Overview
Corruption is a significant problem for democracies throughout the world. Even the most democratic countries constantly face the threat of corruption and the consequences of it at the polls. Existing research has identified an array of possible explanations for variation in corruption across democracies, focusing primarily on cultural, socioeconomic, and institutional/political reasons for why some countries are more corrupt than others. Yet, corruption levels vary significantly across countries even after accounting for these differences. Italy and Spain share a Catholic culture and have similar levels of wealth, yet Italy ranks 69th on the Corruption Perceptions Index and Spain ranks 40th. Chile and Uruguay have corruption scores that place them in the same range as the U.S. (22nd and 19th, respectively), yet culturally and socioeconomically similar Venezuela is one of the most corrupt countries in the world. Slovenia is similar to the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland both in terms of economic and democratic development, but is consistently ranked as having a significantly cleaner government.

What explains these differences? Why are some governments more corrupt than others, even after considering cultural, social, and political characteristics? In this book, we argue that clarity of responsibility is critical for reducing corruption. Clarity of responsibility refers to political institutions and party structures that make it easy for voters to monitor their representatives, identify those responsible for undesirable outcomes, and hold them accountable by voting them out of office. Although research has posited a variety of measures of clarity of responsibility (in both parliamentary and presidential systems), the most common measure focuses on majority government: clarity of responsibility is high when a single party majority controls the government; it is low when the government is controlled by multiple parties or lacks majority support altogether.

We argue that clarity of responsibility is important for controlling corruption because it increases accountability in the political system. When clarity of responsibility is high, politicians have a more difficult time shifting blame for undesirable outcomes, and voters can more easily monitor decision makers and assign them responsibility for political performance. Voters can then vote corrupt officials out of office. When clarity of responsibility is low, parties can blame one another for poor outcomes, such as corruption, and voters cannot be sure which of the parties is in control of government or assign responsibility. It is much more difficult for voters to vote corrupt officials out of office under these conditions. In the end, the threat of facing potential retribution at the ballot box curbs the behavior of elected officials, linking clarity of responsibility to reduced corruption levels.

This book demonstrates the relevance of the clarity of responsibility theory for corruption with multiple forms of evidence from democracies throughout the world. We first show, controlling for well-established explanations of corruption, that when clarity of responsibility is high, corruption levels tend to be consistently low. This finding is based on cross-sectional time-series analysis using an original dataset of 78 democracies from 1990-2010. It is one of the largest datasets compiled on corruption both in terms of country coverage and time period. One downside of these observational data, however, is that they only establish a correlational relationship between clarity of responsibility and corruption rather than a causal relationship. Thus, we conduct a second set of analyses that show that electoral accountability is the likely causal mechanism linking clarity of responsibility and corruption by analyzing mass survey data
on voters’ choices at election time. Using Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) and International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) survey results for up to 37 democracies from the mid-2000s, we demonstrate that voters actually are more likely to vote corrupt officials out of office when clarity of responsibility is high rather than when it is low. Third, we present concrete evidence of accountability as the causal pathway using an original survey experiment in the United States. The experiment simply and clearly isolates unified (i.e., single party majority) vs. divided (i.e., minority) partisan control of government as a cause of corruption voting—more people vote incumbents out of office under unified government than under divided government, all else equal. Taken together, these three sets of analyses demonstrate the power of the clarity of responsibility theory for increasing electoral accountability for corruption.

This research is not only relevant for propelling academic research on institutions and corruption forward but has important policy implications as well. Whereas most research on controlling corruption identifies factors that are largely static or slow-moving, the clarity of responsibility explanation suggests that policy and institutional changes that could be introduced by current governments and that make government more efficient, in general, can also help curb corruption. We highlight these implications in the conclusion of the book.

**Related Literature**

In the past fifteen years, a wealth of literature in economics, sociology, and political science has emerged on corruption. These studies have identified various factors that influence the level of corruption in countries—religious cultures, social problems, levels of economic prosperity, trade ties, inequality, authoritarianism and democracy, presidentialism and parliamentarism, and the representation of women, to name a few (for an excellent review, see Treisman 2007; Lambsdorff 2007; Rose-Ackerman 1999). The vast majority of the academic work on corruption has been in the form of journal articles. Books—many of them published by Cambridge University Press—have tended to emerge in two forms. One set is country studies that examine different kinds of corruption and policy solutions (see, for example, Bussell 2012; Gingerich 2013; Kang 2002; Power and Taylor 2011; Yadav 2011). Another set of books are more broadly theoretical and span multiple countries or regions, but they focus on specific government bodies, practices or policies (Shah 2007; Stapenhurst, Johnston, and Pellizo 2006; Szarek-Mason 2010), on non-political explanations such as inequality and trust (Uslaner 2008), or on interactions between corrupt agents (Lambsdorff 2007). Notably, Rose-Ackerman’s edited *International Handbook on the Economics of Corruption* volumes 1 and 2 (2006; 2012) provide a collection of recent (mostly economic) research into corruption at various levels.

Despite these contributions, the existing literature has not considered the important role that the partisan and institutional arrangements of government, in the form of clarity of responsibility, have had on corruption. Clarity of responsibility has been a central theoretical explanation in research on economic voting (Powell 2000; Powell and Whitten 1993), but it has not been considered to any significant degree in the corruption literature. In her 2007 *American Journal of Political Science* article, Tavits identified the importance of clarity of responsibility for corruption in the parliamentary and semi-presidential systems of Europe, and the article has collected a large number of citations (111 according to Google Scholar). Yet, that article only introduces the idea in the context of Europe and parliamentarism whereas this book extends the country and regional coverage and delves more deeply into the theoretical and empirical role that the theory assumes for electoral accountability. Also in this vein, Johnston (2005, 2014) has argued that heightened political accountability—citizens’ ability to defend their interests by political means—is central to curbing corruption of any type. However, his work does not
identify clarity of responsibility specifically as the source of variation in accountability. Thus, our study, with its focus on accountability and clarity of responsibility, naturally follows Johnston’s books yet differs because its emphasis is the causal role of clarity of responsibility whereas Johnston’s was to identify “syndromes” of corruption, more generally. In sum, then, the proposed book would not directly compete with any existing studies and would offer an original and comprehensively tested theory about an important institutional explanation for corruption and the policy implications that emerge from it.

Target Audience
The primary audience for this monograph is academics—faculty, graduate students, and advanced undergraduate students. Corruption is a major topic of interest for political scientists but also for scholars in economics, sociology, and public policy. The book’s theory of clarity of responsibility and accountability should be of interest to scholars working on corruption as well as democracy and representation, parliamentary and presidential systems, legislative studies, and voting. Empirically, the book draws from rigorous cross-national, time-series statistical analyses, multilevel survey analyses, and experimental studies, but will be presented in a way that makes it accessible to a wide audience. This will make it useful not only in academic scholarship but for graduate and advanced undergraduate courses, as well. The book is broadly cross-national, so it does not focus on any one particular region of the world, but part of its appeal may be precisely that.

The book also will be relevant to the large community of international organizations that devote attention to issues of politics and corruption, such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and the myriad U.N. agencies that focus on corruption. Unlike much of the current political science literature on corruption, which identifies causes that are very hard to change—culture, level of economic development, and level of democracy—our study offers feasible policy solutions for curbing corruption. Clarity of responsibility can be shaped by institutional adaptations: we know how to make majority governments more likely in both parliamentary and presidential systems. This highlights the importance of our study for the policymaking community. Furthermore, the book draws upon three measures of corruption produced by important international organizations—the World Bank, Transparency International, and the International Country Risk Group—who are also likely to be interested in work produced with their corruption indices. These highly regarded and well-known organizations, and others like them, will be an important audience for this book.

Timeline and Length
We have finalized drafts of the first four chapters of the manuscript (out of a total of 6) and plan to have a completed manuscript by October 31, 2014. We estimate that the manuscript will be approximately 80,000 words (excluding tables, figures, references). Illustrations for the book will be tables and figures with approximately 5-8 per chapter. The book will have a data and modeling appendix as well.

Authors’ Credentials
Both of the authors have published extensively on democratic institutions, parliamentary and presidential systems, parliaments and legislatures, and more recently, corruption.

Margit Tavits is a professor of political science at Washington University in St. Louis and her work is grounded in democratic institutions with a geographic focus on Europe, industrialized
democracies, and post-communist countries. She has published this work at top journal outlets including the American Political Science Review, American Journal of Political Science, The Journal of Politics, British Political Science Review, European Political Science Review, Comparative Political Studies, among many others. She has published two books, Presidents with Prime Ministers at Oxford University Press and Post-Communist Democracies and Party Organization with Cambridge University Press. For more information, see tavits.wustl.edu.

Leslie Schwindt-Bayer is an associate professor of political science at Rice University and her work focuses on institutions and presidential systems with a regional focus on Latin America and developing democracies. She has published her work in American Journal of Political Science, The Journal of Politics, Electoral Studies, British Political Science Review, Comparative Political Studies and Legislative Studies Quarterly, among others. She also has published two books, both with Oxford University Press: Political Power and Women’s Representation in Latin America and The Gendered Effects of Electoral Institutions: Political Engagement and Participation. For more information, see schwindt.rice.edu.

Chapter Outline

Chapter 1: An Introduction to Clarity of Responsibility and Corruption

Corruption is a threat to democracy throughout the world, and in this book, we argue that an important but overlooked explanation for variation in corruption levels is clarity of responsibility. But, what is corruption, how extensive is it, and how does clarity of responsibility help to explain it? In this chapter, we define corruption and distinguish which kinds of political activities are considered “corruption” and which are not. We explain that, in this book, we define corruption broadly as general perceptions about corruption, which cover both grand corruption as well as street-level petty corruption, and personal encounters as well as information about corruption from the media and social networks. We also discuss the pros and cons of the various cross-national measures of democracy that are currently status quo in the literature and how this book moves beyond studying corruption only with these aggregate indicators and uses survey data and an experiment. This chapter goes on to highlight the pervasiveness of corruption in many democracies around the world and some of the consequences of that corruption for governance. We review the existing literature that explains corruption across countries and over time, and we highlight that the corruption literature has largely overlooked the role of clarity of responsibility. We conclude the chapter by overviewsing the theoretical contribution that the book will make, discussing the scope of the project in more detail, and offering a chapter outline for the book.

Chapter 2: A Theory of Clarity of Responsibility, Accountability, and Corruption

Clarity of responsibility refers to the extent to which political institutions and partisan structures in government disperse power and, thus, diffuse the ability of voters to hold elected officials accountable for political actions. When clarity of responsibility is high, voters can easily and directly attribute responsibility to elected officials. When clarity of responsibility is low, voters have a more difficult time assigning blame to political elites. Although the clarity of responsibility concept was initially constructed to explain variation in how voters hold elected officials accountable for the economy, we argue that it is also important for understanding the extent to which voters assign responsibility for other political phenomena, such as corruption. Specifically, we suggest that clarity of responsibility helps explain individual parties’ and politicians’ decisions to curb corruption, and thus, clarity of responsibility is directly linked to
overall corruption levels in a country. In this chapter, we introduce the concept of clarity of responsibility to the corruption literature and develop a theoretical argument for how clarity of responsibility works through electoral accountability to reduce overall levels of corruption in democracies. We introduce the different measures of clarity of responsibility that have been used in the economic voting literature (e.g., cabinet duration, opposition influence in the legislature, effective number of parties), but following Powell’s (2000) seminal study, we argue that majority government is the most central dimension of clarity of responsibility for corruption. Two hypotheses emerge from the chapter: 1) elected elites should be less likely to engage in corruption, and thus overall levels of country corruption should be lower, in contexts of high clarity of responsibility, and 2) voters should be more likely to vote incumbent governing parties out of office for corruption when clarity of responsibility is high. These hypotheses drive the following three empirical chapters of the book.

Chapter 3: Aggregate Corruption Perceptions
In this chapter, we test empirically the first hypothesis developed in the theory chapter—that country corruption levels should be lower under contexts of high clarity of responsibility. Using an original dataset on democratic institutions and corruption for nearly 100 democracies from 1990-2010, we provide compelling statistical evidence that clarity of responsibility correlates with reduced corruption levels. This finding is evident across three common measures of corruption—Transparency International’s (TI) Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), the World Bank’s (WB) World Governance Indicators Control of Corruption dimension, and the International Country Risk Group’s (ICRG) corruption indicator—and holds in the context of myriad controls for other common explanations for corruption. It also holds not only for our main indicator of clarity—single-party majority government—but also across several of the other indicators of clarity of responsibility discussed in the previous chapter and in both parliamentary and presidential systems. Substantively, the effect of clarity of responsibility rivals, and in some cases even exceeds, that of some of the most prominent explanations of corruption in the existing literature—democratic development, economic development, and culture (Protestantism). We also observe that over time within the same country, changes in clarity correspond with changes in corruption levels. In sum, this chapter demonstrates that clarity of responsibility and corruption go hand in hand.

Chapter 4: Corruption and Accountability in Voting: A Survey Analysis
This chapter offers an initial test of the second hypothesis derived in the theory chapter—that voters should be more likely to vote incumbent governing parties out of office in contexts of high clarity of responsibility compared to low clarity of responsibility. We use questions on corruption perceptions and vote choice from two different and well-respected mass surveys—the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) and the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP)—during the one wave of the survey that asked these questions in the mid-2000s. We demonstrate statistically that voters do take corruption perceptions into account when voting, and we show that they are more likely to do so in high clarity rather than low clarity settings. This helps confirm that electoral accountability is part of the causal link between clarity of responsibility and corruption.

Chapter 5: Corruption and Accountability: An Experimental Analysis
We test hypothesis two further in this chapter with a survey experiment. As part of the April/May The American Panel Survey (TAPS), we included a battery of survey questions that
allow us to determine how citizens are likely to evaluate and hold accountable elected elites in different environments of clarity of responsibility and corruption. Specifically, the survey experiment asks respondents to evaluate a hypothetical situation where a governor is presiding over a government known to have engaged in corruption. Half of the respondents are prompted with a context of high clarity of responsibility (governor’s party controls a majority of seats in the legislature) and the other half with low clarity of responsibility (governor’s party has no majority in the legislature). We ask several questions of the respondents to determine whether they would vote for the incumbent governor, how corruption influences their vote, and whether clarity of responsibility influences their choice. As expected, we find that significantly more respondents in the hypothetical setting of high clarity of responsibility will vote corrupt governors out of office than in the setting of low clarity of responsibility. This simply and clearly illustrates how voters respond to clarity of responsibility in the context of corruption and demonstrates the power of the clarity of responsibility theory for increasing electoral accountability for corruption.

**Chapter 6: Conclusion**

This book reveals an important role for clarity of responsibility and electoral accountability in reducing corruption in democracies throughout the world. It offers a clear and nuanced theory of clarity of responsibility, accountability, and corruption using a novel theoretical argument and it provides extensive evidence that clarity of responsibility in government increases the ability of voters to hold elites accountable for corruption and thereby reduces overall levels of government corruption. The concluding chapter briefly summarizes these major findings and then evaluates the implications of these findings for future academic research and for future policymaking efforts aimed at reducing corruption and improving the quality of democracy.

**References**


