

Forum: Special Committee on SDG 16

Issue: Harnessing the role of the media in the fight against corruption

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Introduction

The late Malcolm X once said, “The media’s the most powerful entity on earth. They have the power to make the innocent guilty and to make the guilty innocent, and that’s power. Because they control the minds of the masses.” To break this quote down in a nutshell, Malcolm X was referring to the power that the media has on the opinions of the people. In the context of corruption, the media has the potential to play an even larger role in being able to completely investigate, and inform the people of corrupt practices that they may have encountered. If they come back with definitive results of corruption, depending on their country, they may be able to encourage the masses to seek political change.

Today, the media has the potential to play an important role in being the voice for the people. In the context of a democracy, there are generally two extremities on the political spectrum, liberals, (left wing), and conservatives (right wing). Both currently have a large media presence, and both are considered fair representations of the people that believe in those values. However, the idea of questionable news sources has sometimes come under question, with each side of the political spectrum assuming the other is using the media and “fake news” to tarnish the other’s reputation. Nonetheless, the media still has the power to help report corruption in the government, and if utilized properly, can create waves of political change.

Corruption is a very important worldwide problem today. It hinders the well being of all citizens and the county as a whole at the expense of the greed of some individuals, the governmental officials. Corruption can be found in both less economically developed countries (LEDCs) and more economically developed countries (MEDCs), but the methods of corruption differ tremendously. In LEDCs, corruption may be more blatant in ways such as bribery, blackmail, or embezzlement, while in MEDCs, corruption can be seen thorough ways such as nepotism and conflicts of interest. Ultimately, regardless of the place or the method, any act that hinders the wellbeing of the people, while feeding the greed of the politicians, remains to be seen as corruption.

Definition of Key Terms

Corruption

Corruption is very hard to define plainly as a concept. We often suggest that it represents deviating from the normal standard of behavior of a politician of caring for the welfare of the people. Essentially corruption is the abuse of power one takes when in a position of authority. These activities include embezzlement, bribery, blackmail, nepotism, and conflicts of interest, as they all provide personal gain for politicians looking to gain personally. Moreover, as aforementioned, these different practices are practiced in different nations, with more blatant activities like embezzlement being the focal point of corruption in LEDCs, while MEDCs have further problems like nepotism regarding high ranking government positions.

Bribery, Blackmail, and Embezzlement

Bribery, blackmail, and embezzlement are the most blatant forms of corruption. Firstly, bribery has been used in LEDCs as a way of political gain by politicians, while blackmail has also helped them win countless elections and votes. On the other hand, embezzlement, helps politicians personally, with the personally gaining money off the backs of the people.

The Media

The media is a term loosely used to define corporations and platforms whose sole purpose is to inform viewers/readers of news, information, or to provide entertainment. In recent years, the media has come under political scrutiny in both MEDCs and LEDCs. In MEDCs for the very fact that news sources have become more and more politicized and politically divided. While, they are under scrutiny in LEDCs for being state controlled (propaganda essentially), and false reporting.

Background Information

Corruption and media in LEDCs

Corruption in LEDCs is much more blatant than that in MEDCs. The people are widely aware of the fact there is heavy amounts of corruption in LEDCs including bribery and blackmail. However, in many LEDCs that have autocratic governments, the media is powerless, as it all is state run media. Moreover, as many LEDCs are autocratic, the media is less likely to play a large role in helping to fight corruption. If anything, the only way for citizens of LEDCs to be able to take action against their corrupt

regimes would be if they were to be in touch with the reporting and findings of global news sources, as local ones would not suffice for criticizing their own leader.

Corruption and media in MEDCs

Conflicts of interest are also a more prevalent form of corruption in MEDCs. A conflict of interest is when a leader or politician has business interests that may cause them to favor their business needs over those of the nation. Usually conflicts of interest are dealt with by the politician handing the business off to someone else for the time they are in office. But in rare cases, like the one happening in the US right now, President Trump has continued to be the President, while managing his Trump brand that specializes in hotels, and luxury goods. MEDCs are really the core target of this issue. The media in democracies is free, and all groups are represented to a certain extent by different news outlets. In the context of the US, the leftists have centrist liberal news networks like CNN and Huffington Post, while conservatives have sources like Fox News and Breitbart News. This variety in news sources gives all people the representation that they need for their voices to be heard. As well, with multiple private news corporations, Americans may have an even easier time to take advantage of their coverage and seek political change as a result of news findings. This is largely the same case in the UK and Europe, as they also have a variety of news sources that is willing to undertake touch issues that may be critical of the government.

Nepotism and Conflict of Interest

Nepotism originated in Ancient Rome due to the fact the high church officials gave their *nephews* high positions in the church regardless of merit. Since then, Nepotism has been an ever present concept in autocratic regimes all over the world. For example, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is completely controlled by one family regardless of their merit. Moreover, it has been unheard of in democracies until now. Currently in President Trump's government, he has appointed his daughter and son in law to high advisor positions regardless of the fact they have no experience governmentally.

The Victims of Corruption

In a problematic scenario, there is always a perpetrator(s) and a victim(s). In this case, corrupt politicians are the perpetrators, while the people are the victims. Politicians in LEDCs who are corrupt often leave their people out to dry in that, they do not give much thought about their welfare, education, or employment. While victims of corruption in MEDCs are not as affected as much, they are still affected in that, for example, American luxury and hotel businesses are affected by the fact that President Trump still has not acknowledged his company is a conflict of interest, yet continues to promote it in the global scale. This is just one many small effects that corruption can have in MEDCs. Furthermore, continuing with the example of the US, Scott Pruitt, the former head of the EPA used taxpayer dollars to hire extra

security detail, install an illegal \$43,000 phone booth in his office, and attempt to secure a Chick-Fil-A franchise for his wife based on his position alone. All of these actions are corrupt, and immoral, and especially the first two actions have monetary consequences, which directly affect the taxpayer citizens of the United States.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

Indonesia

Corruption has been present in the government of Indonesia for a long while, which is one of the biggest constraints on the political leadership to be able to govern effectively. Political Corruption is faced commonly in Indonesia where large parts of the population report having to pay bribes for some government services.

Corruption is seen every day in the lives of Indonesia, people in Indonesia have now started considering corruption as a part of their culture. A recent study which was conducted by the Statistics Indonesia (2013) showed that the bribery is an acceptable action. A very recent example of bribery is when the Head of Energy Regulator was alleged of taking \$40,000 from an oil company along with another businessman Jensen and Paramaditha in 2013. Out of all the cases that have occurred in Indonesia, they still continue as it is 'perceived' a part of their culture. Indonesia has been ranked highly in exposure to corruption, it is ranked 96 out of the 180 countries which were involved in the gathering of the data. Indonesia is ranked 150 in the Corruption Perception Index out of the 210 countries which are in the Control of Corruption Indicator as stated by the World Bank.

However, there are noticeable improvements which are taking place in Indonesia being the population gaining information on how the government is trying to combat this issue. Indonesia has had a stellar performance in the Anti-Corruption Commission which is to reform the business environment in a manner which helps the country to decrease corruption and reform anti-corruption.

Philippines

Irregular payments which are favorable for judicial decision is something which is very commonly seen in the Philippines. The judiciary may be considered independent however the rich and the wealthy do have some powerful control over it such as in criminal cases where favoritism and impunity occur. Often investment issues can take several years to get out of courtroom due to the understaffing, corruption in the court system and a lack of resources. The reason of bribery being so common in judicial officials is due to the salaries which they are provided with; noticing the salaries being very low which

demonstrates the reason for bribery being very common. Due to them being underfunded by the state they depend on the local sponsors which often leads to the court decisions being very biased.

United Nations Office of Drug and Crime (UNODC)

United Nations Convention against Corruption

United Nations Convention against Corruption is one of the only legal document which binds the universal anti-corruption instrument. Most of the member states are part of this convention. Majority of Member States are parties to this convention.

The body of the convention is meant to support the member states in their implementation of the convention which gives the policy guidance to UNODC. as this is helpful for them to develop and implement these anti-corruption activities. furthermore, the implementation of the Convention into laws by State Parties which helps the reviewing which is called the Implementation Review Mechanism.

Prevention

UNODC has a statement which is that “prevention is better than cure” this phrase not only looks at the current but also is a futuristic phrase. This phrase is inclusive of corruption, public trust, economic development, the effectiveness of institutions and the security of the state. This not only helps prevent corruption but decreases the question of bribery as there is trust being built. Inclusive of the successful law which is implemented which has detrimental consequences of corruption.

United States of America (USA)

The issue pertains in the United States of America due to various reasons such as but not limited to the wealthy citizens influence the government to be able to “pay to play”, and the US financial system constantly being abused by the corrupt kleptocrats.

The US president upon his election which took place November 8, 2016, he was elected with the promise of him making the American politics better by which means the government works for and especially those who have been neglected by political elites. However, significant change has been noticed that there has been no change it rather has become worse for the majority. Six out of ten people in the majority claim the corruption has increased in the past twelve months along with roughly a third stating the corruption rates are likewise to the ones in January 2016. When the citizens were questioned about their proclaims it was observed that approximately two-thirds stated what they were informed via media sources such as television, news channels, etc.

Romania

In article 30 of the Romania 1991 constitution it is stated “freedom of media” which is not a freedom which is given to the Romania Media. The structure of the media is dependent on the on the state. the mass media of Romania is print media, television, and radio where these is one distribution network which is controlled by the state. This then means that the information which is provided can be manipulated. The newspapers and the media communication methods are owned by the country which further shows how the media can directly or indirectly be changing the news that occurs in the country to meet the needs of political parties. This information was provided by the National Institute of Statistics 2001. Authorities appoint people for making sure that the manipulation of news that occurs is to the benefit of the country and not letting the country down.

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
1973	US companies provided slush funds to government officials
1977	Foreign Corrupt Practices Act (FCPA) criminalizes bribery for officials
1997	OECD Anti-Bribery Convention legalized bribery for member states
1998	Council of Europe adopts Criminal Law Convention on Corruption
2005	UN Global Compact declares all organizations to combat corruption
2010	UK Bribery Act criminalizes foreign bribery
2013	Russian law enforces countries to implement anti-corruption programs
2014	Brazil enacts Clean Company Act (CCA)

Relevant UN Treaties and Events

- United Convention against Corruption, October 1, 2003, **(A/RES/58/4)**
- Compendium of United Nations Standards and Norms in Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, 2016
- Thirteenth United Nations Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, 17 December 2015 **(A/RES/70/174)**
- Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development (Addis Ababa Action Agenda), 27 July 2015 **(A/RES/69/313)**
- Preventing and combating corrupt practices and the transfer of proceeds of corruption, facilitating asset recovery and returning such assets to legitimate owners, in particular to countries of origin, in accordance with the United Nations Convention against Corruption, 19 December 2016 **(A/RES/71/208)**

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

Exposing of South African Zuma Corruption

In 2017, three news outlets in South Africa, *News24*, *The Daily Maverick*, and the *AmaBhungane Center for Investigative Journalism* were presented with the Taco Kuiper Award for Investigative Journalism. This was won on account of the work they did in exposing the corruption between now former President Jacob Zuma and his cronies. As a result of the facts they brought forth to the public, the administration has tried to in court and unseated. What allowed for the success of this venture is South Africa's strong constitutionalism, freedom of speech in the media, and unbiased court rulings.

The Resignation of Scott Pruitt

On July 5th, 2018 American official Scott Pruitt, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Administrator, resigned from his post after numerous instances of American media uncovering corrupt acts of his. Among the many questionable acts uncovered were: his installation of an illegal \$43,000 phone booth in his office, demotion or reassignment of EPA officials who raised concerns about his waste of taxpayer money, making travel decisions based on his desire to visit certain countries, directing staff to secure him more trips to his home state of Oklahoma where he would vacation on taxpayer money, and use of his position to attempt and secure a Chick-fil-A franchise and \$200,000 a year job for his wife.

Communist Party of China (CPC)

One of the largest priorities of Chinese president Xi Jinping is dealing with the rampant corruption present in the current ruling party, the Communist Party of China which is replete with accusations of collusion and corruption. Despite Xi Jinping's aims, the corruption levels have largely remained the same. Analysts looking at the situation have identified constraints on the press as a limiting factor in the government's goals. A fundamental part of exposing corruption is the liberalization of press so that they can report on these matters without fear of retaliation.

Possible Solutions

Instituting Freedom of the Press

Freedom of the press refers to the principle that media outlets should be allowed to publish what they see fit. In respect to the issue of corruption, it is especially important that media outlets are able to criticize political systems and politicians without fear of retaliation. While this is a reality in many

countries, a larger percent of countries restrict or control the press so that they can not make statements against the country's rulers. In order for media to realize their full potential in being a catalyst for political change, freedom of press existing as a safeguard is a prerequisite, thus, nations which do not already secure this right should adopt it.

Releasing Imprisoned Journalists

With a recorded high of 262 journalists being imprisoned in 2017, it is evident that the imprisonment of journalists whose reports go against ruling political party agendas is indeed a very large issue. In order to restore justice, these wrongly imprisoned journalists should be released and allowed to continue their work without the looming threat of imprisonment or assassination.

Prosecution of Parties Which Threaten Journalists

For the vast majority of cases where journalists are wrongfully imprisoned, killed, or mysteriously reported missing, there is little if any follow up and often times no one is held responsible. To combat this, those which threaten and harm journalists can be prosecuted with International Humanitarian Law (IHL). International Humanitarian Law aims to protect individuals not participating in war from its violent outcomes and often times find themselves in battlegrounds or in the crosshairs of armed conflict, thus IHL could be applied for their protection. When prosecuting under IHL, the harming of such a journalist would be considered a war crime.

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