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Moving Away From Corrupt Equilibrium:
'Big Bang' Push Factors and Progress Maintenance

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Moving away from corrupt equilibrium: 'big bang' push factors and progress maintenance[1]

Alexander Kupatadze*

Abstract

Corruption is a complex problem and there are no easy ways for its solution. Most countries are stuck in corrupt equilibrium with little chance for endogenous change. The internal forces of public pressure, political leadership, free media and anti-corruption institutions as well as external dynamics of coercive, economic and normative leverage of international actors may push for the change. The risk is that corrupt interests may hijack progress and even reverse achievements. I argue that the interplay between various elements of these variables may move the polity away from corrupt equilibrium to a better one as well as control for the spoiler trap. Over the long-term the institutionalization of anti-corruption reform and transforming social norms are important to sustain progress.

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Table of Contents

1. Introduction	3
2. Corrupt Equilibrium	4
3. Internal Forces Disrupting Corrupt Equilibrium	7
3.1 Social Protest and Related Political Change	8
3.2 The Role of Political Leadership	10
3.3 Free Media	12
3.4 Anti-Corruption Agencies	12
3.5 Petty and 'Black' Corruption vs. 'White' and 'Grey' Corruption	13
4. External Forces Disrupting the Corrupt Equilibrium	14
5. Maintaining a Less Corrupt Equilibrium	17
6. Conclusions	18
Bibliography	20
List of GEG Working Papers	28

1. Introduction

In the literature on political transitions it has been argued that some post-transition countries may become trapped in a 'gray zone' when 'transitions get stuck.' (Przeworski 1991, Carothers 2002). Similarly, empirical evidence suggests that countries often get stuck in vicious cycles of malfeasance and corruption despite major economic transformations or political developments. Nevertheless we have several cases of remarkable transitions from high corrupt regimes to less corrupt environments where progress has been sustained at least over several years or for more than a decade. This paper is about conceptualizing the 'gray zone' of corruption, discussing the push and pull factors that move polities away from corrupt equilibrium to better one, and outlining the factors which help to sustain progress.

For the purposes of this paper I adopt Philp's (2011) definition of corruption:

> Corruption in politics occurs where a public official (A), acting in ways that violate the rules and norms of office, and that involve personal, partisan or sectional gain, harms the interests of the public (B) (or some sub-section there-of) who is the designated beneficiary of that office, to benefit themselves and/or a third party (C) who rewards or otherwise incentivises A to gain access to goods or services they would not otherwise obtain.[2]

This definition is most comprehensive because it accommodates often-overlooked issues such as influence trading, systems of patronage, the use of legal means to deliver favours and illegal funding to groups rather than individuals that can indirectly lead to private gain (Yadav 2011). Also, it does not exclude the acts that are not restricted by the legislation such as state capture. The literature often differentiates between grand and petty corruption. Grand corruption 'occurs at the highest levels of governments and involves major government projects' (Rose Ackerman 1999, p.27) and petty corruption 'occurs within a framework where basic laws and regulations are in place and implementing officials seize upon opportunities to benefit personally (Rose Ackerman 2006, p. xviii).

The paper starts by describing and conceptualising corrupt equilibrium. Then the paper moves on to discuss the internal and external dynamics that may move the polity away from corrupt equilibrium to a better one. Public pressure and social protest, political leadership, free media, anti-corruption institutions are discussed, followed by the coercive, economic and normative leverage of external actors. It is argued that primarily petty and 'black' types of corruption are fought rather than other types that are prevalent in many different countries albeit to various extents, including contemporary achievers against corruption and developed Western democracies. Then the question is asked how better equilibrium can be maintained, and three mutually-reinforcing pathways are identified: – continuous internal public pressure, aided by external leverage and support and the capacity of the anti-corruption institutions to perpetuate themselves. Over the long-term the institutionalization of anti-corruption reforms and transforming social norms are most important to sustain progress. A brief conclusion sums up the findings.

[2] As Philps acknowledges A and C sometimes can be one and the same as in kleptocracies

2. Corrupt equilibrium

The major thrust of this section goes against the frequently made assumption that political competition and elections are automatic remedies against corruption. I demonstrate first, that corrupt equilibria can be either competitive or collusive and second, that corrupt equilibria can coexist with elections.

The market derived model of 'competition' is viewed as the most important mechanism in controlling corruption (Gerring and Thacker 2004). Public choice literature explains corruption by a lack of competition (Montinola and Jackman, 2002, p. 149). A multitude of actors vying for power are more likely to hold each other in check (Persson, Tabellini and Trebbi 2002, Grzymala-Busse 2003). However, the proposition that political competition reduces corruption lacks compelling proof and empirical evidence is mixed (Svensson 2005).

The point often missed in political competition arguments is that often political actors do not check each other against corruption but they rather compete over the illicit rents. In this case competition is about who is more corrupt rather than who is less corrupt. Political competition is not exogenous to corruption because the prospect of corrupt income may motivate politicians to collude and thus eliminate competition. Further political competition may create incentives for using clientelism to mobilize supporters and more importantly it may make state apparatus dysfunctional, as was the case in post-Orange revolution Ukraine when the struggle between President Viktor Yuschenko and Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko shut down the window of opportunity. Like Ukraine, political competition has not lead to decreasing levels of corruption in Kyrgyzstan where competition has degenerated into a corrupt game between various political factions (Kupatadze 2012). Analysts writing on Africa found that more political competition leads to even more corruption (Szeftel 2000). On the other hand there is a variation in the effect of a lack of political competition on corruption levels. Countries like Singapore and Hong Kong that are achievers against corruption have little or no political competition (Quah 2006). The Central Asian autocracies that also lack political competition are rather kleptocracies than reformers. This reaffirms the importance of good/bad leadership that is discussed below.

Political elites divide the spoils among themselves either in collusion or competition with each other (Shleifer and Vishny 1993). Corruption can be pervasive in all kinds of political systems including highly competitive polities as well as outright autocracies. In fragile democracies with low-capacity institutions that are unable to channel political interest, competing elites are often divided along societal, ideological, class, ethnic, religious or regional lines. Some research has shown that ethno-linguistic fractionalization is positively correlated with corruption indices (Mauro 1995, Easterly and Levine 1997, Kingston 2003). This has been referred to as the 'common pool' problem, where different ethnic elites seize their share in the pool of rents (Persson, Roland, and Tabellini 1997).[3] If each fraction gets the region, Ministry or sector of the economy under its control, they may engage in competitive rent-seeking that is either an uncoordinated process, where the actors do not take into account the effect of their actions on the rents of others (Easterly and Levin 1997, p.1214-5), or a coordinated action that rests on an implicit agreement to collude (Gebara 2007). This collusion can be the outcome of an agreement between multiple actors to divide rents, or it can be imposed by an authoritarian political system. In any case the bribes and the rents are predictable and corrupt

[3] Cultural essentialists would argue that ethnic fractionalization is related with particularized trust where the kinship group trust only the people of their own kin and this explains the effect on corruption

equilibrium is stable. Collusion produces a centralized type of corruption where the bribes are extorted by a joint monopoly of rent-seeking elites (Bardhan 2006). A lack of collusion produces decentralized corruption where there are several independent actors trying to maximize their illicit income in competition with others. The following table outlines four 'ideal types' of corrupt equilibrium.

	Low centralization	**High centralization**
Low political competition	Controlled and decentralized Mainly autocracies Two or three actors Bribes and rents are either predictable or less predictable Example: Russia under Putin	Collusive and centralized Mainly totalitarian states One actor Bribes and rents are predictable Example: North Korea, Turkmenistan
High political competition	Chaotic and decentralized Dysfunctional states Multiple actors Bribes and rents are less predictable Example: Georgia under Shevardnadze, Russia under Yeltsin	Competitive and centralized Fragile democracies Multiple actors Bribes are predictable Example: Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan

Competitive equilibriums (chaotic and decentralized, competitive and centralized) are less sustainable because the risk of exposure is higher and the process of decision-making is complicated because many actors are involved (Maesschalck and Van De Walle 2006). The actors may reach an agreement and may not intervene in each other 'influence areas'; however there is always someone who is not satisfied with the status-quo. Demand for a greater share may lead to conflict that either maintains the status-quo or results in a new equilibrium. Disagreement on the division of markets and a constant struggle for greater turf may drive up corruption costs and may destabilize the regime, leading to greater discontent among businesses and the general public. This may create pressure to negotiate, at least temporarily, or may motivate one actor to monopolize corruption. In any case, competitive equilibriums are more sensitive to external shocks and are more likely to move to better equilibriums. Collusive regimes are more stable, and are therefore harder to abandon unless there is a major external shock (external invasion) or complete elite reshuffle (through revolution).

In corrupt equilibrium, except in 'collusive and centralized' regimes, elections make little difference because incumbents may have a lower chance of winning without illicit electoral tactics; hence these tactics can be highly attractive. Elections, which are usually expensive, may exacerbate

incentives to raise illicit funds and can lead to abuse of power for private ends (Heywood 1996, Geddes 1997, Chang 2005, Yadav 2011). There are enough examples of notoriously corrupt politicians being elected and re-elected in circumstances where either the electorate faces the choice between a corrupt incumbent and an equally corrupt challenger (Glaeser and Goldin 2004, p. 10), and/or there is a 'real accountability' problem of a lack of accurate information and too much mud-slugging by the press (Besley, Pande and Rao 2005, Besley 2007, Collier 2009). Voting patterns can also be influenced by numerous other factors such as historical circumstances, ethnic/regional/clan loyalty and others (Bardan and Mookherjee 2004, p. 170).

In all four types of equilibrium corruption is used for 'distributive' and 'informational' control of elite factions in the centre and on the periphery, albeit to different extents. Also, institutions are often designed for extortion rather than for delivering public goods. In a nutshell, it is often more efficient to allow and rely on corruption rather than engage in comprehensive public sector reform that is expensive and often more costly than doing nothing (Geddes 1991, p. 373, Kpundeh 1998). Not only is it difficult to achieve, but public sector reform may also alienate political allies and destabilise the bureaucratic apparatus. For this reason a bad status quo may persist because of uncertainty regarding who will gain from the reform (Fernandez and Rodrik 1991). Instead of tackling corruption, there can be benefits for political elites if they rely on it.

Political leadership may 'pragmatically accept' the existence of corruption (Persson, Rothstein and Teorell 2012) or even deliberately design and perpetuate corrupt institutions (Hellman 1998, Ganev 2005). This may come in the form of excessive bureaucracy that needs to be greased by bribes (Golden 2003), or partially reformed institutions where rules and norms remain ambiguous enough to be interpreted in different ways (Hellman 1998). Rent-seeking elites may use it not only for self-enrichment but for accommodating diverging interests.

Corruption is not only an access point used by informal and disadvantaged groups to participate in political decision-making or a way to circumvent inefficient bureaucracy (Gardiner 2009, Scott 2009), but it is a deliberate policy of incumbents to co-opt and accommodate diverging interests, ensure loyalty of regional 'clans,' and thus maintain political control (Khan 1998, Migdal 2001, p. 76). The political leadership in countries as diverse as Russia, Zaire and Spain have used patronage to attach peripheries to the centre (Hopkin and Mastropaolo 2001, Wrong 2000, Nemtsova 2013). This qualifies as 'political clientelism' or distributing public resources and offices in exchange of political allegiance (Kitschelt 2000), but it also provides a tool to consolidate power and involves clients as well as non-clients. Additionally corruption can be instrumentalized to establish bond reciprocity thus supplementing ideological and rational (career motivated) commitment.[4]

Corruption is not only the means of 'distributive control', to secure the loyalty of elites, but also the means of 'informational control', using the available evidence for blackmail. American political scientist Keith A. Darden shows how political leadership encourages corruption in order to use it afterwards for blackmail and control (Darden 2001). This is a form of hostage-taking, a political control strategy based on corruption. Competing elites often use incriminating information for blackmail, since the only 'adequate response to compromat is counter-compromat'[5] (Szilagyi 2002). Cases of punishing political defectors through initiating criminal investigations against them or releasing

[4] For instance Adolf Hitler has been using his discretionary funds paying off his officers through secret monetary gifts and landed estates in order to buy off their loyalty (Gooda 2004).

[5] 'Compromat' is the Russian word for 'compromising evidence'

compromising materials to the press, serve as warnings and suppress other potentially dissenting voices.

Political elites often agree then disagree on the expediency of corruption that leads to 'the institutionalisation of corruption', whereby corruption becomes the rule of the game (Teorell 2007). In this way corruption becomes a self-reinforcing institution where political actors share the beliefs that certain behaviour, in this case illicit transaction, will be followed in a particular situation, and each of them is thereby motivated to follow it (Greif 2001).

In this environment political elites are often stuck in corruption equilibrium 'when everyone expects that everyone else is corrupt' (Persson, Rothstein and Teorell 2012, p. 9). From the game theoretical framework the choice of being corrupt depends on strategic interaction between individuals. When one group believes that its competitor amasses significant resources by corruption it also tries to do the same (Rothstein 2011a, p. 102). By the same token, no politician in a competition can afford to give up their political tactics of patronage and corruption. This may make them better off only if other actors also reciprocate (Geddes 1991), but there is a lack of trust and the actors do not think that other actors will refrain from corruption (Rothstein, 2011a). The diffusion of corruption reduces its moral cost, lowers the risk of being denounced and marginalises those who remain honest (Della Porta and Vanucci 1999, p.19). In corrupt settings, politicians opt for corrupt alternatives because they lack the willingness or capacity to bear the costs of being honest (Levi 1988, Della Porta and Vannucci 1999). There is also a risk of going clean because there is a fear that corrupt politicians may use the proceeds of corruption to retain political power and thus out-compete the honest politicians (Buchanan 1993).

The key question asked over the next sections is how the change may occur? Or under what conditions corrupt equilibrium is abandoned for a better one? The intuitive answer would be that the change occurs when it is no longer in the interest of the stakeholders to reproduce the corrupt equilibrium. In other words, the change is deemed to happen when the benefits of abandoning corrupt equilibrium exceed the costs of maintaining it. Certainly the incentive structure depends on the type of equilibrium. Inherently the competitive regimes have more chance to break out of corrupt equilibrium. Also the variables discussed below play out differently in different equilibriums. To reiterate, in most cases several of these variables need to converge in order to have an impact on corruption levels.

3. Internal forces disrupting corrupt equilibrium

As the above discussion indicates, the study of how political power is exercised must be at the core of understanding corruption. As I demonstrated, corruption is often operationalised for consolidating political control. By implication, it can evolve from being a feature of a political system to being the political system itself (Meagher 2005). Hence the frequently-asked question 'how the political system can fight against corruption' is fundamentally wrong in this case. This suggests little chance for endogenous change in an environment that might require a strong external push or an internal transformation that brings a radical break with the past and/or a dramatic elite reshuffle.

The literature speaks about external threats (Kang 2002, Ulsaner 2008), social and economic crisis (Brinkerhoff 1999, Heilbrunn 2004, Schütte 2012), loss of war (Teorell and Rothstein 2012), mass uprisings against misrule (Kupatadze 2012), major corruption scandals (Heywood 1997, Doig

and Riley 1998) as the triggers of anti-corruption reform. Reducing corruption to less destructive levels requires revolutionary change in institutions (Diamond 2007, p. 119) and hence the non-incremental, 'big bang' shifts (Rothstein 2011b) have more potential to bring change. In this paper I focus on two dynamics that can move the polity away from corrupt equilibrium – internal dynamics of social protest and the related political change, and external dynamics of coercive, economic and normative leverage of international actors. At least some elements of these two explanations and possibly other factors must converge in order to move a country from high to lower corruption levels.

Free media and anti-corruption agencies are regarded as 'secondary' variables because they are 'not enough' for moving polity away from corrupt equilibrium. In corrupt equilibriums establishing anti-corruption agencies with some degree of autonomy and independence is a collective action problem, and even if it is established it may be undermined by corrupt interest. The media in corrupt equilibrium is sometimes pluralistic/competitive but politically partisan since its independence is undermined by the efforts of corrupt interest to manipulate and hijack media sources. However, as demonstrated below, the two often work effectively in interplay with other factors.

3.1. Social protest and related political change

The contemporary world is experiencing an increasing number of social protests and popular movements where corruption is at the very least an important contributing factor. Most of these popular movements lack any other ideological basis and are mainly directed against parasitical and corrupt elites. In 2011, corruption was named as a mobilising factor behind the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt, and was a determining variable in sparking India's largest protest movements.[6] In the case of India, corruption was both a structural and a proximate cause, while in the Middle Eastern cases it provided a general context for generating public discontent rather than triggering the movement. Earlier, a wave of 'anti-corruption revolutions' swept over post-Soviet Eurasia between 2003-2005 (the Rose Revolution in Georgia in 2003, the Orange Revolution in Ukraine in 2004, and the Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan in 2005).[7] There are historical precedents too. Corruption has caused discontent and disillusionment culminating in military coups in Brazil in 1964, Ghana in 1979 and Pakistan in 1999 (Yadav 2011). Official corruption was a reason behind the student demonstration at Tiananmen Square in 1989 (Hao and Johnston 2009). This indicates that corruption has become a powerful mass mobilising issue across distinct political, social and cultural settings, feeding general discontent and generating a common sense that society has significant problems. Widespread bribery undermines political systems because it promotes inequality (Uslaner 2005) and contributes to mounting public anger since it produces a large mass of discontented individuals who have been denied access to public services due to corruption.

Precisely because corruption is contributing to the mobilisation of the masses and exerting popular pressure on the government it emerges as the salient issue since the ruling elites need to legitimize themselves. In a nutshell, the cost to political leadership of maintaining corrupt equilibrium is associated with decreasing legitimacy that is far outweighed by potential gain of garnering more

[6] On Egypt see Sharp (2011), The Guardian (2011); On Tunisia see Assaad (2011), Ayadi, Colombo, Paciello, Tocci (2011); On India see Sharma (2011), Voice of America (2011).

[7] On the Rose Revolution see for instance Shelley and Scot (2003); Kandelaki (2006); Regarding the Orange Revolution: Yuryi Lutsenko repeated several times that it was primarily an anti-criminal revolution, see for instance Lutsenko quoted in Kyiv Post, 23 July 2008. On the Tulip Revolution, see Aslund (2005), Radnitz (2006).

public support and increase and/or re-gain international prestige. In collusive and centralized equilibrium social protest is more likely to succeed if it climaxes in a revolution that may bring about a complete elite reshuffle. In other types of equilibrium the popular movements with corruption high on their agendas may have a bigger impact. For instance progress has been noted in Tunisia, where its corruption measurement indices improved after its revolution (US department of State 2012). The Arab Spring's contagious effect was felt outside of the region too. In January 2011 Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliev, alarmed by the regime change in Middle Eastern autocracies, announced a year of anti-corruption measures that were followed by a number of dismissals from lower ranks of bureaucracy. Even though many of these dismissals were regarded more as score-settling and 'witch hunts' than as comprehensive fights against bribery, they still had some positive results. For instance informal salary payments have stopped for a few months (Safiyev 2013).

Hence even if the impact is limited, and the social protests do not culminate with revolutions, over the medium or long-term these may still contribute to better equilibrium. The case of Russia is interesting in this regard. An end to endemic bribery dominated the newly born public protest rhetoric in late 2011 and early 2012. The key slogan of the initial gatherings on Bolotnaya square and Sakharov Avenue in Moscow was 'Russia without Corruption'. The emergence of anti-corruption activist Alexey Navalny as one of the key leaders of the movement demonstrates the salience of the corruption issue. In March 2012 46 percent of the respondents surveyed by the Levada Center thought that Putin's priority should be fighting corruption.[8] On the back of popular protests, Vladimer Putin adopted new anti-corruption rhetoric. In a letter entitled 'on our economic tasks' published in the newspaper Vedomosti on 28 January 2012, he spoke of systemic corruption and the need to clean up Russian bureaucratic apparatus. Since then, Putin has made the fight against corruption his central electoral issue, and has campaigned on the promise of curbing bribery, thus mobilizing anti-corruption sentiments as an electoral resource (Krastev and Neier 2004). By hijacking the popular movement's agenda, Putin has tried to make a new pact with the wider population and the younger urban middle class that was widely dissatisfied with his policies over the last years, and constituted the most active part of the popular movement. However, the new policy risks undermining the existing pact with the patronage networks and corrupt officials. Some think that this dynamic may eventually destabilize Putin's powerbase (Kratsev and Inozemtsev 2013), which is highly likely unless the results of the anti-corruption campaign are felt by the larger population in the form of effective and corruption-free public services.

A few months after his [re]election a number of high ranking officials have been fired on corruption charges, including the Minister of Defence. Despite the arrests little has changed in terms of everyday bribery, but the public has been divided over the campaign motives. According to the Russian Public Opinion Research Center's (2012) poll, 45 percent of the respondents think that Putin has followed up on his pre-election promise and another 45 percent thinks that he is score-settling and putting up a political fight. Notwithstanding the motives of his leadership, some changes have made steps in the right direction. Several laws have been introduced including the 2012 ratification of OECD Convention on Combating Bribery and the 2013 prohibition on state officials to possess foreign property and bank accounts. Despite the potential for selective application of the law and its use to ensure political loyalty, a series of high profile resignations by deputies and senators indicates that public exposure of corruption is no longer a pointless exercise. Since 2012 Russia has moved to better equilibrium, although it is not clear how far the anti-corruption fight can go or how sustainable

[8] came only second after economic growth with 59%

the results will be. Nevertheless it may transpire that the activity of self-interested politicians could unintentionally benefit the public good (Moe 1984).

Hence social protest provides a 'window of opportunity' for change, even more so if it climaxes into revolution that eliminates the influence of 'old guard' and reshuffles ruling elites. The political leadership in Georgia was not constrained by the spoiler trap because of the radical reshuffle that distinguished the Rose Revolution from Ukraine's Orange Revolution (2004) or Kyrgyzstan's Tulip Revolution (2005), where the transitions were 'pacted' and 'old guard' retained significant power. Georgian leadership enjoyed high levels of legitimacy and hence could afford radical, often unpopular reforms that cut red tape and established better functioning institutions (Kupatadze 2012). This highlights the importance of political leadership that is discussed in the next section.

3.2. The role of political leadership

If someone could search through the speeches and contributions at major international anti-corruption conferences, 'political will' would prove to be the most commonly mentioned phrase. The political will argument comes in all forms as a motive, an explanation and as a solution for the problem of corruption, without much effort to unpack the vague concept. This demonstrates how elusive the term is, up to the point where it almost becomes useless. More importantly, however, it indicates how much importance is attributed to political leadership. Indeed, there are several notorious examples of how the committed leadership may engage in successful anti-corruption campaigns (Georgia, Rwanda, Singapore, etc.) 'Quality of political class is an important determinant of good policy', as Besley (2007) puts it. Senior (2006) indicated that politicians are 'the principal people' in the struggle against corruption 'because they make the laws, and allocate the funds that enable the laws to be enforced.' Even though civil society and other stakeholders are important, ultimately it is the political leadership that introduces rules and enforces them.

Many tools proposed to use against corruption, such as strict sanctions, better salaries, meritocratic recruitment and deregulation have been based on a principal-agent framework (Banfield 1975, Becker and Stigler 1974, Klitgaard 1988) that builds on the assumption that bureaucracy can be disciplined by the benign politicians that are always interested in promoting public interest. However, politicians may not be primarily motivated by public interest, or may not seek a balanced set of controls or monitoring mechanisms (Moe 1984, Persson, Rothstein and Teorell 2012). Moreover, certain institutions can be designed to extort bribes (Sajo 2002). Politicians are self-interested actors that need to be 'rationally motivated', and may not be genuinely driven by the belief in creating collective good that would benefit future generations.

Political will, as it is defined in literature, embraces commitment, capacity and enforcement relating to anti-corruption policy (U4 2010, Brinkerhoff 2000, Persson and Sjostedt 2012). All these aspects are important, but this approach often misses how the leadership considers corruption. The leadership may have different outlooks on types of corruption and how much of it can be tolerated or fought against, and hence may not regard it among key problems or consider it to be unacceptable. In the words of Alexander Wendt (2001, p. 1023) there must be a shared perception among the political elite as to whether corruption is a 'problem' (versus not) and whether it requires action (versus not). Commitment and enforcement come afterwards.

Hence 'the rational motivation' does not mean that norms and ideas do not matter. Historically it was the transformation in political thinking and the birth of new value systems in the political system that led to the decrease of corruption. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Western Europe the modern idea of the state as a moral entity did not go well with the pre-established concept of public office as private property (Swart 2002, p. 104). Simultaneously liberal values such as neutrality, impartiality, merit and egalitarianism took root (Hill 2006) and the standards of public conduct and administrative efficiency became established in public office, especially in nineteenth century Britain (Harling 1996, p. 10). In this period corruption became 'increasingly intolerable and unacceptable, for fundamental ideological and cultural reasons, to the elite which benefited from it' (Rubinstein 1983). However these elite projects have been crystallized as a result of interaction with organized societal actors, and have come about as a result of struggles for political power between the power-holders and their challengers and critics outside of power (Harling 1996, Neild 2002).

Even though this aspect of political contestation is important, hypothetically the leadership that is not constrained by organized [and potentially corrupt] interests, and that regards corruption as a security threat or a major problem, may bring change. This may also control for a spoiler trap because of limited access to power and hence lack of capacity to oppose reform. Historically corruption under cohesive elites, as in early Ayub Khan in Pakistan, early Naser Egypt, and early Ataturk Turkey were relatively low compared to fragmented elite structures as in post-war Thailand, early Stuart England, Ethiopia, Iran and Morocco in the 1970s (Scott 1972, p. 87). Some researchers have convincingly shown that more heterogeneous states perform poorly in terms of quality of government (Alesina et al. 2003). Among the contemporary achievers there are several countries that display either a one-party dominance system or a large extent of elite homogeneity. This explains the relative success of the authoritarian countries like Singapore, Rwanda, Qatar or Saudi Arabia where the nature of their political systems determine elite cohesiveness. In more democratic settings as in Botswana, low levels of corruption were partially explained by the absence of vested interests that could block the implementation of policies pursued by the regime (Taylor 2002, Eriksen 2011). This is commensurate with the literature on 'Weak Government Hypothesis' (Roubini and Sachs 1989, Ashworth et al. 2006, Coffé and Geys 2005, Goeminne et al. 2007) that argues that fragmented governments are less effective at responding to challenges, and that fractionalization decreases their decision-making capabilities.

This suggests that cohesive regimes matter, as does the sustainability of good leadership. The experience of Eastern Europe shows that changes in government may sometimes break momentum, resulting in abandonment or partial implementation of policies as a result of deliberately different approaches adopted (Batory 2010). If elite reshuffling contributes to better equilibrium, then stability of good leadership is also important for sustaining better equilibrium. This applies to the regime stability observed in Singapore (Quah 2006, 2008) and to the sequence of good leaders, as in Botswana (Beaulier 2003, Sebudubudu and Botlhomilwe 2011).

The role of political leadership is regarded as key in corruption control. However, there is a need for bottom-up control by civic society and the independent media in order to make sure that the political leadership upholds governance standards, and to ensure that progress achieved is not reversed by new leadership.

3.3. Free media

The role of pluralistic media is often emphasised as a critical stakeholder in the anti-corruption fight that demands accountability and provides transparency. Its role is conceived as the advocate, whistleblower, watchdog, etc (Johnston 2005, Malena 2009). The free media is one of the strongest predictors, as a number of studies demonstrate. Brunetti and Weder (2001) found that higher press freedom leads to lower corruption.

There are examples where countries with burgeoning pluralistic media are notoriously corrupt (Kyrgyzstan, Jamaica) and where countries with limited media freedom are successful in their fight against corruption (Saudi Arabia, Rwanda). There are examples of countries with long-standing experience of exposing illicit practices through various media sources (Russia, Ukraine, many African countries), but where corruption is still rampant. In corrupt equilibriums the media is either strictly controlled (low competition equilibriums) or pluralistic media is manipulated by political elites, for instance in Ukraine where leading television channels are controlled by the oligarchs close to the President Viktor Yanukovich, and editorial policies are often influenced by verbal instructions from the presidential administration to TV owners (Wilson 2012). In this kind of system serious investigative journalism is replaced by partisan mudslinging (Holmes 2006, p. 258). Ukrainian media is also known for the publication of sponsored texts to sully the name of political and business competitors (Matuszak 2012, p. 11). The instrumentalisation of media for private/group purposes is not unique to Ukraine and has been observed in many other countries ranging from Southern Europe and Latin America to Africa.[9]

However, empirical evidence indicates that interplay/interaction between the media and other factors are important. For example, media framing in India helped Anna Hazare in his battle against corruption (Arnold and Lal 2012); the cooperation between some government institutions, international donors and local media functioned successfully to reduce corruption in the Ugandan education sector (Hubbard 2007); and a foreign-funded media campaign successfully reduced the excessive pensions of retired top officials in Nicaragua, where new legislation was subsequently introduced.[10] The example of Indonesian anti-corruption commission outlined below also reinforces the point of media's importance. In addition, the use of social media has proved successful in putting pressure on corrupt governments in Russia, South Africa and during the Arab Spring protests.

3.4. Anti-corruption agencies

Designing the institutions that strengthen accountability is important for controlling corruption (Myerson 1993; Person & Tabellini 2000), but in corrupt equilibrium the establishment of efficient anti-corruption agencies is a collective action problem (Rothstein 2011b). The agencies may still be established but in many cases, as in most of the African countries, they may fail due to a lack of political commitment and the absence of a broad coalition that would support reform (Heilbrunn 2004, p. 2, Quah 2006). Generally ACAs need the cooperation of all law enforcement agencies such as the prosecutor's office, police and secret services in order to be effective. These agencies can be

[9] For South European and Latin American cases see Hallin (2002); for Zambia see Mukanga (2013) and for India see (Besley and Prat 2002)
[10] See the implemented projects section of PTF (partnership for transparency fund), available online at http://ptfund.org/apply-grant/examples-of-supported-projects/

undermined by the political elites that are not interested in fighting corruption and establish ACAs only for international prestige and due to compliance with international legislation (Meagher 2005, De Sousa 2010).

The key determinant that defines the success of ACAs is operational independence (broad mandate, strong legal basis, immunity from prosecution, budget guarantee by law or constitution, etc).[11] The continuous support of the political leadership is crucial, but if the ACAs are initially exogenously imposed and are set up with a broad mandate and a certain degree of independence, and if this results in successful fight against corruption, ACAs may have better chances for survival. The example of Indonesia is telling.

Established in 2002, Indonesia's anti-corruption commission (KPK) had some remarkable success in terms of prosecuting high ranking officials and businessmen. However, since 2009 the corrupt interest in legislative and executive branches of government started working to undermine KPK. The legislators drafted the laws weakening KPK, law enforcement structures initiated criminal cases against KPK leadership, and KPK became near-isolated as inter-institutional cooperation suffered. However, the commission fought for its autonomy and its rights, mainly capitalizing upon its well-established links in civil society and found numerous allies including military, religious organisations, international organisations, media, NGOs and the general public. Public demonstrations and pressure from civic stakeholders made the leadership back down (Bayuni 2012 Kuris 2012). This indicates that ACAs supported by stakeholders within civil society and the international community may succeed in fighting corruption. As the above example shows, going after the 'bigger fish' or fighting 'grand corruption' is the most important task, and as the next section demonstrates, governments often fail to deliver even in developed democracies.

3.5. Petty and 'black' corruption vs. 'white' and 'grey' corruption

Hidenheimer (2009) distinguishes between various normative evaluations of corrupt practices and speaks about black, grey and white corruption. 'Black corruption' would be seen as universally problematic that is condemned by both elites and the public. The involvement of a police general in drugs trafficking would fall under this category. 'Grey corruption' signifies that some actors may want to see the action punished but some others would be uncertain or unconcerned. Various forms of nepotism, patronage or lobbying may be included in this group. 'White corruption' can be regarded as tolerable by elites and the public. The favours benefiting a constituency in the case of elected officials may fall under this category. Implicitly, normative consensus is more likely to develop against black types of corruption. According to cultural relativist argument, corruption means different things in different contexts/countries and there is a wide disagreement on its definition. Many politicians would understand corruption as outright bribe-taking and would not think of nepotism (Philp 2009) or instrumentalizing state institutions for private or group profit (state capture), such as using the police for maintaining political power, as yet another form of corruption.

The countries that have successfully fought low-level bribery and have made strong advances in Transparency International's index still face significant problems of 'grand corruption', state and/or market capture that is generally less reflected in perception indices or other available measurements

[11] See Jakarta Statement on Principles for Anti-Corruption Agencies, Jakarta, 26-27 November 2012

of corruption. These practices include private and group interest undermining market competition and elite networks using power to control legal and economic structures. This remains a problem in Georgia (Kupatadze 2012), Rwanda (Booth and Golooba-Mutebi 2012), Hong Kong (Yung 2010) and among other 'achievers', albeit in different forms and to various extents. Numerous forms of grey and white corruption (various forms of lobbying, 'revolving door' that undermines fair market competition, etc) remain an issue in many West European and North American countries (Wedel 2009).

Certainly petty and grand corruption is inter-related, and each changes depending on the changes in the other. If bribery is eliminated in low level bureaucracy it undermines pyramid structures of corruption (Wade 1982). In parallel with delivering corruption-free public services, the political leadership may remain involved in grand corruption for instance in the form of discretional distribution of public contracts to 'friendly' business groups, or in supporting import-export market monopolies that contribute to political party coffers. Petty corruption, or bribery in sectors where the state interacts with the citizenry (such as licensing, passports, police) is a useful target because despite the culturally relativistic understanding of corruption, this kind of bribery is more a source of popular discontent rather than a widely endorsed activity; it represents a basic denial of justice (Johnston 2005) and reinforces existing inequalities (Uslaner 2008). Generally, moving towards better equilibrium means limiting petty and black corruption types. Grand and white/grey corruption may also change in form but it is harder to control.

4. External Forces Disrupting the Corrupt Equilibrium

External forces may either trigger internal developments or may help internal dynamics to have more impact on corruption levels. Had Russia been under external threat, or subject to conditionality standards from large supranational organizations, social protests might have had more of an impact. The convergence of domestic demand and foreign pressure may motivate leadership to initiate reforms and reduce corruption as the cases of Bulgaria and Romania demonstrate (Ivanov 2010). Similarly, in Georgia, the electors' support for strong measures against corruption have converged with broad political consensus over the foreign policy conditions of EU membership that have established incentives for the leadership to implement wide-sweeping reforms in the aftermath of the Rose Revolution in 2003. This has been exacerbated by the Russian threat, and the desire of the leadership to build an 'alternative governance model in post-Soviet Eurasia,' meaning a government marked by low levels of corruption, in contrast to the way Russia functions (Civil Georgia 2008, Saakashvili 2010).

External dynamics that create incentives for moving to better equilibrium can be divided in three broad categories: normative, coercive and economic. The states may either be coerced into pursuing reform agendas or may emulate successful governance models in order to gain international legitimacy and demonstrate compliance with international standards (Weyland 2005, p. 270). Normative category includes the diffusion of international norms of 'good governance' and the emulation of foreign models. Coercive category involves the conditionality of international organisations like EU (Grigorescu 2006, Batory 2010) and external threat of war or invasion that may incentivize the regime to establish better functioning institutions. Economic category includes the introduction of competition through exposure to international trade, and the pressure to reduce the illicit tax of corruption on international businesses. The agents of change can be various states and international organisations.

Type of external dynamics	Instruments of change	Agents of change
Normative	Norms of office conduct, transparency and accountability Norms of legal-rational bureaucracy Emulation of successful foreign models of governance	EU, UN, World Bank, OECD, Council of Europe Achievers against corruption (Singapore, Estonia, Chile, etc)
Coercive	Conditionality International exposure External Threat	EU, Transparency International, Global Witness Belligerent states
Economic	Problematizing corruption as 'additional illicit tax' Introducing competitive pressures Investments go to the neighbours if corruption persists	IMF, World Bank, Some transnational corporations

There is some evidence that the lack of competitive pressures and openness to international trade perpetuates corrupt practices (Sandholtz and Gray 2003). Corruption hurts the prospects of foreign direct investment by adding costs to international businesses through imposing kickbacks and bribes. Hence investors may avoid countries with corruption problems and go directly to their neighbours instead.[12] This pressure may motivate the leadership, especially the leadership of resource-poor countries in desperate need of foreign investment, to reduce corruption (Habib and Zurawicki 2002, Lambsdorff 2003).

Normatively, the emulation of foreign models by the developing countries plays a significant role in anti-corruption campaigns. For example Japan was a role model to South Korea, and Finland to Estonia (Mungiu-Pippidi 2012). EU governance standards have had a significant impact on Balkan countries and more recently on post-Soviet Eastern Europe (Moldova, Georgia). The impact is both direct, through integrating corruption in pre-accession criteria, as well as indirect, through triggering reform of public institutions and increasing their transparency and efficiency (Vachudova 2009). Normative influence is difficult to exert over low competition equilibriums because the space of deliberation and contestation is often limited. However, normative influence may follow economic relationships as a consequence of increased socialization.

[12] It needs to be noted that some investors may prefer investing in centralized corruption equilibriums due to its predictability and also the possibility to deal with only one powerbroker.

The EU is both a normative and coercive agent. It has gradually developed as a civilizing, normative and postmodern political structure (Bull 1982, Manners 2002). Since the late 1990s corruption has become an important political criteria set out in the 'Copenhagen criteria' of EU accession. In the post-Cold war era there was a shift away from 'hard security' to 'soft security,' that identified corruption among the key concerns (Galeotti 2002). The internal soft security agenda for the EU, and the external agenda of bringing about institutional change in its neighbourhood and assuming more responsibility for ensuring peace and security in its periphery, has reinforced the export of 'good governance' standards and anti-corruption policies to the applicant states (Smith 2008, pp. 52-54). Fighting corruption was an important pillar in the foreign policy instruments of the EU, including the European-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP launched in Barcelona in 1995), the Group of State against corruption (GRECO established in 1999) and the Eastern European Neighborhood policy (ENP developed in 2004). All these instruments have set benchmarks and governance standards for the countries that wish to potentially qualify for EU membership. The researchers have observed identifiable progress in terms of establishing anti-corruption institutions and enacting appropriate legislations in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia and Bulgaria as a result of EU conditionality (Grigorescu 2006, Batory 2010). The progress was limited in the cases of Romania and Bulgaria, where problems with corruption and the penetration of politics by organized crime remained, but the trend of moving to better equilibrium is clearly recognizable (Vachudova 2009).

The emulation of foreign success models have sometimes been linked to the adoption of a neoliberal agenda, for instance the idea of creating a 'minimalist state'. This agenda played a key role in motivating political leadership in Estonia and Georgia to deregulate the state, and to cut the red tape that decreases bribery in public services due to the overall shrinking of unnecessary bureaucracy.[13] However, the same neoliberal agenda, for instance privatisation, has had a reverse effect on the overall levels of corruption in the aftermath of Soviet breakup (Reed 2002, Holmes 2006).

The 'transnational moral entrepreneurs' are other important agents of change that are defined as nongovernmental transnational organizations. These 'mobilize political opinion and popular support both within their host country and abroad, stimulate the creation of like-minded organisations in other countries' (Nadelmann 1990, Payne 2001), and are often comprised of international financial institutions that coordinate much-needed aid to developing countries and often influence the decision of investors. These organisations essentially use carrot and stick to induce countries to reform (Weyland 2005). Transparency International and Global Witness are good examples. These organisations have produced various evaluations and assessments to uncover corrupt practices in many different countries. Often a ranking in the TI corruption index is a matter of international prestige and a potential incentive or constraint for foreign investment.

Apart from the impact of benign state or non-state actors through conditionality, discourse or aid, some authors followed up on the Hobbesian emphasis on shared perception of threat as the foundation for collective action and focused on how external threat mobilizes the elites to implement dynamic reform. The logic is built on the earlier work of Tilly (1992) and Mann (1993). If the regimes are faced by real or perceived external threats that intend to invade or change the regime in the country, the regime attempts to strengthen the state in order to make it more efficient and functional.

[13] However there are opportunities in minimalist state too, because the state still retains some basic functions like building infrastructure of providing law and order (Hutchcroft 1997, p 641). On the other hand some of the notoriously clean countries for example in Scandinavia have big governments.

External threat increases the leaders' incentive to reduce opportunism and to move from predatory to productive practices (Kang 2002).

As Kang (2002, p.8) argues, in South Korea, Japan and the US, influences tended to disrupt the old order and a severe threat from North Korea provided impetus for growth. On the contrary, in the Philippines, Spain and America, colonialism tended to reinforce traditional political and economic patterns and the absence of any realistic threat provided Philippine leaders with little incentive to alter the existing arrangements. Woo (1991) describes the South Korean example as 'defensive industrialization' by a 'security state' emphasizing the extent to which external threat influenced the country's drive for development and internal discipline. The process of mobilizing against the external threat of China, at least in the initial stages, was important in the context of Singapore and Hong Kong, who were afraid to be dominated by a big neighbour (Ulsaner 2008). Hence the states under external threat strive to survive by reforming in ways that increase their capacity to mobilise resources, attract foreign investment, and establish good international reputations.

However, external dynamics need to converge with some other variables to have an impact on corruption levels. The external threat can also be manipulated for legitimizing authoritarian rule, decreasing the need for bargaining with other political actors, bolstering the image of ruling regime in a public eye, or increasing military expenditure rather than engaging in public sector reform (Abiodun 2000). It may also motivate short-term horizons for the elites who may grab state resources and transfer assets abroad as an insurance strategy in case of forceful elite turnover. Inherently this suggests that external threats may work better in competitive equilibriums with some presence of civil society and free media. Continuous foreign pressure is important but it may decline significantly; just as the EU's interest has declined regarding corruption in new member countries, which has led to a slump in anti-corruption activity (Pridham 2008, Batory 2010). This brings us to the discussion of the circumstances under which the momentum of the anti-corruption fight can be sustained.

5. Maintaining a less corrupt equilibrium

The important question is how progress can be maintained despite erratic political positions. Political regimes may make cosmetic changes to meet public demands or international requirements, but may maintain the most lucrative corruption channels or reverse the changes once the pressure declines. The spoilers, or those who benefit from corrupt practices, may sidestep and undermine anti-corruption institutions after EU membership is achieved or internal pressure subsides. Hence the key question is how to avoid the spoiler trap or, in other words, how to neutralize the efforts of corrupt stakeholders to reverse or undermine the anti-corruption reform.

The Eastern European experience shows that anti-corruption reform has been mainly exogenously imposed by EU, and that domestic pressures have been traditionally weak (Vachudova 2009), although there are successful examples of when the efforts involving the free media, anti-corruption agencies and non-governmental organizations have pressed for further change, for instance in Latvia (Pridham 2008), Hungary (Batory 2010) and Indonesia (Bayuni 2012, Kuris 2012).

The key point of departure here is that depending on the longevity and the depth of the anti-corruption fight it may generate its own momentum. Several years of experience of living in less corrupt environments may create different expectations in the citizenry. The delivery of public goods in a non-corrupt manner to citizens raises expectations for the future governments in case of

government changeover. This may become especially effective if civil society and the free media maintain pressure on the leadership. This pressure may prevent the retraction of anti-corruption legislation and prevent the leadership from undermining achieved progress. But this hypothesis only stands if the population 'feels' the reduction of bribery (Kratsev and Neier 2004, p.115). If the change is gradual, and usually time is required for the institutions and the legislation to take hold and have an impact, then the spoilers have better chances. In this case it would be easier to undermine institutions without facing powerful opposition backed by wider segments of the population. The institutions that have been established under external pressure may also become self-perpetuating as the case of Indonesia suggests. Hence there are three basic, mutually reinforcing mechanisms – public/civil society pressure to maintain better equilibrium, the capacity of the institutions to perpetuate themselves, and continuous leverage of external actors over governments as well as support for free media and civil society initiatives aimed at transparency and accountability.[14]

Ultimately anti-corruption reform needs to be institutionalized by creating effective institutions (for example independent and autonomous anti-corruption agencies), and by establishing functioning systems of checks-and-balances. As Felson (2011, p.15) argues, we can think of checks and balances as 'the theory for corruption control' because they can protect responsible decision and actions.

The longer-term effect of reforms may also be watered down by slowly-changing social norms of tolerance and encouragement for clientelistic and nepotistic practices. Even though the fear of punishment is important in generating greater self-discipline and rule-abiding behaviour, it needs to be complemented with other measures targeting these norms. Corruption as a culturally relativistic phenomenon is often understood differently across societies. Sandholtz and Koetzle (2000, p. 35) mention that 'what counts improper in one society does not in another.' Even though some have argued that corruption is morally disapproved of universally, including in the most corrupt societies (Noonan, 1987, Miller 2006, Widmalm 2008, Persson, Rothstein and Teorell 2012, p. 7), there is some evidence that condemnation of corrupt practices goes only so far, as it does not constrain the behaviour of the concerned person (Medard 2009, p. 387). For instance Yang (1988) showed that the Chinese admire the individual exploits of *guanxi*[15], while condemning its widespread use by others. Empirically there are cases of transformation from high to lower corruption levels (Georgia, Rwanda) under committed leadership in societies where corruption was considered a 'cultural habit' or 'way of life' just a few years before changes occurred. However, ignoring ingrained social norms may undermine reforms over the long-term if less committed leadership comes to power. Hence, any reforms must address social norms and transform political culture.

6. Conclusions

Corruption is a complex problem and there are no easy ways for its solution. Most countries are stuck in corrupt equilibrium with little chance for endogenous change. Nevertheless, the recent history of social movements and associated political change shows that corruption has become an important contributor to the mobilisation of the masses against the ruling regime and hence ranks high on the political agenda. The political leadership often uses anti-corruption activities to gain greater

[14] None of the these variables of maintaining momentum apply to collusive and centralized equilibrium or the totalitarian states.

[15] Chinese term used to describe informal relationships/networks that are often the basis for the exchange of favors

legitimacy internally and externally. The external dynamics are an amalgam of various coercive, normative and economic influences of international actors that may have an impact. Anti-corruption activities are often politically motivated and aim to secure the loyalty of various factions of political elites. However, internal pressures combined with external dynamics often bring change, and move the polity away from corrupt equilibrium to a better one.

Depending on the type of corrupt equilibrium, the interplay of diverse variables can move the polity towards better equilibrium. I suggest that public pressure/social protest, political leadership and the leverage of external actors are key, but free media and anti-corruption institutions can also be effective when combined with other factors. In any case, the impact on corruption levels is limited. I argue that primarily petty and 'black' types of corruption are fought, rather than other types that are prevalent in many different countries albeit to various extents, including contemporary achievers against corruption and developed Western democracies.

However, progress may be undermined and changes reversed by corrupt interest or by the spoiler trap that benefits from the status-quo. Three basic, mutually reinforcing mechanisms can control for the spoiler trap – public/civil society pressure to maintain better equilibrium; the capacity of the anti-corruption institutions/practices to perpetuate themselves; and continuous leverage of external actors over the governments as well as support for free media and civil society initiatives aimed at transparency and accountability. Ultimately anti-corruption reform needs to be institutionalised through creating effective institutions (for example independent and autonomous anti-corruption agencies) and by establishing functioning systems of checks-and-balances. The long-term effects of reforms may be watered down by slowly-changing the social norms of tolerance and transforming clientelistic and nepotistic practices. Any reform must address these norms and transform political culture.

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