The Role of Media in Curbing Corruption in Iran

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ABSTRACT

The study examines the role of media in curbing corruption in Iran as well as the problems encountered in the process of performing this role. Media plays considerable role in providing us with adequate information about society, politics, economics, and culture. Opposition parties attempting to capture power also form public opinion through press. It shapes public policy by providing information about the priority of a government. However, Freedom of press (FOP) has its negative impact on society in the form of ‘yellow journalism’. This so-called ‘yellow journalism’ may possibly misguide us by forming public opinion in wrong direction. Sometimes, it can also tarnish the image of respected persons by interfering on their personal life.

Keywords

Media
Corruption
Freedom of press

1. Introduction

In many countries, the activities of defense, bureaucracy, and other government Machineries are not supposed to be examined by ordinary people or parties outside the power. The major hindrance to information comes in the form of so called official secrets. Hence, people have to depend on press or media where almost everybody has some sort of access at minimum cost. In a broader sense, FOP may come out in the form of newspaper, radio, and television.

Putting the negative elements aside, we can say that FOP reveals the untold stories of government in the form of publication of reports about what is happening in judiciary, executives, and legislative authorities. One additional aspect of FOP is that it also tells us about the corrupt practices of public officials. It is postulated that countries with more press freedom can control famine, high population growth rate, and financial crisis more effectively.

2. Literature Review

The media also provide information on political markets, exposing corrupt and unethical politicians (World Bank, 2002b) hence, sometimes the vested interest groups may consider the news of independent press as propaganda against the government as well as country. It is the established fact that when the media are controlled by the state, they are more likely to be subject to political pressures (World Bank, 2002b).
In many developing countries, major source of income of newspapers is government advertisements (Staphenhurst, 2000). As a result, some newspapers always try to be loyal to the existing ruling party for financial reasons. As soon as party changes, the newspapers also change their position. This kind of scenario is not conducive to media freedom. The empirical research on FOP and its impact on society are mostly qualitative. The quantitative research about cross country analysis of the impact of FOP on public corruption is limited by two things: absence of long time series data on public corruption and the data on press or media freedom. In spite of limited data availability, there exists a few major works in the area on what determines corruption. The factors that are already identified are: the type of government (Shleifer & Vishny, 1993, Cai & Triesman, 2008); competition (Bliss & Tella, 1997, Ades & Tella, 1999); culture or religious differences (Paldam, 2001); maturity of democracy (Mohtadi & Rhee 2003); foreign aid (Tavares, 2003); wage differential between the private and the public sector (Rijckegehem & Weder, 2001); legal origin of countries (La Porta et al., 1998); ethno linguistic fractionalization (Mauro, 1995); fiscal decentralization (Fishman and Gatti, 2002); press freedom (Stapenhurst, 2000; Brunetti & Weder, 2003; Chowdhury, 2008); and political rights and civil liberties (Ades & Tella, 1999; Chowdhury, 2008).

From the above review, it appears that the impact of press freedom on corruption is getting increased attention at policy level in recent years. This paper adds to the existing literature by exploring the impact of FOP on Iran over the period 2005-2010 for a total of 77 observations. The additional advantage of using panel data is that it allows more variability in data, less multicollinearity, and less omitted variables bias (Baltagi, 1995).

3. **Data Analysis**

FOP helps reducing corruption through several channels. (Staphenhurst, 2000) has identified some tangible and intangible factors through which media can affect corruption. The tangible factors are (i) investigating and exposing corrupt officials and office-holders; (ii) prompt investigations by official bodies; (iii) reinforcing the work and legitimacy of the state’s anti-corruption bodies; (iv) strengthening anticorruption bodies by exposing their flaws; (v) pressure for changes to laws and regulations that create a climate favorable to corruption, and (vi) anticipation of adverse media publicity prompts a preemptive response.

Brunetti and Weder (2003) argued that free media can help reducing both the ‘extortive corruption’ and the ‘collusive corruption’. Free media reduces ‘extortive corruption’ -the type of corruption mostly takes the shape of bribe by raising the probability of being detected and punished by laws. Bureaucrats enjoy the discretion to refuse or delay in providing some services to the bribe payers in this situation. But in the ‘collusive corruption’ which is mostly observed in the form of ‘tax evasion’, tax-payers also collude with the bribe-takers. In this situation, both the bribe payers and takers extract some unfair gains on mutual basis. Free media is most effective in curbing ‘collusive corruption’ of this kind.

4. **The channels can be summarized as follows:**

First, FOP helps us communicating well with each other and creates some sort of resistance against any irregularities. Second, it can help us in diverting resources to the sectors where they are mostly needed. Third, when we hear news or reports from many different sources freely it becomes easier for us to verify which one is right and which one is wrong and creates a sort of public awareness against corruption. Fourth, in a democratic country (such as Iran) where the press is somewhat free the ruling party does not want to lose in next election just by ignoring the press report regarding corruption. For the purpose of data analysis, the researcher has used T-test, Correlation, Partial Correlation and Multi Regression through the computer by SPSS Software.

5. **Conclusion**

Controlling corruption is one of the policy objectives of many of the countries of the world. Sometimes in some countries the ruling authorities run the risk of losing power through election if they fail to control corruption in public office.

The empirical literature on corruption is limited by unavailability of data on corruption for long time periods and the absence of a unified theoretical framework for modeling corruption. Among all the determinants of corruption, competition, types of government, foreign aid, wage differential, legal origin, ethno linguistic fractionalization, fiscal decentralization, culture or religious difference, political
rights, civil rights, and press freedom are noteworthy. There are only few studies that deal with the role of press freedom in curbing corruption using only a limited number of observations. The media naturally play an important role because it is through international or local media that people generally become aware of human rights violations and corruption. Sensitising the media to corruption, and linking it to human rights violations, has enormous educational and advocacy potential. To combat corruption in the long-term, it will be essential to change the attitudes towards corruption of younger people. If the next generation grows up perceiving corruption to be normal, the battle has already been lost. The media have a great capacity to influence the development of anti-corruption awareness among young people.

In other cases, governments appear to take measures to counter corruption (by establishing anti-corruption agencies or passing legislation) but the measures are not effective or are not prosecuted with seriousness. In such cases, human rights NGOs again need to exercise care before they support reform processes. Other elements also need to be in place for effective action to be feasible. Human rights NGOs will need to carefully analyze the social, legal and political context when they develop strategies for working on anti-corruption programmers or with anticorruption institutions.

Indeed, if access to information is elevated into the main tool against corruption, this could divert attention from the primary responsibility of government authorities (including prosecution services and courts). It may be wise to describe access to information less as a tool to identify cases of corruption, and more as a preventive mechanism that reduces the space in which government corruption can occur. To fulfill this role, the amount of information automatically available to the public should increase.

References


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