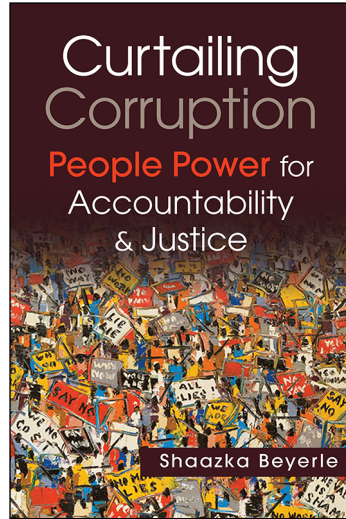


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Curtailing Corruption:
People Power for
Accountability and Justice

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Introduction

Little did I know in August 2004 that a trip to Ankara, Turkey, would change the course of my professional life. The setting was the New Tactics in Human Rights Symposium, organized by the ever-innovative Center for Victims of Torture.¹ While speaking on a panel discussion, “Mass Actions for Public Participation,” a fellow panelist riveted all of us in the room. He told us about a campaign in Turkey in 1997 that mobilized an estimated 30 million people—yes, 30 million—to fight endemic corruption and linkages between crime syndicates, arms traffickers, the state, the private sector, and the media. The campaign was the One Minute of Darkness for Constant Light, and the speaker was Ersin Salman, one of its founders.

I returned home inspired and intrigued. Here was an astounding case of people power that had gone unnoticed—in the international media, in the civil resistance realm, and in anticorruption circles. Regular people mobilized, truly *en masse*, not to oust a dictator or occupier but to expose, shake up, and begin to change a rotten system of graft, abuse, and impunity. How peculiar, it seemed at the time, that a campaign targeting malfeasance was highlighted at, of all places, a human rights conference. I wondered if the One Minute of Darkness for Constant Light was a rarity, or were more campaigns and movements targeting corruption going on in other parts of the world? My sense was that this case represented only the tip of the iceberg. Thus began a journey—yielding discoveries, knowledge, inspiration, and rich lessons about civil resistance and people power.

In the ensuing years, through the International Center on Nonviolent Conflict (ICNC), I began initial research and then immersion into

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the anticorruption and accountability realms. By the end of 2009 I had embarked on an in-depth study. The project had four main objectives. The first was to identify, document, and analyze contemporary nonviolent campaigns and movements to fight graft and abuse, demand accountability, and win rights and justice. The cases took place over the past seventeen years or were ongoing. Corruption was the sole focus in some instances. In other cases, it was linked to overall public concerns (such as authoritarian rule, state capture, violence, impunity of authorities, dishonest politics) or to tangible grievances touching daily life (for example, the provision of basic services, endemic “petty” bribery, land expropriation, environmental destruction, and misuse of antipoverty and development resources). The multidimensional nature of most of these civic initiatives reflects the reality that corruption does not occur in a vacuum; it is both source and enabler of many forms of oppression.

The second objective was to ascertain common attributes and patterns, and distill general lessons learned. The third objective was to examine the international dimension and policy implications of home-grown, civic anticorruption campaigns and movements. The final objective was to offer recommendations for anticorruption advocates, donors, development institutions, and policymakers, based on actual case studies and the views of campaign leaders and civic actors.

Campaigns and movements targeting corruption often face decentralized targets rather than an identifiable dictator or external government, and can be found both in undemocratic and democratic systems. Graft and abuse are manifested in a systemic manner rather than a hodgepodge collection of illicit transactions. Consequently, this research brings to light new applications of civil resistance beyond the more commonly known cases against occupations, such as the Indian independence movement, and authoritarian regimes from Chile to Poland. It also expands our understanding about the dynamics of how people collectively wield nonviolent power for the common good.

Criteria and Methods

The focus of this research is on citizen agency: what civic actors and regular people—organized together and exerting their collective power—are doing to curb corruption as they define and experience it. Hence, the analytical framework is based on the skills, strategies, objectives, and demands of such initiatives, rather than on the phenomenon of corruption itself, which has been judiciously studied for more than

two decades by scholars and practitioners from the anticorruption and development realms.

I selected cases that met the following criteria:

- They were “popular” initiatives. They were civilian-based, involved grassroots participation, and were led and implemented by individuals from the civic realm, rather than governments or external actors, such as donors, development institutions, and international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs).
- They were nonviolent. They did not threaten or use violence to further their aims.
- They involved some degree of organization and planning, which varied depending on the scope—objectives, geographical range, duration—of the civic initiative.
- Multiple nonviolent actions were employed. Thus, instances of one-off demonstrations or spontaneous protests were not considered. There are countless examples of such actions around the world virtually every day.
- Objectives and demands were articulated.
- The civic initiative was sustained over a period of time.²

I identified more than twenty-five cases (and the pace of new initiatives continues unabated).³ Of them, twelve spanning the globe and touching upon various forms of corruption are featured, from Afghanistan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Brazil, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Italy, Kenya, Mexico, (South) Korea, Turkey, and Uganda. Overall, the research found that graft and abuse can be curbed, particularly those forms that matter to everyday people. When citizens raise their collective voice and exert their collective power, they translate corruption from an abstract societal ill to tangible experiences of oppression and social and economic injustice. While the goals involve curbing negatives—graft, abuse, and impunity—underpinning their struggles is the desire to attain positives: information, accountability, participatory democracy, freedom, and last but not least, human dignity.

For this study I developed a set of research and interview questions, with input received from scholars and practitioners from the civic realm. Cases were documented through a review of scholarly literature; a review of databases, reports, and publications from international civil society and the anticorruption, democracy building, and development communities; articles and media reports; and phone interviews, written correspondence, and personal conversations with civic actors. These ac-

Case Studies

Context of Corruption	Type of Collective Action	Country	Organizers
Reconstruction and development projects	Civic initiative/ social accountability	Afghanistan	Integrity Watch Afghanistan— CSO
Overall endemic corruption	Campaign within broader social movement	Bosnia-Herzegovina	Dosta! [Enough!] — nonviolent youth movement
Political corruption	Ficha Limpa (Clean slate) —social movement	Brazil	MCCE (Movement Against Electoral Corruption) and Avaaz
Overall endemic corruption/impunity	shayfeen.com/Egyptians Against Corruption— social movement	Egypt	Egyptians Against Corruption— SMO
Overall endemic corruption/bribery	5th Pillar— social movement	India	5th Pillar—SMO
Efforts to neutralize the anticorruption commission	CICAK (Love Indonesia, Love Anti-Corruption Commission) campaign	Indonesia	Informal network of civic leaders, activists, and CSOs
Cosa Nostra mafia	Addiopizzo [Good-bye, protection money]—social movement	Italy	Addiopizzo—SMO
Parliament Constituency Development Funds	Civic initiative/ social accountability	Kenya	MUHURI (Muslims for Human Rights)— CSO-CBO
Overall endemic corruption	DHP (Dejemos de Hacernos Pendejos)— social movement	Mexico	Informal network of civic leaders and activists
Political corruption	CAGE (Citizens Alliance for the General Election) 2000 campaign	Korea	Coalition (1,104 NGOs, CSOs, citizen groups, YMCA/YWCA, religious organizations)
State-organized crime/paramilitary groups linkages	One Minute of Darkness for Constant Light campaign	Turkey	Informal network of civic leaders and activists
Police	Civic initiative/social accountability	Uganda	NAFODU (National Foundation for Democracy and Human Rights in Uganda) CSO- CBO

Notes: CBO = community-based organization; CSO = civil society organization; SMO = social movement organization.

tors came from bottom-up civic initiatives targeting corruption; local, in-country civil society organizations (CSOs) and social movement organizations (SMOs);⁴ INGOs; and regional and country anticorruption and development practitioners. I also sought the counsel of scholars focused on democracy building, corruption, civil resistance, peacebuilding, and human rights.

The Plan of the Book

Chapter 1 explores the linkages among corruption, violence, and poverty, as well as the synergies between anticorruption and peacebuilding. Here I add civil resistance into the equation and summarize research on the efficacy and outcomes of nonviolent civic initiatives, highlighting people power movements against authoritarian regimes in which corruption was a source of public anger and one of the key grievances around which people mobilized. I also identify three related misconceptions about civil resistance and people power that are common in the anticorruption and development realms.

In Chapter 2 I scrutinize the traditional definitions of corruption from a people power perspective, presenting two alternative conceptualizations—one that is systemic and one that is people-centered—and discuss the ways in which civil resistance complements and reinforces legal and administrative approaches.

Afghanistan, Brazil, India, Indonesia, Italy, Korea, and Uganda are the focus of the seven in-depth case studies I present in Chapters 3 through 9. Chapter 10 features an additional five abbreviated cases—Bosnia-Herzegovina, Egypt, Kenya, Mexico, and Turkey—which complement the detailed examinations of the previous chapters.

In Chapter 11 I present a comparative analysis of the civic initiatives, focusing on common attributes, general lessons learned, and noteworthy patterns that expand our understanding of civil resistance, people power, and the practice of democracy. My focus in Chapter 12 is on the relevance of bottom-up civic initiatives to foreign policy; donor effectiveness; and overall anticorruption, development, democracy, and peacebuilding strategies.

As the international anticorruption and development communities have begun to acknowledge the impact of citizens on systems of corruption, two major policy issues have emerged. First is the question of what roles the international community can play in grassroots anticorruption initiatives. In this book I provide analysis and real examples that are relevant to key international concerns—for example, conflict and

peacebuilding in Afghanistan and the Democratic Republic of Congo; consolidation of democracy in the Middle East; and political corruption, impunity, and economic decline in parts of the Global North. Second, an unsettling new trend is emerging to scale up—to systematize and extensively replicate citizen empowerment actions and tools—without strategic analysis and consideration of local contexts. Such attempts may not only lead to weak results or failure but can also divert grassroots efforts from more effective paths and potentially put civilians in harm’s way.

* * *

For regular citizens, the experience of corruption can be a source of oppression and the denial of basic freedoms and rights. In spite of such bleak circumstances, or perhaps because of them, this research has shown that people can move from being victims and bystanders of malfeasance to becoming a force for transforming their societies. I have been inspired, informed, and humbled by the accomplishments, resourcefulness, strategies, and skills of these nonviolent campaigns and movements, and the modest yet great women and men—young and old, everyday heroes—behind them. I trust you will be as well.

Notes

1. Information about the New Tactics in Human Rights Symposium and the session titled “Mass Actions for Public Participation” can be found at <http://www.newtactics.org/WorldSymposium> and <http://www.newtactics.org/WK416>.

2. The term “civic initiative” refers to organized civic efforts that fit the above-stated criteria. It encompasses nonviolent, grassroots campaigns and social movements.

3. Research was also conducted on the Movement to Defend Khimki Forest in Russia. However, it was not included because of ongoing developments that could not be documented at the time of writing this book. As well, during this interval, new cases emerged that merited investigation, such as ongoing land-right campaigns in Cambodia and the 2011 Wukan village blockade in China. Unfortunately, initiating new research was not possible.

4. A social movement organization (SMO) is a nonstate entity that is part of a social movement. It can provide multiple functions to the movement, such as identity, leadership, strategizing, and planning, but the movement is not bounded by the SMO, nor are SMOs essential for social movements to flourish.