To what extent does corruption erode trust? evidence of reputational spillovers from ten countries in the Southern African development community

Sergio Fernandez [a,b,*], Lianne P Malan [b], Natasja Holtzhausen [b] and Michel M Tshiyoyo [b]

[a]O'Neill School of Public and Environmental Affairs, Indiana University Bloomington, USA;

[b]School of Public Management and Administration, University of Pretoria, South Africa

*CONTACT Sergio Fernandez. Email: sefernan@indiana.edu

Abstract

Emerging research indicates political corruption erodes political trust. However, previous studies have not adequately explored the question of whether corruption by a policy actor can spill over to influence trust in other policy actors. We draw insight from research and theory on collective reputation of organisations among other literature to explain why political corruption can produce reputational spillovers. Using individual-level Afrobarometer survey data from ten countries in the Southern African Development Community, one of the world's corruption hotspots, the analysis reveals perceived involvement in corruption by a policy actor can spill over to tarnish the reputation of other actors involved in the policy process. State and nonstate policy actors like politicians, judges, bureaucrats and traditional leaders in some measure share a collective reputation and fate. We offer suggestions on how to combat corruption in ways that minimise spillovers and safeguard a shared reputation.

Keywords: Corruption; trust; reputation; spillovers; Southern Africa

Building and sustaining political trust has become a difficult challenge. Political trust refers to citizens' judgements about the trustworthiness of state and nonstate actors, organisations, and institutions involved in the policy process (Citrin & Stoker, 2018). Public opinion surveys reveal declining trust globally. The US has experienced nearly 50 years of declining trust in national government, while data from the World Values Survey show declining trust in national legislatures throughout the world since 1981 (Citrin & Stoker, 2018). Recently, the Organization for Co-operation and Development (2020) reported that trust in many member states is deteriorating, with only 43% of citizens saying that they trust their government. The importance of political trust for governance makes this an alarming trend, since trust fosters political participation and support for policies (Citrin & Stoker, 2018), induces compliance and coproduction (Marien & Hooghe, 2011; Scholz & Lubell, 1998), and contributes to stronger institutions, peace and economic development (Citrin & Stoker, 2018). Research has identified a variety of factors affecting political trust, including personality; social identity; political preferences; attitudes towards incumbents; and the behaviour and performance of public actors and institutions (Citrin & Stoker, 2018; Hetherington & Rudolph, 2015).

New Public Management reforms were adopted partly over concerns about declining trust in government. Policymakers introduced a bevy of innovations to improve performance under the assumption that this would increase satisfaction and build trust (Bouckaert & Van de Walle, 2003; Lapuente & Van de Walle, 2020; Vigoda-gadot & Yuval, 2003). Some experts have

questioned this claim, arguing that the relationship between performance and trust is simultaneous (Bouckaert & Van de Walle, 2003). Still, others maintain administrative processes and procedures explain trust better than policy outcomes (Van Ryzin, 2011). These misgivings notwithstanding, studies point to governmental performance being a predictor of political trust (Marlowe, 2004; Vigoda-gadot & Yuval, 2003; Yang & Holzer, 2006; Mizrahi, et al., 2009).

Similarly, a growing body of evidence suggests that political corruption erodes political trust (Anderson & Tverdova, 2003; Chang & Chu, 2006; Hakhverdian & Mayne, 2012; Marlowe, 2004; Pellegata & Memoli, 2016; Seligson, 2002; Zhang & Kim, 2018). Even though conceptualisations of political corruption abound (Lancaster & Montinola, 2001), Gans-Morse et al. (2018) note that most refer to "misuse of public office, authority, or resources for private gain" (p. 172), a broad definition encompassing activities and behaviour like bribery, embezzlement, diversion of funds and property, trading in influence, nepotism and fraud. Political corruption's adverse effects on society and the economy include declining legitimacy of government; reduced rates of investment and growth; greater poverty and inequality; and declining health and education (Dimant & Tosato, 2018; Rose-Ackerman & Palifka, 2016). Corruption can also erode confidence in the rule of law, foster bureaucratic inefficiencies and increase public debt and spending (Liu et al., 2017; Moldogaziev & Liu, 2021).

While there is plausible evidence of a link between corruption and trust, insufficient attention has been given to the direction of causality (Babos, 2015; Chang & Chu, 2006). Moreover, researchers have not adequately explored the disturbing possibility that involvement in corruption by one policy actor can spill over to influence trust in others. This is largely the result of researchers' reliance on aggregated measures of political corruption, like summated rating scales comprised of items measuring experts' and organisations' perceptions of general corruption (Anderson & Tverdova, 2003; Hakhverdian & Mayne, 2012) or items measuring perceived involvement in corruption by various actors (Seligson, 2002). Such measures tell of the spread of corruption across the public sector (Pellegata & Memoli, 2016). However, by summing or averaging corruption scores across a set of actor-specific indicators, aggregated measures of political corruption can hide significant underlying variability across actors and levels of government (Lancaster & Montinola, 2001). Notable exceptions include Pellegata and Memoli (2016), who measured perceived corruption at different levels of government (see also Marlowe, 2004). When it comes to measuring political trust, most studies likewise use summated rating scales of general trust created from survey items capturing trust in different actors (Seligson, 2002; Chang & Chu, 2006; Hakhverdian & Mayne, 2012; for an exception, see Anderson & Tverdova, 2003).

This study explores the question of whether perceived involvement in corruption by a policy actor can influence trust in policy actors other than the offender, what we consider to be a reputational spillover. We conceive of policy actors as state (e.g., politicians, judges and bureaucrats) and nonstate (e.g., traditional and religious leaders) actors, organisations, and institutions involved in formulating and/or implementing public policies. Not only is there a paucity of more granular research on how the behaviour of a policy actor can influence attitudes towards other policy actors (e.g., Marlowe, 2004; Pellegata & Memoli, 2016), the literature offers little in the way of theorising about how such reputational spillovers can occur. We begin, therefore, by developing a theoretical explanation for why corrupt behaviour can not only influence trust in the offender but in others involved in the policy process. For this, we turn to the organisation theory literature on collective reputation of organisations (Tirole 1996; Barnett & King, 2008; Kang, 2008; King et al., 2002) and others like the literature in social

psychology on entitative groups (Campbell, 1958; Crawford et al., 2002; Hamilton & Sherman, 1996; McConnell et al., 1997), those groups characterised by close proximity, a high degree of similarity, coordinated movement and/or common fate (Campbell, 1958). Regression analysis of individual-level Afrobarometer survey data from ten countries in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) then explores if perceived involvement in corruption by various state and nonstate actors is negatively related to trust in the offending actor as well as in trust in other policy actors. As we will argue, the SADC region is a promising research setting due to disconcerting levels of corruption and the range of initiatives launched to combat it. Also, being sensitive to the cultural embeddedness of corruption and wishing to mitigate Western biases concerning corruption and governance in Africa, we rely on survey data collected by and from Africans. The findings, which add to the growing body of research on the antecedents and the consequences of trust and corruption by political scientists, economists and public administration scholars, reveal perceived involvement in corruption does produce reputational spillovers that can be substantial in magnitude. We conclude by discussing the policy and management implications of our findings, including the need for a more deliberate and comprehensive strategy to fighting corruption to ensure probity on the part of all actors and avoid collective sanctions resulting from a single offender's action.

A theoretical explanation for reputational spillovers

Citizens tend to generalise attitudes towards government (Bouckaert & Van de Walle, 2003; Vigoda-gadot & Yuval, 2003; Yang & Holzer, 2006). This happens when they draw a general conclusion about the government without differentiating between policy actors (Bouckaert & Van de Walle, 2003). This general conclusion then shapes perceptions of all or most policy actors, regardless of their actual behaviour. Another form of generalisation is the reputational spillover, referring to when perceptions of an actor, including its behaviour, influence attitudes towards other actors. Studies have found a link between perceptions of government at the national level and of regional and local governments (Beeri & Navot, 2013; Glaser & Denhardt, 2000); confidence in the executive and legislative branches and in public administrators (Marlowe, 2004); and corruption at different levels of government (Pellegata & Memoli, 2016). However, the literature on political corruption is yet to provide an adequate theoretical explanation for why corrupt behaviour by one policy actor can spill over to influence attitudes towards others. As a result, we must turn to other literature for an explanation.

Research on the collective reputation of organisations offers insight into why such reputational spillovers can occur in relation to political corruption. Organisational reputation may be thought of as a set of judgements and assessments individuals make about an organisation that give it a distinct identity (Barnett et al., 2006; Carpenter & Krause, 2012). Like trust, reputation is an attitudinal concept but broader in scope, comprising various judgements and assessments of organisational performance, including but not limited to capability, profitability, quality, consistency, probity and innovativeness. Firms doing business together can affect each other's reputations through their actions (Tirole 1996; Barnett & King, 2008; Kang, 2008; King et al., 2002). Industrial accidents can tarnish the reputation of entire industries (Barnett & King, 2008). Managers also consider how outsourcing might impact their organisation's reputation. As the potential for transactions to adversely affect an organisation's reputation increases, the probability of outsourcing declines (Mayer, 2006; Nickerson & Silverman, 2003). Firms can even experience positive spillovers when rivals experience crises (Paruchuri et al., 2019).

The reputation of public organisations is a valuable asset public managers use to generate authority and autonomy, gain human and financial resources and protect the organisation from

external threats and criticism (Carpenter & Krause, 2012). Public managers pursue various strategies to manage their reputation, including gathering and analysing evidence to reduce the risk of making bad policy choices (Carpenter (2002)) and shifting blame to other actors when decisions have adverse consequences (Gilad et al., 2015; Moffitt, 2010). They also try to enhance their reputation by emulating the structures and practices of agencies with high public standing (Carpenter & Krause, 2012; Maor, 2007) and engaging in strategic communication to shape stakeholder impressions (Maor et al., 2013). Research indicates that like their private sector counterparts, public managers are also concerned about the possibility of reputational spillovers and seek to mitigate their impact. Carpenter and Krause (2012) point to the "bad apple" effect when maleficence by one agency ends up tarnishing the reputation of related ones. Moffitt (2010) suggests that when agencies are concerned that partnering agencies may botch implementation, they are more likely to increase public participation and pursue publicity to ensure stakeholders become aware of distributed responsibilities and can identify and attribute blame to the culprit.

There are three main reasons why reputational spillovers occur, the first one pertaining to the need to reduce uncertainty to hold organisations accountable. Improper behaviour by organisations can create uncertainty about the motives of managers and soundness of their business practices. When it comes to accountability, stakeholders are at a disadvantage since they imperfectly observe the decisions and actions of managers (Tirole 1996; Barnett & King, 2008; Kang, 2008). To reduce uncertainty, therefore, they augment what is often noisy information obtained directly from the organisation with information from other available sources like related organisations and the media. Organisations try to shape media coverage to create a positive reputation for themselves (Pfarrer et al., 2010; Rindova et al., 2007). However, media reporting can also give rise to and sustain reputational spillovers. Press coverage of organisational failures makes the events cognitively available to stakeholders and can transfer them onto related organisations (Paruchuri et al., 2019). To reduce uncertainty, stakeholders also draw on general impressions of an industry and develop similar schema of its members given their close interactions and similar dispositions and responses to events (Yu & Lester 2008), thereby producing reputational spillovers across an entire industry.

The opportunity to economise on transaction costs has been offered as another reason why reputational spillovers occur (Barnett & King, 2008; Kang, 2008; King et al., 2002). Organisations have multiple external constituencies that provide vital resources and support but exert influence over organisations and make demands of them. When one or more industry members produce a negative externality, the information stakeholders need to identify and hold the offender accountable may be very difficult and costly to gather (Kang, 2008). For instance, several firms may be involved in dumping hazardous material, but it may be prohibitively expensive for government to estimate each offender's share of the harm caused and sanction them proportionately (King et al., 2002). Unable to distinguish between the actions of industry members and properly attribute blame, stakeholders impose collective sanctions on an entire industry, causing all members to experience shared pain and a similar fate (Barnett & King, 2008). It is also the case that imposing collective sanctions through a single common response impacting an entire industry is more efficient than tailoring responses to individual members.

Research in social psychology on how individuals process information about entitative groups suggests a third explanation for reputational spillovers. Entitativity refers to the perception that a group of individuals forms a single entity with its own identity (Campbell, 1958). People process information and develop impressions of highly entitative groups like they do of individuals (Crawford et al., 2002; Hamilton & Sherman, 1996; McConnell et al., 1997). As

Hamilton and Sherman (1996) explain, when people perceive an individual, they generally assume the person to be a coherent entity with a unified personality who acts in a consistent fashion. When they perceive the person, they draw spontaneous inferences about the person's underlying core dispositional properties, looking for consistencies in behaviour to develop a stable and integrated impression of the person. In contrast to individuals, groups typically are not considered to be unified entities whose members are assumed to behave consistently. Information about group members is stored independently and not in a manner that produces a coherent impression of the group. Highly entitative groups are the exception, with research showing people perceive and form impressions of them and their members much like they do of individuals (Hamilton & Sherman, 1996; McConnell et al., 1997). Studies reveal that highly entitative groups are treated as a set of interchangeable parts and that transference of impressions occurs from one group member to another, eventually leading to a group stereotype (Crawford et al., 2002; McConnell et al., 1997). Subsequent impressions and judgements of group members are influenced by each other's behaviour as well by this stereotype.

While the foregoing discussion focused primarily on firms, the same logic can be applied to state and nonstate actors involved in policymaking. Legislators, chief executives and judges play corresponding and overlapping roles in formulating and enforcing public policies. This intertwining of roles becomes even more pronounced in a parliamentary form of government where legislatures bestow on chief executives their position and authority. In the SADC region, traditional leaders as nonstate actors have historically played functionally equivalent roles to those of legislators, executives and judges by enforcing laws, adjudicating disputes and collecting taxes (Dusing, 2002). Additionally, the complementarity of politics and administration has been well established. Complementarity entails separate actors – politicians and bureaucrats – playing mutually supporting roles in the shared pursuit of sound governance (Svara, 1999). Bureaucrats cooperate with and support politicians in accomplishing their goals and shape those goals through expertise and administrative discretion. While politicians have the authority to formulate policy and marshal resources, they rely on bureaucrats to implement public programmes, resulting in a pattern of reciprocal influence. In short, due to their shared pursuit of policy objectives, complementary roles, and frequent and rich interactions, state and nonstate actors involved in the policy process can be viewed as members of an entitative group and influence each other's reputations through their actions. Now, we have arrived at our hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1. Perceived involvement in corruption by a policy actor will be negatively related to trust in that same actor, the offender.

Hypothesis 2. Perceived involvement in corruption by a policy actor will be negatively related to trust in policy actors other than the offender.

The Southern African Development Community

Political corruption has become a major concern in the Southern African Development Community (SADC). Established in 1992, SADC is an international intergovernmental organisation with 16 member states in Southern Africa and a population of approximately 350 million inhabitants. Its objectives include achieving development, peace and security; promoting economic growth; alleviating poverty; facilitating regional integration; and strengthening democracy. In recent years, the region has gained notoriety for alarming levels of corruption. Transparency International (2022) identified it as one of the world's most corrupt

regions, with more than two-thirds of member states having above average levels of corruption. In an effort to combat corruption, member states have signed the African Union Convention on Preventing and Combatting Corruption and the SADC Protocol Against Corruption, requiring governments to monitor, investigate, prosecute and recover lost assets resulting from acts of corruption. All member states also have policies regarding ethical and criminal conduct, procurement, financial management and asset disposal to reduce corruption, as well as public agencies dedicated to ensuring accountability and fighting corruption (Chitakunye et al., 2015; Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa, 2017). However, scattered evidence suggests many of these agencies suffer from lack of independence, poor funding, inadequate staffing, deficiencies in skills and weak commitment to investigating and prosecuting corruption cases (OSISA, 2017; Transparency International, 2022).

Researchers refer to the cultural embeddedness of corruption, or how understanding of corruption is influenced by the social and cultural context. The apparent pervasiveness and serious consequences of corruption have figured prominently in scholarly research on Africa (Mbaku 2010). However, corruption can be difficult to assess through Western eyes since African cultural logics of negotiation, gift giving and group solidarity can be confused for practices considered corrupt in the West (De Sardan, 1999). The narrative concerning corruption in Africa has been shaped significantly by Westerners, who see corruption as a pathological condition endemic to the continent even though it exists in all societies (Apata, 2019). Akpome (2021) argues central to this narrative is the perceived inability of Africans to rule themselves and hence the need for ongoing tutelage and support from the West. He warns against uncritically using measures of corruption developed by Western organisations like Transparency International and the World Bank to assess corruption in Africa. Our empirical analysis is sensitive to these concerns, relying on Afrobarometer survey data collected by African researchers and from African citizens, in their own languages, rather than on data from experts outside the region. Moreover, we focus on countries in Southern Africa with similar values and norms that have promulgated policies to arrive at a common understanding of political corruption.

One advantage to studying the influence of corruption on trust in the SADC region is that member states have cultural and ethnic affinities and similar histories, thereby minimising variation among social and historical factors related to both trust and corruption. And yet, even within this single region, there is significant variation in levels of trust in various policy actors and in perceptions of their involvement in corruption, the main variables of interest. For instance, average trust in the president is more than twice as high in Namibia than in South Africa, while average trust in the police is nearly 50% higher in Lesotho than in Madagascar. Average perceived involvement in corruption by the president is nearly twice as high in South Africa as in Tanzania, while average perceived involvement in corruption by the tax department is 60% higher in Zimbabwe than in Botswana. In addition, Table 1 shows significant heterogeneity at the country level, ranging from sparsely populated countries to some of the most populous ones in Africa and from some of the poorest countries on the continent to some of the wealthiest ones. Importantly, the countries differ in regard to political and administrative factors. Our sample includes democracies and authoritarian regimes, countries with relatively strong and weak rule of law, and those with bureaucracies resembling the Weberian ideal of a politically neutral, merit-based public service along with those with politicised, patronage-riven bureaucracies. Finally, the countries seem to vary in the robustness of their national anti-corruption policies.

Table 1. Comparison of SADC Member States.

Country	Population[1]	GDP Per Capita (PPP)[1]	Form of Government[1]	Unitary or Federal Structure of Government[1]	Democracy Index[2]	Rule of Law[3]	Professional Bureaucracy[4]	Anti-Corruption Policies[3]	Freedom of the Press[5]
Botswana	2,182,719	$16,000	Parliamentary	Unitary	7.6 (Flawed democracy)	65.9	88	7	77
Eswatini	1,435,613	$7,800	Absolute monarchy	Unitary	3.1 (Authoritarian)	33.2	38	N/A	53
Lesotho	1,947,701	$2,800	Parliamentary	Unitary	6.3 (Flawed democracy)	35.6	13	4	72
Madagascar	23,812,681	$1,400	Semi-presidential	Unitary	5.7 (Hybrid regime)	19.7	13	4	73
Mozambique	25,303,113	$1,200	Presidential	Unitary	3.1 (Authoritarian)	15.4	0	3	70
Namibia	2,212,307	$10,800	Presidential	Unitary	6.5 (Flawed democracy)	62.5	63	6	88
South Africa	53,675,563	$13,000	Parliamentary	Federal (quasi)	7.1 (Flawed democracy)	49.5	50	5	78
Tanzania	51,045,882	$2,700	Presidential	Federal (quasi)	5.1 (Hybrid regime)	29.3	38	4	72
Zambia	15,066,266	$4,100	Presidential	Unitary	4.9 (Hybrid regime)	28.9	38	3	66
Zimbabwe	14,229,541	$2,000	Presidential	Unitary	3.2 (Authoritarian)	7.7	25	2	61

[a]Central Intelligence Agency (2022); [2]Economist Intelligence Unit (2022); [3]World Bank (2022); [4]Global Integrity (2022); and [5]Reporters Without Borders (2022).

Methodology

Afrobarometer data from Round 6 (2014–2015) are used to explore the relationship between perceived involvement in corruption and political trust. The Afrobarometer is a cross-national survey designed to understand Africans' values and attitudes regarding a variety of issues, including politics, work, family, culture, religion and wellbeing. The survey is administered by researchers in each country who draw a probability sample for their country and carefully train staff to collect data through face-to-face interviews supplemented by telephone interviews. Interviewers are supervised by team leaders to ensure data accuracy.

Twelve of the sixteen SADC member states, representing approximately 70% of the region's population, participated in Afrobarometer, Round 6: Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe; Angola, Comoros, Democratic Republic of the Congo and Seychelles did not participate. Mauritius and Malawi were not included in the study due to missing data on questions used to construct our variables.

The dependent variables are a series of indicators of trust in eight state and nonstate policy actors: *trust in president*, *trust in parliament*, *trust in local government council*, *trust in tax department*, *trust in police*, *trust in courts*, *trust in traditional leaders* and *trust in religious leaders*. Each is measured using a single four-point ordinal survey item. Table 2 provides the measures and descriptive statistics and Table 3 provides a correlation matrix of the independent and control variables. The main independent variables represent perceived involvement in corruption by these same eight actors: *corruption by presidency*, *corruption by parliament*, *corruption by local government councilors*, *corruption by tax officials*, *corruption by police*, *corruption by judges*, *corruption by traditional leaders* and *corruption by religious leaders*. These are perceptual measures that do not directly capture acts of corruption. The response scale for the independent variables is somewhat unusual in that the highest and lowest responses signify no one associated with an institution being involved in corruption and everyone involved in corruption, respectfully, situations that in reality are unlikely to occur. However, the response scale is suitable as an ordinal measure of perceptions of involvement in corruption.

To minimise omitted variable bias, the analysis controls for 16 factors that can influence both trust and perceived involvement in corruption, beginning with a set of demographic indicators: *black*, *female*, *employed*, *public employee* (past or present), *education* and *age*. The models also control for a variety of citizen attitudes, including perceived general trend in corruption over the past year (*corruption trend*), economic wellbeing (*economic wellbeing*), perceived safety and freedom (*safe living environment* and *political freedom*), and perceived political intimidation (*fear of political intimidation*). In addition, the analysis controls for level of political participation (*political participation)* and various forms of political satisfaction, including with the country (*satisfaction with direction of country*), the political system (*satisfaction with democratic system*), and the government (*satisfaction with the current government*, *perception that leaders serve people*, *responsive parliament* and *responsive local government*). All of these variables are measured using either a single dichotomous or ordinal survey item or a summated rating scale created out of two or more ordinal survey items.

Table 2. Variables, Measures and Descriptive Statistics.

Variable	Measure	Mean	Stand. Dev.	Min.	Max.
trust in president	*Single item*. "How much do you trust each of the following": (a) president, (b) parliament/ national assembly, (c) your elected local government council, (d) tax department, (e) police, (f) courts of law, (g) traditional leaders and (h) religious leaders. Responses: 0 = Not at all to 3 = A lot.	1.70	1.17	0	3
trust in parliament		1.63	1.08	0	3
trust in local government council		1.60	1.06	0	3
trust in tax department		1.67	1.05	0	3
trust in police		1.60	1.10	0	3
trust in courts		1.82	1.04	0	3
trust in traditional leaders		1.95	1.06	0	3
trust in religious leaders		2.18	0.98	0	3
corruption by president	*Single item*. "How many of the following people do you think are involved in corruption, or haven't you heard enough about them to say" (a) office of the presidency, (b) members of parliament, (c) local government councilors, (d) tax officials, (e) police, (f) judges and magistrates, (g) traditional leaders and (h) religious leaders. Responses: 0 = None to 3 = All of them.	1.24	0.88	0	3
corruption by parliament		1.28	0.79	0	3
corruption by local government councilors		1.28	0.79	0	3
corruption by tax officials		1.30	0.82	0	3
corruption by police		1.53	0.83	0	3
corruption by judges		1.20	0.82	0	3
corruption by traditional leaders		0.99	0.84	0	3
corruption by religious leaders		0.99	0.84	0	3
black	*Single item*. 1 = black	0.98	0.12	0	1
female	*Single item*. 1 = female	0.51	0.50	0	1
public	*Single item*. 1 = public employee (past or present)	0.10	0.77	0	1
education	*Single item*. "What is your highest level of education?" Responses: 0 = No formal schooling to 9 = Postgraduate.	3.65	1.92	0	9
age	*Single item*. In years	37.87	15.09	18	103
employed	*Single item*. 1 = currently employed	0.39	0.49	0	1
corruption trend	*Single item*. "In your opinion, over the past year, has the level of corruption in this country increased, decreased, or stayed the same?" Responses: 1 = Decreased a lot to 5 = Increased a lot.	2.05	1.20	1	5
economic wellbeing	*Summated rating scale, five items (alpha 0.77)*. "Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family?" (a) gone without enough food to eat, (b) gone without enough clean water for home use, (c) gone without medicines or medical treatment, (d) gone without enough fuel to cook your food and (e) gone without a cash income. Responses: 0 = Always to 4 = Never.	5.55	4.53	0	20
satisfaction with direction of country	*Summated rating scale, two items (alpha 0.70)*. "In general, how would you describe: The present economic conditions in this country?" and "In general, how would you describe: Your own present living conditions?" Responses: 1 = Very bad to 5 = Very good.	5.23	2.13	2	10
safe living environment	*Summated rating scale, two items (alpha = 0.81)*. "Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family" (a) felt unsafe walking in your neighbourhood and (b) feared crime in your own home. Responses: 0 = Never to 4 = Always.	2.23	2.79	0	8
political freedom	*Summated rating scale, three items (alpha = 0.81)*. "In this country, how free are you" (a) to say what you think, (b) to join any political organisations, and (c) to choose who to vote for without feeling pressured". Responses: 1 = Never to 4 = Every day.	10.12	2.35	3	12

(*Continued*)

Table 2. (Continued).

Variable	Measure	Mean	Stand. Dev.	Min.	Max.
political participation	*Summated rating scale, four items (alpha = 0.75)*. "Thinking about the last national elections in [20×X], did you" (a) attend a campaign rally, (b) attend a meeting with a candidate or campaign staff, (c) try to persuade others to vote for a certain presidential or legislative candidate or political party, and (d) work for a candidate or party". Responses: 0 = No, 1 = Yes.	0.90	1.22	0	4
satisfaction with democratic system	*Single item*. "Overall, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in . . . ? Are you": Responses: 1 = Not at all satisfied to 4 = Very satisfied.	2.41	1.07	1	4
perception leaders serve people	*Single item*. "Do you think that the leaders of political parties in this country are more concerned with serving the interests of the people, or more concerned with advancing their own political ambitions, or haven't you heard enough to say?" Responses: 1 = More to serve their own political ambitions – strongly agree to 5 = More to serve the people – strongly agree.	2.18	1.36	1	5
responsive parliament	*Single item*. "How much of the time do you think the following try their best to listen to what people like you have to say: Members of Parliament?" Responses: 0 = Never to 3 = Always.	0.84	0.86	0	3
satisfaction with current government	*Summated rating scale, fifteen items (alpha = 0.92)*. "How well or badly would you say the current government (national or local) is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say?" (a) managing the economy (national), (b) improving living standards of the poor (national), (c) creating jobs (national), (d) keeping prices down (national), (e) narrowing income gaps (national), (f) reducing crime (national), (g) improving basic health services (national), (h) addressing educational needs (national), (i) providing water and sanitation services (national), (j) ensuring enough to eat (national)" (k) fighting corruption (national), (l) maintaining roads and bridges (national), and (m) providing reliable electricity supply (national), (n) maintaining roads (local) and (o) maintaining local markets (local). Responses: 1= Very bad to 4= Very well.	32.62	10.14	15	60

Table 3. Correlation Matrix, Independent and Control Variables.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)	(15)
(1) *corruption by president*	1														
(2) *corruption by parliament*	0.69	1													
(3) *corruption by local government councilors*	0.55	0.62	1												
(4) *corruption by tax officials*	0.42	0.48	0.48	1											
(5) *corruption by police*	0.40	0.49	0.52	0.55	1										
(6) *corruption by judges*	0.45	0.52	0.45	0.58	0.53	1									
(7) *corruption by traditional leaders*	0.41	0.41	0.48	0.41	0.34	0.43	1								
(8) *corruption by religious leaders*	0.37	0.36	0.42	0.34	0.27	0.36	0.64	1							
(9) *black*	−0.09	−0.05	−0.06	−0.02	−0.05	−0.02	−0.05	−0.06	1						
(10) *female*	−0.02	−0.02	−0.00	−0.02	−0.01	−0.01	0.08	0.01	0.01	1					
(11) *public*	0.00	−0.01	0.02	0.00	−0.00	−0.01	0.02	0.04	−0.00	−0.03	1				
(12) *education*	0.15	0.13	0.16	0.06	0.11	0.05	0.14	0.14	−0.13	−0.05	0.30	1			
(13) *age*	−0.04	−0.04	−0.05	−0.02	−0.02	−0.00	−0.07	−0.06	−0.05	−0.06	0.09	−0.25	1		
(14) *employed*	0.02	−0.00	0.02	0.06	0.03	0.03	−0.02	−0.02	−0.06	−0.11	0.22	0.19	0.03	1	
(15) *corruption trend*	−0.25	−0.24	−0.22	−0.17	−0.20	−0.18	−0.13	−0.11	0.04	0.02	0.03	−0.07	−0.02	−0.04	1
(16) *economic wellbeing*	0.01	0.04	−0.02	0.07	0.05	0.06	−0.02	−0.04	0.11	0.02	−0.14	−0.32	0.07	−0.12	−0.03
(17) *satisfaction with direction of country*	−0.11	−0.12	−0.06	−0.10	−0.11	−0.11	−0.00	0.03	−0.04	0.02	0.13	0.17	−0.12	0.01	0.17
(18) *safe living environment*	0.12	0.07	0.08	0.02	0.07	0.05	0.07	0.08	−0.03	0.04	−0.01	0.04	−0.02	−0.01	−0.09
(19) *political freedom*	−0.16	−0.17	−0.13	−0.12	−0.13	−0.12	−0.14	−0.12	−0.03	−0.01	0.01	−0.04	0.07	0.06	0.11
(20) *political participation*	−0.07	−0.07	−0.02	−0.01	−0.02	−0.03	−0.05	−0.05	0.07	−0.11	0.05	−0.04	0.14	0.09	0.04
(21) *satisfaction with democratic system*	−0.24	−0.23	−0.14	−0.16	−0.16	−0.17	−0.11	−0.09	0.04	0.01	0.05	−0.01	0.03	0.04	0.20
(22) *perception leaders serve people*	−0.21	−0.19	−0.13	−0.12	−0.13	−0.10	−0.05	−0.01	0.04	0.02	0.04	−0.05	0.00	−0.03	0.24
(23) *responsive parliament*	−0.10	−0.14	−0.06	−0.07	−0.10	−0.11	0.02	0.03	0.01	0.00	0.06	0.01	0.00	0.01	0.19
(24) *satisfaction with current government*	−0.25	−0.23	−0.16	−0.15	−0.20	−0.18	−0.06	−0.03	0.03	0.00	0.07	−0.01	−0.02	0.01	0.31

	(16)	(17)	(18)	(19)	(20)	(21)	(22)	(23)	(24)
(16) *economic wellbeing*	1								
(17) *satisfaction with direction of country*	−0.31	1							
(18) *safe living environment*	0.11	−0.07	1						
(19) *political freedom*	−0.14	0.08	−0.06	1					
(20) *political participation*	0.04	−0.02	−0.02	0.12	1				
(21) *satisfaction with democratic system*	−0.17	0.23	−0.14	0.31	0.16	1			
(22) *perception leaders serve people*	−0.07	0.23	−0.06	0.09	0.09	0.23	1		
(23) *responsive parliament*	−0.07	0.16	−0.04	0.07	0.11	0.20	0.24	1	
(24) *satisfaction with current government*	−0.19	0.36	−0.11	0.17	0.09	0.36	0.33	0.35	1

We pool individuals from ten countries with different demographic, economic, political and administrative characteristics that may be related to both corruption and trust. Therefore, to reduce endogeneity, we used country fixed effects by including in our regression models a series of dummy variables for the SADC member states in which the survey respondents lived. This enables us to control for country characteristics appearing in Table 1 as well as other unobserved characteristics, like the general level of trust in a society or reputation of the whole political system. A country fixed effects approach estimates the relationship between perceived corruption and trust within countries, controlling for differences between countries.

An ordered probit estimator is typically used when the dependent variable is ordinal. However, since the relationship between corruption and trust may be simultaneous (Babos, 2015; Chang & Chu, 2006), the coefficients from an ordered probit model could be correlated with the error term and biased. We, therefore, used the eoprobit command in Stata 16 to estimate an ordered probit model with instrumental variables, a two-stage least squares (2SLS) approach that can produce unbiased estimates of corruption's influence on trust. In the first stage, indicators of how a respondent perceives corruption by businesses and the extent to which he or she consumes media are used as instruments to predict the focal actor's involvement in corruption, the independent variable. Strong instruments should be correlated with the independent variable (e.g., more media consumption increases citizens' awareness of corruption) but not with the error term and should not directly influence the dependent variable. The second stage, which includes all the other variables, then predicts trust in the focal actor, the dependent variable.

Importantly, even though the 2SLS approach can reduce simultaneity bias in an ordered probit model, 2SLS estimates can themselves be biased if weak instruments are used in the first-stage equation. Consequently, we performed the Stock and Yogo (2005) test for weak instruments for each of our eight eoprobit models. Our instruments passed the joint significance test ($p < 0.01$) and in every case the null hypothesis that the instruments are weak was rejected at a relative bias tolerance level of 10. The instruments are, therefore, adequate, and the coefficients for perceived involvement in corruption obtained from a 2SLS are unbiased. Finally, we use robust standard errors clustered by country when estimating our models.

Results

The descriptive statistics reveal that respondents have somewhat higher levels of trust in nonstate actors, such as traditional leaders and religious leaders, than in state actors like politicians, judges and bureaucrats (see Table 2). Conversely, the lowest level of trust is for the local government council and the police. In regard to corruption, respondents report the highest level of perceived involvement in corruption for the police and tax officials, two bureaucratic actors, and the parliament and local government council, two political actors. On the other hand, they indicate traditional leaders and religious leaders, the nonstate actors, to be least involved in corruption.

Our regression models predict trust in different policy actors: *trust in president* (Model 1), *trust in parliament* (Model 2), *trust in local government council* (Model 3), *trust in tax department* (Model 4), *trust in police* (Model 5), *trust in courts* (Model 6), *trust in traditional leaders* (Model 7) and *trust in religious leaders* (Model 8). Before testing the fully specified models with all control variables, we tested streamlined versions of the models that only had the independent variables, the demographic control variables and country fixed effects. Across all eight models, we find the perception that a policy actor is involved in corruption is negatively

related to trust in that same actor at $p < 0.01$ (results not shown but available from authors). We then added the remaining controls (see Table 4), and once again find perceived involvement in corruption by a policy actor is negatively related to trust in that same actor at $p < 0.01$, including political institutions like the president, parliament, and local government councilors, bureaucrats like tax officials and the police, judges, and traditional and religious leaders. This can be observed in the coefficients in the shaded diagonal region across the top portion of Table 4. For example, the coefficient for *corruption by president* in Model 1 is −0.44 ($p < 0.01$), the coefficient for *corruption by local government councilors* in Model 3 is −0.24 ($p < 0.01$), the coefficient for *corruption by tax officials* in Model 4 is −0.22 ($p < 0.01$), and the coefficient for *corruption by judges* in Model 6 is −0.17 ($p < 0.01$).

The regression results also offer evidence of reputational spillovers, which we consider to be the case whenever perceived involvement in corruption by a policy actor is negatively related to trust in a policy actor other than the offender. Models 1–8 point to 14 reputational spillovers achieving statistical significance at $p < 0.10$ or better. This can be observed in the cells of the shaded diagonal region across the top portion of

. We consider $p < 0.10$ statistically significant because of the dearth of research on corruption and reputational spillovers in the public sector. Among politicians in central government, perceived involvement in corruption by the president is negatively related to trust in parliament (−0.05, $p < 0.05$, Model 2), while perceived involvement in corruption by members of parliament is negatively related to trust in the president (−0.06, $p < 0.01$, Model 1), bureaucrats working for the tax department (−0.04, $p < 0.10$, Model 4) and the courts (−0.05, $p < 0.01$, Model 6). Interestingly, an increase in perceived involvement in corruption by local government councilors appears to increase trust in the president at the national level (0.08, $p < 0.10$, Model 1), pointing to a positive reputational spillover. When citizens witness impropriety on the part of local officials, it may lead them to place more of their trust in central government.

Regarding bureaucrats, perceived involvement in corruption by tax officials is negatively related to trust in political institutions like the president (−0.05, $p < 0.05$, Model 1) and parliament (−0.06, $p < 0.05$, Model 2) and in the police (−0.05, $p < 0.10$, Model 5). When another bureaucratic entity, the police, is involved in corruption, it reduces trust in traditional leaders (−0.04, $p < 0.01$, Model 7). The perception that judges are involved in corruption is positively related to trust in both traditional leaders (0.03, $p < 0.05$, Model 7) and religious leaders (0.04, $p < 0.10$, Model 8), pointing again to positive reputational spillovers. When people lose confidence in the courts, they may turn to traditional and religious leaders to resolve disputes and address grievances.

Turning to nonstate actors, perceived involvement in corruption by traditional leaders is negatively related to trust in the local government council (−0.05, $p < 0.05$, Model 3), trust in the courts (−0.04, $p < 0.01$, Model 6) and trust in religious leaders (−0.05, $p < 0.05$, Model 8).

The results reveal that most control variables are statistically significant and in the expected direction in the regression models. Generally speaking, they indicate blacks and public employees (past or present) have higher levels of political trust, while education is negatively related to political trust. Among the various control variables representing political attitudes, the sense that people enjoy political freedom, that leaders serve the people and that parliament and the local council are responsive to citizens are positively related to trust in public actors.

Table 4. Regression Results, Ordered Probit Models with Instrumental Variables and Country Fixed Effects (Statistically Significant Independent Variables in Unshaded Cells are Indicative of Spillovers).

	Dependent Variables							
	Model 1 *trust in president*	Model 2 *trust in parliament*	Model 3 *trust in local government council*	Model 4 *trust in tax department*	Model 5 *trust in police*	Model 6 *trust in courts*	Model 7 *trust in traditional leaders*	Model 8 *trust in religious leaders*
	Coef.	Coef.	Coef.	Coef.	Coef.	Coef.	Coef.	Coef.
Perceived Involvement in Corruption								
corruption by president	−0.44***	−0.05**	−0.03	0.00	−0.04	0.01	−0.01	−0.01
corruption by parliament	−0.06***	−0.28***	0.02	−0.04*	0.00	−0.05***	0.01	0.03
corruption by local government councilors	0.08*	0.05	−0.24***	−0.02	0.01	0.00	−0.02	−0.02
corruption by tax officials	−0.05**	−0.06**	−0.02	−0.22***	−0.05*	−0.04	−0.03	−0.03
corruption by police	0.03	0.02	0.03	0.02	−0.23***	−0.02	−0.04***	0.01
corruption by judges	0.01	−0.04	0.01	−0.00	−0.07	−0.17***	0.03**	0.04*
corruption by traditional leaders	−0.00	−0.02	−0.05**	0.01	−0.00	−0.04***	−0.31***	−0.05**
corruption by religious leaders	0.02	0.02	−0.02	−0.06	0.01	−0.01	−0.02	−0.40***
Demographic Characteristics								
female	0.01	−0.00	0.02	0.00	−0.03*	−0.01	−0.01	0.07***
black	0.32***	0.24***	−0.03	0.11	0.03	0.02	0.22**	0.22*
public	0.13**	0.13***	0.09*	0.13***	0.17***	0.06	0.04	0.07
education	−0.04***	−0.03***	−0.03***	−0.02*	−0.05***	−0.03*	−0.06***	−0.02**
age	0.00*	0.00	0.00*	0.01	0.00	−0.00	0.00	0.00**
employed	−0.04	−0.04	−0.05	0.01	−0.04	0.02	−0.02	−0.05
Political Attitudes and Perceptions								
corruption trend	−0.09***	−0.08***	−0.06***	−0.05**	−0.05**	−0.04**	−0.02	−0.01
satisfaction with direction of country	0.03**	0.03*	0.02*	0.01	0.02**	0.01	0.01	0.01
economic wellbeing	−0.01	−0.00	0.01	0.01**	−0.00	−0.00	−0.01**	−0.01
safe living conditions	−0.02**	−0.01	−0.01**	−0.00	−0.00	−0.01**	−0.01	−0.01
political freedom	0.06***	0.05***	0.04***	0.04***	0.04**	0.05***	0.04***	0.03***
political participation	0.07***	0.05***	0.01	0.02	0.02	0.01	0.04*	0.05***
satisfaction with democracy	0.19***	0.16***	0.10***	0.09**	0.08***	0.07***	0.03*	0.01
leaders serve people	0.10***	0.11***	0.11***	0.07***	0.10***	0.08***	0.06***	0.05***
responsive parliament	0.13***	0.21***	0.18***	0.10***	0.12***	0.13***	0.14***	0.09***

(*Continued*)

Table 4. (Continued).

	Dependent Variables							
	Model 1 *trust in president*	Model 2 *trust in parliament*	Model 3 *trust in local government council*	Model 4 *trust in tax department*	Model 5 *trust in police*	Model 6 *trust in courts*	Model 7 *trust in traditional leaders*	Model 8 *trust in religious leaders*
	Coef.	Coef.	Coef.	Coef.	Coef.	Coef.	Coef.	Coef.
satisfaction with current government	0.03***	0.03***	0.03***	0.03***	0.02***	0.02***	0.02***	0.01***
Countries								
botswana	0.32***	−0.22***	0.01	−0.51***	−0.00	0.02	0.21***	−0.12***
eswatini	0.62***	0.37***	0.49***	−0.25***	0.37***	0.17***	0.35***	0.29***
lesotho	0.50***	0.08*	0.15***	−0.43***	0.22***	0.07	0.38***	0.69***
madagascar	0.61***	0.23***	0.80***	−0.50***	−0.08	−0.63***	0.48***	0.29***
mozambique	0.81***	0.21***	0.30***	−0.40***	−0.09**	−0.29***	−0.04	0.02
namibia	0.77***	0.40***	0.39***	−0.33***	0.32***	0.13***	0.44***	0.36***
tanzania	0.65***	0.26***	0.47***	−0.51***	0.18***	−0.10	0.16***	0.37***
zambia	0.43***	0.07***	−0.01	−0.57***	0.07***	0.06**	0.26***	0.24***
zimbabwe	1.06***	0.44***	0.46***	−0.42***	0.26***	0.28***	0.37***	0.35***
constant	0.60***	0.72***	0.64***	0.75***	0.96***	0.73***	0.31***	0.19**
Wald Chi-Square	2676.55	2168.57	1911.16	1466.87	1589.79	1623.95	1089.96	860.32
Sig.	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
N	8012	8005	7982	7936	8033	8001	7891	8007

***p < 0.01, **p < 0.05 and *p < 0.10.

Satisfaction with democracy and the current government are also positively related to political trust. And participation in political activities is positively related to trust in public actors.

Nearly all of the country dummy variables in Models 1–8 are statistically significant. Although there are too many results to interpret in detail, these dummy variables generally show trust in the eight policy actors is higher in the nine countries that are not South Africa, the omitted country. For example, trust in the president is higher in all of the other countries in our sample compared to South Africa, which during the time of the survey was plagued by allegations of corruption involving President Jacob Zuma. Trust in parliament and the local government council is higher in eight and seven countries, respectively, in our sample compared to South Africa. The one exception is trust in the tax department, with trust in the South African Revenue Service, an international exemplar among revenue agencies, higher than trust in its counterparts in other countries.

Since our models include a large number of control variables representing similar political attitudes, we checked them for multicollinearity and could not detect a problem. VIF tests of the models did not find a single independent or control variable with a VIF score above 4, the highest VIF score being around 2.5 for *corruption by parliament* in Models 5–8.

Discussion

The results offer strong support for Hypothesis 1. Consistent with previous research (Anderson & Tverdova, 2003; Chang & Chu, 2006; Hakhverdian & Mayne, 2012; Marlowe, 2004; Pellegata & Memoli, 2016; Seligson, 2002), we find that perceived involvement in corruption by eight different state and nonstate policy actors is negatively related to trust in the same actor or offender. The set of actors includes elected officials, judges, bureaucrats, and traditional and religious leaders.

We also find support for Hypothesis 2 regarding reputational spillovers. Perceived involvement in corruption by seven of eight policy actors spills over to influence the reputation of at least one other policy actor that was not the offender. Indeed, perceived involvement in corruption by parliament, tax officials, judges and traditional leaders is related to trust in *two or more* policy actors in addition to the offender. Moreover, every one of the eight state and nonstate actors observed seems to suffer the consequences of spillovers, as perceived involvement in corruption by another policy actor is negatively related to citizens' trust in them. These are important and novel findings given the few studies alluding to the occurrence of reputational spillovers in government (Marlowe, 2004; Pellegata & Memoli, 2016).

Statistically significant coefficients in Table 4point to a relationship between perceived involvement in corruption and trust but reveal little else about the true nature of the relationship. We, therefore, used the margins command in Stata 16 to predict the probability of a level of trust in an actor for a given level of perceived involvement in corruption, holding all other variables at their means. Specifically, Table 5 reports the predicted probabilities of a respondent reporting one of the four levels of trust – (0) "no" trust, (1) "a little" trust, (2) "some" trust and (3) "a lot" of trust – when perceived involvement in corruption is at its highest level of 3. Only the predicted probabilities of statistically significant independent variables ($p < 0.10$ or better) in Models 1–8 are shown.

Table 5. Predicted Probabilities for Levels of Trust in Public Actors – (0) to (3) – for Highest Level of Perceived Involvement in Corruption, Only Statistically Significant Independent Variables from Models 1–8 Shown (Unshaded Cells are Indicative of Spillovers).

Dependent Variables								
Independent Variables	Model 1 *trust in president*	Model 2 *trust in parliament*	Model 3 *trust in local government councilors*	Model 4 *trust in tax department*	Model 5 *trust in police*	Model 6 *trust in courts*	Model 7 *trust in traditional leaders*	Model 8 *trust in religious leaders*
corruption by president	(0) 0.32 (1) 0.32 (2) 0.24 (3) 0.12	(0) 0.16 (1) 0.33 (2) 0.36 (3) 0.16						
corruption by parliament	(0) 0.14 (1) 0.27 (2) 0.32 (3) 0.27	(0) 0.27 (1) 0.37 (2) 0.27 (3) 0.08		(0) 0.14 (1) 0.31 (2) 0.36 (3) 0.19		(0) 0.14 (1) 0.29 (2) 0.36 (3) 0.20		
corruption by local government councilors	(0) 0.10 (1) 0.23 (2) 0.31 (3) 0.27		(0) 0.27 (1) 0.37 (2) 0.27 (3) 0.08					
corruption by tax officials	(0) 0.15 (1) 0.27 (2) 0.31 (3) 0.27	(0) 0.16 (1) 0.33 (2) 0.35 (3) 0.16		(0) 0.26 (1) 0.37 (2) 0.27 (3) 0.09	(0) 0.20 (1) 0.32 (2) 0.31 (3) 0.17			
corruption by police					(0) 0.30 (1) 0.33 (2) 0.25 (3) 0.10		(0) 0.12 (1) 0.23 (2) 0.35 (3) 0.31	
corruption by judges						(0) 0.26 (1) 0.35 (2) 0.29 (3) 0.10	(0) 0.10 (1) 0.21 (2) 0.35 (3) 0.35	(0) 0.05 (1) 0.15 (2) 0.31 (3) 0.48
corruption by traditional leaders			(0) 0.17 (1) 0.33 (2) 0.34 (3) 0.15			(0) 0.14 (1) 0.30 (2) 0.36 (3) 0.20	(0) 0.28 (1) 0.30 (2) 0.28 (3) 0.14	(0) 0.08 (1) 0.18 (2) 0.33 (3) 0.41
corruption by religious leaders								(0) 0.25 (1) 0.29 (2) 0.29 (3) 0.16

Across all eight regression models, we find that when perceived involvement in corruption is at the highest level of 3 for an actor, the most likely outcome is (1) "a little" trust in that same actor and the least likely outcome is (3) "a lot" of trust. The predicted probabilities for corruption and trust for the same actor appear in the shaded diagonal region in Table 5. For instance, when members of parliament are perceived to be involved in corruption at the highest level, the predicted probability of (1) a "little" trust in parliament is 0.37, while the predicted probability of (3) "a lot" of trust in parliament is 0.08. When tax officials are perceived to be involved in corruption at the highest level, the predicted probability of (1) "a little" trust in the tax department is 0.37, compared to a predicted probability of 0.09 for (3) "a lot" of trust in the tax department. And when traditional leaders are perceived to be involved in corruption at the highest level, the predicted probability of (1) a "little" trust in traditional leaders is 0.30, while the predicted probability of (3) "a lot" of trust in parliament is 0.14.

In comparison, in the case of reputational spillovers, when perceived involvement in corruption is at the highest level of 3 for an actor, the most likely outcome across all the regression models is (2) "some" trust in an actor other than the offender. Together with the predicted probabilities reported above, this suggests the highest level of perceived involvement in corruption by an actor erodes trust more in the offender (most likely resulting in a little trust) than in other actors (most likely resulting in some trust). The predicted probabilities for corruption by an actor and trust in an actor other than the perceived offender – what we interpret as reputational spillovers – appear in the cells of the shaded diagonal region in Table 5. To illustrate, when the president is perceived to be involved in corruption at the highest level, the predicted probability of (2) "some" trust in parliament is 0.36. When tax officials are perceived to be involved in corruption at the highest level, the predicted probability of (2) "some" trust in the president is 0.31 and the predicted probability of (2) "some" trust in the police is also 0.31. And when traditional leaders are perceived to be involved in corruption at the highest level, the predicted probability of (2) "some" trust in local government councilors is 0.34.

The predicted probabilities reveal something else that is interesting. As previously mentioned, when perceived involvement in corruption is at the highest level of 3 for an actor, the least likely outcome is always (3) "a lot" of trust in that same actor. For reputational spillovers, however, a different pattern emerges. When perceived involvement in corruption is at the highest level for an actor, the least likely outcome for an actor other than the perceived offender is *either* (3) "a lot" of trust or interestingly 0 "no" trust. For example, when members of parliament are perceived to be involved in corruption at the highest level, the predicted probability of (3) "a lot" of trust in the tax department is 0.19, a little higher than the predicted probability of (0) "no" trust in the tax department. When tax officials are perceived to be involved in corruption at the highest level, the predicted probability of (3) "a lot" of trust in the police is 0.17, a little lower than the predicted probability of (0) "no" trust is in the police. And in the case of the highest level of involvement in corruption by the president, the predicted probabilities of (0) "no" trust in the parliament and (3) "a lot" of trust in parliament are both 0.16. That being said, it is important to note that in nearly all instances of reputational spillovers, (1) "a little" trust or (2) "some" trust is more likely to occur than either (0) "no" trust or (3) "a lot" of trust.

Support is also found for the view of the complementarity of politics and administration (Svara, 1999), making politicians and bureaucrat members of an entitative group of policy actors. The results show corrupt behaviour by politicians to be negatively related to the reputation of bureaucrats. For example, perceived involvement in corruption by members of parliament appears to erode trust in the tax department (Model 4). However, the evidence also indicates

involvement in corruption by bureaucrats can spill over to tarnish the reputation of politicians. Perceived involvement in corruption by those working in the tax department is negatively related to trust in the president (Model 1) and parliament (Model 2). Similarly, perceived involvement in corruption by the police is negatively related to trust in traditional leaders.

Conclusion

Declining trust in government's ability to hold up its end of the social contract has made the task of governing more difficult in countries throughout the world. As a result, many countries now face low rates of citizen participation in politics, reluctance by citizens to coproduce services and subpar service delivery. Research indicates that involvement in corruption by public officials contributes to declining levels of political trust (Anderson & Tverdova, 2003; Chang & Chu, 2006; Hakhverdian & Mayne, 2012; Marlowe, 2004; Pellegata & Memoli, 2016; Seligson, 2002). However, this study reveals that the relationship between corruption and trust is even more complex and unsettling than originally conceived. Involvement in corruption by politicians, bureaucrats, traditional leaders and other policy actors seems not only to reduce trust citizens have in them, the offending actors, it can also damage the reputation of others. Organisation theory on firm behaviour and reputational spillovers, backed by empirical evidence, seems to apply well to political and bureaucratic actors and their reputations. As noted previously, the literature on public sector corruption offered few clues into if or why corruption could erode trust in more than just the offending actor, compelling us to leverage research and theory on firm reputation and the psychology of entitative groups. Hence, we believe our analysis underscores the value of drawing theoretical insight from different disciplines and fields of study when analysing public sector phenomena.

The findings point to the need to fight corruption in ways that minimise reputational spillovers and safeguard collective trust in all public institutions. Researchers assert that reputational spillovers can be minimised in two ways: through self-regulation aimed at reducing the threat of stakeholder sanctions and by differentiating reputation so that stakeholders can attribute blame to the offending actor (Barnett & King, 2008; King et al., 2002). While there have been no systematic efforts to document specific anti-corruption initiatives across the SADC region, scattered evidence points to exemplars for others to emulate. In regard to reducing the threat of sanctions through self-regulation, Botswana and South Africa have developed robust, well-staffed and relatively independent agencies with authority to investigate allegations of corruption and assist in their prosecution (Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa, 2017). When it comes to differentiating reputation, the experiences of South Africa and Tanzania are enlightening. Both countries encourage active participation by members of civil society in reporting acts of corruption through hotlines, stakeholder forums and community gatherings, in addition to undertaking detailed and systematic collection and reporting of acts of corruption that enables stakeholders to distinguish the actions of different ministries and public organisations (Carr, 2009).

Another promising approach to minimising reputational spillovers involves partnerships between government, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), academics and consultants to design more effective anti-corruption policies and augment ongoing efforts to collect, analyse and disseminate data on corruption in government. Corruption Watch (2021), an anti-corruption NGO in South Africa, encourages citizens to submit reports of governmental corruption, provides detailed reporting on corruption so that stakeholders can differentiate between public institutions and spheres of government and conducts investigations in support of law enforcement.

Interestingly, King et al. (2002) point to cooptation of influential stakeholders as another way to reduce the threat of sanctions and safeguard a collective reputation. For firms, co-optation may work to stave off sanctions for externalities like environmental pollution or industrial accidents. However, politicians coopting citizens to avoid sanctions for corrupt behaviour may elicit even greater corruption, particularly in neo-patrimonial states with strong patron–client relationships through which economic rewards are exchanged for political support. The danger of political corruption begetting further corruption as policy actors seek to avoid collective sanctions is a real one stakeholders should recognise and strive to avoid.

Reputational spillovers are pertinent not only to the issue of political corruption but to various other aspects of public administration, particularly those involving interorganisational arrangements. Stakeholders may perceive organisations in a policy implementation network to be part of a highly entitative group and impose collective sanctions. For instance, one actor in a child welfare network may cause harm to a child, occasioning negative public scrutiny and cuts in funding for the entire network. Similarly, a scandal in a national government department involving gross misappropriation of funds may tarnish the reputation of the department's counterparts at the regional level in a federal system of government. Finally, as mentioned above, reputational spillovers can occur in cases of outsourcing. A government contractor defaulting on a contract for poor performance might tarnish the reputation of the public organisation who awarded the contract and that of other contractors providing the same services.

We conclude by noting several limitations of the study, suggesting the need for future research on corruption and trust, particularly when entitative groups in the policy process are involved. The analysis relies on measures of perceived involvement in corruption by policy actors and not firsthand observations of actual corrupt behaviour. Randomised experiments that expose participants to examples of corrupt behaviour by policy actors would be valuable in enhancing our understanding of how corruption produces reputational spillovers, especially in regard to the magnitude of spillovers. In addition, future studies should consider a wider range of bureaucratic actors, including examining whether public organisations in the same policy domain are more likely to tarnish each other's reputations through illicit behaviour than those addressing different problems. The role of the media – including both mass and social media and government communications – in shaping citizens' attitudes and creating reputational spillovers is another important issue worthy of future investigation. Finally, care should be taken in generalising this study's findings beyond the SADC region and Africa given, as we noted, the cultural embeddedness of corruption and the need to contextualise the meaning of this phenomenon. The proliferation of international surveys measuring political values, attitudes and behaviour presents opportunities to test the generalisability of our findings, including in countries with less collectivist and more individualist political cultures and those with more highly developed media industries that can serve to either differentiate or confound the reputation of policy actors. Still, differences in how people understand corruption across the world make it challenging to compare findings from different regions, especially when relying on the perceptions of citizens and experts.

Disclosure statement

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Notes on contributors

Sergio Fernandez., is Professor in Indiana University Bloomington, O'Neill School of Public and Environmental Affairs and Extraordinary Professor in University of Pretoria, School of Public Management and Administration. His work focuses on organisational behaviour in the public sector, representative bureaucracy, public sector leadership, and government procurement.

Lianne P. Malan is Associate Professor in University of Pretoria, School of Public Management and Administration. Her work examines a variety of issues regarding intergovernmental relations, organisation theory, public policy, and teaching and learning in public administration.

Natasja Holtzhausen., is Professor in University of Pretoria, School of Public Management and Administration. Her work explores public sector ethics, organisation theory, and public administration education.

Michel M Tshiyoyo is Associate Professor in University of Pretoria, School of Public Management and Administration. His work focuses on leadership and governance, organisation theory, and public financial management.

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