

See discussions, stats, and author profiles for this publication at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/326998741>

“Does Xi Jinping’s Anti-corruption Campaign Improve Regime Legitimacy?” With Yuan Beishun. In *Modern China Studies*, 2017, No. 2.

Article · August 2018

CITATION

1

READS

222

1 author:



Yan Sun

CUNY Graduate Center

24 PUBLICATIONS 332 CITATIONS

SEE PROFILE

Some of the authors of this publication are also working on these related projects:

Project

Political corruption in China [View project](#)

Project

Ethnic Politics in China [View project](#)

DOES XI JINPING'S ANTICORRUPTION CAMPAIGN IMPROVE REGIME LEGITIMACY?

YAN SUN

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
GRADUATE CENTER AND QUEENS COLLEGE
CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

BAISHUN YUAN

CENTER FOR CORRUPTION RESEARCH
HUNAN UNIVERSITY

ABSTRACT

Using interview data from a medium Chinese city collected in Dec. 2005, this paper assesses the impact Xi Jinping's anti-corruption campaign on the Chinese public's perception of corruption and relatedly, regime legitimacy. We argue that the campaign has mixed effects: it has had more effects in cracking down on high-level officials and the "three public consumptions," but it has had less effects in controlling the types of corruption that affect citizens' lives more directly. Thus the campaign has helped to enhance public satisfaction with anti-corruption at the national level, but less so at the local level or with anti-corruption mechanisms in general. The latter trends will continue to affect public perception of corruption and its associated impact on regime legitimacy, but serious damages will be mitigated by perceived anti-corruption success at the national level and expectations for trickle-down effects on anti-corruption at the local level.

Keywords: Corruption Perception, anti-corruption efficacy, regime legitimacy

十八大以来的反腐败成效是否提升执政党合法性？

孙 雁

纽约市立大学研究生院及皇后学院政治学系

袁柏顺

湖南大学廉政研究中心及政治学系

摘要

本文根据湖南大学廉政研究中心 2015 年底所做的访谈数据，调查中部一省会城市的公众对十八大以来反腐败成效的感知，进而分析其对执政党合法性提升的影响。我们的结论是此次反腐运动的成效有两面性：一方面它在打击高官腐败（“老虎”）以及治理“三公消费”上有明显成效，因而受调民众对中央的反腐成效较为满意，执政党合法性也相应提升；而另一方面在打击基层腐败（“苍蝇”）上的成效则相对不足，因而受调民众对地方上的反腐成效及现有体制内的反腐机制的则相对不满，也使执政党合法性的提高受到一定影响和牵制。总的来看，中央一级的反腐成效及民众对自上而下反腐运动的期望，使执政党的合法性藉由反腐败运动至少在短期内得到较大增强。

关键词：腐败感知，反腐成效，执政党合法性

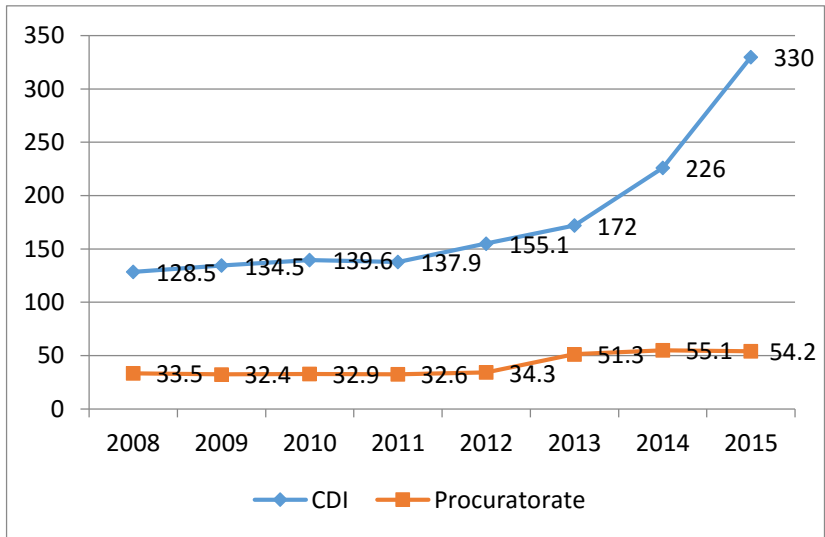
INTRODUCTION

Since the Tiananmen Protests of 1989, the successive leaders of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) have linked corruption to regime legitimacy by calling it a matter of “life and death” for the party. The historical awareness of how China’s imperial dynasties and the Kuomintang regime collapsed due to uncontrolled corruption is an acute reminder to the contemporary leadership that corruption can affect the fate of the regime. Close watchers of Chinese politics agree that pervasive corruption has done severe damages to the CCP, causing a serious legitimacy crisis (Li 2014; Pei 2016; Shambaugh 2014). A successful anti-corruption campaign, on the other hand, can allow a regime to recover from a crisis of legitimacy (Gilley 2009).

Indeed every new administration since Tiananmen began with a campaign against corruption. The latest, launched by Xi Jinping’s administration since the CCP’s 18th Congress in Nov. 2012, has been unprecedented in intensity, duration and the level of party ranks affected. There has been a significant increase in the number of corruption cases investigated and disciplined in the three years since the end of 2012 (Figure 1), including over 130 officials were at the provincial/ministerial rank and above, about a dozen high-ranking military officers and several national leaders. This paper intends to examine whether this vigorous campaign has been effective at curbing corruption, hence improving regime legitimacy.

Divergent assessments are found among China analysts. Some find long-term positive impact. Manion (2016) argues that the current campaign notably differs from previous efforts, due especially to significant changes in the structure of the party and government incentives to reduce bureaucratic opportunities for corruption and structural obstacles to anticorruption enforcement. She argues these features constitute important steps toward anticorruption institutionalization and credible commitment to good governance. Cheng Li (2014) contends that Xi’s corruption crackdown is more than factional politics and will likely herald deeper institutional change.

Figure 1, Number of Officials Investigated and Disciplined by Anti-corruption Agencies (in thousands)



Note: All office-related cases from the procuratorate can be classified as corruption cases, but not all cases processed by the CCDI can be classified as such, since some may be cases involving political transgressions.

Source: Work Reports of CCDI, 2009-2016; Work Reports of the Supreme People’s Procuratorate, 2009-2016.

Others are however less sanguine. Quah (2015) argues that Xi Jinping’s campaign targets symptoms of corruption without addressing its causes, which may explain why it has been ineffective in minimizing corruption two and half years since its inception. Shambaugh (2014), while finding the seriousness of Xi’s campaign encouraging, points to indications that the campaign is being cynically viewed as a selective purge. Economy (2013) argues that the seemingly selective and extralegal style of the campaign may undermine much of the purpose of the campaign, which was to restore the CCP’s legitimacy. Most of all, Fu (2015) argues that although Xi’s campaign has augmented the regime’s popularity and legitimacy by cracking down on high-level “tigers,” it has done so by repatriating power to the center and operating in more opaque, secretive and less rule-bound ways, thus undermining the very institutions that may be the most effective in curbing corruption in the long run, such as the freedom of the press and public participation. In short Xi’s campaign may be successful in the short run but unlikely to be sustainable or restore the regime’s legitimacy in the long run.

Using interview data from a medium Chinese city collected in Dec. 2005, this paper will assess the impact of the current anti-corruption campaign on public

perception of corruption and regime legitimacy. We argue that the campaign has mixed effects: it has had more effects in cracking down on high-level officials ("tigers") and the "three public consumptions" (vehicles, entertaining and overseas trips), but it has had less effects in controlling the types of corruption that affect citizens' lives more directly. Thus the campaign has helped to enhance public satisfaction with anti-corruption at the national level, but less so at the local level or with anti-corruption mechanisms in general. The latter trends will continue to affect public perception of corruption and its associated impact on regime legitimacy, but serious damages will likely be mitigated by perceived anti-corruption success at the national level and expectations for trickle-down effects on anti-corruption at the local level.

The rest of the paper will proceed as follows. After discussing data collection, we will present data showing the general perceptions of anti-corruption at the national level. Next we will present data showing more localized perceptions of anti-corruption. Then we will analyze, on the basis of the contrasting perceptions at the national and local levels, the mixed effects of Xi's anti-corruption campaign on regime legitimacy. The conclusion will highlight the implications of our findings for anti-corruption and regime legitimacy in China.

DATA COLLECTION

Interview data for this paper was collected in December 2015 in the city of Changsha, exactly three years after the inception of Xi's anti-corruption campaign in November 2012. Changsha, the capital city of Hunan province, was chosen because it is a middle city in geographical location, economic development and population size. The institutional base of one of the co-authors' for this paper, in Changsha city, also facilitated the logistics of the interview process.

Led by one of the co-authors, fifty researchers from the Center for Corruption Research at Hunan University conducted face-to-face interviews of 1000 residents from December 12 to December 19, 2015. First we randomly selected 10 residential communities across the five districts of the city, and within each community, we used systematic sampling to select 100 households. Then using the Kish selection grid, we selected one member to be interviewed within each household. The Kish grid was used to ensure that all eligible household members had an equal chance to be selected, so as to avoid sampling bias on the one hand and the representativeness of the selected member on the other. Interviews were conducted in the homes of the selected interviewees. 925 of the 1000 collected questionnaires were verified as valid.

The 925 respondents can be further grouped by gender, age, education, place of employment, income and duration of residence. For gender, 48.3% were male and 51.7% female. For age, about half were under 40 years old (32.6% between 18-30 and 21.1% between 31-40) and the other half over 40 (18.55% between 41-50, 16.6% between 51-60 and 11.1% over 60). For education, about half had secondary

and high school education (25% and 27% respectively), while 44% had college education, with the remaining 3.8% unclear. For employment, about 55% were privately employed (21.7% in private enterprises, 1.6% in foreign enterprises, 23.4% in self-employment, and 8.3% in free lancing), one quarter in public employment (1.2% in party and state agencies, 11% in public institutions, 12% in state enterprises), with the remaining 20.7% in others. For income, 41% were in the middle income (¥2,000-4,000 monthly) and 19% in the upper middle (¥4,000-8,000 monthly) range, 4.5% were in the upper income range (¥8,000), with 12% in the low income range (under ¥2,000 monthly), 11% reporting no income, and 12.3% declining to disclose income. For local residency: 61.8% were long-term residents (over 10 years) and the rest relatively short-term ones (14.7% between 5-10 years, 14.9% between 1-5 years and 8.5% under 1 year). The background distribution of the respondents well represented the residents of Changsha as a whole.

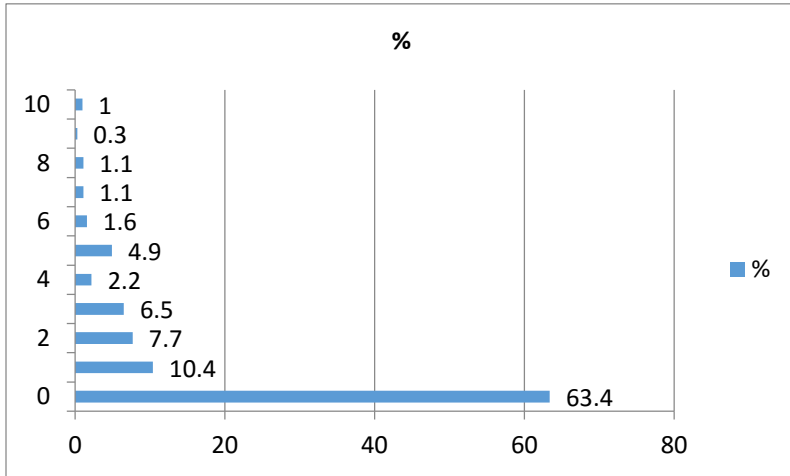
Our target questions centered on local residents' perceptions of and attitudes towards corruption as well as their assessment of the anti-corruption campaign since the 18th CCP Congress in Nov. 2012. The questionnaires included four areas of indicators: the interviewees' views on the types and levels of corruption in society, their responses to various scenarios of corruption, their tolerance levels for corruption, and their assessment of the current anticorruption campaign. In this paper we highlight the data that reveal the respondents' views on the current anti-corruption campaign.

PERCEPTION OF ANTI-CORRUPTION AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL

Given the intense publicity and forcefulness of Xi's anti-corruption campaign, we expect strong public support for the campaign at the national level. The reasons include high public dissatisfaction with corruption, popular targets of anticorruption and popular crackdowns, the national campaign's far greater efficacy than local campaigns, and public expectations of top-down campaign effects.

Above all, Xi's anti-corruption campaign addressed head-on the public's cumulated frustration with rampant corruption, thus representing a strong regime response to public dissatisfaction and demand for redress. As Li Lianjiang has shown on the basis of survey data from six Chinese provinces, Mao-style anticorruption campaigns have garnered support from peasants and that this support is stronger the more frustrated the peasants are with local government performance (2001). This high degree of frustration with corruption is reflected in our interview data, shown in Figure 2. The highest percentage of respondents, 63.3%, expressed complete intolerance for corruption (0 = complete intolerance). Another 24.8% ranked their tolerance levels between 1 and 3 out of 10, making those who ranked their tolerance levels below 5 a total of 94.2% of the respondents. Together, the average ranking was a mere 1.2 out of 10 for all the respondents. This result corresponded well with various public opinion polls in China, both online and on the ground, where corruption has consistently ranked among top public grievances and anticorruption among the top priorities of public demands.

Figure 2, Tolerance Levels for Corruption among Changsha Residents



Note: 0=zero tolerance for corruption; 10=complete tolerance for corruption.

Secondly, the anti-corruption campaign’s commencing focus on the “tigers” and the “three public consumptions” was well chosen and effective. The jurisdiction over high-level officials by the central party, coupled with the greater potency of the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI) at the central level, made it procedurally and technically easier to investigate and discipline the targeted “tigers.” By contrast, starting with local campaigns would likely encounter far more political inertia, collusive obstruction and bureaucratic foot-dragging. Likewise, central control over the fiscal sources of the “three public consumptions” in state agencies facilitated the new consumption restrictions, which are further reinforced by the deterrence effects of the crackdown on high-level officials.

Indeed, as Tables 1 shows, a strong majority of the respondents found the latest anti-corruption campaign to be effective overall. The respondents were asked to evaluate “the party and the state’s” control of the two categories of corruption shown on Table 1.

The mix of those who viewed the crackdown on corruption as “fairly effective” (*bijiao youxiao*) and “very effective” (*feichang youxiao*) totaled 74.75% (56.75% and 18% respectively). The mix of those who viewed the crackdown on the “three public consumptions” as fairly effective and very effective totaled 65.52% (50.59% and 14.93% respectively). “The three public consumptions” refer to the use of official vehicles for private use, the use of public funds for lavish entertaining and the use of public funds to make unjustified overseas trips. Wasteful and hugely unpopular with the public, these misuses of public funds have been a main target of Xi’s anti-corruption campaign from the beginning. Together, the majority

assessment on Table 1 suggests strong public approval for the current anti-corruption campaign.

Table 1, Perception of the Party and State’s Crackdown on Corruption in the Past Year

Is the party & state’s crackdown on corruption effective in the past year?	Control of embezzlement and bribery		Control of the “three public consumptions”	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Very effective	167	18.1	138	15.0
Fairly effective	525	56.8	468	50.8
Not very effective	167	18.1	166	18.0
Not at all effective	22	2.4	28	3.0
Do not know	44	4.8	121	13.1
Total	925	100.0	921	100.0

Thirdly, the top-down campaign from the center has shown far more efficacy when compared with anti-corruption efforts at local levels, which only makes the central campaign more popular and the central government more credible. Table 2 offers overwhelming confirmation of public assessment of this trend. One explanation for the lackluster efforts at the sub-national levels may be temporal. That is, it would take time for the top-down campaign to spread from the center to the grass-roots. While we do not have data over time to assess this conjecture, the three-years’ lapse between the inception of the campaign and the time of our data collection renders the temporal explanation unconvincing. A structural explanation may be more plausible. That is, the center’s inability to pass down the campaign to lower levels. The following observations by the head of Guizhou province’s CCDI are representative of the mood among local anti-corruption officials: “despite a heavy storm at the top, not even a breeze at the bottom” (*Zhongguo jijian jiancha bao* 2015). Moreover, he adds, the lower the level of the state, the worse the situation: “county and village levels are worse than provincial and municipal levels, different departments of the local government are worse than the executive branch, and public enterprises and institutions are worse than party and state agencies.”

Table 2, Perception of Anticorruption Efforts at Various Levels

Which level of the party and state has been more forceful at cracking down on corruption?	Frequency	Percentage
Central government	663	71.7
Provincial government	34	3.7
Municipal government (provincial capital)	16	1.7
Sub-municipal government	46	5.0
Do not know	166	17.9
Total	925	100.0

Finally, the public may itself expect the campaign to reach the grass-roots levels over time and support the center's top-down strategy. As Table 3 shows, a majority of the respondents (59.9%) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that "crackdown on the 'tigers' or high-level officials is more important than crackdown on the 'flies' or petty corruption close to ordinary citizens." This is in spite of the fact, as will be shown in the next section, that the respondents did express strong dissatisfaction with grass-roots corruption that affected their lives directly. The party's sweeping crackdowns at the center, at the very least, have displayed the will and willingness to seriously tackle corruption as well as signaled a dramatic change in the atmosphere of helplessness about corruption that prevailed during the previous administration. The change itself boosts public confidence about the exemplary effects of a top-down campaign.

Table 3, Importance of the Crackdown on the "Tigers" versus the "Flies"

Crackdown on the "tigers" is more important than crackdown on the "flies"	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	338	36.5
Agree	216	23.4
Neutral	139	15.0
Disagree	135	14.6
Strongly disagree	97	10.5
Total	925	100.0

In short, Xi's anti-corruption campaign, especially the crackdown on high-level officials and the "three public consumptions," has gained strong public support for the central government. It appears to boost public confidence in the determination and ability of the party leadership to rein in the unruly party and bureaucratic ranks.

PERCEPTION OF ANTI-CORRUPTION AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

The respondents' responses to more specific and localized questions, however, reveal a more complex picture. The types of corruption that concerns them involve grass-roots officials or the so-called "flies," rather than the high-level senior officials or "tigers," which have been the main casualties of Xi's anti-corruption campaign.

First, on specific areas of corruption that they or their relatives/friends had experienced during the past year, respondents chose issues or areas that affected themselves directly and routinely. As shown on Table 4, the educational sector came first, followed by traffic and vehicle administration, dealings with state agencies, professional promotions, healthcare sectors, housing and social welfare administration, and others. Corruption in these areas often involves having to pay extra expenses for public services, in the form of bribes or unnecessary charges. In the educational sector, this often happens to anxious parents who want to send their children to choicer schools. In traffic and vehicle administration, it may involve the removal of penalties or the registration of vehicles. In professional promotion, it may range from cronyism to the use of fraudulent credentials or bribes. In dealings with state agencies, it can involve cronyism, influence peddling or bribery to facilitate permit approval, procurement orders and contract bidding. In the healthcare sector, abuse often involves the overuse of diagnostic and therapeutic interventions by public hospitals for the purpose of profit making. In the administration of public housing and social welfare, which serve low-income residents, corruption may occur in the evaluation or granting of eligibility. All these areas of corruption directly impact the quality of life for ordinary citizens, and unsurprisingly, were reflected in the respondents' responses.

Table 4, Areas of Corruption Experienced by Respondents or Their Relatives and Friends during the Past Year*

Areas of Corruption experienced	By Oneself			By Relatives and Friends		
	Number of selections	% of all selections	% of percentage frequency	Number of selections	% of all selections	% of percentage frequency
Schooling for oneself or one's child	56	20.1%	42.1%	49	19.1%	39.5%
Traffic and motor vehicle administration	49	17.6%	36.8%	36	14.1%	29.0%
Permit approval, state procurement, project bidding	40	14.4%	30.1%	32	12.5%	25.8%
Professional promotions	37	13.3%	27.8%	32	12.5%	25.8%
Hospitals and healthcare sectors	34	12.2%	25.6%	41	16.0%	33.1%
Administration of public housing	25	9.0%	18.8%	25	9.8%	20.2%
Social welfare administration	23	8.3%	17.3%	29	11.3%	23.4%
Others	14	5.0%	10.5%	12	4.7%	9.7%
Total	278	100.0%	209.0%	256	100.0%	206.5%

* Respondents may make multiple selections.

Secondly, in their assessment of corruption by sectors in the city of their residence, the respondents still showed greater concern with areas of corruption that affected their lives directly. As Table 5 shows, healthcare and education were again ranked among the most corrupt sectors. The combination of those who viewed corruption as “fairly serious” or “very serious” total 60.2% for the healthcare sector and 53.7% for the education sector. Only the construction and land sector (60.7%) and the state agencies (56.5%) were perceived to be more corrupt, though only by a slight margin. By contrast, the least number of people chose “do not know” in the categories of education (19.6%) and healthcare (21%), which means more respondents knew about corruption in these two sectors than in any other sectors. On the other hand, the largest number of people professed no knowledge of corruption in these sectors - social organizations (42.1%), party and mass organizations (40.8%), banking and finance (38.3%), and law enforcement agencies (36.2%). This suggests that the respondents either do not have as frequent

interaction with these sectors as with educational and healthcare sectors, or that they felt more acutely about corruption in the latter two sectors.

Table 5, Perception of Corruption in Various Sectors of Changsha City (%)

Agency or sector	Very serious	Fairly serious	Not very serious	Not at all serious	Don't know	Total
Construction and land development	31.2	29.5	9.9	1.2	28.2	100
Public healthcare	28	32.2	16.3	2.5	21	100
State agencies	22	34.5	11.7	1.1	30.8	100
Education	22.1	31.6	22	4.7	19.6	100
Police, prosecutors and courts	19.7	26.8	15.7	1.6	36.2	100
Party organs and mass organizations*	15	28	15	1.1	40.8	100
Banking and finance	11.4	24.5	21	4.7	38.3	100
Social intermediate organizations	10.4	20.2	23.4	3.9	42.1	100
Other	5.7	8	9.1	1.7	75.6	100

** Party organs include at various levels of the state, the party committees and branches, the party's organizational departments, the discipline inspection commissions, the propaganda departments and the united front departments. Mass organizations include the workers' unions, youth leagues and women's federations, all of which are affiliated with the state.*

Thirdly, a strong majority of the respondents viewed corruption as common in their city, even while only a minority of them reported direct or indirect experiences with corruption in the past year. Table 6 contrasts all respondents' perceived levels of corruption in their city with their reported experience with corruption, including their own experience and that of their relatives and friends. The contrast here is interesting. In overall perceptions, a significant majority (66.81%) chose "fairly common" (41.84%) or very common (24.97%). This ratio rose to 84.2% among those respondents who expressed their opinions, namely, if we leave out the respondents who did not know about the city's levels of corruption. Just 12.54% of the respondents found corruption to be "very infrequent" (0.54%) and "fairly infrequent" (12%). By contrast, a good majority (58.1%) also reported no direct or indirect experiences with corruption, while just 21.3% reported such experiences. However, if we compare the corruption perception of those who

experienced corruption with those who did not, the latter group did not widely overestimate corruption levels in their city, as Table 7 and 8 show.

Table 6, Perceived Levels of Corruption versus Experience with Corruption in Changsha city during the Past Year

Perceived level of Corruption: 1=Rare, 4=Very common		Freq	%	Direct/indirect experience with corruption	Freq	%
Infrequent	1	5	0.54	No	537	58.1
	2	111	12			
Common	3	387	41.84	Yes	197	21.3
	4	231	24.97			
Don't know		191	20.65	Not sure	191	20.6
Total		925	100	Total	925	100

Tables 7 and 8 contrast the corruption perceptions of respondents who did or did not have direct or indirect experience with corruption. Overall the former group perceived corruption to be more common and serious than the latter group, although the correlation is weak. As seen on Table 7, a whopping 93.8% of those who experienced corruption found corruption to be “very common” (41.8%) or “fairly common” (52%), while the combined percentage for those without corruption experience was 79.9%, a difference of 13.9%. As seen on Table 8, both groups rated corruption in those three sectors highly serious, with combined negative perceptions in similar decimal ranges. This suggests that even though without experience with corruption have not only a highly negative but also a realistic view of corruption in the three government sectors.

Table 7, Experience with Corruption and Perception of Corruption Levels

Direct/indirect Experience with corruption	Perception of Corruption Levels in Changsha City				
	Very common	Fairly common	Fairly uncommon	Very uncommon	Total
Yes	41.8%	52.0%	6.2%	0	100.0
No	29.6%	50.3%	19.0%	1.1%	100.0
Total	31.5%	52.7%	15.2%	.7%	100.0

Table 8, Experience with Corruption and Perception of Corruption Severity across Three Government Sectors

Sector	Direct/ indirect experience with corruption	Perception of Severity of Corruption				
		Very serious	Fairly serious	Not very serious	Not at all serious	Total
Party & mass Organizations	Yes	32.8%	43.3%	23.1%	0.8%	100%
	No	23.5%	48.3%	25.7%	2.5%	100%
State agencies	Yes	33.8%	49.3%	15.0%	1.9%	100%
	No	35.4%	45.5%	17.4%	1.7%	100%
Judicial organs	Yes	35.2%	42.1%	22%	0.7%	100%
	No	32.2%	40.7%	23.9%	3.2%	100%

Finally and most importantly for our argument, respondents’ experience with corruption negatively affects their perception of the efficacy of the anti-corruption campaign at the national level. That is, the more they knew about corruption on a personal level, the less they thought of the efficacy of the anti-corruption campaign. As Table 9 shows, 85.1% of those without corruption experience perceived the national anti-corruption campaign to be “very effective” or “fairly effective,” contrasted with 67.2% of those with corruption experience. And 79.6% of those without corruption experience rated the control of the “three public consumptions” as very effective or fairly effective, contrasted with 65.9% for those with corruption experience. In other words, those respondents who had local experience with corruption were less satisfied with the anti-corruption campaign overall.

Table 9, Experience with Corruption and Perceptions of the Campaign against Corruption and the “Three Public Consumptions”

	Direct/ indirect experience w/ corruption	Very effective	Fairly effectiv e	Not very effective	Not at all effective
Perception of the anti- corruption campaign	Yes	9.9%	57.3%	29.7%	3.1%
	No	24.5%	60.6%	12.6%	2.3
Perception of the crackdown on the three consumpt- ions	Yes	13.1%	52.8%	27.8%	6.3%
	No	19.6%	60.0%	17.8%	2.6%

These sentiments find confirmation in the complaints of local CCDI officials about impasse in fighting corruption at local levels. In interviews of CCDI officials at municipal and county levels from four provinces, by the CCDI's official newspaper *Zhongguo jijianjiancha bao* (2015b), these officials point to six major hurdles in their efforts to catch “flies” at local levels. Some have to do with reluctance or resistance from local state agencies and officials. One is that corruption investigations by a local CCDI often encounter interferences from the party committee of the local government, to which the local CCDI is structurally subordinate. Another is that local CCDIs often encounter non-cooperation or protectionism from local state and public agencies, which try to diffuse and evade investigations. Even when corruption scandals break out, thirdly, the targets of investigation will find local networks to intercede on their behalf, including local state officials who may come to CCDI offices to dissuade investigators.

Other hurdles have to do with factors outside the political structure. One is the small size and inexperience of local CCDI staff, which make it difficult to investigate cases requiring highly technical and professional expertise. Another is the lag of local CCDI offices' technical equipment, which is well behind the new smart technologies of the perpetrators and compounded further by the legal and political limits that CCDI offices face in the use of electronic tracking. Yet another hurdle is a negative discourse that has grown among local officialdom to delegitimize the anti-corruption campaign, including a characterization of the campaign as “excessive,” “a temporary storm,” “harmful to economic development” or “inflectional” (i.e. a change in the wrong direction). In all instances above, CCDI officials feel constrained or even fearful about doing their work. Needless to say,

these are all tenacious challenges that even the hard charging Wang Qishan, the czar of the central CCDI, has not been able to successfully confront.

In short, the respondents' perceptions of the anti-corruption campaign are less optimistic at the local level, due to the types of corruption that affect their lives directly, to the perceived levels and severity of this corruption and to the direct or indirect experiences they have had with corruption.

MIXED IMPACT ON REGIME LEGITIMACY

The evidence so far suggests that the public is more satisfied with Xi's anti-corruption campaign at the national level than at the local level. The gap raises questions about the "tigers" focused strategy and its deeper repercussions for improving regime legitimacy. If this strategy cannot go far beyond Beijing or address the fundamental causes that breed corruption at the top as well as grass-roots levels, the impact on strengthening regime legitimacy in the long run will be questionable.

One reason is the tangibility and broad impact of the "flies" or low-level corruption for ordinary citizens. The areas of corruption identified by the respondents who had directly or indirectly experienced them – school choice for one's child, healthcare, traffic and motor vehicle administration, business matters (permit approval, procurement and contract bidding), professional promotions, public housing and social welfare – involve public institutions and state agencies which the public have contact with and which impact their quality of life directly. While high-profile crackdowns may restore regime credibility in a quick and effective way in the short run, over time the public will feel little impact in the real world. Moreover, the affected public is sizeable.

Take education for example. During the academic year 2014-2015, Changsha city had 1,828,841 students matriculated in all types and levels of public institutions of learning, with 1,078,788 of them in kindergartens, elementary and middle schools (Csedu 2015). The latter number alone entails that behind each student is a household in the city directly affected by the public schools. And behind each household is a network of relatives and friends who are indirectly connected to the school system as well. Thanks to a number of factors - traditional reverence for education, the competitive job market and the uneven quality of schools, it is the top priority of every family to send its child to the best school possible.

In this competitive context, any influence peddling by government officials to send their own children to the choice schools is extremely sensitive and intolerable for other parents. Not surprisingly this type of abuse is ranked at the very top on Table 4 by those respondents who had experienced corruption directly or indirectly. It is also ranked highly in the public perception of corruption across sectors on Table 5. Compared with the grand corruption of the "tigers," the use of power or other influence to get one's child into choice schools is "petty" corruption in monetary

terms. The “tigers” cases often involve hundreds of millions in Chinese *Yuan* and serious damages to political institutions and large economic projects. By contrast, of all 126 education-related cases prosecuted in Hunan province during the first half of 2016, just ¥200,000 in corrupt money was involved (*HNJY* 2016). Parents however care about this type of cases far more acutely.

Healthcare is another sector that ignites intense public indignation about corruption, as reflected in Tables 5 and 4 earlier. This is another public service on which citizens rely for competitive and indispensable services. Existing studies have highlighted the structural and individual sources of abuse in this industry. Chen (2007) attributes the overuse of expensive diagnostic and therapeutic interventions by Chinese physicians partly to the corruption of medical decision-making motivated to earn supplementary income. This motive, Tam (2011) finds, is rooted in a number of factors, including the reduction of state funding since the mid-1980s, the excessive and chaotic development of the pharmaceutical sector, and the failure of the state regulatory infrastructure to check the spread of corrupt practices. Likewise, Rose-Ackerman and Tan (2014) blames the intertwining of three parties—the government, hospitals and companies, specifically the Chinese hospitals' transition from state-financed institutions to profit-seeking organizations, incomplete healthcare reforms and misguided government policies that further distorted the market, and the efforts of multinational companies to win the competition for business through any means available. The diagnoses of these studies are sound. The growth of patient-hospital disputes in China, sometimes involving violence, may in part be due to increased public mistrust of hospitals.

Traffic and motor vehicle administration is yet another area where corruption affects the general public. As of Oct. 2015, for example, the number of registered vehicle in Changsha city exceeded 2 million, 1.62 million of which were automobiles. This included 1.03 million registered automobiles in the city's metropolitan area, whose population size was 3.876 million in 2015 (Huang 2015a and 2015b). Leaving out vehicles that belonged to companies and institutions, on average nearly every household had a registered automobile. Corruption in the areas of vehicles registration, driver licensing, and handing of traffic violations and accidents, thus, affects a wide spectrum of local residents.

Apart from the tangibility and broad impact of low-level corruption, a more fundamental question for regime legitimacy in the long run is whether the underlying causes for the “flies” as well as the “tigers” can be effectively addressed. Table 10 shows the respondents' assessment of the three most important reasons for corruption in their city. The top three choices were “insufficient rule of law,” “insufficient anti-corruption efforts” and “a lack of transparency.” For the central government's part, the Xi administration has made efforts to improve the rule of law and transparency in the party's anti-corruption work. One is a revision of the Disciplinary Regulations of the Chinese Communist Party, which removed disciplinary statutes that overlapped with law, thus eliminating the loophole whereby disciplinary actions may be used to replace legal punishments (CCDI

2015). Because the former are administrative in nature and do not involve prison time, it may be misused to give the appearance of punishment that entails few costs or deterrence effects in reality. Another change is the issuance of the Regulation on Documenting, Reporting and Holding Accountable Leading Officials Who Interfere in the Judiciary and in the Handling of Specific Cases (Xinhuanet 2015). The new regulation is aimed at ensuring judicial independence from local political interference. For transparency in anti-corruption, the CCDI began a practice in 2014 to openly report the names and affiliations of discipline violators in official announcements and on the CCDI website, including those whose cases are still under investigation (*People.cn* 2014). This contrasts with the previous practice of using the phrase “a certain official” to hide the identity of the violators or even their affiliations.

Nevertheless, these new regulations and practices aim to strengthen deterrence by toughening anticorruption, but fall short of addressing the structural sources that cause corruption in the first place. Most of all, these include the overconcentration of power in the party chief and state officials at each administrative level, the lack of institutional and popular checks on the power of officials and agencies, the lack of transparency in the decision making of these officials and agencies, the lack of independence of local CCDIs and judiciaries, and the lack of oversight by citizen groups and the media. Moreover, some of the new practices are explicitly extra-legal measures. The new practice of transparency in anticorruption, or public exposure of officials being investigated and disciplined for corruption, is intended to last for five years as a “high-exposure and high-deterrence” measure (*People.cn* 2014). The emphasis on the anticorruption end of deterrence against corruption, rather than on the causal end, suggests a more expedient strategy than a fundamental one.

Table 10, The Three Most Important Reasons for Corruption in Changsha City

Causes	Freq	% of all select -ions	% of all respondents	Rank
Insufficient rule of law	400	14.6	43.6	1
Insufficient anticorruption efforts	381	13.9	41.5	2
Lack of transparency	355	13.0	38.7	3
Culture of nepotism and particularism	341	12.5	37.2	4
Ties between political & business circles	329	12.0	35.9	5
Lack of political will to fight corruption	325	11.9	35.4	6
Individual greed and selfishness	316	11.6	34.5	7
Lack of public participation	122	4.50	13.3	8
Low salary of state officials	87	3.2	9.5	9
Lack of media freedom	76	2.8	8.3	10
Total	2732	100		

CONCLUSION

We have argued that the CCP's anticorruption campaign since late 2012 has mixed effects on controlling corruption and by extension, on improving regime legitimacy. On the one hand, the campaign has received high marks from the public for cracking down on high-level officials and the "three public consumptions." In the short run it has helped to garner much public support and restore regime credibility. On the other hand, the campaign's sluggish performance at local levels has mitigated public satisfaction with anticorruption and local governance. In the longer run this dissatisfaction may matter more for regime legitimacy.

Three reasons stand out. One is the direct and tangible impact of local corruption on ordinary citizens. While the crackdown on high level officials can restore citizens' confidence in the regime and raise their expectation for local redress, the inability to tackle the types of corruption that affect ordinary citizens will gradually erode that confidence and increase cynicism. Secondly, the greater dissatisfaction with corruption and anticorruption among those who have personally experienced corruption bodes ill for the regime, as it reflects more closely what the national campaign has not achieved and the deeper problems that the regime has yet to tackle. Thirdly, to the extent that these deeper problems pertain to institutional flaws of the political structures rather than the mere deviation of individual officials, they are not likely to be swept away easily by a campaign-style strategy that only temporarily relieves some symptoms. Fundamentally, such a strategy is still based on rule of man, exactly the opposite of what real reforms need, i.e. building up rule of law in China.

For the time being, nevertheless, the positive effects of the anticorruption campaign will sustain popular support and regime legitimacy, as it ostensibly demonstrates the integrity and direction of the central leadership. The indifference and impasse at local levels, paradoxically, can even make the central efforts more appreciated.

REFERENCES

- CCDI, 2015. *Zhongguo gongchandang jilu chufen tiaoli*. Oct. 22;
http://www.ccdi.gov.cn/special/ljzl/jd/201510/t20151022_63892.html
- Chen, Xiao-Yang, 2007. "Defensive Medicine or Economically Motivated Corruption? A Confucian Reflection on Physician Care in China Today." *Journal of Medicine & Philosophy* 32.6: 635-648.
- Csedu. 2015. "Statistics reports of schools and students, 2014-2015." July 24;
<http://www.csedu.gov.cn/news/76331.html>

- Economy, Elizabeth. 2013. "The risk of China's anti-corruption campaign." *The Atlantic*, Sept. 17.
- Fu, Hualing. 2015. "Wielding the sword: President's Xi's anti-corruption campaign", in S. Rose-Ackerman and P. Laguenes (eds.) *Greed, Corruption and the Modern State: Essays in Political Economy*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 134-160.
- Gilley, Bruce. 2009. *The Right to Rules: How State Win and Lose Legitimacy*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Huang, Juan. 2015a. "The number of insured vehicles will exceed 2 million." *Sanxiang dushibao*, Oct. 17.
- Huang, Juan. 2015b. "The number of insured vehicles exceeds 2 million." *Sanxiang dushibao*, Oct. 20.
- Li, Cheng. 2014. "China's corruption crackdown more than factional politics." July 31. Brookings report. <https://www.brookings.edu/on-the-record/chinas-corruption-crackdown-more-than-factional-politics/>
- Li, Lianjiang. "Support for Anti-corruption Campaigns in Rural China." *Journal of Contemporary China* 10.29 (2001): 573–586.
- Manion, Melanie. 2016. Taking China's anticorruption campaign seriously, *Economic and Political Studies* 4 (1): 3-18.
- Pei, Minxin. 2016. *China's Crony Capitalism: The Dynamics of Regime Decay*, Harvard University Press.
- People.cn. 2014. "Wang Qishan de touming fanfu." Dec. 31. <http://politics.people.com.cn/n/2014/1231/c1001-26304680.html>
- Quah, J.S.T. 2015. "Hunting the corrupt "tigers" and "flies" in China: an evaluation of Xi Jinping's anti-corruption campaign (November 2012 to March 2015)." Baltimore, MD: Carey School of Law, University of Maryland.
- Rose-Ackerman, Susan, And Tan Yingqi. 2014. "Corruption In The Procurement of Pharmaceuticals and Medical Equipment in China: The Incentives Facing Multinationals, Domestic Firms and Hospital Officials." *UCLA Pacific Basin Law Journal* 32.1 (2014): 1-53.
- Shambaugh, David. 2014. "China at the Crossroads: Ten Major Reform Challenges." Oct. 1. Brookings report.

<https://www.brookings.edu/research/china-at-the-crossroads-ten-major-reform-challenges/>

Tam, W. (2011) “Organizational corruption by public hospitals in China”, *Crime, Law and Social Change*, 56(3): 265-282.

Xinhuanet. 2015. *Lingdao ganbu ganyu sifa huodong, chashou juti anjian chuli de jilu, tongbao he zeren zuijiu guising*. March 30.

Yuan, Baishun. 2015. “Public perception of corruption and folklore of corruption.” *Gonggong xingzheng pinglun*, 3: 56-70.

Zhongguo jijian jiancha bao. 2015a. “Guizhou CCDI Secretary General discusses corruption.” May 16; http://news.xinhuanet.com/legal/2015-05/16/c_127807933.htm.

Ibid. 2015b. “Expose: Six hurdles encountered by local CCDIs in combatting the ‘flies’” May, 16; <http://news.sohu.com/20150516/n413184309.shtml>