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Can messaging help us to fight SOC and corruption in Albania?

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About SOC ACE

The Serious Organised Crime & Anti-Corruption Evidence (SOC ACE) research programme aims to help 'unlock the black box of political will' for tackling serious organised crime, illicit finance and transnational corruption through research that informs politically feasible, technically sound interventions and strategies. Funded by the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO), SOC ACE is a new component in the Anti-Corruption Evidence (ACE) research programme, alongside Global Integrity ACE and SOAS ACE. SOC ACE is managed by the University of Birmingham, working in collaboration with a number of leading research organisations and through consultation and engagement with key stakeholders.

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Summary

Serious and organised crime (SOC) and corruption have particularly significant implications not only for the rule of law but also for development, inequality and poverty. While SOC may sometimes appear to have a stabilising impact—for example, by providing livelihoods opportunities—it may also be coercive, violent or help to build the legitimacy of criminal groups (Jesperson, 2020). The same is true of corruption, which may be justified on the basis that paying a bribe is the cost of 'getting something done', but which has consistently been found to reduce the access of poorer citizens to key public services, while exacerbating inequality (Mbate, 2018; Peiffer & Rose 2018; Justesen & Bjornskov, 2014).

It is therefore imperative to develop effective anti-SOC and anti-corruption strategies. Currently, these strategies typically include an awareness-raising element featuring the communication of messages about SOC or corruption. However, a growing body of research suggests that raising awareness of 'social bads' like organised crime and corruption may do more harm than good. This research paper tests the effect of different kinds of anti-SOC and anti-corruption messages in Albania, reporting on a nationally representative sample of 3,003 Albanian adults.

The survey had two components. The first was a survey experiment in which we divided the sample into six groups, five of which received the kind of anti-SOC or anti-corruption message that might be used in a government campaign, and one of which acted as the control. The second survey component included general questions about attitudes to SOC and corruption to enable us to better understand how Albanians think about and conceptualise these issues. By assessing whether individuals in each of these groups have attitudes or beliefs that are distinct from those in the control group, we generated a systematic estimate of the impact (or its absence) of anti-SOC and anti-corruption messages.

The results confirm the patchy and often problematic impact of messaging in these areas. Overall, the messages that we tested did not influence participants' willingness to pay a bribe, beliefs that SOC or corruption are (un)acceptable, the willingness of participants to report corruption and SOC, or their desire to take up activism to resist these 'social bads'. In other words, for some of the most important outcomes of interest the messages we tested had no effect—and therefore represent questionable value for money. Things look a little different in relation to issues of political accountability. Regarding the belief that officials can be held accountable and that it is worth voting for an anti-corruption candidate, almost all of our messages had a positive effect. This suggests that the messages we tested may be worth communicating, but only if these outcomes alone are deemed to be worth the investment.

The picture becomes even more challenging, however, when we look at a range of other beliefs about SOC and corruption. Here we find that a number of messages—more specifically those that describe the current situation—generate unwanted unintended consequences. Most notably, exposure to these messages increases agreement with the idea that bribery is needed to get things done when dealing with the government—

which risks bolstering the belief that the payment of bribes is inevitable and therefore not worth resisting—while increasing agreement that people have lost confidence in the government because of the extent of organised crime. This finding implies that none of the messages worked as had been hoped.

None of the messages we tested both maximised the positive influence of the information being communicated while minimising its negative influence. All of the messages worked inconsistently, and there appears to be a trade-off between effectiveness and minimising unintended consequences. The research paper therefore ends by considering whether the best way forward is to design new kinds of messages, or to move away from messaging campaigns in favour of deeper and more sustained forms of engagement. In either case, the path ahead should involve rigorous testing in order to avoid unintended consequences and ensure that investments are well spent.

1. Introduction: Challenging SOC and corruption in Albania

Serious and organised crime (SOC) and corruption have particularly significant implications not only for the rule of law but also for development, inequality and poverty. According to Jesperson (2020, p. 1), SOC 'is known to disrupt the development process and pervert the benefits of development. While sometimes it may appear to have a stabilising impact on the surface—for example, by providing livelihoods opportunities—it can still be coercive, violent or help to build the legitimacy of criminal groups'. The same is true of corruption, which may be justified on the basis that paying a bribe is the cost of 'getting something done', but which has consistently been found to reduce the access of poorer citizens to key public services, while exacerbating inequality (Mbate, 2018; Peiffer & Rose 2018; Justesen & Bjornskov, 2014). SOC and corruption also have other features in common: they have the possibility of becoming entrenched within the state itself (Cheeseman, 2020), and they have the potential to undermine the legitimacy of the political system and support for key elements of the social contract such as payment of taxes (Cheeseman & Peiffer, 2020).

In addition to sharing certain characteristics, SOC is intractably connected to corruption. SOC activities are often facilitated by and indeed parasitic on networks of corruption and the willingness of those working in the formal sector to 'look the other way' (Marquette & Peiffer, 2021). Recent research has shown how the spread of such networks facilitates the emergence of 'shadow states' in which political power is gradually ceded to unelected—and often criminal—groups (Cheeseman, 2020). It is therefore imperative to find policies that can work to deter individuals from becoming involved, facilitating or being tolerant of SOC, and to reduce levels of corruption. This is especially true for countries such as Albania, which, since the end of communist rule in 1989, has established a parliamentary constitutional republic that holds regular competitive elections but which Freedom House (2022) regards as only as 'partly free' on the basis that '[c]orruption and organ crime remain serious problems despite recent government efforts to address them, and the intermingling of powerful business, political, and media interests inhibits the development of truly independent news outlets'.

As of 2020, Albania was ranked 104/180 countries in the Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index, on a par with Côte d'Ivoire and El Salvador (Transparency International, 2021). Similarly, the US Department of State has concluded that Albania 'is the mainstay of organized crime worldwide and the main points of drug trafficking, weapons and immigrants in counterfeit goods' and serves 'as a base of operations for crime organizations operating in the United States, Europe, the Middle East, and South America' (US Department of State, 2019, p. 37). This is not just a threat to development and democracy in Albania, but also represents a major challenge to the wider world. SOC is a transnational issue, with cross-border networks facilitating smuggling, illicit trade, and people smuggling, and the UK government has found that SOC in Albania poses a direct threat to UK security (Home Office et al., 2020). More specifically, the National Strategic Assessment of Serious and Organised Crime (2017, p.

7) identifies SOC in Albania as a direct threat given that it has 'established a high-profile influence within UK organised crime and have considerable control across the UK drug trafficking market'.

Developing effective anti-SOC and anti-corruption strategies is therefore crucial. Currently, these strategies typically include an awareness-raising element, in which messages about SOC or corruption are designed and disseminated. For example, the UK government's *Serious and Organised Crime Strategy* (2018) identifies raising awareness of the consequences of SOC as key to preventing and reducing the space for SOC networks to operate. This is seen as important for building public support for non-corrupt leaders and anti-SOC policies, and could be said to make intuitive sense. The success of SOC in part depends on the complicity of members of the public and state officials. The same is true of corruption, which thrives when citizens are willing to engage in and tolerate corrupt behaviour, so that leaders are not held accountable for theft and waste. Given this, it makes sense to see efforts designed to harden public attitudes against SOC and corruption as a central element of any effort to bring such processes under control.

However, a growing body of research suggests that raising awareness to 'social bads' like organised crime and corruption may risk doing more harm than good. While, to the best of our knowledge, there has been no systematic research conducted on the impact of SOC-specific awareness-raising efforts, findings from research on such efforts focused on corruption suggest there may be cause for concern. These studies have almost universally found that messaging either has no impact, or indeed that it backfires. Peiffer's (2017, 2018) study in Jakarta, for example, found that exposure to anti-corruption messaging reduced willingness to report corruption. Most recently, Cheeseman and Peiffer (2021)'s study in Lagos found that exposure to messaging made Lagosians more likely to pay a bribe in a simulated bribery game. The most likely explanation for these findings is that by making the problem salient, anti-corruption messaging works to reinforce beliefs that corruption is systemic and so unintentionally makes people feel that the problem is too big and intractable to try to resist. In other words, because citizens already hold strong beliefs about how intractable corruption is, any message that encourages them to think about corruption has the potential to backfire and encourage recipients to 'go with the flow' rather than to fight back (Cheeseman & Peiffer 2022).

Though we lack the evidence to say for sure, it seems likely that a similar dynamic may be at work with SOC awareness-raising efforts. Messages used in these efforts are also often designed to highlight the damage SOC causes (for instance, the UK's *Serious and Organised Crime Strategy*, 2018) and even messages which publicise counter-SOC successes, such as stories of seizing assets, may still give the impression that the problem is bigger than previously imagined. As with corruption messaging, by raising awareness of the problem of SOC, counter-SOC messaging may unintentionally make people feel that the system is beyond repair—too overrun by SOC for individual efforts to have any impact. This possibility presents policy-makers with two major questions: Are anti-SOC messages doing more harm than good? And, how can we design anti-SOC and anti-corruption strategies that work as intended? More broadly, there is a lack of reliable data on how individuals think about SOC, who they think is responsible for it, and its negative impacts on matters like political trust.

In order to test the impact of anti-corruption and anti-SOC messages for the first time in Albania, we surveyed a 3,003-person sample that is nationally representative of Albanian adults. The survey had two components. The first was a survey experiment in which we divided the sample into six groups, five of which received the kind of anti-SOC or anti-corruption message that might be used in a government campaign, and one of which acted as the control. The second survey component included general questions about attitudes to SOC and corruption to enable us to better understand how Albanians think about and conceptualise these issues. This battery of questions also asked about individuals' attitudes towards a range of behaviours, from paying a bribe through to voting for an anti-corruption candidate. By assessing whether individuals in the groups that received a treatment have distinctive attitudes or beliefs to those in the control group, we can generate a systematic estimate of the impact (or its absence) of anti-SOC and anti-corruption messages.

Co-producing the design of the messages with the Albania programme team of the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), we developed different kinds of messages to test with regard to both SOC and corruption.[1] We felt it was important to innovate for three reasons: a) to ensure that the messages resonated in the Albanian context; b) because although the literature has generally found almost all anti-corruption messages to have no effect or backfire, it is plausible that this will not be the case for SOC; and c) because there is some indication that messages that focus on public disapproval of 'social bads' rather than describing how widely they are practiced – have less risk of generating unintended effects (Widner et al., 2000; Cialdini et al., 2006; Agerberg, 2021). We therefore test messages that highlight that 1) *corruption is systemic* and 2) that *SOC is systemic,* as well as ones that focus on 3) *disapproval of corruption*, and 4) *disapproval of SOC*. A final message 5) *kleptocracy and transnational corruption* is included because during the process of designing the messages some interlocutors felt that emphasising the fact that Albanian wealth and resources are lost to other countries because of kleptocratic patterns of corruption could prove to be a particularly effective narrative as it plays on a sense of national pride.

Our findings are worrying in relation to the effectiveness of anti-corruption and SOC messaging but more positive than the findings of previous studies. Overall, the messages that we tested did not influence participants' willingness to pay a bribe, notions that SOC or corruption are (un)acceptable, the willingness of participants to report corruption and SOC, or their desire to take up activism to resist these 'social bads'. In other words, for some of the most important outcomes of interest, the messages we tested had no effect.

Things look a little different regarding issues of political accountability, however. In relation to the belief that officials can be held accountable, and that it is worth voting for an anti-corruption candidate, almost all of our messages have a positive effect. This suggests that the messages tested may be worth communicating, but only if these outcomes alone are deemed to be worth the investment.

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[1] The project also benefited from collaboration with the survey firm IDRA, which helped us improve the phrasing of messages and survey questions.

Moreover, the picture becomes even more complicated when we look at a range of other beliefs about SOC and corruption. Here we find that a number of messages, more specifically those that describe the widespread nature of corruption or SOC, appear to generate unwanted unintended consequences. Most notably, exposure to these messages increases agreement with the idea that bribery is needed 'to get things done' when dealing with the government—which risks bolstering the belief that payment of bribes is inevitable and therefore not worth resisting—while increasing agreement that people have lost confidence in the government because of the extent of organised crime. These findings confirm the difficulty of using messaging to shape public opinion in a desired direction.

Unfortunately, there are no obvious solutions in relation to the different types of messages that we tested. None of the messages had a positive effect on the acceptability of corruption and SOC, or a desire to report or take up direct activism to tackle these 'social bads'. Unexpectedly, it was messaging that emphasised how entrenched and widespread corruption and SOC were that had the most substantive effect on political accountability, but these remain the messages most likely to generate unwanted unintended effects in terms of popular attitudes concerning the need to pay bribes to get things done and confidence in the government itself. Messaging that emphasised public disapproval of these 'social bads' had a less significant effect in terms of strengthening confidence in political accountability, but as anticipated from the existing literature, was less likely to exacerbate problematic public attitudes in other areas such as confidence in the government and the belief that it is necessary to pay bribes.

Put another way, none of the messages that we tested both maximises the positive influence of the information being communicated while minimising its negative influence. All of the messages work inconsistently, and there appears to be a trade-off between effectiveness and minimising unintended consequences. At this stage, it is difficult to see how these outcomes could lay the foundation for an effective intervention that would have the desired effect and represent value for money. Whether this means that we should seek to design new kinds of messages, or should be looking to move away from messaging campaigns in favour of other kinds of engagement, is a topic discussed in greater detail in the conclusion.

2. Why do we expect corruption and SOC messaging to have negative effects?

To the best of our knowledge, no previous research has been conducted on the impact of SOC-specific awareness-raising efforts. Six previous studies have been conducted to assess the impact of anti-corruption awareness-raising messages (Corbacho et al., 2016; Peiffer, 2017; 2018; Peiffer & Walton, 2019; Kobis et al., 2019; Cheeseman & Peiffer, 2020, 2021; Agerberg, 2021). All of these studies establish whether messaging has an impact by comparing how participants who are exposed to messaging behave in a bribery game or respond to a survey, to participants who are not exposed to messaging (control group). Overall, this literature paints a fairly bleak picture regarding the effectiveness of raising awareness of corruption and suggests there may also be cause for concern for those advocating to raise awareness of other 'social bads', such as SOC.

Table 1 summarises briefly the findings from this literature. As Table 1 indicates, 16 messages overall have been tested in six countries. Strikingly, *the literature finds that half of the 16 messages have 'backfired' to some extent, which suggests that, in practice, many anti-corruption awareness-raising efforts may be doing more harm than good.* Exposure to the message in Corbacho et al. (2016) was about bribery increasing elicited greater self-reported willingness to bribe. Peiffer's four very different messages tested in Jakarta similarly increased concern about corruption, reduced pride in the government's anti-corruption response, and reduced belief that ordinary people could easily fight corruption (Peiffer, 2018). Exposure to all four also reduced willingness to protest against corruption (Peiffer, 2017). These findings are especially interesting because the four messages tested were different from each other, some describing the widespread nature of corruption, but others highlighting the government's successes in fighting corruption, and even an 'up-beat' one which described ways citizens could get involved to fight against corruption. Finally, and perhaps most worryingly, three of the five messages tested in Cheeseman and Peiffer's (2020; 2021) study in Lagos encouraged the majority of participants in a simulated bribery game to pay a bribe. These messages were also different to each other and described corruption as endemic, or as being against religious moral teachings, and a final one underlining the government's successes in fighting corruption. Given that different types of messages in three quite different contexts have been found to 'backfire', the risk that awareness raising may cause more harm than good appears to be quite high.

These findings are a stern reminder that raising awareness of corruption is not the same as helping to address it, and that such efforts may in fact be exacerbating the problem. So why does this happen and is there a risk that raising awareness of SOC will also backfire? The corruption messaging literature suggests that awareness raising primes the issue of corruption, effectively making people think more, but not differently, about the issue (Peiffer, 2018; Cheeseman & Peiffer, 2022; see also Brody & Page, 1972; Riker, 1986; Lenz, 2009). For many who are exposed to such messaging, and who already

believe that corruption is systemic or widespread, messaging unintentionally reinforces beliefs that the problem is too big and intractable to try to resist. This is also said to apply to messages which emphasise how widespread corruption is, and others taking a more optimistic tone (Peiffer, 2018; Cheeseman & Peiffer, 2022). Because corruption is an issue on which people have already formed strong opinions, this interpretation suggests that messaging is unlikely to change firmly held views on the topic. Rather, even up-beat messages can encourage people to recall those firmly held beliefs that corruption is endemic and impossible to solve. This reasoning explains why any message about corruption may backfire.

Given this reasoning, a similar dynamic may be at work with SOC awareness-raising efforts. Like corruption, SOC is another 'social bad' that is perceived to infiltrate the state and heavily influence the actions of public officials. By raising awareness of the problem of SOC, counter-SOC messaging may unintentionally make people feel that the system is beyond repair—too overrun by SOC for individual efforts to have any impact. Moreover, with this logic, not only would we expect that messages highlighting the damage SOC causes could backfire in this way, but even messages that publicise counter-SOC achievements, such as stories of seizing assets, may still cause people to think and become pessimistic about the task of controlling SOC.

Table 1: Summary of findings in anti-corruption messaging literature

Study	Location	Themes of message(s) tested	Impact(s) of message
Corbacho et al. (2016)	Costa Rica	Increasing rate of bribery in country	Increased self-reported willingness to bribe
Peiffer (2017; 2018)	Jakarta	Grand corruption is endemic	All increased worry about corruption, reduced pride in the government's response, and reduced belief that ordinary people could easily fight corruption (2018); All also reduced willingness to protest against corruption and had almost no impact on attitudes to reporting it (2017).
		Petty corruption is endemic	
		Government successes in anti-corruption	
		Citizens can get involved in anti-corruption	
Peiffer & Walton (2019)	Port Moresby	Corruption is endemic	No impact on attitudes to reporting corruption.
		Corruption is illegal	No impact on attitudes to reporting corruption.
		Corruption is against religious teachings	No impact on attitudes to reporting corruption.
		Corruption is a 'local' issue	Encouraged favourable attitudes to reporting corruption.
Kobis et al. (2019)	Manguzi	Bribery declined recently in region	No impact on bribery in game for those who took on role of citizen. Reduced bribery for those who took on role of public official.
Cheeseman & Peiffer (2021)	Lagos	Corruption is endemic	Increased chances of bribing in game for majority who think corruption is very widespread; no impact on minority.
		Corruption is against religious teachings	Increased chances of bribing in game for majority who think corruption is very widespread; no impact on minority.
		Corruption is a 'local' issue	No impact on bribery in game.
		Corruption steals tax money	Reduced changes of bribing in game for minority who do not believe corruption is very widespread; no impact on majority.
		Government successes in anti-corruption	Increased chances of bribing in game for majority who think corruption is very widespread; no impact on minority.
Agerberg (2021)	Mexico	Citizens strongly condemn corruption	Increased interpersonal trust, reduced belief that corruption is a basic part of Mexican culture, and reduced self-reported willingness to pay a bribe.

In addition to the eight messages that backfired, a further six of the 16 messages tested in the literature are found to have largely no impact. This suggests that, in practice, there is a real risk that investing in awareness raising will be a waste of resources. Peiffer and Walton (2019) found that three of the four messages tested in their study in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea (PNG)—one on corruption as endemic, another about corruption being illegal, and a third framing corruption as against religious, moral teachings—had no impact on attitudes towards reporting corruption. Similarly, Kobis et al. (2019) found that a message about bribery decreasing locally failed to have any impact on the participants' willingness to pay a bribe in a lab-based simulated bribery game, when those participants took on the role of the 'citizen'. Cheeseman and Peiffer (2020; 2021) also failed to find that a message about corruption being a 'local issue' and another which framed corruption as stealing tax money affected the majority of participants' willingness to bribe in their bribery game.

Only two of the 16 messages tested thus far registered clear, 'positive' or intended impacts.[2] Walton and Peiffer's (2019) survey experiment in Papua New Guinea found that exposure to a message framing corruption and anti-corruption as 'local' issues encouraged favourable attitudes towards reporting it. The authors make sense of the effectiveness of this message by suggesting that such a theme resonated particularly well in PNG, where people tend to identify very strongly with their ethnic group rather than with the nation. While this finding represented a first glimmer of hope, Cheeseman and Peiffer's (2020) study tests the impact of a very similar message on bribery in Lagos, where ethnic identification is also prominent. As noted earlier, they found that it had no impact on bribery in their bribery game. This suggests that Walton and Peiffer's (2019) positive finding about this type of message encouraging corruption reporting may not be generalisable beyond the context of PNG, or that the message perhaps has no impact on deterring bribery in practice, which Walton and Peiffer (2019) did not test, or both.

The second message tested which has had a clear 'positive' impact was from Agerberg's (2021) survey experiment conducted in Mexico. This message emphasised the fact that citizens strongly condemn corruption (public disapproval). In social norms research terminology, this message invoked an injunctive norm—the extent to which citizens disapprove of a certain kind of unwanted behaviour (Widner et al., 2000; Cialdini et al., 2006), and it was the first study in this literature to test such a message. All previous messages tested tend instead to highlight descriptive norms, such as describing how much corruption is practised or that bribery is increasing or decreasing, and/or prescriptive norms, which refer to values which encourage support for reducing corruption and how people should fight or resist it (Brauer & Chaurand, 2010). Indeed, these types of messages—describing how widely its practised or a scandal, and those

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[2] Two other findings have been 'normatively positive in the literature, but other considerations suggest we should be cautious before celebrating them. Kobis et al. (2019) found that exposure to a message about bribery decreasing locally reduced participants' willingness to accept a bribe when they took on the hypothetical role of a 'public official' in their bribery game. However, not only were most participants of this study not public officials in real life, but those who took on the role of 'citizen' in the game—which all of them were—were not affected by the message to which they were exposed. It is therefore unclear how much confidence to place in the 'positive' finding. Moreover, Cheeseman and Peiffer (2020) found in Nigeria that exposure to a message framing corruption as stealing tax revenue discouraged bribery among a small minority of participants who did not believe that corruption was very widespread in their bribery game, and had no impact on two-thirds of the participants who did believe that corruption was very widespread in Nigeria.

urging citizens to 'get involved'—is what established policy guidance on anti-corruption awareness raising suggests should be used. In the 2004 United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC), for example, signatory states are called to raise awareness through 'public information activities' to the 'existence, causes and gravity of and threat posed by corruption' to contribute to the 'non-tolerance of corruption' (UNCAC, 2004, Article 13, p. 15).

Several studies have found, however, that messages that emphasise the extent to which people do not comply with the rules are particularly likely to backfire. In addition to the risk of priming citizens to think about the pervasiveness of corruption, as discussed above, these messages may encourage citizens to believe that people like them are not doing what they are supposed to (Cheeseman & Peiffer, 2021). This both can create a subconscious signal that officially problematic behaviour may actually be socially acceptable and imply that there is little social or practical cost to breaking the rules (Tankard & Paluck, 2016). In turn, these cues may have the potential to encourage precisely the kind of behaviour that messages are designed to discourage, because in a range of areas including adherence to COVID-19 protocols, 'people match their behavior to perceived social norms' (Norton et al., 2021).

As a corrective to these approaches, Agerberg (2021) argues that messaging focused on the fact that most people disapprove of corruption is likely to be critical to successful anti-corruption messaging. In countries that suffer widespread corruption, Agerberg (2021) argues that many people may falsely underestimate the fact that most other people think corruption is wrong and want it controlled. This is held to be, in part, because in countries with a corruption problem there tends to be a low level of social trust, and therefore people in these settings are prone to interpret high levels of corruption as a sign that many people buy into the corrupt system, rather than, for example, the fact that others, like themselves, resent having to engage in corruption to get things done (Agerberg, 2021; Uslaner, 2004).

According to Agerberg (2021, pp. 5–6):

> While messages about descriptive corruption norms are likely to highlight well-known facts, messages with information about injunctive norms hence have the potential to provide novel information ... It is an important difference whether individuals believe that corruption persists because other people think corruption is acceptable and justifiable, or if they believe that other people are honest potential collaborators that are stuck in a corrupt system (Hoffmann & Patel, 2017). The prospects of reducing corruption through collective efforts are arguably higher in the latter case.

Indeed, Agerberg (2021) finds compelling evidence to support the notion that public disapproval messaging may work as intended. Those exposed to a message about how most Mexicans condemned corruption demonstrated higher levels of interpersonal trust, less acceptance that corruption is a basic part of Mexican culture, and a lower likelihood of self-reported willingness to pay a bribe.

As Agerberg (2021) is the only study thus far to test a public disapproval anti-corruption message, it is unclear if the findings are generalisable beyond the experiment he

conducted. If, however, the finding is generalisable, it suggests a plausible way forward for those hoping to use messaging to change minds about tackling difficult and systemic problems. By informing people that most disapprove of corruption and/or SOC, awareness-raising campaigns may inspire a greater sense of hope that these problems can be tackled.

Taking off from this literature, and in order to provide a further test of Agerberg's (2021) argument, we designed our research to explore the following hypotheses:

- **H1 (Widespread):** Exposure to a message that emphasises how widespread corruption/SOC is will weaken anti-corruption/counter-SOC sentiment.

- **H2 (Public disapproval):** Exposure to a message that emphasises the strength of anti-corruption/counter-SOC norms will strengthen anti-corruption/counter-SOC sentiment.

In addition to offering another test of public disapproval messaging, our research advances research on 'social bads' awareness raising in two further ways. First, our study represents the first examination of the impact of counter-SOC messaging on a range of important outcomes, including willingness to report organised criminal activity, feelings of whether SOC is acceptable, and perceptions of and trust in the government. By examining both counter-SOC and anti-corruption messages, our findings provide insight into whether a similar dynamic may be at work with respect to the efficacy of raising awareness of either 'social bad'. Second, ours is the first study of awareness raising conducted in Europe, and we do so with a nationally representative sample of Albania. All previous anti-corruption awareness-raising studies, apart from Agerberg's (2021), were conducted in single cities, outside Europe. Given the representative nature of the sample, our findings are more reliable than most previous studies, and in conducting this study in Albania, our findings are able to suggest whether the trends previously established are generalisable to a completely different context.

3. Research Design

3.1. Location

This study uses data from an experiment conducted in Albania, which ran from 15 January to 27 February 2022. Albania proved to be a good location for this study, not only because it is believed that corruption and organised crime are serious problems in the country, but also because neither topic is socially taboo to discuss, which made the recruitment of participants unproblematic. It is worth noting that none of the previous studies on anti-corruption messaging has been conducted in Europe. Choosing Albania for this study allows us to see whether findings established elsewhere are generalisable in a new context.

3.2. Recruitment

We recruited a 3,003-person sample that is representative of all Albanian adults for this study, which is notable as previous anti-corruption awareness-raising experiments were not conducted with a nationally representative sample. Working with IDRA, an experienced research firm based in Albania, we used a multi-stage stratified cluster sampling strategy. As Albania is divided by 'polling areas', primary sampling units were selected based on Albanian voting centres, of which there is only one in each polling area, with stratification by region and urban location. Households were selected randomly, based on distance from a voting centre, and individuals were randomly selected within them. To ensure gender balance in the sample, enumerators alternated between asking to interview a woman or a man. All interviews were conducted at the household level, face to face, in Albanian. Details on the demographic characteristics of the sample are available in Appendix A.

3.3. Experimental design

Participants were randomly assigned to one of six groups: *control, corruption is systemic, disapproval of corruption, kleptocracy, SOC is systemic,* or *disapproval of SOC* (n=500 to 501 in each). For each interview, professional enumerators from IDRA started by reading a short introduction that described the study's aims as wanting to 'learn what citizens think about politics, society, public services and the experiences they have with public officials' and the study as having a particular interest in how the respondent feels about corruption and crime in Albania. It was then explained to all participants that they could withdraw at any time and that their responses would be treated confidentially.[3]

All participants were first asked the same simple demographic questions. If assigned to the *widespread corruption, public disapproval of corruption, kleptocracy, widespread SOC,* or *public disapproval of SOC* groups, after the demographic questions, respondents were

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[3] At the end of the study, respondents were asked again for their permission for their responses to be included in the study. Only 3% of the sample asked to withdraw their data.

then asked to read their group's respective treatment paragraph (messages). Following exposure to the treatment (or not for those in the control group, which proceeded to the next set of questions), participants in the *widespread corruption, public disapproval of corruption* and *kleptocracy* groups were asked a series of survey questions gauging their perceptions about corruption, willingness to get involved in reporting or fighting corruption, as well as their attitudes about how corruption informs voting decisions. In contrast, participants in the *widespread SOC,* and *public disapproval SOC* groups were asked a series of survey questions gauging their perceptions about SOC, willingness to report SOC, as well as their attitudes about how SOC informs voting decisions. Those assigned to the control group were asked all survey questions about (counter-)SOC and (anti)corruption.

3.4. Treatments

We co-produced messages with the FCDO programme team in Albania to develop five different treatments (messages) for our study. These messages were designed to test the hypotheses set out above, but also to resonate with the Albanian SOC/corruption context, as well as to reflect content that the programme team felt could be used in practice in the future. The project also benefitted from feedback from the team at IDRA in this respect; they gave feedback on the messaging as well as survey questions.

Each of the treatments was a paragraph long (see Appendix B for the full text of each treatment).[4] The *widespread corruption* message described corruption in Albania as being widely practised and hampering access to public services. It also described recent high-profile corruption scandals and the fact that most Albanians believed that corruption often occurs in the government. Similarly, the *widespread SOC* message described serious and organised criminal activities that take place in Albania, and many negative impacts SOC is thought to have in the country, including threatening democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and social and economic progress. As a final descriptive message, we tested a *kleptocracy* message, which focused on the transnational nature of high-level corruption. This was tested because some interlocutors felt that emphasising the fact that Albanian wealth and resources are lost to other countries through kleptocratic corruption patterns could prove to be a particularly effective narrative as it plays on a sense of national pride.

In contrast, the final two treatments were designed to highlight public disapproval of these social bads. The *public disapproval of corruption* message reported that overwhelming majorities of Albanians disapproved of different forms of corruption, felt that corruption was unacceptable, and that certain acts of corruption should be punished. Similarly, the *public disapproval of SOC* message reported that overwhelming majorities of Albanians strongly disapproved of organised criminal groups, organised criminal activity (like drug trafficking), recognised that organised crime has negative consequences for the country, and disapproved of using organised crime to make money.

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[4] A pilot study was conducted to ensure that the messages and survey questions were well understood.

3.5. Dependent Variables

We examined whether exposure to the treatments affected responses to 14 survey questions, which represent four distinct categories of potential outcomes, or dependent variables. Table 2 displays the exact wording of question on our survey scrutinised, as well as a note on how the full sample responded to each question. We describe each in turn here briefly.

We focused first on notions of the acceptability of SOC and corruption and the associated willingness to engage in bribery; doing so allows us to gauge whether messaging is influential in shaping the social tolerance of each 'social bad'. Willingness to bribe is measured with responses to two questions that ask for agreement with the idea of respondents being willing to pay a small bribe to avoid a traffic ticket (*traffic bribe)* or to receive speedier hospital admission (*hospital bribe).* The extent to which respondents think SOC and corruption are acceptable is measured by agreement with statements about working in SOC being OK, as long as it is done for the right reasons *(SOC OK)*, and similarly, it being OK for government employees engage in corruption to benefit their community (*corruption OK)*.

The second type gauges attitudes towards anti-corruption activism and reporting SOC and corruption; these questions allow us to see whether messaging can inspire a greater sense of indignation with respect to each 'social bad'. We asked respondents one question about whether they would join an anti-corruption organisation (*join anti-corr org)*, and two questions about whether they would be willing to report a case of corruption (*report corruption)* and report suspected organised criminal activity (*report SOC).*

We examined to what extent SOC and corruption considerations inform voting decisions and feelings of personal efficacy through voting with our third category of dependent variables. We asked for respondents' agreement with the idea that they can help hold public officials accountable by not voting for those deemed corrupt (*not vote corrupt*) and, separately, by not voting for those with links to organised crime (*not vote SOC*). We also asked whether respondents would be more inclined to vote for a candidate who focused their campaign on fighting corruption (*vote anticorruption*) and, separately, for a candidate who focused their campaign on fighting organised crime (*vote SOC*).

Finally, respondents were also asked about other types of perceptions, which capture the perceived extent of each problem. These allow us to see whether messaging influences how people think of each 'social bad'. The first asked for agreement about whether it is hard to get things done with the government if a bribe is not paid. The second was about whether controlling organised crime was one of the most important challenges facing Albania, and the third was whether people have lost confidence in the government because of SOC.

All response options are coded on 5-point scales. Most response options, except for *report SOC,* range from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). *Report SOC's* responses are very unlikely (1) to very likely (5).

Table 2: Dependent Variable Questions

Variable	Question/Statement	Distribution note
Acceptability		
Traffic bribe	In order to avoid paying a traffic ticket, I would be willing to pay a small bribe to a police officer.	30% agree (8% strongly agree)
Hospital bribe	In order to receive speedier admission to hospital for myself or a loved one, I would be willing to pay a small bribe to a health worker.	49% agree (26% strongly agree)
SOC OK	Working in organised crime is OK as long as you do it for the right reasons.	15% agree (5% strongly agree)
Corruption OK	Most corruption is bad, but sometimes it is OK for government employees to use their position to benefit their community.	24% agree (9% strongly agree)
Activism		
Join anti-corr. org.	I would become an active member of an anti-corruption organisation, spending a few hours a month at meetings and organisational events.	46% agree (23% strongly agree)
Report corruption	I would report a case of corruption even if I would have to spend a day in court to give evidence.	47% agree (24% strongly agree)
Report SOC	If you became aware of someone who you suspected was involved in organised crime would you be likely to report it?	44% likely (15% very likely)
Voting		
Not vote corrupt	I can help hold public officials accountable by not voting for the corrupt ones.	88% agree (51% strongly agree)
Vote anticorruption	I would be more inclined to vote for a candidate who focused their campaign on fighting corruption.	91% agree (60% strongly agree)
Not vote SOC	I can help hold public officials accountable by not voting for the ones that have links to organised crime.	90% agree (60% strongly agree)
Vote counter-SOC	I would be more inclined to vote for a candidate who focused their campaign on fighting organised crime.	85% agree (52% strongly agree)
Perceptions		
Bribery get stuff done	When dealing with the government, it's hard to get stuff done if you don't pay a bribe.	72% agree (39% strongly agree)
Control SOC important	Controlling organised crime is one of the most important challenges facing Albania.	92% agree (56% strongly agree)
Lost conf. gov't.	People have lost confidence in the government because of the extent of organised crime.	80% agree (41% strongly agree)

Note: Distribution notes are based on full sample.

3.6. Estimation Strategy

Pair-wise difference in means (DIM) tests are appropriate to evaluate the influence of messaging in an experiment like this, when it is possible to assume that the only difference between respondent groups is that they received different treatments or received no treatment (the control group).[5] For this reason, DIM tests were run on basic demographic indicators. There were no significant (i.e. p-value <0.05) differences among the six groups (five treatment groups and control group) with respect to gender, education, and socio-economic status.[6] However, the tests did reveal two things of interest. First, the *widespread corruption* group had a significantly higher percentage of rural dwellers than the *control* group, and the *public disapproval of corruption*, *kleptocracy*, and *widespread SOC* treatment groups. Second, the *public disapproval of SOC* group is significantly older than the *control* group. Therefore, instead of using DIM tests, we conducted ordered logistic regressions to determine how exposure to the treatment messages influenced responses to survey questions. These analyses allow us to control for the potential influence of urbanisation (for analyses examining the potential impact of corruption treatments) and age (for analyses examining the potential impact of SOC treatments). Controlling for these variables is important because it allows us to ensure that any differences in responses we identify across groups are not due to variations in urbanisation or age. Ordered logistic regressions analyses are also appropriate to use because the dependent variables examined have 5-point ordered response options.

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[5] A difference in means (DIM) test measures the absolute difference between the mean value in two or more groups. In experiments like ours, such a test shows the degree of difference between the averages of the control and different treatment groups.

[6] Details of how demographic variables were measured are presented in Appendix A.

4. Results

4.1. Messages tested did not influence notions of acceptability

Irrespective of their differences in content or framing, the tested messages did not shape beliefs that corruption or SOC is acceptable or participants' reported willingness to engage in bribery. The results in Table 3 show that in no case across this category of dependent variables were the tested messages found to be significantly associated with willingness to pay a bribe or notions that SOC or corruption are (un)acceptable.

Table 3: Impact of messaging on acceptability and engagement

	Traffic bribe	Hospital bribe	SOC OK	Corruption OK
Widespread corr.	0.05	0.10		0.04
Public disapproval of corr.	-0.00	0.09		0.13
Kleptocracy	-0.05	-0.03		-0.04
Widespread SOC			0.03	
Public disapproval of SOC			-0.04	
Urban	0.04	-0.27***		0.14
Age			0.00	
N	1,903	1,910	1,425	1,913
LR chi^2	1.13	12.10	1.28	4.82
Prob>chi^2	0.89	0.02	0.73	0.31
Pseudo R^2	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00

Level of significance indicated by: *** for p-value <0.01, ** for p-value <0.05, * for p-value <0.10.

The good news is that these 'null' results do not suggest that counter-SOC and anti-corruption messaging will 'backfire' by, for example, encouraging a social tolerance for either 'social bad' or even bribery—something that Cheeseman and Peiffer (2022) found in their study in Lagos and Corbacho et al. (2016) found in Costa Rica. The bad news is that the results suggest that resources spent on awareness raising with the aim of shaping social tolerance of these 'social bads' is could very well be wasted in Albania. Moreover, they also undermine the hope inspired by Agerberg's (2021) study on public disapproval anti-corruption messaging; in our case the results show that the public disapproval messages we tested have no more impact than the messaging which described corruption as being widespread that Agerberg (2021) warns against using. In other words, there are no easy fixes to designing messaging that will be more effective in discouraging social tolerance in relation to SOC or corruption in the Albanian context.

4.2. Messages tested did not influence activism and reporting

The results shown in Table 4 show a very similar picture to those shown in Table 3. Once again, none of the messages is found to have a significant impact on the dependent variables in this category. Specifically, the messages failed to shape willingness to join an anti-corruption organisation, and willingness to report organised criminal activity. The second model shows that the *widespread corruption* message is significantly and positively associated with willingness to report corruption. However, in this case, the model itself is not significant (Prob>chi^2 is greater than 0.10), which means that the significant finding displayed is not reliable. Models fail to reach significance, as in this case, when they do not perform sufficiently better in explaining variations in the dependent variable than an alternative model containing no explanatory variables at all. Put differently, something much more influential than exposure to messages, not included in the model, is probably shaping variations in willingness to report corruption. Once again, these results show a risk that investment in awareness raising will be poorly spent.

Table 4: Impact of messaging on activism and reporting

	Join anti-corr org.	Report corruption	Report SOC
Widespread corr.	0.02	0.28**	
Public disapproval of corr.	-0.05	0.11	
Kleptocracy	-0.04	0.09	
Widespread SOC			0.17
Public disapproval of SOC			0.09
Urban	0.23***	0.05	
Age			0.01*
N	1,911	1,921	1,374
LR chi^2	8.75	7.04	5.86
Prob>chi^2	0.07	0.13	0.12
Pseudo R^2	0.00	0.00	0.00

Level of significance indicated by: *** for p-value <0.01, ** for p-value <0.05, * for p-value <0.10.

4.3. Messages strengthen attitudes about using voting to hold officials accountable

In contrast to the previous two tables, Table 5 shows that the messages tested were largely influential in shaping ideas about whether citizens feel able and willing to use voting as a way to make corrupt and SOC-associated public officials accountable. Encouragingly, exposure to all our corruption messages bolstered agreement that respondents can hold public officials accountable by not voting for corrupt ones, as well as their willingness to vote for candidates who focused their campaign on fighting corruption. Specifically, Table 5 shows that, compared to those who received no message at all (control group), all three treatment groups are significantly more likely to

agree with these two views. While we expected that the public disapproval of corruption message may encourage more optimistic beliefs about using voting to hold officials accountable (H2), it was expected that the opposite would be true of the impact of the *widespread corruption* and *kleptocracy* treatments (H1). Unexpectedly, the findings suggest the most influential treatment is the *kleptocracy* treatment that stresses the loss of resources to other countries and the consequent impact on Albania, which had the largest positive impact of the three on agreement (*beta: 0.44)* that voting can be used to keep corrupt officials accountable, and on agreement (*beta: 0.39)* that participants would vote for a candidate running on an anti-corruption platform.

This demonstrates the importance of always co-producing messaging in this kind of research: our interlocutors in Albania were correct that emphasising the fact that Albanian wealth and resources are lost to other countries because of kleptocratic patterns of corruption would prove to be a particularly effective narrative. More broadly, this finding suggests that there is scope to explore the effectiveness of messages that play on a sense of national pride when dealing with 'social bads' that are widely seen to undermine a country's international reputation and standing.

In the case of the SOC models in Table 5, we found that exposure to the *widespread and public disapproval* of SOC messages increased willingness to vote for candidates who focused their campaign on fighting SOC. Again, we have an unexpected finding, namely that the *widespread SOC* treatment registers the larger estimated positive impact of the two. Unfortunately, our *not vote SOC* model is not significant (Prob>chi^2 is greater than 0.10), which means that our findings say little about whether exposure to messaging influenced agreement with that dependent variable.

Table 5: Impact of messaging on voting

	Not vote Corrupt	Vote anticorruption	Not Vote SOC	Vote counter-SOC
Widespread corr.	0.32***	0.24*		
Public disapproval of corr.	0.26**	0.34**		
Kleptocracy	0.44***	0.39***		
Widespread SOC			0.17	0.29**
Public disapproval of SOC			0.22*	0.25*
Urban	-0.17*	0.15*		
Age			-0.00	0.00
N	1,936	1,941	1,431	1,440
LR chi^2	16.72	14.01	3.92	6.21
Prob>chi^2	0.00	0.01	0.27	0.10
Pseudo R^2	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00

Level of significance indicated by: *** for p-value <0.01, ** for p-value <0.05, * for p-value <0.10.

4.4. Widespread messages influence beliefs about 'social bads' and government

Finally, Table 6 shows that widespread messages are also influential in shaping other beliefs about SOC and corruption. Specifically, exposure to the *widespread corruption* and *kleptocracy* (which also describes a pattern of corruption) treatments are shown to increase agreement that bribery is needed to get things done when dealing with the government. In contrast, exposure to the *public disapproval of corruption* treatment did not shape this perception. Similarly, exposure to the *widespread SOC* treatment increased agreement that controlling SOC is one of Albania's most important challenges. Exposure to this treatment also increased agreement that people have lost confidence in the government because of the extent of organised crime. In both of these models, the *public disapproval of SOC* treatment had no influence in shaping these attitudes.

Table 6: Impact of messaging on perceptions of 'social bads'

	Bribery get stuff done	Controlling SOC important	Lost confidence in gov't
Widespread corr.	0.25**		
Public disapproval of corr.	0.11		
Kleptocracy	0.22*		
Widespread SOC		0.26**	0.31***
Public disapproval of SOC		0.13	0.19
Urban	0.16*		
Age		0.01*	0.00
N	1,917	1,439	1437
LR chi^2	10.05	8.04	8.92
Prob>chi^2	0.04	0.04	0.03
Pseudo R^2	0.00	0.00	0.00

Level of significance indicated by: *** for p-value <0.01, ** for p-value <0.05, * for p-value <0.10.

5. Conclusion: Which way forward now?

Our results are both worrying in terms of the effectiveness of anti-corruption and SOC messaging and more positive than the findings of previous studies. We summarise the findings of all analyses in Table 7, which shows that overall, the messages that we tested did not influence participants' willingness to pay a bribe or beliefs that SOC or corruption are (un)acceptable. The same is true in relation to activism about corruption and SOC: none of our messages either made individuals more likely to say that they would report corruption and SOC or join a campaign against them. In other words, in relation to persuading individuals to avoid, report or contest unwanted behaviour in this area, the messages are ineffective. The findings suggest that deploying them in an awareness-raising campaign with these aims may be a waste of money.

Table 7: Summary of findings

Impact of messaging	Dependent Variable
	Acceptability
None of the messages was influential	Traffic bribe
None of the messages was influential	Hospital bribe
None of the messages was influential	SOC OK
None of the messages was influential	Corruption OK
	Activism
None of the messages was influential	Join anti-corr. org.
None of the messages was influential	Report corruption
None of the messages was influential	Report SOC
	Voting
W, PD, & K increases agreement	Not vote corrupt
W, PD, & K increases agreement	Vote anticorruption
None of the messages were influential	Not vote SOC
W & PD increases agreement	Vote counter-SOC
	Perceptions
W & K increases agreement; no impact of PD	Bribery get stuff done
W increases agreement; no impact of PD	Control SOC important
W increases agreement; no impact of PD	Lost conf. gov't.

Note: W refers to the widespread messaging (either corruption or SOC messaging, depending on dependent variable), PD refers to public disapproval messaging (either corruption or SOC messaging, depending on dependent variable), and K refers to the kleptocracy message.

A slightly more positive story emerges regarding the impact of messaging on whether individuals feel able and willing to use voting as a way of keeping corrupt and SOC-associated public officials accountable. Promisingly, all of the corruption messages that we tested increased the willingness of participants to vote for a candidate dedicated to fighting corruption and bolstered agreement that citizens can hold public officials accountable by not voting for those who are corrupt. Where these positive results were concerned, there was an unexpected finding regarding which messages have the most

substantial effect. Contrary to our assumption that public disapproval messaging would be more effective/less counter-productive than messaging which described patterns of either SOC or corruption, it was the latter (*kleptocracy message)* that had the strongest positive effect for encouraging optimism about voting as a way of countering SOC and corruption.

In particular, where corruption is concerned, the kleptocracy treatment, in which we emphasised the loss of wealth and resources to other countries, proved to be the most influential treatment in shaping agreement that voting can be used to keep officials accountable and that it is worth voting for a candidate running on an anti-corruption platform. In turn, this demonstrates the importance of always co-producing the design of messages in studies such as this, since without our collaboration with FCDO we would not have included this treatment in the study.

We also look at whether messages shape a range of other beliefs about SOC and corruption, and unfortunately our findings here further complicate any straightforward account of whether the messages can be said to have a positive or negative effect overall. While messaging describing patterns of 'social bads' was most effective in encouraging favourable attitudes about political accountability, they also increased agreement with the view that bribery is needed to get things done when dealing with the government—which could potentially encourage individuals to think that paying bribes is inevitable and therefore not worth resisting—and also increased agreement that people have lost confidence in the government because of the extent of organised crime. By contrast, the messages communicating public disapproval were not influential on these issues, showing no positive effect.

Where does this leave us? Messages making salient how widely practised 'social bads' are have no effect in relation to the acceptability of corruption and SOC, or a desire to report or take up direct activism to tackle these 'social bads'. They have the most positive effect in shaping popular beliefs that public officials can be held to account, and that this can be done by voting for anti-corruption candidates—but they also have negative effects in relation to popular attitudes concerning the need to pay bribes to get things done and confidence in the government itself.

By contrast, public disapproval messaging has no effect with respect to the acceptability of corruption and SOC, or a desire to report or take up direct activism to tackle these 'social bads'. They have less of a positive effect when it comes to shaping public attitudes towards political accountability, but nor do they exacerbate problematic attitudes regarding confidence in the government and the need to pay bribes when engaging with it.

It is therefore clear that there is no simple solution here. Messaging describing these 'social bads' has the strongest effect in one important area, but makes no difference in terms of its core purpose and appears to have the highest risk of doing harm. Public disapproval messaging is less likely to generate unwanted effects, but also less likely to have positive effects, and again makes no difference in relation to the core aim of awareness raising.

Given this, perhaps the clearest conclusion suggested by these findings is that messages have yet to be designed that have a consistently positive effect; engaging in any messaging in these areas is therefore problematic and likely to generate at least some unintended and unwanted consequences; and, that even the most carefully designed messages are unlikely—at least if they are communicated outside a wider package of engagement, as was the case in our study—to represent a value for money investment.

This suggests three ways forward. The first is to stop investing in awareness raising in order to avoid the risk that such investments may not yield the intended results.

The second is to design and test a further set of messages, in the hope of designing one that maximises the positive effects identified above while minimising the negative unintended consequences. One possibility may be to try to harness the apparent power of the 'kleptocracy' message, and the way that it taps into national pride, by a) adapting it as more of public disapproval message; and b) developing a version of this that would apply to SOC in addition to anti-corruption. Ideally, such tests would be done cross-nationally, which would allow for the research to make a stronger statement on whether such messaging resonates in the same way beyond Albania.

A third possibility would be to accept that one-off messaging is always likely to have uneven and in many cases counter-productive consequences, and therefore to focus on testing programmes that seek to communicate information as part of a wider and deeper set of engagements with key communities that may be able to shape how messages are interpreted and the impact that they have on actions and behaviour. Of course, there is no guarantee that such efforts would be successful—and we would need to carefully test the influence of any engagement in the same systematic way that we have tested the messages outlined in this paper—but this approach perhaps offers the best prospects for shifting popular opinion in the desired direction.

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Appendix A: Details on demographic characteristics of the sample

Variable	% of sample
Gender	
Male	50
Female	50
Age	
18–25	16
26–35	19
36-45	15
46–55	16
56–65	19
66+	17
Education	
No formal education	<1
Primary education	2
Secondary education	32
Some university	34
Vocational training	10
Completed university	17
Completed postgraduate	4
Urban/Rural	
Urban	57
Rural	43
Household socio-economic experience	
We don't have enough money for needed food	5.56
We have enough money for food but not enough for needed clothing	22.44
We have enough to buy food and clothing but not enough to buy more expensive items	41.92
We can afford some expensive items like a TV or a refrigerator	26.81
We can afford anything we need or want	3.26

To the extent to which they were available, the demographic characteristics of the sample can be compared with the demographic breakdown of Albania as reported in the World Bank's World Development Indicators (WDI). Keeping in mind that figures from the World Bank's WDI state that 17% of Albania's population is under the age of 14, our age sample of respondents (at least 18 years) is comparable with official figures, which finds that 14% of the population is aged over 65 and 68% is between 15 and 64 years. Similarly, our sample has a similar percentage of urban/rural residents as recorded by the World Bank's WDI for Albania, according to which 38% of the population lives in rural areas.

Appendix B: Full text of each treatment

Widespread Corruption Treatment

Corruption in Albania is widespread, ranging from fraud at the highest level of government to everyday fraud, which hampers access to basic public services, such as health care or education. Albania is now said to be the most corrupt country among the EU Member States and the candidate countries for accession, alongside North Macedonia. In recent surveys, more than half of Albanian respondents believe that corrupt practices occur often or very often in local or central government. Sixty-six per cent thought that corruption has increased in the country. There is evidence that many elites have been involved in corruption. For example, the Ministry of Health has been accused of awarding contracts totalling Euro 289 million to unknown and inexperienced companies based on their personal affiliations with government officials. And, recently, the government awarded three contracts for waste incinerators with a total value of Euro 178 million through private-public investment schemes that have been criticised for being non-transparent. We all need to fight corruption because it infects most if not all sectors of Albania's society, private sector and government.

Public Disapproval of Corruption Treatment

An overwhelming majority of Albanians disapprove of corruption. In a recent survey, around 80% judged public officials—like teachers, traffic police, and doctors—asking for bribes or gifts as completely unacceptable. A majority of respondents also believed that it was unacceptable for citizens to offer public officials bribes. In another survey, over 70% said that teachers, participating in corruption by accepting a gift for altering grades should be punished, while over 80% said the same of officials accepting bribes to let citizens jump queues to process official documents. A growing number of professional and educated Albanians are also saying that they will reject corruption wherever they find it. Most citizens in Albania do not think that corruption of any type is acceptable.

Kleptocracy Treatment

Some have warned that since the fall of communism, Albania is turning into a 'kleptocracy'—a society whose leaders make themselves rich and powerful by stealing from the rest of the people. Several recent corruption scandals suggest that influential public officials, the private sector, and the judiciary work with each other to engage in corruption to benefit themselves. Many high-profile public officials have been accused of giving multi-million Euro government contracts to personal associates, rather than to the companies that are best able to do a good job. This means that people connected to those giving contracts benefit tremendously, while the services paid for are not always delivered to the public or are delivered to a lower standard. Several influential people have also been recently charged with using 'money laundering' to hide and protect the

money they steal from the government. In laundering money, public officials funnel public money through other countries' financial systems and buy property abroad anonymously, for example. This means that a lot of the money stolen from the Albanian people is now invested and spent abroad, so that it is permanently lost to the country.

Widespread SOC treatment

Serious and organised crime has a profoundly negative impact on Albania, creating a network of criminal organisations involved in drug trafficking, extortion, bribery, money laundering, prostitution, and human trafficking. Through these networks, Albanian groups work with criminal gangs in the United States, Europe, the Middle East, and South America, stealing from wider society and defrauding governments. As a result, serious and organised crime is widely believed to threaten the rule of law, human rights, and social and economic progress. It also influences our elections, undermining the ability of democracy to reflect and represent what ordinary people want. Money laundered through serious and organised crime often lands in the construction sector, which has increased the price of property for all. There is also a widespread impression that some people in Albania, due to their connections with serious and organised crime, are above the law. It also reinforces the negative perceptions some people have in relation to Albania itself. It is therefore critical to the future of Albania that everyone in society fights back against organised crime as their number one priority. We must bring criminals to justice, change the culture of criminality, and provide young people with viable alternatives to a life of crime.

Public Disapproval of SOC Treatment

An overwhelming majority of Albanians strongly disapprove of organised crime and organised criminal gangs. This strong disapproval is based in the fact that citizens recognise that organised crime endangers the country's economic, social and political future. Of particular concern for many Albanians is the fact that serious and organised crime groups prey on vulnerable young people, smuggling them into foreign countries where they risk their lives to do dangerous jobs like dealing drugs just so that a few powerful organised criminals can get rich. Most Albanians also disapprove of drug trafficking, which leads to violent crime, and is widely seen to be immoral. As a result, most Albanians do not respect those that have gotten rich by taking part in such activities. A growing number of professional and educated Albanians are therefore pressing the government to fight organised crime wherever it happens. This is also leading to a rise in activism by civil society groups. Most citizens in Albania do not think that organised crime, of any type, whether here or abroad, is acceptable.