1 Course description

Corruption is often seen as a major problem for economic and human development around the world. To fight it, states and international organizations have issued laws and conventions, established specialized agencies, and invested billions of dollars. At the same time, corruption scandals seem to be ubiquitous, and have become a real threat for the survival of elected leaders. In the past few years, the head of government of countries as diverse as South Korea, Brazil, Spain, South Africa, Pakistan, and Peru (among others) have been toppled before the end of their mandates in the middle of corruption scandals. Non-democratic regimes like China and Saudi Arabia recently launched wide anti-corruption crackdowns that purged part of the state elite. Corruption seems to be everywhere, and to have far-reaching consequences. Yet, day-to-day discussions about it are often fraught with ambiguity, bitterness, and a sense of helplessness. How can we make sense of corruption, and if not eliminate it at least limit it?

This class takes students through an exploration of the political, economic, and cultural dimensions of corruption in the public sector. We will read academic research from political science, economics, and anthropology, and examine contemporary and historical cases of corruption from around the world. Building on these sources, we will tackle a number of fundamental questions. How can we define and measure corruption? How does corruption relate to economic, social, and political development? How does corruption manifest itself in different areas of the public sector? How can we design effective anti-corruption strategies?

Through an examination of corruption, this class will build students’ ability to leverage the concepts, theories, and methods of the social sciences to think through complex social problems and to propose sound policy solutions for them. The skills we build in this class will be useful for those seeking careers in sectors where analyzing complex social problems and devising solutions for them is valuable, be it in business, government, international organizations, or research. The sections below detail the course’s learning objectives, expectations, schedule and readings, additional resources on corruption, and campus resources.

2 Learning objectives

By the end of the semester, students should be able to:

1. Reflect about different definitions and dimensions of corruption, and discuss some of its causes and consequences.

2. Apply key concepts and theories of political science and economics to debates about the political economy of corruption.

3. Productively participate in discussions about corruption and related social problems, with respect for others, ability to engage with different points of view, and synthesis capacity.
4. Analyze the merits of academic and policy arguments about corruption, and offer reasoned and constructive critiques thereof.

5. Propose evidence-based policy solutions to anti-corruption problems.

3 Course expectations

3.1 Prerequisites

This class assumes that students have some prior exposure to political science. In particular, students are expected to have taken or be taking PSCI 1100, 1101, 1102, 1103, or 1150. Students who have not taken any political science class before should get in touch with me.

3.2 Requirements

Attendance and participation (17%). Students are expected to attend all sessions and actively participate in the discussions and activities therein. In-class discussions and activities are designed to help students assimilate key concepts, connect ideas, and build their ability to critically engage with arguments and evidence about social phenomena. In so doing, attendance and participation will help students achieve all learning objectives (starting with learning objective 3). Actively and productively participating in group discussions and activities requires doing the readings before class. Absences will negatively affect students’ grades unless they are due to extenuating circumstances (which must be adequately documented by email).

Quizzes (18%). Throughout the semester there will be thirteen short quizzes done during class time (i.e., one quiz every week except the first and the last week of the semester). Quizzes will focus on the readings for the week. I will drop the lowest quiz grade of each student, and the remaining 12 quiz grades will each be worth 1.5% of the final grade. Quizzes are intended as an incentive for students to do the required readings attentively and critically before class, and to help them achieve learning objectives 2 and 4. Doing the required readings before class, critically reflecting on them, and thinking about how the readings relate to the key concepts and theories that we discuss in class should be sufficient preparation for these quizzes. Students cannot consult the readings themselves or any online resources while taking a quiz, but they may consult their own notes about the readings, either handwritten or printed. If a student misses a session in which a quiz is administered there will be no opportunity to retake it. If it is due to extenuating circumstances (which must be documented by email), that quiz grade will not be taken into account and thus the weight of the remaining quizzes in the final grade will increase.

Take-home exercises (15%). Throughout the semester there will be three graded exercises (each worth 5% of the grade) where students will be required to apply the concepts and theories covered in class to the analysis of a particular case. Exercises are designed to help students develop skills for their own final project, and to help them achieve learning objectives 2, 4 and 5. Each of these exercises will follow from in-class discussions or activities, but will require students to work individually at home.

Research project (50%). Students are expected to work in an individual research project, which they will develop throughout the semester. Students will work on an academic or policy research question that they will choose based on their own interests but in consultation me. The final deliverable is a paper that, leveraging the concepts and theories we will cover throughout the semester, defends an argument about corruption and/or anti-corruption. Research projects will help students achieve learning objectives 2 and 5. The final paper should have between 18 and 20 pages of text using 12-point font, 1.5-point line spacing, and 1-inch margins.
Tables, graphs, and/or diagrams can be included in an appendix (with no page limit) to support the student’s argument. Three intermediate deliverables will help students make progress towards their final paper: (i) a one-page list of 2-5 ideas for potential research projects students would like to work on, (ii) a two-page memo developing one of those ideas chosen in consultation with me, and (iii) a draft paper. Students will receive written feedback from me on each intermediate deliverable, as well as written and oral feedback from a peer on their draft paper. In addition, students are welcome to email me questions and/or to come to office hours as necessary throughout their research journey.

More details and guidelines for the take-home exercises and the project deliverables will be made available on Brightspace.

### 3.3 Readings

Rather than follow a textbook, in this class we will be reading academic papers and chapters from political science, economics, and anthropology, as well as a few policy reports. These readings use a variety of methodological approaches to study corruption – from experiments to ethnography. While I do not expect students to have a background in social science methods, I do expect them to make an effort to read and engage with the papers even when they leverage methods students are unfamiliar with. Through in-class activities and workshops we will build students’ ability to read social science research, to understand the basics of major methodological approaches to the social world, and to engage critically with scholarly arguments.

All required readings (listed in 4) will be available on Brightspace. I expect students to do all required readings before class, paying close attention to the authors’ argument, their evidence, and the consistency between the two. I encourage students to take notes before class on each piece’s argument and evidence, on potential weak points, on how a reading speaks to or contradicts other pieces or theories we see throughout the semester, as well as any questions that emerge in the process. Critical reading of the texts helps students boost their grades in every component of the course (participation, quizzes, exercises, and research project).

Optional readings are listed for those who want to go deeper in particular topics of interest, and as useful starting points for the research required for the research project. Additional scholarly works on corruption can easily be found and downloaded through Google Scholar (within the Vanderbilt network) or obtained from the Library. Students are not required to purchase any books for this course, but in 5.2 below I list a few recent textbooks on corruption that students can use to complement their readings and to do further research throughout the semester.

### 3.4 Writing and in-class workshops

This course is a writing seminar and is designed to provide students with tools and opportunities for students to improve their writing through reflection, feedback, and practice. Through in-class activities and workshops we will build students’ ability to build and develop their own argument, to refine their writing, and to incorporate feedback. In that process, students are encouraged to check and use the resources of Vanderbilt’s Writing Studio. Other in-class workshops will help students hone their skills for consuming academic research and for analyzing public policies.

### 3.5 Grading

**Grading scale.** Assignments will be graded in a 0-100 scale. Students who do not submit a given assignment will receive a 0 for it. Final numeric grades will be calculated through a simple weighted average, using the weights detailed in 3.2. Final numeric grades will be transformed to letter grades using the following system: 94
Late submission policy. Assignments submitted after the deadline (even if by a few minutes) will incur in an automatic penalty. 10 points will be deducted if the delay is shorter than 24 hours, 20 if it is between 24 and 48 hours, and so on. Students who submit any assignment late due to extenuating circumstances may send me an email, with documentation for the delay’s motives, to request a penalty waiver.

Grade revisions. If a student is unhappy with their grade on an assignment, they should feel free to email me or come to office hours. I am happy to explain the grade and suggest ways to get a better grade next time around. Students may also request a review of any graded assignment. To do so, they must send me an email with a reasoned argument to motivate the request no later than 3 days after the assignment has been returned. I will examine the argument and determine whether the grade should be revised. As a result of the review, the grade may be raised, lowered, or left unchanged. Any revised grades will be final.

3.6 Important dates
These are the course’s most important dates and deadlines. All hours are in Nashville time (CT).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Project deliverable 1 (ideas)</td>
<td>September 13, 11.59pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exercise 1 (stakeholder analysis)</td>
<td>September 20, 11.59pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project deliverable 2 (memo)</td>
<td>October 4, 11.59pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exercise 2 (theory of change)</td>
<td>October 11, 11.59pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project deliverable 3 (draft paper)</td>
<td>November 10, 11.59pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exercise 3 (peer review comments)</td>
<td>November 17, 11.59pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final paper</td>
<td>December 14, 11.59pm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.7 Technology in the classroom
Quizzes will be done online, so in order to take them students must come to class with a wifi-enabled device (cellphones are fine, since quizzes will be short). For the remaining of the sessions I expect students not to use electronic devices unless it’s strictly necessary. Abundant research has shown that students who use laptops during class get lower grades, and that even when laptops are used exclusively to take notes they are detrimental to learning when compared to taking notes by hand. Students who have special needs requiring them to use electronic devices to take notes should get in touch with me.

3.8 Academic integrity
Students are expected to have read and agreed to Vanderbilt University’s Honor System. In all written assignments, students must use standard citation practices in the social sciences and properly cite any books, articles, or other resources used in their argument (including websites). Any case of plagiarism, cheating, or other forms of academic dishonesty would be taken very seriously, in agreement with Vanderbilt policy. Consequences of academic dishonesty can include a 0 grade in the assignment, failure of the course, or disciplinary action.

3.9 Diversity and inclusion
I am committed to making this course a safe and productive learning environment for all students, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, country of origin, sexual orientation, gender identity, abilities, or religion. I see people’s
diverse backgrounds and worldviews not merely as differences to tolerate but as valuable assets to recognize and celebrate. When in the classroom, I expect students to treat each other with kindness, openness, and respect.

Any student who feels they need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should email me as soon as possible to discuss their needs. We will work with Vanderbilt’s Student Access Services to accommodate their needs.

3.10 One-on-one support

Students are welcome to meet with me to discuss any questions or concerns they may have. I hold office hours Tuesdays and Thursdays after class (from 5.10 to 6.10pm) in person at my office (Commons 359) or over Zoom. To sign up, go to https://calendly.com/guillermo-toral/office-hours and choose a 20-minute slot. If you can’t make it in any of the available slots, or if you want us to meet for a longer time, please e-mail me and we will set up an alternative time to meet. Students are also welcome to email me with any questions or concerns. I typically respond within 48 hours.

3.11 Brightspace and syllabus

The course’s Brightspace page is https://brightspace.vanderbilt.edu/d2l/home/330126. I will post readings, slides, assignments, grades, and announcements on Brightspace, in alignment with this syllabus. All assignments will be submitted through Brightspace. This syllabus remains the main guiding document for the class. I reserve the right to amend the syllabus throughout the semester, but I will alert students of any changes should they be necessary. This version of the syllabus is dated August 26, 2021.

4 Course schedule and readings

The course is organized around weekly themes, which we will explore through readings, in-class discussions and activities, and a variety of assignments. Weekly themes are, in turn, organized in blocks:

- First, a block of 2 weeks focused on the conceptualization and measurement of corruption. We will consider different ways of thinking about and measuring corruption, and investigate their implications for the study as well as the control of corruption.

- Second, we will spend 3 weeks examining the three main Approaches to corruption. We will look at corruption from the lenses of economics, institutions, and culture, and examine how the concepts and theories of these three perspectives help us understand (and fight) corruption.

- Next, we will do a block of 4 weeks centered on some of the most important Arenas of corruption in the public sector, namely public service delivery, public procurement, public employment, and elections and legislatures. We will examine how corruption plays out in different areas of government activity, and the promises and pitfalls of policies designed to counter corruption in these areas specifically.

- The last four weeks of the semester will be dedicated to major Answers to corruption, or public policy anti-corruption strategies that are commonly leveraged across sectors of government activity. For each of these four Answers (transparency and technology; sanctions and selection at the polls; citizen participation and civil society; and auditors, judges, and prosecutors) we will dissect their rationale and consider how the political, economic, cultural, and organizational context matters for their success.
4.1 Introductions (August 26)

In this session we will mostly do introductions – of each other and of the course.

No required readings

4.2 Conceptualizing corruption (August 31 & September 2)

Workshop: How to read a regression table

Required readings:


Suggested readings:


4.3 Measurements and patterns of corruption (September 7 & 9)

Workshop: How to read an academic paper

Required readings:


Suggested readings:

4.4 Approaches to corruption I: Economics (September 14 & 16)

Assignment due: Project deliverable 1 (ideas)

Workshop: How to do a stakeholder analysis

Required readings:


Suggested readings:


4.5 Approaches to corruption II: Institutions (September 21 & 23)

Assignment due: Exercise 1 (Stakeholder analysis)

Workshop: How to critique an academic paper

Required readings


Suggested readings


- Treisman, Daniel. “What have we learned about the causes of corruption from ten years of cross-national empirical research?” Annual Review of Political Science 10 (2007): 211-244.


### 4.6 Approaches to corruption III: Culture (September 28 & 30)

**Workshop:** *How to develop and present an argument*

**Required readings:**


**Suggested readings:**


### 4.7 Arenas of corruption I: Public procurement (October 5 & 7)

**Assignment due:** Project deliverable 2 (memo)

**Workshop:** *How to do (and leverage) a theory of change*

**Required readings:**


**Suggested readings:**
• OECD. *Preventing corruption in public procurement.* (2016).


### 4.8 Arenas of corruption II: Public service delivery (October 12)

*There is no class on October 14 (fall break)*

**Assignment due:** Exercise 2 (Theory of change)

**Required readings:**


**Suggested readings:**


4.9 Arenas of corruption III: Public employment (October 19 & 21)

Workshop: Mid-semester course evaluation (hosted by the Center for Teaching)

Required readings:


Suggested readings


4.10 Arenas of corruption IV: Elections and legislatures (October 26 & 28)

Workshop: How to infer causality in policy, politics, and beyond

Required readings:


Suggested readings


### 4.11 Answers to corruption I: Transparency and technology (November 2 & 4)

**Workshop:** *How to revise a paper* (hosted by the Writing Studio)

**Required readings**


**Suggested readings**


### 4.12 Answers to corruption II: Sanctions and selection at the polls (November 9 & 11)

**Assignment due:** Project deliverable 3 (draft paper)

**Workshop:** *How to use and cite others’ research*

**Required readings:**


**Suggested readings:**


### 4.13 Answers to corruption III: Citizen participation and civil society (November 16 & 18)

**Assignment due:** Exercise 3 (peer review comments)

**Workshop:** *Peer review: Theory and practice*

**Required readings:**


**Suggested readings:**


### 4.14 Answers to corruption IV: Auditors, judges, and prosecutors (November 30 & December 2)

**Workshop:** *How to write an abstract or an executive summary*

**Required readings:**


**Suggested readings:**


**4.15 Conclusions (December 7 & 9)**

*In the final week we will take stock of all the different perspectives and ideas about corruption covered throughout the semester. To do so, we will watch and debate the Romanian, Oscar-nominated documentary Collective, by Alexander Nanau.*

**No required readings**

**5 Additional resources on corruption**

In addition to the required readings detailed above, here I include some additional resources (academic, policy, and fiction) that students may find useful throughout the semester.

**5.1 Textbooks**

In this class we will not follow a particular textbook and instead read academic papers, policy reports, book chapters, and other materials. That being said, the following textbooks have plenty of good ideas about corruption and anti-corruption efforts which may be useful for complementing the required readings as well as for completing assignments. Online copies of the first two are available through the Library.


5.2 Podcasts

Listening to podcasts can be a great way for students to complement their readings and to find inspiration for their research projects. The following two podcasts are particularly thoughtful and stimulating – I recommend students to scroll through their episodes and listen to episodes centered on topics of their interest:

- **Kickback – The Global Anticorruption Podcast.**
- **Power Corrupts.**

5.3 Novels, movies, and TV shows

Fiction can provide useful insights into the dynamics of corruption and anti-corruption efforts. Watching or reading some of these materials may be helpful and interesting. As you read or watch any of these, think about how corruption and anti-corruption are represented, and about how those representations relate to the social and political context of creators.

- **1992** – TV show about the *Mani Pulite* corruption scandal in the Italy of the early 1990s.
- **Conversation in the cathedral** – novel written by Mario Vargas Llosa, set in Peru during the Odría dictatorship in the 1950s.
- **Serpico** – movie directed by Sidney Lumet, about police corruption in New York in the 1960s.
- **The mechanism** – TV show about the *Lava Jato* corruption scandal in Brazil that started in 2014.
- **The wire** – TV show about the interplay of corruption in policing, politics, and bureaucracy, set in Baltimore in the 2000s.

5.4 Key organizations and online resources

Here are (in alphabetical order) some of the leading organizations in the anti-corruption field. Their websites provide useful resources for researchers and policymakers:

- **European Research Centre for Anti-Corruption and State building** – Berlin-based center publishing data and reports on anti-corruption efforts.
- **Global Anti-Corruption Portal** – UNDP site with useful resources on the link between corruption and development, organized by country and by sector.
- **Global Integrity** – global anti-corruption NGO. Their website has dozens of reports on corruption, open government, and public service delivery.
- **GRECO** – the Council of Europe’s Group of States Against Corruption.
- **OAS Anti-Corruption Portal** – Organization of American States’ anti-corruption site, including country reports and best practices.
- **OECD Anti-Corruption Hub** – Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development anti-corruption page, with useful resources by sector and by country.
- **Transparency International** – global anti-corruption NGO. Their website has dozens of reports and resources specific to countries and to policy areas.
- **UNODC** – United Nations’ Office on Drugs and Crime, which covers global anti-corruption efforts under the scope of the UN Convention Against Corruption.
6 Campus resources

6.1 Academic writing

Writing is a critical communication skill in almost any job you will have after graduation. Writing well, especially writing well about complex issues like corruption, is by no means an innate skill. It takes reflection, feedback, and practice to become a good writer. This class will provide students with an opportunity to improve their writing through those three channels. Additional support, for those who find it more difficult to write or who simply want to get better at it, can be obtained from Vanderbilt’s Writing Studio.

6.2 Mental health

Staying emotionally and mentally healthy is critical for personal, academic, and professional success. The ongoing public health, economic and political crises can make this more of a challenge. I encourage students who are struggling with any mental health issues, and/or who want to build their emotional and mental wellbeing to use the relevant resources around campus. The office of Vanderbilt’s Dean of Students offers a number of useful resources, including the University Counseling Center and the Center for Student Wellbeing. The Student Care Network is a hub of wellness related services available to all Vanderbilt students.

Any student who is dealing with difficulties that hinder their ability to succeed in this class, especially if feel they need special accommodations, should email me so we can discuss their situation.

6.3 Equity, diversity and inclusion

College is a unique opportunity not only to gain skills and knowledge, but also and critically to gain insight into one’s background and identities and how they relate to the identities and backgrounds of others around us. Vanderbilt has a number of centers that can provide useful resources in that journey, including the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, the Black Cultural Center, the Women’s Center, the Office of LGBTQI Life, the Office of the University Chaplain and Religious Life, the International Student and Scholar Services, and the Student Center for Social Justice & Identity.

I am available to discuss matters of equity and diversity and will keep those conversations as confidential as possible. Students should be aware however that all faculty are “mandated reporters” who are legally obligated to report any allegations of sexual misconduct and any suspected discrimination to Vanderbilt’s Title IX Coordinator.

6.4 Career guidance

I encourage all students to think hard about what they want to do after graduation and about what they want to do in the long term. Vanderbilt’s Career Center offers a number of useful resources, including coaching, ads on job and internship opportunities, and advice for fellowships and graduate schools. I hope that this class will motivate students to take more classes in political science and other social sciences, and to consider careers related to politics and public policy.

I am always happy to meet students to discuss their post-graduation plans, and I can offer first-hand advice on careers in research and in international organizations.