A review of the relationship between corruption and social justice

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1. Introduction – Definition and underlying concepts

The United Nations (2006, p. 7) broadly understands ‘Social Justice’ as “as the fair and compassionate distribution of the fruits of economic growth” (The term ‘distributive justice’ is often used interchangeably). Being an alone standing concept within which interactions between institutions, groups and individuals could be classified as just or unjust, the understanding of what is ‘social justice’ requires qualification by a geographical, sociological, political and cultural framework affecting all areas of political, economic, environmental, social and human development (see figure 1). The individual sovereignty of the nation-state typically defines the scope of influence and the boundaries of such framework. However, ‘social justice’ has a universal dimension by encompassing the idea of ‘humanity’ (i.e. the universality of human rights). The historical but artificial separation of the human rights domain from the economic and social domains led to undesired development outcomes and therefore requires focus of priority policy action on addressing inequity and inequality. Consequently:

“To support the concept of social justice is to argue for a reconciliation of these priorities within the context of a broader social perspective in which individuals endowed with rights and freedoms operate within the framework of the duties and responsibilities attached to living in society.” (United Nations, 2006, p. 13)

The idea that individuals’ rights and freedoms are exercised within a framework of duties and responsibilities guides our perception and understanding of what is ‘corruption’.

![Figure 1: Justice interdependence](Source: (UNESCWA/EDID, draft))

Rights and freedoms as well as duties and responsibility within society can be both formally (i.e. rule of law, codes of conduct) and informally (i.e. moral standards) codified. For this reason, causes and impact of corruption are multi-dimensional and therefore, researchers have struggled to define ‘corruption’. For example, the UNODC considers corruption:

“[…] a complex social, political and economic phenomenon that affects all countries. Corruption undermines democratic institutions, slows economic development and contributes to governmental instability. Corruption attacks the foundation of democratic institutions by distorting electoral

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1 For a recent and detailed literature overview, please refer to (Leslie, 2014, p. 39)
processes, perverting the rule of law and creating bureaucratic quagmires whose only reason for existing is the soliciting of bribes. Economic development is stunted because foreign direct investment is discouraged and small businesses within the country often find it impossible to overcome the "start-up costs" required because of corruption."

While research often centers around the actions of individuals with power (e.g. elites), corruption is not only a state-centric or elite phenomenon. It can be found at all levels in society and in all spheres (public and private). Corruption manifests in negative behavior and/or negative outcomes of behavior not in accordance with the individual’s (and/or the institutions) rights, freedoms, duties and responsibilities attached to being part of society. In sum, corruption can be defined as the abuse of public office and/or private position (both in terms of actions and intent) for either direct or indirect personal gain, which in turn can violate obligations of fairness and betray social trust.

As the notions of fairness and trust permeate procedural rules (e.g. democracy), their administration (e.g. no bias) and income distribution (e.g. unskewed and relatively equal), corruption evidently undermines justice, as it is neither functional for economic efficiency nor human development due to the negative externalities corrupt practices create. However, under certain circumstances and potentially relevant for the Arab region, an important distinction between moral and practical/utilitarian judgment about corruption comes into play to explain behavior of individuals and institutions. For example, You (2007) argues that unjust rules - in terms of substantive principles of justice or in terms of implementability and observability - in combination with weak institutions partially justify corruption as a self-defense mechanism or last resort. The questionable argument can be found especially in societies that prioritise (economic ) efficiency over justice, though it works “only when the gain in substantive justice is large enough to clearly outweigh the loss in formal justice and other alternatives are unavailable” (You, 2007, p. 11).

2. Influence of corruption on the pillars of social justice

Having said that ‘social justice’ requires qualification by a geographical, sociological, political and cultural framework covering all areas of economic, environmental, social and human development also means that there is potential for corruption to emerge at the various hinges of such framework. For example, due to their geographical location nation-states have diverse resources endowments (e.g. oil and non-oil in the Arab region) or due to different cultural norms have different political regimes (e.g. sectarian vs. non-sectarian). With a justice lens the figure in the annex 1 breaks down areas of political, economic, environmental, social and human development that are crucial for the Arab region and that serve as the structure for

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2 E.g. preferential treatment or peddling influence, nepotism, fraudulent activities, misuse of financial resources, bribery and so on
3 E.g. government failure, market failures, biased allocation of welfare services, distorted business practices and so on
4 The proposed definition expands on existing definitions (The World Bank, 1999; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2004; United States Institute of Peace, 2010), for example the World Bank definition, which straightforwardly defines corruption as “the abuse of public office for private gain” and UNODC detailing the origins of the word corruption as steming “from the Latin corruptus (spoiled) and corrumpere (to ruin; to break into pieces)”.

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the following discussion. Based on a comprehensive literature review, tables 1 through 3 provide concrete examples to show where potential for corruption emerges by components of social justice and how it impacts individuals, societies and economies. In its current form the paper does not assess the impact of corruption in case of domestic, regional or international violence, given that the analysis of corruption in war economies is beyond its scope.\(^5\) Political instability together with colonial heritage appear to be strong determinants of corruption (Billon, 2003; Gunardi, 2008; Serra, 2004).

| Drafting the constitution / Political participation / Political representation | Ensuring that constitutions include an anti-corruption principle (as for example in the US constitution) and recognition of modern forms of corruption in the political context (Teachout, 2009):
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<td>• “Criminal Bribery: Corruption As “Quid Pro Quo” and “The Creation of Political Debts”” which leads to legislation that favors lobbyists or is drafted in return for financial gain;</td>
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<td>• “Inequality: Unequal Access, Unfair Deployment of Wealth and Undue Influence” as in unequal access to political life and political power, undue influence of corporate power on the legislation drafting process;</td>
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<td>• “Drowned Voices: Corruption as Suppressed Speech” refers to the concern that loud political voices will drown out or effectively silence others, thus being concerned with equality and justice the issue is to ensure that quiet voices are heard also;</td>
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<td>• Perception of a “Dispirited Public” that does not consider citizenship as public office as well as the notion of that is not just corruption itself, but the mere perception of corruption can have a dispiriting impact on the public and lead to disaffected groups among the population, in this context ‘confidence’ in political representation is key;</td>
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| • “Corruption as a loss of political integrity, and systems that predictably create moral failings”, meaning that corruption is a subversive process that eats away at a political process, which pitches potentially activist citizens vs egoistic political actors. Research\(^6\) on Tunisia (Olaya & Hussmann, 2013) as well as on Egypt (Al-Ali & Dafel, 2013) as countries emerging from the Arab Spring and drafting a new constitution address deficiencies of previous constitutions and provides guidance to members of the Constitutional Assembly (i.e. with an overview of the deficiencies of the 1971 Egyptian Constitution in establishing an anti-corruption framework) in order to address “the pervasive problem of political

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\(^6\) A full list of related papers can be found here: [http://constitutionaltransitions.org/consolidating-arab-spring/](http://constitutionaltransitions.org/consolidating-arab-spring/)
Table 1: Procedural rules - Selected pillars of Justice and entry points for corruption (cont’d)

<table>
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<th>Rule of Law</th>
<th>De jure provisions on women’s rights</th>
<th>De jure provisions on human rights</th>
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<td>• Corruption hollows out the provisions of legal texts and turns them into tools for discretionary (ab)use: Abiding by the law is a basis for personal and business relationships, as otherwise there are not incentives to invest or to develop. To combat or prevent corruption the issue of “judicial empowerment” (independence, accountability and competence) needs to be addressed as did (Ginsburg, 2013) in the context of Tunisia.</td>
<td>• The Council of Europe defines “gender equality as equal visibility, empowerment and participation of both sexes in all spheres of public and private life” (Committee on Rules of Procedure [Immunities and Institutional Affairs], 2014). The gender and corruption nexus can be explained both via non-economic and economic determinants for corruption: For example, Not only in the Arab region, property rights and inheritance rights are key to women’s empowerment and according to UN Habitat’s Urban Indicators, the Arab regions rank just slightly better than Africa, but worse than the rest of the world (see comparison in <a href="http://www.un.org/ga/Istanbul+5/34.pdf">http://www.un.org/ga/Istanbul+5/34.pdf</a>)</td>
<td>• The effectiveness of international human rights treaties as well as national de jure provisions on human rights are ideally to be included in the constitution (Melton, 2014) and it may be most effective in authoritarian systems with at least a modest level judicial independence that do not already a high-level of de facto rights protection</td>
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<td>• To measure the effectiveness of Rule of Law, the UN capture 135 indicators for police, judiciary and prisons, which highlight the several layers of necessary anti-corruption (see Annex 2)</td>
<td>• Corruption is generally associated with negative effects to human rights protection in all spheres (economic, political, civil, social, cultural) and the “consequences of corrupt governance are multiple and touch on all human rights — civil, political, economic, social and cultural, as well as the right to development. Corruption leads to violation of the government’s human rights obligation ‘to take steps... to the maximum of its available resources, with a view to achieving progressively the full realization of the rights recognized in the [International] Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights’. The corrupt management of public resources compromises the government’s ability to deliver an array of services, including health, educational and welfare services, which are essential for the realization of economic, social and cultural rights. Also, the prevalence of corruption creates discrimination in access to public services in favour of those able to influence the authorities to act in their personal interest, including by offering bribes. The economically and politically disadvantaged suffer disproportionately from the consequences of corruption, because they are particularly dependent on public goods.” (OHCHR, 2014)</td>
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<td>• In turn, “policies driving the anti-corruption agenda, development strategies and human rights protection are often rooted in similar or common principles, i.e. non-discrimination, participation, accountability, rule of law, freedom of information, and transparency. Integrating such common principles into development projects aimed at fighting corruption will have a positive effect on the affected population and their enjoyment of human rights” (Global Portal on Anti-Corruption for Development, 2014).</td>
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7 The UN has developed several tools for measuring the effectiveness of Rule of Law (e.g. RoI indicators, juvenile justice indicators): http://www.unrol.org/article.aspx?article_id=32
9 See for more information (OHCHR, 2014)
Table 2: Administration of procedural rules - Selected pillars of Justice and entry points for corruption

| Systems of checks and balances | • The modalities of governance differ from country to country: The underlying idea for the separation of powers (e.g. USA, Italy) – executive, legislative and judiciary – is that the independent powers and areas of responsibility of one branch are not in conflict with another. “Checks and balances” ensure a system-based regulation that allows one branch to limit another’s powers. Parliamentary systems (e.g. constitutional monarchies) are often characterized by a fusion of power between the branches or little separation (e.g. UK, Canada). Both forms come with distinct advantages and disadvantages: e.g. a strong separation of powers enables deadlock as was the case of the US Government shutdown in 2013 over the omnibus budget bill (Pinkowski, 2014).
• Empirical analysis supports that that “a divided government and elected, rather than appointed, state supreme court judges are associated with lower corruption and, furthermore, that the effect of an accountable judiciary is stronger under a unified government, where the government cannot control itself” (Alt & Lassen, 2008).
• The question addressed is how to political systems and their institutions (e.g. electoral rules, newspaper circulation and so on) incentivizing rent-seeking behavior? |
| Security Sector Oversight | • Security sector reform requires a consolidated approach to rebuild the state’s security sector (military, police, and intelligence services) that is thoroughly grounded in the constitution of the respective country. For example, in the case of Tunisia (Roach, 2013) it is suggested that security forces report to a cabinet member and not directly the President to prevent accumulation of presidential power.
• The security sector especially in transition countries may also require capacity-building for a better understanding of the difference between democratic vs. authoritarian rule of law given that there operations are strongly linked to human rights issues (see below). |
| De facto provisions on womens’ issues | • The translation of de jure provisions on womens’ rights is translated into de facto by “Gender mainstreaming” […] the process whereby a gender perspective is included from the earliest planning stages to final decisions on policy or implementation in a specific field.” (Committee on Rules of Procedure (Immunities and Institutional Affairs), 2014)
• Only aggregate measures of corruption exist, which fail to measure direct impact on citizens as well as do not disaggregate by gender. (Hossain, Musembi, & Hughes, 2010)
• Correlating women’s participation with corruption, researchers argue the higher the involvement of women in public offices the lower corruption as they less condone or are involved in corrupt practices, because: “First, women may be brought up to be more honest or more risk averse than men, or even feel there is a greater probability of being caught.” Second, women, who are typically more involved in raising children, may find they have to practice honesty in order to teach their children the appropriate values.” Third, women may feel more than men - the physically stronger sex - that laws exist to protect them and therefore be more willing to follow rules.” Lastly, girls may be brought up to have higher levels of self-control than boys which affects their propensity to indulge in criminal behaviour.” (Swamy, Knack, Lee, & Azfar, 2000) (Following Gottfredson and Hirsi (1990) and Paternoster and Simpson (1996, p. 52)
• The relationship between better womens participation and lower levels of corruption appears not universally applicable, a new theory (Esarey & Schwindt-Bayer, 2014) using data from 70 democracies tries to explain why women’s representation is sometimes related to lower levels of corruption: “greater risk aversion has been observed in women, and there is evidence that voters hold women to a higher standard at the polls. We hypothesize that the relationship between women’s representation and reduced corruption will be strongest in democracies with high electoral accountability: where corruption is not the norm, where press freedom is respected, in parliamentary systems, and under personalistic electoral rules.” |
So far, the discussion focuses on the nexus of corruption and various pillars of social justice. While notoriously difficult, but before continuing with the overview on corruption and income distribution nexus, it is worthwhile to put a number to the costs of corruption (transactional corruption) and the potential extent of funding that is not allocated to a greater public good such as improved education or health outcomes (see Box 1).

**Box 1: The costs of corruption**

“Bearing [...] serious caveats [i.e. high margin of error due to data issues] in mind, an estimate of the extent of annual worldwide transactions that are tainted by corruption puts it close to US$1 trillion. The margin of error of this estimate being obviously large, it may well be as low as US$600 billion; or, at the other extreme of the spectrum, it could well exceed US$1.5 trillion. But even if a US$1 trillion estimate of the global size of bribery worldwide seems very large, it does not, in and of itself, give us much of a guide to the actual cost of corruption. Theoretically, it could be argued that all these bribes just grease the wheels of commerce, and no productive value added is lost to the economy. Therefore, to get a closer idea of the costs of corruption and poor governance, it is important to relate governance indicators with outcome variables, such as incomes or infant mortality, for instance.”

(Kaufmann, 2005, emphasis added)

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10 To ascertain the implementation of de jure human rights the CIRI Human Rights Data Project dataset contains standards-based quantitative information on government respect for 15 internationally recognized human rights for 202 countries, annually from 1981-2011 (http://www.humanrightsdata.com/p/data-documentation.html)
Table 3: Income distribution – Selected pillars of Justice and entry points for corruption

| Education outcomes | • Private schools’ ability to pay higher salaries and thus attract better teachers -> high tuition compared to free public schools, which reduces accessibility for lower income groups (Cammett, 2014; Gupta, Davoodi, & Tiiongson, 2000)
  • An educated citizenry has been empirically associated to lower levels of corruption in some American states (Alt & Lassen, 2008) |
| Health care outcomes | • Private hospitals’ ability to pay higher salaries and thus attract better medical staff -> selective admission of patients based on private insurance or group identity (e.g. sectarian welfare services provision in Lebanon (Cammett, 2014)) as well as overall negative externalities (e.g. reduced immunization and higher child mortality (Azfar & Gurgur, 2004; Gupta et al., 2000)) |
| Natural resources management | • Rent-seeking (“resource curse”) and patronage behavior (e.g. paying political supporters) require strengthening of institutions and the need to restructure incentives (Kolstad & Soreide, 2009) |
| Investment climate and business environment | • Detrimental patron-clientelism: “policymakers distribute privileges to particular groups on the basis of loyalty, ethnic or cultural solidarity, or other political criteria at the expense of the broader public” (Desai & Pradhan, 2005)
  • Corruption reduces the ratio of investment to GDP, while increasing the “level of integrity” within a country increases the net inflows of capital (Lambsdorff, 2003) |
| Labour Market | Corrupt practices have direct consequences on labour market concerns ranging from compromised safety over depression of wages to skewed collective bargaining power. In country analysis on Thailand, which contains lessons for rural areas in the Arab region, Walsh (2010) states:
  • “Lax policing of minimum wage legislation and unknown numbers of migrant workers contribute to depression of wages as whole and reduced incentives to add value to production. [...] short-term competitiveness through low labour-cost manufacturing is prioritized.
  • Although individual transactions which may be deemed corrupt are small scale in nature, they appear to be repeated very regularly and therefore have a significant impact upon the income generating possibilities for local workers and for their future prospects, not to mention the overall competitiveness of the country. [...] corrupt activities also lead to lower levels of safety in the workplace and for such issues as collective bargaining and freedom of association.”
  Lacko (2004) establishes a link how tax rates, the extent of corruption and various institutional aspects of the labour market influence the relative size of different segments (unemployment, employment, self-employment and activity in the hidden economy) |
| Infrastructure | Opportunity for corruption at all stages of large-scale infrastructure projects (Hawkins, 2013; Kenny, 2006):
  • Project selection: diversion of resources from one sector to another, as well as selection of uneconomical projects due to kick-backs and patronage;
  • Planning stages: neglect of priority but voter catching, overstatement or misrepresentation of specifications to advantage certain bidders, as well as favouring “white elephant projects” over pro-poor projects, lack of oversight mechanisms in place, malpractice;
  • Design: over-design, manipulation of timing and project plan to benefit particular suppliers, consultants, contractors, and other private parties. Bribe for favourable environmental impact assessment/planning proposal/approval, etc.;
  • Bid and contract signing stage: political influence, levy large rents on international businesses in return for government contracts, kick-back expectations;
  • Construction: Provision of equipment or goods of lower then specified quality (typical examples include lesser cement or steel reinforcements), non-transparent contract amendments and diversion of funds (e.g. payment issues, duplication of invoices), lack of record-keeping |
3. Summary

The present note explored the mechanisms of how corruption erodes social justice and reviewed the literatures on corruption and its link to political, economic and social outcomes in given societies. Quantitative analysis on the impact of corruption is limited geographically and also sectorally. For example, Brunetti and Weder (1998) include only Algeria, Egypt, Morocco and Jordan in their analysis on how institutional uncertainty affects investments. While Gupta et.al. (2000) examine the health and education sector only. The events of the Arab Spring have drawn attention to the requirements for anti-corruption principles in the drafting of new constitutions (Al-Ali & Dafel, 2013; Ginsburg, 2013; Olaya & Hussmann, 2013) for Arab countries in transition. That is a major step towards strengthening institutions and empowerment of the judiciary. While political transitions in Tunisia and Egypt provide a window of opportunity for establishing anti-corruption principles, Lebanon – currently resilient towards external and internal pressures – teeters on the brink and perception of public sector corruption ranks just slightly better than in conflict countries Syria, Yemen, Iraq, Libya and Sudan. As the latest results of the Corruptions Perception index\textsuperscript{11} by Transparency International show: Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) countries score on average 38/100 (compared to globally 43/100). The Arab countries with the perception of lowest public sector corruption are Gulf States, namely the United Arab Emirates and Qatar (see annex 3). The Arab countries with the worst score are Iraq and Sudan. Overall 84 per cent of the countries in the MENA region score below 50. In their empirical study across 41 developing countries Shabbir and Anwar (2007) conclude “that economic determinants are more important as […] non-economic determinants in reducing the perceived level of corruption in developing countries”, while the impact of religion may be negligible\textsuperscript{12}. Bearing these very recent empirical results in mind and in consistent opinion among the existing body of research on corruption, Brunetti and Weder’s (1998, p. 17) conclusion still stands:

“Perhaps the most interesting and promising result from a policy perspective is the relative importance of a more stable and predictable law enforcement. According to our analysis, governments can get most mileage from an improvement of the predictability of law enforcement and, more generally, adherence to the rule of law. Therefore, reducing corruption and improving the general predictability of the institutional framework should be among the reform priorities.”

In an uncertain institutional environment of the public sector, private actors (firms, individuals, non-state actors, etc.) might take-over functions of the state and control access to services. Their distribution may not be based on fairness or equity, but on group-membership or any deliberate criteria to differentiate. In result, social justice outcomes over time will be negative.

\textsuperscript{11} Measuring the perceived levels of public sector corruption in 175 countries/territories around the world with a score: 0 = worst perception of public sector corruption to 100 = best perception (http://www.transparency.org/cpi2014/results)

\textsuperscript{12} However and as discussed earlier, the role of religion or belonging to a sectarian group, however plays a role in distribution of welfare services (Cammett, 2014).
4. **REFERENCES**


Figure: Structure of the instrument to measure performance of Rule of Law

(United Nations, 2011)
Figure: Corruption Perceptions Index 2014 – Middle East & North Africa

Country/Territory          Score | Rank
United Arab Emirates       78/100 | 26/175
Oman                       69/100 | 26/175
Qatar                      50/100 | 37/175
Israel                     49/100 | 55/175
Bahrain                    49/100 | 55/175
Jordan                     49/100 | 55/175
Saudi Arabia               49/100 | 55/175
Oman                       45/100 | 64/175
Kuwait                     44/100 | 67/175
Tunisia                    40/100 | 79/175
Morocco                    30/100 | 80/175
Egypt                      37/100 | 94/175
Algeria                    36/100 | 100/175
Iran                       27/100 | 136/175
Lebanon                    27/100 | 136/175
Syria                      20/100 | 150/175
Yemen                      19/100 | 161/175
Libya                      18/100 | 166/175
Iraq                       16/100 | 170/175
Sudan                      11/100 | 173/175

(Transparency International, 2014)