

## **The Effect of Official Corruption on Trust in Government**

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Two variables that seem to be at the root of current political discourse are official corruption and public trust in government. Although research exists for the determinants and consequences of both variables, there is seemingly nothing in the respective literature about the relationship between them. Thus, the purpose of this project has been to see whether higher rates of public corruption result in lower levels of public trust in government. For this project, official corruption was defined as the number of both prosecutions filed and convictions of government officials on corruption charges in each state between 1987 to 2017. Trust in government was measured by a series of surveys about individuals' state governments conducted within that same time frame. With these two variables defined, regression analysis was used to try and find a statistically significant correlation between them while controlling for other state and individual level variables. What we found was that convictions ( $r = .08$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) was statistically significant while prosecutions filed ( $r = -.03$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ) was not, but that neither were meaningful. A variable that stood out, though, was an individual's relationship to the controlling political party in that state. Alignment with the controlling party ( $r = 4.13$ ,  $p < 0.000$ ) or the opposing party ( $r = -4.15$ ,  $p < 0.000$ ) has a much more substantial effect on trust in state government. Therefore, it seems that the level of corruption has little, if any, effect on people's trust in government. Rather, partisanship and political polarization are the primary determinants of one's trust in their government.