

ACCOUNTABILITY IN DEMOCRATIC REGIMES

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Abstract: This article discusses the relation between corruption and accountability, showing that the more accountable a government is, the greater the ability of the voter to evaluate the true effectiveness of that government and inhibit and repress occasional abuses. Confidence in the political class is dependent on mechanisms that guarantee freedom and the preservation of that confidence, which is in direct relation to the need for accountability. A consequent issue is the effectiveness of what has been called vertical accountability, i.e., elections. This article argues that elections serve only to invest authority in politicians and do not reward or punish; therefore, elections are a weak mechanism for accountability. Finally, this article establishes the importance of accountability in representative democracies for good institutional functioning.

Keywords: corruption, accountability, oversight.

1 Introduction

The confidence we have in the political class in democratic societies is subject to mechanisms that guarantee freedom. In turn, the preservation of this confidence, which the political class desires to maintain, derives specifically from the need for accountability (Patricio, 2001).

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The real effectiveness of what has conventionally been called vertical accountability (elections) and has long been regarded as the primary mechanism of accountability is being questioned by empirical analysis. Thus, elections can prevent unpopular but technically correct steps from being taken by a government, and elections can also compel a government to fulfil campaign promises. However, Fearon (1996, apud Patrício, 2001), Manin, Przeworski and Stokes (1997), and Ferejohn (1986) show that one cannot prove empirically that some voters have a tendency to vote for politicians who follow reward and punishment parameters. Consequently, confidence in representative democracies or in constitutional governments is increasingly linked to mechanisms other than elections that concomitantly limit and allow governing, whereas elections function to invest authority in the ruling elite.

This rationally founded confidence requires that rulers be accountable, either by elections or by any other form of public inspection [oversight]. That is, individuals who govern will only be reliable if it is in their best interests to do what is expected of them. And they will only do what is expected of them if they are obliged to be accountable (Patrício, 2001, p. 97).

Because there are, in political life, many institutions run by individuals with a high degree of self-interest, the confidence of the public they need to win is based on work performed in the public interest. For this “altruistic” work to occur, some of these public servants must be directly accountable to citizens, and others must be accountable to other public servants. Because both of these types of control are extremely fragile and weak, a theory is necessary that shows how essentially self-interested bureaucrats who are motivated by income and their careers may serve millions of citizens (Hardin, 1991). The conclusion that reliable governments are those that are accountable is also clear in Pettit (1997). Oversight, according to these authors, derives precisely from the belief that rulers should be subject to checks and balances, which was developed and shown to be justified in the *Federalist Papers*. A system of checks and balances is the only way for a nation to take precautions against the arbitrary will of rulers and prevent corruption (Patrício, 2001).

2 Definitions of accountability

Highly relevant and useful definitions of accountability are also presented in Patricio (2001). Therefore, I will utilise here the entire excerpt that dissects these definitions:

Accountability relationships are typical “agency” relationships, those in which an agent is committed to act on behalf of a principal. It is said that a person, A, is accountable to another, B, if two conditions are met:

- 1) It is implied that A is obliged to act in some manner in favour of B.
- 2) B has the power, by formal rules or informal means, to sanction or reward A for A’s activities and performance in the exercise of this activity.

Another definition of “accountability” compatible with this one is as follows: In a representative democracy, there is “accountability” if the principals – voters, citizens – have tools that allow them to discern and sanction (punish or reward) the behaviour of institutional agents (Laver & Shephse, 1999, p. 87).

Electoral accountability supports “minimalist” definitions of democracy, such as the following: “Democracy is a political system in which the rulers are indicated by free, regular and repeated elections, in which parties may lose elections” (Przeworski, 1997, *apud* Patricio, 2001, p. 121).

Alternatively, the following definition: “Democracy is a political system distinguished by the accountability of rulers to the ruled” (Cheibub & Przeworski, 1997, p. 156).

In this situation, accountability is generated by elections but may occur only indirectly, as in the parliamentary system, in which government (or Cabinet, or executive branch) accountability is held by the legislative branch, which, in turn, is governed by the system of elections, creating a chain of several links between the government and the electorate. The same occurs in the case of executive branch agencies, whose bureaucrats are directly accountable to the president and to congress but only indirectly to the voters.

In parliamentary democracies, political agents (or representatives) may be treated as principals and cabinets

treated as agents who are accountable or react to the possibility of sanctions by acting in accordance with what they believe to be the will of the principal. In this case, a vote of mistrust is perceived as a real threat, inducing an appropriate behaviour or forcing resignation if a vote of mistrust is anticipated.

The representative government, based on delegation or assignment of power to representatives elected periodically, is, in the first definition, considered an accountable form of government:

“If individuals are rational and governments are competent [...] and voters know everything they need to know regarding the exogenous conditions and the effects of policies on the results, then both a “responsible” government and an accountable government are representative. [...] People give signs of their will in elections, and a responsive government will implement their instructions to generate the results that people want. Alternatively, the government will anticipate retrospective judgements of the electorate, and, to win elections, will do the same” (Manin, Przeworski, & Stokes, 1997, p. 73).

However, if one accepts the possibility of sanctions in the strict sense as a definition of accountability, there is no guarantee that elections are an effective mechanism for the sanctioning of a representative by a voter.

The literature considers several problems, such as the so-called “problem of the last term in office”, the problem of the existence of a large variety of candidates or campaign issues or the problem of incomplete information on the part of voters. The limitations of the electorate to reward and punish the behaviour of elected representatives during the representatives’ term in office and the lack of coordination on the part of voters ensure that representatives obtain economic “revenues” in this relationship.

Pasquino (1997, *apud* Patricio, 2001, p. 123) suggests that instead of minimalist definitions based on the existence of elections, the following definition of democracy should be considered: “A constitutional democratic state is a political system in which the will of an elected majority can be overturned or modified – at least for a time – by an unelected and politically unaccountable body”.

This definition has the advantage of including bodies such as Constitutional Courts, in which unelected officials make

decisions that may invalidate majoritarian decisions. It is assumed, furthermore, that constitutional elections allow certain bodies to discard and impose results that may negate the decisions of democratic majorities. However, constitutional elections include horizontal accountability as the foundation of democracy.

The result is that the minimalist definition of democracy, based on the existence of periodic elections, tends to give way to a “counter-majoritarian” definition in which freedom is associated with horizontal accountability, which is more important than (or complementary to) vertical accountability in preserving confidence.

The existence of non-elected bodies in democracies, such as the judiciary and the bureaucracies of executive branch agencies to whom decision-making power is delegated, requires considering the legitimacy of these bodies and an effective manner in which to hinder bureaucrats from benefitting from the information asymmetry existing between them and the institutions that control them, which can cause them to deviate from their functions in a predatory manner (Patrício, 2001, p. 124).

The conclusion that we can draw is that elections, a democratic factor of moderate governments, ultimately do not solve the agency problem of the delegation of power. Elections therefore only serve to give consent to, but not to reward and punish, politicians.

There are authors who demonstrate that democracy, as a method of producing governments founded on elections, does not prevent accountability problems, and most models and empirical research conclude that the information asymmetry between rulers and the ruled is one of the main reasons for this systemic fragility. These authors consider this information asymmetry a key to explaining the agency problems arising from the delegation of power.

Electoral institutions are the democratic component of representation, not because there is a selection of representatives, but because there is a possibility that representatives will be changed periodically. Electoral institutions serve “not only to choose good rulers but also as an accountability mechanism of the politicians to the public and thus render the policies more or less close [responsive] to the desires

of the public” (Ferejohn, 1986, p. 65). Even today, the idea of representation “brings the supreme moment in which the electorate judges the past actions of the rulers” (Manin, 1997, p. 178).

However, what ensures “that the elections actually induce representatives to act in the public’s interest in the best manner possible?” (Pitkin, 1967, p. 34). Do elections ensure accountability? Do “elections effectively ensure that, in anticipation of sanctions or rewards, representatives strive to act in the best interest of the citizens? And if that does not occur, [would] there be any reason to choose the elections as a source of voters’ confidence in representatives?” (Patrício, 2001, p. 138). We observe different answers from each author.

Manin, Przeworski and Stokes (1999), Maravall, Ferejohn (1986), and Cheibub and Przeworski (1999) suggest that elections do not prevent problems such as “moral hazard” and adverse selection, nor do elections guarantee the reward or punishment of politicians by voters. The authors present evidence that elections are weak mechanisms of accountability. The quality of information available to the common voter is a precise determinant of the extent of electoral control.

With the exception of the Banks and Sundaran (1997) model, the majority of the older election dynamic models postulate the possibility of some type of electoral control, even if it is only the presence of unreliable voter information. Ferejohn’s (1986) model, for example, posits that voters vote, punishing or rewarding the performance of candidates, based on what will maximise their own welfare, assuming that politicians will only pursue their own interests. The mere existence of this rule hypothetically induces candidates to pay attention to the interests of voters. Ferejohn arrives at the following conclusion: Because the electorate is as homogeneous as the number of competitors is large, voters have increasing control over politicians in office as the value of the office to the candidate increases and less control as the politician’s desire to be re-elected decreases.

In contrast, Fearon (1996, apud Patrício, 2001) considers in his model that repeated elections do not function as a structure of accountability because voters know that the ability to observe what politicians do and subsequently assess whether these actions are favourable to themselves is a remote possibility. Fearon asks, therefore,

how elections should be understood and whether they should be considered an instrument of choosing the “right king” politician or an instrument of accountability. He also questions whether voters perceive elections as an opportunity to choose a “good kind” of political leader who will act on behalf of these same voters, regardless of any re-election incentive, or if voters even have the ability to discern the “good guys”. If the latter, electoral accountability would not be necessary for elections to guarantee the public policies desired by voters.

According to the answer provided by Fearon (apud Patricio, 2001), if we consider as given the two conditions that define the relation between accountability and representative democracies, namely, 1) that representatives act according to the interests of voters and 2) that voters can punish or reward the representatives if the representatives do not act according to the interests of the voters, the logical consequences are that 1) there is no relation between elections and accountability and 2) the lack of electoral accountability does not imply a lack of agents who act in the manner that the principal desires.

Patrício (2001) explains that in this model, if

voters believe and are able to distinguish and vote for “right types” (those who want to implement exactly what the voter wants), then the elections do not need to be instruments of sanction to produce good public policies. Conversely, with a good legal system and watchdog type agencies, there would be fewer incentives for corruption; additionally, the representatives would not need to provide favours to the corporations that generally fund their campaigns. Thus, we cannot clearly conclude that the end of electoral accountability would make politicians less [responsive] to public policies (Patrício, 2001, p. 145).

In turn, Manin, Przeworski and Stokes (1999), when considering an elitist system, reiterate the argument of authors such as Schumpeter (1942), Dahl (1971) and Bobbio (1989), who consider democracy a system of “competitive oligarchies” in which those governed can replace those who govern by elections. Manin, Przeworski and Stokes then inquire whether this fact would be enough to force governments to act in a representative manner. Is there any reason for one to believe that

because of the simple fact of being elected, politicians will act in a representative manner? Additionally, if we also assume that elections are free, that participation is widespread and that citizens enjoy political freedom, does this ensure that governments are representative? There is consensus on the origin of representative democracies and the fact that formal arrangements and democratic procedures encourage representatives to act in the interest of the represented. The fundamental question, then, is how do these incentives operate?

The authors define a representative government, therefore, as one that acts in the interest of at least a majority of citizens or that acts according to what the government believes is in the interest of the majority of citizens. The authors define representation as a relation between interests and outcomes and define two basic concepts that are implicit in “representation”: responsiveness and accountability. In the concept of responsiveness, there is an implicit relation between signs and policies. Thus, a government is responsive to the extent that the policies it applies are those that voters prefer. Governments know what the voters prefer by election polls, opinion polls, political demonstrations, or votes on specific platforms during elections. In the concept of accountability, there is a relation between results and sanctions. Thus, a government is accountable if citizens are able to differentiate governments that represent their preferred policy from those that do not. Citizens will not re-elect politicians who do not act according to the policies the voters prefer. Nevertheless,

there is no *a priori* relation established between the will of voters and political behaviour. What politicians do between the two election periods is based on what they anticipate regarding the behaviour of voters, both punishments and rewards, depending on the information that voters have (Patrício, 2001, p. 148).

The authors conclude that elections are not necessarily effective in leading representatives to act in the manner voters expect or lead voters to vote for those politicians who perform their tasks in the best interests of citizens. The information asymmetry between rulers and the ruled is harmful to the latter.

Maravall (1997, *apud* Patrício, 2001), by utilising the principal-agent theory, expresses the view that public opinion is much more a result of manipulation than the cause of any policy, stating that preferences are not exogenous. Maravall attributes to politicians the fact that they always want to get elected, stay in power and maximise their autonomy in case their policies go against the preferences of voters. Because the voters' preferences are endogenous, the cost of this disagreement is mitigated as politicians use manipulation strategies ("Machiavellian policies", according to Maravall). In this case, the principal can make two mistakes: rewarding an agent who disagreed with the voter's interest or punishing those who acted according to their preferences.

The control of the agent by the principal depends on three requirements: 1) that the control of the agent and the conditions under which the agent operate are publicly known, 2) that both parties are symmetrically able to fully anticipate all possible contingencies that may arise during their relationship, and 3) that the agent may be required by the principal, at no cost, to follow his preferences.

The conclusion is that

the political scenario in which accountability mechanisms operate has changed much in recent times. The media always takes on the role of opposition to the parliament, which indicates that the opposition follows the media. The parliamentary agenda is generally set by the information that stems from newspapers, radio and television programmes. [...] The judiciary has also acquired an important role in the mechanism of political accountability and the definition of the agenda. In other words, politics became more and more judicialised and justice more politicised. [...] However, control over politicians can hardly be accomplished by pluralistic institutions when democratic institutions (such as the parliament or political parties) are helpless instruments of accountability. Thus, when politicians complain about the treatment received by these institutions, their best strategy is to facilitate the monitoring of the parliament and the parties (Maravall, 1999, *apud* Patrício, 2001, p. 152).

Cheibub and Przeworski (1999) demonstrate that re-election does not indicate that the politician was representative, only that the voters saw him/her as such. Cheibub and Przeworski define democracies as political regimes that differ from other regimes by the electoral accountability of the rulers to the ruled, concluding, after the observation of a great number of democracies, that the survival in office of many heads of state is completely independent of their economic performance, even when there is visibility and/or clarity of the politicians' responsibilities. Thus, Cheibub and Przeworski conclude that there is a weaker relation between democracy and elections than is generally assumed. Possible explanations for this are the following: 1) voters do not care about economic issues; 2) voters do not use proper incentives to convince representatives to act on their behalf (in this case, it is not enough for voters to be sensitive to economic performance; it is necessary that politicians are certain that, if they act properly, they will be re-elected, but this last possibility is denied by the statistics regarding the re-election of candidates in office); 3) voters do not know how to evaluate the performance of the candidate in office because of a lack of information, re-electing the candidate indiscriminately if conditions are good; and 4) the voters are "myopic": at the end of the term, they cannot calculate the value of the future bequeathed by the candidate.

Patrício (2001) summarises the conclusions analysed as follows:

1) Although in economics, it is assumed as possible, through a contract, that the principal limits the ability of the agent to extract monopolistic rents, electoral competition does not eliminate the monopolistic opportunities of agents, even if temporary; 2) to avoid the costs of divergence with voters, politicians manipulate the electorate; 3) voters and candidates up for re-election have conflicting preferences, voters preferring agents easier to control and frequent elections, and candidates preferring contracts that render it difficult to observe their actions. Voters prefer clarity, politicians prefer obscurity; and 4) electoral punishment is not guaranteed, and candidates up for re-election are only moderately accountable to voters.

3 Bureaucracies and control of the legislative branch: The “fire alarm” and the “police patrol”

With regard to the accountability of executive branch agencies, whose powers are delegated by the legislature, imperfections in information and control are the main problems a parliament faces when delegating such authority. Therefore, the choice of the type of delegation by a parliament is marked by conflicts of interest and by the level of uncertainty regarding policy outcomes.

McCubbins and Schwartz (1984), in an article that became a reference in the analysis of the accountability of executive branch agencies to legislative branches, are concerned about these problems and develop a simple model for choosing a type of control. McCubbins and Schwartz present evidence of that choice, developing some implications with regard to the discretionary power of bureaucrats and the legislature.

The article begins with a definition of control (*oversight*): “Congressional oversight policy concerns whether, to what extent, and in what way Congress attempts to detect and remedy executive-branch violations of legislative goals” (McCubbins & Schwartz, 1984, p. 2). These authors then define two types of oversight according to an analogy of their function: “fire-alarm” oversight and “police-patrol” oversight.

The type of oversight designated as *police patrol* encompasses a manner of monitoring in which parliamentarians actively seek errors in the implementation of policies by the agencies. This type of oversight is more centralised, active and direct than *fire-alarm* oversight. A parliament seeks or attempts to discourage violations of the objectives for which the agency was created. In *fire-alarm* oversight, parliamentarians expect a signal from the electorate or their stakeholders before engaging in oversight of the agencies.

McCubbins and Schwartz define *police-patrol* oversight as follows:

[...] Analogous to the actual use of police patrols, control of the police patrol type is comparatively centralized, active and direct: the own initiative of Congress, lawmakers examine a sample of the Executive agency activities. The purpose of these actions is to detect and remedy any violations of

legislative goals, and the impact of enforcement itself, discourage such violations. “An agency’s activities might be surveyed by any of a number of means, such as reading documents, commissioning scientific studies, conducting field observations, and holding hearings to question officials and affected citizens.” (McCubbins & Schwartz, 1984, p. 3).

Next, they define *fire-alarm* oversight:

[...] Analogous to the use of real fire alarms, fire-alarm oversight is less centralized and involves less active and direct intervention than police-patrol oversight: instead of examining a sample of administrative decisions, looking for violations of legislative goals, Congress establishes a system of rules, procedures, and informal practices that enable individual citizens and organized interest groups to examine administrative decisions (sometimes in prospect), to charge executive agencies with violating congressional goals, and to seek remedies from agencies, courts, and Congress itself. Some of these rules, procedures, and practices afford citizens and interest groups access to information and to administrative decision-making processes. Others give them standing to challenge administrative decisions before agencies and courts, or help them bring alleged violations to congressmen’s attention. Still others facilitate collective action by comparatively disorganized interest groups. Congress’s role consists in creating and perfecting this decentralized system and, occasionally, intervening in response to complaints. Instead of sniffing for fires, Congress places fire-alarm boxes on street corners, builds neighborhood fire houses, and sometimes dispatches its own hook-and-ladder in response to an alarm (McCubbins & Schwartz, 1984, p 3).

Some important consequences arise from the McCubbins and Schwartz model. We only mention those that have implications for our study.

With regard to the parliamentary activity that promotes such control activities, parliamentarians tend to prefer fire-alarm oversight at the expense of police-patrol oversight. The argument that supports this statement is that a parliamentarian, by being objective (following the assumption adopted in the article), uses fire-alarm oversight

because this is the most visible type of oversight in the eyes of voters; thus, the parliamentarian receives more credit from fire-alarm oversight than from police-patrol oversight. Furthermore, McCubbins and Schwartz demonstrate that fire-alarm oversight is more effective than police-patrol oversight for three reasons: 1) parliamentarians engaged in police-patrol oversight inevitably spend time examining a large number of actions by executive branch agencies (including matrices and branches) that do not violate legislative goals or harm anyone, at least not enough to generate complaints; 2) considering realistic police-patrol political oversight, parliamentarians examine only a small sample of the actions of executive branch agencies; and 3) despite fire-alarm oversight being more costly than police-patrol oversight, much of this cost is paid by citizens, interest groups, administrative agencies and courts that “sound the alarm” rather than by the parliamentarians.

It is significant that analyses show we must consider that the fire-alarm policy covers any violation of legislative goals that seriously undermines an organised group. In addition, the police-patrol policy certainly misses many violations by only examining a sample of the actions of executive branch agencies. However, there is a trade-off between the two types of oversight, and although the authors demonstrate that fire-alarm oversight is more desirable than police-patrol oversight, this method does have some drawbacks. Thus, the authors conclude their analysis by saying,

[...]To be sure, *fire-alarm* oversight tends to be particularistic in the sense of Mayhew (1974): it arguably emphasizes the interests of individuals and interest groups more than those of the public at large. This is an important difference - the essential difference, we think, between the respective products of *police-patrol* and *fire-alarm* oversight. But whether it is a shortcoming of *fire-alarm* oversight depends on one's ideological point of view: even if *fire-alarm* oversight deemphasizes some public interest concerns, it gives special emphasis to a concern for the interests and rights of individual citizens and small groups (McCubbins & Schwartz, 1984, p. 9).

Some of the models that we have discussed assume as desirable the control of bureaucracies by the legislature. This is a form of guarantee against the avidity of bureaucrats and simultaneously a manner in which to create incentives for these bureaucracies to become more accountable.

Thus, according to our arguments and those demonstrated in Manin, Przeworski and Stokes (1997, 1999), Maravall (1997, apud Patricio, 2001) and Ferejohn (1986), among others, the foundation of the minimalist version of democracy is that elections, despite being fundamental for consenting, are weak mechanisms of accountability. This is because the existing information asymmetry between rulers and the ruled allows rulers to extract benefits from their mandate, which ultimately causes additional mechanisms of accountability to be required, such as controls by the legislative and the judicial branches. Bureaucracies, in this scenario, end up taking advantage of their monopolistic position in relation to citizens, acting arbitrarily and with little transparency. In addition, controls of the legislature, “rationally concentrated on the modality [type] ‘fire-alarm’” (Patricio, 2001), are not secure guarantees that effectively limit the power of bureaucrats, from which a lack of accountability can be derived.

We have therefore established the importance of accountability in representative democracies for good institutional functioning. One can deduce that the more accountability there is, the greater the transparency and the smaller the possibility of corruption in government bodies. However, what is the relation between accountability and corruption as it relates to institutional design? We will now address this issue.

4 Accountability, control of corruption and reforms

Public accountability is necessary to control corruption. Both autocracies and democracies can be profoundly corrupt, and both forms of government can also be accountable in different manners. Elections can constrain politicians, although this tool can be imperfect. Public accountability is possible even in countries without elections or with a ruling party that always wins. Autocrats may find these constraints more difficult to accept than elected public servants; however, even public servants of democracies resist reforms that expose them to criticism

and public scrutiny. Corruption may be limited both by internal government structures and by organisations that constrain illegal behaviours and breaches of duty by public servants and by external pressures coming from the public.

Limits on the power of politicians and political institutions, combined with independent monitoring and sanctions, can be powerful anti-corruption strategies. An independent judicial branch, including an independent system of judgement of actions, may also limit the power of political leaders. However, fragmentation of political power is not necessarily effective in preventing corruption. Under identical conditions, a system with multiple veto points is particularly subject to improper influences, and a federal system can simply provide national and local political leaders with extra money with which to grow richer at the expense of the public. Independent sources of judicial and prosecutorial power are less problematic as long as these institutions are obviously free of corruption and patronage. Although independence is a necessary condition for controlling corruption, it is not a sufficient condition.

The legislature's delegation of the implementation of policies to the executive branch is also a desirable manner in which to limit political corruption. However, after delegating power to the executive branch, the lack of accountability of the latter when the regulatory powers are centralised can facilitate corruption, which gives the executive branch wide discretionary capacity.

What has been discussed thus far suggests that administrative reform of the law should be a component of any anti-corruption strategy. The conditions that determine the enacting of a rule for executive agencies should be examined to ensure appropriate levels of participation and adequate transparency. The actors therefore must have access to facilitated judicial channels if the government does not follow procedures properly or simply acts illegally. Therefore, one of the objectives of anti-corruption reform must be to render corrupt activities more difficult to hide. Review procedures intended to achieve a solid and substantial policy and democratic accountability can also indirectly combat corruption.

Many countries already have exemplary anti-corruption statutes; however, such statutes are irrelevant in the real world (Singh, 1997;

UN, 1990). The prosecutors of a country being actively engaged in punishing corruption will mean little unless the country has an honest judiciary. In the absence of such basic institutions, bodies specialising in focusing on corruption are required. Rose-Ackerman (1999) uses the *Fletcher v. Peck* case as a sign that the establishment of an independent judicial branch is not sufficient in places in which corruption is commonplace. Deeper reforms of the political system are required. Judicial independence, however, appears to be a valuable concept.

Judicial reform is politically difficult. Although surveys with citizens suggest dissatisfaction with the justice system in many countries, the judges themselves are most likely not dissatisfied. Judges can support programmes to increase wages and improve working conditions because these improvements are not accompanied by rigorous reviews of their performance. The Executive branch may also block the reform of the judicial branch if the courts are full of patronage appointments.

It is common for prosecutors to ignore corruption and focus their work on less sensitive political issues. One response to this type of behaviour is creating independent anti-corruption commissions or even generating the presence of inspectors general who report only to the chief executive or to the parliament. The best-known cases and the best examples are demonstrated by Hong Kong and Singapore, both city-states and former British colonies. In both cases, the time devoted to combating corruption, in conjunction with high-ranking commissions, gives credit to law enforcement through independent agencies operating under a strong statute and for the reform of public service.

Anti-corruption agencies are a popular reform proposal in developing countries. In addition to the two countries mentioned, other countries such as Malaysia, Botswana, Malawi and the Australian state of New South Wales have similar institutions (Skidmore, 1996). Even so, the Independent Commission against Corruption (ICAC) of Hong Kong is not without problems.

One potential problem is the reforms remaining in the background. For example, the process of obtaining a driver's licence in Hong Kong had become too long and complicated. The ICAC then discovered that people who paid bribes could obtain licences more quickly. Although the committee in office had included recommended

manners in which to reduce incentives for corruption in the process of obtaining a licence, the approach taken by the agency was to strengthen the laws against drivers and corrupt officials at the expense of a reform in the bureaucracy to facilitate the issuing of licences (Skidmore, 1996). An anti-corruption policy is not useful if the policy leaves in place restrictive laws and complicated processes that produce incentives to bribery. An anti-corruption agency should only be a portion of a larger strategy that includes fundamental reforms that complement programmes to strengthen the legislation.

Citizens may be important in monitoring and combating the arbitrariness of governments. However, this monitoring and combativeness are effective only if governments make information regarding their actions available. Citizens should have a convenient means of presenting their complaints and must be protected from reprisals. There are two basic paths to public pressure: collective complaints relating to general failures of the government made by citizen groups and private objections made by individuals against treatment by public authorities. Both individual and collective complaints can foster reforms in the structure of government.

A precondition for any type of complaint is information. It is easy, however, to underestimate the importance of posters, pamphlets and videotapes that tell people what they should expect from honest public servants and how citizens can complain. In many cases, such informational materials represent the first time that ordinary citizens hear about their right to combat abusive authority.

Complementary to the basic information regarding public servants, citizens must have more comprehensive information. Governments should inform citizens regarding what is occurring with the budget; what the new laws, rules and statutes are; and what the procedures of the legislative bodies are. Although such practices are already routine in developed countries, citizens of many developing countries are deprived of information from their governments.

However, governments that maintain good marks and make those marks available to the public can operate with impunity if no one bothers to review the available information or if people who analyse the information are afraid to disclose their analysis. There are three possible

paths to accountability. If the objective is to pressure the government to act in the public interest, the roles of both the media and organised groups are important. If the objective is that government must be accountable to individuals, paths for individual complaints must be established. In all three cases – media, groups and individuals – there is the problem of fear. If public servants or their allies in the private sector intimidate and embarrass those who speak freely, the formal structures of accountability will not be effective.

Laws that facilitate the establishment of private associations and non-profit corporations collaborate in monitoring and combating corruption. These laws facilitate the creation of watchdog surveillance groups, such as Transparency International. These local and international organisations conduct a range of activities that include participation in Integrity Workshops organised with the institutional support of the Institute for Economic Development and conducted by the World Bank and other bilateral agencies. These workshops have occurred in Tanzania, Uganda, Malawi and Jordan. They bring together individuals from the public and private sectors to discuss issues of corruption. A meeting held in Tanzania in 1995 produced an agreement among high-ranking public servants that they would disclose their assets and the assets of their families; this led to the creation of the Presidential Commission of Inquiry against Corruption (Tanzania, 1996).

The fight against high-level corruption requires national attention and private organisations urging leaders to change their behaviour. Conversely, limiting bureaucratic corruption at the lower levels of government is always of interest to high-ranking officials who may try to convince ordinary citizens to engage in this effort. This type of fight against corruption can be conducted without the citizens' being organised – as long as individuals can easily express their complaints without fear of reprisal.

Rendering it easy to formally complain only combats the type of corruption that generates bribes obtained for a service that should be free. Bribes that allow illegal activity or that soften a legal regulation or the amount of taxes are less likely to be revealed by private individuals and firms unless officials have been arrested and wish to reduce their punishment. Conversely, if the demands for bribes are a condition of

obtaining a legal benefit, individuals may disagree with the payment if they can appeal to an honest court.

Some public agencies have created “hotlines” for direct complaints from citizens. In England, numerous local communities have experimented with anti-fraud hotlines (United Kingdom, Audit Commission, 1993). The Programme for Modernisation of Public Administration from the Mexican government has created a similar system of hotlines for businesses harassed by tax inspectors (Mexico, Federal Executive Branch, 1996). This type of method can be successful if complaints remain anonymous and complainants have no fear of reprisal. If the hotline numbers are not widely available to people in rural areas or in poor urban areas, other methods of collecting complaints must be considered. The hotlines must be more than symbolic. Public servants – ombudsmen, control agents of certain units or agents of law enforcement – must monitor the complaints closely and transparently. If the complaints refer to individuals, the accused should have the right to defend themselves against false accusations in a creditable fashion. Otherwise, anti-corruption campaigns can degenerate into personal “vendettas”, with individuals requesting the state to facilitate their feuds.

5 Conclusion

We demonstrate that to generate a system of efficient accountability and to control corruption indirectly by imposing limits on political power, two strategies are possible. The first strategy is government structures that create veto points and independent sources of political, administrative and judicial power. These structures limit corruption, rendering it less advantageous for both public servants and corruptors. The second strategy provides the population and groups (interest groups and pressure groups) with manners in which to formally complain about the government and about bad services provided to the public. The government provides information regarding their own actions in the media, the public can complain, and private organisations (such as NGOs) and individuals themselves create pressure and demand public accountability. The first type of anti-corruption strategy is more

compatible with democratic government structures. The second type renders the government more vulnerable to popular discontent. Consequently, many regimes, including even “nominal democracies”, view such policies with concern and suspicion. We conclude that such strategies are, nevertheless, important methods for undermining the ability of the actors to corrupt and be corrupted.

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