Anti-Corruption Agencies: Tactics for Holding Off Potent Adversaries

First developed by Singapore and Hong Kong in the mid-twentieth century, anti-corruption agencies (ACAs) have emerged in dozens of countries since the 2005 United Nations Convention Against Corruption. Combining investigative (and sometimes prosecutory) powers with preventive and educational activities, these agencies have achieved varying levels of success in their efforts to reduce abuse of public power for private benefit.

ACAs frequently encounter opposition from powerful antagonists who benefit from existing corruption. These antagonists often seek to neutralize the agencies by weakening their credibility, legal power, or operations. In the face of these challenges, agency leaders must decide whether to pursue high-level investigations and bold reforms—risking pushback and dissolution—or focus on less controversial efforts that could draw criticism of timidity and bias.

A new cross-cutting report by ISS explores strategies that ACA leaders in eight emerging democracies---Botswana, Croatia, Ghana, Indonesia, Latvia, Lithuania, Mauritius, and Slovenia---have used to escape this "spoiler trap." The ACAs in these countries have operated for at least a decade and are still in existence. They faced powerful opposition that threatened their capacity. However, they earned high levels of public trust, increased the intake of public corruption complaints, conducted high-visibility investigations, achieved high conviction rates in investigated cases, secured favorable coverage in independent media, and were considered by experts to perform well relative to peer agencies.

Drawing from ISS interviews and case studies, the ISS report describes how the agencies protected themselves from pushback by recruiting allies, instituting internal controls to bolster transparency and accountability, and pursuing low-visibility preventive efforts.

Featured Interviews

In recent interviews with ISS, Graham Stockwell and Bertrand de Speville describe their experiences establishing and leading successful anti-corruption agencies. Both were high-level leaders of the Independent Commission Against Corruption in Hong Kong. Stockwell also created and led the Directorate on Corruption and Economic Crime while de Speville recently penned Overcoming Corruption: The Essentials.

Stockwell focuses on his experiences in Botswana and the process of creating a new agency, including legislative advocacy, office set up, and recruitment.

De Speville details the critical components of successful anti-corruption agencies. He also stresses the need for a single institution to coordinate investigations of allegations of corruption, prevent corruption from occurring, and educate the general public about how to eliminate corruption.

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Anti-Corruption Resources

The following organizations provide resources to national governments, anti-corruption agencies, international organizations, researchers, and others interested in fighting public corruption.

**The U4 Center** is an anti-corruption research institute serving partner agencies in eight countries.

**The World Bank's Anti-Corruption Authorities Portal** functions as a platform for sharing ideas and experiences between anti-corruption agencies, practitioners, and international actors.

**The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development Anti-Corruption Network** engages national governments, anti-corruption authorities, civil society, the business sector, and international organizations and financial institutions in Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

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