

## **Call for Abstracts for a Special Issue Proposal for World Development**

### **Why are we failing to beat corruption? Rethinking Definitions, Measurement and Anti-corruption Strategies**

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Corruption - widely defined as the mis/abuse of entrusted power for private gain (Sandholtz and Koetzle 2000; Transparency International 2020) - is one of the most challenging threats facing contemporary societies around the globe. Corrupt acts range from relatively small-scale bribery and embezzlement to various forms of high-level favouritism including cronyism and nepotism, the sale of public policies and other types of rent-seeking, as well as sextortion (Holmes 2015).

Although there are very large variations in how corruption operates, it exists in every society, in every sector and at all levels. In all its forms, it is detrimental to economic, social and political development (Mauro 1997; Uslaner 2013; Mungiu-Pippidi and Hartmann 2019) and harms social, economic, ethical and mental well-being at both an individual and community level, even in those settings where it functions as a last-resort response to governmental failure. It decreases the quality, effectiveness and efficiency of public services (e.g. health, education, access to clean water) (Rose-Ackerman 1999; Rose and Peiffer 2015), widens social inequality and negatively affects overall happiness (Treisman 2007). Corrupt acts undermine legal rules (Karklins 2005), damage government legitimacy (Holmberg and Rothstein 2012), and weaken the social fabric of democratic society (Melgar et al. 2010; Anderson and Tverdova 2003; Johnston 2005). These negative consequences are seen in both developing and developed countries, in democracies, non-democratic systems and hybrid regimes.

Scholars have made substantial progress over recent years in analyzing the causes of corruption and establishing its detrimental impact (e.g. Treisman 2000, 2007), yet we still have not found appropriate, context-specific and effective strategies against corruption. Despite the exponential rise in research on the topic since the mid-1990s, we still have insufficient understanding of the links between corruption and other socio-political pathologies, the causal relationships that drive them, as well as the mechanics and dynamics that underpin its operation in practice. In turn, these shortcomings reflect insufficiently developed theories and concepts in the field of corruption research, and have contributed in large measure to disappointing outcomes from most mainstream anti-corruption strategies.

These deficiencies in the current corruption research and anti-corruption strategies reflect several factors, which in turn form the core focus of this special issue. In particular, we highlight three core dimensions that require further in-depth research and analysis if we are to move

beyond 'admiring the problem of corruption' (Pyman 2017) and instead develop effective counter-measures.

Therefore, we are looking for contributions in the following areas:

### **(1) Definitions and understanding of corruption**

We argue that we have to rethink the current definition and understanding of corruption.

The most widely accepted definition of corruption in current use sees it as 'the misuse of entrusted power for private gain'. Whilst such a definition may be applicable in a generic sense to many instances of corruption in most countries, it nonetheless underplays the importance of context as well as specific forms and types of corrupt practice. In essence, it operates solely at the 'domain' [regio] level of a taxonomic ranking, saying nothing about the 'regnum', 'phylum', 'classis', etc. levels of classification. In contrast, scholars of 'crime' have devoted major attention to such issues, both in relation to the very purposes of classification (such as description, discovery, prediction), its nature (monothetic versus polythetic, natural versus artificial), its precision and level of abstraction, as well as its methodology, including validation methods (see Brennan 1987). This has resulted in some sophisticated, if still contested, classifications of crime - particularly for the purposes of statistical analysis (see NASEM, 2016). Similarly, if we take the case of cancer, by far the most widely-used analogy for corruption, oncological researchers see 'uncontrolled growth of abnormal cells' (the equivalent of 'misuse of entrusted power for private gain') as a basic starting point, going on to distinguish at least 200 different types to generate a vast array of diagnostic, pathogenetic, curative and palliative analysis.

Not only is there no equivalent to such analytical disaggregation in the existing work on corruption, but the very terms used in the example cited above can be challenged: for instance, what do 'abuse' or 'benefit' mean in practical terms and who gets to decide? Precisely because of the practical impact of such questions, which relate directly to our capacity to develop appropriate and targeted counter-corruption measures, we are in urgent need of a more usable approach to establishing how we should define and understand corruption as a complex, varied and multi-level phenomenon (Rothstein and Torsello 2013). In particular, we need to develop much more contextually-sensitive and informed understandings that can help link reforms to the specific dimensions of corruption we are seeking to address.

### **(2) Measurement of Corruption**

We argue that we have to rethink the measurement of corruption. If we have inadequate definitions and conceptualizations of corruption, we will inevitably be limited in our capacity to measure it. Approaches such as Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index (CPI) or the Control of Corruption Index in the World Bank Governance Indicators provide some

insights, but also suffer from several methodological limitations (Andersson and Heywood 2009; Heywood and Rose 2014): for instance, they do not consider the variation of corruption 'between or within societies', focusing instead on explaining 'variations in whole countries' scores on one-dimensional corruption indices' (Johnston 2005, p. 19). Furthermore, perception-based measures are highly aggregated and do not take into consideration different forms of corruption, nor gendered differences or regional variations in such things as levels of poverty, etc. (Hossain et al. 2010).

Shortcomings of corruption measurement limit our capacity to develop effective policies and to understand whether we are progressing. There have been various attempts to find more 'objective' measurements (e.g. conviction rate (Hill 2003; Fiorino et al. 2012)), including experience-based surveys such as Transparency International's Global Corruption Barometer (GCB); the International Country Risk Guide (ICRG) (based on expert assessments); the "I paid a bribe" initiative; the World Values Survey (based on citizen responses); context analyses (e.g. newspapers, NGO reports over a particular time span); press reports (Rehren 1996); experimental approaches (field, survey, laboratory experiments) and proxy approaches -- e.g. Golden and Picci (2005) and Olken (2007), which look, for instance, at the difference between physical quantities of public infrastructure delivered and the price paid by the government. Other measures include the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) index that encompasses executive bribery and embezzlement, public sector bribery, embezzlement, legislative and judicial corruption. In addition, there are public sector diagnostics - measuring the strength of government institutions - and private sector surveys, multi-country tools based on a mix of perception data and information about existing anti-corruption laws, risk and preventive measures of corruption focused on an ex-ante strategy to prevent corruption beyond the central core of punishable criminal conducts (Carloni 2019).

Overall, therefore, this wide array of different instruments highlights that the field of corruption measurement is highly diverse, with some measurement instruments best suited to particular research and policy problems. It is also highly specialized, and advanced to some extent, even though the lack of communication between different studies and results tends to hamper cumulative knowledge (Mungiu-Pippidi and Heywood, 2020). We, therefore, need further work to help systematize and focus on these various diverse approaches.

### **(3) Anti-corruption strategies**

We argue that current anti-corruption strategies are too short-term oriented, insufficiently focused and lack regional, context-specific focus. Although some forms of corruption are present in rich and poor countries alike, as well as in democratic and non-democratic systems, such as corruption in the police (O'Hara and Sainato 2015) or in sport (Hough and Heaston 2018), corruption varies widely. Different countries suffer from different types of corruption. Just as

seeds planted in different soils grow in different ways, so corruption also takes different shapes in different environments, thus emphasizing the importance of understanding the particular context in which the seed of corruption has germinated (Kubbe and Varraich 2019).

The particular form of any given instance of corruption depends on the nature and structure of the political system and the context in which it occurs (Heidenheimer et al. 1989). Equally, the public acceptance of what is commonly understood as corruption varies significantly across societies and contexts (Heidenheimer and Johnston 2002; Kubbe and Engelbert 2017). What is considered a bribe in a low-level corruption setting might be considered a gift in a high-level corruption setting.

Corruption often goes hand in hand with social norms that can provide incentives for individuals to be corrupt and may even facilitate corruption (Kubbe and Varraich 2019), such as kinship, social status, hierarchies, affection, reciprocity, and reputation. For example, informal practices like *wasta*, *baksheesh*, and *hamula* operate as integral parts of daily life in the Middle East. Such practices coexist and work in parallel to formal institutions underpinned by social norms (see also Kubbe and Engelbert 2017). In the words of Ledeneva (2008, p.119), they serve as 'people's regular strategies to manipulate or exploit formal rules by enforcing informal norms and personal obligations informal contexts'. By the same token, much of what passes for anti-corruption strategies instead offers 'cookie-cutter' style prescriptions developed on the basis of generic approaches, usually pitched at the level of nation-states regardless of the specific corruption issues in question. We, therefore, need to develop more sophisticated and targeted approaches to the design of anti-corruption measures.

This special issue aims to bring together an exciting and innovative set of articles written by a mix of scholars, ranging from established names in the field to mid-career specialists and also promising early career researchers working on these topics. Taken together, the articles will offer important insights into some of the most intractable challenges of tackling corruption, alongside suggested ways forward.

If you are interested in contributing to this special issue please send the following by **15 August: long abstract of 750 words** of your proposed paper, including the **paper's title author name[s]/affiliation[s]short author bio(s) of 100 words** the expected completion date of the paper (**the latest by end of the year**) **3-5 proposed names of arms-length peer reviewers.**

Your paper should be relevant and strongly connected to the described main issues at hand. Your paper should (1) have a strong evidence base for proposed arguments; (2) avoid advocacy except for recommendations that rest on analysis and evidence; (3) clearly show the advance

over existing knowledge; and (4) be empirical for the most part, and not based mostly on reviews of existing work.

Please send your abstract and required information to:

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