

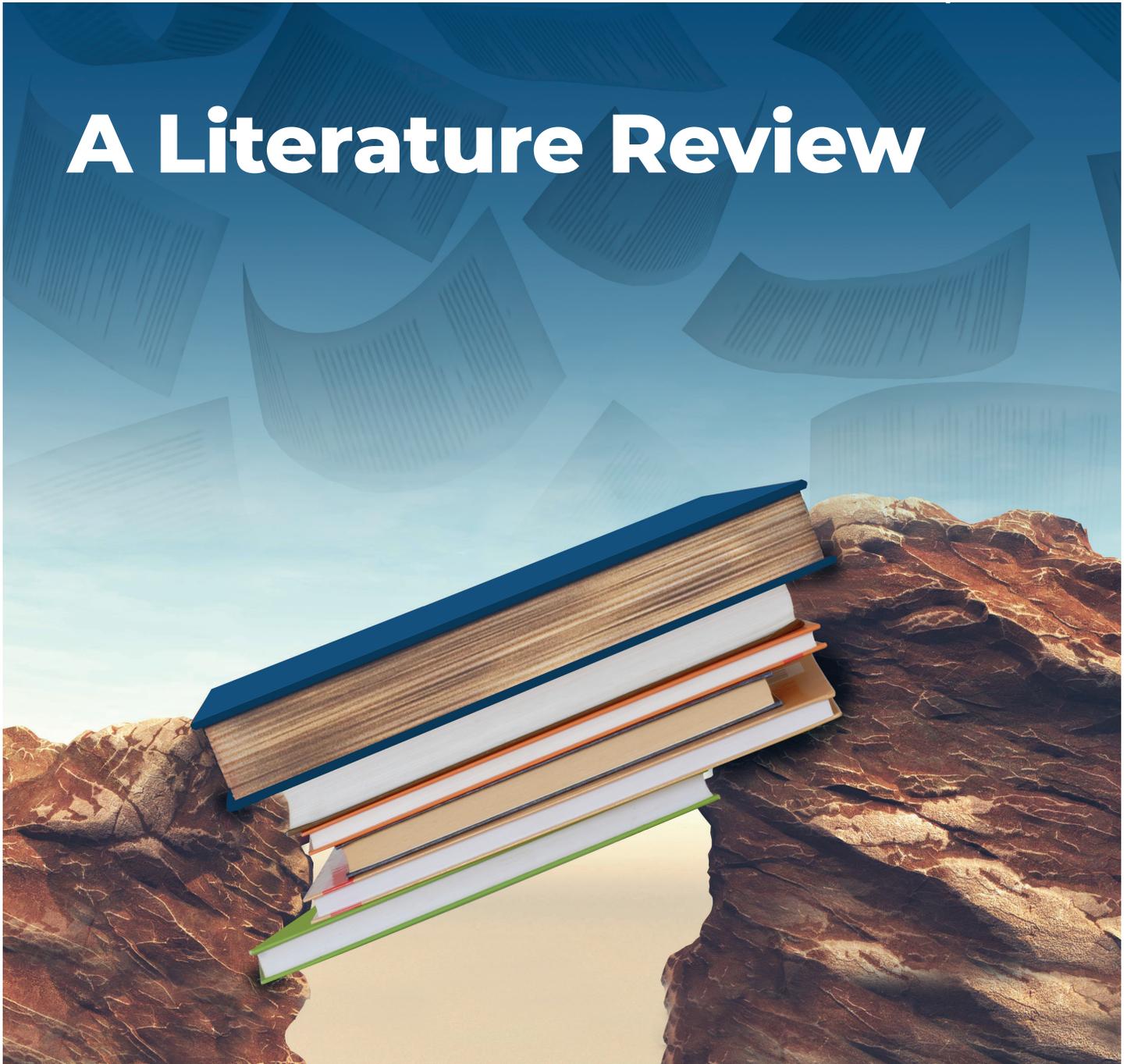


Adapting Anti-Corruption Strategies in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Settings

The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy • Tufts University

DECEMBER 2021

A Literature Review



Summary

This paper identifies the prominent debates in the literature on how to adapt anti-corruption strategies for fragile and conflict-affected settings (FCAS). Across the international development community, there is growing attention to the interconnected relationships between conflict and corruption, in addition to the well-documented ways in which systemic corruption inhibits sustainable development. However, there is little consensus among scholar and practitioner communities alike on how to adapt anti-corruption strategies for FCAS. Effective and conflict-sensitive anti-corruption strategies become exponentially more challenging in settings with low institutional capacity, unstable political settlements, and ongoing conflict or conflict-related social tensions. In addition to capturing the most salient ongoing discussions on how to support successful and appropriate anti-corruption strategies in FCAS, this paper identifies significant gaps in the evidence base.

Acronyms

ACC	Anti-Corruption Commission
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
DFID	Department for International Development
FCAS	Fragile and Conflict-affected States
EITI	Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative
EU	European Union
GIZ	Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
PWYP	Publish What You Pay
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Program

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Corruption, Justice and Legitimacy Program

The **Corruption, Justice and Legitimacy Program (CJL)** is a research-to-practice initiative committed to improving the effectiveness of anti-corruption programming in contexts of endemic corruption. Based on CJL's belief that corruption should be approached as a complex system, CJL uses systems-thinking in our approach to corruption analysis. As part of this approach the Program has taken a deep dive into the nexus of social norms and corruption to understand their role and importantly how to catalyze norm shifts to support enduring behavior change.

CJL regularly works in contexts with fragility and conflict dynamics. These experiences have repeatedly highlighted the need to better understand how conflict, corruption, and their interactions influence the effectiveness and durability of programming in these contexts. The Corruption and Peacebuilding Project supports the development of greater synergies between the anti-corruption and peacebuilding fields in order to advance practice.

Acknowledgements

I extend my sincere thanks to a number of individuals who graciously gave their time to review this paper: Michael Johnston, Karen Hussman, Lara Olsen, David Jackson, Ulrike Hobb-Nishaka, Sarah Dix, Richard Nash, Ina Kubbe, Nieves Zúñiga, and Francesca Recanatini. I am also deeply grateful to Diana Chigas and Cheyanne Scharbatke-Church for advising and supporting this research. This research was also supported by The Fares Centre for Eastern Mediterranean Studies at The Fletcher School at Tufts University.

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Suggested Citation

Ventura, Rosemary. "Adapting Anti-Corruption Strategies in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Settings: A Literature Review." *Corruption Justice and Legitimacy Program: The Fletcher School, Tufts University*, December 2021.

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Introduction

This review presents a synthesis of key trends in the literature discussing how anti-corruption efforts should be adapted to the challenges of fragile and conflict-affected environments. There are areas of growing consensus among leading authors – particularly on what to avoid doing – but the evidence informing most of the debates is often based on a few comparative country case studies or short anecdotes. Most of the authors’ recommendations thus emerge less as prescriptions and more as suggestions of what might work better than other approaches, given highly challenging and often idiosyncratic conflict and political economic environments. What follows below intends to capture ***the most salient ongoing discussions among leading authors on how to support successful and appropriate strategies for controlling corruption in fragile environments*** and, where available, to capture the evidence behind various perspectives and recommendations.

The paper’s organization reflects key themes identified in the literature, such as considerations for anti-corruption strategies like *when, what, who, how much, and how* to tackle corruption. Overall, these recommendations for anti-corruption approaches in fragile and conflict states are generally motivated by two justifications: increased program effectiveness and ensuring conflict sensitivity. In highly complex contexts, significant adaptations to the traditional anti-corruption ‘toolkit’ are necessary in order to achieve program aims of reducing corruption; these adaptations should also aim to mitigate the risks of unintentionally exacerbating conflict and fragility through program implementation.

For the purpose of this literature review, anti-corruption efforts encompass a wide range of national strategies, time-bound programs, and reform approaches that aim to address forms of corruption. There are many strategies in the traditional anti-corruption ‘toolkit,’ though the effectiveness and assumptions of these strategies require greater clarity before attempting to adapt them to fragile and conflict settings.¹ This review synthesizes recommendations for adaptations to fragile and conflict environments but does not examine, challenge, or endorse the traditional anti-corruption toolkit from which approaches are implicitly adapted. Many topics remain contested in the broader anti-corruption field and would equally merit consideration in fragile and conflict-affected settings. The review takes stock of existing debates – and evidence, where available – for appropriate adaptations for complex fragile and conflict-affected settings. In doing so, it points to gaps and potentially overlooked assumptions within the anti-corruption field and indicates avenues outside this realm for advancing collective knowledge on appropriate strategies.

Some approaches are labeled with the language of *accountability, transparency, or integrity*, and related fields like governance and statebuilding may also aim to address corruption. For this literature review, all of these approaches fall under the wide umbrella of anti-corruption efforts. Notably, many humanitarian and development assistance programs include measures to mitigate risks of fraud and corruption occurring in their programming, but do not directly target corruption occurring in the broader environment.

1 Corruption scholar Michael Johnston has also characterized the five mainstream anti-corruption paradigms as follows: crime prevention (deterrence and punishment); incentives (for good performance); civil society action (demanding reforms or monitoring and reporting corruption); liberalization (deregulation and privatization); and international treaties and conventions against corruption. The U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Centre at the Chr. Michelsen Institute has also published multiple definitions and taxonomies of anti-corruption. It describes the conventional anti-corruption approaches as: awareness raising and empowerment; prevention; detection; sanctions; and management and leadership. It takes on several unconventional anti-corruption approaches, including: Thinking and Working Politically; informal contexts and social norms; and collective action and corruption functionality. Michael Johnston. “First, do no harm—then, build trust: Anti-corruption strategies in fragile situations.” Background paper to The 2011 World Development Report. Washington, DC: World Bank. 2010, 7-8; U4 Resource Centre, “What is corruption? The basics of corruption and anti-corruption efforts for sustainable and inclusive development” <https://www.u4.no/topics/anti-corruption-basics>; U4 Resource Centre, “Identifying feasible, high-impact anti-corruption interventions: The case of Albania, Appendix G – Anti-corruption tools and techniques, a Taxonomy.” <https://www.u4.no/publications/identifying-feasible-high-impact-anti-corruption-interventions>.

Finally, although the review does not engage in debates over defining corruption, the included literature underscores the value in developing more nuanced differentiation between various forms of corruption.

One of the key challenges is the lack of differentiation in most of the literature between fragile and conflict-affected contexts, particularly the distinct potential negative impacts on fragility, conflict, and stability. This likely reflects the significant overlap and entanglement between these various contextual factors; most conflict-affected states experience high degrees of fragility, and many fragile states are at risk of violent conflict. However, further differentiation is needed to understand appropriate strategies for settings with ongoing violent conflict, post-conflict transitional periods, or effectively absent governments. Where possible, this review attempts to disentangle and clarify which contextual factors and consequences authors are discussing, while noting instances where further distinguishing between conflict and fragility is most necessary.

Literature Review Methodology

This synthesis of disparate discussions on anti-corruption in fragile settings reflects the overarching purpose of the literature review: to understand ongoing conversations, emergent areas of consensus, and the strength of available evidence supporting recommendations. As such, it is not intended to provide an all-encompassing summary of the literature on these topics, but rather a survey of the key debates and areas necessitating additional research. A concept saturation process was used to capture the prominent conversations by leading scholars and practitioners, identified through the following search terms in the Ginn Library search database, Google Scholars, and JSTOR:

- (anti-) corruption, conflict
- (anti-) corruption, harms
- (anti-) corruption, fragil(e, ity)
- (anti-) corruption, peace processes
- (anti-) corruption, stabili(ty, zation)

By focusing on the scholarly conversations explicitly about anti-corruption appropriate for fragile and conflict settings, this review pulls together key trends specific to the anti-corruption field. Notably, the search terms are not likely to capture a fulsome representation of the evidence from related fields such as statebuilding, stabilization, and peacebuilding which may incorporate anti-corruption considerations using different terminology. These adjacent fields could offer valuable insights to dilemmas anti-corruption practitioners face in fragile and conflict-affected settings. Further, because of the potential for political sensitivities related to corruption, some strategies may prefer terms such as integrity, accountability, transparency, or good governance programs. In some cases, the different names may reflect meaningful distinctions, and they indicate the value in expanding the aperture to broader ranges of programs aiming to reduce corruption-related abuses of power.

Finally, there is a body of work that deals with corruption in peace negotiations and political settlements but may not frame it in the language of corruption, e.g., ‘dirty deals.’ Due to limitations of time, the material was not included because the literature is highly fragmented and based on specific country case studies. There would be value in future efforts to synthesize findings from the cases on how to navigate common corruption-related dilemmas in peace processes.

Time Frames for Addressing Corruption in Fragile and Conflict Contexts

Short-term Versus Long-Term Tensions

The question of when to deal with corruption in fragile and conflict-affected states (FCAS) is perhaps the area of most active disagreement between experts focused on corruption in the context of conflict and post-conflict settings. This is largely because peace and stabilization objectives often appear to be actively in tension with anti-corruption objectives, and because there are so few successful cases from which to draw lessons and insights. Despite increasing recognition that stabilization and anti-corruption objectives can be highly complementary, the German development corporation GIZ's 2020 literature review notes that the consensus on complementarity "provides little in the way of prescriptive insight into the appropriate timing of anti-corruption measures in fragile contexts."² Longer-term stability, positive peace, and adequate control of corruption may indeed be intricately tied together, but this does not readily provide clear advice for when to start addressing corruption at all or in what sequence to address various forms of corruption.

For example, in peace negotiations, this tension between ending violent conflict in the short-term and achieving lasting, sustainable positive peace in the longer term becomes even more challenging. Scholars and practitioners such as Philippe Le Billon³ and Bertram Spector⁴ articulate the dilemmas surrounding incorporating anti-corruption measures in peace agreements, as well as the consequences of ignoring corruption for the sake of reaching agreements.⁵

Traditionally, statebuilding scholars "maintained that tackling corruption is a secondary consideration in the initial stages of establishing security and (re)constructing state structures."⁶ However, there is increasing recognition of the risks in waiting until a certain level of stability is reached before beginning to consider corruption.⁷ Journalist Sarah Chayes provided particularly compelling evidence in her case study of Afghanistan for how the failure of international actors to prioritize corruption during stabilization efforts actively undermined statebuilding aims, created enduring grievances, and provided the Taliban with legitimacy and fodder for recruitment.⁸ This is not to suggest that Afghanistan was teeming with obviously viable reforms options, but the lack of international attention to corruption is particularly notable given the exceptionally prominent role of corruption.

Immediate response efforts often only consider corruption risks to their own interventions and programs, ignoring the broader context of corruption which often serves as an underlying driver of conflict. As such, many scholars, agencies, and practitioners have called for anti-corruption to

2 GIZ - Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit. "Anti-Corruption In Fragile Settings: A Review Of The Evidence." Eschborn: German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), 2020, 26.

3 Philippe Le Billon. "Buying Peace or Fuelling War: The Role of Corruption in Armed Conflicts." *Journal of International Development* 15, no. 4, 2003: 413-26; and Philippe Le Billon. "Overcoming Corruption in the Wake of Conflict." In *Global Corruption Report 2005*, 73-89. London, United Kingdom: Pluto Press, 2005.

4 Bertram I. Spector. *Negotiating Peace and Confronting Corruption: Challenges for Postconflict Societies*. Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 2011.

5 While important, the debates of how and when to include anti-corruption provisions in peace agreements are beyond the scope of this review because it was felt that they are a sufficiently distinct set of circumstances that warrant their own review.

6 Ibid.

7 United Nations Development Program. "Fighting Corruption in post-conflict and recovery situations," UNDP Publishing, New York. 2010, 62.

8 Sarah Chayes. *Thieves of State: Why Corruption Threatens Global Security*. Norton: New York. (2015).

be considered early during stabilization periods.⁹ Indeed, recognizing the degree of corruption built into some ‘dirty deals’ of peace agreements, participants at the 2019 Stockholm Forum of Peace and Development called for corruption to be dealt with from the very beginning during contingency and peace operations.¹⁰ However, this recommendation did not specify the exact types of corruption to deal with initially, nor how to approach it.

Early Post-Conflict Anti-Corruption Approaches

Jesper Johnson, in his book on anti-corruption in fragile contexts, adds nuance to the question of when to start addressing corruption by distinguishing between “stabilizing anti-corruption” and “good governance anti-corruption.” He argues that donors should begin anti-corruption work early in fragile contexts to avoid patterns of corruption from becoming ingrained but should initially focus the stabilizing anti-corruption strategies on forms of corruption “more relevant for government accountability and legitimacy.”¹¹ While he does not provide sufficient clarity on which strategies would be more relevant, he proposes that “stabilizing anti-corruption” strategies should require less state and civil society capabilities and have the aim of safeguarding human security and well-being and reducing the risks of conflict.¹² After fragility has been sufficiently reduced, Johnson argues that donors should then switch towards more cookie-cutter “good governance anti-corruption” aimed at achieving economic and human development and focus on forms of corruption such as petty and bureaucratic corruption. His staggered approach is based on evidence gathered from analyzing three large donors’ (World Bank, EU, and UNDP) anti-corruption strategies in Afghanistan, though his work does not provide sufficient clarity regarding the threshold at which fragility can be considered to have sufficiently declined and what the two approaches could tangibly be.

Michael Johnston, a preeminent scholar in the anti-corruption field, similarly advocates for beginning anti-corruption strategies early, though he provides caveats to this recommended approach in his 2010 background paper to the 2011 *World Development Report*.¹³ He has a twofold emphasis on long-term indirect strategies that initially focus on early-stage trust-building and public service provision strategies. In order to contribute to building trust – and over time a sense of common interest – he recommends focusing on delivering the basic services in which wide swaths of society share an interest, such as public utilities, health, education, and basic public facilities.¹⁴ He identifies a number of risks and harms of anti-corruption programs in the early stages of stabilization and suggests that early actions – while necessary to prevent corruption from becoming further ingrained – should actively work to ‘do no harm.’ For instance, he cites the common risks of doing harm through poorly conceived, rushed anti-corruption programs in contexts with minimal absorptive capacities. Instead, he proposes to focus initially on indirectly rebuilding state-society relations through visible service provision gains that help “reassert the ‘stateness’ of the state by emphasizing the provision of basic services in which broad segments of society share an interest.”¹⁵

9 Harald Mathisen. “Addressing corruption in fragile states: What role for donors?” U4 Issue 1: 2007, Bergen: U4, Chr. Michelsen Institute; UNDP; Alix J. Boucher, William J. Durch, Margaret Midyette, Sarah Rose, and Jason Terry. *Mapping and Fighting Corruption in War-torn States*. Report; No. 61. Washington, D.C.: Henry L. Stimson Center, 2007.

10 Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2019. “Corruption and Peacebuilding Session Report” *Stockholm Forum on Peace and Development 2019: From Crisis Response to Peacebuilding: Achieving Synergies*, Stockholm, Sweden, 14-16 May 2019. Stockholm: SIPRI.

11 Jesper Johnson. *Anti-Corruption Strategies in Fragile States: Theory and Practice in Aid Agencies*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2016, 210.

12 Johnson, 34.

13 Johnston “First, Do No Harm”

14 Ibid., 28.

15 Ibid., 38.

Scholar-practitioner Heather Marquette's 2011 case study of statebuilding efforts in Afghanistan similarly advocates for starting early and working indirectly over the long run to build integrity through realistic, small steps.¹⁶ Debates over indirect versus direct, and 'good enough' versus 'zero tolerance' approaches are summarized in the following section, but these three leading scholars' emphasis on finding appropriate ways to start tackling corruption early has been influential in scholarly and donor conversations about anti-corruption over the last decade.

Alexandra Gilles and Page Dykstra provide evidence for specific anti-corruption strategies that may be more successful if implementers wait until after a transitional period. They examine the comparative cases of Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) in Liberia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).¹⁷ In Liberia, the generally successful strategy was not implemented under the fragile and corrupt transitional government (despite concerns that delays would entrench the post-war sources of extractive industry rents) but waited two years until Johnson Sirleaf became president.

Conversely, in the DRC, implementers attempted and essentially failed to roll out EITI during the transitional period of continued turmoil. Gilles and Dykstra recognize that this strategy of waiting to implement reforms until greater stability is achieved was well-suited for this particular reform strategy, in part because the EITI mechanism requires certain levels of state competencies and systems, as well as operating industries.¹⁸ As such, they do not attempt to generalize the recommendation to other anti-corruption reform strategies. The lessons from their findings are not necessarily in contradiction with Johnson, Johnston, and Marquette's assertions that the types of reforms implemented early are essential in both determining their success and avoiding larger negative effects. Gilles and Dykstra recognize that certain strategies may be entirely inappropriate for early post-conflict transitions because they pose risks to stability; other authors emphasize that while early reforms may not be easy, accountability processes and anti-corruption objectives should be actively prioritized early.

Given the wide range of conflict dynamics, underlying drivers of fragility, political settlements, and other highly idiosyncratic contextual factors, it may be unrealistic to seek generalizable insights into anti-corruption strategies appropriate for early post-conflict periods. However, there is a strong recognition of the need to put corruption considerations on the table early in any transition; only when corruption is not relegated by default to a secondary priority to address in a future time can appropriate anti-corruption measures be considered.

Reasonable Timelines For Addressing Forms Of Corruption

Another point of contention in anti-corruption strategies for FCAS is in the expectations for the time frame in which corruption control gains will be achieved. Many diverse authors note the disconnect between donor expectations for feasible achievements within program cycles and how slow corruption reduction typically is in reality. Johnston summarizes how "aid agencies operate within an assumption that a positive result in terms of reducing corruption can be achieved with relatively few financial resources over a relatively short period of time."¹⁹ The 2011 *World Development Report* summarizes

16 Heather Marquette. "Donors, State Building and Corruption: Lessons from Afghanistan and the Implications for Aid Policy." *Third World Quarterly* 32, no. 10 (2011): 1871–90.

17 Alexandra Gilles and Page Dykstra. "International campaigns for extractive industry transparency in post-conflict settings." In *Corruption and Post-conflict Peacebuilding: Selling the Peace?*, edited by C. Cheng and D. Zaum, 237–256. Abingdon: Routledge, 2011, 244.

18 Ibid.

19 Johnson, 34.

evidence from Pritchett and de Weijer (2010) that it has taken on average 27 years for countries to bring corruption under reasonable control.²⁰

Madeline O'Donnell describes the divergence of donor versus stakeholder time expectations in even starker terms. She proposes (though without any specific evidence) how international donor strategies can push anti-corruption politicians into campaign promises that become 'the third rail of politics' by limiting patronage, antagonizing key clients, and failing to provide a political payoff at the polls.²¹ The international actors want strong upfront corruption reform commitments from politicians, but it takes much longer to implement the anti-corruption assistance programs. Results are not delivered before the next elections, undermining the political leaders who proclaimed their support for the measures; thus, these promises become a political 'third rail' – an issue perceived as too sensitive and risky to tackle.

Moving Too Quickly

Michael Johnston and Dominik Zaum emphasize the risks of moving too quickly in implementing anti-corruption strategies. Moving too quickly, Johnston argues, can result in elite resistance and unintended negative backlashes. Presenting a sudden threat to entrenched corrupt elites may provoke repression and send elites into a thievery overdrive (as they attempt to maximize on rents while they can).²² More gradual approaches, he asserts, can slowly shift power centers and develop stronger public institutions. In these gradual transitions, elites may start to find it 'expedient to act as a political cartel,' shifting from a more deleterious syndrome of corruption into what he describes as the more tolerable "Elite Cartel syndrome" of corruption.²³ However, Johnston's 2010 paper contains very little empirical evidence in support of these contentions for more gradual approaches, in part because the paper primarily introduces a theoretical framework for understanding manifestations of corruption.

Zaum also warns of the risks of acting too quickly using the case of Nigeria (no citation or indication of the evidence is given). Trying to "transform the system rapidly may risk triggering violence and instability, as in the case of the Nigerian government's attempt to remove the corrupt system of fuel subsidies in January 2012."²⁴ Though Zaum does not elaborate on the risks, this case – and the broader literature – suggest the utility of further research²⁵ into the relevant factors influencing how fast one can deal with corruption, and in what sectors. For instance, research is required into how the speed of reforms would be impacted by whether there are anti-corruption provisions in the peace agreement, how the conflict ended, and what the governance or power-sharing arrangements are. These variables are likely to influence the pace at which corruption is addressed after violent conflict ends.

It is useful to distinguish intentionally gradual anti-corruption strategies such as those proposed by the aforementioned authors from those who default to simply waiting for greater stability in volatile areas before confronting corruption. Those pursuing this latter strategy regarding corruption may also use the term 'gradual approach,' even in the absence of careful considerations of the longer-term trade-offs of ignoring corruption in the short-term.

20 World Bank. "World Development Report 2011: Conflict, Security, and Development. World Development Report. (2011), 108-109.

21 Madeline O'Donnell. "Post-conflict Corruption: A Rule of Law Agenda?" Civil War and the Rule of Law. Unpublished draft chapter. 2006, 9.

22 Johnston "First, Do No Harm," 2-3.

23 Ibid., 32.

24 Dominik Zaum. "Political economies of corruption in fragile and conflict-affected states: Nuancing the picture", U4 Brief. 2013, 3.

25 Process-tracing case studies such as Mungiu-Pippidi and Johnston's may be particularly valuable: *Transitions to Good Governance: Creating Virtuous Circles of Anti-Corruption*, edited by Alina Mungiu-Pippidi and Michael Johnston. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd, 2017

Setting The Bar: Appropriate ambitions for how much corruption to address

How much corruption to tackle is another similar distinction made in recommendations for anti-corruption programming in fragile and conflict-affected states. The conversations can loosely be categorized as advocating for zero tolerance, ‘good enough,’ and ‘big bang’ shifts. Marquette provides a useful summary of the debates between these approaches as of 2011, though they may have evolved in the subsequent decade.²⁶

Zero-Tolerance Approaches

Most often, zero-tolerance policies are directives from donor headquarters mandating that all incidents of corruption in the program implementation context are investigated with potentially severe consequences such as withdrawal of all current and future funding. In highly corrupt contexts, these policies are mostly applied to cases of fraud, theft, or misuse of donor resources by partners, though the policies on paper often cover a wider range of issues.²⁷ Several authors²⁸ raise concerns that the policies may amount more to efforts to reduce bad domestic press coverage from aid leakages, rather than actually addressing corruption in fragile contexts. Johnson notes that aid agencies’ hardline zero-tolerance approaches to corruption may have served to increase momentum for the anti-corruption agenda in the mid-1990s and often continue to be used to signal toughness to domestic constituencies.²⁹ However, greater skepticism may be warranted before assuming that zero-tolerance policies can do anything meaningful to actually address corruption in fragile and conflict contexts; when implemented in systemically corrupt areas, zero-tolerance policies arguably are not a strategy for addressing corruption *in the broader system*, but rather can only dictate what forms of corruption *in their programs* they will not tolerate on paper.

Johnson argues that the zero-tolerance policies are “operationally meaningless in a fragile state context where corruption is systemic.”³⁰ He cites the risk that Lambsdorff raised in 2007 that zero-tolerance policies create incentives *against* whistle-blowing behaviors and thus can undermine wider corruption control efforts. For instance, program officers in systemically corrupt areas may be reluctant to investigate potential instances of corruption if it automatically triggers a mechanism that cuts off funding to local implementing partners. Johnson also claims that zero-tolerance approaches can do more harm than good when they have a paralyzing effect on international actors who “end up doing nothing about corruption in the early phases of [an] intervention.”³¹ While Johnson does not cite direct evidence, Jonathan Goodhand’s case study of the drug economy in Afghanistan provides more concrete evidence for similar claims of the limited effectiveness and high potential for perverse effects of zero-tolerance approaches.³²

Notably no authors included in the review advocate *for* zero-tolerance strategies, though the majority of the largest bilateral aid agencies still implement elements of zero-tolerance policies. Particularly in

26 Marquette “Donors, State Building and Corruption,” 1875-1877.

27 Arne Strand. “Zero tolerance of corruption in international aid: How a scaled approach can bolster anti-corruption.” U4 Anti-corruption Resource Centre, 2020.

28 Johnson, 32; Strand.

29 Johnson, 32.

30 Johnson.

31 Ibid., 33.

32 Jonathan Goodhand. “Corrupting or consolidating the peace? The drug economy and post-conflict peacebuilding in Afghanistan.” In *Corruption and Post-conflict Peacebuilding: Selling the Peace?*, edited by C. Cheng and D. Zaum, 144–161. Abingdon: Routledge, 2011, 159.

endemically corrupt fragile and conflict settings, alternatives such as scaled zero-tolerance policies³³ may be more appropriate. Arne Strand has proposed scaled policies in which the responses to alleged or suspected corruption is proportionate to the severity of the problem, and donors support the capacities and willingness of partner organizations to actively prevent corruption in their programs.³⁴

Incremental Approaches and Good-Enough Objectives

In contrast to zero tolerance, many approaches now aim for ‘good-enough’ objectives in fragile states, which often means initially focusing on achieving the minimally acceptable levels of corruption control. In alignment with statebuilding approaches, Johnston argues that in fragile contexts, there is often not an effective, credible state that would be required for implementing most mainstream anti-corruption strategies. As such, he recommends going slower and aiming for ‘half-way’ states of reform that allow for the longer-term emergence of security, stability, and good governance.³⁵ He argues for focusing on credible basic service provision while very gradually building up trust. This may entail tolerating certain types of elite corruption early on while building a broader base of public support and trust through public service provision and gradual reforms. These gradual reforms should be focused on ‘expanding the scope of free and trust-building interactions,’ through approaches like strengthening civil society, civil liberties, rule of law, and free press.³⁶ What is good enough in the short- to medium-term may be characterized as states of corruption reform that are “suboptimal, but still facilitate *de facto* government capacity and reduce certain kinds of stresses.”³⁷ However, he does not clarify how and what types of ‘half-way’ states might enable versus undermine the longer-term emergence of security, stability, and good governance, nor does he provide clear evidence in support of his theoretical formulation.

Marquette offers an example of what incremental approaches that build towards longer-term goals might look like. She describes how the Performance-Based Governors’ Fund (PBGF) in Afghanistan aimed for nothing more than just small steps while acknowledging and tolerating the inevitability that some funds would be misused.³⁸ The program provided direct budgetary assistance to provincial governors (mostly unelected former and current ‘warlords’ appointed by Karzai with high corruption risks) with a requirement only that they use basic budgeting in tracking expenditures. She argues that this strategy is more realistic for a highly fragile, endemically corrupt setting and is more likely to work in the longer term because it focuses on gradually building integrity within society instead of confronting corruption directly.

Among the many authors advocating for gradual, incremental, or sequenced approaches, there is little consensus on what should initially be prioritized, though much of the statebuilding efforts stress basic service provision in fragile and conflict settings. None of the authors offer evidence in support of their choices of what strategic aim to focus on at first (ex: building trust and integrity versus ensuring stability), nor do they offer guidance on how to determine the specific tactics to prioritize. For instance, simply asserting that the best initial strategic aim is building social trust provides the anti-corruption practitioner with no support in deciding whether to focus first on transparent budgeting mechanisms, public service provision, or both simultaneously. This is a substantial gap, given the range of authors advocating for gradualist strategies.

33 Strand. “Zero tolerance of corruption in international aid.”

34 Ibid.

35 Johnston “First, Do No Harm.”

36 Ibid., 21.

37 Ibid., 7.

38 Marquette “Donors, State Building and Corruption.”

Big-Bang Approaches

In introducing the indirect ‘big bang’ theory of anti-corruption, scholar Bo Rothstein challenges the notion of directly attempting to address corruption through discrete programs. He proposes that corruption needs to be understood as a collective action problem instead of a principal-agent problem.³⁹ According to Marquette and Peiffer, corruption as a principal agent problem focuses on the role of “individuals’ calculations about whether or not to engage in or oppose corruption; the influence of transparency, monitoring, and sanctions on those calculations; and the technical challenges of monitoring and sanctioning corrupt behaviour” while collective action theory points to the importance for individuals’ decisions of “group dynamics, including trust in others and the (actual or perceived) behaviour of others.”⁴⁰

In a 2011 article,⁴¹ Rothstein proposes that the only way to overcome a ‘social trap’ (collective action problem) is to have a ‘big bang’ that sufficiently disrupts the overall corruption equilibrium and opens windows of opportunity for change. (Rothstein, it must be noted, revises this recommendation in his 2018 paper to include the possibility of combining gradual and big-bang approaches.⁴²) One implication is that, according to this theory, external anti-corruption programs are not likely to be sufficient to overcome the social trap, regardless of how much corruption they aim to address. The strongest evidence for the big-bang approach comes from Alina Mungiu-Pippidi and Michael Johnston’s 2017 book *Transitions to Good Governance*, which compiles evidence from process tracing in ten countries. Alexander Kupatadze’s chapter on Georgia shows how the ‘big-bang’ approach to disruption equilibria worked when the 2003 Rose Revolution created a limited window of opportunity for massive corruption reforms and reductions.⁴³ In this window from 2004–2008, young elites were able to capitalize on the collective momentum for sweeping governance reforms, particularly reforms to reduce administrative discretion via a simplification of legislation and economic liberalization to uproot the available ‘resource base’ for corruption.⁴⁴ Unfortunately, this progress was eventually undermined when the reformers increasingly manipulated the state apparatus for private and group interests, resulting in wholesale state capture.

GIZ’s 2020 literature review of anti-corruption in fragile settings suggests a way of reconciling the gradualist approaches with the big-bang theories. The authors propose that donors must be prepared to commit to longer-term incremental strategies aimed at reducing corruption and fragility while remaining ready to “scale up their ambitions where windows of opportunity present themselves.”⁴⁵ Rothstein’s 2018 revision of his formulation for overcoming collective action problems similarly includes the possibility of big-bang and gradual approaches, as well as combined approaches in which a lower corruption equilibrium is achieved when gradual approaches first pave the way and allow for a big-bang change.⁴⁶

39 Bo Rothstein. “Anti-Corruption: The Indirect ‘Big Bang’ Approach.” *Review of International Political Economy* 18, no. 2. 228–5, 2011.

40 Heather Marquette and Caryn Peiffer. “Corruption and collective action” Developmental Leadership Program, University of Birmingham, 2015.

41 Rothstein “Anti-corruption: The Indirect ‘Big Bang’ Approach.”

42 Bo Rothstein. “Fighting Systemic Corruption: The Indirect Strategy.” *Daedalus*, 147 (3): 35–49. 2018, 43–44

43 Kupatadze, Alexander. “Georgia: Breaking out of a Vicious Circle.” In *Transitions to Good Governance: Creating Virtuous Circles of Anti-Corruption*, edited by Alina Mungiu-Pippidi and Michael Johnston. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd, 2017.

44 Ibid.

45 GIZ, 20.

46 Rothstein “Fighting Systemic Corruption: The Indirect Strategy”, 43–44.

Who Should Address Corruption in Fragile and Conflict Contexts

National Governments and Political Will

Much of the grey literature raises the issue of national-level political will. While many argue that anti-corruption reforms in fragile contexts have little chance of success without sufficient political will, the literature simultaneously acknowledges that fragile contexts frequently have little political will for such reforms. Boucher et al. claim that a “will to fight corruption on the part of a country’s top leadership” is a basic requirement for anti-corruption efforts, based on their conclusions from the case study of anti-corruption in post-conflict Liberia.⁴⁷

Accommodating differing levels of political will in fragile contexts is a central theme of USAID’s 2018 review of anti-corruption programming in Sub-Saharan Africa. The report notes that the absence of political will was a key determinant of program failure,⁴⁸ echoing a similar conclusion from the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction in 2016.⁴⁹ In situations of low political will, the USAID review recommends indirect anti-corruption interventions⁵⁰; focusing on local levels instead of national levels; and building on multilateral initiatives and economic incentives.⁵¹ For instance, the report found that there were islands of political will to improve corruption related to service delivery at the local level in Tanzania, despite a lack of national level political will. The opposite was true in projects in Liberia in which USAID overestimated the willingness of the national government to support reforms and tackle internal corruption. Based on this experience, the report also suggests the tactic of more flexible government partnerships in which a program starts with one government agency and can switch to working with a different agency or division “if the agency is not a willing partner.”⁵²

In a 2005 working paper for DFID, practitioners Claire Vallings and Magui Moreno-Torres provide a simple classification for designing more contextually responsive anti-corruption interventions in fragile states. They categorize according to the strength of institutions and willingness of political elites to control corruption: ‘weak but willing’; ‘strong but unwilling’; and ‘weak and weak’ (where the sole focus is regime survival).⁵³ The GIZ review summarizes their classification and suggests that in ‘strong but unwilling’ states, “government officials may themselves be predatory” and political actors may “deliberately constrain independent oversight institutions”; conversely, in ‘weak and weak’ contexts, the state may be actively vying for power with other non-state actors, “including religious groups, social movements, militias and traditional leaders,” partnerships with governments may further damage social cohesion.⁵⁴ As such, anti-corruption strategies that work exclusively with governments (the GIZ report

47 Alix J Boucher et al. *Mapping and Fighting Corruption in War-torn States*. Report (Henry L. Stimson Center); No. 61. Washington, D.C.: Henry L. Stimson Center, 2007, 57.

48 United States Agency for International Development, *USAID Anti-corruption Program Efficacy in Sub-Saharan Africa*, by Phyllis Dininio and Brian Calhoun: USAID, 2008.

49 Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction. *Corruption in Conflict: Lessons from the U.S. Experience in Afghanistan*. SIGAR, 2016.

50 By “indirect” interventions, the report largely refers to strategies that can help avoid triggering political sensitivities such as public management systems, addressing inefficiencies, and improving local service delivery.

51 GIZ, 31.

52 United States Agency for International Development, *USAID Anti-corruption Program Efficacy in Sub-Saharan Africa*, 23.

53 Claire Vallings and Magui Moreno-Torres, “Drivers of Fragility: What Makes States Fragile?,” PRDE Working Papers 12824, Department for International Development (DFID), 2005.

54 GIZ, 21.

gives the example of establishing anti-corruption agencies) may be “more about virtue signaling to the international communities” and less likely to yield success.⁵⁵

Other authors have critiqued political will as an understandably tempting but empty concept, particularly in fragile contexts. David Hudson et al. underscores that the concept is opaque and insufficient in providing useful explanations for policy makers and programmers, unless there are efforts to “unpack the black box [of political will] and understand its inner workings.”⁵⁶ Johnston is similarly skeptical of the concept because it is “a matter of intentions and dispositions and as such is fundamentally unknowable a priori”⁵⁷; it is far too simple to declare in hindsight that a program failed because of a lack of political will in the government.

Political will is clearly a chameleon in fragile and conflict-affected environments; international actors struggle to identify in advance what sufficient political will even looks like, let alone find ways to support or catalyze it. More work would be useful to understand incentives and barriers for key leadership figures and organizations, as well as what possible roles the international community could play in nurturing the requisite support.

Civil Society

Many authors have argued that non-state actors and civil society organizations can play a key role in supporting anti-corruption in fragile contexts. Often this involves increasing demand-side accountability and pressure on governments. The 2020 GIZ review presents strong evidence ‘from the field’⁵⁸ on the benefits of integrating civil society into anti-corruption interventions in fragile contexts, particularly groups “involved in issues related to strengthening voice and accountability” at local and national levels.⁵⁹ The GIZ authors provide anecdotal accounts on the valuable roles of civil society from DFID project evaluations and annual program reviews in Nepal, Bangladesh, and Nigeria. For instance, in a governance program in Nepal, civil society engagement and integration into governance programming was determined to be essential for sustaining results and strengthening accountability.⁶⁰

Alina Mungiu-Pippidi and Michael Johnston similarly compile evidence through process tracing of the positive role civil society organizations (CSOs) play in controlling corruption and increasing social resistance to corruption in Estonia, Chile, Uruguay, and Costa Rica, though notably these are not conflict-affected states.⁶¹ However, they ultimately caution against blanket policy prescriptions relying heavily on civil society, noting that CSOs are often “weak, vulnerable, divided or manipulated from above in extensively corrupt situations” and that civil society should be thought of in more nuanced terms that critically assess their political agendas and capacities.⁶²

Roberto Belloni, an academic with expertise in peacebuilding and corruption, pushes back on what he considers to be overly optimistic assumptions of the role of CSOs in keeping a state in check. Civil

55 GIZ, 21.

56 David Hudson, Claire McLoughlin, Heather Marquette, and Chris Roche. “Inside the black box of political will: 10 years of findings from the Developmental Leadership Program.” *Developmental Leadership Program*, 2018, 1.

57 Michael Johnston. “Reforming Reform: Revising the Anticorruption Playbook.” *Daedalus* 2018; 147 (3): 53.

58 The report does not define what ‘evidence from the field’ entails, though they cite several of DFID’s annual reports from anti-corruption programs in Nepal, Nigeria, and Bangladesh.

59 GIZ, 25.

60 Ibid.

61 Alina Mungiu-Pippidi and Michael Johnston. “Conclusions and Lessons Learned.” *In Transitions to Good Governance: Creating Virtuous Circles of Anti-Corruption*, edited by Alina Mungiu-Pippidi and Michael Johnston. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd, 2017, 261.

62 Ibid.

society is not homogenous and should not be treated as such; he argues that in conflict settings “civil society is better understood as a conglomeration of competing groups with different relationships with state authorities.”⁶³ They need to be understood as incorporated in and reflecting the broader political and institutional context in which they operate. In other words, CSOs also have agendas and identities related to the political context. Marie Chene’s 2012 U4 guidance note also highlights that “during and immediately after the conflict, civil society tends to be organized along conflict lines, reflecting the social divisions that may have led to conflict,” further complicating possible partnerships.⁶⁴

There is also substantial evidence suggesting the risk that CSOs themselves are corrupt or are perceived as such by local populations. Belloni presents evidence from nine geographically varied countries in which civil society is embedded within patronage systems, undermining the autonomy of CSOs to hold political authorities accountable when they are gaining resources from those very authorities.⁶⁵ Civil society groups can provide an “important electoral basis for sectarian political parties,” so they may receive resources and privileges from authorities and become part of clientelist networks of political actors trying to extend influence in society. There is also a broader risk of CSOs being created to take advantage of influxes of aid, which can lead to the wide-spread societal perception that all CSOs are corrupt or have illegitimate intentions. A director of an anti-corruption and peacebuilding CSO in Afghanistan extensively described the difficulties of fighting the pervasive assumption that all CSOs are only an excuse to get external funding.⁶⁶ Particularly in rural areas of Afghanistan, hardly anyone believes that CSOs might not just be a corrupt means of making money, presenting significant legitimacy challenges for organizations working on issues of accountability and integrity.

In contrast, ideologically driven anti-corruption CSOs, the opposite of corrupt CSOs, may pose different problems. Belloni presents evidence from Indonesia and Afghanistan of how Islamic organizations may be successful in advancing anti-corruption agendas but may simultaneously promote values and norms that are incompatible with and undermine liberal peacebuilding.⁶⁷

Several authors suggest specific risks and opportunities associated with outside organizations (such as donors and international NGOs) supporting local civil society. Belloni highlights how international NGOs working with local CSOs can provide more political cover for sensitive activities that could jeopardize local CSOs like publishing sensitive or controversial reports. The GIZ 2020 review stresses how civil society can play a strong role in supporting donor political economy analysis of local contexts, citing the example of an anti-corruption program in Bangladesh.⁶⁸ It also indicates the important role for donors in safeguarding civic space so that downward accountability mechanisms can function with less risk of violent reprisal from government authorities.⁶⁹ Chene warns that existing civil society efforts can be easily undermined if external actors “throw money at the NGOs,” when instead they should focus on identifying and strengthening existing mechanisms, resources, and actors.⁷⁰

There is clear recognition in the literature of civil society’s value and potential contributions to anti-corruption progress. It may be particularly well-suited for supporting and reinforcing accountability

63 Roberto Belloni. “Part of the problem or part of the solution? Civil society and corruption in post-conflict states.” In *Corruption and Post-conflict Peacebuilding: Selling the Peace?* edited by C. Cheng and D. Zaum, 218–237. Abingdon: Routledge, 2011, 235.

64 Marie Chene. “Lessons learned in fighting corruption in post-conflict countries.” U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Centre, CMI, Bergen, Norway 12 pp. [U4 Expert Answer 355], 2012, 4.

65 Belloni, 226.

66 Samiullah Hamidee spoke at the April 29th 2021 FriENT conference webinar entitled “A Double Challenge for Peacebuilders: Exploring the Vicious Circle of Corruption and Conflict.”

67 Belloni, 222.

68 GIZ, 30.

69 Ibid., 22.

70 Chene, 10.

relationships in society, such as through strategies like social accountability, democracy promotion, free media, and electoral oversight. However, it is equally clear that civil society is not homogenous, and before developing strategies reliant on civil society, it is essential to ascertain CSOs capacities, political and social affiliations, and authentic alignment with the anti-corruption aims.

Whole of Society and Coalition Approaches

Boucher et al., pulling evidence mostly from the DRC and Liberia, advocate for comprehensive ‘whole-of-society’ approaches involving high-level reforms of government institutions, civil society, the media, the public at large, and international donors. In mapping out the relationships between conflict and corruption, they find that many sectors influence one another; therefore, holistic strategies should aim at sectoral reforms of the criminal justice, legislative, and political institutions, as well as the civil service and elections, while strengthening the role of civil society and the media.⁷¹ In his chapter on civil society in fragile contexts, Belloni concludes that civil society organizations are often too weak in post-settlement states and that strategies are “more likely to succeed if all stakeholders in societies (government, civil society, media, the private sector, business and so on) are included.”⁷² However, these approaches involving everything and everyone at once have largely fallen out of favor in donor guidance publications, which increasingly argue for more realistic incremental and tailored approaches.

O’Donnell proposes a variant of ‘whole of society’ approaches that may be more appropriate for fragile and complex contexts – building strategic coalitions among various actors within and outside of government at all relevant levels of society to address highly specific corruption problems from multiple points. She describes the case of a successful ‘integrity island’ in the DRC that reduced unauthorized taxation of river commerce in the DRC by unsalaried civil servants.⁷³ The INGO worked with the agencies and ministries responsible for the civil servants to constrain their corrupt behaviors, while equipping the river communities most frustrated with the taxation to provide community oversight and monitoring with a direct reporting line to the implicated ministry. The coalition also created an open dialogue with territorial administrators through a civil society forum with government, private sector, and donor representatives in order to allow civil society to publicly and transparently “express itself concerning abuses and corrupt government agency practices.”⁷⁴ However, while O’Donnell describes the approach as achieving real gains in the difficult post-conflict transition, the longer-term sustainability of this ‘integrity island’ example is not known.

Gillies and Dykstra provide evidence from several countries for how multi-stakeholder coalitions can open civic space for more direct ways of confronting and engaging governments over corruption in natural resource practices. They used the cases of Extractive Industries Transparency Initiatives (EITI) committees formed between government, private extractive sector representatives, and civil society in Congo-Brazzaville, Azerbaijan, and Equatorial Guinea.⁷⁵ They also described how in the authoritarian contexts of Gabon and Angola, the involvement of international actors in a Publish What You Pay (PWYP) ‘movement’ helped to protect local activists and civil society by drawing attention “to their cause when they have faced intimidation or arrest by authorities.”⁷⁶

71 Boucher et al, 25.

72 Belloni, 236.

73 O’Donnell, 27-28.

74 O’Donnell, 27-28.

75 Gillies and Dykstra, 247.

76 Ibid.

Finally, the 2020 GIZ review describes evidence from a 2019 DFID report on a program in Bangladesh that brought together government, civil society, and private sector actors to effect multi-stakeholder change over six years. The review notes the importance of strengthening local level collective action: “by empowering citizens to work together, gain confidence and demand accountability from public officials, local authorities became more responsive to citizens.”⁷⁷

Recommendations for ‘whole of society’ and coalition approaches often sound vague, but these offer some of the strongest examples of concrete successes in anti-corruption. Because these approaches leverage the capacities of strategically positioned actors across societies, it may in fact be difficult to extract evidence that is generalizable across contexts, suggesting potential value in nuanced case studies of successful coalitions.

Donor Roles

The majority of what has been written about adapting anti-corruption strategies for fragile contexts has been aimed implicitly and explicitly at international donors and implementers, as opposed to national or local reformers. While there are available documents offering guidance to donors, most focus on what *not* to do in fragile contexts. The 2020 GIZ review claims there is “near unanimity on the need for international actors to coordinate their efforts so as to not overburden recipients” of anti-corruption funding in fragile situations.⁷⁸ Several authors⁷⁹ elaborate on the need for donors to be attentive to the risks of overwhelming absorptive capacities (state and non-state) in fragile contexts. However, donor coordination and recipient capacity issues are commonly cited concerns across development interventions in fragile and conflict-affected contexts, so further research into the specific implications of sudden surges of funding for anti-corruption strategies would be useful.

In tracing how societies shift from more to less corrupt societies (in their terminology, from particularistic to ethical universalist societies), Mungiu-Pippidi and Johnston also seek to understand what role external agents like donors can play in engineering and supporting transitions. They conclude that the “international anti-corruption movement from the mid-1990s onwards cannot claim credit for any of the success stories” covered in the book.⁸⁰ While entirely rejecting the notion of any anti-corruption roadmaps or best practices, they indicate several common denominators in what they term ‘virtuous circle countries,’ societies that have escaped traps of systemic corruption.

For Mungiu-Pippidi and Johnston, fundamental questions of power and wealth are at stake; it is therefore important to “convince citizens that they have a stake in a government that can perform basic tasks effectively, credibly, and above all, in ways that are demonstrably fair.”⁸¹ They dismiss the concept of ‘political will’ as a clichéd and fundamentally flawed concept. External actors also need to analyze more systematically the supporters and opponents for anti-corruption strategies and tactics under consideration, as well as the ways in which social support for anti-corruption strategies can be sustained. This helps to anticipate and address collective-action problems and to think through the best sequencing of reforms. Mungiu-Pippidi and Johnston summarize this multi-dimensional challenge as “how can one reform, or some other form of change we can bring to pass, [and] help later ones succeed.”⁸² They ultimately suggest

77 GIZ, 25.

78 Ibid., 26.

79 Johnston “First, Do No Harm”; Chene; and Johnson.

80 Mungiu-Pippidi and Johnston, 244.

81 Ibid., 256.

82 Ibid., 253.

that donors and external actors can play a role in the transitions but need to start with sound assessments of the “role of government within a society, an appreciation of what corruption represents within those relationships, and a comprehension of the full scope of changes needed.”⁸³

The literature points to a number of areas in which donors can support programming towards anti-corruption goals, both in explicit anti-corruption programming and in ensuring that other international assistance is not inadvertently making corruption worse. However, many authors also indicate the challenges of advancing anti-corruption within the existing foreign assistance system, given issues such as short program time frames, difficulties identifying and targeting the most situationally salient forms of corruption, and selective donor political will to promote anti-corruption only through aid programs rather than diplomatic or political measures. Particularly in fragile and conflict affected states, there is a need to identify and promote promising practices for donor roles in anti-corruption efforts.

83 Mungiu-Pippidi and Johnston, 259.

What Forms of Corruption to Prioritize in Fragile and Conflict Contexts

Perhaps one of the few points of agreement on this question is that there is no single roadmap for anti-corruption efforts in FCAS. Each context presents highly distinctive challenges and has different constraints and assets for addressing corruption, so there is little use and great potential for harm in relying on ‘best practices’ imported from other countries. Several authors⁸⁴ suggest that conducting better analysis of the corruption is critical for informing priorities, though there was no consensus on what this analysis should entail.⁸⁵ Moreover, conducting robust corruption analysis was a surprisingly infrequent recommendation across the reviewed literature. Higher-level strategy discussions⁸⁶ often omitted the need for corruption analysis entirely, focusing rather on theoretical justifications for prioritizing different types of corruption to address. Some of the key considerations in the reviewed literature on what to focus on in fragile and conflict settings include:

- Demonstrable ‘victories’: frying big fish versus low-hanging fruit
- Petty/bureaucratic versus grand/political corruption
- Stabilizing vs destabilizing corruption in fragile contexts
- Sectors to prioritize

Demonstrable ‘Victories’: Frying big fish versus low-hanging fruit

Anti-corruption programs in fragile contexts often face challenges associated with very low public expectations for reforms or corruption control. As such, several authors⁸⁷ propose that clear visible victories are needed to start building momentum. Johnston warns against the temptation of going for ‘big fish to fry’ early on in fragile contexts. He argues these approaches are more likely to have ripple effects on conflict dynamics, such as when anti-corruption actions might entail jailing the leaders of an opposition party.⁸⁸ Peacebuilding and humanitarian practitioner Corinna Kreidler also raises the concern that prosecuting ‘big fish’ can create spoilers to peace processes.⁸⁹ (Neither Johnston nor Kreidler provide evidence for these claims). Instead, Johnston and other authors like Johnsen suggest a theory of change for addressing corruption that focuses on lower-hanging fruit and gradually increasing confidence, though they do not comprehensively articulate how this practically can be implemented nor their assumptions in this theory.

For example, Gilles and Dykstra propose that international strategies and campaigns for transparency in extractive industries are low-hanging fruit in fragile contexts; they are “concrete and low-cost strategies that international actors can promote” and offer entry points into complex political economies.⁹⁰ Other authors use the ‘demonstrable victories’ rationale to make the case for their recommendations on specific

84 For example, GIZ; Zaum “Political economies of corruption in fragile and conflict-affected states;” Marquette “Donors, State Building and Corruption;” O’Donnell.

85 There is, for instance, an emerging trend around conducting Political Economy Analysis to inform anti-corruption programming, though the specifics of what it includes and how it differs from a corruption analysis remain unclear.

86 For example, Johnston “First, Do No Harm”; Philippe Le Billon. “Overcoming Corruption in the Wake of Conflict.” In *Global Corruption Report 2005*, 73-89. London, United Kingdom: Pluto Press, 2005.

87 For example, Gilles and Dykstra; Johnston “First, Do No Harm.”

88 Johnston “First, Do No Harm”

89 Corinna Kreidler. “Can fighting corruption harm building peace?,” in Life and Peace Institute (eds), *Pilfering the Peace: the nexus between corruption and peace-building*. Pg. 38-41. 2009, 41.

90 Gilles and Dykstra, 248.

priority approaches or sectors, such as the focus on visibly improving service delivery. While there may be merits to both approaches, there is also a potential risk that strategies only pursuing low-hanging cases will become the norm, while not addressing bigger challenges.

Petty/Bureaucratic vs Grand/Political Corruption

While far short of consensus, there is some agreement among authors that it may be more appropriate to focus on political or grand corruption than petty or bureaucratic corruption in fragile contexts. The 2020 GIZ review strongly asserts that petty and bureaucratic corruption may be more visible, but “grand and political corruption typically have the greatest bearing on fragility.”⁹¹ However, it does not specify the aspects of fragility (as defined in the OECD framework it uses⁹²) most impacted by grand and political corruption, or how and why this may be the case. Moreover, the reasoning and evidence for this claim is very limited.

Johnsøn similarly concludes from a literature review conducted in 2016 that corruption related to government accountability and legitimacy matters more than bureaucratic and petty corruption in fragile states, largely because of the destabilizing and stabilizing roles the respective forms of corruption play (see next section).⁹³

A group of authors recommend prioritizing grand and political corruption over petty corruption because of their findings on what people perceive as societally damaging versus functionally helpful corruption (sometimes called survival corruption by other authors). Scholar-practitioners Sarah Dix, Karen Hussmann, and Grant Walton support this assertion through evidence from qualitative interviews with Liberian elites who express that, of the various forms of corruption, “bribery would be less likely to lead to instability” because citizens were not as outraged by it as they were by other types of corruption.⁹⁴ Academic Malin Nystrand draws similar conclusions on the lesser implications of bribery from a case study of small business owners’ perceptions of corruption and conflict in northern Uganda. She finds that grand corruption was seen as more related to the conflict dynamics while petty corruption was normalized in local perceptions as “the way things are.”⁹⁵ However, she insists that this should not be generalized beyond this specific conflict context because the connections between forms of corruption and conflict “are likely to differ between post-war societies” and because conflict dynamics are highly contextual.⁹⁶

Cheng and Zaum note, however, that petty corruption is more directly experienced by citizens and that “petty corruption can become a vehicle for targeting ethnic and political groups,” although they do not make recommendations for whether petty or grand corruption is more important to address.⁹⁷

Other arguments involve the relationship between petty and grand corruption and factors contributing to fragility. Through process tracing the case of Rwanda, Mungiu-Pippidi and Johnston find that “petty or administrative corruption can in some cases be a very different issue from grand or political corruption,

91 GIZ, 19.

92 OECD. “States of Fragility” OECD Publishing, 2018, Paris, 7. https://www.oecd.org/dac/conflict-fragility-resilience/docs/OECD%20Highlights%20documents_web.pdf

93 Johnsøn, 210-211.

94 Sarah Dix, Karen Hussmann, and Grant Walton. “Risks of corruption to state legitimacy and stability in fragile situations.” U4 Issue No.3. Bergen: U4, Chr. Michelsen Institute, 2012, 38.

95 Malin Nystrand. “Petty and Grand Corruption and the Conflict Dynamics in Northern Uganda.” *Third World Quarterly* 35, no. 5 (2014): 821-35, 821

96 Ibid.

97 Christine Cheng, and Dominik Zaum. “Introduction: Selling the Peace? Corruption and Post-conflict Peacebuilding.” In *Corruption and Post-conflict Peacebuilding: Selling the Peace?* edited by C. Cheng and D. Zaum, 1–24. Abingdon: Routledge, 2011, 6.

as curbing the former does not necessarily mean reducing the later.⁹⁸ Indeed, in the case study in the same volume on Rwanda, relative success in reducing bribery was not associated with higher levels of accountability, transparency, and citizen participation.⁹⁹ If one is to believe the hypothesis that grand corruption is more important for conflict and fragility, then this research would point to the ineffectiveness of strategies that aim to chip away at the larger issue of grand corruption by tackling more petty forms of corruption. It is noteworthy that, within the material found in this review, little scholarly attention has been given to understanding the exact linkages between petty and grand corruption.¹⁰⁰

Through systems mapping projects in the DRC and Uganda, the Corruption, Justice & Legitimacy Program found that the structures of grand corruption and political influence significantly affected petty corruption; corruption was generally vertically structured in the DRC and horizontally structured in Uganda, so the systems of grand corruption ‘trickled down’ into the forms of petty corruption in ways that reflected the power dynamics and structures of governance.¹⁰¹

Given the lack of evidence supporting these theories and the importance for determining which forms of corruption to prioritize in fragile and conflict settings, additional research is required.¹⁰² Some authors¹⁰³ challenge the conceptual value of the grand versus petty distinction, given the complex interlinking relationships often manifesting between the two forms. Further, many of the rationales given for prioritizing grand or political corruption revolve around the assumption that some forms of petty corruption are more societally legitimate, but how an external implementer could assess perceptions of legitimate versus illegitimate corruption to inform programmatic decisions remains an open question.

It seems likely – though not explored in the reviewed literature – that some forms of petty or bureaucratic corruption may indeed be related to government accountability and legitimacy, such as corruption to hide police brutality or human rights abuses in prisons. In some cases, petty and grand corruption may be related if eliminating petty corruption is an affirmative strategy used by political actors to retain power and avoid accountability at the higher level. This calls into question whether the juxtaposition of grand versus petty corruption is indeed helpful, given their likely relationships.

Further, insofar as inequality is a driver of conflict, and petty corruption contributes to inequality, petty corruption may likely be a highly relevant form of corruption to prioritize in fragile and conflict affected settings. Finally, more research is needed into how petty versus grand corruption may have stabilizing or destabilizing effects, such as in the case of patronage networks (see section on stabilizing and destabilizing effects). If petty versus grand is a useful distinction for donors and programmatic decision-makers in determining what forms of corruption to pursue, substantially more research is needed into the functions and public perceptions of these different types of corruption in complex political and conflict systems.

98 David Sebudubudu, Lina Khatib, and Alessandro Bozzini. Essay. In *Transitions to Good Governance: Creating Virtuous Circles of Anti-Corruption*, edited by Alina Mungiu-Pippidi and Michael Johnston. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd, 2017, 53.

99 Ibid.

100 For two examples of studies on this question not related to fragility and conflict, see: Jiangnan Zhu and Dong Zhang. “Weapons of the Powerful: Authoritarian Elite Competition and Politicized Anticorruption in China.” *Comparative Political Studies* 50, no. 9 (2017): 1186-220.; as well as Vineeta Yadav and Bumba Mukherjee. *The Politics of Corruption in Dictatorships*. Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 2016.

101 Cheyanne Church and Diana Chigas. “Facilitation in the Criminal Justice System Occasional Paper: A Systems Analysis of Corruption in the Policy and Courts in Northern Uganda” *Corruption, Justice and Legitimacy program Occasional Paper*, 2016.

102 Other authors have proposed alternative categorizations of corruption, such as Monika Bauhr’s distinctions between corruption driven by need versus greed. Bauhr, Monika. “Need or Greed? Conditions for Collective Action against Corruption.” *Governance (Oxford)* 30, no. 4 (2017): 561-81.

103 For example, see Michael Johnston. “Reforming Reform: Revising the Anticorruption Playbook.” *Daedalus* 147 (3): Pg. 50–62, 2018.

Stabilizing vs Destabilizing Corruption in Fragile Contexts

Distinctions between stabilizing and destabilizing forms of corruption are frequently made by authors¹⁰⁴ discussing appropriate anti-corruption measures in fragile contexts. Most often, these acknowledge that some forms of corruption, particularly patronage, can be stabilizing in the short run, but destabilizing and harmful in the medium to long run. Johnson provides a more fulsome review of evidence for the relationships between corruption and stability, although little of this evidence is specifically focused on conflict settings.¹⁰⁵ The relationships he covers between the two phenomena of corruption and stability could be substantially different in conflict versus non-conflict settings, indicating a potentially relevant gap in the existing evidence base.

Framing the costs of corruption in the wider context of peacebuilding, Cheng and Zaum propose three main effects: (1) an initial stabilizing function of corruption *in ending violence and cementing peace*; (2) in the post-conflict period, corruption can also be stabilizing when it has *redistributive effects*, particularly through patronage systems; (3) in the long term, corruption has *corrosive effects* that are overwhelmingly negative and that damage state legitimacy and trust.¹⁰⁶

Cheng and Zaum provide a number of anecdotal accounts for these three effects from Liberia, Burundi, and Afghanistan, and the relationships are corroborated by the other authors in the volume who analyze case studies in six countries.¹⁰⁷ Dix et al. similarly find that public sector corruption in Liberia serves to distribute and redistribute rents through informal means, performing integral social functions like providing employment opportunities and assisting vulnerable people.¹⁰⁸

There is general agreement that *patronage* is the type of corruption most likely to be stabilizing (at least in the short run), particularly when the patronage networks assume the functions that formal institutions have of providing improved service delivery.¹⁰⁹ In the longer run, however, patronage can “inhibit the development of accountability mechanisms” and increase the risk of violence because entrenched patronage often engenders grievances by exacerbating social exclusion.¹¹⁰ Dix et al. found similar conclusions in the opinions of elites in Liberia, Nepal, and Colombia: patronage with widely distributed benefits can strengthen the legitimacy and stability of incumbent governments in the short to medium term (most seen in case of Nepal); however, elites consider patronage to most threaten stability when state or illegal actors use violence to sustain a patronage network and when corruption only benefits a narrow group of people without being ‘fairly’ redistributed.¹¹¹ Given the need to prioritize interventions, more research would be useful into how and under what circumstances and time frames patronage systems are stabilizing, as well as how to shift them in the longer term in conflict-sensitive ways.

Other authors have cited different variations of the stabilizing effects of corruption. Marquette and Peiffer note the many social functions that patron-client relationships serve, citing the research by Guari, Woolcock, and Desai of the ways patron-client relations in Honduras “provide security and safety in a highly

104 For example, Marquette and Peiffer “Grappling with the ‘real politics’ of systemic corruption”; Cheng and Zaum, “Introduction: Selling the Peace?”; Le Billon “Buying Peace or Fuelling War”

105 Johnson, 47-49.

106 Cheng and Zaum “Introduction: Selling the Peace?” 8-12.

107 Bosnia, Herzegovina, Liberia, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Sri Lanka.

108 Dix et al, 16.

109 Johnson, 47; Dix et al; GIZ, 12; Peter Uvin. “Corruption and violence in Burundi”, in *Life and Peace Institute (eds), Pilfering the Peace: the nexus between corruption and peacebuilding*. Pg. 17-19, 2009.

110 GIZ, 12.

111 Dix et al, viii.

violent and unstable environment.¹¹² Goodhand's case study of drug-related corruption in Afghanistan pointed to dual effects: stabilizing in North Afghanistan where it cemented political relationships and added to political order, but destabilizing in South Afghanistan where it fueled the combat economy and enabled the Taliban to gain political capital and legitimacy through protecting peasants and traffickers.¹¹³ He points to patronage leading to the exclusion of the Pashtun ethnic group in the country's South, while in the North, the drug economy peace dividend meant that powerful growers, sellers, and middlemen did not want to spoil the peace, and with it, their sources of significant revenues.¹¹⁴

Finally, Johnston's typologies of corruption have been used to indicate different impacts on stability. His four syndromes of corruption can help in differentiating among types of corruption and their underlying causes: 'Official Mogul' corruption often has "dominant, corrupt rulers...[who] wield state power with impunity" and can monopolize power, though there are very low state capabilities; 'Oligarchs and Clans' differs by being dominated by a small but competing set of highly powerful figures, amidst low state capabilities, and often the competition for power results in pervasive insecurity and violence; 'Elite Cartels' has greater stability because corruption operates in "extended high-level networks sustained by the spoils of corruption" and brings diverse elites together to maintain the status quo of corruption through elite collusion amidst moderately strong institutions and economic competition; finally, 'Influence Markets' are often found in "settled, affluent market democracies" in which economic interests can buy influence in strong institutions.¹¹⁵ His contention is that 'Elite Cartel' corruption systems offer medium-term stability, (though they are destabilizing in the long term), while 'Oligarch and Clans' systems are the least stable, peaceful, or predictable.¹¹⁶ Citing how the post-Cold War withdrawal of external resources fueled state failure and conflict, Zaum argues that 'Official Mogul' corruption is particularly susceptible to conflict risks when patronage systems are disrupted.¹¹⁷

There is general agreement among these authors that forms of corruption can serve a stabilizing function in specific situations. These findings caution against blanket anti-corruption strategies in fragile settings that cast a wide net aimed at all forms of corruption. Instead, more nuanced understandings of the stabilizing roles of corruption are needed to appropriately weigh the circumstances and time periods in which strategies may intentionally tolerate forms of corruption.

Sectors to Prioritize

Many authors provide indications of specific sectors to prioritize for early action in fragile settings, though the evidence in support of the recommendations is often scarce and anecdotal. The priority sectors vary widely, although there is some convergence among authors in support of focusing on improving essential service delivery. The 2020 GIZ review notes that many authors advocate (though based on sparse evidence) focusing on social sectors like health and education because of the higher potential payoffs: it may be more possible to "generate and maintain momentum for reform"¹¹⁸ by widely communicating early successes in these areas, thus contributing to rebuilding trust and confidence. They do not fully articulate the theory for why these are the sectors with higher potential payoffs, nor under

112 Heather Marquette and Caryn Peiffer. "Grappling with the 'real politics' of systemic corruption: Theoretical debates versus 'real-world' functions." *Governance (Oxford)*, 31(3), 2017, 499–514.

113 Goodhand, 159.

114 Goodhand, 155-156.

115 Johnston "First, Do No Harm", 18-20.

116 Ibid.

117 Zaum "Political economies of corruption in fragile and conflict-affected states," 2.

118 GIZ, 27.

what conditions these sectors could be more advantageous. Though they do not articulate this, one might plausibly extrapolate that there could be higher payoffs in visibly improving the social sectors most tied to corruption-related grievances, though this requires additional research.

Boucher et al. include basic public service delivery in the anti-corruption priority sectors in war-torn states because of the contributions that service delivery can make to redefining and establishing public perceptions of the government's legitimacy. However, based on literature reviews and their attempt to map corruption in Liberia, they also suggest that aid should "begin with the criminal justice system and national lawmaking apparatus" (including media capabilities for monitoring and oversight) in order to stabilize volatile situations by ensuring public safety and facilitating fair elections.¹¹⁹ Relatedly, other authors¹²⁰ have encouraged focus on the security sector, given the central relationship between state legitimacy and the ability to exercise a monopoly over violence.

Mcloughlin provides a less optimistic perspective on when and why improved service delivery may have positive impacts on legitimacy and trust.¹²¹ Looking at a wide range of service delivery approaches intended to improve state legitimacy in fragile states, she argues that statebuilding through service delivery is not as linear as many aid programs think: these programs can fail to realize that citizens may not see improved services as an expression of state legitimacy. She challenges the conventional wisdom in statebuilding and broader aid policy discussions that "the provisions of vital public services necessarily improves the legitimacy of a fragile or conflict-affected state" by improving the basic services that are part of the social contract in reciprocal state-society relations.¹²² She provides theoretical reasoning and secondary empirical research for why the direct linear causal relationship between service delivery and enhanced government legitimacy is spurious. However, despite significant interest and research into this topic, she notes important limitations to the validity of many of the studies on the correlates and causal factors of legitimacy. While beyond the scope of this review, it would be important to develop a stronger base of evidence on the effects of service delivery on state legitimacy and trust in government before anti-corruption reformers incorporate the assumption into their own theories of change.

A few authors¹²³ emphasize that the process of determining priority anti-corruption sectors needs to be mindful of the conflict context. However, no one has elaborated on the practical implications of using conflict analysis to inform program sector decisions and there is little evidence available regarding how different sectors can most impact conflict dynamics. Kreidler recommends focusing anti-corruption attention on the sectors driving the specific conflict such as working towards accountable management of natural resources related to the conflict,¹²⁴ while Gilles and Dykstra explicitly recommend avoiding these types of sectors until later such as post-conflict or post-transition.¹²⁵ Their rationale is that the sectors most relevant to conflict often represent areas in which "the state, political factions and society itself will need to agree on how the sector should be governed," and this post-conflict negotiation and consensus building is often beyond the scope of anti-corruption programs.¹²⁶ Finally, there is some discussion among various authors on the importance of contextual understandings of socially acceptable versus illegitimate corruption. Kreidler suggests that anti-corruption programming

119 Boucher et al, 58.

120 Julien Joly. "Peacebuilding and corruption in focus: Can looking through an anti-corruption lens strengthen Security Sector Reform?." *Corruption in Fragile States Blog, Abusing Power: Corruption and Conflict*; Tufts University, 2021.

121 Claire Mcloughlin. "When Does Service Delivery Improve the Legitimacy of a Fragile or Conflict-Affected State?" *Governance* 28, 2014: no. 3, 341–56.

122 Mcloughlin, 243.

123 E.g., Johnson; Gilles and Dykstra; Kreidler; Le Billon "Overcoming corruption in the wake of conflict."

124 Kreidler, 38.

125 Gilles and Dykstra, 255.

126 Ibid.

needs to first analyze locally accepted “codes of conduct” and “generally recognized legitimate control of resources and power.”¹²⁷ Other authors echo this line of reasoning, but Kreidler goes the furthest in describing possible linkages between the cultural perceptions of the forms of corruption that anti-corruption initiatives go after as acceptable or illegitimate “targets,” and implications for conflict.¹²⁸ Goodhand’s study of the drug economy in Afghanistan finds that “not all forms of corruption are equally harmful or equally wrong in the eyes of most Afghans.”¹²⁹ People might be more inclined to tolerate petty corruption that provides tangible benefits to them. Interestingly, corruption related to the drug economy in Afghanistan produces far less anger in local discourses on corruption than the misuses of foreign funding and fraudulent NGOs.¹³⁰ This suggests the need for more nuanced, contextually specific understandings of what forms of corruption matter to people and for government legitimacy. More research is needed to build an evidence base, as current discussions remain mostly theoretical and derive from generalizations from a small number of case studies.

127 Kreidler, 38.

128 Ibid., 41.

129 Goodhand, 156.

130 Goodhand, 156.

Viable Strategies and Tactics

Many authors provide prescriptive recommendations for addressing corruption in fragile contexts. While there is a lack of consensus on the practicalities of appropriate strategies and tactics, several recurring themes are commonly discussed:

- Technical vs political approaches
- Direct vs indirect approaches
- Contextual analysis
- Stakeholder expectations in program designs

Technical vs Political Approaches

The majority of authors included in this review acknowledge the political complexities of anti-corruption in fragile contexts and caution against importing technical ‘cookie-cutter’ approaches from non-fragile contexts. Most of the conventional anti-corruption approaches elaborated in the introduction to this paper (e.g., prevention, deterrence, sanctions, incentives) are technical responses to problems formulated using the principal-agent model of corruption. Alternatively, political approaches work from a base understanding of corruption as a problem of collective action, power asymmetry, social norms, and political economy.¹³¹ The 2020 GIZ review concludes that it is apparent that technically focused “interventions that have worked in non-fragile developmental contexts cannot be replicated in settings marked by recent conflict and other manifestations of fragility.”¹³²

Three main reasons are most often given. First, fragile contexts often lack the prerequisite structures, capacities, and political will for technical approaches.¹³³ Mungiu-Pippidi and Johnston emphasize that “in the absence of rule of law and judiciary independence, the tools that the anti-corruption industry advocates do not work.”¹³⁴ Given the very close negative correlation between rule of law and control of corruption (Mungiu-Pippidi and Johnston cite over 90 percent correlation based on World Governance indicators data), rule of law is often particularly low where corruption is high, so “legal approaches to anti-corruption can hardly be expected to work.”¹³⁵ Similarly, they use evidence from their case studies to show how bureaucratic improvements are largely questions of politics, not administrative reforms because corrupt principals will always stand in the way of reform, and successful efforts depend on top-down political will. They conclude that bureaucratic interventions such as ethical codes and training for civil servants under corrupt principals are “a frequent waste area of anti-corruption” in fragile contexts.¹³⁶

The second reason for focusing on political approaches is that the types of corruption that can be addressed with technical solutions are fundamentally less important for fragility and conflict than political corruption. As mentioned earlier in this paper, many authors claim that the most damaging forms of corruption in many fragile contexts are not petty or bureaucratic in nature, often using this claim as the justification for prioritizing political approaches to anti-corruption.¹³⁷ The assumptions behind this rationale for prioritizing political approaches would benefit from additional research; for example, what

131 David Jackson. “How Change Happens in Anti-Corruption.” U4 Issue 2020: No. 14. Bergen: U4, Chr. Michelsen Institute, 2020.

132 GIZ, 19.

133 Boucher et al.

134 Mungiu-Pippidi and Johnston, 247.

135 Ibid.

136 Ibid.

137 GIZ, 19.

forms of corruption – petty or political – can indeed be addressed by technical solutions? However, despite the lesser importance of technical approaches in fragile contexts, many domestic and international actors still have strong incentives for prioritizing technical anti-corruption strategies. Pulling evidence from case studies of Anti-Corruption Commissions (ACCs) in Hong-Kong, Singapore, Sierra Leone, and Timor-Leste, practitioner-scholar John Heilbrunn claims that large-scale bureaucratic approaches to political problems are often a means through which local political elites can send signals of their “credible commitment to reforms” to international actors.¹³⁸

The final rationale often given for focusing on political over technical approaches in fragile contexts is that everything is political when corruption involves essential issues of power and access to resources. Cheng and Zaum introduce their 2012 edited volume on post-conflict anti-corruption with the declaration that “corruption is a political problem that requires a political solution; a technical approach will not succeed on its own.”¹³⁹ Mungiu-Pippidi and Johnston similarly indicate that technical approaches are largely pointless when they fail to reflect political circumstances because “at stake is the fundamental political issue of where power comes from, who should have it, and what the real and acceptable relationships between power and wealth are and how both should and should not be used.”¹⁴⁰ They recommend a strong potentially productive role for debate, contention, and even conflict in transforming relationships with power and corrupt practices and overcoming collective-action problems, although notably this recommendation is not specific to fragile and conflict settings.¹⁴¹

The reviewed evidence does not uniformly indicate prioritizing only political approaches and ignoring technical problems, but rather suggests that all approaches to corruption – including technical ones – must include an explicit political lens. Technical approaches may be necessary but will not get a foothold without explicitly navigating power and politics in the environment.

Direct vs Indirect Approaches

There are widely divergent opinions between prominent authors on whether it is more appropriate to address corruption directly or indirectly in fragile settings. According to Johnson (2016), *direct* anti-corruption projects involve explicit support for anti-corruption reforms, commissions, or agencies, while *indirect* approaches often have corruption reduction as an implicit, secondary, or mainstreaming strategy.¹⁴² In summarizing findings from the ‘virtuous’ case countries, Mungiu-Pippidi and Johnston note that none have tackled the problem directly and that “progress has been long term, indirect and often independent of deliberate reforms.”¹⁴³ However, the focus of their case studies is on how corruption change can occur and is not focused on explicit recommendations for how external actors can help drive this change through indirect approaches. Johnston and Marquette make somewhat more concrete prescriptions for indirect and long-term approaches, though their emphasis on building trust and integrity still lacks practical guidance for promising tactics.¹⁴⁴ Johnson pushes back on the recommendations for indirect approaches only insofar as he notes that a combination of indirect and direct may be better suited for fragile contexts.¹⁴⁵

138 John Heilbrunn “Post-conflict reconstruction, legitimacy and anti-corruption commissions.” In *Corruption and Post-conflict Peacebuilding: Selling the Peace?*, edited by C. Cheng and D. Zaum, 201-217. Abingdon: Routledge, 2011, 203.

139 Cheng and Zaum, “Introduction: Selling the Peace?” 22.

140 Mungiu-Pippidi and Johnston, 256.

141 *Ibid.*, 253.

142 Johnson, 13-14.

143 Mungiu-Pippidi and Johnston, 253.

144 Johnston “First, Do No Harm”; Marquette “Donors, State building and Corruption”

145 Johnson.

Rothstein differentiates direct and indirect approaches based on the theoretical understanding of the problem of corruption. Direct strategies arise mostly from a principal-agent understanding of corruption and generally involve attacking corrupt behavior “head-on with increased control, stricter punishments, and less discretion of the agents” or going after the ‘big fish.’¹⁴⁶ Indirect approaches more often reflect collective-action theory; strategies might “focus on reciprocity, changing perceptions about ‘the rules of the game,’ and breaking a corrupt equilibrium.”¹⁴⁷ He provides examples that include working towards a functioning taxation system, gender equality in the public sector, and universal free public education, though he does not specify adaptations of these strategies for fragile and conflict-affected settings, but rather asserts that indirect strategies writ large are more appropriate for these contexts.

Dix et al. also recommend avoiding explicit anti-corruption approaches in favor of implicit measures. This is based on qualitative interviews with elites in Colombia, Nepal, and Sierra Leone. In Colombia, “respondents saw indirect anti-corruption initiatives [such as the reform of political parties and campaign finance] as having had some positive impact on state legitimacy, while direct measures have been met with greater skepticism.”¹⁴⁸

Many of these recommendations overlap with discussions of the timing of anti-corruption efforts in fragile states (see previous section), and notably no authors present evidence beyond inferences from individual case studies.

Contextual Analysis

Unsurprisingly, most thoughtful reflections on how to adapt anti-corruption strategies for fragile contexts include a strong emphasis on understanding the nuances of the context. It is worth noting that recommendations nearly always call for Political Economy Analysis (PEA) and not conflict analysis. Of the literature included here, only authors Kreidler along with Scharbatke-Church and Reiling explicitly mentioned the value of in-depth conflict analysis for anti-corruption programming in fragile and conflict contexts.¹⁴⁹ Political Economy Analysis has no single methodology, but often seeks to understand the underlying societal, cultural, historical, political, and economic factors driving corruption – or other problems addressed through development programming – in a specific context. It can involve mapping out power dynamics between actors and institutions but is unlikely to incorporate all of the nuanced insights into fragility and conflict that an in-depth conflict analysis on a proposed program or reform can offer.

Considering Stakeholder Expectations in Program Designs

Several authors emphasize the imperative of understanding and carefully managing stakeholder expectations throughout the process of anti-corruption strategy design and implementation in fragile contexts. Perceptions of corruption levels in society, as well as expectations for the potential for success of reforms, must be considered. This is particularly important when strategies depend on overcoming collective action problems by convincing people who might reasonably have a stake in changing corrupt behaviors that changing the status quo is possible. Excessively high or low expectations by the public,

146 Rothstein. “Fighting Systemic Corruption: The Indirect Strategy,” 43.

147 Ibid.

148 Dix et al, 44.

149 Kreidler; Scharbatke-Church, Cheyanne and Kirby Reiling. “Lilies that fester: seeds of corruption and peacebuilding”, in Life and Peace Institute (eds), *Pilfering the Peace: the nexus between corruption and peacebuilding*. Pg. 4-9. 2009; 6.

international partners, and national governments all can result in negative unintended consequences. Johnston describes reforms in general as an exercise of changing expectations for corrupt behaviors: even when actual corruption levels are less common than publicly believed, “the expectation that corruption will be the norm and that ‘playing by the rules’ is futile is a serious, corruption-enhancing problem.”¹⁵⁰ Le Billon similarly emphasizes that “raising public expectations is key to the long-term success of reconstruction [in post-conflict settings] so that corruption becomes unacceptable rather than unavoidable,” and notes the potential role here for CSOs and media.¹⁵¹

While confidence in the potential for success is important, Johnston also discusses the risks associated with programs that raise expectations for reforms unrealistically high too early in the process and fail to deliver on those expectations, leading to public disappointment, increased social and political distrust, and restriction of future opportunities for corruption reforms.¹⁵² According to this rationale, if the public, international donors, and national actors have low expectations of what can possibly be done about corruption, this can prevent the necessary sustained support and momentum for reforms. Additionally, when donors or international backers have unrealistically high expectations, they can push for unrealistically short timelines on reforms or overemphasize the importance of changes in national corruption index scores as the metric of success. This can disrupt other more carefully devised longer-term strategies.¹⁵³

Kreidler raises a particular conflict risk associated with insufficient attention to expectations. If reforms fall far short of excessively high expectations, “those who fought for social change may feel disillusioned, betrayed by the slow progress” and take up arms again if they feel that ‘playing by the rules’ is not a viable reform strategy.¹⁵⁴ However, she does not provide any examples, additional supporting evidence, or indications of where this concern might be most relevant. In recommendations based on findings in Nepal, Colombia, and Sierra Leone, Dix et al. discuss the risk of how unrealistically inflated public expectations can “make it difficult for incumbents to govern when results fall short,”¹⁵⁵ threatening stabilization efforts.

150 Johnston “First, Do No Harm”, 24. This is also consistent with the «collective action» formulation of the problem of corruption as proposed by Rothstein (“Anti-Corruption: the Indirect ‘Big Bang’ Approach.”; “Fighting Systemic Corruption: The Indirect Strategy”) and Mungiu-Pippidi and Johnston, among others.

151 Philippe Le Billon. “Overcoming Corruption in the Wake of Conflict.” In *Global Corruption Report 2005*, 73-89. London, United Kingdom: Pluto Press, 2005,” 80.

152 Johnston “First, Do No Harm”, 2.

153 Le Billon, «Overcoming Corruption in the Wake of Conflict.,” 6-7.

154 Kreidler, 41.

155 Dix et al, 48.

Conclusion

This paper identifies the key trends in the literature on how to adapt anti-corruption strategies for fragile and conflict settings. Implementers working on anti-corruption in highly complex, endemically corrupt, and volatile settings face difficult dilemmas, severe programmatic constraints, and high stakes in the program's failures or successes. They grapple with questions of what type of corruption to focus on, with whom to partner, and trade-offs between short-term stability while ignoring corruption and longer-term impunity and negative peace. Given the underwhelming – and at times detrimental – track record of anti-corruption programs in complex and fragile situations,¹⁵⁶ many current program strategies and implementation approaches should be reassessed.

Emerging Insights on Anti-Corruption in Fragile and Conflict Settings

Clearly there are no blueprints for addressing corruption in fragile and conflict affected settings – and for good reason, given the need to ground each strategy in the particular post-conflict context. Yet despite fragmented literature and sparse evidence, I would assert that there are several considerations prudent practitioners would take into consideration in order to effectively adapt their policy or programs. What follows are insights gleaned from many months sitting in this literature, reflecting on its application, and teasing out these ideas in discussion with numerous scholars and practitioners:

- **Consider corruption early:** There is little consensus on what to do to proactively tackle corruption in the early period after conflict abates or during peace transitions. Yet there is highly compelling evidence for why policymakers and practitioners should insist on incorporating corruption into discussions and calculations of early strategies, instead of unthinkingly punting anti-corruption to a later time. While it may be in certain situations corruption needs to be a secondary priority (e.g., to maintain a ceasefire). at the least, corruption should be actively on the table in developing cohesive strategies in conflict and immediate post-conflict periods.
- **Everything is political when power is challenged:** Apolitical technical responses are understandably appealing to practitioners and policymakers looking to demonstrate tangible anti-corruption *action* within 'classic donor timelines.' This is particularly true in fragile contexts in which government political support may be lacking, absorptive capacities limited, and the risks of exacerbating conflict-related tensions high. Yet even seemingly straightforward technical approaches need to be implemented with political awareness; that is, thinking and working politically to understand the power dimensions involved in disrupting access to resources and power through anti-corruption measures.
- **Ground the response in the context and conflict:** While anti-corruption strategy formulation can and should build off existing good practices, it certainly cannot supersede the need to base strategies off context and conflict analysis. The reviewed literature demonstrates the necessity of tailoring strategies around the constraints and capacities of the specific context. In addition to more standard political economy analysis, relevant dimensions may include: conflict dynamics, social

¹⁵⁶ Several authors among many who have expressed this sentiment include: Mungiu-Pippidi and Johnston; Marquette and Peiffer "Grappling with the 'real politics' of systemic corruption" 2017; Johnston "Reforming Reforms" 2018; Jackson, "How Change Happens in Anti-Corruption" 2020.

expectations for reforms versus cynicism, the strength and capacities of civil society, social norms and relationships between corruption and underlying drivers of conflict such as social grievances.

- **Determine what types of corruption matter most, then select approaches:** The reviewed literature shows the diversity of opinions on what forms of corruption matter most, and why. Many anti-corruption organizations specialize in specific approaches, so it may be easy for the hammers to only see nails. Instead, select the strategic focus (sectors, forms of corruption, and geographic areas) to target in programs based on a clearly defined rationale. This rationale may take account of various considerations such as which forms of corruption are locally perceived to be most egregious, which are actively contributing to violent conflict (e.g., by funneling resources into conflict), which serve a temporarily stabilizing role, and which are driving cynicism and undermining collective action.
- **Sound strategy trumps donor convention and convenience:** Appropriate anti-corruption strategies in fragile and conflict affected settings – that is, strategies more likely to be effective and conflict sensitive – may not necessarily conform perfectly to dominant foreign aid processes. The literature review provided evidence of the need to reconsider questions such as reasonable time frames for anti-corruption progress, the utility of zero-tolerance policies in endemically corrupt and hard to monitor settings, and the reliance on certain types of partners such as civil society organizations.

Recommendations for advancing evidence-based practices

Overall, this literature review points to a general need for stronger evidence in what adaptation might yield the strongest, most durable results towards tackling corruption in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. However, as the review indicated, there are perhaps more gaps in concrete evidence than areas of consensus. This perhaps reflects implicit prioritization among scholars and practitioners to first understand how corruption in general can be addressed; adaptations for fragility and conflict necessarily build on this foundational understanding, though alone it is insufficient guidance. With little research-based material available, additional empirical efforts to deepen the evidence base specific to conflict and fragility would be most valuable in the following areas:

- **Evidence mining from adjacent fields:** Gaps identified in this review do not necessarily mean that relevant research is entirely missing; for some areas, there may not be evidence *specific* to anti-corruption in fragile or conflict settings, but insights can be gleaned from adjacent fields. Statebuilding, peacebuilding, and governance may have robust evidence or well-tested good practices for addressing power, accountability, and state-society relationships in fragile and conflict settings from which the anti-corruption field can benefit.
- **Dialogue and cross-pollination of ideas between fields:** Similarly, the anti-corruption community may not be alone in facing some of the larger tensions identified in this review; facilitated dialogue and intentional cross-sectoral learning between sectors which also grapple with similar dilemmas could result in innovative approaches to addressing corruption in complex and dynamic contexts. Areas of overlap may include, among others: how to support legitimate and accountable governance systems; what ‘good enough’ looks like; what forms of corruption may need to be initially tolerated; and how external actors can support ‘whole of society’ coalitions.
- **Robust research and case studies:** While much can be gained from expanding the search for evidence and insights in other fields, additional research such as longitudinal studies and in-depth case studies specific to anti-corruption in fragile and conflict settings would be valuable. These

are particularly needed to shed light on the tensions between short- and long-term dilemmas in temporarily prioritizing peace over anti-corruption. Another priority area should focus on what forms of corruption to prioritize. Greater research and attention should be given to supporting program designers and implementers through the process of deciding what forms of corruption to prioritize. With seemingly endless issues to address in endemically corrupt and conflict-affected settings, there could be great value in developing evidence-based guidance for choosing when and what forms of corruption to address.

- **Theories of Change articulation:** It is always important to have well-articulated Theories of Change and all the more so in highly complex and fragile environments.¹⁵⁷ These allow scholars, policymakers, and practitioners alike to identify the assumptions under which they envision anti-corruption change will unfold. This is particularly important for settings in which the risks of unintentionally exacerbating conflict or fragility are higher than ever. This process of making assumptions explicit may also benefit the consensus around best practices in the ‘traditional’ anti-corruption repertoire.
- **Nuanced distinctions between fragility and conflict contexts:** In building more robust evidence bases for anti-corruption strategies, researchers should more clearly differentiate between the impacts of programs on fragility versus conflict. While there is substantial overlap, implicitly conflating fragility and conflict muddies the waters for designing contextually appropriate program strategies.

157 While not specific to fragile and conflict-affected settings, David Jackson maps the theories of change in several dominant and alternative paradigms of anti-corruption approaches. David Jackson. “How Change Happens in Anti-Corruption.” U4 Issue 2020: No. 14. Bergen: U4, Chr. Michelsen Institute, 2020.

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