GATEWAY
CORRUPTION ASSESSMENT TOOLBOX

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Political Corruption
Topic Guide

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What are political corruption assessments?

We define political corruption assessments as those tools which aim to identify: (a) misconduct in political finance and the use of state resources for political purposes, and/or (b) weaknesses in the rules governing the legislature and political parties (and their applications in practice) which present corruption risks[1].

Purpose and context of the assessments

The specific purposes of political corruption assessments fall broadly under the two areas identified above:

Political finance/campaigning and conflicts of interest

- To identify specific instances of corruption in political financing[2]
- To identify weaknesses in the regulatory framework governing political finance and to monitor the enforcement of existing regulations[3]
- To identify areas in which anti-corruption reforms are most needed with regard to political finance regulations[4].

Legislature

- To evaluate the representativeness, transparency, accessibility, accountability and/or effectiveness of parliaments and to identify areas for reform with regard to the prevention of corruption[5].

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[1] We do not include election monitoring or assessments of electoral systems in our analysis, as these are well covered elsewhere (e.g International IDEA).

[2] E.g. OSI - Monitoring Election Campaign Finance A Handbook for NGOs

[3] Ibid.

[4] E.g. TI – CRINIS Index, TI Zimbabwe - Promoting Transparency in Political Finance in Southern Africa: Comparative Analysis and Findings from Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe

[5] E.g. IPU - Evaluating parliament. A Self-Assessment Toolkit for Parliaments, GOPAC - Preventing Corruption: UNCAC Toolkit for Parliamentarians

- To evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of specific political institutions (e.g. Electoral Commission)[6]

It is worth noting that whilst there are a significant number of tools which address political finance and parliamentary performance, there is a notable gap in the areas of monitoring asset disclosures, conflicts of interest and lobbying in politics. The most promising tool in this regard is the World Banks Public Accountability Mechanisms (PAM) initiative which has developed in law and in practice indicators to monitor the transparency of governments and the accountability of public officials (Head of state, Ministers/Cabinet members, Members of Parliament) in five areas: asset disclosure, conflict of interest, freedom of information, immunity protections, and ethics training[7].

Assessment approaches

In the area of political finance and campaigning the most common assessment approaches involve some form of monitoring[8], including:

- Monitoring income, either by analysing official data on individual donors and parties' income, or by monitoring political decisions for evidence that they benefit donors[9].
- Monitoring expenditure is closely linked to income monitoring and is often used to assess the accuracy of parties' income declarations. Spending can be estimated, for example, through price lists obtained from companies delivering campaign-related services, or by estimating the costs of media campaigns (see media monitoring below). Direct observation of election campaign activities using standardized questionnaires and checklists can supplement this information. Linking expenditure to income in this way can reveal whether a party is receiving illegitimate income[10].
- Monitoring the media to detect incidences of hidden campaign advertising. This can be done by analyzing objective variables such as the number and the size of advertisements in the newspapers or the frequency and duration of radio advertising, and the size and characteristics of signs, posters, mobile elements, billboards, murals, canvas and banners[11].
- Monitoring compliance with existing legislation or assessing political financing arrangements against international standards on party funding to provide recommendations on how the institutional framework can be strengthened[12].
- Monitoring transparency/anti-corruption commitments by election candidates. This is usually done on a voluntary basis and involves specific agreements between the monitoring body and individual candidates[13].

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[6] E.g. TI Bangladesh - Bangladesh Election Commission: A Diagnostic Study

[7] World Bank Stolen Assets Recovery Initiative - Income and Asset Declarations: Tools and Trade-offs

[8] Broadly defined as the observation of a particular process over time to record how a system operates in practice

[9] E.g. OSI - Monitoring Election Campaign Finance A Handbook for NGOs, Transparency International Anti-corruption Center - Monitoring of Campaign Finance of the 2007 and 2008 Elections on Armenia

[10] Ibid.

[11] E.g. OSI - Monitoring Election Campaign Finance A Handbook for NGOs, TI Latvia - Transparency in the Financing of Political Parties, Participa - Monitoring Media Election Coverage, Chile

[12] E.g. TI – CRINIS Index, TI Serbia - Financing Presidential Electoral Campaign In Serbia 2004. A blow to Political Corruption or Preservation of Status Quo?, TI Bangladesh - Tracking the National Election Process, GRECO - Questionnaire on Transparency of Party Funding, Chile Transparente - Control del Financiamiento y Gasto Electoral en Chile

[13] E.g. Transparencia Mexicana - Programa de Monitoreo sobre el Financiamiento de Precampañas Políticas, Chile Transparente - Control del Financiamiento y Gasto Electoral en Chile

In the case of the legislature the most prevalent corruption assessment approaches include:

- Self-assessments by members of the legislature to measure the performance, accountability and transparency of their parliament against internationally accepted standards or to monitor compliance with anti-corruption conventions[14].
- Assessing perceptions of corruption in political processes among parliamentarians and other political actors[15] or among the general public[16] as well as experience among parliamentarians on corruption in their profession[17].

An additional approach is TI's National Integrity Assessment method for assessing national governance institutions (including the legislature and political parties) which combine 'in law' indicators through secondary sources and 'in practice' indicators based on key informant interviews and occasionally information requests from the relevant bodies[18].

Data sources

Political corruption assessments use a combination of primary and secondary data sources, although they tend to rely more heavily on primary sources to assess how political corruption manifests itself in practice. Primary sources include the use of interviews with political actors, direct observation, requests for information from political parties, self assessments of parliamentarians and media monitoring. Secondary sources such as legal institutional analysis are used to ascertain how political institutions are supposed to operate (in law) as a benchmark against which to assess practice, and to identify gaps in legislation which may facilitate corruption.

Key issues and challenges

One of the major challenges with political corruption assessments relates to the availability and reliability of primary data. The challenge is most apparent with regards to:

- Political finance data: Because requests for information from political parties are often voluntary, this inevitably affects the reliability of the data, although the response rate itself may be an indicator of transparency. Likewise, criteria for which categories of campaign expenditures should be declared are often unclear, making it difficult to compare official declarations with independent monitoring data. As such supplementary tools such as key informant interviews are often required to obtain information on income and expenditure that is not available through other channels[19].

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[14] E.g. IPU - Evaluating parliament. A Self-Assessment Toolkit for Parliaments, GOPAC - Preventing Corruption: UNCAC Toolkit for Parliamentarians

[15] E.g. APNAC and the Parliamentary Centre of Canada - Parliamentarians and Corruption in Africa: The Challenge of Leadership and the Practice of Politics, TI Belgium - Résultats de l'enquête "Transparence et politique", PORIS - Final Report on Combating Corruption in the Electoral process in Tanzania and Implementation Progress

[16] E.g. Transparency International Anti-corruption Centre - Phone Survey findings on Violations of 2007 Parliamentary Elections Yerevan

[17] E.g. APNAC and the Parliamentary Centre of Canada - Parliamentarians and Corruption in Africa: The Challenge of Leadership and the Practice of Politics

[18] TI - National Integrity System Assessments

[19] E.g. Accion Ciudadana. Poder Ciudadano and Pacticipa - Índice Regional de Transparencia Parlamentaria, TI Latvia - Transparency in the Financing of Political Parties, TI Kenya - Paying the Public or Caring for Constituents? Preliminary findings from a pilot survey of seven volunteer MPs,

- Interviews with officials: Serving members of parliament may be unwilling to participate in a corruption assessment if there is a chance of implicating themselves or colleagues or their party. Compiling responses on an anonymous basis can go some way to encouraging greater openness, although it is still likely that those most willing to participate are also the least likely to engage in corrupt practices, thus creating bias in the results[20].

A related consideration is the need to build political support for conducting an assessment, especially to create buy-in for any potential reforms resulting from the assessment:

- Building relationships with former senior politicians can help facilitate communication with the current political establishment. These individuals may also be able to provide valuable and more candid information on corrupt practices[21].
- Parliamentary self-assessments can also be a good way of building a sense of ownership and buy-in to the assessment process. However, it is vital to ensure that there is a shared understanding of purpose and that the assessment is non-partisan, involving representatives from both opposition and ruling parties. Inviting external actors to take part in the assessment, such as civil society groups, academics and local representatives of international organisations, can also strengthen the process[22].

Examples of promising practices

- Context: OSI's handbook for Monitoring Election Campaign Finance recommends conducting a preliminary scoping study to collect existing information on political finance in the country in question in order to define clearly appropriate objectives for a monitoring effort. This is because the areas of campaign finance to be monitored will depend on a number of factors, including: the political context and type of elections; the legal and institutional environment regulating campaign finance; and the way in which parties raise and spend campaign resources[23].
- Timing: Because of the nature of political cycles, the timing of corruption assessments is often a crucial consideration. The CRINIS Index, for example, measures political transparency in two different time frames, both in terms of the ordinary operations of political parties (non-election year) and election campaigns (election year)[24]. Even within an election year, countries vary considerably in the period that will require monitoring because of differences in restrictions on the permitted duration of election campaigns[25]. Participa in Chile, for example, monitored campaigning during designated (legal) campaigning period and the period

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Transparency International Anti-corruption Center - Monitoring of Campaign Finance of the 2007 and 2008 Elections on Armenia

[20] E.g. TI Kenya - Paying the Public or Caring for Constituents? Preliminary findings from a pilot survey of seven volunteer MPs, NDI - Money in Politics: A Study of Party Financing Practices in 22 Countries, APNAC and the Parliamentary Centre of Canada - Parliamentarians and Corruption in Africa: The Challenge of Leadership and the Practice of Politics,

[21] OSI - Monitoring Election Campaign Finance A Handbook for NGOs

[22] IPU - Evaluating parliament. A Self-Assessment Toolkit for Parliaments, GOPAC - Preventing Corruption: UNCAC Toolkit for Parliamentarians

[23] OSI - Monitoring Election Campaign Finance A Handbook for NGOs

[24] TI – CRINIS Index

[25] TI Latvia - Transparency in the Financing of Political Parties, OSI - Monitoring Election Campaign Finance A Handbook for NGOs

when campaigning was restricted to detect illegal practices[26]. Timing is also crucial in the case of media monitoring, because it has to be undertaken in "real time", (i.e. as a media campaign is happening, rather than retrospectively). For this reason, it is important to have tested the methodology before monitoring begins, to allow for possible adjustments[27].

- Learning: OSI's handbook for Monitoring Election Campaign Finance provides some useful guidance on how to evaluate the success of a monitoring project beyond its immediate objectives. In particular it focuses on whether an exercise contributes to building capacity within an organisation to conduct monitoring and the extent to which it contributes to methodological improvements which can be applied elsewhere by other organizations[28].

- Direct observation: Whilst somewhat resource intensive, direct observation is a relatively reliable data collection method, and one which is quite widespread in the area of political corruption. Some of the more commonly used methods include monitoring parliamentary sessions, monitoring political campaigning events, and reviewing political advertising. Other interesting examples include field tests to measure how easy it is for citizens to access data on political finance[29], and engaging administrative staff in monitoring the weekly accounts of MPs expenditures related to the performance of their duties at the constituency level[30].

- Finally, although not strictly an assessment approach, a number of publically available data portals on political finance and campaigning[31] and conflicts of interest[32] are increasingly being used to increase citizen demand for political accountability. For example, Fair Play Alliance Slovakia has developed a database of all flows of public money to private hands which allows the media, NGOs and citizens to investigate cases of alleged unethical or illicit political practices[33].

All tools referenced in this guide are accessible via the gateway tool database:
http://gateway.transparency.org/tools

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[26] Participa - Transparencia, Límite y Control del Gasto Electoral en el Marco de las Elecciones Parlamentarias y Presidenciales, Chile 2005

[27] OSI - Monitoring Election Campaign Finance A Handbook for NGOs

[28] Ibid.

[29] TI – CRINIS Index, TI Zimbabwe - Promoting Transparency in Political Finance in Southern Africa: Comparative Analysis and Findings from Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe

[30] TI Kenya - Paying the Public or Caring for Constituents? Preliminary findings from a pilot survey of seven volunteer MPs

[31] E.g. As Claras http://www.asclaras.org.br/ano/, Vote Bien http://www.votebien.com/, Excelencias http://www.excelencias.org.br/, Campaign Finance.org http://www.campaignfinance.org/, Follow the Money http://www.followthemoney.org/Research/index.phtml, CQ Moneyline http://www.tray.com/pml/home.do

[32] Cumuleo http://www.cumuleo.be/, Influence a L'Assemblee Nationale. Ameliorer La Transparence du Lobbying http://www.regardscitoyens.org/transparence-france/etude-lobbying/, Fair Play Alliance http://www.fair-play.sk/index_en.php

[33] Fair Play Alliance http://www.fair-play.sk/index_en.php

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