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# CONTROLLING CORRUPTION THROUGH COLLECTIVE ACTION

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The revelations of the spoils gathered by ousted autocratic rulers such as Tunisia's Zine El Abidine Ben Ali or Egypt's Hosni Mubarak tend to cloud over a fact that is becoming more apparent every day: Many of the countries that do a poor job of controlling corruption are electoral democracies. In fact, among the countries where corruption is prevalent, those that hold free elections outnumber those that do not. Although the most egregious examples of "state capture" are found in autocracies, it is not autocratic rulers alone who are guilty of plundering state resources for their own benefit. The political elites of new democracies—sometimes even consolidated ones—are also quite capable of engaging in large-scale corruption.

Democratization is increasingly producing a new type of regime—one in which rulers who monopolize power and treat the state as their own patrimony are succeeded by competing political groupings or parties that practice a similarly nonuniversal allocation of public resources based on patronage, nepotism, and the exchange of favors. In a previous article in these pages, I labeled the main governance norm in such regimes "competitive particularism."<sup>1</sup> For despite the presence of political pluralism and contested elections in these societies, ethical universalism fails to take hold as the main rule of the game, and winners of the political process, in their turn, treat the state as the major source of spoils, feeding off the public resources that they divert toward their clients.

Under competitive particularism, violent power grabbing gives way

to corrupt politics and elections (sometimes free, though rarely fair). The allocation of public resources is particularistic and unfair; rent seeking is common; the rule of law is partial at best (those in power are above the law); and the state is perceived as an instrument for the spoliation of the many and the enrichment of the few.

Of the 21 countries that have made significant progress on control of corruption since 1996, 12 are electoral democracies—but so are 10 of the 27 countries where control of corruption has weakened. (A far larger number has not registered any significant change.) This confirms that there is no linear relation between the holding of elections and corruption, and that in many electoral democracies a governance regime has developed and stabilized that is far from the norms of polyarchy and an open society.

In his book *Development as Freedom*, Amartya Sen famously argued that individuals, in order to achieve their potential, must be free from one-sided social domination and must combine their resources to pursue together their collective interests and provide public goods to the many. It has never been obvious, however, that the goal of freedom is to distribute public resources equally and fairly to everyone. In other words, liberty does not necessarily result in a governance regime based on ethical universalism. Elites, clans, tribes, political parties, and groups of every denomination may in fact use their freedom to advance their own narrow interests rather than those of society at large. Indeed, in the 91 countries that currently hold regular elections yet lag in controlling corruption, pluralism has delivered particularism rather than ethical universalism.

Thus political competition is not by itself an antidote to particularism. Some countries have held many rounds of elections and yet made little progress toward universalism. The list of those that have made such progress since 1996 (the first year for which we have comparative data on corruption) is not very impressive, given that most of them are small islands (along with Estonia, a similarly tiny country). Thus gaining control over corruption via a democratic path remains a vexing problem. Scholars have intensively studied the first step of democratization—gaining freedom. Yet the next step—achieving fair governance—remains understudied and far less well understood, though we know that it is no less difficult.

New democracies so rarely attain fair governance because they generally fail to impose normative constraints on predatory elite behavior that would result in an allocation of public resources based on ethical universalism. This includes equality before the law and the impartial treatment of all citizens by the government. Most studies of corruption, especially those written by economists, adopt a “principal-agent” approach: They postulate the existence at all times of a well-meaning “principal” whose trust is abused by some “agent” and in whose interest

it is to fight corruption.<sup>2</sup> Thus assistance for good-governance programs usually is directed toward such principals (ministries, control agencies, and anticorruption bodies), which are assumed to be morally above corruption.

Yet those who have the most discretionary power also have the most opportunities to act corruptly, putting high-level government officials and legislators in the best position to manipulate anticorruption bodies or to influence policy and legislation in favor of particular interest groups. Consequently, more often than not, such “principals” may serve as a patron or gatekeeper for corruption, if not the actual *capo di tutti capi*. In order to place effective checks on these officials, thereby creating real accountability, there must exist at the grassroots level an active and enlightened citizenry rather than simply dependent clients or disempowered individuals. Ordinary citizens themselves should be able to play the role of principals. Indeed, this is where normative constraints on elite predatory behavior should be articulated through collective action.

### Normative Constraints on Corruption

The scholarship on good governance frequently addresses normative constraints on corruption by discussing such concepts as “civil society,” “moral values,” “the media,” and sometimes “culture.” In recent years, awareness of the importance of collective action has increased within the development community, yet many of its approaches to collective action remain disconnected both from theory and from one another. In an attempt to rectify this problem, in 2001 the World Bank devoted an entire *World Development Report* to “empowerment” and later proposed the concept of “social accountability,” and in 2002 the United Nations Development Programme established the Oslo Governance Centre. Yet only USAID and later the U.S. Millennium Challenge Corporation, along with private foundations such as George Soros’s Open Society Institute, have started to fund civil society groups and, to a lesser extent, the media as main priorities of their good-governance programs. The founding of Transparency International and its proliferation of local chapters in more than a hundred countries have helped to channel a steadier flow of funds toward anticorruption initiatives and to create a genuinely international anticorruption NGO community. Nonetheless, few anticorruption programs foster collective action at the national level, where the battle must primarily be fought, and those that do seem to do so more by chance than by design.

Studies on social capital and civic culture have identified four distinct components of normative constraints:

- Values—A prevailing societal *norm* of ethical universalism based on values such as fairness and honesty;

- Social Capital—A *widespread habit* of engaging in formal or informal collective action around shared interests, purposes, and values;
- Civil Society—A dense *network of voluntary associations* (including NGOs in the Western understanding of the term, but also unions, religious groups, and the like);
- Civic Culture—Sustained *participation and political engagement* of the people, for instance through media or social movements.

The virtuous combination of these four factors enables them to overcome competing tendencies toward violence, cronyism, and social hierarchy and to generate normative constraints that empower ethical universalism. The evidence shows that all four elements are necessary—no smaller combination is sufficient for the development of normative constraints capable of ensuring sustainable good governance. It seems that ethical universalism becomes an institution (a widespread norm endorsed by the majority) rather than a mere ideology of the enlightened when 1) a significant part of society shares the belief in the superiority of ethical universalism over particularism as a mode of governance, and 2) enough individuals are also willing to act on this belief to make it a reality. This does not necessarily require an absolute majority, but rather a majority of active public opinion, including a fraction of the elite.

The best historical examples of this development are the Dreyfus Affair in France at the turn of the twentieth century and the extension of the franchise in early nineteenth-century Britain. The story of Captain Alfred Dreyfus, the Jewish scapegoat unjustly sentenced by a military court to life imprisonment for treason is well known, as is Emile Zola's public denunciation of the trial, *J'Accuse!*, published in 1898 on the front page of the newspaper *L'Aurore*. Less well known is the extensive public mobilization in favor of impartial justice: Young writers like Marcel Proust joined Zola in collecting 1,482 celebrity signatures, including that of painter Claude Monet, against the Dreyfus verdict. Zola's manifesto on the "civic crime" committed by the military tribunal initiated a long cycle of contestation and political realignment that led to Dreyfus's exoneration—and to a change in public norms—twelve years after the original trial and eight years after the publication of *J'Accuse!* In the end, a majority of the public agreed that justice should be universal and impartial, regardless of patriotic appeals or the background of the defendant. A clear threshold was crossed in the Dreyfus case, and normative constraints at that point became institutionalized. Civil society and the press played the main roles, but the strong supporting cast included rising politicians and honest officers and bureaucrats. Many new democracies have not yet had their Dreyfus Affair.

While the Dreyfus case is often cited as an example of the power of

public opinion and the media, the British political reform a half-century earlier is frequently described as a major institutional change.<sup>3</sup> In 1832, a reform-minded aristocracy concerned with avoiding a French-style revolution greatly extended the franchise in England and Wales. There had been widespread and sustained collective action prior to the bill's passage. Ongoing pressure from the working class, including riots and strikes, was sometimes harshly repressed. At the same time, an irrepressible and unauthorized press not only advocated change but singled out for blame those who opposed it. Moreover, there was continuous advocacy for further extending the franchise to the middle class and for abolishing royal sinecures.

For the reform to succeed, the Crown and the existing voters (the "institutional winners") had to agree to extend electoral rights to more people. Game theory predicts that they would have defended their privileges and fought to maintain the status quo. Yet when the reform stalled, voters enfranchised under the old system returned the reformers to power by a wide margin, underscoring that the bill itself merely mirrored a change that had already taken place in the collective mind of British society.<sup>4</sup> Thus it was the voters themselves who extended the rights that they enjoyed to their disenfranchised compatriots, bringing about positive change. What appears to be a textbook example of political development driven by an elite strategic decision aimed at averting a potential revolution was actually far more than that, as *both the bottom-up and the top-down elements were present*. The change was grounded in collective action at the grassroots level on many fronts—from the trigger of the French Revolution across the Channel to the activity of various groups at home.

But where did a universalist-minded "civil society" come from in the few countries that came to enjoy this remarkable asset? Although a virtuous civil society is present in most philosophical visions of good governance, the mechanisms of its influence are not fully clear. The republican tradition insists on both civic virtue and participation in the city's affairs. Machiavelli was highly skeptical about the former and suggested that a free government is unachievable if the citizenry is corrupt. By and large, republican thought presumes that good government rests on a virtuous, enlightened, and engaged citizenry.

Alexis de Tocqueville in his depiction of American society was the first to explain the mechanisms that yield good governance and an engaged citizenry. According to Tocqueville, civil associations, political participation, and the media all serve to empower collective action on behalf of society, thus rendering it better equipped to solve common problems. Associations of every kind lower the cost of collective action for the average citizen. If achieving a certain political aim requires collective action, it will happen more readily in societies with high levels of horizontal cooperation. The bonds of trust built through the practice

of meeting regularly with your bowling team, for example, can facilitate collective action if, say, one of your team members objects to a new public-works project and asks you to join him in protest.

Tocqueville offered a comprehensive answer to most, if not all, of the questions about civil society widely debated in recent years, including the relationship between engaged civil society (pro-transparency activists, for instance) and nonengaged civil society (such as bowling leagues or book clubs) and between political and nonpolitical society. Once cooperation and the habit of association exist, it becomes easier to use the social capital these produce for any collective action. Tocqueville acknowledged that people can organize for any purpose, good or bad, but he viewed the capacity to act collectively as undeniably positive and as the only possible path to good governance. A society capable of collective action is capable of controlling its most violent or selfish tendencies, such as the extreme individualism and divisiveness that pervades societies governed by tyranny, where no one trusts anyone else, and each person acts on his own behalf and against anyone who stands in his way. In short, the capacity for collective action is a public good that derives from extensive social interaction.

### Testing Tocqueville

Was Tocqueville right? The explanations he offers can be tested empirically. First, if civic and political associations both draw on the same capacity for collective action, we should find a positive relationship between them. Second, if civil society or the independent media—proxies for normative restraints—in fact limit corruption, we should find a positive relationship between their presence and success in controlling corruption. Despite the imperfections of data on corruption, we have enough material to test Tocqueville's theories and even to test the weight of normative constraints in a model of control of corruption.

The first hypothesis is easily confirmed. Regressing political-party membership on the total number (national aggregates) of civic voluntary associations (including recreational, artistic, charitable, environmental, and consumer groups) recorded by the World Values Survey between 1995 and 2008, we find a relationship of high explanatory power.<sup>5</sup> Party membership in a country can be predicted on the basis of membership in general associations. The results (based on data from 54 countries and over 68,000 observations) are statistically significant at both the national and individual level, with controls for GDP, religion, experience of democracy, education, age, and income. In other words, the propensity toward association is consistent across political and nonpolitical activity. The collective-action capacity of civil society draws on people's habits of solving problems together. Results are robust with all tests. If we find low political participation, we also find few civic associations;

hence, predatory elites can monopolize politics and engage in state capture with little opposition from society.

What of the normative constraints? We can test their effects using the World Bank Institute's control-of-corruption measure as a dependent variable. Most models of reported corruption focus on the role of development, income, trade policies, colonial legacies, democracy, and an independent judiciary.<sup>6</sup> The four variables used here as proxies for normative constraints are 1) freedom of the press (using Freedom House scores); 2) the number of civil society associations per 100,000 inhabitants; 3) the number of Internet connections per 100,000 inhabitants (as an indicator of individual autonomy and access to information); and 4) the presence of Protestantism as the main religious denomination.

It is worth mentioning that the impact of majority Protestantism has been tested often and has proven significant. Yet the relationship between Protestantism and good governance is probably more rooted in history than in present-day practice. Today many nominally Protestant countries are *de facto* secular, while many non-Protestant countries tackle corruption quite efficiently. The influence of Protestantism seems to stem from its egalitarian ethos, which may have worked indirectly to support a general orientation toward ethical universalism, literacy, and the promotion of individualism. Its role was therefore important in specific periods of development, which explains why the first good-governance countries were predominantly Protestant. This does not mean that other religious traditions are incompatible with good governance, but simply that at the "right" historical moment they did not manage to assemble this particular complex of factors.

As the Table shows, there is a significant positive relationship between control of corruption and the number of associations (CSOs) per capita that explains 54 percent of the total variation, controlling for either human development (HDI) or GDP per capita. A strong association also exists with the other proxies for normative constraints: freedom of the press (explains 67 percent), the number of Internet connections (71 percent), and living in a country where Protestantism is the major religious denomination (61 percent), each with the HDI control. A joint linear-regression model with all these components (see column 1 of the Table below) explains nearly 78 percent of the cases. The explanatory power of the model grows to 84 percent when outliers are eliminated (see column 2). HDI was used as a control alternatively with GDP per capita, resulting in minor differences in the explanatory power of the model and no difference in the significance of the determinants. Both freedom of the press and the number of CSOs per capita are stronger determinants of control of corruption than Protestantism (when controlling for human development). The test of civil society's impact on governance, drawing on a larger number of cases than tested before, thus confirms both Tocqueville's observations and the findings of more



**TABLE—OLS REGRESSION FOR CONTROL OF CORRUPTION  
(WITH ROBUST STANDARD ERRORS AND OUTLIER EXCLUSION)**

	(1)	(2)
Number of CSOs (per 100,000 pop.)	0.00710** (0.00270)	0.00554* (0.00226)
Freedom of the press <sup>a</sup> (Freedom House)	-0.00993*** (0.00240)	-0.0134*** (0.00191)
Internet users (per 100 people)	0.0224*** (0.00331)	0.0212*** (0.00263)
Protestant (% of population)	0.00348 (0.00213)	0.00454* (0.00176)
HDI <sup>b</sup>	0.740 (0.376)	0.566 (0.315)
Constant	-0.810** (0.251)	-0.500* (0.206)
Number of Obs.	153	145
Adj. R-Squared	0.782	0.847

*Note:* Regression results for 153 countries using the World Bank's 'Control of Corruption' index as the dependent variable. Huber-White standard errors are in parentheses. Model 2 excludes outliers using Cook's D as test statistic. Significance levels: \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ .

Eight outliers with Cook's D  $> 4/N$  identified. These outliers are Belize, Botswana, Jamaica, Namibia, Papua New Guinea, Qatar, Rwanda, and Singapore.

<sup>a</sup>Values range from 0 (best) to 100 (worst); <sup>b</sup>Human Development Index, values range from 0 (low development) to 1 (high development).

recent studies.<sup>7</sup> A panel regression using corruption-risk data from the International Country Risk Guide (ICRG) as the dependent variable also confirms the importance of freedom of the press for 133 countries and 1,077 observations.<sup>8</sup>

The normative constraints are also robust in more complex variants of the model, when tested alongside pluralism, natural resources, ethnic fractionalization, independence of the judiciary, and various economic policies. By contrast, such popular contemporary anticorruption remedies as the existence of a dedicated anticorruption agency or an ombudsman have no statistical impact at all.<sup>9</sup>

## What Makes Collective Action So Difficult?

We have strong evidence that normative constraints are essential for enforcing ethical universalism as a governance norm. The critical question for policy makers, then, is how normative constraints can reach this point of efficacy. How did they develop historically and how can we replicate this process? Since a level of normative constraints sufficient to enforce an open-access order has emerged in so few countries, it is clear that this socially optimal equilibrium is difficult to reach. The correlation between having been colonized and corruption underlines the difficulty of developing normative constraints in poorly defined communities. Even when such constraints existed in the metropolis—and some colonial powers were among the most advanced and best-gov-

erned countries in the world—they were not exported overseas, where normative constraints were very weak. New Zealand, Canada, and the other successful colonies created their own equilibria instead of importing them.

Examining the matter from a developmental perspective helps us to understand why the odds against moving from weak to strong normative constraints seem so high. As S.N. Eisenstadt and L. Roniger have noted, clientelism is frequently in competition with more open forms of exchange.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, the development of civil society and rule-bound associations does not advance in a vacuum, but rather in opposition to groups benefiting from particularistic arrangements and seeking to advance their own interests against collective ones.

In a society dominated by particularism, it is more convenient for individuals to try to accede to the privileged group or to become clients of influential patrons than to engage in a long-term battle to change the rule of the game to ethical universalism. In such societies, there is no tradition of association between equals, since trust is particularistic and is built on clans, patrons, and clients. Attempts to change this are bound to have high costs with few immediate returns. Any progress toward ethical universalism would threaten the existing order, and the predators and patrons who would fight against such progress are likely to be greater in number, richer, and better placed in the society than the new horizontally structured associations.

Finally, the political mobilization of public opinion in support of ethical universalism is also difficult to achieve. More than a century has passed since Zola's manifesto, yet such instances remain memorable chiefly because they are rare; they have become routinized in only a handful of societies. For a society to reach the optimal equilibrium that maximizes social welfare, there must be some sort of critical mass that favors governance based on ethical universalism. Societies must have the permanent capability to exercise normative constraints, and not be forced to rely solely on the vertical accountability provided by elections.

But why, a social psychologist might ask, would individuals associate to promote ethical universalism rather than narrow self-interest? If we look at historical developments, we find instances when competitive groups, such as traders, were better able to expand their private profits under universal rather than privilege-based rules. Thus good governance was brought about not by the most disenfranchised and powerless but by merchants and tradesmen who engaged in collective action against privilege and in favor of fair competition and an even playing field. If today such developments are scarce, and businesses (even Western ones) prefer to bribe than to fight to change the rules of the game, we must try to understand the environments in which they currently operate and how these differ from premodern Europe.

People's behavior is shaped by their expectations about the future

consequences of their actions. If they perceive particularism as a general norm, they are unlikely to engage unilaterally in altruistic, cooperative, and honest behavior. They know that their action will have little effect if undertaken alone rather than collectively. The problem is thus one of inducing a sense of efficacy that will mobilize individuals in favor of changing the rules of the game, and then building a critical mass of such individuals. How can this be done?

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***Successful recent examples of civil society–driven good governance are few, but they do exist—notably, the Baltic States, Central Europe, Georgia, and South Korea.***

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While the international anticorruption community is putting unprecedented pressure on international businesses not to bribe their way into foreign markets, such markets are often strictly controlled by the favoritism of national governments. So bribery is the only in for outsiders.

Successful recent examples of civil society–driven good governance are few, but they do exist—notably, the Baltic States, Central Europe, Georgia, and South Korea. There are some commonalities among them, as democratization in South Korea, Central Europe, and the Baltics was propelled by civil society movements that, after starting as grassroots protests and loosely organized social movements, eventually evolved into more institutionalized and specialized NGO communities. The anticorruption actions of such organizations span many years and are extremely diverse, but broad government-monitoring and “naming-and-shaming” coalitions have consistently been successful.

It is usually taken for granted that the media will serve as watchdogs for ethical universalism. We presume that freedom of the media works to control corruption by allowing a plurality of voices and interests to manifest themselves openly in a society. This is insufficient, however, because such voices could simply promote private interests (those of their owners for instance) to the detriment of others and even of society as a whole. Therefore, the media must be pluralistic and must carry out their watchdog duties effectively and credibly in order to generate normative constraints. The media must promote ethical universalism as the chief principle of governance and denounce governments captured by private interests. This simple definition shows the difficulty of the task. Why, in a society where particularism is the rule of the game, would a media organization buck the system to promote ethical universalism—or, in media terms, fair and accurate reporting?

When Zola denounced the Dreyfus verdict, most other newspapers sided with the establishment. Some were openly nationalistic and anti-Semitic. Of course, opinions are diverse in any society, and most media are private and seek to appeal to readers of different persuasions. In the

few media systems around the world where ethical universalism is the dominant norm—in the United States and, to a lesser extent, in Europe—it developed gradually during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Earlier media were wildly partisan and thrived on blackmail (quite an effective way of coercing advertising) and on government or partisan subsidies in exchange for slandering opponents and promoting propaganda.

The well-documented story of the corrupt political machine known as Tammany Hall, which dominated New York City politics at the end of the nineteenth century, provides an excellent example. Although the “Tweed Ring” of corrupt local administrators (who also ran the local Democratic Party and controlled the judiciary) was eventually brought down with the help of the media, it was also the media that enabled it to survive for so long. Most New York newspapers were on the Ring’s payroll. The minority market-oriented media, especially the *New York Times* and *Harper’s Weekly*, fought Tammany Hall for years. But it was not until they were able, thanks to a stroke of luck, to publish the city’s financial accounts on their front pages that they succeeded in building a critical mass against the Ring.

On some [newspapers] . . . there were six or eight staffers who drew stipends from the city ranging from \$2,000 to \$2,500 a year. Their jobs were to write blurbs in the guise of news stories. Some specialized in writing letters to out-of-town papers extolling the accomplishments of Mayor Hall’s administration.<sup>11</sup>

Such unethical public-relations efforts disguised as journalism may seem shocking to today’s Western reporters, but they are all too familiar to journalists in many other parts of the world. Freedom House rates the media in most countries as Partly Free, but this broad category obscures the widespread phenomenon of “captive media”—media whose main role is not to inform or entertain the public but to serve as a means of trading influence and favors for its owners. The existence of this kind of media landscape can be diagnosed by some clear features. For instance, we can identify far more media outlets than the advertising market would predict in such countries. Most such outlets are unprofitable but heavily subsidized by their owners. Captive media have a business model that allows them to lose money while profiting their owners in other ways. Advertising from private sources will not be strongly correlated with circulation, for instance, and tax breaks, monopolies, or other forms of subsidy that distort the media market will exist in abundance.

Though a plurality of sources exists, as in today’s unconsolidated democracies, the media owners will in all likelihood belong to vested interest groups linked to both business and politics. Often in such parts of the world there is no de facto separation between the media and politics or business, and the most powerful individuals will own the media either directly or through intermediaries. In this landscape, one would

be hard-pressed to find an investor who makes a profit from the media alone. Instead, businessmen own media companies in order to promote their other business or political interests through blackmail or intimidation. Such media owners act as a cartel directly opposed to the autonomy of the journalistic profession, which is unable effectively to promote collective action due to the presence of so many mercenaries and “disinformation” agents accountable only to their bosses.

The picture is therefore more complex than many anticorruption crusaders and promoters of media freedom believe. As electoral democracy expands, government monopoly of ownership and direct censorship become less and less the main obstacles to media freedom.<sup>12</sup> The dominant model in such countries resembles not the Anglo-Saxon ideal of objective journalism but rather the institutionalized particularism of Italian journalism in the 1980s. Under this system (known as *lotizzazione*), journalists would report only the malfeasance of the other side, never their own, forcing the public to patch together the varying viewpoints to get an accurate picture.

Can such media successfully exercise the role of watchdog and serve as the “pillar of integrity” called for by organizations such as Transparency International? The answer is not plain, illustrating the difficulties faced by anticorruption activists and honest journalists in such environments. While media outlets can serve as the main drivers for accountability, they are also susceptible to corruption themselves. A civil society favoring ethical universalism and rule of law has to impose itself gradually against networks of predators; likewise, a free and uncorrupt media must compete for dominance against a captive media, as in the case of Tammany Hall.

### How Can External Donors Help?

The statistical evidence presented here makes a strong case for the importance of normative constraints in the control of corruption. The historical cases provide additional support but introduce some concerns as well. London in the 1830s, Paris at the end of the nineteenth century, and New York after the Civil War probably had higher capacities for collective action in support of ethical universalism than many developing countries do today. A present-day Tocqueville visiting cities where anticorruption struggles have been waged for many years now—Accra, Bucharest, Kiev, Manila, New Delhi—would describe not a dense network of voluntary associations but rather a few dedicated individuals and groups who are isolated, exhausted, and underfunded and have failed to reach a critical mass. Prague and São Paulo might do better. But the overall picture is one of insufficient collective action, and even that is maintained in large part by external donors due to the lack of adequate support (cash and volunteer work) from domestic sources.

A number of factors hinder the effectiveness of civil society anticor-

ruption projects funded by international donors.<sup>13</sup> The first problem can be called *insufficient concreteness*: Far too many projects deal with corruption in general, with a focus on “raising awareness,” while only a handful directly attack corruption in a specific organization or branch of government. External donors seek to replicate in recipient countries the kinds of normative constraints on corruption that prevail in their own societies, but this objective can be achieved only through concrete and well-publicized projects aimed at changing behavior. Building the rule of law and control of corruption requires the equivalent of promoting a Dreyfus Affair or an anti-Tammany Hall campaign. Some people who are bound to lose from a successful anticorruption campaign are certain to resist it, and thus exposing and targeting predators is essential for success.

A second frequent source of inefficiency is poor contextualization. To challenge corruption, one must understand how it works in a specific environment. Importing anticorruption policies from developed to less-developed countries, where the institutional fit is poor, cannot succeed. For the least-developed countries, reformers must help to create normative constraints suitable for premodern settings if they are to achieve some control of corruption. A rich source of inspiration can be found in the good-governance arrangements of the city-states of Renaissance Italy (based on conscription of the citizenry into various temporary public jobs), for instance, but donors ignore such older examples, and try to build modern states on the Western model everywhere and overnight.

A third problem with many anticorruption campaigns stems from confusion between the two roles of civil society. Having the same organization work both as a watchdog over government and as a deliverer of services for that same government raises conflict-of-interest issues. If civil society is funded by the government or asked by its donors to carry out joint programs with the government that it is supposed to monitor, it risks jeopardizing its critical oversight role, and a client-patron relationship may emerge instead. Donors are often pleased when civil society organizations show that they have helped the government to develop some new legislation (which may never even be implemented), but such actions do not increase normative constraints a bit.

Finally, donors should focus their support on genuine local initiatives to build normative constraints on corrupt behavior. There is a great difference between responding to local demand—for instance, by offering some cash to reward voluntary efforts to fight corruption by those who stand to lose from it—and trying to create the demand oneself, which inevitably is unsustainable. After many wasted grants, in fall 2012 donors in Ukraine seemed finally to have found the right path by endorsing the grassroots Chesno campaign for the integrity of candidates to Parliament, which has mobilized thousands of volunteers and much in-kind support. Yet in many other countries where the Internet and social media have started to be used for whistleblowing, international donors hire intermediaries

with little or no local knowledge (such as TechSoup Global) who lecture the locals on the benefits of Facebook rather than endorsing and supporting the local efforts that are already underway. As normative constraints in corrupt societies are more often exercised against whistleblowers than against corrupt officials, it is essential that donor groups provide political support and take their cues from local actors rather than trying themselves to direct the creation of domestic forces in favor of change.

### **Good Intentions, Limited Results**

Despite their good intentions, donors have achieved limited results. Many shy away from tackling political anticorruption, the only approach that might actually curb competitive particularism. Donors instead prefer to train government officials, although there is little evidence that such programs in and of themselves are effective in controlling corruption. In fact, donors have few instruments for measuring what they do well and what they could do better. For instance, a lot of support goes to the training of investigative journalists, yet the efficacy of such training is questionable, as each country has its own unique set of obstacles to investigative reporting. Locals are bound to know better than outsiders how to gather and check data in their own contexts. Their problem is the lack of autonomous media outlets to publish the stories of the watchdogs or to galvanize anticorruption campaigns. Online publications and social networks increasingly appear to be the solution, as in Mexico, where anonymous bloggers fight organized crime more vigorously than established publications. Few donor programs support the establishment of independent media outlets, or seek to ensure that such outlets, which cannot be economically viable in countries dominated by particularism, survive. Moreover, there is an acute lack of long-term support for building widespread, grassroots watchdog activity and disseminating its findings via bloggers and even ordinary citizens with mobile phones.

Yet our finding that Internet access is closely associated with control of corruption shows that there is huge potential in using online media to build control of corruption. And there are ways of circumventing censorship and repression in some authoritarian countries—by placing watchdog platforms on servers abroad, for example. Strange as it may sound, opening an Internet cafe in every village may be a more effective approach to anticorruption than the establishment of an anticorruption agency. While the Emile Zolas of the world may be rarities, nearly all societies produce figures of this type. The key is to help build sustainable collective-action networks around them until the society reaches a reasonable level of normative constraints, so that these corruption fighters no longer remain isolated and exceptional.

## NOTES

1. Alina Mungiu-Pippidi, "Corruption: Diagnosis and Treatment," *Journal of Democracy* 17 (July 2006): 86–99.
2. See also Anna Persson, Bo Rothstein, and Jan Teorell "The Failure of Anti-Corruption Policies: A Theoretical Mischaracterization of the Problem," University of Gothenburg Quality of Governance Institute Working Paper 2010, 19, available at [www.sida.se/PageFiles/39460/Failure%20Anti\\_Corruption%20policy%20%282%29.pdf](http://www.sida.se/PageFiles/39460/Failure%20Anti_Corruption%20policy%20%282%29.pdf).
3. See Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson, *Economic Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).
4. See Elie Halévy, *History of the English People in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Ernest Benn, 1961), 43–45.
5.  $AdjRsq=0.585$  at 54 countries. For full results, see the table "Association Between Political and Nonpolitical Groups" at [www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/supplemental-material](http://www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/supplemental-material).
6. See, for instance, Daniel Treisman, "The Causes of Corruption: A Cross-National Study," *Journal of Public Economics* 76 (June 2000): 399–457.
7. See also Douglas Baer, "Voluntary Association Involvement in Comparative Perspective," in Lars Trägårdh, ed., *State and Civil Society in Northern Europe: The Swedish Model Reconsidered* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007), 67–125; Marcia Grimes, "The Role of Civil Society Organizations in Combatting Corruption," paper presented at the MPSA Annual National Conference, Chicago, 2–6 April 2008, [www.allacademic.com/meta/p266844\\_index.html](http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p266844_index.html); Aymo Brunetti and Beatrice Weder, "A Free Press Is Bad News for Corruption," *Journal of Public Economics* 87 (August 2003): 1801–24.
8. See the regression table "Effect of Press Freedom on Corruption," at [www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/supplemental-material](http://www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/supplemental-material).
9. For full models, see Alina Mungiu-Pippidi et al., *Contextual Choices in Fighting Corruption: Lessons Learned*, NORAD, Report 4/2011, July 2011, available at [www.norad.no/en/tools-and-publications/publications/publication?key=383808](http://www.norad.no/en/tools-and-publications/publications/publication?key=383808).
10. S.N. Eisenstadt and L. Roniger, *Patrons, Clients and Friends: Interpersonal Relations and the Structure of Trust in Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).
11. Nathan Miller, *Stealing from America: A History of Corruption from Jamestown to Whitewater* (New York: Marlowe, 1996), 232.
12. See also Pippa Norris, ed., *Public Sentinel: News Media and Governance Reform* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2010), available at <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTGOVACC/Resources/PublicSentineleBook.pdf>; Alina Mungiu-Pippidi, "How Media and Politics Shape Each Other in the New Europe," in Karol Jakubowicz and Miklós Sükösd, eds., *Finding the Right Place on the Map: Central and Eastern European Media Change in a Global Perspective* (Chicago: IntellectBooks, 2008), 87–100.
13. Alina Mungiu-Pippidi, "The Experience of Civil Society as an Anticorruption Actor in East Central Europe," *Romanian Journal of Political Science* 10, no. 2 (2010): 5–25.