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CORRUPTION: ANALYSIS AND REMEDIES

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Abstract. *Although anticorruption has grown into a global industry backed by considerable funding, its effectiveness, especially in developing and postcommunist countries, still remains limited. This paper sheds light on a major reason, which is the widespread neglect of the political and structural origins of corruption, particularly the prevalence of particularism, a system in which public resources are allocated based on favoritism rather than impartial rules. In these settings, corruption is not an exception but a built-in feature of the political order, sustained by elite alliances and informal networks of influence. Further, this study underlines Western-style reform models that often fail because they overlook the complicated realities of transitional and hybrid political systems. Based on both personal experience in leading anticorruption initiatives and cross-country comparisons, this article emphasizes the urgent need for strategies that are sensitive to local contexts and political dynamics. In turn, the paper also advocates for long-term measures, including external pressure, public engagement, and incentives for ethical behavior. Ultimately, tackling corruption effectively depends on broader processes of democratization and modernization, without which reforms are unlikely to produce meaningful or lasting change on the whole.*

Keywords: *democratization, public engagement, anticorruption initiatives, fairness and equality, modernization, postcommunist countries, particularism*

KORRUPSIYA: TAHLIL VA CHORALAR

Ahmadjonov Murodullo Nurali o‘g‘li,
Toshkent davlat yuridik universiteti
mustaqil izlanuvchisi,
Namangan viloyati, Kosonsoy tuman
prokurorining yordamchisi

Annotatsiya. *Korrupsiyaga qarshi kurash global miqyosdagi siyosiy harakatga aylangan va katta miqdordagi moliyaviy mablag‘lar bilan qo‘llab-quvvatlanayotgan bo‘lsa-da, mazkur amalga oshirilayotgan harakatlarning samaradorligi, ayniqsa, rivojlanayotgan va postkommunistik davlatlarda, hanuzgacha cheklanganligicha qolmoqda. Ushbu maqolada bunday holatning asosiy sababi – korrupsiyaning siyosiy va tizimli ildizlari, ya’ni partikulyarizm deb nomlanuvchi tizim yoritib beriladi. Mazkur partikulyarizm tizimida davlat resurslari adolatli va xolis qoidalarga emas, balki tanish-bilishlik va guruh manfaatlariga asoslangan tarzda taqsimlanadi. Bunday sharoitda korrupsiya istisno emas, balki siyosiy tuzumning ajralmas qismiga aylanadi, elita ittifoqlari va norasmiy ta’sir tarmoqlari orqali qo‘llab-quvvatlanadi. Shu bilan birga, tadqiqotda G‘arb andozasidagi islohot modellarining ko‘pincha muvaffaqiyatsizlikka uchrashi ta’kidlanadi, chunki mazkur modellarda o‘tish davridagi va gibrid siyosiy*

tizimlarning murakkab haqiqatlari hisobga olinmaydi. Bundan tashqari, maqolada turli davlatlar misolida olib borilgan taqqoslama tahlilga asoslanib, mahalliy sharoit va siyosiy dinamikaga moslashgan strategiyalarni ishlab chiqish zarurligiga alohida urg‘u beriladi. Mazkur maqolada, korrupsiyadan holi bo‘lgan barqaror islohotga erishish uchun partikulyar tizimlarni demontaj qilish adolat va tenglik me’yorlarini targ‘ib qilish, fuqarolik jamiyati vakillarini faollashtirish zarurligiga asosiy e’tibor qaratiladi. Shuningdek, maqolada uzoq muddatli choralarni, ya’ni xalqaro hamkorlik, jamoatchilik nazorati va ishtiroki hamda axloqiy xatti-harakatlar uchun rag‘batlantirish mexanizmlari ilgari suriladi. Xulosa qilib aytganda, korrupsiyaga qarshi samarali kurashish demokratlashtirish va modernizatsiya jarayonlarining kengroq kontekstida olib borilishi zarur. Aks holda, hech bir islohot amalda samarali yoki barqaror natijalar bermaydi.

Kalit so‘zlar: *demokratlashtirish, jamoatchilik ishtiroki, korrupsiyaga qarshi tashabbuslar, adolat va tenglik, modernizatsiya, postkommunistik davlatlar, partikulyarizm*

КОРРУПЦИЯ: АНАЛИЗ И ПУТИ ПРОТИВОДЕЙСТВИЯ

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Аннотация. *Несмотря на то что антикоррупционная деятельность превратилась в глобальную индустрию с масштабным финансированием, её эффективность, особенно в развивающихся и посткоммунистических странах, остаётся ограниченной. В статье анализируется ключевая причина данной проблемы – игнорирование политических и структурных истоков коррупции, в частности феномена партикуляризма, при котором распределение общественных ресурсов осуществляется на основе личных связей и фаворитизма, а не объективных правил. В подобных условиях коррупция представляет собой не исключение, а системообразующий элемент политического устройства, поддерживаемый альянсами элит и неформальными влиятельными сетями. Автор также подчёркивает, что реформы по западным моделям часто терпят неудачу, поскольку не учитывают сложную специфику переходных и гибридных политических систем. Опираясь на личный опыт участия в антикоррупционных инициативах и сравнительный анализ практик различных стран, в статье указывается на необходимость выработки стратегий, чувствительных к локальному контексту и политическим реалиям. Кроме того, обосновывается важность долгосрочных мер, включая внешнее давление, активное вовлечение общества и формирование стимулов для этичного поведения. В конечном итоге эффективное противодействие коррупции невозможно без широких процессов демократизации и модернизации, поскольку без них даже масштабные реформы не способны обеспечить устойчивые и значимые изменения.*

Ключевые слова: *демократизация, общественное участие, антикоррупционные инициативы, справедливость и равенство, модернизация, посткоммунистические страны, партикуляризм*

Introduction

Corruption stands as a significant obstacle in many developing and post-communist countries. Albeit a global anticorruption sector has emerged and substantial financial resources are dedicated annually to reform efforts, actual progress remains limited. One key reason is that internationally promoted solutions that are often modeled after Western frameworks tend to fall in the short term because they fail to account for the deeply rooted political and structural dimensions of corruption. In such societies, corruption is not an occasional failure

of governance but rather an entrenched mode of operation, sustained by networks of favoritism and elite control, which is commonly known as particularism.

Furthermore, this paper contends that many mainstream anticorruption initiatives are ineffective because they overlook critical factors such as historical context, local power structures, and institutional fragility. Drawing from both firsthand experience in leading reform campaigns and wider comparative analysis, it calls for a more tailored, politically sensitive approach grounded in universal values of integrity and fairness. Instead of relying heavily on generic models, reform efforts must directly challenge the informal systems and social norms that perpetuate corruption. By viewing corruption through the lens of power distribution and political competition, we can craft more targeted, durable strategies to weaken particularism and advance democratic development as a whole.

This research employs a qualitative and comparative methodology, combining personal experience with international case analysis. It builds on the author's involvement in effective anticorruption initiatives and examines examples from post-communist, conventional, and developing nations.

The study relies on primary sources such as historical narratives, patterns of elite conduct, and institutional evaluations, while also utilizing secondary materials like academic studies, global surveys (including the World Values Survey and Freedom House data), and reports from organizations like Transparency International and the World Bank. Rather than relying heavily on broad statistical approaches, the research prioritizes context-specific examination, especially of political systems and informal networks that perpetuate corruption within particularist frameworks. Tools such as power mapping, public perception analysis, and elite influence indicators help uncover the inner workings of corruption across a wide range of regimes as a whole. The study challenges uniform reform models, advocating instead for strategies tailored to each context and guided by principles of fairness, transparency, and equitable access to public resources.

Main body

This study reveals that despite the rapid growth of the global anticorruption sector, with annual spending of approximately $100 million, its impact remains modest on account of a fundamental misunderstanding of the problem itself. Most anticorruption initiatives fail because they overlook the inherently political nature of corruption, particularly in developing and post-communist societies where "particularism"—a system rooted in favoritism and patronage—prevails.

In these contexts, access to public resources is formulated by power dynamics and informal networks, making corruption a systemic feature rather than an anomaly. Reforms that rely on externally imposed institutional frameworks or uniform strategies often prove ineffective, especially when they encounter entrenched elites who benefit from the status quo.

Standard tools like surveys and legal reforms fall short unless they are grounded in an understanding of local power relations and reinforced by strong public pressure for fairness.

The study underscores that legal enforcement only becomes effective once particularism is dismantled. Therefore, it advocates for context-aware, politically engaged reforms that promote universal standards of fairness, strengthen civil society, reduce reliance on the state, and enhance transparency. Genuine anticorruption progress depends on structural transformation toward universalism and democratic accountability, not on imported

solutions to root out corruption and avert corruption risks to build a corruption-free society.

In recent years, fighting corruption has evolved into a global industry, with annual spending estimated at roughly $100 million on the whole. Notwithstanding this significant investment, tangible successes remain still limited. While discussions around corruption have increased and funding to address it has grown over the course of time, there is little proof that these efforts are delivering meaningful results. To be obvious, Transparency International's handbook sheds light on certain legal frameworks and institutions from various countries as examples of good practice, yet their actual effectiveness has not been properly evaluated. Similarly, the World Bank's Anticorruption in Transition focuses more on ongoing efforts than on proven achievements [1].

First and foremost, political corruption remains a major challenge to the development and stability of democratic systems. It is a glaring example that, just a year after Ukraine's celebrated Orange Revolution, parliamentary seats were reportedly being sold, though at high prices. The continued failure to reduce corruption, regardless of its growing visibility, is fueling public cynicism and undermining trust in fledgling democracies as a whole.

Why do so many anticorruption programs fail in the short term? Is it possible to bolster more effective strategies by learning from the few instances of success? My argument is that many anticorruption efforts do not work because they fail to deal with the inherently political nature of corruption in developing and post-communist societies. In wealthier, developed countries, corruption typically refers to isolated breaches of integrity. In contrast, in many developing countries, corruption is often a systemic issue rooted in "particularism"—a system where public resources are distributed based on favoritism rather than universal principles, reflecting deeper imbalances in power on the whole [2].

Additionally, most anticorruption efforts avoid confronting this core problem because doing so would challenge the very power structures that uphold corruption. As a result, such campaigns are often carried out with the involvement—or even under the control—of the very elites that take advantage of the system. Coming from my personal experience leading a successful anticorruption campaign in my country and neighboring ones and analyzing many that failed, I believe that democratic breakthroughs can only bring lasting transformations if they are followed by a sweeping movement to dismantle particularism. Without such a fundamental shift, efforts to fight against corruption in societies where particularism dominates are unlikely to succeed [3].

According to the survey carried out by Harvard University in 2020, some scholars erroneously ask why modernization and democratization seem to bring more corruption, failing to recognize that in pre-modern states, the expectation of impartial public service was largely absent as a whole [4]. In a sense, where those universal standards do not apply, societies tend to be hierarchical and collectivist, operating under a system known as particularism. This system directly and indirectly contrasts with universalism, which is the principle that everyone should be treated equally irrespective of group identity.

In particularistic societies, an individual's treatment by the state depends on their social or political status. People do not expect fairness for all but rather expect to be treated similarly to others within their group. Max Weber, one of the most renowned scientists, described these societies as governed by tradition rather than law and regulations, with powerful groups monopolizing

authority and resources [5]. A person's status, and therefore their access to public goods, is associated with their proximity to power, whether that's through a political leader, a dominant group, or a network of influence. Such systems consolidate a culture of privilege where unequal treatment is normal. Rather than striving for fairness and equity, individuals seek to join elite circles as a whole.

Fairness and disparity are often disregarded. In these environments, power and influence, not money, are the basic currency. Benefits from corruption are spread throughout a network and may not even directly profit the gatekeepers involved [6]. Bribery, in many cases, becomes a way for lower-status individuals to secure equal treatment on the whole.

In reality, societies, in turn, don't fall neatly into either universalism or particularism. Instead, they exist along a spectrum. We can sweepingly categorize political systems into three forms related to the level of corruption and distribution of power, with one end representing authoritarian regimes and the other liberal democracies. After the fall of traditional or communist systems, transitions barely lead directly to liberal democracy. Instead, they often lead to hybrid regimes lacking checks and balances, where particular social or ethnic groups dominate. In these situations, political competition becomes a fight to take over the state and its resources; power equates to wealth. In turn, revolutionary change might seem to promise greater accountability; however, this is rarely the case.

Revolutions often prioritize sudden shifts and rely heavily on charismatic leadership, which can undermine the development of strong institutions. In these hybrid or transitional regimes, what can be called "competitive particularism" corruption tends to thrive. Nonetheless, once citizens undergo political change, their tolerance for corruption typically diminishes [7]. Even though corruption remains widespread, people commence to expect better governance, making corruption less socially accepted than under traditional systems.

As people come to realize that free elections can change governments, though not always improve governance public demands for accountability coupled with transparency begin to grow. Even in impoverished or largely illiterate societies, citizens are less willing to tolerate corruption from newly elected leaders than they once were with traditional rulers [8]. Nevertheless, the ways in which societies resist corrupt elites vary significantly among what are called "competitive particularist" regimes, such as Latin America's delegative democracies, Africa's unstable competitive systems, and postcommunist electoral democracies. While these regimes differ in structure, they share one crucial feature: a fusion of older forms of favoritism (particularism) with fashionable forms of corruption and corruption risks.

In contrast to conventional societies, where a select few were above the law, these newer regimes accounts for a large number of competing groups seeking privileged access and immunity. In turn, this competition often leads to wider societal corruption. When leaders or rulers act with impunity, it encourages citizens to also engage in illicit conduct. As a consequence, the gap between official rules (the rule of law) and real-world practices widens. In such settings, democratic institutions risk losing legitimacy and the state can become "captive" serving narrow interests rather than the public good [9].

That is a glaring example that Eastern European communist regimes offer a special case. Though they were committed to modernization, their structures increased corruption and corruption risks in public

government. The system concentrated power and economic control in the hands of elite groups, like the nomenclature, undermining their own goals. Power, not merit, became the basis for rewards and advancements, resulting in what political scientist Andrew Janos described as a modern version of feudal ranking systems. Different status-holders, ranging from party officials to members of state-supported organizations, enjoyed privileges in a system where alternative sources of wealth and status had been eliminated. This created a rigid social hierarchy that Ken Jowitt, one of the well-known scientists at the University of Cambridge, called "neotraditionalism". Thus, the roots of corruption in postcommunist societies lie in these distorted power structures, not in democracy itself.

In contrast, Western Europe and North America developed accountable governments and professional civic services gradually over the course of time. Driven by social movements from Swedish nobility to British bankers and American reformers, these regions established formal and informal mechanisms for government accountability. To be clear, in these liberal democracies, corruption is less common because social power is more balanced, and universal rules resist elite behavior. In this regard, where universalism isn't the norm, democracy struggles to take hold even when elections are held regularly.

This is reflected in the strong correlation between Freedom House scores and Transparency International's corruption perceptions. According to the 2022 World Values Survey, people who observe widespread corruption and weak rule of law in their countries are ironically also the most supportive of democracy because their frustration and anger stem from governments' failure to ensure basic fairness and uphold the law itself [10].

Recently, it has become commonplace for governments to invite international teams to assess corruption and pledge to combat it. Yet, both the tools used to assess corruption and the anti-corruption strategies produced tend to be standardized and generic—applied in a one-size-fits-all fashion across various countries. International summits yield similar recommendations, in spite of local context.

Despite the effort to develop better theories and global strategies to fight corruption, we still often fail to diagnose it correctly and properly. A proper diagnosis amounts to understanding the prime causes of corruption in a specific social and institutional context. As Tolstoy suggested in Anna Karenina, all happy families resemble each other, but every unhappy one is unique.

Similarly, corruption in each society has its own logic and causes. To handle corruption meaningfully, we need a qualitative approach rather than a quantitative one—one that examines whether corruption is a rare deviation from the norm of universal treatment or whether it is the norm itself. In each society, we must ask:

Is corruption the exception or the rule? We must ask whether we are dealing with a society where corruption is an exception to the rule or one where particularism, a system related to favoritism and privilege, is the norm.

Creating a network map of powerful individuals and their relationships can reveal far more than surveys about bribery. Diagnosing particularism entails only basic investigative or anthropological skills. In many places, asking local residents who can "get things done" will quickly identify the true power brokers. There are also several indirect signs of particularism:

– Corruption is perceived as widespread, even when the government changes;

– Key public positions remain in the hands of the same people or groups despite elections;

– Politicians frequently switch parties to align with whoever is in power;

– Many believe politicians are not subject to the law;

– Nearly all access to resources is mediated by elite networks;

– No legal action is taken against obviously corrupt individuals within high-status groups.

While particularist systems share root traits, they can vary widely. Particularism is not the same as totalitarianism—it often allows for some mobility and adaptation. Its durability comes from offering limited ways for outsiders to move up, such as marrying into elite families or serving influential patrons. These small opportunities make people more likely to participate in the system than try to overthrow it. Once particularism is identified, it is significant to evaluate whether the system is closed or open. A tightly closed system results in higher frustration in the long run and is more vulnerable to crises. More open systems that allow for limited entry into elite circles tend to be more stable and resilient [11].

We must also consider what is at stake. Influence and power are always currencies in corruption, but is public authority the main prize? In many places, the state apparatus itself—offices, contracts, resources—is informally "privatized" by elites. In turn, in postcommunist countries, where the state was historically dominant across all sectors, corruption often involves state officials who use their position to enrich themselves, disguising this exploitation as private enterprise as a whole.

In some systems, the very institutions accountable for enforcing the law, such as the police, are controlled by those who benefit from corruption. These systems often bear striking resemblance to criminal organizations, structured hierarchically, where low-level officials collect bribes that are passed upward to more powerful figures.

To better understand and categorize corruption, we can follow a sweeping framework. For example, Freedom House scores provide invaluable insight into whether a country operates under competitive particularism or liberal democracy. The distribution of power can be evaluated through a country's electoral history or significant events, like when the courts prosecute powerful individuals.

A. In strictly particularist systems:

– Power is centralized in competitive particularist systems;

– It is contested among elite groups.

B. In universalist societies:

– Power is more evenly spread.

To truly understand a state's corruption, we are expected to trace networks of power and privilege and examine how public resources flow through them and what they are channeled into, how exclusive these networks are, and how much influence they wield. In turn, public opinion polls also offer valuable clues. When large numbers of people believe that politicians, judges, or police are above the law itself, meaning corruption is socially accepted. In this regard, understanding the boundary between public and private spheres is more sophisticated; however, it is still possible. In a fully particularist society, there is no separation public officials might routinely hire family members or expect personal errands to be performed by subordinates. Competitive particularist systems might show only partial separation, while universalist systems enforce a clear divide on the whole [12].

There is no wonder that corruption is a universal feature of human society and is present throughout history, and it is impossible to get rid of it without a radical change in human nature. The prevailing advice from the global anticorruption community is that corrupt countries should imitate the institutional models of cleaner ones.

However, this has had limited success. Many emerging democracies have adopted Western-style institutions—such as the Scandinavian ombudsman—without seeing real change. This is because the deeper historical shift toward universalism, which underpinned the success of such institutions in Scandinavia, has not been replicated at all. To make meaningful progress in the realm of combatting corruption and averting corruption risks, initially we must identify the specific institutional and historical conditions that triggered the rise of universalism in successful cases. Instead of focusing only on legislation, we should learn from anticorruption initiatives that have produced measurable results as a whole.

In many contexts, courts and legal enforcement are not central to these successes—not because the legal route is not important, but because in many conventional or corrupt systems, the courts are not independent, and laws are barely enforced [13]. In such environments, where legal violations are widespread and status groups dominate institutions, trying to fight corruption through the judiciary is futile. Judicial mechanisms only work efficiently once particularism has already been weakened or dismantled [14]. In terms of addressing corruption broadly, the following steps play a critical role:

A. *The first step* - We should establish and promote universalist standards, necessary norms of fairness and integrity in public life. These standards should be openly discussed and agreed upon across political lines and ideally reflected in legislation. Even if not codified, they can still serve as benchmarks for evaluating the behavior of public servants, with results made publicly available. If one or more political parties adopt and enforce these norms internally, they should be recognized and rewarded for doing so as a whole.

B. *The second step* - International support is particularly valuable to implement practical tools that can be used by the anticorruption coalition and reform-minded individuals. These tools, or "institutional weapons," might constitute laws on transparency, integrity, and mandatory asset declarations for public officials and access to public information. Although these reforms require some level of government cooperation, their enforcement relies heavily on civil society engagement.

C. *The third step* - It is highly demanded to create real incentives for individuals to reject and hate corrupt practices. In this regard, public scrutiny, particularly during election periods, can pressure state officials to behave with integrity. Using available tools, civil society can challenge the influence of entrenched elites by exposing wrongdoing and demanding accountability.

However, timing is vitally crucial. People are unlikely to resist corruption when they benefit from or are comfortable with the status quo.

Long - term strategies to root out corruption.

- International actors (figures) should continue to apply consistent pressure for transparency and accountability.

- Citizen dependence on the state should be lessened, for instance, via shrinking the public payroll and limiting direct state control over resources.

- Free and fair competition should be established vehemently across all sectors to reduce monopolistic or privileged access.

These recommendations, in turn, are not meant to replace traditional anticorruption tools, such as those offered by technical assistance programs, but rather to underscore the importance of making use of the right tools in the right context. An anticorruption agency may function effectively in a country like Australia, where the judiciary is independent [15].

Ultimately, governments cannot be relied on to fight particularism, because those who hold power often benefit from it. Anticorruption campaigns inherently make winners and losers, and in corrupt systems, the people who stand to lose the most are usually those in power on the whole. Therefore, the battle against particularism is not just about cleaning up government—it's part of a broader struggle for modernization and democratic accountability along with transparency.

Conclusion

To sum up, the global effort to combat corruption has seen limited success, largely because it overlooks the deeply political and structural nature of the issue—particularly in developing and postcommunist countries. Although awareness and funding have increased, most anticorruption initiatives target surface-level problems rather than addressing the root cause: particularism—a system where favoritism, not fairness, dictates the distribution of public resources. In such environments, corruption is not an exception but an inherent part of how power operates.

Consequently, reforms based on corruption-free countries' models often fail unless they are part of broader strategies aimed at breaking down entrenched elite networks and promoting universal standards of governance. Real and lasting progress depends on understanding the specific context of each country, identifying where particularism prevails, and implementing tailored solutions. These should empower civil society, harness public demands for transparency, and foster ethical behavior. Anticorruption efforts must be both politically informed and locally adapted, rather than relying on generic, imported solutions on the whole.

Ultimately, the fight against corruption is deeply tied to wider efforts for democratic development and social fairness. Without tackling the underlying power imbalances that sustain corrupt systems, reforms will remain shallow. Success lies in building locally grounded norms of accountability and equality as a whole.

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