

U4 Helpdesk Answer 2019:3

# Media and anti-corruption

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The media can play a paramount role in exposing corruption and initiating legal, political and penal action against it. Different media genres unfold their respective strengths and show their limits as anti-corruption tools depending the different levels of on which they take effect, on the audiences they address and on the broader media ecosystem on which they rely.

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# Query

What are the linkages between various genres of media and anti-corruption? To the extent possible, please include the nexus between gender equality and media.

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## The power of media in fighting corruption

There is a general agreement among researchers and practitioners alike that the media has a pivotal role to play in strengthening processes of democratisation (Norris 2008), quality of government, (Färdigh 2013), economic development (Besley & Prat 2006) and anti-corruption (Brunetti & Weder 2003, Färdigh 2013). The media can be broadly defined as the communication outlets used to deliver information to large audiences.

Regarding anti-corruption, the media offers a key route for information about governmental, administrative and business activities to be disseminated throughout society, and thus providing the public with a critical capacity to hold those in power accountable. By uncovering, exposing, informing and educating about the detrimental effects of corruption for society at large, the media can significantly increase the political risk of those exposed for their corrupt

## Main points

- The media can inform and educate people about the detrimental effects of corruption and, through exposure, increase the political risk of those involved in corrupt practices.
- Fierce competition for audiences means some media outlets aim to entertain and amuse than to inform and mobilise people for reform.
- Professional ethics and skills, protection from oppression and physical abuse, independence, sufficient resources and accessibility are necessary for the media to have an effect on anti-corruption efforts.

practices and foster the critical awareness of civil society (Mendes 2013).

A 2018 OECD study found that 2% of foreign bribery cases resulted from previous media reports on alleged corruption, which makes media reporting the most important source for public awareness and a paramount source of detection of corruption (Chêne 2019).

The capacity of the media to be an effective tool against corruption depends in great part on having a sufficient degree of media freedom. Weaver

(1977) defines media freedom as: i) the relative absence of governmental restraints on the media; ii) the total absence of governmental and other restraints; iii) the presence of conditions that ensure the dissemination of a plurality of ideas to a large audience.

Empirical research suggests a relationship between media freedom, media plurality and levels of corruption (Weder and Brunetti 2003). The argument is that an independent and vigilant media constitutes an important channel of external control with a unique capacity to uncover transgressions by government and business officials. Independent journalists working in competitive and plural media markets have a strong incentive to uncover and expose stories of private and public sector corruption, which hinders the misuse of public resources because media reports increase the probability of being caught and punished for corrupt behaviour. Thus, the media helps to keep the political system transparent and accountable (Freedom House 2018; Färdigh 2013). Transparency is considered as a crucial factor in assessing the state of democracy around the world, which highlights the importance of a free press (Freedom House 2019).

Due to the lack of transparency in government management and the existence of corruption in public office, citizens lose faith in the system and withdraw from their own civic responsibilities (Freedom House 2019).

However, the positive correlation between media freedom and lower levels of corruption is not always that obvious. Comparing Ukraine and Belarus, Färdigh (2013) notices that, despite a significantly higher degree of press freedom in Ukraine, the level of perceived corruption in both countries is the same. As there is no strict causality between media freedom and lower corruption

levels, it remains difficult to pinpoint what exact mechanisms enable the media to be successful in curbing corruption.

Why does free media lead to lower levels of corruption in some cases and not in others? The answer to this question depends on different aspects. First is the need to distinguish between short- and long-term effects of the media on anti-corruption. Second is an understanding of the complex interrelation between the media and its “media ecosystem” understood as the multi-layered external circumstances under which the media can or cannot fulfil its potential in countering corruption (Schiffrin 2014). In addition, different types of media may have different effects on anti-corruption.

Before looking more closely at different media strengths and limitations, it is necessary to reflect on: i) the different functions of the media and their capacity to affect people’s awareness and attitudes about corruption; and ii) the difficulties in assessing the media’s direct impact when corruption stories have been exposed.

### Three functions of the media

The media can play at least three main functions regarding corruption: to be watchdog of corruption, to promote integrity and to engage citizens in anti-corruption efforts. The watchdog function is founded on an understanding of the media as the “fourth pillar” of democracy within a system of checks and balances with the purpose to monitor and observe the behaviour of public officials in the legislature, executive and judiciary.

Most people’s information about politics is acquired through mainstream media. Nevertheless, mainstream media’s monopoly in forming public opinion is increasingly challenged and transformed by emerging forms of alternative media outlets in the internet. The multiplicity of sources of

information provided on the internet also gives rise to multiple opinions. Emergent forms of journalism such as indymedia, watchblogs, social media, civic or participatory journalism increasingly partake in the contested media field over political, economic and social influence (Drüeke 2018; Eberwein 2010; Atton 2002). This diversity implies increasing opportunities to fulfil the media's potential as watchdog.

The media can unfold its role as watchdog against corruption through day-to-day monitoring of government performance or through investigating exposure of particular transgressions, which might pressure decision makers to take action (see, for example, the [arrest of Angola's ex-president's son](#)). By providing continuous oversight over individuals and institutions, the media can name and shame those representatives in public office who use their influence to hide instances of corruption or remain inactive when well-founded evidence about corruption is presented to them (see the [2018 protests against the Romanian government](#)).

Challenges for the media's watchdog include tight governmental control over the press (for example, in North Korea, Myanmar, Russia and China), the consolidation of media ownership and increasing market pressures (for instance, in the United States), vilification of critical reporting as "fake news" by political leaders, which threatens the public trust in journalism as an unbiased and fact-based source of information (Freedom House 2019). Such challenges have become more accentuated over the past years as 2019 Freedom of the World data shows, indicating that in the past 13 years freedom of expression has progressively decreased (Freedom House 2019).

In addition, the media's freedom is often hindered by inadequate legal frameworks. A 2010 study shows that fewer than 7.5% of African countries

have an enforceable right to information law (Darch and Underwood 2010). For further research on this aspect, the [Right2Info platform](#) provides comprehensive information about the constitutional and legal framework for the right to access information and case studies from more than 80 countries.

The role of the media in promoting integrity has recently gained force, especially in response to the social disenchantment regarding governments' commitment to eradicate corruption. As Ibelema (2008) observes in a number of emerging democracies in Africa, there is a deep-rooted civic cynicism with regards to the political process and the credibility of actors in the state, civil society and the media alike. Such civic cynicism promotes a normalisation of corruption in people's daily experience and thus stands as a major hindrance in attempts to counter corruption. Considering the importance of challenging such widespread attitudes of civic passivity and disenchantment in the face of corruption, approaches to promote integrity through campaigns involving the media can play an important role. By creating a national discourse in positive terms about the value of integrity, transparency and accountability, such campaigns can both educate about the effects of corruption and show that there is a viable alternative.

Efforts to promote integrity are present among different media genres, but appear to be particularly effective when they involve popular media such as television channels reaching large audiences (Schiffrin 2014). The [integrity idol campaign](#), for example, has had a significant impact in Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Nigeria. The objective of the campaign is to generate debates on the need and benefits of public integrity by rewarding honest government officials publicly on national television shows. Candidates are nominated by the public, and citizens can vote via

their mobile phones in a safe and anonymous way, which helps to increase participation while empowering civil society to counter corruption (Integrity Idol 2019).

The role of the media in engaging citizens in anti-corruption efforts has been favoured by new technologies and digitalisation. Various forms of participatory and civic journalism have emerged as a result of technical innovation, the rapid growth of the internet, networked journalism and the proliferation of skills with digital technology, which partly dissolve the separation between media consumer and producer (Drüeke 2018). This might suggest a general “watchdog culture” in the making, which can strengthen traditional investigative media (see, for example, [Mi Panamá Transparente](#)) and leads traditional media to increasingly adopt more participatory formats (Gillmor 2004; Correira 2012).

Increasing numbers of citizens across the globe resume and complement the media’s work by setting alternative agendas, providing information and witness accounts from local perspectives, giving voice to marginalised groups and documenting transgressions by governments, businesses, and the traditional media (Correira 2012; Guardian 2013). These emerging forms of alternative and citizen-based media are drastically changing the media landscape, patterns of distribution as well as the speed of circulation and global reach of information (Schiffrin 2014).

There is no clear-cut line between the different roles the media plays – monitoring, promoting civic values, engaging citizens to become active. All the described functions of the media can overlap or complement one another.

## Assessing the media’s effects on anti-corruption

The impact of the media on anti-corruption can be long-term and short-term. There is a broad consensus among researchers and practitioners alike about the long-term effects of the media on anti-corruption in relation to societal changes such as increased public awareness and citizens’ capacity of critical judgement, grown political participation, strengthened civic values and the shaping of public hostility towards corrupt behaviour (Schiffrin 2014; Färdigh 2013; Ibelema 2008; Nogara 2009).

In the short-term, in some cases, critical media coverage of corruption cases have yielded immediate effects in countering corruption. A number of cases show that investigative reporting has led to governmental or criminal investigations (Spiegel 2018), resignations of public officials and managers (OCCRP 2019; Ni 2014; Nogara 2009; Transparency International 2012b; OCCRP 2019b), arrests (OCCRP 2018) and changed legislation (Correctiv 2019; Nogara 2009). This suggests that this type of direct impact on anti-corruption has been more pronounced as a result of investigative journalism than of mainstream media and alternative, internet-based media (Drücke 2018).

At the same time, mainstream media plays an important role in bringing investigative reporting to broader audiences, which leads some authors to suggest that groundbreaking media coverage often remains ineffective if their findings are not disseminated via mainstream media (Färdigh 2013, Schiffrin 2014). However, the impact of critical reporting on corruption cases is not solely dependent on the quantity of the audience but on its journalistic depths and accuracy, which can prompt advocacy organisations and governmental investigators to become active (Spiegel 2018, Guardian 2018).

The type of media and pattern of media use can also determine how anti-corruption efforts might be affected. The printing press in most developing and developed countries alike is struggling with declining numbers of circulation due to increased media competition and the expansion of digital media (Ibelema 2014). Young people tend to consume more media on web-connected platforms as well as on-demand programmes, like podcasts (Bosch et al. 2018). Moreover, while digitisation has significantly increased the circulation and accessibility of information, the audiences are now more fragmented (Schiffrin 2014). Thus, increasing opportunities for disseminating information does not necessarily make this information more effective.

The context is also relevant. For instance, the printing press in African emerging democracies is much more powerful than its declining circulation would suggest (Ibelema 2008). Similarly, Nogara (2009) notes for Uganda that, even though the outreach of private and independent print media is much smaller than that of government-owned media, the media's efforts against corruption primarily come from private newspapers with low circulation levels. Thus, the media's ability to have an impact is not only dependent on how big the audience is but on whether it reaches actors empowered to act upon the exposed information.

## Prerequisites for media effectiveness as an anti-corruption tool

Some prerequisites are necessary for the media to have an impact on anti-corruption, among them are: professional ethics and skills, protection from oppression and physical abuse, independence, sufficient resources and accessibility.

## Professional ethics and skills

A high degree of integrity, professional skills and ethics is paramount for journalists in any media genre to effectively counteract corruption as well as to establish and maintain the necessary credibility in the eyes of the public. The more thorough, transparent, accurate, unbiased and credible the reporting on corruption is, the more effective the political pressure on those responsible can be (Graeff 2004). "Polemics masquerading as critical journalism" (Ibelema 2008) undermines the media's credibility and, thus, their potential to curb corruption. This relates to a general criticism by the "media malaise" school, which claims that the increasingly fierce competition for audiences makes the media act increasingly as a "scandalmonger", seeking rather to entertain and amuse than to inform and mobilise people for reform (Coronel 2010).

Moreover, contestations about the media's credibility have become accentuated by the growing prevalence of concerted false information ("fake news") via social media. The allegation of "fake news" not only serve to discredit accurate journalistic work but also serve as a pretext for restricting media freedom (Freedom House 2019; Kossow 2018). The spread of fake news, both as a strategy of disinformation and a weaponised term to discredit critical journalism, poses serious concerns for anti-corruption activists, who strongly depend on the public's trust in independent media.

## Media independence

The most apparent prerequisite for any media genre to be an effective anti-corruption tool is its independence. Media independence is determined by the legal framework (freedom of information laws, licensing laws and libel laws); financial and economic pressures; concentration of media ownership; governmental ownership of the media;

professional ethics and the level of direct repressions faced by journalists through the state or private actors (Ibelema 2008; Schiffrin 2014; Mendes 2013; Weaver 1977). Restraints on media freedom can develop into government censorship, detention, arrest or physical abuse of journalists, self-censorship or cash for coverage.

The lack of media freedom not only influences the capacity of media to curb and prevent corruption but affects other anti-corruption measures too. Lessman and Markwardt (2010) suggest a direct correlation between media freedom and other important anti-corruption measures, such as decentralisation and education. For example, while decentralisation is likely to counteract corruption in countries with a relatively free media, countries with a low degree of media freedom might suffer greater levels of corruption through decentralisation (Lessmann and Markwardt 2010).

Moreover, Ahrend (2002) finds that to initiate improvements in education and schooling in an anti-corruption effort might prove counterproductive in countries with low degrees of media freedom because, in the absence of effective control mechanisms, educated agents might use their increased capacity to become more efficient corruption seekers.

### Accessibility

To fulfil its watchdog function of monitoring and scrutinising those in power, the information made available by the media must be accessible and understandable to the public (Färdigh 2013). Accessibility to media can be affected by the degree of state censorship, the quality of technical infrastructure for broadcasting and digital media, the plurality of media and degree of circulation, strong professional ethics and skills that advance non-biased, non-ethnocentric, context-sensitive and intelligible language, a general trust of the

citizenry in the credibility and integrity of the information provided, literacy rate and social awareness about the detrimental effects of corruption (TAZ 2018; Färdigh 2013; Ibelema 2008; Schiffrin 2014).

## Examples of media types and genres and anti-corruption

There is no agreement in the literature about where the exact boundaries can be drawn between different media genres.

Media genres can be classified according to: 1) the medium in use (print, television, radio, digital media); ii) the audiences they address (elite media, mainstream media, childrens media, consumer media, among others); iii) their mode of journalistic practice and required skills (for example, knowledge on investigative tools and data analysis); and iv) ownership structures. Especially relevant for anti-corruption are investigative journalism, mainstream media, satire and alternative media and, in particular, regarding their ownership structures, degrees of political, editorial and financial independency, types of journalistic practice and accessibility.

### Investigative journalism

For more than a century, investigative reporting has had a significant impact against corruption, human rights abuses and corporate exploitation (Schiffrin 2014). The spectrum of investigative journalism is very wide, as are the different views of investigative journalists about their profession. For some, conducting interviews with political officials, validating information and in-depth research counts as investigative practice, while others see the groundbreaking uncovering of yet unknown connections as the profession's main characteristic (Drüeke 2018).

Investigative reporting work has been disseminated in mainstream media and alternative media in print, television and radio. The following are examples of how investigative reporting has had immediate effects and often attracted oppressive and violent reactions by state or private actors:

- Following the 2011 exposure of the local government official's involvement in human trafficking in China, the investigative journalist Pang Jiaoming was detained on false charges. Still, his story was widely shared via social media and picked up by a state-run magazine. Three months later, 12 officials were forced to resign from office (Ni 2014).
- In Brazil, the former President Rousseff's chief of staff was released from office and subjected to legal investigations after three investigative journalists exposed his involvement in illicit enrichment practices (Transparency International 2012b).
- In 2018, the Bulgarian investigative TV reporter Viktoria Marinova interviewed two investigative journalists from the Rise Project, which had uncovered the misappropriation of EU funds with bribes being distributed at all levels, from deputy ministers to auditors. The report accuses the EU's anti-fraud office (OLAF) of being ineffective. Marinova has been one of the few TV journalists who reported on the issue and was murdered one month later. Her murder sparked a public outcry in Bulgaria, drew international condemnation and calls for further investigation. The prime minister has subsequently stopped the European funded projects in question and OLAF has begun to investigate the case (Bivol 2018; OCCRP 2018b).
- In Angola, following the publication of the Paradise Papers by journalists of the

[International Consortium of Investigative Journalists](#), the son of former president Jose Eduardo dos Santos was arrested in September 2018 and another manager was put under investigation. A few months earlier, the president himself had already been charged with fraud (OCCRP 2018). His successor, President Joao Lourenco, has since taken notable steps against corruption and impunity (Freedom House 2019).

- In February 2018, the Slovak investigative journalist Jan Kuciak was murdered after his investigation into the misappropriation of EU funds. Kuciak showed how the government had been involved in covering up organised crime for over a decade. Kuciak's murder led to the biggest protests since the fall of communism and forced then-prime minister Robert Fico to step down. Further investigations are still ongoing (OCCRP 2018c).

Arguably, the particular strength of investigative journalists lies in their focus, skill and aim to expose, uncover and put into context information that has as yet gone unnoticed to the public. Investigative journalists produce original information distinct from other media genres which typically share and follow up on stories that have been published already. It is due to the potentially groundbreaking nature of investigative work that researchers and practitioners ascribe the most proactive, critical, progressive and effective role in anti-corruption efforts to investigative reporting (Färdigh 2013; World Bank 1999; Transparency International 2012b and 2013; Ibelema 2008; Schiffrin 2014; Bandurski et al. 2010; Drüeke 2018).



In a survey of 3,000 businesspeople in 30 countries on corruption and the most effective anti-corruption tools, [Transparency International's Putting Corruption out of Business \(2012\)](#) has found widespread agreement that investigative journalism plays an important role in countering corruption. In addition, in most countries, more people believed more in the effectiveness of journalism than in national anti-bribery laws. For example, 70% of businesspeople in Brazil believed that investigative journalism was either effective or very effective against corruption compared to 42% believing in the effectiveness of national anti-bribery laws. Similar results were found in Chile, China, Germany, Ghana, Pakistan and the Philippines, among others (Transparency International 2012).

To live up to its potential, investigative journalism implies intensive and persistent research, which requires and benefits from sufficient financial resources, international networks, and collaborations with advocacy organisations and researchers. It also requires a high degree of professional standards, guided by the imperative of public relevance, accuracy, responsibility towards sources, as well as sensitivity to country-, regional- and sector-specific contexts (Drüeke 2018; Mendes 2013). Moreover, investigative journalism is heavily reliant upon adequate legal frameworks to be in place, most importantly through source and whistleblower protection laws as well as freedom to information legislation.

Increasingly, sensitive information about potential corruption links is made accessible through web-based platforms for whistleblower information. In such cases, investigative journalists from traditional media have confirmed their pivotal role in interpreting and translating raw information, thus providing greater accessibility (Drüeke 2018). The publication of the Panama Papers by the

[International Consortium of Investigative Journalists](#) with traditional news outlets from different countries, like the German print newspaper *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, is a good example.

Cross-border investigative journalist networks in collaboration with advocacy organisations and actors from civil society have proven powerful anti-corruption agents (Schiffrin 2014). The [Global-Anti-Corruption Consortium](#) shows how the sharing of knowledge, data and expertise yield palpable results (Global Anti-Corruption Consortium 2019). For example, the concerted effort by the OCCRP and 32 journalists working in different countries uncovered a vast network of money laundering involving 5,140 companies in 96 countries and initiated legal investigations in the UK, Moldova Latvia and Russia (OCCRP 2017). Another example is the exposure of misappropriated EU funds in Slovakia by a cross-border collaboration between the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP), the Czech Center for Investigative Journalism (CCIJ) and the Investigative Reporting Project Italy (IRPI) (OCCRP 2018c).

Another valuable asset for investigative journalism can be seen in the growing use of electronic platforms designed to publicise information about procurement and government official's personal assets in Latin American countries (Chile, Panama, Brazil and Mexico, for example). Such platforms guarantee a transparent flow of public information and enable citizens and journalists to scrutinise the different stages of bidding and contracting processes (ELLA 2012).

Similarly, the [Rise Project's](#) initiative to provide easy-to-use mapping tools and training to researchers, journalists and local activists is a good example of the increasing power of investigative

methods through networking, cross-border and participatory collaboration (Rise Project 2013).

According to the founding editor of the German independent investigative research platform *correctiv*, recent success stories from investigative reporting are increasingly encouraging in commercially driven mainstream outlets to strengthen their investigative journalism departments (ZEIT 2014).

## Mainstream media

Mainstream media, as contrasted with alternative media, reaches a large population, which increases its potential to shape the collective thinking (“agenda-setting media”). Generally, mainstream media includes large newspapers and public or private broadcasting services, even though in the last years mainstream media outlets have adopted digital and online forms.

Something that characterises mainstream media is the ownership structure. While government control of the media is still a major issue in several developing countries, the “controlling impact of corporate and other advertisers has been a major concern on the context of the Western press” (Ibelema 2008). Research by the World Bank on ownership structures in 97 countries indicates that state-owned media tend to be less effective in monitoring government activities (Transparency International 2003). Particularly in developing countries, the links between mainstream media and political elites is more pronounced, and journalists take greater risks for their critical reporting (Coronel 2010 and Ibelema 2008).

While media market liberalisation has increasingly eroded the direct grip of governments on media reporting, it has also led to an increasing number of ownership concentration in the media sector. This tendency has become a major concern for developed

and developing countries alike because of an alleged homogenisation of media coverage through commercial imperatives threatening the plurality of dissenting ideas and perspectives (Barnett 2010). Moreover, the increasingly complex ownership structures of private mainstream media have opened the gates for more subtle strategies of media manipulation through vested business interests and corruption such as cash for coverage, hidden advertisement and loyalty to aligned business interests (Ibelema 2008; Hermann and Chomsky 1988; McChesney 1999; Schiffrin 2014).

On the other hand, while market pressures in mainstream media are a major challenge to sustained critical reporting, in some cases the liberalisation of the media market has encouraged the emergence of dissenting voices (Coronel 2010).

Larger private media outlets outside the Western world have been found to significantly contribute to media freedom and plurality in their countries, for example, in Latin America since the 1980s, in post-dictatorship South-East Asia (Coronel 2010), in China since the late 1990s (Gavra et al.; Ibelema 2008) and in African emerging democracies since the 1970s (Ibelema 2008)

Journalists working in private media are more prone to pursue critical reporting about the causes of public dissatisfaction. For example, in analysing Chinese journalists’ attitudes and practices regarding social protest and discontent related to corruption, Gavra et al (2018) found that sensitive issues were largely ignored by journalists working in Chinese mainstream media when traditional-state-owned media was prevailing in China in the 1990s. The same study found that journalists working in private media had a more positive attitude towards reporting on politically sensitive issues than those who worked in state-owned or state-subsidised media (Gavra et al. 2018).

Mainstream media can play an important role in amplifying and making accessible critical reporting on corruption cases, especially once investigative journalists have managed to push their stories over a certain threshold of public reaction. For example, in China, Jaoming's exposure of organised human trafficking by government officials gained attention through the microblogging service Weibo and was then picked up by a local state-owned newspapers. Despite attempts to intimidate Jaoming, the government had to react and forced the resignation of 12 officials involved in the case (Ni 2014).

In other cases, mainstream media has proven to be a powerful anti-corruption tool when their own investigative journalism departments initiated investigations into corruption. For example, the Israeli TV Channel 10 investigated an obscure Israeli purchase of German submarines in 2017. Corruption allegations against Prime Minister Netanyahu's personal lawyer and five other government and company officials for being allegedly involved in paying bribes resulted in legal investigations (Correctiv 2017).

In addition, cross-genre collaborations have shown strong results in South Africa, where the cooperation between two for-profit media outlets and a non-profit organisation of investigative journalists resulted in serious corruption allegations in the Zuma administration (CFR 2018).

These examples validate Schiffrin's (2014) observation that, even though alternative media and more independent investigative journalism might be more prone to expose instances of corruption, their stories often go unnoticed without the help of mainstream media and the particular weight the latter give to anti-corruption reporting.

## Satire

Satire as a media genre is characterised by its use of humour, cynicism, exaggeration and ridicule as a way to criticise and denounce social grievances. Cartoons and satire are popular across large audiences due to their immediacy, their refreshing and humorous take on political issues as well as their unique ability to reach illiterate audiences. This point is highlighted by cartoonist Sam Sarath of the Center for Social Development (CSD) on Cambodia: "All the cartoons I draw now focus on four concepts: transparency, governance, management, and corruption. Why? Because CSD knows that many people in the provinces have little ability to read". (Phnom Peng Post 2006). When the population suffers from widespread corruption but are too afraid to act, and when the general level of education is low, cartoons with their exaggerated depiction of everyday problems, create an environment of integration, solidarity and identification with a commonly shared experience of discontent. Moreover, cartoons can educate about what corruption means, how it affects society and gradually empower people to demand their rights (Phnom Peng Post 2006). Sarath stresses that cartoonists need to be very precise, well-informed and evidence-based to have an impact and to avoid persecution.

The power of cartoons and satire to motivate critical social and political change has been well understood by authorities around the world (see examples in [Egypt](#), [Equatorial Guinea](#), [India](#), [Malaysia](#), [Palestine](#)). Research by the [Committee to Protect Journalists](#) (CPJ) confirms that cartoonists are heavily targeted with censorship, lawsuits, physical assault, murder and imprisonment for their journalistic work (CPJ 2014). The same research validates the claim that this high degree of repression is due to satire's capacity to communicate complex political ideas and criticism in an easily accessible form that resonates with

mass audiences and transcends the borders of language. Typically, cartoons and satire are based on already produced content by other media genres, in particular investigative reporting.

### Alternative media: civic journalism and social media

Sometimes described as the “fifth estate”, alternative media, in the form of civic journalism and social media, is increasingly considered an emergent force in anti-corruption efforts by professional journalists and citizens alike. In civic journalism, the media does not only inform but engages citizens to take action. This tendency is seen as a reaction to a growing unease with the increasing centralisation of ownership in mainstream media outlets by large profit-seeking corporations where commercial considerations gain priority over critical and in-depth reporting on sensitive political issues (Drüeke 2018; Schiffrin 2014).

Civic journalism refers to the idea of integrating journalism into the democratic process by abandoning the notion of citizens as passive spectators of the political process. Civic journalism stresses the need for the media to be part of the solution rather than a detached observer (Ibelema 2008). Thus, civic journalism has begun to fill the gaps and to create a mobilised readership that takes matters into their own hands (Bosch et al. 2018; Drüeke 2018).

Digital networks, like web-based platforms for direct content publishing, microblogging services like Twitter or the Chinese Weibo, have significantly lowered the barriers to entry for collecting, producing and disseminating information about corruption. In China, for example, citizen’s investigation and reporting are gaining increasing attention. Pedroletti describes a number of cases where engaged citizens have managed to spark widespread debate in Chinese

social media about corrupt public officials (Guardian 2013). Indicative of the social media’s potential impact on corruption are the findings of the Global Corruption Barometer, which showed that 56% of people surveyed from 107 countries felt most inclined to get active against corruption through social media (Global Corruption Barometer 2013). This was particularly highlighted in countries like Russia, Sudan, Algeria, Papua New Guinea and Lebanon.

The impact of citizen reporting on anti-corruption is also highlighted by an article in the Jakarta Post (2018), which claims that “politicians and public officials have fallen one by one like flies for cases including bribery and mishandling of money”. Other examples from Peru (TAZ 2018), China (Ni 2014) and Romania (Welt 2017) also illustrate how networked and citizen-directed media have been the deciding factor in creating awareness about the realities of corruption and in sparking widespread public debate protest.

As for the media’s ability to inspire social and political engagement and to promote integrity and personal responsibility, civic journalism is particularly powerful compared to other media genres as it fosters direct participation (Nielsen 2015; Bosch et al. 2018). In recognition of this potential, civic journalism based on social media and digital platforms is increasingly intersecting with traditional media outlets. The Huffington Post Investigative Unit, for example, fosters collaboration between citizens and professional media in the production of news (Ostertag/Tuchman 2012: 925). Another interesting case of participative journalism is the [Mi Panamá Transparente](#) project, which encourages citizens to directly report on crimes connected to drug trafficking, a major breeding ground for corruption.

A general criticism and reason for caution with regard to the optimistic predictions on the role of civic journalism and social media in strengthening good governance in general and anti-corruption in particular, is based on the lack of quality control, limited reach and questions of credibility (Firmstone and Coleman 2015; Bosch et al. 2018). Thorough and accurate investigative reporting requires extensive resources and professionalism, which is often missing in social media and civic journalism (Schiffrin 2014). Social media is just as subject to fierce competition over political and social influence as other media. Exacerbated through the lack of transparent mechanisms of quality control, this might render civic journalism even more vulnerable to manipulation. Ni (2014) observed that state-owned media and public officials in China regularly use the exposure of corruption incidents by investigative reporting as a way to divert attention from the systemic causes of corruption and instead blame certain individuals for their moral inaptitude in a sensationalist manner.

### Corruption in the media

The media has the potential to be an effective anti-corruption tool, but at the same time is itself at risk from corruption. The media can sometimes be continuously targeted by undue interference from vested interests, abuses of power and corruption.

Being the most important source of information for most people, the media represents an important channel of manipulating public opinion in favor of vested interests. Different media channels can be used to cover up instances of malfeasance, clientelism and embezzlement, among others. Thus, attempts to capture the media for personal benefits are risk in developing and developed countries alike. In extreme cases this might involve direct in-kind donations, extortion or cash for (non-)coverage to journalists and editors (Mendes 2013). Media

capture can also take indirect forms through administrative and legislative regulations (for example licencing laws), which favor certain political or business interests (Besley and Prat 2006; Ramaprasad et al. 2018). Placing hidden advertisement is another way to influence media reporting, which often results from the widespread collusion between journalists, public relations and advertisement agencies (Spence 2008).

Fertile grounds for corruption may be created through lack of journalistic training and technical skills, low professional and ethical standards, financial pressures on media outlets and individual journalists, which makes them susceptible to bribes, as well as ownership structures aligned with business interest (Mendes 2013; Schiffrin 2014; Ibelema 2008). Under such circumstances, the media's role in fighting corruption can be significantly undermined and highlighted

Transparency International's Global Corruption Barometer from 2013 found that in Australia, Egypt, New Zealand, United Kingdom the media was perceived as the most corrupt major institution, and as the second most corrupt institution in countries like Norway, Serbia, Sudan, Turkey, among others (Global Corruption Barometer 2013).

### Media, anti-corruption and gender

There is no comprehensive research on the nexus between different media genres, anti-corruption and gender roles. Moreover, little is known about the gendered impact of media corruption. Without substantiated research about the specific linkages between different media genres, gender equality and anti-corruption remain largely based on assumptions that need further validation.

According to a study by Gudipaty et al. (2018), the past decades have seen an increasing number of

female journalists in BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) countries. While top positions within the media are still clearly male-dominated (IWMF 2011), the study suggests that computerisation, internet technologies, online journalism and social media have empowered women in the media and increasingly transform gender relations (Gudipaty). Within the emerging forms of alternative media, structural hierarchies of the traditional newsroom are dissolved in networked organisations which foster a culture of community and consensus (Gudipaty et al. 2018).

Studies from Peru and Mexico suggest that a higher share of women participating in the labour force result in reduced corruption levels (Esarey and Chirillo 2013). Brought together with Wängnerund's claim that women are more dependent on a functioning state (Wängnerund 2015), one can assume that women could be more perceptive, engaged and vigilant in their journalistic work when it comes to corruption, gender stereotypes, sexual extortion and sexism in general.

Furthermore, Gudipaty et al. (2018) found a general perception among male and female journalists about women being better managers when placed in higher positions, that they would champion more sensitive issues, and that they are more sincere, responsible, careful, meticulous, disciplined, committed and efficient. However, journalistic roles remain heavily gendered, with male journalists considered to be more neutral and professional, and their female counterparts predominantly defined and judged by their femininity (Gudipaty et al. 2018).

Regarding the link between the role of women, anti-corruption and investigative journalism, in India and China both female and male journalists agreed that women were doing a better job in establishing sources and getting them to talk and

share sensitive information (Gudipaty et al. 2018). However, these judgements were not necessarily based on a perception of superior skills of women but often attributed to their femininity and the phenomenon that sources and interview partners might feel less hostile and competitive to women than to men (Gudipaty et al. 2018).

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