Research article UDC 316.62 https://doi.org/10.21702/rpj.2023.3.15

# The Degree of Outrage Over Corruption Among Russians with Different Levels of Attitude Toward Social Dominance

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#### Abstract

Introduction. Status relationships and status perceptions are the main driving forces for behavior, self-perception, and the individual picture of the world. This empirical study aims to investigate the relationship between moral outrage over corruption among Russians and their attitudes toward social dominance. In addition, the social dominance orientation (SDO) scale was approved and validated. Methods. A total of 509 subjects participated in an online survey (mean age 41.34 years, SD = 10.67; 57.6 % males, 42.4 % females). The study used the Social Dominance Orientation scale, the 5-point scale to measure awareness of corruption (General Social Survey), the 4-point scale to measure outrage over corruption, and the Short Dark Triad questionnaire. The data were processed with the SPSS 19.0 software. **Results.** The results of the study showed a positive relationship between the degree of moral outrage over corruption and the approval of the social hierarchy among Russians. The exploratory factor analysis of the data from the Social Dominance Orientation scale made it possible to distinguish the following three factors: (a) "the idea of social equality (anti-egalitarianism)", (b) "the idea of social dominance (egalitarianism)", and (c) "the idea of rivalry (competition)". The correlation analysis showed significant correlations between personality traits of respondents (the parameters of the dark triad) and their attitudes toward social dominance. Discussion. The findings of this study are confirmed by the results of previous studies on the impact of social dominance orientation on the low level of awareness of corruption, which in turn contributes to the desire to maintain the social hierarchy and strengthens corrupt intention. Furthermore,

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according to the results of foreign studies, psychological predictors for corrupt intention are competitive world beliefs and dangerous world beliefs. This requires additional verification and is the objective of our future research.

#### **Keywords**

social dominance orientation, corruption, moral outrage over corruption, perception of corruption, attitude toward social dominance, social justice

#### For citation

Maksimenko, A. A., Krylova, D. V., & Deyneka, O. S. (2023). The degree of outrage over corruption among Russians with different levels of attitude toward social dominance. *Russian Psychological Journal*, 20(3), https://doi.org/10.21702/rpj.2023.3.15

# Introduction

Thirty years ago, J. Sidanius and F. Pratto (Sidanius & Pratto, 1993) developed the theory of social domination, which postulates the superiority of one group over others as a kind of social consensus that minimizes group conflicts. The authors of the concept defined social dominance orientation (SDO) as the degree to which individuals wish and support group hierarchy and the dominance of 'superior' groups over 'inferior' ones.

As further studies have shown, men have higher social dominance orientation scores than women (Licciardello, Castiglione, Rampullo & Scolla, 2014; Tan, Liu, Huang, Zhao & Zheng, 2016). In addition, individuals with higher SDO scores show a stronger negative attitude toward others in terms of gender (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth & Malle, 1994; Kugler, Cooper & Nosek, 2010), ethnicity (Pratto et al., 1994), social class (Guimond, Dambrun, Michinov & Duarte, 2003), and sexual orientation (Huang & Liu, 2005).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, social dominance orientation proved to be related to the mental health of the population (Shi et al., 2021). Thus, individuals with high social dominance orientation scores experienced a higher level of depression than those with low SDO scores. At the same time, the lifestyle changes perceived by the participants reduced the relationship between SDO and depression. Individuals with high SDO scores are less likely to engage in behaviors aimed at preventing the spread of COVID-19 (Clarke, Klas & Dyos, 2021). SDO negatively correlated with support for government restrictions to reduce the spread of coronavirus infection (wearing masks and physical distancing).

According to research by Van Hiel & Kossowska (2006), social dominance orientation is negatively associated with psychological well-being. Data from a large-scale survey conducted in the United Kingdom by Lalot, Jauch & Abrams (2022) showed that a greater degree of right-wing authoritarianism is related to a greater social dominance orientation. Similar data were found by other researchers (Nicol & Rounding, 2013).

A study by R. Mesler (Mesler et al., 2022) demonstrated that social dominance orientation is a predictor of rule-breaking behavior. Moreover, intra-group identity contributes to strengthening the relationship between SDO and rule-breaking.

In a 2018 study by O. A. Gulevich and colleagues, two closely related sub-factors (anti-egalitarianism and dominance) were identified during the authors' survey and confirmatory factor analysis of the social dominance orientation questionnaire, which incorporated only 10 of the 16 statements in the questionnaire into a model. The authors assumed that the remaining 10 statements in the model correspond better to the data than the model, which initially contained 16 statements.

Socio-psychological research on corruption shows the relationship between corruption perception and various factors determining citizens' ideological views and attitudes toward social solidarity. Thus, Modesto & Pilati (2020) considered the following 3 levels of causes contributing to corruption:

- The micro-level includes gender, age, personality characteristics (such as hedonism, self-control, narcissism, and conscience), as well as beliefs and creativity (some studies confirm the hypothesis that creative people have higher rates of dishonest behavior (Gino & Ariely, 2012; Shu & Gino, 2012; Vincent, Emich & Goncalo, 2013; Gino & Wiltermuth, 2014; Kennedy & Kray, 2022).
- The meso-level of the model includes conformity, group norms, social identity, as well as the four-eyes principle (4EP), which reduces dishonest behavior in the presence of another. We should note that this principle is effective if the management of an organization (company) adheres to anti-corruption behavior and shows patterns of this behavior by personal examples.
- The macro-level contains cultural and political factors. The liberal economic model increases corruption, and the impact of democratic institutions on reducing corruption is only significant in countries where the GDP per capita is over 2,000 dollars.

According to Stupnianek & Navickas's data (2019), belief in a just world can be a predictor of more just and less corrupt behavior. People who think they get what they deserve are less likely to be corrupt. On the contrary, people who believe that they do not get what they deserve are more likely to act unfairly and corruptly. Recent studies of the impact of belief in a just world on corruption (Modesto & Pilati, 2020) have shown the importance of considering such a factor mediating the correlation as awareness of punishment for a corruption offense when analyzing predictors of delinquent behavior.

Social dominance theory complements the theory of belief in a just world and system justification theory (Jost & Hunyady, 2003) in terms of justifying the social status of certain groups in society, and the attitude of the elite toward corrupt behavior as the use of power in their own interests.

Tan and colleagues (Tan et al., 2016b) have convincingly shown that the justification of the common system is negatively associated with the perception of corruption and corrupt intentions, as well as the fact that institutional trust mediates these relationships.

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In another article (Tan, et al., 2016c), the authors continued to develop ideas on the impact of meritocratic ideology on weakening the perception of social injustice and proved that meritocratic ideology was negatively associated with the perception of corruption, and was positively associated with corrupt intention, as it encouraged individuals to express their willingness to participate in unfair acts.

Thus, the review of English-language sources on the theory of social dominance orientation confirms the high relevance of its research in relation to other social phenomena.

Global research highlights the lack of understanding of the relationship between the perception of social dominance and the motivation for corrupt behavior, as well as the relevant measures against corruption offences. Russian research in the field of social psychology of corruption (Zhuravlev & Yurevich, 2012; Berkovich, Dukhanina, Maksimenko, & Nadutkina, 2019; Maksimenko, Deyneka, Krylova, & Dukhanina, 2020; Dukhanina, Deyneka, Krylova, & Maksimenko, 2020; Krylova & Maksimenko, 2021; Krylova & Maksimenko, 2022) have also demonstrated a notable lack of new methodological tools and empirical works.

This study **aimes** to investigate the relationship between moral outrage over corruption among Russians and their attitudes toward social dominance.

We suggest that among those Russians who are less tolerant of situations related to social dominance and who are more satisfied with fair relations between social groups, the degree of moral outrage over corruption is higher. The study also sought to identify the relationship between respondents' personality traits and their attitudes toward social dominance and corruption. In addition, the Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) scale was approved and validated in this study (Annex 1).

# **Methods**

#### Respondents

The study was conducted anonymously in the third decade of January 2023 in the online survey mode of the survey design service Anketolog.ru by collecting the responses of respondents through the Yandex. Toloka service.

A total of 509 subjects participated in an online survey (mean age 41.34 years, SD = 10.67; 57.6 % males, 42.4 % females). The residence (urbanization level), education level, and subjective income of the respondents were also taken into account.

In our study, 11.3% of respondents resided in Moscow; 21.2% – in St. Petersburg and other megacities and million-plus cities; 36.3% – in large cities with less than 1 million of inhabitants; and 31.3% – in district centers.

According to the level of education, the majority were respondents with higher education (57%); 41.8% of respondents had secondary and incomplete higher education; 1.2% of respondents had an academic degree.

The level of subjective income was very high or high for 3.6% of respondents, average for 54.0% of respondents, and low for 31.0% of respondents; 11.4% of respondents indicated that they made ends meet.

#### Measures

The study used a 16-point Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) scale (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999) (Annex 1), the 5-point scale to measure awareness of corruption (General Social Survey) (Davis & Smith, 1991) (Annex 2), the 4-point scale to measure outrage over corruption (Li, Triandis, & Yu, 2006) (Annex 3), and the Short Dark Triad questionnaire (Paulhus, Williams, 2002) to measure three psychological personality traits: Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy in adaptation (M. S. Egorova, M. A. Sitnikova, & O. V. Parshikova, 2015).

# Data processing

The data were processed with the SPSS 19.0 software. We used frequency analysis, regression analysis, exploratory factor analysis, Spearman correlation analysis, and determination of statistically significant differences (Mann-Whitney criterion).

#### Results

Table 1 provides descriptive statistics for the 16-point SDO scale.

**Table 1**Social dominance orientation

Items	М	SD
1. Some groups of people are simply inferior to other groups	3,18	1,11
2. In getting what you want, it is sometimes necessary to use force against other groups	2,81	1,21
3. It's OK if some groups have more of a chance in life than others	2,57	1,22
4. To get ahead in life, it is sometimes necessary to step on other groups	3,66	1,04
5. If certain groups stayed in their place, we would have fewer problems	2,86	1,09

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6. It's probably a good thing that certain groups are at the top and other groups are at the bottom	2,36	1,09
7. Inferior groups should stay in their place	2,11	1,03
8. Sometimes other groups must be kept in their place	2,65	1,10
9. It would be good if groups could be equal	3,71	1,04
10. Group equality should be our ideal	3,62	1,07
11. All groups should be given an equal chance in life	4,08	0,97
12. We should do what we can to equalize conditions for different groups	3,78	1,02
13. Increased social equality	4,11	0,97
14. We would have fewer problems if we treated people more equally	4,04	1,00
15. We should strive to make incomes as equal as possible	4,06	1,06
16. No one group should dominate in society	3,90	1,07

**Note**. A 5-point Likert scale was used. The highest mean scores are shown in red, the lowest – in areen.

Russians associate higher SDO scores with the possibility of providing equal opportunities to all social groups (4.08), reducing income inequality (4.06), and treating everyone equally (4.04). At the same time, the low degree of agreement among the respondents concerns statements about the unchanged status of lower groups (2.11) and the increase in life chances of some groups (2.57). This can be explained by the socialist views of the respondents.

Table 2 provides descriptive statistics for the 5-point scale to measure awareness of corruption (General Social Survey).

 Table 2

 Awareness of corruption (scale)

Items	М	SD
1. Corruption always exists in different eras	4,18	0,96
2. Most people who have opportunities to be corrupt will be corrupt	3,85	1,03
3. At present, corruption is a very common phenomenon and spreads to almost every industry	4,24	0,95
4. The problem of corruption is very severe in today's Russian society	4,26	0,95
5. The corruption phenomenon has appeared in universities and become more and more serious	3,84	1,04

**Note.** A 5-point Likert scale was used. The highest mean scores are shown in red, the lowest – in green.

The survey respondents described the problem of corruption in modern Russian society as very serious (4.26) and very widespread, considering that almost all sectors of the economy and the social sphere are affected by it (4.24).

Table 3 provides descriptive statistics for the 4-point scale to measure outrage over corruption.

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**Table 3** *Awareness of corruption (scenario)* 

Items	М	SD
1. The behavior of taking a bribe and helping a friend with false certification is wrong	4,08	1,07
2. This type of corrupt behavior is very common in society	4,05	,91
3. This corrupt behavior harms the public	4,22	,93
4. This corrupt behavior harms the interests of other candidates	4,34	,91

Respondents expressed outrage at corruption offences and stressed that corruption is mainly discriminating against other participants in the competitive process and damages society.

The factor-exploration analysis of the survey data with a principal components analysis (with varimax rotation) enabled us to distinguish three factors (Table 4).

**Table 4**Factor analysis for social dominance orientation

	Factor analysis				
Items	The idea of social equality (anti- egalitarianism)	The idea of social dominance (egalitarianism)	The idea of rivalry (competition)		
<ol> <li>Some groups of people are simply inferior to other groups</li> </ol>			,717		
2. In getting what you want, it is sometimes necessary to use force against other groups			,718		
4. To get ahead in life, it is sometimes necessary to step on other groups			,802		

		Factor analysis	
Items	The idea of social equality (anti- egalitarianism)	The idea of social dominance (egalitarianism)	The idea of rivalry (competition)
5. If certain groups stayed in their place, we would have fewer problems		,697	
6. It's probably a good thing that certain groups are at the top and other groups are at the bottom		,674	
7. Inferior groups should stay in their place		,792	
8. Sometimes other groups must be kept in their place		,807	
9. It would be good if groups could be equal	,793		
10. Group equality should be our ideal	,824		
11. All groups should be given an equal chance in life	,812		
12. We should do what we can to equalize conditions for different groups	,839		
13. Increased social equality	,825		

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		Factor analysis	
Items	The idea of social equality (anti- egalitarianism)	The idea of social dominance (egalitarianism)	The idea of rivalry (competition)
14. We would have fewer problems if we treated people more equally	,847		
15. We must strive to reduce income inequality	,758		
16. No one group should dominate in society	,757		
Total variance, %	6,436	2,679	1,195

"The idea of social equality (anti-egalitarianism)" was the first best weighting factor (6.436). It is characterized by the deviation of estimates of ideal income equality, attitudes to groups and everyone, and the absence of dominant groups in society. It includes statements such as "we would have fewer problems if we treated people more equally" (0.847), "we should do what we can to equalize conditions for different groups" (0.839), "increased social equality" (0.825). Therefore, the idea of social equality and equal conditions prevails among the Russians surveyed.

The second factor (2.679), "the idea of social dominance (egalitarianism)", combines agreement with statements on unwillingness to change anything in the hierarchy and the idea of maintaining the status quo as a problem-free situation. It included the following statements: "sometimes other groups must be kept in their place" (0.807) and "inferior groups should stay in their place" (0.792).

The third factor (1.195), "the idea of rivalry (competition)", is a set of responses to items stating the need to make efforts to get ahead in life, even using force to achieve results. It includes statements such as "to get ahead in life, it is sometimes necessary to step on other groups" (0.802), "in getting what you want, it is sometimes necessary to use force against other groups" (0.718), "some groups of people are simply inferior to other groups" (0.717).

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The results of the correlation analysis indicate that moral outrage is closely related to the gender and age of the respondents. Thus, women and elderly people are more likely to say that "this corrupt behavior harms the interests of other candidates" (p < 0.001). At the same time, elderly respondents expressed more outrage at corruption as a phenomenon that harms society (p < 0.001) and religious respondents expressed less moral outrage (p < 0.01) (no gender differences were found in this type of moral outrage). Moral outrage had no correlations with the subjective level of income, urbanization, and education of the respondents.

Moreover, we found a significant relationship between social dominance orientation and moral outrage (the hypothesis was confirmed). Respondents who do not agree with the statement of the normality of the situation when some groups have more opportunities in life than others largely support the judgments on corrupt behavior that that is detrimental to the interests of others (p < 0.001) and society (p < 0.001). The same negative relationship was found for the statement that the inferior groups should be kept in their place (p < 0.001). We found positive relationships for moral outrage and judgments like "all groups should be given an equal chance in life" (p < 0.001), and "we should strive to make incomes as equal as possible" (p < 0.001).

Social dominance orientation expectedly correlated with the dark triad parameters. Thus, such a psychological trait as machiavellianism positively correlated with the items of the rivalry factor (competition), such as "to get ahead in life, it is sometimes necessary to step on other groups" (p < 0.001) and "in getting what you want, it is sometimes necessary to use force against other groups" (p < 0.001). Narcissism positively correlated with the statement that "it's OK if some groups have more of a chance in life than others" (p < 0.001) and negatively correlated with the statement on the need to increase social equality (p < 0.001). Psychopathy positively correlated with the statement that the inferior groups should be kept in their place (p < 0.001) and negatively correlated with the statement that "we would have fewer problems if we treated people more equally" (p < 0.001) and the statement on the need to increase social equality (p < 0.001).

#### Discussion

As V. Rosenblatt (Rosenblatt, 2012) showed, social domination orientation leads to a low level of people's awareness of the use of official positions for personal purposes (abuse of power), which further contributes to a great desire to maintain the social hierarchy and leads to organizational corruption. The results of Tan, Liu, Zheng & Huang (2015) confirmed their hypothesis that social dominance orientation was positively related to corrupt intentions. They believed that individuals who scored high in SDO (subscale "idea of social dominance / egalitarianism") want to advance up the career ladder and receive benefits disproportionate to their contribution to the organization. At the same time, they expressed their willingness to commit corruption offences in order to achieve this.

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Although power is generally seen as a potentially corrupt force, which reduces morality and increases the likelihood of corruption intention, studies have shown that power increases the tendency to think about morality, increases respect for principles and rules (Fleischmann & Lammers, 2020). We believe that values are the key factor and that the desire for power is not always corrupt, but often leads to a richer, mature, and more diverse form of morality.

Vilanova, Milfont & Costa (2022) explained the high level of corruption in Brazil and proposed a model that included ideological factors (social dominance orientation and right-wing authoritarianism) and the underlying worldviews (competitive world beliefs) and (dangerous world beliefs) as predictors of corrupt intentions.

All the previous results indirectly confirmed and supplemented the data obtained and provided further research hypotheses.

#### Conclusion

Thus, in the study of the relationship between the moral outrage of Russians over corruption and the attitude toward social domination, a positive relationship between the level of moral outrage over corruption and the approval of the social hierarchy can be established. The exploratory factor analysis of the findings of the social dominance orientation questionnaire enabled us to identify the following three factors: (a) "the idea of social equality (anti-egalitarianism)", (b) "the idea of social dominance (egalitarianism)", (c) and "the idea of rivalry (competition)". Furthermore, we found significant correlations between personality traits of the respondents (parameters of the dark triad) and their attitude toward social dominance. The preliminary validation of the social dominance orientation questionnaire was also performed. To do this (after double converting and data collection), the data were factorized to verify the design (factor validity). The structure of the three factors, similar to that of the authors of the diagnostic tool, confirmed the validity of the factors. Furthermore, the reliability of the Social Dominance Orientation scale was checked.

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#### Annex 1

#### Social Dominance Orientational scale

Please indicate the extent of your agreement or disagreement (from 1 to 5) with the following statements selecting only one option in each line, where 1 - strongly disagree, and 5 - strongly agree

Items	Strongly disagree	Dis- agree	Unde- cided	Agree	Strongly agree
1. Some groups of people are simply inferior to other groups	1	2	3	4	5

Items	Strongly disagree	Dis- agree	Unde- cided	Agree	Strongly agree
2. In getting what you want, it is sometimes necessary to use force against other groups	1	2	3	4	5
3. It's OK if some groups have more of a chance in life than others	1	2	3	4	5
4. To get ahead in life, it is sometimes necessary to step on other groups	1	2	3	4	5
5. If certain groups stayed in their place, we would have fewer problems	1	2	3	4	5
6. It's probably a good thing that certain groups are at the top and other groups are at the bottom	1	2	3	4	5
7. Inferior groups should stay in their place	1	2	3	4	5
8. Sometimes other groups must be kept in their place	1	2	3	4	5

Items	Strongly disagree	Dis- agree	Unde- cided	Agree	Strongly agree
9. It would be good if groups could be equal	1	2	3	4	5
10. Group equality should be our ideal	1	2	3	4	5
11. All groups should be given an equal chance in life	1	2	3	4	5
12. We should do what we can to equalize conditions for different groups	1	2	3	4	5
13. Increased social equality	1	2	3	4	5
14. We would have fewer problems if we treated people more equally	1	2	3	4	5
15. We should strive to make incomes as equal as possible	1	2	3	4	5
16. No one group should dominate in society	1	2	3	4	5

# Annex 2

# Awareness of corruption (scale)

Items	Rarely	Some- times	Unde- cided	Often	Very often
Corruption always exists in different eras	1	2	3	4	5
Most people who have opportunities to be corrupt will be corrupt	1	2	3	4	5
At present, corruption is a very common phenomenon and spreads to almost every industry	1	2	3	4	5
The problem of corruption is very severe in today's Russian society	1	2	3	4	5
The corruption phenomenon has appeared in universities and become more and more serious	1	2	3	4	5

#### Annex 3

# Awareness of corruption (scenario)

After reading the scenario, please indicate the extent of your agreement or disagreement (from 1 to 5) with the following statements selecting only one option in each line, where 1 - strongly disagree, and 5 - strongly agree.

Imagine that you have a friend (A) who wishes to pursue his studies abroad. A charitable organization, X, has offered an overseas scholarship. It has 5 places every year, and more than 50 candidates want it. Therefore, the selection will be based on the number of hours contributed to volunteering activities. The five highest candidates will receive this scholarship. Now you are the president of the volunteers association of your university. Your friend gives you 150,000 rubles and hopes you aid him in receiving the scholarship. Although he did not participate in the volunteer activities of your association, he wants you, as president of the volunteers association, to provide him a false certification indicating that he has participated in volunteer activities for many hours. If you help your friend and give him the false certification, the probability that he will receive the scholarship will be greatly improved.

Items	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree
1. The behavior of taking a bribe and helping a friend with false certification is wrong	1	2	3	4	5
2. This type of corrupt behavior is very common in society	1	2	3	4	5
3. This corrupt behavior harms the public	1	2	3	4	5

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Russian Psychological Journal, 20(3), 2023

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Items	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree
4. This corrupt behavior harms the interests of other candidates	1	2	3	4	5

Received: April 21, 2023

Revision received: May 08, 2023

Accepted: June 06, 2023

# **Author Contribution**

**Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Maksimenko** contributed to the experimental design of the study, translated the text of diagnostic tools measuring social dominance orientation, corruption awareness, and moral outrage over corruption, carried out the survey, prepared the text of the manuscript, and carried on correspondence with the RPJ editorial board.

**Dina Vladimirovna Krylova** developed the research concept, interpreted the results, and prepared the text of the manuscript.

**Ol'ga Sergeevna Deyneka** developed the research concept, interpreted the results, and prepared the text of the manuscript.

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# **Conflict of Interest Information**

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.