

# AGENCY LEARNING PRIORITY: ANTI-CORRUPTION

Rapid Literature Review

*What anti-corruption approaches are effective at addressing systemic corruption across multiple sectors?*

AUGUST 2023

*Produced at the request of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), this rapid literature review is part of a series contributing toward the 2022–2026 Agency Learning Agenda. In response to critical evidence needs, this series seeks to improve awareness and sharing of the latest available evidence linked to the Agency’s highest policy priorities through a review and synthesis of select studies published from 2018–2022.*

## **CONTRACT INFORMATION**

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## ACRONYMS

ACAs	Anti-corruption agencies
CSOs	Civil society organizations
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
EU	European Union
GSAM	Ghana Strengthening Accountability Mechanisms
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
JSTOR	Journal Storage
NGO	Non-governmental organization
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
SMS	Short Message Service
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development

## I. INTRODUCTION

In its 2022 *Anti-Corruption Policy*, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) defines corruption as “the abuse of entrusted power or influence for personal or political gain,” and sets forth six lines of effort to mobilize Agency action—including countering corruption across sectors to free development progress and address corruption from multiple angles. As part of this priority action, USAID also released its 2022 USAID Guide to Countering Corruption Across Sectors, which aims to lay out practical, practitioner-oriented guidance for USAID staff, implementers, and the broader anti-corruption community to identify opportunities to address corruption across sectors and to bring anti-corruption concepts into sectoral programming.

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“USAID will integrate anti-corruption approaches and considerations across our assistance portfolio in order to improve sectoral outcomes and counter corruption from multiple angles. USAID will also rally other donors to incentivize anti-corruption reforms and make game-changing investments in transforming the country systems required for partner governments to lead development across key sectors with integrity, transparency, and accountability.”

—USAID Anti-Corruption Policy (USAID 2022a, 26)

**Corruption is a widespread, ongoing phenomenon that harms development.** According to the World Bank’s Control of Corruption Continuum, “[more] countries are more corrupt than non-corrupt...so a development agency is more likely than not to be dealing with a situation in which corruption is not only a norm but an institutionalized practice.” Corruption and mismanagement of public resources harm national development by reducing the quality of government services and undermining economic growth (Fiala and Premand 2018). When countries do reduce corruption, it takes

decades: the 2011 World Development Report states that countries need an average of 27 years to bring corruption “under reasonable control” (Ventura 2021).

**Evidence gaps on effectiveness of anti-corruption reforms remain.** There are significant evidence gaps regarding the effectiveness of anti-corruption reforms, as highlighted by various studies (Jackson 2020; Stahl 2022). Transparency International’s literature review (Rahman 2022) points out the lack of comprehensive and comparable impact evaluations, methodological challenges in measuring corruption, and the need for context-specific intervention design. Collaboration between international donors and domestic civil societies is crucial, but evidence gaps remain regarding systemic or multi-sectoral approaches (Mungiu-Pippidi 2018).

The widely implemented state modernization paradigm, based on the principal-agent model, has not consistently achieved sustainable anti-corruption outcomes. Empirical research suggests challenges with implementation fidelity and insufficient conditions for sustained changes in anti-corruption norms or behaviors (Johnsøn, Taxell, and Zaum 2012; Mungiu-Pippidi 2015; Poate and Vaillant 2011; Disch, Vigeland, and Sundet 2009 cited in Jackson 2020). Anticorruption Policies Revisited: Global Trends and European Responses to the Challenge of Corruption,<sup>1</sup> a study on external conditional aid for good governance and anti-corruption initiatives, analyzed the 110 countries receiving conditional aid from the European Union (EU) and member states between 2002 and 2014, revealing limited impact on governance indicators.<sup>2</sup> Ventura (2021) highlights challenges such as short program time frames, difficulties in targeting significant forms of corruption, and limited political will.

## II. REVIEW METHODOLOGY AND SEARCH TERMS

This rapid literature review was developed in collaboration with the USAID Anti-Corruption Task Force and Bureau for Policy, Planning, and Learning points of contact to collate and summarize evidence in response to the question: “**What anti-corruption approaches are effective at addressing systematic corruption across multiple sectors?**” The review contributes toward the [2022–2026 Agency Learning Agenda](#) question on anti-corruption integration: *How can USAID work with host countries, interagency colleagues, and other development actors to address systemic corruption through multisectoral approaches?* The approaches examined in this review are salient to, and can be applied across, programming in multiple sectors. Certain multi-sectoral studies aiming to foster coordination among government, civil society, private sector, and international organizations are further highlighted in call-out boxes throughout the report.

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<sup>1</sup> *Anticorruption Policies Revisited: Global Trends and European Responses to the Challenge of Corruption* was one of the EU’s largest social-science research projects.

<sup>2</sup> Major European bilateral aid did not significantly impact governance in recipient countries, while multilateral financial assistance from EU institutions had only a small positive effect on governance indicators. Further, targeted aid for good governance and corruption initiatives within multilateral aid packages did not yield significant results.

To conduct the review, the authors first examined resources shared by Agency Learning Agenda points of contact for anti-corruption, followed by a search for relevant literature from the most recent five-year period (2018–2022) on USAID’s Evaluation Registry, the International Initiative for Impact Evaluation Development Evidence Portal, Journal Storage (JSTOR), and the American Economic Association’s registry of randomized controlled trials. The authors used similar search terms across sites, with adaptations made as outlined in Table I. Evidence included case studies, literature reviews, expert opinion surveys, impact evaluations, and randomized controlled trials.

Table I. Anti-Corruption Resources Reviewed

Site	Date Range	Search Terms	Results	Action	Date Performed
Agency Learning Agenda Points of Contact	2018–2022	Reviewed all entries provided by points of contact	34 results	reviewed all	December 6, 2022
International Initiative for Impact Evaluation	After 2018	abstract:(corrupt*)	47 results	reviewed all	December 7, 2022
American Economic Association	2018–2022	abstract:(corrupt*)	20 results	reviewed all	December 7, 2022
JSTOR	2018–2022	title: "corrupt*", journals only	87 results	reviewed all	December 7, 2022
USAID Evaluation Registry	2018–2022	Reviewed abstracts/descriptions from output of impact evaluations only	97 results	reviewed all	December 7, 2022

The primary intended users of this review include those designing and implementing development and humanitarian assistance programming focused on country system strengthening for a sector or set of sectors that also expressly aims to address corruption or advance integrity (USAID, 2022b). Its findings are organized by the categories outlined in the USAID [Guide to Countering Corruption Across Sectors](#): transparency and awareness raising, social and institutional accountability, prevention, detection, and response.<sup>3</sup> The reviewed literature shares which approaches have worked, which can be adapted to improve effectiveness, and why some approaches have not worked in some contexts.

<sup>3</sup> For more information, see Table 2 (Pages 24-26) in the USAID Guide to Countering Corruption Across Sectors.

### III. FINDINGS: ANTI-CORRUPTION CONTEXTS AND TECHNICAL APPROACHES

While the literature indicates anti-corruption programming has had limited impact, this section discusses areas where there have been potential successes and key lessons learned. It presents recent evidence on enabling contexts and the impact of efforts within the following anti-corruption categories, as defined by the [USAID Guide to Countering Corruption Across Sectors](#):

- [Transparency and Awareness Raising](#)
- [Social and Institutional Accountability](#)
- [Prevention](#)
- [Detection Social and Institutional Accountability](#)
- [Response](#)



#### Transparency and Awareness Raising

Government transparency, the quality of disclosure of information and processes, is necessary to ensure social and institutional accountability. Public awareness raising informs community members about governmental performance and socializes accountability. Increasing public demand for clean government is a strategy to make supporting corrupt practices more costly, and raising awareness about the pervasiveness of corruption can strengthen demands for clean government (Cheeseman and Peiffer 2022). **This section shares key findings about improving messaging and increasing public knowledge from transparency and awareness-raising initiatives that aim to reduce corruption.** Notable findings from the 2018–2022 literature reviewed for this report include:

- There is a risk that anti-corruption messages may make individuals more despondent and less willing to resist corruption. Even carefully targeted statements emphasizing anti-corruption efforts can have this unintended effect (Cheeseman and Peiffer 2022).
- Transparency and awareness-raising campaigns that include positive, contextualized messaging disseminated to specific groups are relatively more successful than campaigns that use other messaging (Stahl 2022).
- Direct-to-citizen messaging and other information and communication technologies (ICT)<sup>4</sup> can promote transparency and accountability and facilitate citizen participation and government-citizen interactions (Schechter and Vasudevan 2021).
- Public awareness raising on corruption can steer votes away from perceived corrupt parties during an election (Schechter and Vasudevan 2021; Buntaine et al. 2018).

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<sup>4</sup> ICT includes social media, radio, short message service (SMS) text, electronic government (e-government), internet or telephone-based platforms, ledger technologies such as blockchain, and artificial intelligence technologies (Adam and Fazekas 2021).

- Public awareness raising on laws can reduce bribe payments and gender-based violence at transnational borders (Croke et al. 2020).

### Improving Public Messaging on Corruption

Cheeseman and Peiffer (2022) found that **exposure to anti-corruption messages generally did not discourage bribery and, in some cases, made individuals more willing to pay a bribe.**

They conducted a household-level field experiment in Nigeria and tested the influence of different anti-corruption messages on behavior using a bribery game. The researchers studied five messages in their study (as well as a control): a religious message, government success message, local fight message, taxes message, and widespread message. Exposure to two anti-corruption messages that highlight the role of leaders in combating corruption—religious and government success messages—had the opposite effect, encouraging bribery instead of discouraging it.<sup>5</sup> There was no significant difference in the likelihood of bribery between those exposed to local fight and taxes messages and those who were not shown any message. Exposure to the widespread message was significantly associated with an increased likelihood of bribery.<sup>6</sup>

**Nonetheless, anti-corruption campaigns appear to be more successful when they include locally contextualized information, utilize positive or hopeful messaging, and target specific audiences,** according to a 2022 systematic review (Stahl 2022). Stahl examined nine social norm and behavior change experiments across the globe from 2016–2022 comprising 23 different treatments that used behavior change communication approaches to identify factors associated with effective interventions. Of the 23 treatments studied in Stahl’s review, 13 utilized messaging with generic normative information; i.e., awareness-raising campaigns that conveyed that corruption is bad without including nuance about local issues or interests. Stahl’s analysis of these studies suggests that using generic information about corruption actually emphasizes its pervasiveness and negative trends, which “confirm and exacerbate widespread beliefs about the inevitability and normality of corruption.” These generic awareness-raising campaigns were associated with unsuccessful outcomes.

Meanwhile, **contextualized or socially-sensitive information can move people to action.** For example, Montenegro (2020) found that advertisements featuring messages emphasizing the specific impact of electoral misdeeds generated a larger shift in the votes for “cleaner” candidates than ones only providing information about the reporting website.

Furthermore, messages that focus on positivity rather than dwelling on the negative effects of corruption appear to increase the desired persuasion or learning effects (Stahl 2022). In Stahl’s (2022) review, four of the six positively framed treatments were found to be effective, while zero of the eleven negatively

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<sup>5</sup> Exposure to religious messages increases bribe probability by 10 percentage points, while government success treatment is not statistically significant (at  $p < 0.10$ ), but is close ( $p = 0.114$ ).

<sup>6</sup> Compared with those who were not shown a message, those in the widespread treatment group had a 13 percentage point greater predicted probability of paying a bribe in the researchers’ game.



framed treatments were effective. For example, an analysis of Nigeria’s Whistle Blowing Policy (2016–2017) found **messaging that incentivized patriotism increased citizen participation in anti-corruption efforts and aided in recovering looted money** (Tade 2019).

Finally, evidence suggests that **successful awareness-raising campaigns distribute targeted messages to narrowly defined groups**. Stahl found that studies with a “narrow focus on actual norms and/or practices of corruption that intervention audiences are known to experience and care about” (such as in the public health and services sectors) were generally successful in their anti-corruption behavior change objectives. For example, in Tanzania’s health sector, service seekers in hospitals commonly bribe health providers to receive better treatment: Stahl studied two successful pilot interventions at Dar es Salaam hospitals that proactively addressed bribery by targeting messaging to health facility users.

**The effect of the messages Cheeseman and Peiffer studied varied depending on individuals’ pre-existing perceptions of corruption prevalence, highlighting the nuanced impact of anti-corruption campaigns and suggesting that specific targeted messages have the potential to strengthen public resolve against corruption.**<sup>7</sup> Among those who believed corruption was widespread, anti-corruption messages backfired. Exposure to four of the messages significantly encouraged bribery among pessimistic perceivers, with the widespread and religious messages having the strongest effect.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, among individuals who did not perceive corruption as a significant issue, certain targeted messages emphasizing the direct effects of corruption on individuals through taxation significantly decreased the likelihood of paying a bribe by 15 percentage points (Cheeseman and Peiffer 2022).

### Increasing Public Knowledge on Corruption and Laws

**Efforts to increase public knowledge on corruption and laws have shown promising results in influencing voter behavior and reducing corrupt practices.** Studies conducted during recent Indian and Ugandan elections demonstrated the effectiveness of awareness-raising campaigns utilizing radio broadcasts and short message service (SMS) text updates to inform voters about the costs of electing corrupt politicians and budget management performance (Buntaine et al. 2018; Schechter and Vasudevan 2021). These interventions led to significant shifts in voter support toward non-corrupt parties and reduced instances of bribe payments. Similarly, in-person education programs targeting women traders in cross-border trade demonstrated a decrease in corruption and harassment by officials

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<sup>7</sup> Researchers created an index to identify pessimistic perceivers based on their responses to questions about corruption in Nigeria. The survey results suggest that individuals in this category perceive the situation as worse than reality. Among pessimists, 96 percent agree that most people they know have paid a bribe, while agreement drops to 59 percent for non-pessimists.

<sup>8</sup> Among pessimistic perceivers, exposure to widespread and religious messages increased bribe probability by around 20 percentage points. Government success and taxes messages increased bribe probability by an average of 12 percentage points.

(Croke et al. 2020). These findings highlight the potential of increasing public knowledge as a powerful tool in combating corruption, providing opportunities to enhance transparency and accountability.

During the 2014 Indian general elections, Schechter and Vasudevan exposed millions of voters to an awareness-raising radio campaign sharing the message that electing corrupt vote-buying politicians has significant social and community economic costs. **They found this awareness-raising campaign drew close to 3 million votes away from vote-buying parties**, with no effect on turnout rate or vote share. Although vote buying undermines the political representation of voter interests and diminishes public services for the poor, efforts to diminish its influence have not been cost-effective to date. The study was able to reduce the cost of the awareness-raising campaign by using journalist interviews as an impartial, reliable, safe, and low-cost method for identifying vote-buying parties. The awareness-raising campaign was able to achieve an 18 percent persuasion rate (i.e., the proportion of the audience persuaded to switch to non-vote-buying parties), which is comparable to other voter information campaigns with higher implementation costs. Furthermore, the researchers intentionally timed the awareness-raising radio campaign to occur shortly before the election, to allow little time for vote-buying parties to react through voter intimidation and monitoring of voter compliance (Schechter and Vasudevan 2021).

In addition, during the 2016 Ugandan district elections, Buntaine et al. (2018) tested the potential for ICTs to enable voter action through sending voters SMS text updates on budget management and service provision. This study found that **when budget management and service provision performance were above expectations, communicating factual information about budget management increased voter support for councilors. When the performance was below expectations, it decreased support.** Recipients reported voting for incumbents six percent less often when receiving messages that described more irregularities than expected. They reported voting for incumbents five percent more often when receiving messages that conveyed fewer budget irregularities than expected. The messages had no observed impact on voter turnout (Buntaine et al. 2018). Researchers also noted that nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have easily implemented this SMS text approach, which may be more difficult for politicians to manipulate or censor.

Beyond ICT-based approaches, Croke et al. (2020) evaluated the impact of an in-person education program aiming to inform traders about the legal framework governing cross-border trade between Uganda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The researchers examined whether educating women traders on the law and their rights can lower corruption and harassment (including gender-based violence) by officials at the border. Training women traders on tariffs, legal rights, and border-crossing procedures led to a 47.5 percentage point increase in crossing the border before official working hours to avoid paying bribes. **The training reduced instances of bribe payments by five percentage points in the full sample of traders and by 27.5 percentage points among those**

who complied with the study assignments.<sup>9</sup> The training also reduced the incidence of gender-based violence by 5.4 percentage points and by 30.5 percentage points among those who complied with the study.



## Social and Institutional Accountability

Accountability is integral to democracy, good governance, and anti-corruption efforts. **This section provides evidence on strengthening accountability in governance through activities focused on strengthening formal internal oversight, external third-party oversight, or societal oversight mechanisms.** Notable findings from the 2018–2022 literature reviewed for this report include:

- There is nuance as to how much bureaucratic oversight enhances institutional accountability under corrupt public servants (Bandiera et al. 2020).
- Political discretion can create obligations for bureaucrats to accommodate corruption by their superiors (Brierly 2020).
- ICT such as social media, radio, and SMS text can be an important tool for social accountability and monitoring of corruption (Okunogbe and Pouliquen 2022; Montenegro 2020), but ICT interventions can have disproportionate impacts based on gender, digital literacy, and ICT accessibility (Adam and Fazekas 2021).
- Social accountability trainings that promote community-based monitoring can improve local development projects (Fiala and Premand 2018).
- Mungiu-Pippidi (2018) and Rahman (2022) found that programs promoting local populations' participation in development can strengthen accountability, however, corrupt or misaligned civil society organizations (CSOs) can hinder anti-corruption efforts (Ventura 2021).

### Box 1. Multi-Sectoral Collaboration: Insights from a Training Intervention along the DRC-Rwanda Border Region

In their study, Croke et al. (2020) present evidence from a randomized controlled trial of a training intervention with cross-sectoral results. The intervention provided access to information on procedures, tariffs, and rights to small-scale traders to facilitate border crossings, lower corruption, and reduce gender-based violence along the DRC-Rwanda border. The project emphasized coordination between actors by conducting joint workshops between traders and officials and facilitating policy dialogue to address these systemic issues. The findings offer valuable insights for development aid initiatives seeking to complement efforts on border corruption, poverty reduction, gender equality, entrepreneurship, and other programs that tackle the “demand” side of the fight against corruption.

<sup>9</sup> The study had a high instance of non-compliance with control/treatment assignment. Many assigned to treatment did not report for training, and many of those assigned to the control group showed up to the training. Therefore, the study authors separate estimated effects into the full sample of all people in the study (whether they complied with their assignment or not), and those who complied with their study assignment.

**One strategy to reduce corruption is optimizing the authority structure between third-party corruption monitors and procurement officers.** A study by Bandiera et al. (2020) shows this approach can reduce contract prices and maintain quality in public procurement, an activity that represents about 12 percent of the gross domestic product in the average Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) member country (OECD 2019 cited in Bandiera et al. 2020). In Pakistan, Bandiera et al. (2020) designed a field experiment with a sample of 600 procurement officers. Providing procurement officers with autonomy,<sup>10</sup> incentives,<sup>11</sup> or both autonomy and incentives reduced the price of procurement contracts. When the assigned corruption monitor was more inefficient or corrupt, giving autonomy to procurement officers reduced contract prices by up to 15 percent because it prevented monitors from causing delays. Meanwhile, giving incentives to procurement officers only significantly reduced prices when the assigned corruption monitor was relatively more aligned with the government, or behaving in the interest of citizens.<sup>12</sup> The impact of giving incentives to procurement officers dropped to zero as the agents' alignment decreased, either because they were corrupt or because their minimal effort resulted in inefficient processes and higher prices. **“Taken together, the results indicate that the two policy instruments [autonomy and performance pay] are effective under different circumstances. Giving autonomy to the [procurement] agent is desirable when it means taking it away from an extractive [corruption] monitor, while incentives are ineffective in this case because the [procurement] agent has limited control over prices and vice versa.”** Therefore, there was no observable effect on government performance by giving procurement officers both autonomy and incentives, as the effects of the policy instruments depended on the drivers of bureaucrats' behavior (Bandiera et al. 2020).

However, greater political discretion can increase corruption, as politicians can abuse oversight tools. In Ghana, **politicians used their oversight powers to pressure bureaucrats to engage in illicit activities, with the threat of geographical transfer if they did not comply.** Briery (2020) used survey data from 864 bureaucrats across 80 randomly sampled local governments in Ghana to conduct a list experiment. “The results show that over half of the bureaucrats (53 percent) report corruption when politicians have a lot of discretionary control, compared to just over a quarter (25 percent) when politicians have limited influence. This is equivalent to a 51 percent decrease in the probability of corruption.” Bureaucrats were more likely to comply with and facilitate corrupt procurement deals on

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<sup>10</sup> Autonomy was provided by removing the monitor's discretion over audit documentation requests and giving procurement officers discretion over purchases up to 10 percent of the average budget.

<sup>11</sup> Incentives were provided by paying for procurement performance, measured as price conditional on quantity, quality, delivery speed, and transport costs. This pay ranged from half a month's salary to two months' salary.

<sup>12</sup> Alignment was measured through two proxies: the power to delay payments and the rush to spend a lapsing budget at the end of the year.

behalf of politicians when bureaucrats perceived the politicians to have higher levels of discretionary control and, therefore, able to transfer the officer.

### **Box 2. ICT and Accountability**

With the potential to reach large audiences with low scaling costs, carefully-designed ICT interventions can serve multiple interconnected anti-corruption aims such as transparency, awareness-raising, accountability, and detection. During Colombia's 2018 election, Montenegro and Garbiras-Díaz conducted a communication campaign to encourage societal oversight, reaching 1.4 million Facebook users through Facebook advertisements. Evidence analyzing this communication campaign shows that **advertisements aimed at increasing civil oversight and election monitoring increased citizen reports of election irregularities** on the Attorney General's website by 1.5 percentage points (Montenegro 2020). The author postulates that the increase is modest because 95 percent of advertisement views occurred on cell phones, and the reporting website was not fully compatible with cell phone use. Also, the study found that **citizens exposed to the advertisement were more likely to vote for candidates they perceived to be less engaged in electoral malpractice**. The vote share for traditional candidates (in historically powerful parties) dropped by about two percentage points in the municipalities receiving the ads. The researcher notes this approach may increase pessimism about the transparency and worth of elections.

**However, a systematic review by Adam and Fazekas (2021) found that, when the design and implementation of ICT-based interventions do not resonate with local contexts and needs, cultural backgrounds, and the user experience on technology platforms, they can intensify the societal divides and power relations that support corruption.** For example, the proportion of women in Africa using the internet is 25 percent lower than that of men. This digital divide has implications for the public governance potential of "many ICT tools [that] require connectivity and a certain level of ICT proficiency." Adam and Fazekas found interventions are more likely to successfully reduce corruption when citizens have incentives and skills to monitor and provide feedback on service delivery, potential tasks have a standardized design, and the task outcomes can be attributed to public actors or actions.

### Civil Society Oversight and Advocacy

**Educating civil society, engaging community members to provide oversight, and building advocacy pathways for higher-level reform can enhance social accountability.** Fiala and Premand (2018) conducted an experimental program to research the effectiveness of social accountability anti-corruption training and community-based monitoring in improving local development projects in Uganda. **The social accountability training led to a small but statistically significant increase in the overall quality of projects (by 0.135 standard deviations). These improvements were "concentrated entirely in areas that are reported by local officials as more corrupt or mismanaged."** To conduct this study, the researchers randomly selected 634 communities (out of 940 that received a recent community-driven development program) to receive training on monitoring community projects, identifying corruption, and submitting complaints about corruption and mismanagement to implementing partners and local, sub-national, or national leaders. The findings suggested that the training increased community monitoring of local projects, increased complaints to local and central officials, and increased cooperation with local governments to ultimately

improve project quality. Researchers also found that educating community members on both identifying and reporting problems and on the quality of specific local development projects leads to significant improvements in household welfare. Finally, the study also found a small but statistically significant increase (2.5 percent) in the training participants' trust in the central government compared to community members that did not attend the training.

Anti-corruption interventions appear to work best when they are **locally owned, country-led, and supported by collective action from local stakeholders, with the international community playing a supporting role in amplifying and disseminating** (Rahman 2022). This approach is becoming popular in government programs in Uganda, Liberia, and Sierra Leone (Fiala and Premand 2018). Overall, Mungiu-Pippidi (2018) found aid programs that designate society actors as the main stakeholders in anti-corruption interventions are more effective than those that entrust governments with ownership of anti-corruption programs. Ventura's (2021) literature review found civil society (in Nepal, Bangladesh, Nigeria) and local CSOs (in Estonia, Chile, Uruguay, and Costa Rica) have strengthened accountability at both local and national levels. For instance, the United Kingdom Department for International Development's project evaluations and annual reports from an anti-corruption program in Nepal determined **civil society engagement and integration into governance programming was essential for sustaining lasting results and strengthening accountability** (ibid.). Furthermore, international NGOs can amplify local efforts by safeguarding civic space for accountability and doing activities that would be risky for local CSOs, such as publishing sensitive or controversial reports (ibid.).

All things considered, civil society is not uniform, and Ventura's (2021) review shows **civil society's effectiveness in controlling corruption and increasing social accountability is nuanced**. Literature reviewed by Ventura (2021) found partnering with local CSOs presented issues when local CSOs were corrupt or perceived to be corrupt (as seen in Afghanistan) and when local CSOs in fragile and conflict-affected situations were successful in advancing anti-corruption agendas, but promoted values and norms that undermined conflict sensitivity and peacebuilding (as seen in Indonesia and Afghanistan).



## Prevention

Corruption prevention includes approaches that reduce the opportunities for corruption to occur. **The literature includes evidence of ethics training encouraging the public sector to be better stewards of public resources and deterring public servants from committing corrupt acts.**

Notable findings from the 2018–2022 literature reviewed for this report include:

- Education initiatives aimed at improving police integrity can improve officers' beliefs and attitudes toward corruption (Wagner et al. 2020; Harris et al. 2022).

- E-governance and digital technology tools can minimize opportunities for corruption, but also may provide new opportunities for misuse and corruption (Okunogbe and Pouliquen 2022; Adam and Fazekas 2021).

### Improving Police Integrity

**Integrity-enhancing measures targeted at police officers in professional duty can impact public servants' perception of corruption and behavior. Researchers have found these measures to be successful in reducing corruption.** As part of a quasi-experimental evaluation of corruption and integrity training under Uganda's Police Accountability and Reform Project, Wagner et al. (2020) interviewed a survey sample of 600 police officers pre- and post-training. Their findings suggested officers who participated in the training judge misconduct more severely, are more inclined to report misconduct, and expect their colleagues to judge police misconduct more critically.

In another education initiative targeting police officers, Harris et al. (2022) conducted a field experiment in Ghana, where the police consistently rank as the government's most corrupt sector. The researchers randomly selected traffic police officers to participate in a training program "aimed to (re-)activate the officers' intrinsic motivations to serve the public, and to create a sense of belonging to a new social group that shared the mission of bringing change to the police." Results from a survey and an incentivized cheating game conducted at baseline and 20 months later show **the program positively affected officers' values and beliefs regarding unethical professional behavior, improved their attitudes toward citizens, and "significantly lowered officers' propensity to behave unethically, as measured by their willingness to cheat in the incentivized game."**

### Harnessing Electronic Tools

Governments and development actors are introducing automated systems, such as tax e-filing, to avoid potential human bias and improve efficiency by avoiding direct payoff of tax officials (Amodio et al. 2018). Okunogbe and Pouliquen (2022) designed and implemented an encouragement study design by providing randomly selected small- and medium-sized businesses training on e-filing. They examined the impact of e-filing adoption on compliance costs, tax payments, and bribe payments in Tajikistan. E-filing doubled tax payments for firms previously more likely to evade taxes. The results indicate **e-filing reduces opportunities for extortion, reduces collusion with officials, reduces compliance costs, and makes the distribution of tax payments across firms equitable** (Okunogbe and Pouliquen 2022).

Conversely, **ICT can provide new opportunities for misuse and corruption**, sometimes through the dark web or cryptocurrencies. For example, officials in Croatia manipulated data in a new electronic road toll system by re-registering trucks as cars to keep the price margin for themselves (Adam and Fazekas 2021). This led to an annual loss of \$2.6 million from toll booths.

The Adam and Fazekas study furthermore suggests **corrupt elites can block ICT-based anti-corruption reform or support its adoption if there are other benefits associated with it.**

Case studies from Tanzania and Kenya found ICT interventions are effective against low-level corruption. However, there is little evidence they reduce high-level corruption (i.e., “grand corruption”). The authors suggest this is because corrupt elites design and control the systems in which they operate, such as providing data on government actions. However, systematically corrupt elites may adopt ICT-based government reforms if they perceive the benefits to outweigh the costs. “For example, recent EU enlargement in Central and Eastern Europe have convinced otherwise corrupt governments to adopt digital public services, such as electronic procurement platforms, in return for accession and the associated financial benefits from trade and subsidies” (Adam and Fazekas 2021).



## Detection

Complementing preventative strategies, detecting corruption when it occurs is essential to reducing corruption. **This section discusses literature on how improving audit capacity, management oversight, and community feedback mechanisms can help detect corruption** (Rahman 2022). Notable findings from the 2018–2022 literature reviewed for this report include:

- Audited municipalities appear to show performance improvements (Funk et al. 2020), but impacts across specific sectors may vary according to the risk of sanction (Zamboni and Litschig 2018).
- Decentralized audit institutions may be more corrupt than centralized institutions (Montenegro 2020).
- Soliciting community feedback to detect corruption may be facilitated through social norm and behavior change approaches that increase the perception that reporting corruption is a social norm (Graeme et al. 2019; Scharbatke-Church and Kothari 2021).
- Meanwhile, Mungiu-Pippidi (2018) shows corruption detection alone is ineffective in curbing corruption if the legal structure of the country enables corruption in the first place.

### Box 3. Multi-Sectoral Collaboration: Insights from Improving Auditing in Colombia

Montenegro’s case study exemplifies the effectiveness of a multi-sectoral approach to combating corruption, where governmental agencies, NGOs, and civil society collaborate to report, investigate, and sanction electoral irregularities, ultimately fostering greater transparency and accountability. In Colombia, governmental agencies and NGOs operate online electoral reporting channels. One NGO, the Mission for Electoral Observation, runs a popular reporting website called “Pilas con el voto” (meaning, “keep an eye on your vote”). While the Mission for Electoral Observation does not have the power to investigate or take legal action, it serves as an intermediary between civil society and the government. It prepares official reports based on citizen information and redirects them to the government’s unified reporting unit. The Mission for Electoral Observation’s reporting website has contributed to more than 80 percent of the reports the reporting unit has collected. The reporting unit processes the reports and sends them to the relevant agencies responsible for investigating and sanctioning electoral irregularities. This approach showcases an effective collaboration between civil society, NGOs, and government agencies to promote action on corruption reports (Montenegro 2020).



## Improving Auditing Institutions

Audit-based anti-corruption interventions have improved transparency, accountability, and the provision of public services. Funk et al. (2020) examined the performance of more than 5,000 Brazilian municipalities during the federal government's randomized anti-corruption auditing program (2001–2012). The study compared audited and unaudited municipalities and found **audited municipalities experienced performance improvements**. A randomized policy experiment in Brazil by Zamboni and Litschig (2018) found temporarily increasing the risk municipalities would be subject to an annual audit in procurement, health service

delivery, and cash transfer had mixed effects across industries. For procurement, Zamboni and Litschig found increasing the risk of an audit by 20 percentage points reduced corruption in two ways, with a 10 percentage point decrease in audited resources involved in corruption and a 15 percentage point decrease in processes with evidence of corruption. In contrast, they found no evidence that increased audit risk affected corruption or mismanagement in the other two sectors studied, measured by the quality of publicly provided preventive and primary health care services and local compliance with national guidelines of the conditional cash transfer program Bolsa Família. The authors found **the mixed impacts across procurement, health service delivery, and cash transfer activities was “consistent with differences in potential sanctions and the probability that a sanction is applied”** (ibid.).

**The structure of auditing institutions may affect their success: compared to decentralized public auditing institutions, centralized institutions may be better at increasing government accountability and reducing corruption.** Montenegro (2020) studied public auditing institutions across Colombia with the authority to audit the financial information of the municipal government and directly sanction the mayor and other local officials or involve the national government if acts of misconduct are discovered. These offices are also responsible for evaluating the progress of local government projects and assessing their financial viability. Montenegro found decentralized audit offices increase instances of corruption (measured by the number of processes initiated by a supreme third-party office to charge public officials for corruption activities) by roughly 1-1.5 standard deviations.

### Box 4. Multi-Sectoral Transferability: Insights from Shifting Social Norms in Nigeria

In their study, Graeme et al. (2019) investigate the normative adoption of community-minded behaviors and demonstrate the transferability of their findings across different sectors. Voluntary community contributions, such as reporting social or political problems via text message, are important in contexts where government or private sector initiatives may be ineffective. For example, initiatives in countries such as Kenya, Haiti, and India have asked people to contribute information about local violence, natural disasters, or corruption to help other citizens navigate crises and to identify areas in need. By persuading an initial group of individuals to try these behaviors, the study suggests that bandwagon effects and information cascades can lead to widespread adoption.

The corruption activities investigated were peculation,<sup>13</sup> procuring without legal requirements, unlawful interest in procurement, bribe-taking for delaying or omitting duties, influence peddling, and illicit enrichment. The results show decentralized auditing offices most strongly increased the probability of two types of corruption offenses: procuring without legal requirements (e.g., a public servant signing a contract without executing a competitive tender), with an 87 percentage point increase, and influence peddling (i.e., a public servant using his position or authority to obtain favors), with a 37 percentage point increase. The decentralized auditing offices studied did not sanction public servants more in response to increased corruption. Furthermore, auditing institutions with greater political alignment between the council members and the mayor were more likely to be ineffective and corrupt, supporting the hypothesis that collusion between mayors and councils to appoint auditors facilitates corruption.

### Community Reporting and Feedback

Increasingly, anti-corruption interventions focus on shifting behavior away from corrupt and corruption-enabling practices through the social norm and behavior change approaches (Graeme et al. 2019; Scharbatke-Church and Kothari 2021). Graeme et al. (2019) reviewed initiatives in Kenya, Haiti, and India to encourage people to contribute information about local social or political problems, thus changing social norms about adopting community-minded behaviors. They found that **“technology adoption [studies] show that once a certain threshold of new users is achieved, bandwagon effects, herding, and information cascades can spur new behaviors to become widespread in a society.”** The researchers then conducted a field experiment in Nigeria to test two campaigns that encouraged citizens to report corruption through SMS. They found two barriers to adopting new actions: the perception based on social norms that no one else will join (verifying the findings from their literature review) and minor logistical or technical barriers based on personal and structural capacity. **ICT can enable reporting on corruption.** A film showing actors reporting corruption and promoting a toll free text messaging platform increased actual reports of corruption. This program, a partnership between a Nigerian anti-corruption group and a Nollywood production company, produced significant results. “As a benchmark, [the] seven-month study in 106 small southern Nigerian communities produced 1.7 times as many concrete corruption reports as one year of the previous nationwide corruption-reporting campaign. People most commonly reported bribes and embezzlement perpetrated by politicians, law enforcement, and those in the education sector. Of the corruption-related messages, 86 percent arrived within the first 30 days after the campaigns began” (Graeme et al. 2019). The platform received 3,316 messages, 1,181 from unique senders texting about corruption, and 241 from unique senders about a concrete corruption report, including a corrupt act, person, or institution. Meanwhile, the average effect was close to zero in the control communities.

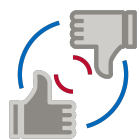
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<sup>13</sup> Peculation is defined as any wrongful appropriation of public funds by a public servant (Montenegro 2020).

## Government Regulations

**Regulations to promote corruption detection, such as establishing autonomous anti-corruption agencies (ACAs), restrictive party finance legislation, or whistleblower protection acts, are not straightforward solutions.** The World Bank’s Public Accountability Mechanism database includes “nearly all instruments that are either frequently used in practice or specified in the [United Nations Convention Against Corruption]: anti-corruption agencies, ombudsmen, freedom of information laws, immunity protection limitations, conflict of interest legislation, financial disclosures, audit infrastructure improvements, budgetary transparency, party finance restrictions, whistleblower protections, and dedicated legislation.” Mungiu-Pippidi’s (2018) analysis of anti-corruption regulations and good governance policies from this database finds evidence that “countries that adopt autonomous anti-corruption agencies, restrictive party finance legislation, or whistleblower protection acts make no more progress on corruption than countries that do not.” The comprehensiveness of anti-corruption regulation matters less than the legal arrangements that are “used to generate privileges and rents” or “its overall regulatory quality” as a sign that the country is controlling corruption (ibid.).

**Finally, civil society activism is necessary for anti-corruption regulation to function within corrupt countries** (Mungiu-Pippidi 2018). Mungiu-Pippidi’s (2018) research report found two ways to improve the domestic agency, or citizens’ perceptions of control over actions and their consequences, to encourage anti-corruption activism: slowly changing institutions until open access, free competition, and meritocracy become dominant; and fostering collective agency and investment in anti-corruption efforts to strengthen the rule of law and control of corruption.



### Response

Responding to detected corruption can ensure accountability. This section discusses literature on the set-up of ACAs to effectively respond to corruption. Notable findings from the 2018–2022 literature reviewed for this report include:

- Host government ACAs require organizational autonomy and a clear mandate to investigate cases and enforce anti-corruption laws (Quah 2018).
- ACAs with expanded powers and sufficient resources can be more successful (Rahman 2022).

Two case studies of ACAs in a combined seven countries examined how the qualities of ACAs and their operating contexts contributed to success and how these factors differed country to country (Quah 2018, Rahman 2022). **ACAs that only performed anti-corruption functions and existed in contexts with strong political will, such as in Singapore and Hong Kong, were effective in impartially enforcing anti-corruption laws** (Quah 2018). Two key qualities of these ACAs included a comprehensive approach to investigating all corruption complaints, including major and minor, public and private, related to the giver and receiver of bribes, and the confidentiality of reports (ibid.). ACAs

are also effective when authorities have prosecutorial powers (such as in Indonesia). Rahman found ACAs were successful when they had access to special investigative techniques, such as the interception of telephone conversations and simulated bribe-giving, extensive confiscation powers, and powers to freeze perpetrators' assets during an investigation (such as in Croatia). On the other hand, Rahman (2022) found **ACAs were ineffective when poorly resourced and mandated to perform both anti-corruption and non-corruption-related functions** (such as in China, India, and the Philippines).

## IV. CONCLUSION

The literature review reveals evidence of anti-corruption approaches across multiple sectors, including government, law enforcement, business, civil society, education, healthcare, and natural resource management. The review emphasizes the need to move beyond the dominant “state modernization” approach by exploring alternative theories of change and building and acting upon rigorous evidence. Further evidence search and review may be needed to explore the linkages between sectors collaborating in anti-corruption efforts and the transferability of these approaches to different sectors. Additional research can contribute to a better understanding of effective strategies for addressing the systemic nature of corruption.

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