

## Book Reviews

# Curbing Corruption: The Elusive Search for a Cure

Jon S. T. Quah is a professor of political science at the National University of Singapore and coeditor of the *Asian Journal of Political Science*. He was on sabbatical leave as a visiting scholar at the Asia-Pacific Research Center at Stanford University for six months in 2006.

E-mail: polqst@nus.edu.sg.

Roberta Ann Johnson, ed., *The Struggle against Corruption: A Comparative Study* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004). 192 pp., \$24.95 (softbound), ISBN: 1403962693.

Michael Johnston, ed., *Civil Society and Corruption: Mobilizing for Reform* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2005). 234 pp., \$35.00 (softbound), ISBN: 0761831258.

Bertram I. Spector, ed., *Fighting Corruption in Developing Countries: Strategies and Analysis* (Bloomfield, CT: Kumarian Press, 2005). 300 pp., \$25.95 (softbound), ISBN: 1565492021.

Nearly four decades ago, it was considered politically incorrect to undertake research on corruption, as it was “almost taboo as a research topic” and was “rarely mentioned in scholarly discussions on the problems of government and planning” (Myrdal 1968, 938–39). However, this taboo no longer exists, as research on corruption in many countries mushroomed into a “growth industry” in the 1990s. Indeed, Leiken notes that since the end of the Cold War, the number of news stories on corruption in the *Economist*, *Financial Times*, and *New York Times* “quadrupled between 1984 and 1995” (1996–97, 58). This “global corruption epidemic” appears to be the result of two trends: the emergence of civil societies and the disclosure of corruption in many countries, as well as a trend toward democracy and markets, which paradoxically has “increased both the opportunities for graft and the likelihood of exposure” (Leiken 1996–97, 58).

The globalization of corruption has contributed to an overriding concern among governments and international organizations about how to combat corruption. This concern has manifested itself in three ways: First, since the 1990s, many international conferences and workshops have been organized by the Asian Development Bank, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the

United Nations Development Programme, and the World Bank on the causes, consequences, and control of corruption in various countries. Second, Transparency International initiated the publication of the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) in 1995 to provide information on the perceived extent of corruption in participating countries. The sample size of the CPI increased from 41 in 1995 to 159 in 2005. The third and most relevant manifestation is the publication of many books and articles on corruption in recent years. Indeed, the three books reviewed here constitute only a small sample of such studies.<sup>1</sup> As Heineman and Heimann recently noted, “Since the mid-1990s, the issue of corruption has gained a prominent place on the global agenda” (2006, 75).

### Differing Objectives and Approaches

*The Struggle against Corruption: A Comparative Study*, edited by Roberta Ann Johnson, is the shortest of the three books under review and consists of four case studies on corruption in India, Israel, Russia, and the United States, plus two additional chapters. The book “examines the nuances, the compromises, the complexities, and the complexion of corruption and its remedies, as it operates in four different countries” (x), but it does not clearly set out its objectives or explain why these countries were selected. Instead, Johnson indicates that the four countries represent two pairings: India and Russia, which are perceived to be more corrupt than Israel and the United States, based on their ranking on Transparency International’s 2002 CPI (145). The book is intended as a text for undergraduate students and contains few policy recommendations.

In contrast, *Civil Society and Corruption: Mobilizing for Reform*, edited by Michael Johnston, is based on eight papers presented at the Center for Ethics and World Societies at Colgate University in Hamilton, New York, between 2000 and 2001. The book addresses the major question of “how to link reform to the kinds of problems and interests that will motivate citizens to take part [in grassroots reforms].”

Rather than serving as “a how-to manual or toolkit for grassroots reform,” it explores “key issues and difficulties involved in grassroots reform, and seeks lessons from both successful and failed efforts” (xiii). Curiously, only three of the 10 chapters focus specifically on the link between civil society and corruption.

Apart from Johnston, who is perhaps the guru of corruption research in the United States, the other contributors are scholars (Arvind Jain, Susan Pharr, Louise Shelley, and Alice Sindzingre), consultants (Sahr J. Kpundeh and Donald Sherck), and practitioners (Jenny C. Y. Chan and Andrea Suarez Falken). The book includes a useful research guide to the literature on corruption by Mary Jane Walsh, who is a librarian at Colgate University.

*Fighting Corruption in Developing Countries: Strategies and Analysis*, by Bertram I. Spector, recommends a sectoral approach to combating corruption. Its chapters are based on research conducted as part of two contracts awarded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and Management Systems International, an international development consulting firm based in Washington, D.C.

The idea of a sectoral approach to fighting corruption was promoted by Madalene O’Donnell, who was the former senior anticorruption adviser in USAID’s Democracy and Governance Office. In her foreword to Spector’s book, O’Donnell attributes USAID’s preparation of “new regional and global strategies” to fight corruption on a sectoral basis to two factors: President George W. Bush’s announcement of the Millennium Challenge Account in March 2002 to reward countries that make an effort to curb corruption, and the new U.S. National Security Strategy of September 2002, which identified corruption as one of the factors responsible for making “weak states vulnerable to terrorist networks and drug cartels within their borders.”

### **Major Findings: What Have We Learned?**

Because space constraints do not permit a detailed discussion of all the findings of the three books, only the major ones will be highlighted here.

#### ***The Power of Comparative Analysis***

Comparative analysis of the successes and failures of anticorruption strategies in different countries may be useful in unraveling the reasons for their varying levels of effectiveness. However, this assumes that the countries selected share common criteria, so that comparisons among them are valid.

*The Struggle against Corruption* illustrates the pitfalls of comparative analysis. Johnston admits that there are “enormous differences” among the countries that she

chose (145). The countries vary widely in size and population. It might have been better to substitute either Chile or Germany (ranked 17th and 18th, respectively, on the 2002 CPI) for Israel because it is so much smaller than the others. Although Russia is five times the size of India, India’s population exceeds that of Russia eightfold. The United States is the richest country in terms of gross domestic product per capita, whereas India is the poorest. As far as governance indicators are concerned, the United States has the highest scores on the World Bank’s six governance indicators (voice and accountability, political stability, government effectiveness, regulatory quality, rule of law, and control of corruption; Kaufmann, Kraay, and Mastruzzi 2005), whereas Russia’s scores (except for political stability) are the lowest. It is difficult to draw valid comparisons among such disparate environments.

Johnson attributes the higher level of perceived corruption in India and Russia to the absence of “independent, fair, strong, and effective laws and law enforcement agencies” and a “civic-culture-based system” in which civil servants are expected to serve the public impartially (155–58). But she leaves out the critical factor of political will or the commitment of the political leadership in these countries to impartially implement the anticorruption measures adopted (Quah 2003, 181). The most useful example is the case study on India, as it includes a discussion of anticorruption measures and remedies adopted (129–32). It would have been helpful if the other chapters had included a similar discussion.

#### ***The Importance of Civil Society***

Civil society has been described by Florini (2000) as the “Third Force” and by Tocqueville as the “Third Sphere,” in addition to the other two spheres of the state and the economy (Chandhoke 2003, 35). As civil society has been defined in various ways, it is surprising that Johnston does not specify explicitly the meaning of civil society.<sup>2</sup> In his joint chapter with Kpundeh, civil society is described briefly as “self-organizing cooperative activity at the level between the state and the household” (151). A more useful definition is provided by Tandon: “a collection of individual and collective initiatives for the ‘common public good’” (2003, 64). Tandon’s definition is useful because it focuses on three aspects of civil society: (1) “a space for ideas, for action, for discussion and debate, and for contestation”; (2) “a movement for advancing various causes,” including but not restricted to corruption; and (3) “a set of organizations” (64–65).

Perhaps the most important argument presented in Johnston and Kpundeh’s chapter is that *both* political will—defined as “credible and demonstrated commitment to reform”—and a strong civil society

are critical ingredients for combating corruption effectively. They further contend that “coalition building is a promising way to strengthen and link political will and civil society” (150–52). Though political will and a strong civil society can reinforce each other, unfortunately, both aspects “seldom emerge simply because they are needed.” A strong coalition can strengthen political will by persuading the “elites that they have an interest in reform, via popularity, enhanced development, a better international image, or simply their own political survival.” Similarly, a strong civil society reduces the costs of corruption by providing its members with the space and organizational capabilities required to act against corruption (162–63).

Hydén, Court, and Mease argue that the impact of civil society on policy formulation is greatest in a democracy, in which “civil society actors are respected and recognized as legitimate contributors to policy” and “the state is weak or failing and civil society is important not by design but by default (i.e., because the state is unable to play its role in fostering development)” (2004, 62–63). Indeed, Peter Eigen, the founder and former chairman of Transparency International, has stressed that as governments and the private sector have been unable to curb transnational corruption, civil society organizations have “stepped into the void” in many areas of “failed governance” (2004, 13), such as corruption control, environmental destruction, and human rights violations. However, Johnston and Kpundeh show that the relationship between political will and civil society need not be a zero-sum game, especially if social action coalitions can be mobilized to strengthen *both* aspects.

### **The Sectoral Approach to Curbing Corruption**

To combat corruption effectively in countries where it is systemic and a way of life, Spector and his associates recommend a sectoral approach. Because the incidence or vulnerability to corruption varies by sector in many countries, it makes sense to devote limited anticorruption resources and efforts to sectors that are more vulnerable to corruption.

The book makes a strong and convincing case for a sectoral approach to curbing corruption. First, all of the contributors (including the editor) are either scholars or practitioners with extensive research or consulting experience on corruption in many countries. For example, an excellent chapter on the justice system is provided by Mary Noel Pepys, a senior attorney with more than 25 years of legal experience in the judicial, legislative, diplomatic, and private sectors in Europe and the former Soviet Union.

Second, the authors use the tools developed by USAID for assessing corruption and integrity. They

follow six steps for assessing corruption and integrity in a particular sector:

1. Determine corruption vulnerabilities and integrity strengths and weaknesses.
2. Make a judgment regarding the degree of systemic corruption that is present.
3. Use prior experience to create a menu of reform options.
4. Choose reform measures that are appropriate to the problem and feasible within the mission’s resource envelope.
5. Take into account strategic considerations.
6. Set up benchmarks for measurement and monitoring (USAID 2005, 45).

Third, the chapters on sectoral analysis of corruption are skillfully summarized and synthesized by Stephen Schwenke, a specialist in good governance and integrated development planning with extensive experience in anticorruption projects in many parts of the world. After discussing the corruption vulnerabilities in the nine sectors and their respective remedies, he concludes, not surprisingly, that “these sector-specific remedies are best implemented taking into account the sensitivities and peculiarities of the sector” (167). He wraps up by stressing the key role of leadership in curbing corruption:

Corruption must be prevented in a variety of ways, some sequenced, some simultaneous, some sectorally based, some regardless of sector. Significant advances can be made in the fight against public sector corruption provided there is the requisite political will, competent and well-trained public sector staff, and effective and civic-minded leadership. (177)

Fourth, the second part of the book, “Applied Analyses,” contains three useful chapters. Omar Azfar, an economist at the IRIS Center at the University of Maryland, provides evidence showing that corruption has undermined the delivery of health and education services in many countries. Spector, Michael Johnston, and Phyllis Dininio provide a valuable systematic methodology for developing “valid generalizations about what works and what does not work in controlling corruption under different conditions based on actual cases” (213). Based on an analysis of 35 cases from Africa, Asia, Europe, and South America, they identify four key findings (227–28):

1. Anticorruption initiatives targeted at grand corruption are unlikely to succeed. Thus, new anticorruption strategies to deal with high-level and entrenched corruption are needed.
2. When the political will to fight corruption resides in leadership, the initiatives are more likely to be effective.

3. Effectiveness of anticorruption programs is influenced strongly by the availability of resources, public support for reform, and good policy design.
4. Awareness raising programs tend to be good first steps to develop public support for more intrusive anticorruption programs.

The final chapter, focusing on “The Risks of Recorruption,” is written by Dininio, who is based at the Transnational Crime and Corruption Center at American University and coauthored the *USAID Handbook for Fighting Corruption* (Dininio, Kpundeh, and Leiken 1998). Apart from emphasizing the need for sustaining anticorruption reforms in order to prevent recorruption or the reemergence of corrupt practices after an initial reduction in corruption, Dininio also notes that “fighting corruption is not a one-time proposition” as “it requires constant vigilance and sustained commitment” (248).

### Conclusion

The books reviewed in this article represent three different approaches to the analysis of corruption. Johnson’s *The Struggle against Corruption* attempts to compare and explain the different levels of perceived corruption in four countries but illustrates the difficulties of comparative analysis. Johnston’s *Civil Society and Corruption* emphasizes the important role played by civil society, especially in countries where the government has been reluctant or ineffective in curbing corruption. In view of the paucity of research on the link between civil society and corruption, Johnston’s book is an important contribution to the literature and should pave the way for more empirical studies on the contribution of civil society to curbing corruption in many countries around the world.

Of the three approaches, the sectoral approach recommended by Spector and his colleagues is perhaps the most promising strategy for fighting corruption because it enables governments that are committed to minimizing corruption to concentrate their anticorruption resources and efforts on the most vulnerable sectors. This pragmatic strategy not only enhances the likelihood of success but also should have positive spillover effects on combating corruption in other sectors as it demonstrates that corruption can be defeated.

Finally, the key finding of both Johnston’s and Spector’s books is the importance of political will and the critical role of leadership in making the difference between success or failure in combating corruption. This finding confirms the research conducted by other scholars on corruption. As the “journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step,” the critical step that must be taken by countries afflicted with rampant corruption is for their political leaders to demonstrate

a commitment to curbing corruption. Without such political will, these political leaders will adopt “hopeless” strategies that perpetuate corruption instead of stifling it (Quah 2006, 179).

### Notes

1. See, for example, Bhargava and Bolongaita (2003); Bull and Newell (2003); Caiden, Dwivedi, and Jabbara (2001); Campos (2001); GOPAC (2005); Green and Ward (2004); Haller and Shore (2005); Heidenheimer and Johnston (2002); Johnston (2005); Kidd and Richter (2003a, 2003b); Lindsey and Dick (2002); Pardo (2004); Pedro (2001); and Quah (2003).
2. For example, Hydén, Court, and Mease (2004, 63) operationalize the concept of civil society in terms of five indicators: freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, freedom from discrimination, input into policy making, and respect for rules. On the other hand, Anheier (2004, 84–98) provides several indicators to measure the structure, space, impact, and values of civil society.

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