Chapter 4

The Corruption Pentagon: Linking Causes, Controls and Consequences

Corruption has been around since prehistoric times but its common understanding as “the use of public office for private or illicit gain” has gained wide currency only since the 1990s (Doig and McIvor 1999). While efforts to arrive at standard definitions for phenomena as complex and multifaceted as corruption are to be applauded, scholars and policy-makers increasingly agree about the inadequacy of such rudimentary descriptions to cover the whole gamut of corrupt acts and dealings. There is a need for comprehensive yet targeted definitions of corruption with emphasis on the analytical linkages among its common causes, controls and consequences. In other words, a comprehensive focus on how corruption may emerge, propagate, soar and recede can illuminate both the theoretical and practical perspectives on corruption.

This chapter attempts to offer a venue for such conceptual clarity by synthesizing a voluminous literature on corruption definitions and measurements. It does this by undertaking a two-pronged analysis. First, the myriad understandings of corruption are compiled and categorized through macro-historical, micro-individual and meso-institutional approaches. The result is the Corruption Pentagon proposed as a conceptual tool to interlink the disparate definitions of corruption at these three levels of analysis. Second, the chapter
focuses on the consequences of corruption on democratization, both directly through nomocracy, referring to rule of law and legitimacy; and less directly through the national integrity systems, or good governance. The results show that transparency, accountability and corruption control feed into democratization in different ways depending on the types and degrees of the specific governance challenges faced at any point in time.

On the conceptual plane, the Corruption Pentagon lists five defining parameters for corruption: Seed-Feed-Need-Greed and Wield. On a macro-historical dimension, the Corruption Pentagon examines the conditions that may lie at the root of corruption (Seed) as well as those that tend to nourish or starve it (Feed). On a micro-individual dimension, it lists the factors that may lead to corrupt transactions among individuals acting out of material necessities (Need) or moral insatiability (Greed). Finally, on a meso-institutional level, it considers the formal/legal and informal/social restraint mechanisms against the emergence and spread of corruption (Wield). Although neither exhaustive nor prescriptive, the Corruption Pentagon attempts to bring corruption closer to a more path-dependent and multiscalar understanding, which several scholars have argued is lacking in the current corruption literature (Xin and Rudel 2004).

On the impact analysis, the chapter proposes to take corruption beyond its debate on “democratic quality” to the overall “processes” of democratization. It differentiates between the direct and indirect connections between corruption and democratization. Directly, corruption prevention, control and sanctioning improve the legitimacy of the government in the eyes of the public while contributing to economic efficiency in the long-run. Indirectly, anti-corruption measures and institutions enhance the quality and the effectiveness of public services and public administration, which then enhance political legitimacy and economic efficiency, contributing therefore to democratization. At a practical level, the cost–benefit model of corruption supported by continuous democratization is found to tackle political corruption at the top, while the principal–agent model supported by coherent governance reforms is better suited to control administrative or street-level corruption (Andvig et al. 2000). Neopatrimonial regimes where corruption permeates all societal sectors and state hierarchies are candidates for