

4 Recent approaches to the study of social norms and corruption

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4.1 Introduction

Empirical research on the social aspects of corruption ranges from interpersonal modes of exchange and social organization forms like networks and clans to the broader rules of the game (institutions) shaping state–society relations (Banfield 1958; Eisenstadt and Roniger 1984; Lambsdorff et al. 2004; Mungiu 2006; Scott 1972). Yet only infrequently have researchers used social norms frameworks as the primary lens with which to analyse corrupt practices. Meanwhile, research on other socially embedded practices has increasingly emphasized the importance of social norms as an analytical and policy framework (Cialdini et al. 2006; Efferson et al. 2015; Bicchieri 2016; Tankard and Paluck 2016). This has enabled new empirical contributions to the key question ‘Why do people engage in corrupt behaviour that they themselves consider to be wrong?’

As a result, an increasing number of empirical studies across various disciplines have begun to analyse corruption through a social norms lens. Reviewing this strand of research reveals that new insights have emerged and begun to open up new frontiers for corruption research. Methodologically, they demonstrate the value of incorporating experimental methods into corruption research; empirically, they have sought to test hypotheses that relate to social norms and corruption; and theoretically, they have nuanced the picture, elaborating on the various ways in which social norms may help to explain corruption.

The following section of this chapter briefly tours the broader landscape of research on the social dimension of corruption. The third section focuses on developments in social norms theory and shows how this social norms approach has provided an advantageous heuristic for empirical research. The **third** section then summarizes studies that the authors identified through a systematic search of several online databases. Finally, the concluding discussion describes the theoretical and empirical channels these studies may open up for future research.

4.2 Research on the social dimension of corruption

Recent empirical work on social norms owes much to previous studies that have demonstrated how social influences shape corruption. In his classic 1955 study of the Lucania region in southern Italy, for example, Banfield (1958) established the concept of ‘amoral familism’ to describe the importance of kinship obligations in shaping the rhythm of social interaction, a normative influence that made public-oriented cooperation challenging. Scholars have also demonstrated how norms around reciprocity create a permissive environment for corruption. Scott (1972) described how patron–client politics underpinned by reciprocal obligations have characterized many different regimes throughout modern history.

Reaffirming the centrality of reciprocity to social orders, Eisenstadt and Roniger (1984) examined the underpinnings of patron–client relations, highlighting the ubiquity of this social institution and putting it in historical and cross-national perspectives. Later, rational choice perspectives on clientelist exchanges became influential (Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007; Stokes 2014). Empirical work has provided further insights into the social dimension of clientelism (Fox 1994; Hilgers 2012). Auyero’s (2001) study of Peronist networks in a shantytown in Buenos Aires revealed that clientelist networks often do not result from opportunistic political constructions, but rather express already existing informal networks and cultural practices that are ‘key elements in the everyday lives’ of poor people (p. 13). Another ethnographic school has argued that the ‘larger fabric of everyday social practices’ shapes patterns of corruption (Olivier de Sardan 1999; see also Olivier de Sardan and Blundo 2006). These researchers have been interested in how social influences infiltrate public sector organizations.

These empirical studies have been buttressed by more theoretical contributions emphasizing that instances of corruption can hardly be explained without reference to the broader institutional and normative context (Mungiu 2006; Mungiu-Pippidi 2015b). The type and extent of general normative forces in societies, including particularistic norms and universalistic norms, have been used to explain the extent to which corruption may spread (Schweitzer 2004). Cross-disciplinary approaches that combine institutional sociology and economics to connect corruption with underlying social patterns have also become influential (Lambsdorff et al. 2004).

Scholars continue to advocate for the study of corruption as a social process (Warburton 2013). Recent empirical and theoretical contributions on elements of interpersonal relations, such as gift-giving and reciprocity (Ledeneva 2008; Graycar and Jancsics 2017), as well as on social networks (Szwarcberg 2011) and broader organizational forms like clans (Schatz 2005), continue to strengthen corruption research.

This scholarship – and much more beyond the scope of this brief overview – provides a valuable and diverse basis for the study of the societal aspects of corruption. This chapter focuses on a discrete subset of that literature revolving around

the concept of social norms, defined in this chapter as what people in a given group believe to be normal in that group; that is, what they believe to be a typical action, an appropriate action or both (Paluck and Ball 2010). A review is timely because there has been a proliferation of social norms and corruption studies in the past decade, creating a discernible body of work from which viable insights can be drawn. The next section elaborates on the social norms concept and the methodology for research.

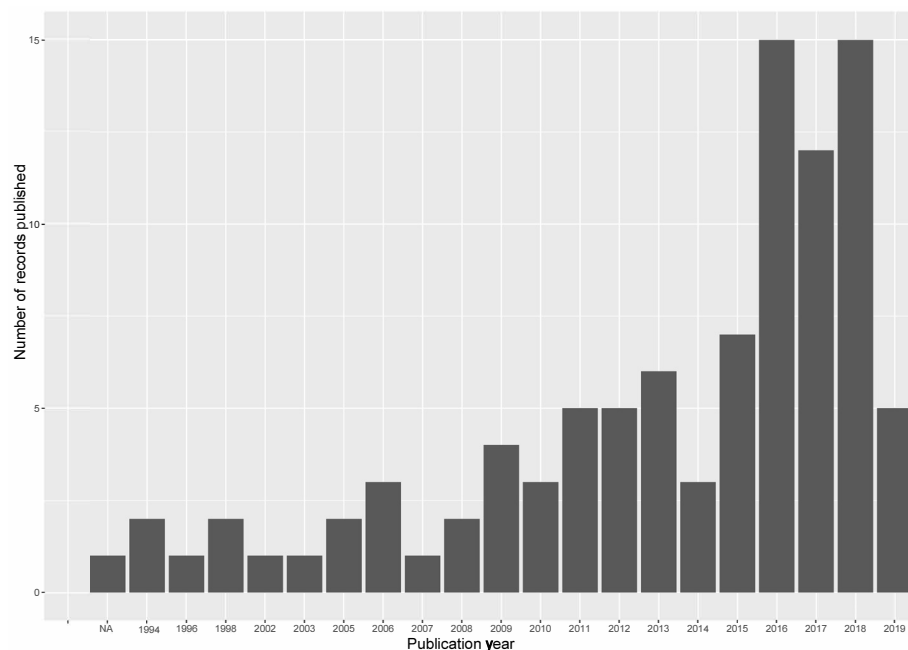
4.3 Developments in social norms theory and the growth of empirical studies

Looking back, elements of thinking on social norms have developed across a range of disciplines (for an interdisciplinary overview, see Hechter and Opp 2001). Scholars have tied together these strands in recent years to present a more consolidated theory of social norms. Influential in this endeavour has been Bicchieri (2006, 2016), who provides a ‘unified architecture’ of social norms (Mackie et al. 2015). This schema pays particular attention to different types of norms, links between norms and specific networks or reference groups that people identify closely with and care about, the role of social sanctions and the varied strength of norms (Cislaghi and Heise 2018). This recent theoretical work has made it possible to derive testable hypotheses, representing one of the main advances in thinking on social norms (Köbis et al. 2018).

As a consequence, corruption researchers have also taken note of this more specific conceptualization of what constitutes a social norm. Indeed, the use of the term ‘norms’ within the corruption literature of the previous five decades or so has tended to operate on a higher level of abstraction compared to this definition of social norms. Studies influenced by the culturalist school (e.g. Banfield 1958) have tended to equate social norms with the more immutable realm of culture, a perspective that leaves little room for normative change. Meanwhile, those adopting normative institutionalist approaches have tended to use social norms interchangeably with informal institutions, a more capacious concept that could cover a wide range of possible sources of behaviour beyond the formal state. Hence, in pursuit of more specific definitions to counter these overly abstract approaches, recent work has emphasized the different types of norms (descriptive, injunctive), the role of reference groups and social sanctions. This theorizing has offered a nuanced and precise conceptual apparatus with which to analyse various social phenomena.

Spurred by these conceptual developments, the number of studies explicitly tying such social norms framework to corruption has swelled in the past decade (Figure 4.1).

The growing popularity of this social norms framework stems also from the recognition that the perspective can help address some of the puzzles presented by the persistence of corruption. First, social norms approaches reflect the view



Source: Identified by a Web of Science search

Figure 4.1 Number of records per year dealing with 'social norms' and 'corruption'

that most corrupt practices are socially embedded. That is, people rarely make corrupt decisions merely on the basis of their own whims, or in response to material incentives, but instead pay (often very close) attention to social information before deciding on a course of action (Köbis et al. 2016; Fisman and Golden 2017). As a corollary of this view, recent theoretical perspectives emphasize that corruption is rooted in collective behavioural patterns rather than just being an outcome of institutional choices (Mungiu 2006; Persson et al. 2013). In stressing the importance of reference groups and social sanctions, an explicit social norms framework can help us understand how normative influences behind corruption are sustained.

Second, an emphasis on social norms helps make clear that this social information consists of two main elements (Rothstein 2000). Descriptive norms indicate what other people actually do, while injunctive norms refer to what other people approve or disapprove of (Cialdini et al. 1990; Bicchieri and Mercier 2014). This distinction provides empirical insights into some of the apparent paradoxes around corruption, such as the observation that people will regularly engage in behaviour that they personally consider to be improper or wrong.

What has emerged in the field of corruption is not necessarily a coherent research stream or recognized school, but rather a collection of studies across

various disciplines that have empirically interrogated the relationship between social norms and corruption. Based on a systematic search, we find two distinct strands within this body of work.¹ One line of research continues the ethnographic tradition remaining close to case study and qualitative based research. The second, ~~more recent~~ line of research draws on behavioural corruption research methods and is closer to variable based research through either experiments or statistical approaches.

4.3.1 Ethnographic approaches

Studies that used qualitative methods, nearly all of which have appeared in the last few years, often focus on a particular community or region to address the research question ‘What kind of social norms may matter for corruption – and how?’ By putting social norms and corruption front and centre, these studies nuance the relationship between the two, highlighting differences between descriptive and injunctive elements and examining the process by which norms are sustained, as well as how norms shape what counts as corruption.

Many of these studies affirm the importance of ‘in-group’ obligations in generating norms that can indirectly facilitate corruption, a process closely linked to patronage, nepotism and particularistic treatment. These obligations tend to relate to the immediate family or ‘kin community’, but the breadth of the in-group can vary, with norms extending even to ‘long-lost cousins’ and members of a person’s ethnic group (Hoffmann and Patel 2017; Jackson 2018; Baez-Camargo et al. 2019). Nearly all the case studies make clear that these obligations tend to be rooted in firmly established forms of cooperative social behaviour, a finding that echoes a long line of scholarship (Scott 1972; Eisenstadt and Roniger 1984). Urinboyev and Svensson’s (2017) fieldwork in a village in the Fergana valley of Uzbekistan shows how ‘illegal’ practices reflect not only impulses of individual self-aggrandizement, but also on social norms that have been generated through a traditional system of mutual aid that aims to ensure basic welfare for all residents. In areas where the state has scant presence and provides few basic services for citizens, this system of self-help is maintained by mutual expectations, meaning that each villager can expect certain behaviours from other residents. Within a limited village context, these social norms may be considered pro-social. However, once applied to the context of public office, such norms can lead to corruption as villagers put pressure on public officials who may be their kin, or simply connected to the village, to provide patronage or largesse. This finding by Urinboyev and Svensson (2017) follows a long history of scholarship that foregrounds the tension between impartial institutions and particularism resulting from social pressures (Banfield 1958; Rothstein 2005; Mungiu 2006).

These ethnographic and sociological studies point to a certain contradiction, namely that norms that can be considered positive or pro-social, such as ‘support thy neighbour’ and other such norms of reciprocity, may lead to corruption. Indeed, one exploratory study has ~~thrown~~ light on how ostensibly pro-social norms

may be necessary for corrupt transactions, refuting arguments that corruption is due to the absence of pro-social norms such as trust and altruism. Rosenbaum et al. (2013) review two lab experiments to show that, in a market setting, parties 'need to rely on such social norms as trust and altruism to structure and enable market corrupt acts' (p. 193).

Most of the recent studies using qualitative methods emphasize that injunctive norms related to corruption are rarely internalized as a straightforward guide to appropriate behaviour, but rather are maintained in conjunction with social sanctions. In Nigeria, for example, if a public official shuns corruption, he or she may be cast out as a pariah (Hoffmann and Patel 2017). In Uzbekistan, the close-knit social structure of 'kin communities' means that public officials who fail to deliver expected benefits face social sanctions such as gossip, ridicule, loss of respect and reputation, humiliation and even exclusion from life-cycle rituals (Urinboyev and Svensson 2017). Public officials who try to keep the public office separate from the private sphere are maligned, while those who provide patronage for the village are afforded respect and social status. In this regard, 'state officials have little room for individual choice and often find themselves torn between loyalty to their family, kin and mahalla [neighbourhood] and honesty at work' (Urinboyev and Svensson 2017, p. 198). These findings also imply that the influence of social norms on corruption is nearly always relative, competing with other drivers of behaviour. In their research in East Africa, Baez-Camargo et al. (2019) found many individuals who felt burdened by the overlapping and often conflicting expectations stemming from social norms, on the one hand, and from their legal duties and responsibilities, on the other. This finding suggests that the way social norms relate to corruption is often the result of an interplay between institutional *and* normative factors, echoing much of the research on patron–client networks that finds norms to be interconnected with broader institutional forces (Eisenstadt and Roniger 1984; Piattoni 2001).

While a majority of these qualitative studies focus on social norms that affect the decision-making of public officials, two studies concentrate on the norms that influence ordinary citizens' motivations to engage in corrupt practices. Jackson (2018), in his study of Kosovo's municipalities, finds that descriptive norms, those that relate to perceptions of what others do, are an important driving force. Because residents tend to believe that other residents engage in these practices, shunning corruption oneself is perceived to be disadvantageous. With descriptive norms, unlike injunctive norms, the cost to the individual is tied not to a social sanction, but rather to a material sanction: the person who eschews corrupt acts will miss out on a share of the public resources that other community members are perceived to enjoy.

Researchers have also explored how social norms shape what counts as 'corruption'. An important contribution of these studies has been to show that a social norms perspective can help explain how local understandings of corruption and its boundaries may differ from the assumptions of international conventions and

development practitioners (Funaki and Glencorse 2014). For example, a case study of Liberia revealed how social norms calibrate practices as corrupt or legitimate. Liberians have differing definitions of, and priorities relating to, corruption, challenging the notion that corruption is a universally understood and agreed upon concept (Funaki and Glencorse 2014). Studies at the community level provide insights into the complex ambiguities that generally shroud corruption, contesting the idea that it can be neatly summed up in terms of universal propositions and measurement indicators.

Two case studies from our search put the social norms of corruption into historical perspective. Looking at nineteenth-century colonial India, Pani (2016) argues that the incongruity between the prevailing social norms of Indian society and the externally imposed British jurisprudence gave rise to a moral justification to defy the law. This eventually led to 'even greater willingness to ignore it, so that breaking the law becomes the norm' (Pani 2016), a dynamic that eventually embeds systemic corruption. Ocheje (2018) argues that this dissonance between laws and norms also unfolded in Nigeria, where the state, forged for the administrative convenience of the British colonial authority rather than constructed on a foundation of local politics, never attained a normative consensus that could constrain corruption. Instead, pro-corruption norms thrived in the vacuum, creating a 'normative context of corruption'.

Nearly all qualitative studies generated by our search focused on the global south. An exception is the work by Klinkhammer (2013), who assesses how organizational norms maintained corruption within the German multinational company Siemens. His study illustrates that bribery was an integral feature of Siemens's business dealings in different areas of the company, a practice that over time acquired an injunctive element: 'the prevailing opinion of a tacit consent among employees could temporarily provide formally illegitimate corrupt practices with the necessary informal approval' (Klinkhammer 2013, p. 203).

4.3.2 Quantitative approaches

4.3.2.1 *Macro level*

One of the first empirical studies on social norms and corruption was done by Fisman and Miguel (2007). The study draws on a unique data source, namely observational data documenting the parking violations of United Nations diplomats stationed in New York City. At the time, diplomats posted to that city enjoyed immunity. They could park even in prohibited locations without legal repercussions, and some abused this privilege by parking in the middle of Fifth Avenue. The authors correlated the observed parking violations with the scores of the diplomats' home countries on the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI). The results showed that diplomats from countries with higher corruption levels committed more parking violations. According to the authors' interpretation, diplomats coming from 'corrupt' countries may have found it less reprehensible to abuse their immunity.

The results provided early quantitative evidence that injunctive norms might be an important factor in explaining corrupt practices, especially in the absence of effective punishment.

Using the same data set, Kapoor and Ravi (2012) challenge the interpretation that injunctive norms drive this effect. They show that when an additional variable is included in the regression analysis, namely ‘government effectiveness’ – one of the six dimensions of governance measured by Kaufmann et al. (2007a) – the correlation between home-country CPI and parking violations disappears. According to Kapoor and Ravi, it is the quality of a country’s institutions, not its cultural norms, that leads to the persistence of corruption. However, due to the large statistical overlap between the ‘government effectiveness’ and ‘control of corruption’ indicators tracked by Kaufmann and colleagues, these interpretations are somewhat undermined by endogeneity concerns. In other words, it remains unclear whether and how government effectiveness is different from corruption and which of the two plays a more important role in explaining the parking violations.

Seeking to overcome the methodological complication of endogenous variables, Dong et al. (2012) combine the responses from several items on the World Values Survey and the European Values Study to test whether corruption is contagious – that is, whether individuals’ perceptions about the corrupt behaviour of others shape their own justifiability rating of corruption. Diverging from most macro-economic research, the study does not test a vertical link between citizens and the state but instead focuses on horizontal ties, examining how citizens influence each other. The results indicate that higher perceived levels of corruption – in other words, descriptive norms – are positively correlated with the justifiability of corruption, or injunctive norms (Dong et al. 2012; for similar results, see McNally 2016).

Taken together, these studies on the macro level present some support for the assumption that high levels of corruption in society correlate with higher acceptability of corruption. Further supporting evidence stems from large-scale efforts to compare cheating levels around the globe (Gächter and Schulz 2016), the results of which suggest that ‘corruption corrupts’ (Shalvi 2016). However, drawing on correlational data undermines the ability to draw causal inferences. Moreover, measuring corruption using survey design faces several challenges (Olken 2009), such as social desirability concerns, meaning that respondents give the answers they believe will be acceptable; for example, people might be reluctant to admit engaging in corruption when asked on the phone or face-to-face. Also, macro assessment of social norms of corruption hinders a much-needed differentiation of various corruption types (Heywood 2018; Köbis and Huss 2018).

4.3.2.2 *Micro level*

To overcome the methodological limitations of correlational macro studies, more recent empirical endeavours have increasingly adopted experimental

approaches to reveal the interplay of social norms and corrupt behaviour (Serra and Wantchekon 2012). Mainly using so-called corruption games, scientists from various disciplines have tried to model a situation that reflects the basic components of a given corrupt practice. Such experimental research aiming to uncover the influence of social norms on corruption has mostly studied bribery, using various bribery games.

In one of the most influential studies on the subject, Barr and Serra (2010) asked foreign students at a British university to play a bribery game. Their results reveal that students coming from countries with high levels of (perceived) corruption, as measured by the CPI were more likely to bribe in the game. The tendency to bribe decreased with the length of time that the students had stayed in the United Kingdom (Barr and Serra 2010). The results suggest that although injunctive norms seem to have an influence on willingness to bribe, people also recognize the 'rules of the game' and adjust to their environment.

In another study, Salmon and Serra (2017) argue that people's disapproval of corruption is directly correlated to the country that people identify with most strongly. Conducting an experiment in the United States, they asked participants 'whether they and their families identify culturally with a country other than or in addition to the US' (p. 67). The researchers then linked this information to behaviour in a bribery game, especially behaviour in which participants expressed disapproval of corruption to the other participants via a message. They find a positive correlation between the CPI of the country with which participants self-identify and their propensity to disapprove of corruption in the game. Put differently, identifying with a high-corruption country leads to lower disapproval of corruption – lending some support to the idea that corruption might be viewed as less reprehensible and more acceptable in countries with higher corruption levels.

However, neither of these studies provides a basis for strong causal inferences, because neither entails a completely randomized design. For obvious reasons, participants were not randomly assigned to a home country, a duration of stay in the UK (Barr and Serra 2010) or a country that they identify most strongly with (Salmon and Serra 2017). Their own particulars were used. Hence, some of the above-mentioned endogeneity concerns also affect these behavioural studies.

Using a fully experimental design, Banerjee (2016) tested the importance of social norms by using different descriptions of the same economic game. Testing for so-called framing effects, Banerjee's research team asked participants in India to play structurally identical games. One was called the Ultimatum Game, while the other was described in more loaded language as a Harassment Bribery Game. Even though the economic cost–benefit calculations remained the same in both games, the name of the game and the terminology it used seemed to influence people's willingness to engage in a bribery act. Fewer participants opted to engage in such a transaction when it was framed as 'harassment bribery' (in the Harassment Bribery Game) than when it was described simply as a 'transfer' (in the Ultimatum Game).

The results indicate that the language used might trigger moral concerns: engaging in 'bribery' feels less acceptable than taking part in a neutral-sounding 'transfer'.

The fact that the effect occurred in India, a country that ranks relatively low on the CPI (78/180), qualifies the idea that a situation of widespread corruption (automatically) leads to wide acceptance of corruption. Banerjee's (2016) results rather suggest that for people who are exposed to corruption in their daily lives, moral concerns about corruption do affect their decisions as to whether to take part in it. The finding also aligns with the widespread use of euphemisms to describe various corrupt practices (Tillen and Delman 2010). Relabelling a bribe as a 'motivation fee' or as a 'sweetener' or 'tea money' helps reduce the moral sting. In fact, one study by Ferreira et al. (2012) identified in the review explicitly examines the perceived meaning of the indigenous Brazilian concept of *jeitinho* (bending rules or social conventions). The results indicate that people perceive *jeitinho* both as a social norms violation *and* as corruption – adding credence to the claim that, in countries that suffer from corruption, at least some forms of corruption are considered as a social norms violation rather than as the accepted norm.

Banerjee et al. (2017) provide additional insights into the factors that shape people's moral evaluations of corrupt practices, in this case bribery. Using vignettes that described different bribery scenarios, they experimentally manipulated the size of the bribe. The results indicate that people disapprove of larger bribes more strongly than of smaller bribes. The researchers additionally manipulated the descriptive norm of corruption, informing participants that corruption either is widespread or is not. The results reveal a link between descriptive and injunctive norms, suggesting that when people know that corruption is widespread, they consider bribery to be more acceptable. Hence the results suggest that higher perceived descriptive norms might be related to more social disapproval of corruption, in other words, to injunctive norms.

While Banerjee and colleagues tested the impact of descriptive norms on injunctive norms, other studies have examined a direct link between descriptive norms and willingness to bribe, showing that when people (are led to) believe that corruption is uncommon, they become less likely to engage in it. In one study by Köbis et al. (2015), participants received descriptive norms information prior to playing a bribery game (Köbis et al. 2017). Groups were randomly presented with one of three statements: a message that 'almost nobody' bribes (low descriptive norms condition), a message that 'almost everybody' bribes (high descriptive norms condition) or no message (control condition). The results reveal an 18 percentage point decrease in bribery in the low descriptive norms condition compared to the control, even though the economic cost (such as punishment) and benefit (such as financial rewards) were the same across all conditions. In line with that finding, Abbink et al. (2018) found that bribery levels doubled when participants knew that bribery was widespread (high descriptive norms condition). These results indicate that perceived descriptive norms are an important factor in the decision to engage in corruption.

Taken together, these findings reveal that understanding the interplay of social norms and corruption requires specification. It appears that there is no single monolithic corruption norm that exists in a given society. Instead, people's perceptions about the acceptability of corruption might differ according to their own background, the way corruption is framed and the size of the bribe, while their willingness to engage in corruption themselves appears to be largely shaped by their belief about the frequency of corruption, in other words, by the perceived descriptive norms. Understanding the social normative forces that sustain corruption thus requires a closer look – one that differentiates between various types of corruption.

First attempts have been made to use such contextualized social norms information as a vehicle for anti-corruption reforms. Hoffmann and Patel (2017) conducted a survey into social norms of corruption in Nigeria entailing 4,200 respondents. In it, they assessed perceived descriptive and injunctive norms across various regions, accounting for demographic background and distinguishing between different corruption types – bribery, extortion, embezzlement and nepotism – across different sectors. The results further corroborate the view that social norms are heterogeneous (Efferson et al. 2015). For example, respondents perceived that bribing a police officer is less acceptable than bribing a nurse. Respondents also believed that women engage in corruption less frequently than men. At the same time, however, respondents condemned female corrupt actors more harshly than male. These results suggest that understanding the social normative forces that sustain corruption – and eventually contributing to its reduction – requires a nuanced analysis of the interplay of injunctive and descriptive norms (Jackson and Köbis 2018).

Initial attempts have been made to use such contextualized social norms information as a vehicle for anti-corruption reforms. Köbis et al. (2019) made use of decreasing levels of bribery in the region of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, as evidenced by recent polls commissioned by Transparency International. They distributed posters containing contextualized social norms information about the reduced levels of bribery, targeting perceived descriptive norms. As a first social norms campaign to reduce bribery in the field, they set up a mobile behavioural lab in a busy shopping centre. Using incentivized economic games, they assessed people's perceived social norms and their willingness to engage in bribery in a corruption game. Could information on posters about the declining prevalence of bribery affect beliefs and reduce bribery in the field, where people are exposed to a multiverse of information in their environment? The results provide first promising affirmative answers, illustrating changes in both perceived descriptive norms and bribery behaviour in the corruption game. The combination of contextualized social norms information and incentivized bribery games as a measure of corruption could point towards a new approach for evidence-based anti-corruption.

4.4 Discussion: where to next?

Quantitative research on the social norms of corruption has been shaped by two classic theoretical accounts, both aiming to explain the apparent persistence of corruption. Although not explicitly labelled in social norms terminology, both theoretical accounts recognize the aforementioned distinction between injunctive and descriptive norms. The first theoretical account argues that shared notions of acceptability and appropriateness maintain corrupt practices (Hauk and Saez-Marti 2002; Scholl and Schermuly 2018). This theoretical work begins with the assumption that engaging in corruption generates guilt or shame. Yet in contexts where corruption has become widespread, such internal and social sanctioning mechanisms might be less effective because the number of people that adhere to a given norm determines its strength (Elster 1989). Put differently, people living in societies where exposure to corruption represents a part of everyday life might show higher tolerance for corruption. Such societies may even see the emergence of pro-corruption norms that sustain its existence, so the argument goes. In such settings people might bribe because they think this represents an acceptable course of action. Put into social norms terminology, corruption no longer reflects an injunctive norms violation.

The second influential account argues that the persistence of corruption is not so much a matter of acceptability as a matter of coordination (Bardhan 1997; Fisman and Golden 2017). If corruption rarely occurs, one should refrain from paying bribes. Yet if bribes are standard procedure, paying them represents the best choice, independent of the moral evaluation of the individuals facing this situation.

In the past decade, empirical research using the outlined distinction between injunctive and descriptive norms reported in this chapter has put both accounts to a test. Such work depicts a promising area of study that has gone through a growth spurt in the last few years. This review of qualitative and quantitative studies has provided an overview of empirical insights into a range of dynamics that connect social norms to corruption – but also points to several knowledge gaps that appear especially fruitful for future research to investigate.

For instance, while studies employing quantitative methods such as surveys and experiments have largely focused on the distinction between injunctive and descriptive norms, qualitative research has mostly investigated the sources of normative pressures. Mixed-methods research that integrates both techniques more closely could open avenues for stronger theoretical and empirical understandings of social norms and corruption – and could foster a better appreciation of the types and sources of social norms that sustain a given corrupt practice. In particular, research that applies methodologies to track dynamic changes in the social norms that relate to corruption marks an important next step. The use of longitudinal methods could pave the way for insights into the conditions under which social norms shift and change.

For these empirical endeavours it is important, moreover, to differentiate between various corrupt practices. In our review, we identify a strong focus on bribery and a lack of research on 'grander' forms of corruption, such as embezzlement. We hope that future research combining qualitative and quantitative methods and making more refined distinctions between types of corruption can contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the social norms of corruption.²

NOTES

- 1 For more details on the search methodology employed, see Supplementary Material on the Open Science Framework, available at <https://osf.io/7c4pg/>.
- 2 This project received funding from the European Research Council under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (grant agreements ERC-StG-637915 and ERC-AdG 295707). Additional support was provided by the Chr. Michelsen Institute, Norway.