0.6%), and paying the water bill (1.2% and 1.1%). Table 1 also reveals that there is a wide variation in people's subjective assessment (our dependent variable) across the procedures, which in the case of the electricity bill payment reaches its maximum mean value (above 8 in both years) and a minimum of 5.5 in the case of municipal services in 2015 (four years later it practically remained in the same level). It should be noted that the survey did not include any data regarding people's assessment of their contact with public security authorities, which, as we discussed, turned out to be the most corrupt procedure; thus, it had to be excluded from the analysis.

The results of the first regression model are displayed in Table 2. The most remarkable outcome is that the occurrence of a bribery attempt does not seem to have a meaningful influence on people's rating of almost every bureaucratic procedure, as the magnitude of coefficients is, by and large, relatively small and, even though more than a half of them have a negative sign in each year, all of them, but three, are statistically insignificant. Only in the case of payment of the electric bill, payment of water, and procedures before the public prosecutor does the occurrence of a bribery attempt reduce users' rating by 0.48, 0.57, and 0.47, respectively, effects that turn out being statistically significant at a 0.05 level. In contrast, the variables of the model more directly related to how procedures are delivered happen to be much more influential on users' ratings and in the expected direction. Three of them are particularly noteworthy. First, dissatisfaction with any aspect of the delivery of a procedure invariably reduces people's ratings. Its marginal effect can be the strongest for some procedures. Consider, once again, the procedures before the public prosecutor's office in 2015: users that found that something went wrong during the transaction have, on average, a rating of 1.56 lower compared to others that did not have any grievance with it. Also, people's satisfaction with the time to complete a procedure is positively associated with their rating, and it is statistically significant for the 19 procedures analyzed in both years. The magnitude of its effect is also substantial: for every additional point in people's satisfaction with completion time, the overall rating increases by 0.72 on average in the same example. This implies that the difference between someone fully satisfied with the completion time of some procedure (who would assign five points to it) and another person entirely disappointed with it (who would give only one point) would equal 2.9, which represents six times the effect of the bribery attempt on people's rating. Something similar occurs with users' satisfaction with personnel attention during any procedure, as its effect on ratings is always positive and statistically significant in all cases.³ The efficacy of a procedure (whether people obtained what

³ The only two explanatory variables that are strongly intercorrelated between them are people's satisfaction with time of completion and their satisfaction with personnel attention (the Pearson's correlation coefficient equals 0.7 in the case of the electricity bill payment). However, the two variables preserve their independent influence on users' ratings, despite their strong intercorrelation. Furthermore, excluding any of them from the

they requested) also has a positive influence on ratings. However, the magnitude of its effect varies across procedures, and its coefficient is not always statistically significant. Finally, it is interesting to observe that neither socio-demographic status nor educational levels influence ratings, although they were merely included as control variables without having any particular theoretical justification.⁴ To facilitate comparing the effect of each variable on people's ratings, Figure 1 describes their standardized coefficients in the same example discussed above, where it is evident that, compared to other factors, facing the event of a bribery attempt has only a moderate effect on users' ratings.

In sum, the evidence clearly indicates that bribery is unrelated to citizens' subjective assessment of bureaucratic procedures.⁵ However, as I noted earlier, a stronger test requires replicating the former model by looking only at survey respondents who explicitly reported having received an invitation to pay a bribe and comparing the response of those who rejected to pay it with those who did not. The results of this additional exercise are displayed in Table 3, which, as pointed out in the previous section, excluded nine procedures due to missing data or insufficient observations. The main finding is that there is not any difference between the ratings for the 10 procedures between people who rejected to pay the bribe and those who agreed to do it in any of the two years analyzed, as the coefficients of that variable fail to meet the standard levels of statistical significance. In contrast, the variables measuring different dimensions of procedure delivery turn out to have a stronger explanatory power, particularly users' satisfaction with the time of completion and with personnel attention, which are, overall, statistically significant.

model is inconsequential for the key finding, as the coefficient associated to the occurrence of a bribery attempt remains statistically insignificant in the most of the procedures analyzed.

⁴ A problem of collinearity caused by the inclusion of both variables can be ruled out as the Pearson's correlation coefficient between them is never higher than 0.4.

⁵ I performed an additional analysis to investigate if the effect of bribery on users' assessments could be mediated by people's perception on corruption in general. Specifically, I included the multiplicative interaction between a bribery attempt and whether the person believed that corruption was the most important public problem. However, the coefficient associated to that interaction was never statistically significant and its sign was not always negative. Results are not displayed for space reasons.

Discussion

The overall implication of these findings is that the ordinary citizen in Mexico seems to be highly tolerant of the corruption that emerges in her everyday interaction with street-level bureaucrats, as the occurrence of bribery acts does not increase or decrease citizens' assessment of governmental procedures. This outcome is consistent with corruption theories discussed in the literature review section, which assert that bribery acts perpetrated by customers and low-level public authorities on a regular basis are an embedded practice whose moral dimension tends to go unnoticed. In other words, it is not that people are unethical when it comes to judging a petty corruption act, but that they do not attach a moral connotation to it. People's indifferent attitude towards everyday corruption contrasts with their perception on high-level political corruption, which, according to the NSGQI, was the second most relevant problem in the country after crime and insecurity in 2015 and 2019.⁶ However, when asked about how often corruption acts take place at specific institutions, people tend to think that the phenomenon prevails far away from their inner circles; while political parties, the presidency, and the police received corruption rating levels over 80%, social sectors closer to survey respondents like relatives and neighbors received rating of more than 23%. Altogether, these results suggest that corruption is socially stigmatized in a very general and abstract sense; but when it comes to corruption acts perpetrated in the daily interaction between users of government procedures and officers responsible to deliver them, people fail to regard it as morally wrong.

People's indulgence toward petty corruption in the fulfillment of government procedures is a clear sign that corruption banalization is one of the most complex challenges for its effective control. Anti-corruption policies might well not succeed if they only rest on a punitive strategy, but fail to deal with its social bases of legitimization. A key policy implication derived from the review of collective action theories is that confronting systemic corruption requires changing the system of

⁶ Crime and insecurity were mentioned by 61.8% of the sample as the most important policy problem, while corruption by 48.4%.

beliefs and expectations among people regarding the ethical behavior of all other actors, with the aim of creating a generalized perception of fairness and trust, which in turn implies promoting universalism and impartiality as the leading principles of a system of public integrity. Many of the policy interventions discussed in the literature review section, such as the creation of merit-based civil services (Heywood & Meyer-Sahling, 2013), the promotion of transparency in government information and decision-making (Mungiu-Pippidi, 2006) or the expansion of inter-party competition (Melo et al, 2009) aim at the ethical universalism and public accountability goals. However, those policies tend to adopt a top-down approach, where policy goals and instruments are agreed upon by political representatives and social and economic elites, but without the active participation of ordinary citizens at a micro-level. The findings of this study clearly suggest that macro-institutional anti-corruption strategies might not be effective if the ethical implications of bribery remain unnoticed by the general public. Therefore, as Gong and Xiao (2017) demonstrate in the case of Hong Kong, top-down policies require to be accompanied by bottom-up approaches aiming to increase people's awareness of the problem of corruption and encourage citizens to denounce specific cases.

An important challenge to construct a wide basis of popular support for anti-corruption reforms in general, but particularly for controlling bribery in government procedures, comes from the fact that bribing low-level officials usually is advantageous for users, as they can accomplish their transactions without bearing the inconveniences that their fulfillments imply. In other terms, bribery is often associated with “market corruption”, “a quid pro quo between only two individuals (not organizations), an agent who illegally ‘sells’ or misuses his or her organization’s resources over which he or she has discretion and an outsider client who pays for them” (Jancsics, 2019, 528). As the motivation behind this type of corrupt exchange is obtaining a personal illicit benefit rather than assuring fair treatment to all citizens, this could hinder the collective action necessary to fight against it. As argued by Bauhr (2017), social mobilization is more likely to succeed in the case of “need” corruption than in the case of “greed” corruption. However, we can hardly assert that greed corruption

is the only motivation behind the bribery acts analyzed in this study, as there are government procedures that are essential for people's well-being and dignity (a medical appointment, the delivery of services like water, or receiving fair treatment in a court case) whose provision is expected to operate under impartial criteria. The survey data analyzed in this study does not allow to distinguish the motivations behind bribery acts for each of the procedures.

Conclusion

This article offered evidence that people in Mexico exhibit high levels of tolerance towards bribery acts when carrying out government procedures, which supports a claim shared by the three theoretical frameworks discussed in this paper, namely that systemic corruption is a regime so deeply engrained in social relationships and norms that prevents people to attribute a moral connotation to their behavior. The evidence clearly shows that people's degree of satisfaction with the 19 procedures analyzed depends substantially on the quality of personnel attention, the time involved for their completion, the efficacy of the procedure, and not being disappointed with any aspect of the transaction. Nonetheless, if a customer faced an episode in which a public official requested money, a gift or a favor during the realization of a bureaucratic transaction, her degree of satisfaction would not be affected at all, as shown in all the procedures analyzed, except in three of them. An additional test focusing only on people who faced a bribery attempt revealed a similar result, as users who explicitly rejected to pay the bribe did not give lower assessment rates for the procedures than users who accepted to pay for it.

One of the most ambitious anti-corruption reform initiatives in Mexico took place in 2016, once a handful of prominent citizen organizations, in alliance with the federal legislature, managed to create a complex national system based on an intricate coordination system to restrain collusive corruption at high political levels (Arellano-Gault, 2019), but with very little attention to the

entrenched corruption practices between street-level bureaucrats and ordinary citizens. My study suggests that top-down anti-corruption policies will be incomplete if they do not increase people's awareness of the corruption problem and reduce the level of social tolerance towards bribery at the micro-level. Bottom-up anti-corruption interventions do not require large-scale institutional reforms beyond the scope of public managers seeking out to remove entrenched corruption practices among their frontline workers, but only small-scale implementation tactics to stimulate people to act honestly, for example through the use of moral reminders regarding gift acceptance or prompting people to make a public commitment about being truthful in their patrimonial declaration (OECD, 2018).

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Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the variables in the model (part 1)

Procedure	Users' subjective assessment of each procedure (1 to 10)		Procedure quality index (1 to 11)		Satisfaction with time of completion (1 to 5)		Satisfaction with personnel attention (1 to 5)		% that reported a bribery attempt		% that obtained what they requested		% that were unsatisfied with any aspect of the procedure	
	Mean, (Standard deviation), Obs.													
	2015	2019	2015	2019	2015	2019	2015	2019	2015	2019	2015	2019	2015	2019
Payment of electricity bill	8.6 (1.5) 16464	8.5 (1.6) 29814	10.3 (1) 16504	10.4 (.95) 20878	4.03 (0.81) 16488	4 (0.9) 20833	4 (0.7) 7107	4.1 (0.7) 9043	3.1%	3.7%	99%	98%	6%	7%
Payment of water service	8.2 (1.7) 12498	8.3 (1.7) 16131	10.1 (1.2) 12513	10.2 (1.2) 16179	3.84 (0.95) 12497	3.9 (0.9) 16135	3.9 (0.9) 11335	4 (0.9) 13725	1.2%	1.1%	98%	98%	8%	7%
Payment of property taxes	8.1 (1.7) 5986	8.2 (1.7) 8868	9.8 (1.4) 5996	9.9 (1.3) 8894	3.62 (1.08) 5985	3.8 (1) 8868	3.9 (0.9) 5818	4 (0.8) 8421	0.9%	1.5%	99%	98%	8%	7%
Payment of vehicle ownership tax	7.4 (2.2) 3706	7.8 (2.1) 6289	9.2 (1.9) 3713	9.6 (1.8) 6358	3.23 (1.32) 3707	3.5 (1.3) 6287	3.6 (1.1) 3391	3.7 (1) 5549	5.9%	6.1%	98%	98%	16%	11%
Motor vehicle procedures	7.5 (2.28) 3940	7.7 (2.1) 6247	9.2 (1.9) 3976	9.4 (1.8) 6512	3.26 (1.34) 3940	3.4 (1.3) 6246	3.6 (1.1) 3839	3.7 (1.1) 6031	14.8%	15%	98%	98%	17%	14%
Fiscal procedures	8.1 (1.8) 2083	8.4 (1.8) 3742	9.7 (1.6) 2089	10 (1.5) 3772	3.59 (1.17) 2085	3.8 (1.1) 3741	3.9 (0.9) 1651	4 (0.9) 2623	3%	2.2%	98%	97%	12%	9%
Scheduling of health care services	7 (2.7) 10572	6.5 (2.9) 6437	9.5 (1.5) 10577	9.6 (1.5) 6456	2.95 (1.48) 10572	2.7 (1.6) 6432	3.4 (1.3) 10508	3.1 (1.5) 6418	1.2%	0.6%	93%	89%	25%	30%
Emergency health care services	6.4 (3) 4767	7.3 (2.5) 11829	9.4 (1.5) 4768	9.7 (1.4) 11852	2.63 (1.63) 4764	3.2 (1.4) 11824	3.1 (1.6) 4761	3.5 (1.3) 11569	1.3%	0.6%	89%	94%	33%	20%
Public education procedures	8 (1.89) 7049	8.1 (1.8) 7273	9.6 (1.5) 7058	9.7 (1.5) 7363	3.55 (1.12) 7049	7.7 (1.1) 7273	3.8 (0.9) 6814	3.9 (0.9) 6812	2.6%	2.8%	98%	97%	12%	10%
Public registry procedures	8 (2.1) 5446	8 (2.1) 7632	9.5 (1.6) 5451	9.6 (1.6) 7692	3.55 (1.2) 5445	3.6 (1.2) 7636	3.7 (1) 4723	3.8 (1.1) 6109	3.7%	4.4%	97%	97%	13%	13%

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the variables in the model (part 2)

Procedure	Users' subjective assessment of each procedure (1 to 10)		Procedure quality index (1 to 11)		Satisfaction with time of completion (1 to 5)		Satisfaction with personnel attention (1 to 5)		% that reported a bribery attempt		% that obtained what they requested		% that were unsatisfied with any aspect of the procedure	
	Mean, (Standard deviation), Obs.													
	2015	2019	2015	2019	2015	2019	2015	2019	2015	2019	2015	2019	2015	2019
Contact with public security authorities	n.a.	n.a	n.a.	n.a	n.a.	n.a	n.a.	2.4 (1.7) 3673	55.2%	59.2%	n.a.	n.a	n.a.	n.a.
Municipal services	5.5 (3.2) 714	5.6 (3.2) 1265	9.8 (1.7) 716	9.9 (1.6) 1316	2.8 (1.6) 712	2.8 (1.6) 1265	3 (1.5) 688	3.1 (1.5) 1197	5.1%	9.6%	60%	62%	51%	46%
Local procedures	6.4 (3) 321	6.5 (3) 428	9.1 (2.1) 329	9.4 (2) 481	2.9 (1.5) 321	3 (1.6) 428	3.2 (1.4) 318	3.2 (1.5) 424	11.8%	22.2%	77%	765	36%	32%
Land use and construction permits	6.6 (2.8) 309	6.6 (2.9) 471	8.6 (2.2) 320	9.1 (2.2) 536	2.8 (1.6) 308	2.9 (1.6) 471	3.3 (1.4) 304	3.3 (1.4) 464	16.4%	25%	90%	88%	30%	28%
Housing and social programs	7.8 (2.4) 1129	7.6 (2.5) 1352	9.5 (1.6) 1136	9.6 (1.6) 1388	3.5 (1.3) 1126	3.4 (1.3) 1354	3.8 (1.1) 1060	3.7 (1.2) 1226	5%	4.2%	89%	83%	16%	19%
Electric energy procedures	6.8 (2.7) 1227	6.6 (2.8) 1685	10 (1.) 1244	10.1 (1.4) 1724	3.1 (1.4) 1228	3 (1.5) 1686	3.4 (1.3) 1194	3.3 (1.4) 1629	8.1%	6.5%	86%	82%	32%	34%
Passport application	7.8 (2.1) 1024	7.9 (2.2) 1260	8.6 (2) 1026	8.8 (2) 1263	3.3 (1.3) 1024	3.4 (1.4) 1260	3.8 (1.1) 988	3.8 (1.1) 1211	2.8%	1.4%	97%	96%	17%	16%
Procedures before the public prosecutor's office	5.5 (3.2) 1023	5.321 (3.235) 1460	9 (2) 1045	9 (2.1) 1586	2.4 (1.6) 1023	2.3 (1.7) 1460	2.8 (1.7) 1020	2.7 (1.7) 1453	23.7%	24.8%	72%	70%	43%	46%
Procedures in courts or tribunals	6.3 (3.1) 732	6.536 (2.889) 1126	9 (2) 750	9.2 (1.9) 1186	2.7 (1.6) 732	2.9 (1.5) 1127	3.1 (1.6) 729	3.2 (1.5) 1124	21.8%	16.4%	80%	81%	35%	31%
Emergency calls to the police	5.6 (3.3) 2743	5.814 (3.329) 4388	8.6 (0.6) 2744	10.8 (0.5) 4395	2.9 (1.6) 2742	3 (1.6) 4387	3 (1.6) 2717	3.1 (1.6) 4358	2.4%	0.9	60%	63%	46%	41%

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the variables in the model (part 3)

	2015		2019	
Socio-economic status	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
1	700	2.13	1,697	1.45
2	15,170	46.22	48,474	41.46
3	11,655	35.54	45,024	38.51
4	5,286	16.11	21,709	18.57
Head of household's education level	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
None	1,463	4.46	3,433	2.77
Junior high school	15,897	43.38	49,627	40.11
High school	6,414	19.54	26,937	21.77
University or technical	9,065	27.62	43,727	35.34

Source: author's elaboration based on INEGI (2015, 2019)

Table 2. Results of the regression analysis of the quality of bureaucratic procedures (part 1)

	Payment of the electricity bill		Payment of water service		Payment of property taxes		Payment of vehicle ownership tax		Motor vehicle procedures	
	2015	2019	2015	2019	2015	2019	2015	2019	2015	2019
Occurrence of a bribery attempt	-0,325 (0,244)	-0.477* (0.268)	0.007 (0.155)	-0.574*** (0.200)	0,007 (0,243)	-0.184 (0.171)	-0,077 (0,129)	-0.173 (0.131)	-0,078 (0,088)	-0.105 (0.076)
Procedure quality	0,078 (0,046)	0.094** (0.045)	0.123*** (0.032)	0.121*** (0.037)	0,07 (0,044)	0.071** (0.032)	0,105** (0,035)	0.110*** (0.032)	-0,078*** (0,088)	0.042 (0.026)
Satisfaction with time of completion	0,639*** (0,1)	0.471*** (0.094)	0.61*** (0.067)	0.525*** (0.069)	0,626*** (0,085)	0.605*** (0.085)	0,701*** (0,078)	0.549*** (0.062)	0,642*** (0,062)	0.685*** (0.056)
Satisfaction with personnel attention	0,726*** (0,103)	0.934*** (0.098)	0.876*** (0.072)	0.814*** (0.069)	0,933*** (0,102)	0.784*** (0.092)	0,759*** (0,082)	0.819*** (0.067)	0,818*** (0,065)	0.815*** (0.062)
Procedure efficacy	1,172* (0,503)	0.577 (0.428)	0.616* (0.312)	0.917*** (0.296)	-0,26 (0,392)	-0.208 (0.668)	0,402 (0,343)	0.657* (0.343)	0,519 (0,466)	0.807*** (0.264)
Any inconformity with the procedure	-1,014*** (0,26)	-0.935*** (0.249)	-0.798*** (0.18)	-1.133*** (0.163)	-0,667** (0,222)	-0.781*** (0.185)	-0,677*** (0,194)	-1.023*** (0.181)	-0,76*** (0,14)	-0.834*** (0.143)
Socio-demographic status	-0,009 (0,063)	-0.002 (0.045)	0.015 (0.044)	0.022 (0.034)	0,101 (0,063)	0.042 (0.058)	-0,062 (0,07)	0.008 (0.050)	-0,055 (0,054)	0.028 (0.047)
Education level of the head of household	-0,041 (0,051)	-0.042 (0.041)	0.002 (0.04)	0.019 (0.031)	-0,048 (0,052)	-0.014 (0.047)	0,103 (0,054)	0.027 (0.048)	0,08 (0,048)	0.018 (0.041)
Constant	1,21 (0,667)	1.410** (0.595)	0.613 (0.399)	0.902** (0.414)	1,543** (0,581)	2.278*** (0.769)	1,094* (0,502)	1.116*** (0.423)	0,924 (0,53)	1.097*** (0.344)
Obs.	686	915	1264	1571	652	926	727	1125	973	1418
R ² adjusted	0.697	0.665	0.716	0.723	0.744	0.679	0.752	0.755	0.768	0.743

Robust standard errors in parenthesis

*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05

Table 2. Results of the regression analysis of the quality of bureaucratic procedures (part 2)

	Fiscal procedures		Scheduling of health care services		Emergency health care services		Public education procedures		Public registry procedures	
	2015	2019	2015	2019	2015	2019	2015	2019	2015	2019
Occurrence of a bribery attempt	-0,167 (0,199)	0.227 (0.251)	-0,011 (0,147)	-0.338 (0.206)	0,104 (0,183)	0.696 (0.496)	-0,129 (0,154)	0.016 (0.171)	0,07 (0,13)	-0.180 (0.112)
Procedure quality	0,043 (0,052)	0.031 (0.035)	0,064* (0,03)	0.046* (0.028)	0,042 (0,036)	0.084*** (0.028)	0,037 (0,038)	0.062** (0.029)	0,09** (0,034)	0.113*** (0.027)
Satisfaction with time of completion	0,673*** (0,126)	0.733*** (0.111)	0,734*** (0,058)	0.624*** (0.054)	0,728*** (0,08)	0.676*** (0.059)	0,612*** (0,086)	0.724*** (0.089)	0,636*** (0,07)	0.624*** (0.070)
Satisfaction with personnel attention	0,846*** (0,125)	0.892*** (0.115)	0,763*** (0,06)	0.850*** (0.056)	0,833*** (0,077)	0.804*** (0.064)	0,914*** (0,087)	0.726*** (0.096)	0,913*** (0,08)	0.768*** (0.080)
Procedure efficacy	0,815 (0,427)	1.320*** (0.378)	0,607*** (0,183)	0.688*** (0.170)	0,474*** (0,147)	0.695*** (0.158)	1,105* (0,435)	0.677*** (0.220)	1,3*** (0,298)	0.658*** (0.249)
Any inconformity with the procedure	-0,33 (0,323)	-0.564** (0.222)	-1,081*** (0,14)	-0.737*** (0.131)	-0,812*** (0,187)	-1.000*** (0.150)	-0,656*** (0,187)	-0.801*** (0.219)	-0,668*** (0,165)	-0.991*** (0.168)
Socio-demographic status	-0,055 (0,054)	-0.116* (0.060)	0,061 (0,063)	-0.059 (0.057)	0,049 (0,076)	-0.051 (0.061)	0,044 (0,063)	0.119** (0.060)	-0,009 (0,058)	0.068 (0.051)
Education level of the head of household	0,08 (0,048)	-0.060 (0.049)	0,005 (0,052)	-0.043 (0.044)	-0,015 (0,069)	-0.011 (0.054)	0,055 (0,056)	-0.044 (0.048)	0,039 (0,048)	-0.005 (0.036)
Constant	0,924** (0,53)	0.856* (0.504)	1,081** (0,348)	1.516*** (0.306)	1,156** (0,421)	1.101*** (0.301)	0,734 (0,546)	1.181*** (0.401)	0,055 (0,438)	1.049*** (0.331)
Obs.	286	501	981	1240	639	943	696	834	708	1127
R ² adjusted	0.781	0.790	0.799	0.759	0.819	0.822	0.728	0.743	0.813	0.787

Robust standard errors in parenthesis

*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05

Table 2. Results of the regression analysis of the quality of bureaucratic procedures (part 3)

	Municipal services		Local procedures		Land use and construction permits		Housing and social programs		Electric energy procedures	
	2015	2019	2015	2019	2015	2019	2015	2019	2015	2019
Occurrence of a bribery attempt	-0,342 (0,317)	-0.135 (0.269)	-0,101 (0,457)	-0.053 (0.205)	0,05 (0,33)	-0.046 (0.266)	0,061 (0,269)	-0.144 (0.403)	-0,294 (0,265)	0.300 (0.204)
Procedure quality	0,02 (0,066)	0.084 (0.056)	0,045 (0,125)	0.112* (0.063)	0,1 (0,071)	0.092 (0.081)	0,12* (0,056)	0.080 (0.050)	0,076 (0,055)	0.139* (0.075)
Satisfaction with time of completion	0,508** (0,179)	0.621*** (0.106)	0,296 (0,255)	0.808*** (0.177)	0,519*** (0,133)	0.653*** (0.126)	0,823*** (0,163)	0.900*** (0.139)	0,75*** (0,135)	0.606*** (0.091)
Satisfaction with personnel attention	0,493** (0,159)	0.421*** (0.106)	0,972*** (0,25)	0.561*** (0.160)	0,803*** (0,152)	0.634*** (0.135)	0,567** (0,182)	0.592*** (0.123)	0,602*** (0,128)	0.636*** (0.104)
Procedure efficacy	1,59*** (0,332)	2.043*** (0.262)	0,645 (0,636)	1.562*** (0.443)	1,26** (0,464)	1.182*** (0.419)	1,572*** (0,457)	1.094*** (0.399)	0,616 (0,362)	1.232*** (0.263)
Any inconformity with the procedure	-2,047*** (0,387)	-1.289*** (0.277)	-1,166 (0,653)	-0.621* (0.345)	-1,494** (0,457)	-1.074** (0.456)	-0,834 (0,441)	-0.781* (0.437)	-1,499*** (0,282)	-1.253*** (0.216)
Socio-demographic status	-0,257 (0,161)	0.094 (0.117)	0,01 (0,252)	0.004 (0.142)	0,305 (0,187)	-0.511*** (0.152)	-0,047 (0,154)	0.243* (0.134)	0,222 (0,12)	0.080 (0.091)
Education level of the head of household	0,011 (0,13)	0.099 (0.100)	-0,125 (0,209)	-0.013 (0.099)	-0,22 (0,182)	0.421*** (0.119)	0,068 (0,133)	-0.035 (0.105)	-0,157 (0,104)	-0.076 (0.085)
Constant	3,368*** (0,801)	0.624 (0.648)	2,278 (1,854)	0.315 (0.698)	0,649 (0,989)	1.624 (1.029)	0,456 (0,846)	-0.026 (0.668)	1,269* (0,644)	0.489 (0.709)
Obs.	148	314	72	140	92	151	150	169	268	489
R ² adjusted	0.782	0.789	0.681	0.890	0.827	0.779	0.824	0.856	0.756	0.761

Robust standard errors in parenthesis

*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05

Table 2. Results of the regression analysis of the quality of bureaucratic procedures (part 4)

	Passport application		Procedures before the public prosecutor's office		Procedures in courts or tribunals		Emergency calls to the police	
	2015	2019	2015	2019	2015	2019	2015	2019
Occurrence of a bribery attempt	0,119 (0,307)	0.036 (0.283)	-0,467* (0,219)	-0.296* (0.166)	-0,023 (0,19)	0.054 (0.145)	-0,076 (0,263)	-0.246 (0.238)
Procedure quality	0,046 (0,048)	0.044 (0.042)	-0,035 (0,051)	-0.040 (0.043)	-0,022 (0,044)	0.058 (0.041)	0,022 (0,08)	0.155 (0.123)
Satisfaction with time of completion	0,562*** (0,103)	0.718*** (0.119)	0,718*** (0,131)	0.725*** (0.104)	0,499*** (0,124)	0.677*** (0.122)	0,47*** (0,082)	0.399*** (0.078)
Satisfaction with personnel attention	1,083*** (0,112)	0.740*** (0.144)	0,556*** (0,128)	0.696*** (0.098)	1,015*** (0,129)	0.896*** (0.109)	0,617*** (0,08)	0.687*** (0.076)
Procedure efficacy	0,457 (0,964)	0.190 (0.321)	0,672* (0,27)	1.012*** (0.216)	0,812* (0,344)	0.802*** (0.230)	1,599*** (0,216)	1.822*** (0.192)
Any inconformity with the procedure	-0,444 (0,269)	-0.612* (0.340)	-1,556*** (0,343)	-0.967*** (0.244)	-0,943** (0,296)	-0.423* (0.249)	-1,712*** (0,222)	-1.530*** (0.165)
Socio-demographic status	-0,125 (0,097)	0.261** (0.116)	-0,01 (0,15)	-0.130 (0.112)	0,019 (0,134)	-0.115 (0.093)	-0,009 (0,101)	-0.013 (0.077)
Education level of the head of household	0,137 (0,108)	-0.211** (0.087)	0,012 (0,108)	0.203** (0.092)	0,09 (0,104)	-0.079 (0.092)	-0,048 (0,083)	0.116** (0.059)
Constant	1,102 (0,854)	1.857*** (0.534)	2,973*** (0,828)	1.850*** (0.548)	1,412** (0,533)	1.098* (0.596)	2,09** (0,724)	0.062 (1.302)
Obs.	211	253	280	425	204	298	593	1144
R ² adjusted	0.751	0.715	0.776	0.762	0.835	0.851	0.753	0.749

Robust standard errors in parenthesis

*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05

Figure 1. Standardized effect of every variable in the model on users' rating of procedures before the public prosecutor's office in 2015

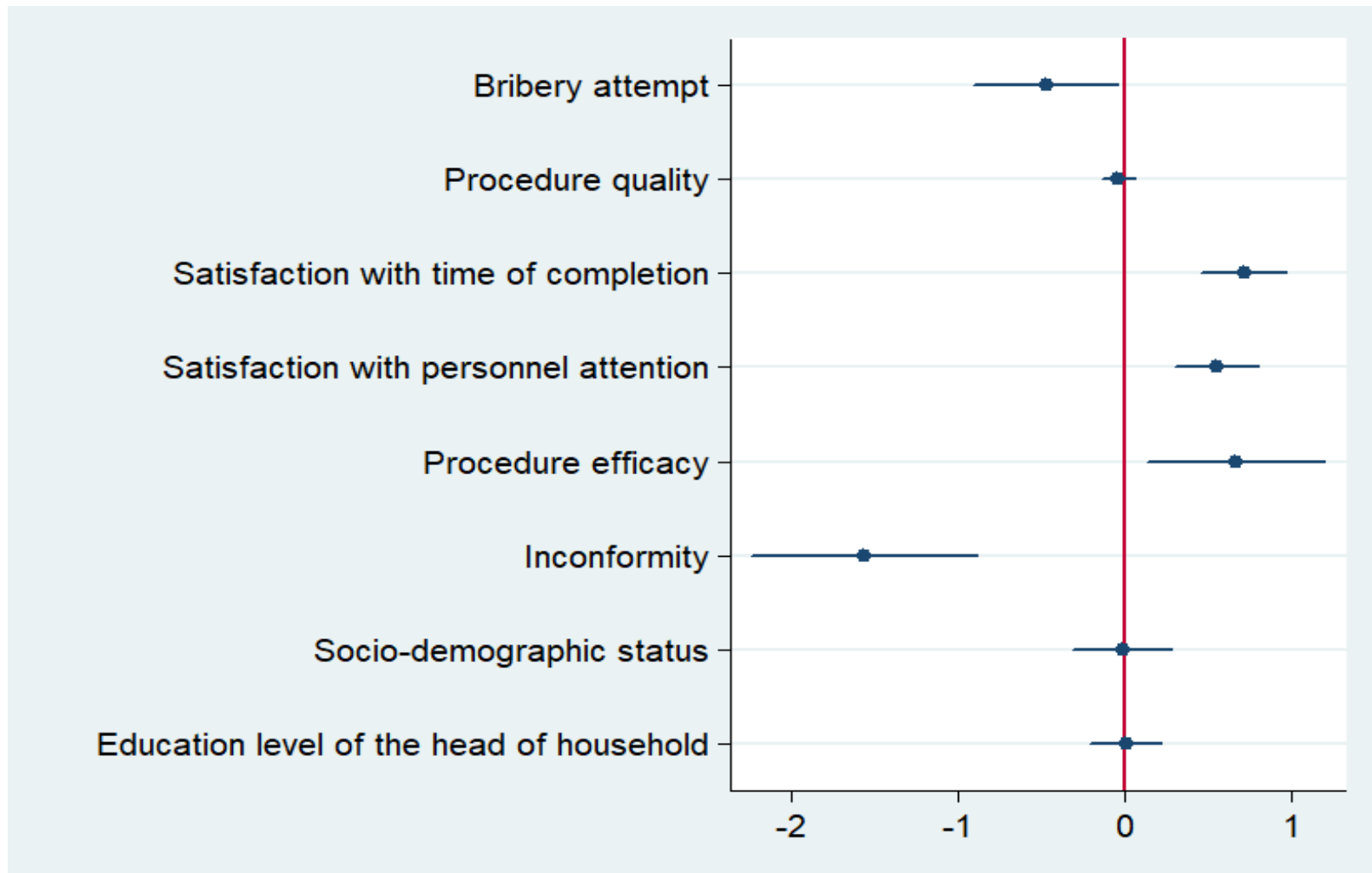


Table 3. Regression results when the sample is restricted to users that were bribed (part 1)

	Payment of the electricity bill		Payment of water service		Payment of vehicle ownership tax		Motor vehicle procedures		Scheduling of health care services	
	2015	2019	2015	2019	2015	2019	2015	2019	2015	2019
The user rejected to pay the bribe (1 yes, 0 no)	0.427 (0.547)	-0.995 (0.577)	-0.141 (0.345)	-0.190 (0.350)	0.248 (0.224)	-0.132 (0.254)	-0.078 (0.088)	0.077 (0.130)	0.154 (0.279)	-0.464 (0.371)
Procedure quality	0.218 (0.219)	-0.182 (0.299)	0.035 (0.142)	0.526** (0.218)	0.216** (0.075)	0.011 (0.086)	0.119*** (0.028)	0.100** (0.047)	-0.032 (0.074)	-0.152 (0.099)
Satisfaction with time of completion	0.62 (0.375)	0.767 (0.482)	0.257 (0.195)	0.656** (0.298)	0.362 (0.201)	0.759*** (0.208)	0.642*** (0.062)	0.618*** (0.097)	0.643** (0.231)	0.543** (0.242)
Satisfaction with personnel attention	0.566 (0.345)	1.459*** (0.187)	1.344*** (0.255)	0.523** (0.249)	0.991*** (0.191)	0.747*** (0.184)	0.818*** (0.065)	0.812*** (0.102)	0.956*** (0.24)	0.836*** (0.193)
Procedure efficacy (1 if obtained what was requested, 0 if not)	3.569* (1.603)	2.413 (1.571)	-1.081 (0.944)	-0.402 (1.101)	-0.259 (0.451)	0.767* (0.443)	0.519 (0.466)	0.618* (0.328)	-0.084 (0.423)	0.329 (0.579)
Any inconformity with the procedure (1 yes, 0 no)	-1.502 (0.884)	0.526 (0.475)	-0.76 (0.626)	-0.226 (1.088)	-0.61 (0.387)	-0.460 (0.430)	-0.76*** (0.14)	-1.027*** (0.217)	-1.138* (0.483)	-1.909*** (0.581)
Socio-demographic status (1 to 4)	-0.471 (0.292)	0.626*** (0.196)	0.441* (0.17)	0.419 (0.283)	-0.152 (0.177)	0.001 (0.159)	-0.055 (0.054)	0.087 (0.083)	0.265 (0.205)	0.051 (0.265)
Education level of the head of household	-0.081 (0.47)	-0.716** (0.301)	-0.149 (0.131)	-0.471* (0.252)	0.012 (0.117)	0.203 (0.171)	0.08 (0.048)	0.061 (0.070)	-0.253 (0.197)	-0.109 (0.253)
Constant	-0.931 (2.626)	-1.245 (2.210)	1.84 (1.198)	-1.727 (1.335)	1.209 (0.873)	0.845 (0.836)	0.924 (0.53)	0.667 (0.446)	2.048* (0.927)	3.988*** (1.126)
Obs.	43	29	77	51	173	147	973	479	101	45
R ² adjusted	0.699	0.834	0.789	0.823	0.745	0.735	0.768	0.755	0.807	0.877

Table 3. Regression results when the sample is restricted to users that were bribed (part 1)

	Emergency health care services		Public education procedures		Public registry procedures		Procedures in courts or tribunals		Emergency calls to the police	
	2015	2019	2015	2019	2015	2019	2015	2019	2015	2019
The user rejected to pay the bribe (1 yes, 0 no)	-0.147 (0.386)	-1.083 (1.736)	0.227 (0.314)	0.777** (0.317)	0.319 (0.225)	0.036 (0.203)	-0.361 (0.328)	0.148 (0.208)	-0.395 (0.497)	0.112 (0.293)
Procedure quality	-0.082 (0.104)	-0.500 (0.559)	0.102 (0.108)	-0.078 (0.080)	0.014 (0.058)	0.155*** (0.054)	-0.038 (0.076)	0.036 (0.063)	0.235 (0.403)	-0.568** (0.245)
Satisfaction with time of completion	0.685*** (0.193)	1.500** (0.280)	0.66** (0.218)	0.207 (0.155)	0.58** (0.194)	0.435*** (0.106)	0.753*** (0.218)	0.647*** (0.156)	0.165 (0.156)	0.656*** (0.161)
Satisfaction with personnel attention	0.985*** (0.197)	0.333 (1.790)	0.662** (0.204)	1.146*** (0.229)	0.809*** (0.174)	0.994*** (0.160)	0.714*** (0.204)	0.840*** (0.138)	0.434* (0.215)	1.269*** (0.178)
Procedure efficacy (1 if obtained what was requested, 0 if not)	0.695 (0.502)	0.000 .	1.131 (1.421)	1.391* (0.725)	1.542** (0.477)	0.482 (0.368)	1.233* (0.521)	1.465*** (0.383)	3.215*** (0.926)	0.179 (0.260)
Any inconformity with the procedure (1 yes, 0 no)	-0.294 (0.52)	-1.833 (2.615)	-0.797 (0.503)	-1.113** (0.536)	-0.913** (0.329)	-0.865** (0.329)	-0.824 (0.489)	-0.420 (0.359)	-1.627* (0.722)	-0.731*** (0.193)
Socio-demographic status (1 to 4)	-0.124 (0.249)	0.667 (1.667)	-0.024 (0.177)	0.120 (0.270)	0.013 (0.146)	0.019 (0.132)	-0.097 (0.323)	-0.051 (0.155)	-0.641 (0.396)	0.153 (0.188)
Education level of the head of household	-0.358 (0.213)	0.667 (3.173)	-0.182 (0.174)	-0.037 (0.221)	0.129 (0.133)	0.176 (0.110)	0.048 (0.181)	-0.079 (0.139)	0.417 (0.308)	0.227 (0.148)
Constant	2.839 (1.59)	3.500 (10.496)	1.16 (1.731)	1.586 (1.010)	0.712 (0.835)	0.235 (0.429)	1.88 (0.948)	0.793 (0.939)	1.667 (3.238)	5.731** (2.414)
Obs.	53	10	123	85	123	125	80	111	54	29
R ² adjusted	0.858	0.776	0.636	0.776	0.791	0.884	0.821	0.865	0.763	0.969

Appendix. Survey questions used in the regression model

Wording in Spanish	Wording in English (authors' translation)
Para realizar o para agilizar, aprobar o evitar alguno de esos trámites o servicios que usted mencionó ¿un servidor público o empleado del gobierno le insinuó o generó las condiciones para que le proporcionara dinero, un regalo o favor para su persona, durante 2015? Sí No No sabe /no responde	To carry out or to speed up, approve or avoid any of those procedures or services that you mentioned, did a public servant or government employee insinuate or create the conditions for you to provide money, a gift, or favor for yourself, during 2015? Yes No Doesn't know / did not answer
¿Enfrentó alguno de los siguientes problemas para realizar el pago o trámite? Sí No No aplica No sabe / no responde	Did you face any of the following problems to make the payment or procedure? Yes No Not applicable Does not know / does not answer
El tiempo para llevar a cabo un trámite o pago debe ser razonable acorde con la dificultad del proceso. ¿Cómo se siente con respecto al tiempo que usted invirtió para realizar el trámite o pago? 1 Muy satisfecho 2 Satisfecho 3 Algo satisfecho 4 Algo insatisfecho 5 Insatisfecho 6 Muy insatisfecho 9 No sabe / no responde	The time to carry out a procedure or payment must be reasonable in accordance with the difficulty of the process it takes to complete. How do you feel about the time you invested to carry out the procedure or payment? 1 Very satisfied 2 Satisfied 3 Somewhat satisfied 4 Somewhat unsatisfied 5 Dissatisfied 6 Very dissatisfied 9 Does not know / does not answer
El trato a recibir por parte del personal debe ser amable, eficiente y con disposición a orientarle. ¿En general, cómo se siente respecto al trato recibido? 1 Muy satisfecho 2 Satisfecho 3 Algo satisfecho 4 Algo insatisfecho 5 Insatisfecho 6 Muy insatisfecho 9 No sabe / no responde	Staff should be friendly, efficient, and willing to guide you. In general, how do you feel about the attention you received from the staff? 1 Very satisfied 2 Satisfied 3 Somewhat satisfied 4 Somewhat unsatisfied 5 Dissatisfied 6 Very dissatisfied 9 Does not know / does not answer
¿Obtuvo lo que requería del trámite o pago conforme a sus necesidades? Sí No No se ha podido concluir el trámite o pago	Did you obtain what you required from the procedure or payment according to your needs? Yes No The procedure or payment has not been completed yet.
¿Algo le inconformó en la atención o resultado del trámite o pago que realizó? Sí	Did you feel dissatisfied with the service or the result of the procedure or payment you made? Yes

No	No
¿Hasta qué año o grado aprobó el jefe de hogar en la escuela?	What is the schooling level of the head of the household?
Ninguno	None
Preescolar	Preschool
Primaria	Elementary
Secundaria	Middle school
Carrera técnica con secundaria terminada	Technical degree with middle school completed
Normal básica	Basic normal school
Preparatoria o bachillerato	High school
Carrera técnica con preparatoria terminada	Technical degree with high school finished
Licenciatura o profesional	Bachelor or professional
Maestría o doctorado	Master's degree or doctorate
List of procedures included	
El pago ordinario del servicio de luz	Payment of the electricity bill
El pago ordinario del servicio de agua potable	Payment of the water bill
El pago de predial	Payment of the property tax
El pago de tenencia o impuesto vehicular.	Payment of the tax on vehicle ownership
Trámites vehiculares como verificación de contaminantes, refrendo, licencia de manejo, cambio de propietario, reemplacamiento, revista vehicular, etcétera.	Vehicle procedures such as verification of polluting emissions, endorsement, driver's license, change of owner, new plates, vehicle inspection, etc.
Trámites fiscales tales como declaración de impuestos ante el SAT o Secretaría de Hacienda, inscripción al RFC o trámites de aduana para importación de bienes.	Tax procedures such as tax declaration before the federal tax administration, registration to the taxpayer registry, customs procedures for importing goods.
Citas o acudió a servicio de atención médica programada en hospitales públicos y clínicas del IMSS, ISSSTE o del gobierno de su Estado.	Medical appointments or attended scheduled healthcare services social security or government hospitals and clinics.
Solicitudes de atención médica de urgencia en hospitales públicos del IMSS, ISSSTE o en hospitales del gobierno de su Estado.	Requests for urgent medical attention in social security or government hospitals.
Solicitudes de trámites de educación pública (primaria, secundaria, bachillerato) tales como inscripción, becas educativas, cambio de escuela, baja escolar, certificados, calificaciones.	Requests for public education procedures (elementary, middle school, high school) such as registration, educational scholarships, change of school, school withdrawal, certificates, grades.
Trámites en el Registro Civil tales como actas de nacimiento, defunción, matrimonio o divorcio.	Procedures in the civil registry such as birth, death, marriage or divorce certificates.
Solicitudes de servicios municipales tales como pavimentación, reparación de calles, alumbrado público, mantenimiento, parques y jardines o pipas de agua potable.	Requests for municipal services such as paving, street repairs, public lighting, maintenance, parks, gardens or water pipes.
Trámites locales como permisos para vender en la vía pública, conexión o regulación del servicio de agua potable y drenaje.	Local procedures such as permits to sell on public roads, connection or regulation of water provision and drainage.
Trámites para obtener permisos de uso de suelo, de demolición o de construcción, solicitud de constancias de libertad de gravamen u otros trámites en el Registro Público de la Propiedad.	Procedures to obtain permits for land use, demolition or construction, request for evidence of freedom from encumbrance or other procedures in the property registry.
Trámites de créditos para la adquisición de viviendas como INFONAVIT o FOVISSSTE o fue beneficiario de programas sociales como PROSPERA, Estancias Infantiles para apoyar a madres trabajadoras, seguro de vida para jefas de	Credit procedures for the purchase of houses or regarding social programs benefits.

familia, pensión para adultos mayores, abasto de leche/ LICONSA, entre otros.	
Trámites de conexión, reconexión o asistencia en fallas técnicas de energía eléctrica por personal de CFE.	Procedures for connection, reconnection, or assistance regarding electrical energy failures.
El trámite de pasaporte en oficinas de la Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores.	Passport processing.
Trámites ante el Ministerio Público para iniciar una averiguación previa o conseguir que se dé seguimiento a un caso.	Procedures before the public prosecutor's office to initiate a preliminary investigation or follow up on a case.
Trámites en un juzgado o tribunal por conflictos legales de tipo familiar, laboral, penal, etcétera.	Proceedings in a court or tribunal regarding family, labor or criminal conflicts.
Alguna llamada telefónica de emergencia para que la policía atendiera alguna situación de seguridad pública.	Emergency calls to the police to attend a public security situation.
Contacto con policías u otras autoridades de seguridad pública por incidentes de tránsito, infracciones, detenciones por riñas, faltas a la moral o administrativas.	Contact the police or other public security authorities to report traffic incidents, infractions, arrests due to fights, moral or administrative offenses.

Source: author's translation to English based on NSGQI's questionnaire (INEGI 2015, 2019)