I. INTRODUCTION

There seems to be growing evidence that markets corrupt morals. For example, Falk and Szech (2013) showed that individuals behaved less morally in market frameworks than in non-market frameworks. It seems that people behave less morally if there is potential for greed to pay off. This fact is illustrated by Vohs et al. (2006). They showed that priming a situation with money is sufficient that individuals behave worse towards others. But markets and money are central topics in economics teaching. A study which focused on the education of individuals was provided by Frank and Schulze (2000). In their experimental setup, they found out that economics students had a higher tendency to be corrupt than students of other disciplines, as the economics students in their artificial setting were more prone to bribery. All these findings correspond with a substantial body of research in the economic literature, which, with the help of surveys, laboratory experiments, as well as field experiments showed that those who learn about markets (economists) or act in markets (businessmen) are lacking in what Frey and Meier (2004) defined as ‘pro-social behavior’. However, there is not only
conflicting evidence on this view (cf. Yezer et al., 1996; Laband and Beil, 1999), some authors also seriously challenge the explanatory power of the research methods (cf. Kirchgässner, 2005). They call for an analysis which shows whether the less-social behavior of economists compared to others found in experiments and surveys also applies in practice, i.e. in real world situations and is thus relevant for policy outcomes (Kirchgässner 2005, p. 552). My contribution to this literature is motivated by this aim. Like Frank and Schulze (2000), I also use corruption as a proxy to show whether there are any differences in pro-social behavior between economists and non-economists, but unlike them, I observe behavior outside the artificial situation of a laboratory. By analyzing real world data of the U.S. Congress, I found that politicians holding a degree in economics are significantly more prone to engage in corrupt practices.

In addition, the work contributes to the existing empirical corruption literature (see Goel and Nelson 2010, Brown and Shackman 2007, Lambsdorff 2003/2006, as well as Treisman 2000, for extensive surveys) in so far as the available studies rely almost exclusively on cross-country data on corruption, analyzing macro-economic determinants on corruption like GDP, real income, economic freedom, or the democratization level and hence ignoring the extent to which personal characteristics and social effects influence individual corruption tendencies (Gatti et al. 2003, p. 2). The remaining studies, which analyze corruption at the individual or microeconomic level, again rely exclusively on surveys (c.f. Gatti et al. 2003 for a World Value Survey analysis) as well as laboratory data (c.f. Mocan 2008 or Olken 2009) and hence also face the problem of external validity.

This paper will proceed as follows: Section II provides some background to the research on the divergence of economists and non-economists. Section III outlines the methodology and the data used; in Section IV, I present the basic econometric results and their interpretation. Section V summarizes the results and concludes.

II. THE BACKGROUND

Over the last three decades, numerous empirical studies comparing economists to non-economists, i.e. surveys, laboratory and field experiments, have attempted to answer the question of whether the social behavior of economists actually differs from that of non-economists. According to the findings from surveys, in comparison with non-economists, economists tend to maximize profits ahead at the expense of the welfare of others (e.g., Rubinstein, 2006), others into account (altruism). One the other hand, reciprocal pro-social behavior arises, if a person acts more cooperatively as a result of the friendliness of others (reciprocity).

4. In this context, Frank et al. (2011, p. 59) also stated that ‘[. . .] reliable microdata on corruption behavior is hard to obtain in the field . . . [ ]’ as well as that ‘[. . .] field data are hard to interpret.’
favor the market mechanism, and also have a different perception of what is ‘fair’ or morally acceptable (Kearl et al., 1979; Pommerehne et al., 1983; Frey and Pommerehne, 1993; Frey et al., 1993; Cipriani et al., 2009; and Haucap and Just, 2010).

In laboratory experiments, tests on the selfishness of economists vs. non-economists concerning questions of cooperation, solidarity, honesty, free-riding, and corruption have yielded similar results: Marwell and Ames (1981) carried out a laboratory experiment on free-riding to test for differences in social behavior between economists and non-economists. They found that students of economics exhibit significantly more free-riding behavior than students of other disciplines, as the economists contributed least to a public good. Carter and Irons (1991) used an ultimatum bargaining game to show that the economists, more than the non-economists, behave in accordance with the rational or self-interest model (p. 177), i.e. they accepted a lower amount of money proposed by their counterparts than the non-economists. Frank et al. (1993) designed a prisoner’s dilemma experiment, where economics students demonstrated less cooperation in a social dilemma situation compared than their non-economics counterparts. Selten and Ockenfels (1998) conducted a solidarity game, in which the winners of an amount of money were asked to share a portion of their earnings with the losers. Also in this setting, the (male) economics students were the least generous. As mentioned above, Frank and Schulze (2000) carried out an experiment on corruption. In their experiment, economics students and students of other subjects could simultaneously choose the amount of bribe (0-144 DEM) they receive for awarding a contract to a craftsman, as well as the consequently damage to their principal (20-200 DEM). As the possibility of detection or interaction between the students was excluded, they were able to show the individual’s decision influenced only by the willingness to place self-interest over the welfare of others. Overall, they found that the students of economics were more bribable than students of other subjects. Moreover, they found a gender effect: Men turned out to be slightly (but not significantly) more corrupt than women.

However, not only were most of these laboratory and survey studies themselves subject to debate due to methodological or operative weaknesses such as framing effects, lacking representative samples or omitting relevant control variables, some authors also generally question the applicability of laboratory and survey results to real world situations. They claim that the external validity of findings cannot be generated by people merely ‘playing’ or ‘responding’ in laboratory experiments or surveys, rather than acting under ‘real conditions’ in

5. For a similar analysis, see Güth et al. (1982).
6. See, e.g., Frank et al. (1996) and Kirchgässner (2005) and the dispute between Yezer et al. (1996) and Frank et al. (1996), or Frank and Schulze (2000).
7. For an overview see, e.g., Cipriani et al. (2009, p. 456).
everyday life (Yezer et al. 1996, p. 177; Kirchgässner 2005, p. 549). Yezer et al. (1996) also raised concerns regarding the observation of differing behavioral patterns between economists and non-economists, which could be due to the fact that economists have a more realistic view of non-cooperative behavior of others, as well as a better understanding of the over-all situation in structured games. To overcome this, a number of researchers have used so-called ‘real world’-, ‘natural’- or ‘field’-experiments to obtain some more generalizable and convincing results.

For this reason, Yezer et al. (1996) conducted a ‘lost letter’-experiment among students of 32 upper-level economic courses, as well as 32 upper-level classes of psychology, political science and history. They found that 31% of the letters dropped in non-economics classes (and filled with an amount of $ 10) were returned by the non-economists, but 56% of the letters from economics classes were returned, which means that the economists in this case acted more altruistically than the non-economists. However, these findings have been seriously challenged by Frank et al. (1996), who listed numerous other possible interpretations of the economists’ behavior. For instance, the economists could have simply ignored the envelopes, because they may not have expected valuable content (p. 188). Laband and Beil (1999) investigated the payment ethics of American economics and non-economics professors. Like Yezer et al. (1996), they found that the economists’ behavior in the field on average was actually more cooperative than the behavior of non-economists. Following this, Frey and Meier (2003/2005) investigated the actual charitable donations by Swiss political- and business economics students and those of other disciplines to two official social funds of the University of Zurich. In contrast to Yezer et al. (1996) as well as to Laband and Beil (1999), they found that the political economics students, if separated from the business economics students (who gave less) from their sample, did not give less than the average amount of the other students. By contrast, Blais and Young (1999) in a quite different field experiment, showed that after the presentation of a ten-minute model of rational choice during the 1993 federal election campaign in Canada, the voting participation of the ‘economics-indoctrinated’ students declined by 7% compared to the others. Bauman and Rose (2011), like Frey and Meier (2003), analyzed the charitable behavior of economists and non-economists, this time at the University of Washington. Again, they found that the economics students on average donated less than other students.

Taking all these studies into account the question remains as to which research strategy ultimately provides the most reliable conclusions. According to Kirchgässner (2005, p. 551), even field-experiments have to face the problem of external validity:

8. For more details about lost letter experiments see, e.g., Milgram et al. (1965).
'[, ...] these laboratory and field experiments tell us more about the preferences of the subjects than about their actual behavior in (costly) everyday situations. Economic theory, however, has hardly anything to tell us about preferences but rather considers changes in behavior of individuals as a result of changes in constraints. If different people in different places at different points of time have different preferences, we should not be surprised to see different results.'

The interesting question then is the following: Do economists still behave differently, i.e. more self-interested or less pro-social than others, when it comes to decisions outside experimental situations in ‘costly real life’?

In order to address this problem, I use real world data in this study. The underlying dataset is associated with cases of corruption made by American congress members in costly ‘real live’ situations (see section III). As the consequences in case of the detection of a corrupt practice are potentially economically sizeable and politically serious, it is feasible to assume that the congress members did not frivolously decide to be corrupt or to behave ‘selfish’, respectively.

III. DATA AND HYPOTHESES

To empirically test the impact of an academic economics education on social behavior beyond an experimental situation, I analyze the academic, demographic as well as the financial background of each the 695 members of United States Congress who served during the 109th–111th congresses between 2005 and 2009. The aim is to identify possible determinants of individual corrupt behavior. The non-profit organization CREW provides data on individual corrupt behavior of each congress member. They collected all public known corruption cases and assigned to each congress member the number of cases for the period of 2005 to 2009, in which he or she was involved. Their definition of corruption covers different aspects of beneficial acquisition, for instance bribery, embezzlement, bank fraud, solicitation of gifts, outside employment, or other general rent-seeking behavior. This therefore corresponds with the widely accepted definition of corruption, which treats corruption as ‘the abuse of public offices for private gains’ Goel and Nelson (2011, p. 156). As socio-demographic data, I collected information on the academic education, financial background and other demographic data, such as the party affiliation and religion of each congress member.

9. Highlighted by the author.
10. ‘Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW) is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to promoting ethics and accountability in government and public life by targeting government officials who sacrifice the common good to special interests’ (http://www.citizensforethics.org/pages/about).
11. Another contemporary rent-seeking issue which is discussed in the corruption literature is the case of so-called ‘crony capitalism’, i.e. the abuse of relationships between business people and government officials. See, e.g., Aligica and Tarko (2014).
12. For more details concerning the methodology and information of every corruption incident, see CREW’s yearly corruption reports.
member. My question of interest is whether an academic background in economics has an impact on the individual corrupt behavior. To verify the academic background of a congress member, data on their college-level degrees have been collected. Equation (1) shows the model of interest with individual corrupt behavior as a function of the socio-demographic data, with subscripts i and j respectively, denoting a single congress member and a corruption measure:

$$\text{CORR}_j = f(\text{Academic}_i, \text{Demographic}_i, \text{Financial}_i, \text{Other}_i)$$

(1)

The dependent variable is the congress members’ individual corruption level alternatively measured as a binary variable ($\text{CORR}_{bin}$, $1 = \text{corrupt [at least one corruption allegation]}, 0 = \text{not corrupt}$) or as an index of corruption ($\text{CORR}_{ind}$; not corrupt = 0, low level = 1–3 corruption allegations [first tertile], mid level = 4–9 allegations [second tertile], and high level = 10–19 allegations [third tertile]). I then regress the individual corruption level on a set of personal characteristics and values, of which a summary is presented in Table 1.

Despite the variables on academic education (ECONOMICS; LAW; POLITICAL, OTHERSTUD), the ‘congress variables’ (PARTY, FUNCTION), the time variables (TIC1-3PERIOD, TIMEBEF), as well as the average net worth of an individual (AWORTH),14 all other independent variables have been used in most related studies on the determinants of corruption related attitudes and perceptions. The variables MARRIED and CHILDREN (the so-called family values), Protestantism, a higher age, or being female, are usually associated with a higher corruption aversion (see, e.g., Gatti et al. 2003). Moreover, I also expect the military variable (MILSERV) to have a negative influence on individual corruption tendencies, as those people who have served their country should have a deeper bond to its moral standards and its judicial conceptions. The dummy variables representing the US Census regions (NORTHEAST, MIDWEST, WEST, SOUTH, USINSULAR) to which the congress members are affiliated, represent the corruption level associated with each member. Living in an area with a relatively high corruption level, would suggest lower congress member barriers to engaging in corrupt practices. Regarding the time variables (TIMEBEF, TIC1-3PERIOD), I expect them to have a positive influence on corruption as time goes by. The longer one congress member serves in congress (TIC1-3PERIOD) or has served in congress (TIMEBEF), the higher are the

13. See Table 1 for detailed information about the education variables.
14. Because of the low variance in congress members’ income (165 thousand dollars on average, see CRS report on salaries, 2013: http://www.senate.gov/CRSReports/crs-publish.cfm?pid=%27%244P%5C%5B%3A-%22%40%20%20%0A), in this study, the self-reported net worth of each congress member is used as a substitute for the INCOME-variable, which, in the corruption literature, is usually negatively correlated with the level of bribery or corruption (the higher the income, the lower the need for ‘additional income’ from bribery; c.f. Gatti et al. 2003, p. 22).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Dummy</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Mean (SD)</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CORRbin</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>corrupt = 1, no = 0</td>
<td>0.081 (0.273)</td>
<td>CREW 2010 [1]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CORRind</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Index: not corrupt = 0, low = 1–3 allegations; mid = 3–8 allegations; high = 9–19 allegations</td>
<td>0.763 (3.213)</td>
<td>CREW 2010 [1]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MALE</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>male = 1, female = 0</td>
<td>0.834 (0.372)</td>
<td>Biographical Directory of the United States Congress [2], NNDB [3]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MARRIED</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>married = 1, no = 0</td>
<td>0.860 (0.347)</td>
<td>Biographical Directory of the United States Congress [2], NNDB [3]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHILDREN</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Number of children</td>
<td>2.510 (1.602)</td>
<td>Biographical Directory of the United States Congress [2], NNDB [3]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MILSERV</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Military service = 1, no = 0</td>
<td>0.244 (0.430)</td>
<td>Biographical Directory of the United States Congress [2], NNDB [3]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CATHOLIC</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Catholic = 1, no = 0</td>
<td>0.318 (0.466)</td>
<td>Biographical Directory of the United States Congress [2], NNDB [3]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PROTESTANT</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Protestant = 1, no = 0</td>
<td>0.473 (0.500)</td>
<td>Biographical Directory of the United States Congress [2], NNDB [3]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OTHERREL</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Other Religion = 1, no = 0</td>
<td>0.209 (0.407)</td>
<td>Biographical Directory of the United States Congress [2], NNDB [3]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NORTHEAST</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>New England and Mid-Atlantic states = 1, no = 0</td>
<td>0.194 (0.400)</td>
<td>U.S. Census Bureau Definition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MIDWEST</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>East North Central and West North Central states = 1, no = 0</td>
<td>0.237 (0.426)</td>
<td>U.S. Census Bureau Definition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WEST</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Pacific and Mountain states = 1, no = 0</td>
<td>0.223 (0.417)</td>
<td>U.S. Census Bureau Definition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOUTH</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>South Atlantic and East South Central and West South Central states = 1, no = 0</td>
<td>0.329 (0.470)</td>
<td>U.S. Census Bureau Definition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USINSULAR</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>United States territory that is neither a part of one of the 50 U.S. states nor the District of Columbia, the federal district of the U.S. = 1, no = 0</td>
<td>0.016 (0.125)</td>
<td>U.S. Census Bureau Definition</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ECONOMICS Yes Academic degree in economics and/or business administration (major) = 1, no = 0 0.232 (0.423) Scientists and Engineers of America [5], own research [6]

LAW Yes Academic degree in law = 1, no = 0 0.436 (0.496) Scientists and Engineers of America [5], own research [6]

POLITICAL Yes Academic degree in politics = 1, no = 0 0.386 (0.487) Scientists and Engineers of America [5], own research [6]

OTHERSTUD Yes Academic degree in any other subject = 1, no = 0 0.556 (0.497) Scientists and Engineers of America [5], own research [6]

FUNCTION Yes Function in congress: Senator = 0, Representative = 1 0.818 (0.386) Biographical Directory of the United States Congress [2]

PARTY Yes Republican = 0, Democrat = 1 0.516 (0.500) Biographical Directory of the United States Congress [2]


TIC1PERIOD Yes Participated in one of 109th to 111th congresses: yes = 1, no = 0 0.212 (0.409) Biographical Directory of the United States Congress [2]

TIC2PERIOD Yes Participated in two of 109th to 111th congresses, yes = 1, no = 0 0.202 (0.402) Biographical Directory of the United States Congress [2]

TIC3PERIOD Yes Participated in all of 109th–111th congresses, yes = 1, no = 0 0.587 (0.493) Biographical Directory of the United States Congress [2]

Data Sources:
chances of being tempted to succumb to temptation. In addition, various corruption opportunities require substantial work experience, as well as a good network of people. For the latter reason, I also expect senators to have a slightly higher corruption tendency than representatives. However, the absolute level of potential for each group to be corrupt should be considered as sufficient.

IV. REGRESSION RESULTS

Estimation of the model was performed in Stata using PROBIT for the binary corruption variable (CORR_{bin}) and ORDERED PROBIT for the corruption index (CORR_{ind}) respectively, with robust \( z \)-statistics reported. A further regression using OLS was conducted to check the robustness of a binary dependent variable with low variance. The coefficients of this regression approximately represent the marginal effects of the probit estimation of CORR_{bin}. Table 2 reports the results from the model, comparing the findings of the two alternative corruption measures of the dependent variable and the different estimation methods. The results show that neither the measure of corruption, nor the method does make a difference in terms of which variables are identified as being significant drivers of individual corruption.\(^{15}\)

Taking the explanatory variables into account, five interesting observations emerge. First and most importantly, Table 2 shows that corruption among US congress members is perceived increasing through holding a degree in economics. The coefficients in the regression models are positive and highly significant (CORR_{bin} [probit] significant at the 1% level, CORR_{bin} [OLS] and CORR_{ind} significant at the 5 % level). The size of the effect is considerable; the marginal effect indicates that the probability of an economist being corrupt is about twice as high as that of a non-economist. Overall, of the 154 individuals holding a degree in economics, 13% were corrupt, but only 6.9% of those without such a degree. In order to compare the impact of the different subjects, I additionally performed a post estimation test for the probit regression. It turned out that the impact of studying economics is also significantly stronger than the impact of the other subjects.\(^{16}\) This finding is consistent with earlier experimental findings of Frank and Schulze (2000), who (on the whole) found that economics students are

\(^{15}\) Because estimates were only slightly different for all regression types, and the qualitative results (sign, significance, order of magnitude) were approximately the same, I focus on the results of the probit regression.

\(^{16}\) Stata post estimation command: test [corrupt] economics – [corrupt] law (political, otherstud) = 0; Prob > chi2 = 0.04 (0.09, 0.06). As a further robustness check, in order to show that the effect of economics studies is not only different from zero, i.e. from a state of not having studied economics, I additionally performed a probit regression using CORR_{bin} as the dependent variable and economics as the only independent variable. As the coefficient in this regression is still positive (0.35; \( z \)-value 2.33) and highly significant at the 2% level, it is evident that the effect of economics studies is also different from every other state of having studied any other subject.
more prone to corruption or bribery respectively, than non-economics students. In line with other experiments and surveys (see section 1) this hence supports the hypothesis that economists tend to be more egocentric than others (here in the sense of corruption), even in (costly) real life. However, the exact (psychological) reasons for this outcome remain complex and difficult to observe merely with the aid of a dataset like the underling one in this study. There are many other conceivable explanations as to why economists in real life situations might behave differently to others, than just ‘being selfish’. For example, in the underlying context, economists might simply be better at hiding corrupt activities than other members of congress. Having a lower chance of getting caught, more prone to corruption or bribery respectively, than non-economics students. In line with other experiments and surveys (see section 1) this hence supports the hypothesis that economists tend to be more egocentric than others (here in the sense of corruption), even in (costly) real life. However, the exact (psychological) reasons for this outcome remain complex and difficult to observe merely with the aid of a dataset like the underling one in this study. There are many other conceivable explanations as to why economists in real life situations might behave differently to others, than just ‘being selfish’. For example, in the underlying context, economists might simply be better at hiding corrupt activities than other members of congress. Having a lower chance of getting caught,
they therefore could simply be more tempted to engage in corrupt activities. Conversely expressed, if they are in fact less skillful in hiding corrupt activities than non-economists in congress, economists might be more likely to get caught. Another possible explanation could be that economists in congress belong to commissions in which corruption is relatively more widespread. Economists may also be generally more eligible candidates for certain positions in congress than non-economists, which explains why they do not get deselected quickly, even in the event of corruption allegations.  

In contrast to Frank and Schulze (2000), who also found that men tend to be slightly more corrupt than women, however, I find no gender influence, as the MALE variable is not significant. Secondly, in this sample, being of protestant faith has a positive and significant influence on one’s probability to be corrupt. The marginal effect and thus the probability of being corrupt is about the same as that associated with having an economics degree and about as twice as high as that of catholic members of congress. This is somewhat surprising, as in the empirical corruption literature, a higher percentage of Protestantism in a country is commonly associated with a lower corruption level (Gokcekus, 2008, p. 59; Sommer et al., 2012, p. 3). Sommer et al. (2012), for instance, explain this with the higher level of individualism, as well as less authoritarian and fewer hierarchical structures associated with protestant regions (p. 3). The influence of being a Protestant though, has never been tested as a possible driver of individual corruption tendencies. Thirdly, being a member of the Republican Party, compared to being a member of the Democratic Party, increases the probability of being corrupt (negative and highly significant coefficient on the binary PARTY variable, Republican Party = 0). This confirms the statement of Stigler (1959, p. 522), ‘[…] that the professional study of economics makes one politically conservative’, insofar as the Republicans and the economists both seem to share the same political core values or in other words, being conservative makes people think like economists (or vice versa). However, a survey conducted by Klein and Stern (2006) among 1000 economists who are members of the American Economic Association showed a different pattern. They found that most economists vote for the democratic party, i.e. the Democrat: Republican ratio in voting was 2.5:1. However, the reasoning behind this voting pattern is mainly associated with issues like gun control, education, or anti-discrimination, and not related to economics concerns (p. 331). Fourthly, the more time a congress member has spent in congress before the observation period (highly significant and positive coefficient on TIMEBEF), the greater the
probability of engaging in corrupt practices. As explained in the last section, one possible explanation of this could be that the potential for an event to occur which is open for corruption rises over time. Furthermore, the longer a politician remains in congress, the more familiar he or she becomes with the processes which could make it easier for him or her to exploit of the system for private gain. However, the marginal effect of only 1% indicates that, compared to the other significant effects, the influence of the TIMEBEF variable is only of minor importance. Fifthly and lastly, being a representative or senator from a United States insular territory, i.e. that is neither a part of one of the 50 U.S. states nor the District of Columbia, the federal district of the U.S. (variable USINSULAR = 1), increases the possibility of being corrupt. Compared to the other regions WEST, MIDWEST and SOUTH, as well as the reference category NORTEAST, the marginal effect indicates that the probability of an economist being corrupt is more than five times higher when affiliated to a USINSULAR region. The latter finding thus complements the cross country corruption data of Transparency International’s Corruption Perception Index (CPI), as the U.S. insular territories such as Puerto Rico have a higher CPI Score (2013: 62/100) than the U.S. CPI Score (2013: 73/100).

V. CONCLUSION

In order to validate the widespread hypothesis in empirical economist vs. non-economist literature, that economists are more self-oriented than others, which to date relies exclusively on survey and experimental evidence, I have analyzed a set of real world data from the 109th–111th U.S. Congresses. The aim is to show the effect of holding an economics college degree on the tendency of politicians to engage in corrupt practices. By matching CREW corruption data with the personal background of each congress member during 2005–2009, I was able to identify ‘holding an economics degree’ as a significant driver that increases the corruption tendency of an individual in the US Congress. My results hence suggest that the hypothesis of economists acting somewhat less socially than others should not merely dismissed, as done by some authors of experimental studies. Even though it is surely problematic to generalize these results as representative for all kinds of economists, the crucial variable of the representativeness of the environment (Cipriani et al., 2009, p. 467), i.e. the external validity which Kirchgässner (2005) has claimed, can be regarded confirmed, at least in this study. It is up to future research to shed more light onto the reasons for the differences between economists and non-economists (e.g. indoctrination or self-selection) and whether other proxies for selfishness in real world yield the

20. U.S. Census Bureau definition.
21. Scores range from 0 (highly corrupt) to 100 (very clean). See www.cpi.transparency.org/cpi.
same outcome. Moreover, I am able to detect another four significant drivers of individual corruption tendencies, namely being a member of the Republican Party, being of protestant faith, being elected in one of the U.S. insular territories, as well as an increasing duration of congress service. Contrary to other empirical studies on corruption, however, I could not determine any influence of gender and personal wealth.

REFERENCES

DOES ECONOMICS MAKE POLITICIANS CORRUPT?


SUMMARY

The present article analyzes the differences between economists and non-economists with respect to observed corruption behavior used as a proxy for selfishness. For this purpose, I analyzed real world data of relating to the 109th–111th US Congress between 2005 and 2009, including 695 representatives and senators. I show that those who hold a degree in economics are significantly more prone to corruption than ‘non-economists’. These findings hence support the widespread, but controversial hypothesis in the ‘economist vs. non-economist literature’ that economists lack what Frey and Meier (2004) call ‘social behavior’. Moreover, by using real world data, these findings overcome the lack of external validity, which impact on the (low cost) experiments and surveys to date.