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Anti-Corruption Agencies:
Why Do Some Succeed and Most Fail?
A Quantitative Political Settlement Analysis

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Abstract

The question of why Anti-Corruption Agencies (ACAs) have reduced corruption in some developing countries but failed in most is unresolved. Many studies identify a lack of "political will" as the root cause, but in turn struggle to explain its source. This thesis argues that only where the distribution of power between contending social groups – the political-settlement – is relatively cohesive, governments are able and willing to support ACAs. The empirical test with a quantitative difference-in-differences-method applied to 172 countries confirms the hypothesis: in developing countries with cohesive political settlements the implementation of ACAs significantly decreases corruption while it has no impact in fragmented political settlements.

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1. Introduction

Over the past two decades, corruption has increasingly been identified as a central impediment to development. As a result, pushed by the World Bank's new agenda on "good governance" and in accordance with the United Nations Convention against Corruption, developing countries adopted a range of anti-corruption measures with the goal of reducing the opportunity structures for corruption in society. A corner stone of this strategy is the creation of specialised Anti-Corruption Agencies (ACAs) that lead and coordinate the state's fight against corruption. Given the great success of such agencies in Singapore and Hong Kong, donors laid great hopes on their successful implementation in other corruption-riddled countries. Unfortunately, with few exceptions, ACAs are not considered to deliver on the high expectations bestowed upon them. Even worse, in some cases ACAs have been abused as a weapon to repress and eliminate political enemies. Thus, the central question that this thesis wants to address is: *What determines the effectiveness of Anti-Corruption Agencies in curbing corruption?*

In the last ten years, a number of scholars (e.g. Doig *et al.* 2007; Heilbrunn 2004; Meagher 2005) have attempted to answer this question, describing and comparing different cases of successful and failed ACAs. The consensus within all these studies is that ACAs that succeeded in curbing corruption – such as in Hong Kong, Singapore, or Botswana – were well staffed and financed, independent from political interference, and backed by broad public and political support. On the other hand, unsuccessful ACAs – such as in Kenya, Tanzania, or Nepal – were missing exactly these characteristics. The crucial question, however, remains largely unanswered: why were some ACAs well-funded, well-staffed and independent, that is, generally supported by a countries leadership while others were not?

I argue in this thesis that the answer to this question lies in the political settlements of developing countries (Khan 2006a; Khan and Gray 2006). Political settlements, that is, the balance of power between contending groups in society, can take on different forms. The most important is the fragmentation of the political settlement, in other words, the number of powerful groups and the division of informal and formal institutions in state and society. The central hypothesis of this thesis is that the higher the fragmentation of the political settlement, the less likely the success of ACAs. Correspondingly, ACAs have only been functional and

effective in states with cohesive or centralised political settlements. Given limited resources, political corruption is structural in all developing countries (Khan and Gray 2006: 18). Centralised political settlements, however, have the ability to confine corruption to the political arena due to higher political stability. Just as important is the fact that governments in cohesive political settlements have large incentives for promoting development, and thus detain any type of corruption that could inhibit economic growth. Consequently, here, the government can actually be perceived as a "principal" wanting to control his "agents" (Persson *e65 663.06d [,6.66 [( )] TJ ET B(a)4(l)-513(ng)1o580.27*

synthesises both frameworks into the working hypothesis. Chapter four illustrates my research design, including a detailed discussion of the selection and the limitations of the applied methods and data. Hereafter, I present the results of the study in chapter five and discuss them in chapter six. Concluding, I summarise the survey's findings, discuss potential policy recommendations, and touch on future prospects.

2. Literature Review

In the last two decades a growing number of scholars have studied the history, structure, and functioning of anti-corruption agencies.

ground seems to be that strengthening public opinion and pressure may increase the political will   (Bolongaita 2010: 18; Doig *et al.* 2005: 12; MacMillan 2011: 621).   This   strategy, however, runs counter to the earlier findings, that public pressure has usually not led to the creation of effective ACAs.

Another important and often-mentioned cause for the failure of ACAs is the lack of context sensitivity. Although former ICAC Chief Commissioner Speville

2010). Arguably, most of them do not even have "good governance" in all its facets today. Generally, while effective governance seems to be related to the effectiveness of ACAs, this

UNECA 2010: 8), and use a "three-pronged attack" including enforcement (both investigation and prosecution), prevention, and public education (Bolongaita 2010: 13–19; Speville 2010: 62–63). To conclude, an independent, well-resourced, multi-functional yet centralised ACA is, according to the majority of the scholars, the most likely institution to reduce corruption.

The common nominator of all-above mentioned factors seems to be "political will". Without it ACAs will not be independent, well-staffed or financed, or entrusted with meaningful tasks or powers. Yet, as mentioned above, none of the summarised studies have been able to explain *why* only a minority of governments have had the political will to empower their ACAs, while in most cases the creation of ACAs appear merely as a token gesture. In addition, to my knowledge, no attempt has been made to subject the question of ACA effectiveness to rigorous quantitative analysis. This thesis intends to fill

3.1 Principal

partake in corruption, for example by selling their votes or bribing officials in order to receive public goods. The bottom line is that in developing countries neither rulers nor citizens meet the high expectations of the principal-agent model – it seems to be applicable to developed countries only (Mungiu-Pippidi 2006: 86–87).

Instead of seeing it as a principal-agent problem, Rothstein, Mungiu-Pippidi, and Booth classify systemic corruption as a **collective-action problem**. The framework, authored by Mancur Olson (1965), describes the situation when a group of actors fails to cooperate to achieve a common objective because a) the first-movers would run the risk of bearing costs, which b) they cannot be sure they will be compensated for by other beneficiaries, who may also "free ride" on the benefit (Booth 2012: 11).

In terms of one prototypical model of collective action and game theory, systemic corruption could be described as an "assurance game", also known as "trust dilemma" or "stag hunt" (Persson *et al.* 2013: 457). As illustrated in Figure 1, in this "corruption game" there are two "players" – an individual and society as a whole – which can choose

Figure 1: Corruption as an Assurance Game

Society Individual	Integrity	Corruption
Integrity	4/4	0/3
Corruption	3/0	2/2

It is important to emphasise that corruption is not a "cultural" but a "social trap" (Rothstein 2011: 232). People in developing countries are not less honest or immoral than people living in developed countries. This is clearly indicated by the results of the third round of the Afrobarometer (2006): a clear majority of Africans is against corruption and knows well that they would be better off without it. As the above game theoretical model has illustrated, however, it is irrational to act with integrity in a systemically corrupt environment. Individuals know that their costs of defying corruption might be unbearable, while it is likely to leave the "game" unchanged (Persson *et al.* 2013: 457). This logic holds both for the rich and poor, as well as for the powerful and weak in developing societies. While the poor simply would often not receive public good provision without paying bribes, public officials would not get promoted, and politicians would not get elected. Whistleblowers are usually sacked or face a high risk of "disappearing" (Persson *et al.* 2013: 459). The collective-action model thus demonstrates how it might be difficult if not impossible for any actor in a systemically corrupt society to act as "principled principal". This explains why principal-agent based approaches that aim at supporting the principle – such as ACAs – are likely to fail. The symptoms of this failure are those commonly identified in the literature: poor equipment, vague missions, and political interference. Perversely, the failure of ACAs is likely to aggravate the problem of systemic corruption. The population will perceive integrity as even more illusory, which reinforces its incentive to play corrupt in the "corruption game" (Persson *et al.* 2013: 464).

3.3 Political Settlement Framework

The preceding two chapters have shown that both the principal-agent approach and the collective-

distribute rents almost universally to the population via the formal fiscal system (for example through social welfare), governments in developing countries are so fiscally constrained, that in order to secure their political survival they have to limit rent distribution to the most powerful or dangerous groups (Khan 2006a: 16). This accommodation of powerful groups, however, is inevitably a form of political corruption: the implicated rents are either created or transferred illegally, usually by using informal patron-client networks (Khan 1998a, 1998b).

Mungiu-Pippidi (2006) and Rothstein (2011) argue that since the political system is

problem and, thus, rendering the creation of an ACA a vain endeavour. Examples would be

Singapore in the 1960s or Hong Kong in the 1970s –

to generalise results.

Figure 2.

countries that had created their ACAs before 1997 are excluded from the sample. This is necessary because the difference-in-differences model calculates not only the differences *between* our treatment and control groups, but also the differences between the pre- and post-treatment values of corruption *within* every country. Thus, in a sense, every country serves as its own control group (Wooldridge 2008). In countries that already had their "treatment" – the creation of an ACA – before 1997, however, we cannot compare the post- with the pre-treatment level of corruption, since the latter is not available. Unfortunately, these 25 countries thus have to be excluded.

4.2 Dependent Variable

One of the central questions of this thesis is what ACA effectiveness means. So far, I have argued that it means curbing corruption, that is, "the use of public office for private gain" (World Bank 1997). Some scholars, such as Johnsøn *et al.* (2012: 11), argue that this assessment is not fair since it "only measures parts of what constitutes an effective ACA." As an alternative Johnsøn *et al.* as well as Quah (2009) propose using measures such as the number of successful prosecutions to assess effectiveness. Apart from the fact that this measurement is less than straightforward, often not in the interest of the ruling class, de facto unavailable, and probably highly correlated with the level of corruption in a country (Meagher 2005: 80), I disagree that the corruption level is an unfair yardstick.

from a newer generation of indirect (Reinikka and Svensson 2003; Sequeira 2012) and experience-based measures (e.g. Transparency International's (TI) Corruption Barometer), which are either only applicable to micro-level case studies or too short in coverage, the main means to measure corruption are perception-based indicators. Perception-based corruption indicators are, as the name indicates, based on the perception of corruption in a g

(2010) find that perception indicators and actual corrupt practices – measured in lab experiments or as the non-payment of parking tickets by United Nations diplomats in New York City – correlate highly.

Despite the limitation discussed above, I have decided to operationalise corruption through the WGI's control of corruption index, abbreviated here as CoC (Kaufmann *et al.* 2014). It is available annually[7] since 1996 and measures "the exercise of public power for private gain, including both petty and grand corruption, and state capture" (Kaufmann 2005: 83). The CoC score ranges from -2.5 (high corruption) to 2.5 (no corruption). There are two reasons why I chose to use the CoC as sole measurement of corruption. First, because there are no true alternatives: TI's Corruption Perception Index is not applicable to panel data due to changing methodologies and the ICRG corruption index measures the political risk of corruption and not the corruption level (Lambsdorff 2005: 5). Second, the CoC is probably the statistically most sound perception-index available (Arndt and Oman 2006: 42). This should not, however, imply that we should think ourselves safe: the CoC has serious limitations.

4.3 Explanatory Variables

The treatment variable used in this study is the ACA-dummy. It is coded "1" if a country has an ACA in a certain year and "0" if it does not. In this thesis, ACAs are defined as "public (funded) bodies of a durable nature, with a specific mission to fight corruption and reducing the opportunity structures propitious for its occurrence in society through preventive and/or repressive measures" (De Sousa 2010: 5). Using this definition and based on a list produced by the KPK, the Indonesian Corruption Eradication Commission (2012), and my own research, I have created a global ACA dataset, including information such as the name and starting year of the respective agency (see Annex). In total, 118 countries have introduced ACAs in the study period.

As discussed in section 3.3, I argue that the impact of an ACA on corruption depends on whether it is located in a cohesive or fragmented political settlement. To account for this moderation, I interact the predictor variable, the ACA-dummy, with the moderator variable, the political fragmentation variable. Given the rather complex nature of political settlements and their level of fragmentation, it is difficult to measure political settlement fragmentation directly. I have therefore decided to proxy it with a "economic convergence" variable. It is coded "0" if a country is a developed, that is, a "high-income" country in terms of the World Bank. Developing countries[3] ("low

one that differentiates most significantly between these groups" (2008: 21). In other words, growth-enhancing governance capabilities typical to cohesive political settlements were found in converging but not in diverging developing countries.

Concluding, I argue that the converging variable is a theoretically and empirically sound proxy for the level of political settlement fragmentation. Whether one attaches credence to this argumentation, however, is obviously central to whether one believes that the results of this study are valid.

4.4 Control Variables

In order to receive causal estimates from our model, the conditional independence assumption has to hold. This implies that we have to avoid spurious correlation and omit any confounding variables. Spurious relationships occur when two variables are actually not connected, but seem to be due to the absence of a variable correlated with both. The typical example is that of the high correlation between a stork population and the (human) birth rate of a

A further variable that should be controlled for is whether a country implemented other anti-corruption policies simultaneously to an ACA. This is important because their effect on corruption – provided they were not implemented in the control group countries – would be attributed to the ACA implementation. As a result, our estimations would likely be biased upwards, that is, making ACAs look more effective than they are. Unfortunately, comprehensive and detailed data for other anti-corruption measures is not readily available on such a scale and difficult to compile. ACAs, however, are usually part of an overall anti-corruption strategy based on the same principal-agent logic. As they should interact by design, it might thus be illusory to think that one can unravel the exact impact of each intervention separately.

4.5 Sensitivity Analysis and Controls for Statistical Dependency

The key identifying assumption of difference-in-differences models is that trends would be the same for treatment and control groups in the absence of the treatment. While we cannot test this directly, knowing whether trends differed before the treatment can give us a sound indication. To test this I have decided to perform a so-called "placebo-test". In essence, I generate a "fake" treatment that mimics the ACA treatment, only that it is "implemented" five years before the ACA actually was. Consequently, the placebo should not have any significant impact on the corruption level. If it does, that is, if the placebo difference-in-differences estimate is different from 0, the trends are not parallel, and our original difference-in-differences estimator is likely to be biased.

Moreover, since panel data consists both of a time-series and cross-sectional dimension, it is prone to autocorrelation and heteroscedasticity. While this does not affect the size of the coefficients, it usually leads to an underestimation of the standard errors, implying an overestimation of statistical significance. To identify whether this is the case, I performed

4.6 Strategy of Analysis

The following analysis will consist of five models. All will include two-way-fixed-effects and robust standard erro

Table 1. Base, Interaction, and Placebo Two-Way-Fixed-Effects Models

Model 3 will serve as an illustration. To begin with, it is important to explain that the convergence moderator variable is not treated by Stata as a three categorial variable, but as a

developing country decreases the CoC significantly at the 10%-level by -0.075+0.071= **-0.004 points.**

The interpretation for Model 4 is essentially the same as for Model 3, only that now we control for the vector of potentially confounding variables. Furthermore, the strength and direction of the coefficients of interest have barely changed. The main change is that they have all lost one level of significance – with the diverging-interaction coefficient now insignificant. This is probably due to the loss of 50 countries compared to Model 3, which is to be accounted for by missing data in the control variables. Essentially copying the interpretation-schema from Model 3, although holding all other variables constant, Model 4 can be interpreted as follows.

6. Discussion

Overall, the results provide broad evidence for the theoretical framework in general and the

threat to the validity and reliability of this study. Before concluding the thesis, we should bear in mind these serious possible limitations.

7. Conclusion

While Anti-Corruption Agencies have successfully curbed corruption in some developing countries, they have failed in most. To date, no study has been able to explain this particular pattern. The only consistent finding is that ACAs were effective when supported by the political leadership and ineffective when they were not. However, the same studies do not

if there is no domestic political support for ACAs, donors should not demand them. Rather, donors should put more effort into analysing and understanding countries' political settlements. Thus, if a country with a relatively centralised and stable political settlement honestly requests technical and financial support for building an ACA, donors should help. In countries with a strongly fragmented political settlement, however, the same efforts will likely be fruitless. As Khan proposes (2002, 23), donors should rather try to help fragmented developing country states to increase their political stability and to make them less dependent on their patron-client networks. This, he argues, could be promoted by more donor-financed official state spending on transparent social programs and redistribution. Only when this approach was successful at increasing the political stability and legitimacy of the state, and when the government believes it is feasible, should donors think about supporting the implementation of an Anti-Corruption Agency.

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Country	ACA	Name	Establishment
Bolivia	Yes	Ministry of Institutional Transparency and Fight against Corruption	2006
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Yes	Anti	

Country	ACA	Name	Establishment
Cote d'Ivoire	*No*		
Croatia	Yes	Office for the Suppression of Corruption and Organized Crime	2001
Cuba	Yes		

Country	ACA	Name	Establishment
Kenya	Yes	Kenya Anti-	

Country	ACA	Name	Establishment
Mauritius	Yes	Commission Against Corruption	2002

Country	ACA	Name	Establishment
Panama	Yes	National Council for Transparency against Corruption	2004
Papua	Yes	New Guinea	
Paraguay	Yes	Office of the Comptroller General	2002
Peru	Yes	High Level Anti-Corruption Commission (different name before)	2001
Philippines	Yes	Office of the Ombudsman	1988
Poland	Yes	Central Anti-Corruption Bureau	2006
Portugal	Yes	Central Criminal Investigation and Prosecution Department	1998
Qatar	Yes	Agency for Administrative Control and Transparency	2011
Romania	Yes	National Anti-Corruption Directorate	2002
Russian	Yes	Federation	
Rwanda	Yes	Office of the Ombudsman	2003
Saint Kitts	No		
Saint Lucia	Yes	Integrity Commission	2002
Saint Vincent	No		
Samoa	No		
San Marino	No		
Sao Tome	No		
Saudi Arabia	Yes	Anti-Corruption Commission	2012
Senegal	Yes	National Commission Against Non-Transparency, Corruption and Extortion	2003
Serbia	Yes	Anti-Corruption Agency	2010
Seychelles	Yes	Office of the Ombudsman	1993
Sierra	Yes	Leone Anti-Corruption Commission	2000
Singapore	Yes	Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau	1952
Slovakia	Yes	Commission for the Prevention of Corruption	2004

Country	ACA	Name	Establishment
Slovenia	Yes	Commission for the Prevention of Corruption	2004
Solomon Islands	No		
Somalia	No		
Somaliland	Yes	Good Governance and Anti-Corruption Commission	2010
South Africa	Yes	Special Investigating Unit	2001
South Sudan	Yes	South Sudan Anti-Corruption Commission	2009
Spain Special	Yes	Prosecutor's Office for the Repression of Economic Offences related to Corruption 1996	
Sri Lanka	Yes	Commission to Investigate Allegations of Bribery or Corruption	1994

Country	ACA	Name	Establishment
Tunisia	Yes	Anti-Corruption Commission	