



# HIDDEN AGENDAS, SOCIAL NORMS AND WHY WE NEED TO RE-THINK ANTI-CORRUPTION

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## What is the problem?

Eradicating corruption is a wicked problem



**The problem:** High levels of corruption persist in many countries in spite of having adopted strong legal and organizational anti-corruption reforms associated with so called international best practices.

**The proposed approach:** Rather than measuring gaps we need to look at how decisions and strategies of local actors are shaped in practice. This should be the departing point to developing a new generation of more effective, contextualised anti-corruption strategies.

**The research agenda:** Research at the Basel Institute on Governance focuses on uncovering and mapping informal practices and norms that drive corrupt behaviours. It is not uncommon that unwritten rules are in practice more binding than the legal framework.

**The research projects:** Two projects investigate the role of informality in driving corruption from the perspective of political and business elites (top-down) and of average citizens (bottom up).

Project "Corruption, Social Norms and Behaviours in East Africa"  
This project investigates the influence of behavioural factors –such as social norms and mental models- on attitudes towards petty corruption among citizens in three East African countries: Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda.  
This project is funded by the East Africa Research Fund of the UK's Department for International Development (DFID).  
For more information please visit:  
<http://www.earesearchfund.org/research-corruption-social-norms-and-behaviors-east-africa>

Project "Informal Governance and Corruption: Transcending the Principal Agent and Collective Action Paradigms"  
This project involves a comparative research design exploring prevalence of informal practices and their links to corruption across seven countries in two distinct regional contexts: East Africa -Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda- and Central Asia and the Caucasus -Georgia, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan-.  
This project is funded by the Anti-Corruption Evidence (ACE) scheme of the British Academy and the UK's Department for International Development (DFID).  
For more information please visit  
<http://www.britac.ac.uk/node/4660>

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## What are the findings?

Prevalent patterns of informal governance

- Co-optation** Co-optation is associated with strategic appointments into public office of allies and potential opponents, who are granted impunity in exploiting the power and resources associated to public office in exchange of mobilizing support and maintaining loyalty to the regime.
- Control** Control mechanisms are instrumental to manage clashes of hidden interests, ensure elite cohesion and enforce discipline of allies. Common examples involve the selective enforcement of anti-corruption prescriptions against opponents or renegades.
- Camouflage** Camouflage refers to the manner in which co-optation and control are hidden underneath institutional façades and policies consistent with a commitment to good governance and democratic accountability. Thus, punishment of a detractor may be accompanied by proclamations on the commitment to anti-corruption.

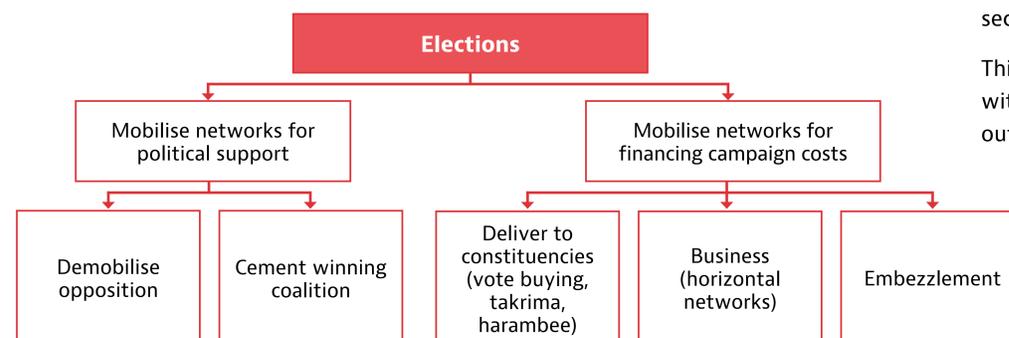
### Informal Practices Top-Down

Informal practices among power networks of political and business elites promote elite cohesion, nurture bases of support and weaken opponents

They are instrumental for regime survival.

They entail an informal re-distribution of resources in favour of the networks of "insiders" at the expense of "outsiders", resulting in high levels of corruption

### Informal practices help win elections



## What can we do better?

Research findings shed light on the limited impact of conventional anti-corruption approaches which typically do not deal with hidden agendas or tackle the habits of corruption.

Thus, we should:

- Recognise that anti-corruption legal approaches need to be complemented with strategies that target behaviours and identified risk areas in a context sensitive manner.
- Aim reform efforts to account for the functionality of corrupt practices (e.g. user fees formalise bribes exchanged for better services)
- Harness the power of local social norms and values (reciprocity and social obligations can energise social accountability initiatives)

### Informal practices facilitate access to jobs, services and resource



### Functionality of corruption

Informal social networks at the grassroots level represent problem solving resources for people.

Such networks operate on the basis of reciprocity and the obligation to look after the group, such that when a member of the network is employed in the public sector it is expected that he or she will utilize this position to benefit of group.

This is linked to patterns of social acceptability whereby a person who behaves with integrity is scorned while the corrupt are at the minimum tolerated if not outright admired.

