

Does Authoritarianism Breed Corruption? Reconsidering the Relationship Between Authoritarian Governance and Corrupt Exchanges in Bureaucracies

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This article advocates for ethnographic and historical study of the political roots of corruption. Focusing on informal economies of Belarusian universities, it reexamines two theoretical propositions about corruption in autocracies. The first proposition is that authoritarianism breeds bureaucratic corruption; the second is that autocrats grant disloyal subjects corruption opportunities in exchange for political compliance. Using qualitative data, the author finds that autocracies can generate favorable as well as unfavorable preconditions for bureaucratic corruption. The author argues that lenient autocratic governance, characterized by organizational decoupling, creates favorable conditions for bureaucratic corruption. In contrast, consolidated autocracy, defined by rigid organizational controls, is unfavorable to such corruption. The author also concludes that in autocracies, disloyal populations may be cut off from rather than granted opportunities for bureaucratic corruption. These findings suggest that the relationship between autocratic governance and corruption is more complex than current studies are able to reveal due to their methodological limitations.

Eradicating corruption is not enough to sustain a country.

Eduard Shevardnadze, former Georgian president (Radio Free Europe 2004)

In Belarus it's only corruption when ordinary people do it . . . When the government does it, it doesn't count.

[BPr3]

INTRODUCTION

Scholars and policymakers contend that corruption, defined as abuse of public office for private gain,¹ has a range of negative consequences. It increases social inequality, exacerbates poverty, slows down economic development, and lowers institutional efficiency (Mauro 1995; Gupta, Davoodi, and Alonso-Terme 2002; Lambsdorff 2005).

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1. While definitional debates on corruption abound in theoretical literature (for an overview, see Johnston 1996; Kurer 2005), most empirical studies adopt a version of this definition.

Most importantly, corruption is believed to be antithetical to the rule of law. In the short run, it contradicts formal rules and procedures, affecting the distribution of resources, access to justice, and effectiveness of law enforcement institutions. In the long run, it undermines the principles of fairness and equity, encapsulated in the spirit of law, corrodes integrity of the government, and weakens the legitimacy of the state (Frye and Zhuravskaya 2000; MacKay 2000; Tamanaha 2004).

Each year, the international community and national governments spend millions of dollars on fighting corruption through localized policy efforts and transnational oversight and coordination (Sampson 2005, 2010; Rose-Sender and Goodwin 2010; Vogl 2012). Yet, scholarly knowledge about the political roots of corruption remains rather limited. Due to the dearth of reliable micro-level data on corruption, most relevant research is based on anecdotal evidence, reductionist cross-national indicators of corruption, or purely theoretical models of economic deviance in different political regimes. Such studies tend to yield simplistic and overly general conclusions about the ways that governance systems affect economic illegality by ordinary citizens.

This article makes a case for a qualitative, historical approach to the study of the political roots of corruption. Its focus falls specifically on the relationship between authoritarian governance and the abuse of power in street-level bureaucracies. Using micro-level data on under-the-table exchanges between ordinary citizens and bureaucrats in Belarus, it evaluates two theoretical propositions that are currently widely accepted in the literature on corruption despite insufficient or conflicting empirical evidence in their support. The first theoretical proposition suggests that autocratic governance breeds bureaucratic corruption; the second proposition maintains that autocratic elites allow such corruption to flourish in exchange for the political loyalty of the population.

An ethnographic and historical analysis of corruption in Belarus partially repudiates both these hypotheses by distinguishing between political and bureaucratic corruption and revealing their relationship to each other. First, the data from Belarus suggest that authoritarianism may either breed or suppress bureaucratic corruption. The Belarusian president's differential treatment of local universities, hospitals, and secondary schools reveals that authoritarian elites can exercise different types of governance over distinct organizational sectors, generating uneven preconditions for corruption across these sectors. Thus, autocratic leaders tend to tighten controls and accountability mechanisms in organizational sectors that they perceive as politically disloyal, thereby eradicating opportunities for informal transactions among their members. In contrast, organizational sectors, perceived by autocratic elites as apolitical or nonthreatening, are subjected to lenient governance that generates favorable preconditions for bureaucratic corruption through relaxed controls and loose hierarchies.

These findings suggest that while political loyalty is an important mediator of the effect that authoritarianism has on corruption, the relationship between the regime, economic informality, and political dissidence may differ from the predictions of political theorists. Thus, in the Belarusian case, the government deprived politically disloyal organizations of corruption opportunities instead of using corruption as an incentive to promote political loyalty. While this finding does not render the latter scenario impossible, it suggests that the link between autocracy and corruption is more complex than current theories would have us believe.

Most importantly, the Belarusian case shows that the effect of authoritarianism on corruption may depend on the political elites' perceptions of dissidence rather than on any objective measures of political loyalty. Given this idiosyncratic element of an autocrat's perception, political loyalty, in and of itself, cannot serve as a reliable predictor of bureaucratic corruption. Instead of assuming that political docility translates into specific corruption levels, scholars should explore the relationship between autocratic governments and different bureaucratic sectors qualitatively and over time, paying attention to the autocrats' ideas about the strategic importance of different institutional spheres for the stability of the incumbent regime.

These conclusions strongly suggest that an ethnographic and historical analysis offers a more effective way to explore the relationship between authoritarianism and bureaucratic corruption than quantitative or purely theoretical work on the topic. Such a methodological approach allows scholars to avoid the historical functionalism and conflation of political and bureaucratic corruption that plague most existing studies. Finally, this methodology allows scholars to step away from the popular demonization of corruption and instead explore the meanings of everyday illegality for ordinary people struggling with dysfunctional bureaucracies and oppressive governments in autocratic regimes.

DOES AUTHORITARIANISM BREED BUREAUCRATIC CORRUPTION?

The first theoretical proposition discussed in this article suggests that authoritarianism generates favorable conditions for the abuse of public office for private gain. Public choice theorists argue that corruption rates are directly proportional to the degree of monopoly that office holders have over a specific bureaucratic domain and inversely proportional to accountability requirements that they bear (Klitgaard 1991; Rose-Ackerman 1999; Kunicová and Rose-Ackerman 2005). Based on public choice theory, corruption is likely to be high in autocratic societies, characterized by low public accountability and misaligned incentive structures within extensive governmental bureaucracies. Due to poverty and red tape, their citizens perceive corruption as beneficial or even inevitable and, since autocracies lack economic competition, free press, and bureaucratic checks-and-balances, the risk of punishment associated with corruption is often minimal (Besley and McLaren 1993; McGuire and Olson 1996).

Most empirical support for these theories comes from econometric analyses of international indicators of corruption compiled by Transparency International (TI) and other international organizations, on the one hand, and from indicators of political regime characteristics on the other. These studies find that characteristics of autocracies such as state intervention in the economy (Sandholtz and Koetzle 2000; Park 2003), lack of a free press (Brunetti and Weder 2003; Chowdhury 2004; Shen and Williamson 2005), fiscal centralization (Fisman and Gatti 2002), ineffectiveness of the legal system (Herzfeld and Weiss 2003), and lack of civil liberties (Shen and Williamson 2005) are associated with corruption.

The main weakness of these studies lies in their inability to differentiate between the capture of political power by elites (political corruption) and small-scale informal

exchanges in organizations (bureaucratic corruption). The data used by cross-national econometric studies of corruption do not distinguish between these two types of informality. Most come in the form of numeric indicators assigned to each country annually or biannually based on surveys of local and Western experts and businesses (Galtung 2006; Knack 2006). These indices combine expert perceptions of state capture by criminal groups, abuse of power by politicians, and bureaucratic corruption.²

Yet, this difference is central to understanding the political roots of corruption. Political or grand corruption refers to the abuse of political power through nondemocratic means such as oppression, economic control, rigged elections, and self-interested manipulation (Amundsen 1999). It therefore represents a violation of the trust with which the populace endows the ruling elites. Corrupt political leaders make resource allocation decisions through national policies that serve their own power-preservation goals rather than the interests of their constituents (Della Porta and Vannucci 1997; Jain 2001, 73). Such corruption is facilitated by insufficient separation of powers and the ensuing absence of checks and balances on the behavior of political elites (Persson, Roland, and Tabellini 1997).

In contrast to bureaucratic corruption, immediate and singular economic gain is not the primary goal of political corruption. While political power is often associated with material spoils, the latter constitute additional benefits rather than the primary goal of such corruption. Importantly, political corruption often occurs through systematic modification of rules that goes beyond their simple evasion or abuse. The advantages generated by political corruption are, therefore, systematic and cumulative as the system itself is subverted and adjusted in a way that benefits political actors.³

Political corruption is distinct from bureaucratic (also known as administrative or petty) corruption, which entails an abuse of office for economic gain by citizens without access to political decision making (Hollyer and Wantchekon 2010). Thus, bureaucratic corruption involves singular, even if frequent, sidestepping of formal rules for personal gain rather than actual manipulation of these rules for long-term and systematic gain. Bureaucratic corruption occurs when officials take advantage of their professional privileges to receive unsanctioned compensation for performing their job-related duties or for extending additional, extralegal benefits to a payer (Jain 2001, 75). Such corruption includes petty bribery, “greasing” of bureaucratic wheels, kickbacks, “protection payments,” and so on (Humphrey 2002; Smith 2010; Zaloznaya 2012).⁴

The conflation of different corruption types is extremely problematic for studies of political causes of corruption because the measures of political regimes, used in these analyses as independent variables, also reflect the degree to which politicians abuse

2. For instance, TICPI measures “corruption which involves public officials, civil servants or politicians. The data sources . . . include questions . . . on: bribery of public officials, kickbacks in public procurement, embezzlement of public funds, and on questions that probe the strength and effectiveness of anti-corruption efforts in the public sector. As such, it covers both the administrative and political aspects of corruption” (TI 2011).

3. That is, falsified elections, suppression of oppositional elements, and forced nationalization of industries that would have otherwise exercised significant political clout.

4. Politicians may also engage in bureaucratic corruption when they allocate contracts in ways that benefit their protégés or use insider knowledge to gain economic advantage. Yet, this informal activity is different from political corruption as it does not modify the “rules of the game” or extend the political power of a corrupt actor.

their office to maintain power (i.e., political corruption). In fact, political corruption, or the capture of political power through suppression of opposition, modification of “rules of the game,” and insufficient separation of powers, is a core characteristic and “one of the basic modes of operation of authoritarian regimes” (Amundsen 1999, 4). Thus, the Economist Democracy Index (2013), Democracy Barometer, Polity Indices, and other regime indicators used in these studies as independent variables inevitably incorporate some measures of political corruption. The simultaneous presence of the latter on both sides of regression equations leads to circular conclusions about the positive and linear association between autocracy and corruption.⁵

Some studies, indeed, offer empirical evidence that does not fit the simplistic “authoritarianism breeds bureaucratic corruption” framework. For instance, scholars find persistent variation in corruption levels across different autocracies (Wright 2008; Chang and Golden 2010). Thus, certain authoritarian regimes, such as Singapore, have unexpectedly low corruption levels (Quah 1994; Heidenheimer 2004). In 2010, TI ranked Singapore among the three least corrupt countries in the world alongside Denmark and New Zealand (TI 2011). Similarly, other nondemocratic city-states, such as the United Arab Emirates, fare surprisingly well in terms of corruption rankings (Pei 2009). There is also a lot of evidence of nondemocratic societies successfully fighting bureaucratic corruption. For instance, the nondemocratic regime in Georgia has been praised in recent years for significant reduction in corruption levels (Sindelar 2010; Engwall 2012). Rwanda and South Korea also experienced reductions in corruption “as their governments were perceived to grow *more* autocratic” (Hollyer and Wantchekon 2011, 2).

The first goal of this study, therefore, is to adjudicate between inconsistent empirical evidence regarding the effect of autocracy on bureaucratic corruption through a historical analysis of authoritarian governance and qualitative exploration of the informal economic behavior by ordinary citizens.

DOES POLITICAL LOYALTY MEDIATE THE EFFECT OF AUTOCRACY ON BUREAUCRATIC CORRUPTION?

The second theoretical focus of this article falls on the role that the political loyalty of the population plays in shaping bureaucratic corruption under authoritarianism. Several rational choice studies suggest that in autocracies, bureaucratic corruption solves the principal-agent problem arising between the leadership and low-level officials. They postulate that autocratic elites dole out corruption opportunities or, at least, overlook corrupt engagement of citizens whose political support they want to secure.

For instance, conceptualizing corruption as an instrument in the hands of the state, an unpublished paper by Hollyer and Wantchekon (2011) lays out a game-theoretical

5. Other empirical evidence that authoritarianism breeds corruption comes from case studies of the late Soviet Union and Communist China (Grossman 1989; Bian 1994; Yang 1994; Ledeneva 1998). Despite their empirical richness, these studies are not generalizable to present-day autocracies, constrained by economic interdependence with other countries, pressures from the international community, and advanced information technology (Morlino 2009; Göbel 2010; Goode 2010; Solomon 2010; Hale 2011).

model that predicts the rates of petty corruption based on the levels of political loyalty of a country's population. According to these authors, less loyal populations are allowed to engage in more bureaucratic corruption in exchange for their complicity. Following the same logic, other political scientists suggest that personalistic autocracies are likely to have more bureaucratic corruption than military or single-party regimes because their leaders depend on corrupt redistribution of material resources to maintain their political power (Bratton and van de Walle 1994; Bueno de Mesquita et al. 1999; Chang and Golden 2010). Yet others have attributed the longevity of the Soviet regime to the complacency of citizens unabashedly benefitting from pervasive bureaucratic corruption (Kramer 1977; Schwartz 1979; Sampson 1987).

Although these studies make an important step toward disentangling the complex relationship between political and bureaucratic corruption, they also make a number of empirically unwarranted assumptions. Specifically, they presume coordination and premeditation on the part of state actors, generating conclusions impaired by historical functionalism. In an exercise of retrospective attribution, they theorize corruption to be an outcome of strategic planning on behalf of methodical and organized leadership. These assumptions are problematic in the absence of any empirical evidence of coordination, strategy, or perceptions of tradeoff by autocratic leaders (to support and illustrate their arguments, scholars use case studies, retrospectively selected on the basis of the desired outcome to fit the theories) (e.g., Bratton and van de Walle 1994; Bueno de Mesquita et al. 1999; Chang and Golden 2010). In fact, many regimes suffering from pervasive bureaucratic corruption are highly disorganized and declining autocracies, weakened by the mass-scale looting of state resources. As Hollyer and Wantchekon (2011) briefly acknowledge themselves, most corruption actually takes place in defiance of the state rather than as a result of informal governmental permission.

Retrospective attribution and imposition of abstract theoretical models are expected, given the lack of historical and qualitative data on corruption. Working exclusively with numeric country-level indicators and rational choice models of decision making, scholars have no choice but to construct postfactum theories to fit the observed historical patterns. These studies, therefore, suggest a need to examine empirically whether political loyalty plays a role in mediating the relationship between authoritarianism and bureaucratic corruption and whether autocratic elites use such corruption to incentivize dissident populations. This is the second goal of this article.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a unique approach to bureaucratic corruption that combines interviews, ethnography, and analysis of local press and online discussion forums. To avoid the common problem of conflating political and bureaucratic corruption, this study explores them separately. The data on autocratic exercise of power over different organizations are gathered through an analysis of these organizations' institutional history, while the data on bureaucratic corruption are collected via interviews with ordinary citizens. These data shed light on the motivation of political and bureaucratic actors, elucidating the micro-macro link between petty economic deviance and grand political corruption, and avoiding the historical functionalism of previous research.

TABLE 1.
Methodology

Method	Sources/Subjects	Selection Method	Number of Data Units
Participant-observation	Foreign language department of a large classical university	Representative of the first major type of Belarusian higher educational establishments	Three months
Participant-observation	Foreign language department of a specialized technical institute	Representative of the second major type of Belarusian higher educational establishments	Three months
Semistructured interviews	Students of Minsk universities	Snowball sampling	Thirty-seven people
Semistructured interviews	Parents of students of Minsk universities	Snowball sampling	Twenty-six people
Semistructured interviews	Professors/instructors	Snowball sampling	Twenty people
Semistructured interviews	Local experts	Based on expertise	Eleven people
Analysis of informal discussion forums	Online	Search through the official Web sites of all Belarusian universities; recommendation of respondents	Twelve forum websites
Analysis of local media publications	Online	Web search	Forty-two articles, reports, and opinion pieces from fifteen publications

The data were collected in the capital city of Minsk⁶ from March to August 2010 and remotely in the fall of 2010. To ensure the veracity of data on hidden and stigmatized exchanges on the one hand and the history of governmental oppression on the other, I relied on multiple data sources (see Table 1 for a summary).

First, I worked and carried out observations in the foreign-language departments of two Minsk universities for a period of three months (April–June 2010). One was a large classical university with a wide range of degree programs; the second was a smaller

6. The capital city of Minsk hosts most higher educational establishments that range from highly prestigious, largest, and oldest universities to the newest, smallest, and most narrowly specialized institutes (Ministerstvo Obrazovaniya Respubliki Belarus 2012, 26–27). Second, while universities in other cities serve mostly local populations, Minsk schools attract students from all over Belarus. By concentrating on this city, I had access to a geographically diverse student body (see the Appendix for more information on respondents).

institute specializing in a technical field. In each, I spent approximately thirty hours a week, teaching English-language classes and participating in faculty meetings and extracurricular activities. Participant-observation allowed me to learn about the informal environment of universities and meet many first-wave interviewees.

I also carried out semistructured interviews with different university members, including students (thirty-seven), professors (twenty), students' parents (twenty-six), and local experts (eleven). The experts were NGO workers (two), opposition activists (five), journalists (two), and politicians (two). Most students and parents were recruited through snowball sampling. I started with personal or professional contacts, who then introduced me to the next wave of respondents, and so on. When I was vouched for by their acquaintances, Belarusians felt more comfortable discussing the sensitive topics of corruption and their oppressive government. Snowball sampling is widely recognized as an effective way to reach hidden populations and to increase participation rates (Biernacki and Waldorf 1981; Kaplan, Korf, and Sterk 1987; Watters and Biernacki 1989; Maxfield and Babbie 2010). The resulting sample included students from across the country, different universities, and different departments. The interviewed parents held a variety of professions and had different self-identified ethnic affiliations (Russian, Ukrainian, and Belarusian) (see the Appendix for more information on interviewees).

I identified the contact information of instructors and experts through the Web sites of their respective employers and contacted them by e-mail, phone, or in person. I also relied on introductions from acquaintances and previous respondents. Since these respondents were generally more apprehensive of participating in research than students and parents, their response and participation consent rates were much lower. Thus, only 15–20 percent of contacted instructors agreed to an interview and only a third of interviewees felt comfortable talking about corruption. These respondents included instructors (part- or full-time employees with a specialist degree, equivalent to a master's) as well as professors (who had kandidat or doctor nauk degrees, roughly equivalent to assistant and full professors in Western institutions). They varied in gender, age, specialization, and tenure in their respective educational organizations (see the Appendix for more information).

Additionally, I analyzed twelve discussion forums associated with unofficial Web sites of Belarusian universities and online youth portals. Over the last decade, many students of post-Soviet universities have developed unofficial online spaces to exchange information on courses, discuss instructors, and share homework. I located these Web sites by asking student interviewees and by searching for links off of official Web sites of Minsk universities (see the Appendix for a list of their URL addresses).

A typical unofficial university Web site has sections where students share their opinions about different courses, offer each other paid assistance with assignments, put their class notes up for sale, and discuss their instructors (often revealing if they require bribes or presents). Sometimes, instructors and administrators contribute to these discussions, but their involvement is generally limited. Other youth portals also have discussion forums where university affiliates and the general public discuss university education.⁷ These forums offer a valuable complement to other data as they approxi-

7. While other sources used in this article pertain exclusively to Minsk, the contributors to informal forums are affiliated with a variety of institutions throughout the country.

mate direct, nonmediated observation of student life in Minsk universities. The analysis of these forums was used to confirm the absence of corruption in Minsk universities, analyze the extent of involvement of the state in the everyday life of Belarusian universities, and assess professional aspirations of graduates.

I complemented my data with an analysis of local media publications online (see the Appendix for their URLs). I located over forty journalistic accounts, research reports, and opinion pieces about bureaucratic corruption published online in the last ten years in fifteen different online publications or Web sites. I used them to evaluate the spread and patterns of bureaucratic corruption across different organizations.⁸

BUREAUCRATIC CORRUPTION IN BELARUS

Belarus is a mid-size country in the western part of the former Soviet bloc that gained political independence in 1991. Following a brief period of liberalization in the early 1990s, Belarusians elected an authoritarian president, Aleksandr Lukashenka, in 1994. Under his leadership, Belarus has become a closed and centralized economy dependent on cheap Russian gas, falsified elections, oppression of the opposition, and governmental control of citizens' expression and mobility (Korosteleva 2011; Silitski 2005; Wilson 2011). Termed "the last dictatorship in Europe" by popular media, Belarus is denounced by Western democracies and international human rights organizations (Amnesty International 2013; Human Rights Watch 2013).

Over the last decade, TI has consistently ranked Belarus in the twentieth percentile of most corrupt countries in the world (TI 2013). My data also show that many bureaucracies in Belarus are filled with small-scale corruption. All but three interviewed students and parents and almost three-fourths of instructors reported routinely using connections and bribes in various bureaucratic organizations in exchange for speedy appointments, good and timely service, scarce goods, or "just in case." The respondents recalled using bribes and connections in hospitals, passport tables, kindergartens, secondary schools, and DMVs. Local press also report such exchanges in courts, tax administrations, and various municipal offices (see, e.g., Dan 2013; Hartiya '97 2013a; Kozlovskiy 2013; 5min.by 2014). Online discussion forums mention corruption in hospitals, construction companies, and customs.

Thus, Elena, a fifty-year-old instructor of humanities, told me that her main "medical expense" for her mother's surgery consisted in bribes: "I had to bring a bottle of expensive cognac to every single doctor's appointment. . . . She is an older lady, and they don't care about old people. So, I literally had to 'sweeten' every single nurse in that hospital" [BPr4]. Similarly, Igor, a thirty-nine-year-old banker, mentioned that it was difficult to obtain zoning permits for the house he was building: "Nothing gets done without someone making a call from up-high! At every stage . . . I had to look for people

8. It is important to note that no matter how rich and carefully triangulated these data are, this study is vulnerable to generalizability concerns. Belarus might be different from other autocracies given its Soviet past, legacy of informal markets, economic dependence on Russia, and so on. The findings are, therefore, used not to establish definitively the links between authoritarianism, political loyalty, and corruption, but to identify the complexities of these relationships and suggest what research methodology is best suited for a careful empirical exploration of the political roots of corruption.

to introduce me and to ask for me. But even with introductions I still had to pay some imaginary fees that went straight to the pocket of the fat bastard in some office" [BPa11].

Most respondents insisted that they had no choice but to resort to bureaucratic corruption—either to obtain desired services as clients or to complement their meager incomes as bureaucrats. The following quote by Raisa, a sixty-year-old engineer, illustrates both rationales: "an old friend of mine works in a hospital. I always turn to her when I need something there. She helped me see this famous surgeon . . . even 'connected' people have to wait for months to see him . . . Of course, I also brought . . . I had to thank him . . . These doctors don't make any money. He needs to feed his family too" [BPa18].

When asked to elaborate on what constitutes corruption, most Belarusians argued that money and expensive gifts offered to officials prior to the service comprised bribes, while the use of connects or nonmonetary compensations following the service were recognized as more ambiguous. For instance, respondents argued that small gifts, such as flowers, alcohol, coffee, and candy were often expected in everyday bureaucratic encounters and, therefore, rarely problematized as unethical. Consider the following quote by Oleg, a thirty-nine-year-old computer programmer: "It seems to me that if a person brings something to a bureaucrat after everything is already done, it's more like gratitude. You can't pay for something you buy after you've already bought it, you know? It's just the way we are, it's a tradition" [Bpa23].

The leveraging of connections in the everyday struggles with extensive and often dysfunctional bureaucracies is also often understood in terms of mutual assistance and relationship building. Yekaterina, a forty-five-year-old housewife, explains: "Sometimes it's hard to get into an organization, or get attention of a good doctor, or avoid endless cues, so people resort to asking 'someone through someone through someone.' I think it's a guarantee of the quality of a service because the bureaucrat will pay more attention to you once he knows you didn't come from the street . . . It's a way to hold them responsible rather than corruption . . . And then you can express your gratitude with a return favor or a bottle of cognac, or even nothing if it's your close friend" [BPa14].

While few Belarusians disagreed that money and expensive gifts, such as jewelry or perfume, constitute bribes, most did not attach moral judgment to these transactions. Consider a quote by Nikolai, a forty-year-old unemployed accountant: "I don't really do it often but it is not because there is anything particularly wrong with it. Probably because I just don't have the money. We all have to make do somehow. . . . It's not a crime to try to get what you want if you have the means" [BPa6]. Even the respondents who expressed chagrin about informal exchanges that prevented them from getting services they deserved found justifications for corruption: "when I was getting my passport . . . I didn't bring anything. . . . So, instead of the month it was supposed to take, it took five . . . because she [the bureaucrat] kept on doing other people's documents who actually paid her something. But oh well, I could have paid also, right?" [BSt2].

PRIMARY CASE: ABSENCE OF CORRUPTION IN BELARUSIAN UNIVERSITIES

Despite ubiquitous informal exchanges in hospitals, passport tables, DMVs, kindergartens, secondary schools, and other bureaucracies, Belarusian universities are

conspicuously free of under-the-table exchanges between students, professors, and administrators. None of the interviewees suggested that they participated, observed, or heard about university corruption. The following quotes illustrate a typical response to my questions: “It doesn’t happen in my school. . . . I mean, that stuff, it’s all over, but our university is an exception really. Professors don’t even take flowers” [BSt31] and “I am so sure though that in my department, among my professors and my classmates, nothing like that happens. . . . No teacher has ever hinted” [BSt12]. Thus, during the entire period of participant-observation, I did not hear about or observe or become implicated in informal transactions. Neither have I identified any informal forum posts talking about concrete instances of bribery in universities.⁹ Furthermore, the rare mentions of such corruption in the local press usually involved high-profile bribery scandals, framed as singular occurrences (see, e.g., Ej.by 2012b; Valah 2011; 5min.by 2013).

At the same time, the interviewees who had been affiliated with universities for more than ten years (nine professors) or who had had encounters with the higher educational sector in the 1990s (seven parents¹⁰) suggested that this absence of corruption was a relatively recent phenomenon. Many maintained that during the 1990s, Belarusian universities were similar to other bureaucracies in terms of high prevalence of informal exchanges. In the words of Aleksandr, a sixty-one-year-old professor of history in Minsk State University, “the time of cognacs, envelopes, and golden chains hidden in flowers is over. . . . But I remember when students were buying TVs and vacuum cleaners for professors, when bouquets of flowers were . . . a way to give professors jewelry. It was not that long ago” [BPr7]. Similarly, several online publications framed university corruption as a problem that used to be very prevalent but that had been conquered in recent years (see, e.g., Listopadov and Protaskin 2009; Prokuratura Mogilyovskoy Oblasti 2011; Ej.by 2012a; Belta.by 2013).

The analysis of changes in Belarusian higher education over the last two decades suggests that in the early 2000s, President Lukashenka changed his attitude to universities and this change of spirit had a largely unintended side effect of decreasing university corruption. Below is a discussion of three time periods, characterized by different governance and different preconditions for corruption in local universities.

POLITICIZATION OF BELARUSIAN UNIVERSITIES

Period I. The “Wild 1990s”

After his election in 1994, Lukashenka paid surprisingly little attention to higher education. The new president concentrated on institutionalizing personal control over the government and suppressing political opposition (Leshchenko 2008; Wilson 2011).

9. In comparison, online student forums in neighboring Ukraine, Russia, and Kazakhstan abound with discussions of bribery (see, e.g., ForumKiev.com 2013; Studencheskiy Portal 2013; StudZona 2013).

10. Four parents had older children who attended a university, two attended universities themselves, and one worked for a university between the years of 1995 and 1999.

As a result, until the early 2000s, university officials exercised substantial freedoms in hiring, budgetary allocations, and curriculum development (Ministerstvo Obrazovaniya Respubliki Belarus 2012, 24–25; interview with Vladimir Dunaev and an EHU instructor). Uninhibited by excessive regulation, universities grew, changed, and, most importantly, liberalized. Left to their own devices, Belarusian intellectual elites were shedding Soviet-era controls over the curriculum, teaching methods, and funding structures. New private universities were opening in Minsk and other Belarusian cities; instruction in international relations, sociology, and political science was introduced throughout the country; new teaching methods and materials were adopted across social science departments (e.g., Human Rights Watch 1999; Ash 2013; BGU 2013).

A number of important legislative innovations were also introduced during this time. The Ministry of Education and the National Institute for Higher Education collaborated with the Council of Europe to update the “Law on Higher Education” that institutionalizes academic freedoms, while the intellectual community mobilized around the initiative to join the Bologna Agreement—a pan-European educational standardization accord (Ministerstvo Obrazovaniya Respubliki Belarus 2012, 40–41; Belarus Project 2012; Belarus Digest 2013).

During this period of change and innovation came a significant growth in university corruption. In the context of little regulation, openness to new models of funding, and rapid changes in university governance, informal relations of exchange spread through various levels of the educational process. Bureaucratic corruption flourished because of new opportunities for profit making, generated by the lack of supervision from the government, the new commercialization and monetization trends in the broader Belarusian economy, relaxation of Soviet propaganda, and increased penetration of new cultural models of private property and uninhibited markets. According to Irina, a fifty-six-year-old doctor: “The only way to get Vika [her daughter] in was through acquaintances. . . . And then I would buy presents for her professors to help push her through. It is such a relief that it is different with Seryosha [her younger son, a current university student]” [BPa1]. Similarly, Dmitriy, a forty-eight-year-old instructor of chemistry suggested that: “in the nineties the salaries of my colleagues used to be dismal but at least they were complementing them under the table. [These] ‘bonuses’ . . . kept our families from starvation. Now we just work for the straight salary, that’s it” [BPr16].

Period II. Lukashenka Discovers the Threat

The period of openness and experimentation ended in the early 2000s when Lukashenka first realized that his *laissez-faire* attitude to universities might be risky for the stability of his regime. During the presidential election of 2001, university students showed very low support for Lukashenka’s candidacy. Although the official statement of the Belarusian Central Elections Committee claimed that Lukashenka received 40 percent of students’ vote, their real support level is estimated to be as low as 5 percent (Nohlen and Stöver 2010). In his infamous inauguration speech, Lukashenka mentioned with much chagrin that despite the support from many Belarusians, university students had not been loyal (Cole 2001; Hill 2002).

The uninhibited liberalization of Belarusian universities was accompanied by a growing pro-democratic sentiment among the country's youth. Inspired by the neighboring Ukraine's *Pora* and Georgia's *Kmara*, Belarusian oppositional youth groups were growing and developing elaborate organizational structures. One of the most active groups, ZUBR (or Bison) relied on an extensive secret network of volunteers and skillful use of cyberspace to organize peaceful protests (Bekkerman 2005; Wilson 2010). Another youth organization, Malady Front (Young Front), initiated an agreement of support between the oppositional presidential candidate, Siamion Domash, and the youth of Belarus during the 2001 election (Malady Front 2013).

The political threat emanating from young and educated Belarusians consolidated as several neighboring countries experienced pro-democratic popular uprisings. Georgia's 2003 Rose Revolution, Ukraine's 2004 Orange Revolution, and the 2005 Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan shook up the region and signaled to the remaining dictators the dangers of gradual liberalization (Berg-Schlosser 2008; Wilson 2010). In the words of Silitski, "as many surviving autocratic leaders saw it, the great mistake of their fallen colleagues was to tolerate social and even political pluralism" (2005, 84).

Period III. Repressions Against Universities and Decrease in Corruption

In response to these growing threats, Lukashenka embarked on a crusade to limit university freedoms and tighten the ideological grip over young Belarusians. The president closed down the private institutions that had relative independence from the state due to their self-sufficient funding structures. Their number declined from over twenty-five in 2001 to ten in 2005 (Maksymiuk 2004; Ministerstvo Obrazovaniya Respubliki Belarus 2012). The most infamous case was the closing of the European Humanities University (EHU), which offered Western-style social science and humanities courses and was very popular among progressive Belarusians. According to its cofounder, Vladimir Dunaev, EHU leaders did not pursue any explicit political goals other than exposing "students to critical thinking" and teaching "them to ask questions about what is going on around them" (interview on May 15, 2010). It was this mission that worried Lukashenka. After several years of gradually increasing pressure, EHU closed down and moved to neighboring Lithuania (EHU 2013; Reisz 2013).

Lukashenka's policies also targeted large classical universities that often served as platforms for the mobilization of student activists. First, Lukashenka replaced their administrators with regime loyalists. For instance, the president of the Belarusian State University from 1996 to 2003, Aleksandr Kozulin, was forced to resign due to the oppositional tendencies of his students¹¹ (Harzl 2008). The new administrators hand-picked by Lukashenka had an explicit task of reducing academic freedoms. *Belarusian Review* reports that "[Lukashenka] advised rectors of both state-run and private universities to get rid of professors and lecturers who oppose government policies. . . . 'If you do not accept the ideas declared by the government and the president, do not apply to a state university for a job,' Lukashenka said explicitly" (Maksymiuk 2004).

11. He subsequently ran as an oppositional candidate in the presidential election of 2006 and was beaten and imprisoned in its aftermath (International League for Human Rights 2013).

The president also implemented a rigid code of conduct for university members, whereby they could no longer freely travel abroad, collaborate with Western colleagues, participate in demonstrations, or write on non-state-approved topics (Silitski 2005, 92; Zaloznaya and Hagan 2012). All liberal reforms and experimental initiatives in universities, including the transition to the Bologna system, were discontinued. Instead, old Soviet curricula were reinstated, new textbooks were replaced with old Soviet manuals, and many social science courses were cancelled altogether (Rich 2003). Instead, the subject of “state ideology” was introduced as a mandatory part of university curriculum (Klyuchnikova 2003; Sidorovitch 2005; Bekus 2008). According to Lidia, a thirty-two-year-old instructor of ideology, the goal of the course is “to explain the choices made by the president and convey how his vision of the country’s future is the correct path” [BPr13].

Another potent instrument of control, activated during this time, was a student organization called Belarusian Republican Youth Movement (or BRSM, in Russian) with an official goal of “instilling patriotism and moral values into the Belarusian youth” (BRSM 2008). BRSM is widely recognized as an instrument of political propaganda (Nyegosh 2001; Bekkerman 2005; Shirokanova 2010; Clem 2011). More than half the students interviewed for this project (twenty-three out of thirty-seven) reported being coerced into joining this organization. Finally, the Soviet practice of *raspredelenie* (redistribution, in English), whereby university graduates are assigned to their first jobs for the period of two to five years, was reintroduced as a means of controlling the physical location of young professionals. Originally developed to make sure that the industrializing Soviet periphery received its fair share of young specialists, *raspredelenie* was revived as a political tool to keep the new graduates away from Minsk and from causing political unrest during their most “troublesome years” (Branstein 2001; Zaloznaya and Hagan 2012).

In addition to more tacit control mechanisms, the government has also engaged in blunt repressions against university members. Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and local Belarusian independent and oppositional news sources report frequent incidents of students and professors being fired, expelled, and imprisoned for participating in NGOs, attending international conferences, or simply traveling abroad. By 2011, the number of politically persecuted students and instructors exceeded 300 (e.g., Alnutt 2007; European Students’ Union 2011; RT.com 2011; UN News Center 2011; UN Watch 2011; European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity 2013).¹²

THE EFFECT OF LUKASHENKA’S RETALIATION ON CORRUPTION IN UNIVERSITIES

My data suggest that Lukashenka’s retaliation eradicated favorable conditions for bureaucratic corruption that had existed in Belarusian universities during the 1990s.

12. Thus, Lukashenka’s strategy was that of repression and negative reinforcement. The only positive rewards, introduced in the early 2000s to incentivize political loyalty, were associated with membership in BRSM, attendance of pro-presidential events, oversight of supervisees, and compliance with new accountability requirements. Salaries of university instructors or tuition payments were not changed notably during this time.

First, the president's reactive policies shrank the spaces of discretion available to university employees, decreasing their opportunities to carry out corrupt exchanges. The interviews suggest that bureaucratic discretion of university officials decreased in response to the tightening of vertical hierarchies, the rise in mandatory accountability procedures, and discontinued reforms and innovation.

Thus, Belarusian instructors reported strong vertical connections within the chains of university employees. Oksana, a twenty-six-year-old instructor of English, complained: "Our chair is dependent on the dean because he signs her contract every year. . . . Everything has to be perfect so the dean can't say anything. And since she signs our contracts . . . we have to do exactly what she says" [BPr11]. The department chair herself explained her strict oversight with references to the pressure that she feels from her own supervisors: "It is so easy to pick on something to bring a person down! It's just better . . . to be impeccable" [BPr14]. Similarly, Alexei, a forty-two-year-old instructor of environmental law, described his department: "It's like army over here. Precise execution of commands of your superiors is your best quality as a worker" [BPr19]. Another instructor elaborated: "The lowest ranks of the university are very careful not to break any rules because we are under so much pressure from above" [BPr12].

Faculty interviewees also pointed out the copious amounts of paperwork that they had to fill out on a daily basis. Some complained that they had to account for everything they did—from grades they gave to classrooms they used: "it feels like I am . . . not able to do anything without having to explain . . . why. Why is this student nominated to go to this competition? Why have I included this topic in this lesson? Why am I using the projector more than other instructors? I feel like I write these [explanations] more than I write lesson plans" [BPr17]. Another instructor, Galina, told me: "All this bureaucracy is out of fear. They tell us there are new laws that we have to observe about writing these endless papers. Nobody wants trouble, believe me" [BPr6]. Numerous bureaucratic hoops instituted by the president increased the accountability of university employees and reduced their opportunities to engage in bureaucratic corruption.

Additionally, the sudden halt put on the Bologna process and other innovations in universities created an artificial stasis, reducing the "gray spaces" that come with transition (Belarus Digest 2011; Mundell 2012). As Belarusian universities went back to operating in familiar and clear-cut Soviet ways, the exercise of discretion and experimentation with alternative funding models was no longer feasible (Gorbachev, Malchenko, and Zenchanka 2006; Shaton 2009).

Second, the interviews suggest that the change in Lukashenka's attitude to Belarusian universities decreased the perceived need for corruption among university students. For instance, a third-year student, Sergey, explained to me that getting through university studies without under-the-table offerings is fairly easy: "sometimes I wonder if it is actually possible to flunk out . . . short of not showing up for exams. . . . So I don't really understand why anyone would pay" [BSt9]. Yana, a fourth-year student of philology, also told me: "I don't really feel a need to pay. Simply throwing my money away is not something I can afford" [BSt13].

The first reason for the decrease in students' reported need to offer bribes is the decline in perceived pressure from instructors. Research shows that clients who know that corrupt exchanges had previously happened in a specific organization tend to perceive extortion from its employees (Cabelkova 2001; Miller, Grødeland, and

Koshechkina 2001; Zaloznaya 2012). Thus, when clients hear rumors about corruption, they often feel that bribes are expected of them as well. As a result of decreased bureaucratic discretion in Belarusian universities, and the subsequent fall in rumors about corruption, students no longer feel like their money is the only thing that professors want. The following quote by Katya, a first-year student of journalism in Minsk State University, reflects this way of thinking: “Have I considered bribery? No. Why? . . . If you are a good student, you will do well” [BSt21]. Similarly, Yana suggested: “I can get what I need without paying. Nobody tells me or hints that I should pay” [BSt13].

The second way in which the pressure from the state decreased students’ reported need for corruption was through *raspredelenie*. Specifically, this mandatory job placement had a strong effect on students’ attitude to studying. Since every graduate is placed into his or her first job and the quality of placement does not directly depend on students’ performance, *raspredelenie* effectively decreased the competition for grades. In some cases, it reoriented students toward obtaining knowledge, rather than grades. The quote by Kolya, a third-year student of computer science at Minsk State University, offers an example: “I don’t really understand why anyone would actually buy a grade. Really, who cares about grades? My studies will be over really soon and then for the rest of my life I will be programming . . . and if I don’t really know how to program then you know who’s really going to suffer? Me” [BSt36]. In other cases, *raspredelenie* decreased students’ motivation to do anything—either gain knowledge or offer bribes. For instance, Misha, a junior at Belarusian State Agrarian University, told me: “I wouldn’t waste my money on bribes. I know they will send me to some village anyways . . . so what’s the point?” [BSt15]. Either way, *raspredelenie* decreased competition for grades and students’ perceived need to rely on corruption.

Furthermore, the introduction of the subject of ideology, activation of BRSM, tightening of university hierarchies, and episodic repressions created a climate whereby any “not-by-the-protocol” activity is avoided for the sake of one’s safety and continual employment. According to Vasilii, a professor of political science: “people are afraid . . . and if you take each individual instance, their fears may be ungrounded but if you look at them as a collective . . . than it makes a lot of sense. . . . And, because from time to time they get a confirmation of their fears, they keep on believing” [BPr3]. This fear was evident in the behavior and testimonies of Belarusian students and instructors. Some interviewees even insinuated that there were undercover KGB (state security) agents in each university. While this information is difficult to verify, its veracity is largely irrelevant. Whether grounded or not, it diminishes the likelihood of corruption.

Student respondents testified that their fear of “being noticed” was due to constant surveillance carried out by the state through mandatory attendance of cultural and sporting events, early voting, and membership in BRSM. Thus, online discussion forums are replete with discussions of pressure that students feel to join this organization:

Today our starosta [student leader of a class] met with the dean who warned her that on Sunday BRSM is having an event and that if none of our students show up she will be expelled. (Unofficial forum of Belarusian National Technical University 2012)

And:

Our dean actually told us pretty straightforwardly that her plan is to have sixty-five to seventy percent of each class in BRSM. And then she said that whoever is interested in going to grad school won't get in unless they join. (Para.by 2012)

SHADOW CASES: BELARUSIAN HOSPITALS AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS

In contrast to universities, many other bureaucracies have not raised Lukashenka's concerns about political loyalty. Thus, secondary schools, hospitals, tax administrations, or utility offices (*ZHEKs*, in Russian), as a rule, do not host identifiable politically active, pro-Western, or oppositional groups of citizens. As a result, Lukashenka's governance over these sectors is more relaxed and permissive. The combination of administrative and fiscal centralization with lenient governance in these sectors generates favorable conditions for bureaucratic corruption.

For instance, Belarusian hospitals are permeated with informal exchanges between employees and their clients. Local press abounds with accounts of under-the-table exchanges between doctors, patients, and hospital administrators (see, e.g., *Imedic* 2010; *Hartiya '97* 2013b), while interviewees testified about the need to invoke connections and offer "gratitude" in order to obtain good and timely health services. Twenty-seven out of thirty-five students, twenty-one out of twenty-five parents, and fifteen out of twenty instructors reported having used acquaintances or given presents or money in Belarusian hospitals.

Fifty-five-year-old Nadezhda complained to me about her recent cancer scare and the mobilization of networks that it required: "Until someone asked for me, I felt abandoned So I literally got on the phone and called everybody I knew. My family has only a modest income so I need to rely on acquaintances They took some of the burden off my shoulders by thanking the doctors who helped me" [BPa9]. Another respondent, a female instructor of Spanish, described the "arrangements" she had to make when she gave birth three years prior: "I would not go just to any random doctor. . . . So I turned to the woman who's been my . . . family's doctor for a long time now. I tutor her daughter and buy all the books and tapes for her and in exchange she's been treating us . . . for years. . . . I thanked her very generously afterwards" [BPr2].

Interviews with ordinary Belarusians suggest that accountability requirements in Belarusian hospitals are lax and sanctions for employee misdeeds are rare. As a result, Belarusian doctors enjoy significant bureaucratic discretion that allows them to engage systematically in under-the-table exchanges with their clients. Galina, a forty-four-year-old instructor of natural sciences, suggested: "People pay additional money to make sure that procedures go well. God knows I pay—I don't want a hungry doctor operating on me They just got freedom, more than we do . . ." [BPr6]. Similarly, Polina, a fifty-one-year-old real estate broker, said that for many years she has been exchanging favors with her friend Inna, who is a doctor: "I usually turn to Inna She can get the medicine for cheaper or . . . sometimes she gets *spravki* [medical notes] for us, sometimes we get to skip queues for appointments. . . . That's what all doctors do, really. Like, with

spravki—they have free access to the forms . . . , no one counts them” [BPa8]. Olga, a thirty-seven-year-old bank teller, added: “I had this minor problem and needed to have my blood drawn . . . The nurse told me to pay additional money for a syringe, needle, alcohol, for this, for that. . . How do I know that she’s telling me the truth . . . ? They don’t give a receipt or anything. They do whatever they want. It’s all up for grabs” [BPa16].

In addition to hospitals, many interviewees also described secondary schools in stark contrast to noncorrupt universities.¹³ For instance, Oksana, a twenty-six-year-old instructor of English, told me that “for most holidays, parents need to bring something for teachers . . . if the kid is . . . in trouble—then parents ask the teacher ‘to settle the situation’ . . . There are basically boundaries that everyone is sort of aware of, within which a teacher can ask” [BPr11]. Another professor from the same department, Valentina, complained about the poor preparation of the incoming university students, which she attributed to corruption in high schools: “it is now necessary to pay money in school . . . It’s all a result of various reforms, implemented mindlessly. . . Now nobody knows the right way to do things!” [BPr14].

Others corroborated Valentina’s observation that inconsistent reforms in secondary education created ambiguity and discretionary spaces, within which Belarusian teachers and parents can engage in small-scale corruption. In the words of Vladimir, a small business owner: “there is just nobody to be afraid of” [BPa5]. Ljubov, a forty-three-year-old instructor of musicology, also suggested that ambiguity of formal rules facilitates corruption in the secondary school where her daughter Masha is currently enrolled: “[Masha’s home economy teacher] is really blunt about what kids need to bring her to get their grades. . . . It’s not like anyone . . . is going to check that her grades are fair. . . . The school is in such disarray!” [BPr17]. Anna, who also has a daughter in high school, added: “the main problem is that no one can really catch them [teachers] doing anything because the rules change all the time—now it’s these textbooks, now it’s those . . . now this subject is mandatory, now it’s a different one” [BPa24].

DISCUSSION

My data reveal a systematic variation in corrupt bureaucratic transactions across different organizational sectors within a single autocracy. While many Belarusian bureaucracies, such as hospitals, tax administrations, and secondary schools, are filled with petty under-the-table exchanges between low-level employees and their clients, Belarusian universities are virtually free of bureaucratic corruption. At the same time, current absence of corruption in universities stands in stark contrast to rampant bureaucratic corruption in higher education during the 1990s.

The institutional history of Belarusian universities suggests that the decrease in university corruption at the turn of the century was associated with President Lukashenka’s increased awareness of the political disloyalty of the university community and the associated threat emanating from higher education. This perceived peril

13. Twenty-nine out of thirty-seven interviewed students, twenty out twenty-six parents, and fourteen out of twenty instructors told me that bureaucratic corruption was present in secondary schools.

led him to eliminate academic freedoms that had previously flourished in higher education. The president's changed attitude translated into policies that tighten organizational hierarchies and institute strict accountability requirements, reducing the spaces of bureaucratic discretion and, consequently, opportunities for corruption in Belarusian universities. By increasing controls over the alumni through mandatory job assignments, Lukashenka's government decreased students' need to resort to corruption, while the ideological pressures through BRSM, a politically charged curriculum, and selective persecutions generated a culture of fear that diminished the propensity of university members toward rule breaking in general and corrupt exchanges in particular.

The case of Belarus, therefore, suggests that authoritarian regimes may generate uneven preconditions for corruption across different organizations. It suggests that the type of governance that an authoritarian regime exercises over a specific bureaucratic sector depends on the perceived loyalty of its members toward the incumbent autocrat. Organizational sectors whose members do not show any tendencies toward dissent and are, therefore, not threatening to the regime are subjected to lenient autocratic governance that offers multiple opportunities for bureaucratic corruption, generates the need for such transactions, and gives rise to local cultures that normalize informal economies. In contrast, bureaucracies that are seen as potentially dangerous due to disloyalty of their members experience defensive, consolidated autocratic governance. They are closely controlled through tightened organizational hierarchies and stringent accountability requirements that decrease opportunities, perceived need, and cultural acceptance of illegality in general and bureaucratic corruption in particular.

Lenient autocracy is a regulatory environment, instituted by authoritarian regimes in some organizations—usually, organizations perceived as loyal and nonthreatening. It is characterized by relaxed accountability requirements, misaligned incentive structures whereby rule breaking is more lucrative than rule following, and the decoupling of formal regulations and laws from on-the-ground organizational processes. Lenient autocratic governance over organizations is associated with low cohesion and “soft” controls within organizational hierarchies. Despite extensive regulations on the books, the accountability of different links of these hierarchies is not enforced effectively. As public salaries are usually unresponsive to the quality of low-level officials' performance, they have few instrumental incentives to do their jobs well. Under such governance, status rewards for compliance with the law are also weak and ineffective.

Organizations subjected to lenient autocracy are characterized by the decoupling of formal rules from on-the-ground processes, which generates spaces of bureaucratic discretion where citizens engage in under-the-table transactions that are normalized and construed as necessary. My data suggest that Belarusian universities in the 1990s, as well as Belarusian hospitals and secondary schools, experienced lenient autocratic governance. Within them, street-level officials enjoyed large spaces of bureaucratic discretion, created by relaxed accountability mechanisms, procedural ambiguity, and excessive concentration of decision-making power in the hands of officials.

Consolidated autocratic governance is also characterized by administrative centralization and absence of open competition. Yet, under this type of governance, the lower ranks of the government are subjected to rigid controls and oversight by higher-standing officials. Thus, while the authoritarian elite enjoys almost complete freedom, subordinates face heavy accountability pressures, ensuring their political complicity and the

legality of their behavior. Under such governance, the hierarchies of organizational employees are tightly integrated so that status and income of bureaucrats depend directly on the political loyalty and complicity of their subordinates. Thus, every link of employee chains is incentivized to oversee the activities of lower-standing officials. Among street-level officials and their direct supervisors, rewards for lawful behavior and political compliance, as well as punishment for noncompliance, are primarily economic in nature. Bureaucrats who observe formal rules and have well-behaved subordinates receive more promotions and higher pay than their colleagues. This type of hierarchical integration encourages social control and diffuses the responsibility for ensuring political loyalty and observation of formal regulations down the organizational hierarchies.

Additionally, consolidation of autocratic governance happens through symbolic rewards and punishments. Under consolidated authoritarianism, positive reinforcement for political loyalty and compliance ranges from group membership (i.e., in the state-run organizations, such as BRSM) and symbolic recognition to tangible economic rewards through bonuses and promotions. Punishment for deviating from state-approved ways of thinking and acting also ranges in seriousness from the lack of a public forum to the loss of employment, imprisonment, and even execution. As a result of tightened hierarchies and ideological pressure, consolidated autocracy is not conducive to illegality and bureaucratic corruption. Belarusian universities (after 2001) offer an excellent example of corruption-free bureaucracies subjected to consolidated autocracy.

THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE BELARUSIAN CASE

This article strongly suggests that ethnographic and historical research methods generate more nuanced and accurate insights into the political causes of corruption than quantitative or purely theoretical work on the topic. First, these methods allow for an analytical distinction between political and bureaucratic corruption, often conflated in the literature. Using historical data on the patterns of political repression, on the one hand, and ethnographic interview data on small-scale organizational illegality on the other, this study offers an explanation for the conflicting evidence regarding the effect of autocracy on corruption. It shows that authoritarianism may, in fact, either breed or discourage bureaucratic corruption. Thus, it suggests that the same authoritarian leadership may create different opportunities, needs, and cultural propensities toward corruption across different organizational sectors.

Second, the historical data used in this study assess the perceptions and motivations of autocratic leaders, avoiding historical functionalism and retrospective attribution of purely theoretical work on the political roots of corruption and ahistorical, “slice-of-reality” case studies that they use for evidence. The findings suggest that the political loyalty of the population does, indeed, mediate the link between authoritarianism and corruption, but only insofar as an autocrat recognizes and fears this disloyalty. In the case of Belarus, the lack of ideological support for the incumbent president was the reason for the changed preconditions for bureaucratic corruption in universities. Yet, it was not until the turn of the twenty-first century that Lukashenka realized the political threat, which had been emanating from the country’s universities for over five years, and consolidated his governance over higher education. Thus, instead of assum-

ing that political docility of an organizational sector is necessarily associated with specific corruption levels, scholars should explore the relationship between the state and different bureaucratic sectors qualitatively and over time.

At the same time, the Belarusian case does not support the theoretical prediction that less loyal populations engage in more bureaucratic corruption in return for complacency with authoritarian governance. In contrast, the data suggest that organizations hosting the populations that are construed by authoritarian leaders as politically threatening experience consolidated autocratic governance that eliminates opportunities, need, and propensity for corrupt exchanges through tightened hierarchies, strict controls, and ideological pressure. In contrast, autocratic leaders exercise lenient, corruption-favorable governance over organizational sectors the political loyalty of which is either beyond reproach or is viewed as unimportant for the stability of the incumbent regime.

While this finding does not refute the possibility of alternative relationships between perceived political loyalty and corruption, it points to the empirical complexity of the political causes of corruption. Therefore, it suggests that while purely theoretical work on the topic is important, it is only through rigorous empirical analyses of how and why ordinary citizens of different regimes participate in bureaucratic corruption in their everyday lives that scholars are likely to adjudicate between inconsistent evidence regarding political causes of petty extralegal behaviors.

Finally, ethnographic and historical methodology allows social scientists to avoid the common fallacy of thinking about corruption as universally undesirable and antithetical to the rule of law. The roots of this assumption can be traced to neoliberal foundations of the global anticorruptionism movement. In neoliberal thought, corruption is construed as uniformly problematic as it interferes with the dynamics of the market (Sampson 2010; Zaloznaya 2013). Yet, the analytical separation between political and bureaucratic corruption—or between corruption perpetrated by political elites and by ordinary people—reveals their potential inverse relationship in autocratic societies. Thus, the more oppressive the autocratic governance, the less economic corruption is likely to take place in street-level bureaucracies. Bureaucratic corruption, then, emerges as a positive indication of agency on behalf of oppressed citizenry and an avenue of resistance against and subversion of the nondemocratic regime.

This finding contributes to the long line of sociolegal research on the role of law in the everyday life of citizens in liberal democracies, such as the work by Sally Merry (1990), Patricia Ewick and Susan Silbey (1998), and Laura Beth Nielsen (2000, 2009), among others, insofar as it offers an alternative view of legal consciousness. In consolidated authoritarian contexts, such as Belarusian universities, legality is often motivated by fear of repression or desire for political power within the existing state apparatus. Thus, when the law is oppressive and subservient to the power-preservation interests of an autocrat, corruption—or the violation of law for personal benefit—represents ordinary people's struggle to survive poverty and institutional dysfunction, maintain their voice and individuality, and even resist the political oppression associated with authoritarianism (Yang 1994; Ledeneva 1998; Hendley 1999; Ginsburg and Moustafa 2008). An important implication of the current study is that the meaning of corruption is, therefore, not to be assumed away, but evaluated in relation to the social value of the law. Future studies should engage in a careful empirical exploration of the actual meanings and functions of bureaucratic illegality vis-à-vis the effectiveness of the law in

providing basic protections, guaranteeing rights, and ensuring citizens' representation in the political process.

Last, but not least, this study contributes to the critical scholarship on systemic corruption in Eastern Europe and other developing regions. The analyses of recent anticorruption reforms by Alina Mungiu-Pippidi (2013), Bo Rothstein (2011), Agnes Batory (2012), and others suggest that without a functional civil society, top-down institutional changes are likely to have only limited impact on informal economic behavior of ordinary people. The Belarusian case shows that even when transparency is achieved by targeted institutional change, specifically designed to shift the incentive structures of organizational members—admittedly, in this case, through fear and oppression—it results in only a temporary and limited relief from corruption. Thus, Belarusians who refrain from bribery and nepotism in universities continue to engage in informal exchanges in hospitals, secondary schools, and other street-level bureaucracies. As Rothstein suggests, corruption is a collective-action problem and is likely to persist until citizens trust that others around them are not engaging in under-the-table dealings (2011, 245–46).

Most importantly, however, this study raises a number of crucial questions that had not been previously considered by anticorruption scholars. Although it is a common consensus that civil society is necessary for the eradication of corruption, little work has been carried out on the varieties and social desirability of transparency. Thus, not all absence of corruption is equally empowering for ordinary citizens or conducive to the development of a collective sense of universalism and personal efficacy. As the Belarusian case demonstrates, rule following that is based in oppression may be more detrimental to the civic fabric of the society than pervasive economic informality itself. Whether or not such forced and instrumental transparency is a better platform for the development of democratic norms and practices than petty corruption and clientelism is an empirical question that sociolegal scholars should integrate into their assessments of anticorruption initiatives.

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APPENDIX

Participant-Observation

I carried out ethnographic participant-observation in two Minsk universities for a period of three months. I chose universities that represented two common types of higher educational establishments (HEEs) in the post-Soviet bloc. The first type comprised of large *classic universities* with a variety of departments in a wide range of disciplines and specializations. The oldest and the most prestigious HEEs in the country, they generate the bulk of Belarusian academic scholarship, employ the most prominent intellectuals, and offer the most sought-after diplomas in a variety of disciplines. The second type of HEEs where I conducted participant-observation was *specialized institutes*. The mission of these institutes is to educate specialists in a specific professional field (i.e., law, linguistics, economics, transportation, environmental sciences, etc.). These schools can be either private or public, but they tend to be much smaller than classical universities. In Minsk, there are twelve HEEs.

In each university, I spent between twenty-five and thirty-five hours a week for the duration of three months, performing a variety of duties ranging from teaching English to grading students' work, helping instructors with class planning and preparation, and holding individual and group-tutoring sessions. Additionally, I spent time in professors' lounges and offices during recesses and after classes, attended university extracurricular events (such as presentations and exhibits), attended faculty meetings, observed in common student spaces (such as corridors, canteens, and outside places of gathering), and spent time with students outside universities, helping them with homework and attending social events. I took extensive fieldnotes and recorded some classes, focus group discussions, and conversations with a voice recorder.

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List of Respondents

Professors

- [BPr1]: A 65-year-old male professor of architecture at a large university.
 [BPr2]: A 31-year-old female instructor of Spanish at a large university.
 [BPr3]: A 59-year-old male professor of political science at a large university.
 [BPr4]: A 50-year-old female instructor of humanities at a medium-sized university.
 [BPr5]: A 67-year-old female chair of a language department at a large specialized institute.
 [BPr6]: A 44-year-old female instructor of natural sciences at a large university.
 [BPr7]: A 61-year-old male professor of history in a large university.
 [BPr8]: A 41-year-old female instructor of English at a large university.
 [BPr9]: A 64-year-old female language instructor at a specialized institute.
 [BPr10]: A 30-year-old male instructor of economics in a small institute.
 [BPr11]: A 26-year-old female language instructor at a large specialized institute.
 [BPr12]: A 34-year-old male instructor of a social science at a medium-sized university.
 [BPr13]: A 32-year-old female instructor of ideology at a large university.
 [BPr14]: A 67-year-old female chair of a language department at a large specialized institute.
 [BPr15]: A 58-year-old female professor of humanities at a large university.
 [BPr16]: A 48-year-old male instructor of chemistry in a smaller institute.
 [BPr17]: A 43-year-old female instructor of musicology at a small specialized institute.
 [BPr18]: A 50-year-old male instructor of mathematics in a small institute.
 [BPr19]: A 42-year-old male instructor of environmental law in a large university.
 [BPr20]: A 51-year-old senior female instructor of graphics in a large specialized institute.

Students

- [BSt1]: A 28-year-old alumnus of Minsk Institute of Management.
 [BSt2]: A 19-year-old female sophomore at Minsk State University.
 [BSt3]: A 25-year-old alumnus of the State Academy of Arts.
 [BSt4]: A 20-year-old female third-year student at Belarusian State University.
 [BSt5]: A 27-year-old alumnus of the Belarusian State Agrarian Technical University.
 [BSt6]: A 20-year-old female third-year student at a smaller Minsk institute.
 [BSt7]: A 21-year-old female fourth-year student at Belarusian National Technical University.
 [BSt8]: A 19-year-old male student at Belarusian National Technical University.
 [BSt9]: A 21-year-old male third-year student at a smaller institute.
 [BSt10]: An 18-year-old second-year female student at large Minsk University.
 [BSt11]: A 27-year-old alumna of Belarusian State University of Culture and Arts.
 [BSt12]: A 24-year-old fifth-year male student at Belarusian National Technological University.

- [BSt13]: A 22-year-old fourth-year female student at Belarusian State University.
- [BSt14]: An 18-year-old second-year male student at Belarusian State Agrarian Technical University.
- [BSt15]: A 20-year-old third-year male student at Belarusian State Agrarian Technical University.
- [BSt16]: A 24-year-old fifth-year male student at Belarusian State Medical University.
- [BSt17]: A 26-year-old female alumna of Belarusian State Medical University.
- [BSt18]: A 19-year-old second-year female student at Belarusian State Medical University.
- [BSt19]: An 18-year-old second-year male student at Belarusian State University.
- [BSt20]: A 20-year-old second-year male student at Belarusian State University.
- [BSt21]: An 18-year-old first-year female student at Belarusian State University.
- [BSt22]: A 23-year-old fourth-year female student at Belarusian State Technical University.
- [BSt23]: A 20-year-old second-year student male student at Belarusian State Technical University.
- [BSt24]: A 22-year-old fourth-year female student at a major Minsk university.
- [BSt25]: A 19-year-old male student at Belarusian State Economic University.
- [BSt26]: A 22-year-old fourth-year student at Belarusian State Economic University.
- [BSt27]: A 26-year-old graduate student at a large Minsk HEE.
- [BSt28]: A 27-year-old alumnus of Minsk State Linguistic University.
- [BSt29]: A 21-year-old third-year male student at Minsk State Linguistic University.
- [BSt30]: A 20-year-old female third-year student at Minsk Pedagogical University.
- [BSt31]: A 19-year-old female student at Minsk Pedagogical University.
- [BSt32]: A 22-year-old male student at a small specialized institute.
- [BSt33]: A 29-year-old alumnus of Belarusian State University of Informatics and Radioelectronics.
- [BSt34]: An 18-year-old male first-year student at Belarusian State Economic University.
- [BSt35]: An 18-year-old first-year female student of the Institute of Modern Knowledge.
- [BSt36]: A 20-year-old third-year male student at Minsk State University.
- [BSt37]: A 25-year-old fifth-year male student at Belarusian State Technical University.

Parents

- [BPa1]: A 56-year-old mother of a former student of the Belarusian Institute of Culture and Arts and a current student at the Belarusian State Economic University.
- [BPa2]: A 49-year-old father of a second-year student at Belarusian State University.
- [BPa3]: A 41-year-old mother of a second-year student at Belarusian State Pedagogic (Maxim Tank) University.
- [BPa4]: A 56-year-old mother of two daughters, an alumnus of Belarusian State Physical Culture University, and a current student of Minsk State Linguistic University.
- [BPa5]: A 39-year-old father of a first-year student at Belarusian State University.
- [BPa6]: A 40-year-old father of a first-year student at Belarusian State University of Transport.
- [BPa7]: A 47-year-old mother of a fourth-year student at Belarusian Agricultural Technical University.
- [BPa8]: A 51-year-old mother of two graduates of Belarusian State University.

- [BPa9]: A 55-year-old mother of a recent graduate of Belarusian State Medical University.
- [BPa10]: A 38-year-old mother of a first-year student of the Institute of Modern Knowledge.
- [BPa11]: A 39-year-old father of a first-year student at the International Sakharov Environmental University.
- [BPa12]: A 57-year-old father of a fourth-year student of the Belarusian State Medical University.
- [BPa13]: A 42-year-old mother of one alumnus and one current student of Belarusian State University of Transport.
- [BPa14]: A 45-year-old mother of a third-year-student of the Institute of Management and Business.
- [BPa15]: A 46-year-old father of a second-year student of Belarusian State University of Culture and Arts.
- [BPa16]: A 37-year-old mother of a first-year student in Belarusian State Economic University.
- [BPa17]: A 49-year-old father of a first-year student of International Sakharov Environmental University and a fourth-year student of Belarusian State University.
- [BPa18]: A 60-year-old mother of two recent graduates of Minsk State Linguistic University and Belarusian State Physical Culture University.
- [BPa19]: A 45-year-old mother of a third-year student of Minsk State Linguistic University.
- [BPa20]: A 47-year-old father of a third-year student of Minsk Institute of Management.
- [BPa21]: A 42-year-old father of a first-year student of Belarusian State Medical University.
- [BPa22]: A 39-year-old mother of a second-year student of Belarusian State University of Informatics and Radioelectronics.
- [BPa23]: A 39-year-old father of a first-year student of Belarusian State Economic University.
- [BPa24]: A 40-year-old mother of a sophomore at Belarusian State Medical University.
- [BPa25]: A 49-year-old mother of a third-year-student of Minsk Pedagogical University.
- [BPa26]: A 55-year-old father of a fourth-year student of Belarusian National Technical University.

Experts

- A cofounder of European Humanities University, Vladimir Dunaev.
- One former instructor at European Humanities University.
- One current instructor at European Humanities University.
- Two Ministry of Education officials.
- One journalist and an active member of Young Front.
- Three members of a student opposition group that asked to remain unidentified.
- Two active members of Belarusian Youth Republican Front.
- One editor of an oppositional online edition.
- Two managers of antitrafficking NGOs.
- A project leader at the Belarusian branch of another human rights NGO.