

Unit 8: Coalition Building

Learning Objectives

What Role Can Coalitions Play in Corruption Control?

After studying this unit, you should be able to:

- Understand how coalitions are built and most effective;
- Understand the role for coalitions in corruption policy reform;
- Understand the role for parliament in successful coalition building.

Introduction & Overview

Societies rarely bring corruption under control through only penalties, morality campaigns, or administrative improvements and working alone is even less effective. Long-term corruption control requires the involvement of empowered citizens, and citizen representatives who encourage accountability, exercise oversight, and check official abuses. Vigorous civil societies and strong, socially rooted, credible parliaments can be effective partners for good governance.

Through trial and error, growing pains and a series of historical events –impeachments, civil wars, etc.-- the relationship between parliament and civil society must draw on lasting interests.

These partnerships:

- Bring major segments of society into politics;
- Build stronger linkages between citizens and those who speak for them; and
- Create new institutions and standards capable of enforcing acceptable limits for the uses of wealth and power.

In this Unit we consider how parliament's role in the anticorruption movement can be maximized through strong partnerships and social action coalitions with mobilized citizens. Thus, this unit focuses on the representation functions of parliamentarians through their interactions with social action coalitions.

What are Social Action Coalitions

Social action coalitions are self-conscious, freely organized, active, and lasting alliances of elites, organizations, and citizens who share partially overlapping political goals and a basic commitment to peaceful change. Synergy between the strength of civil society, the vitality and credibility of parliaments and political will are essential to improving governance and building strong social action coalitions. Partnerships like these between parliaments and social action coalitions draw on the strengths and interests of societies to monitor abuse of wealth and power.

Parliaments

Parliaments are most effective at monitoring corruption when they encourage, protect, and articulate the concerns of society. Parliaments that consider social interests and exercise true autonomy and oversight with the executive effectively represent civil society and strengthen its role in the public arena. Parliaments can carry out these function when they represent citizens, legislate, oversee the executive, self-regulate parliamentary processes and political finance systems.

Parliaments, "Political Will," and Civil Society

Active, democratically-elected, well-managed parliaments can build accountability, become an arena for well-regulated political contention, and add force and focus to citizen concerns. They scrutinize executive policy and decisions and hold leaders to their promises at a level of detail beyond the reach of reform-oriented interest groups.

But parliaments can also be vulnerable to corruption. Some Members of Parliament may:

- Resist taking a stand against corruption in an effort to preserve their own position by accepting funds obtained through corruption by supporters;

- Not take a stand against corruption to preserve a Member's safety;
- Fall victim to greed.

In response to such temptations, the Global Organization of Parliamentarians Against Corruption (GOPAC) encourages parliamentarians of networking among Members and parliaments and of sharing enlightened views of the legislative and oversight processes through education efforts. Actions such as these are essential to coalition-building. GOPAC sees parliaments and their members as parts of a web of institutions, communications, and political processes that draw together citizens, interest groups and advocates, and all segments of government. Organized, active citizens are critical to providing Members and leaders with important resources and reinforcement. Parliamentarians who take this approach will be challenged in the short run, but become more effective in the long run. This is partly because they build a more secure, popular base for themselves, as they are working more in the interest of the people.

The Civil Society Connection: Building Social Action Coalitions

Despite the initial enthusiasm for it, coalition-building is often difficult to sustain. However, when they are organized within individual countries or, at most, well-defined regions they are easier to maintain. Social action coalitions cover every interest from feminism, environmentalism, cultural, civil rights, and even religious movements such as the "Christian Right" in the United States. They can also be more formalized and reform-oriented, such as Ghana's Anti-Corruption Coalition, and Alianza Civica in Mexico, Honduras, and elsewhere. Sometimes, strong coalitions are more effective than parliament in anti-corruption, but there is not a single ideal model. They all intend to mold individuals and groups into a sustainable reform-oriented constituency.

Minimal Conditions

There are minimal conditions for social action coalitions to be successful.

- A functioning state;
- Leaders who are guided by good governance;
- Order;
- An environment free of pervasive violence, famine, disease, or social disintegration.
- Boundaries and linkages between state and society;

- Basic civil liberties—freedom to organize, assemble, and voice
- Freedom of the press;
- Crisis or opportunity-making action imperative. NGO, aid partner, and international organizations support;
- Self-interest in a corruption-free society.

Box 1: Hong Kong's ICAC

Hong Kong's famous ICAC—whose anticorruption strategy included extensive public involvement from the beginning—originated after a corrupt police official's escape touched off mass outrage. Its first step toward winning public confidence was to bring him back to Hong Kong for trial and imprisonment (see chapter 9). But any such crisis will fade—if not, the coalition will have accomplished nothing—making the active support of parliament critical for the long run.

Diverting Corruption

While businesses might like to play a role in corruption prevention, they may be too vulnerable to petty

corruption to be effective. As we have said before in this module, leadership and civil society networks, particularly when they can operate autonomously, can be more effective at educating the possible stakeholders about the costs of corruption. Coalition builders must be patient as they learn how to maneuver through the social networks and abstain from major initiatives until the political climate can be most receptive.

Social action coalitions should be unaffiliated with political parties, but this can be difficult when:

- Parliaments are one-party bodies;
- Parliaments are dominated by powerful individuals, groups, or economic interests.
- The organizations and citizens who compose the coalition have their own affiliations and sympathies.
- Coalition leaders interact with party leaders for reform.

Therefore coalitions should focus their energies on:

- Anti-corruption measures, rather than specific cases or scandals;
- Active engagement with all parties and leaders for anticorruption
- Follow-through on promises
- Technical advice, leaving investigations to others.

Incentives

Why participate in anticorruption coalitions? Individuals who participate are primarily motivated by a desire for better politics and administration, which are known as purposive incentives. However, for individuals who rule by the question, “what’s in it for me”, these incentives alone will not motivate. Solidary incentives such as offices, honors, citations, and exclusive access to information, can be targeted to particular members and supporters and can be used judiciously to reward parliamentary anti-corruption efforts. Collective solidary incentives such as sociability, prestige, and a sense of mutual support are also valuable, particularly where civil society is weak. Coalition leaders may also set up a kind of “corruption insurance” scheme in which business members pool information, resources, and perhaps modest contributions, while agreeing not to pay bribes.

Specific solidary incentives can be most effective at attracting sustained support from small to medium businesses, domestic entrepreneurs and investors. Some solidary incentives include:

- **Training programs** – Advice on auditing requirements and internal control systems, and a database of best practices or risk assessments.
- **Recognition** – Coalition leaders give awards, citations, and favorable publicity to anticorruption champions in parliament.
- **Integrity pacts** – Pacts are brokered by the coalition among industry or bidders for large contracts, or requiring bidders to post deposits subject to forfeit should they engage in corruption.

Collective solidary incentives —sociability, prestige—are also essential to maintaining mass support, visibility and legitimacy. A solid coalition can, through aggressive use of multiple sorts of incentives, build a following that will enhance its standing in dealing with parliament.

Stages of Coalition Building

The general stages in the coalition-building process are:

- **Formation** – The core of a coalition is organized, early leaders and champions are identified, and an agenda takes shape;

- **Credibility** – The coalition can be effective and is worthy of support from a variety of stakeholders and constituencies;
- **Expansion** – A small organization can build a broader social resource base while retaining coherence and effectiveness;
- **Transformation** – The coalition takes initiatives on many fronts, drawing strength from many sources

Of course problems will occur in this process, including low resources, weak coherence, and challenged credibility. Early in the process a coalition should identify “leaders and champions” in parliament and the private sector and building partnerships among them. Experts suggest that in order to avoid defeat, such coalitions should abstain from attacking the larger problems and go after more manageable accomplishments. Once the coalition builds a reputation, it can use solidary incentives to mobilize the broad-based political backing necessary for attacking the larger cases of corruption. When a coalition is fully developed, it combines political will with a strong civil society to become a powerful partner for anti-corruption forces in parliament.

Box 2:

Ghana’s Anti-Corruption Coalition (GACC)

Ghana’s Anti-Corruption Coalition (GACC), cooperating under the aegis of the National Governance Programme, links official agencies such as the Serious Fraud Office and the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ) to a range of civil society groups, including the Centre for Democratic Development and the Ghana Journalists Association. It serves as a public forum and anti-corruption advocacy group, but has also drawn up comprehensive anti-corruption action plans for consideration by governance agencies and parliament, conducts diagnostic surveys, and has participated in the World Bank Institute’s anti-corruption training courses. GACC grew out of the 9th International Anti-Corruption Conference in Durban, South Africa, in 1999, where a group of government officials, official anti-corruption agencies, and representatives of civil society agreed on the need for more-extensive connections with civil society. On several occasions, GACC has actively urged parliamentary action and investigations in connection with alleged cases of corruption—as, for example, in May 2005, when questions arose regarding property dealings by President John Kufuor’s son.

GACC enjoys considerable international backing, but its anti-corruption activities suffer as a consequence of unclear divisions of responsibility among official agencies and the general difficulties that Parliament has in checking the nation’s executive. A related challenge in attaining an optimal level of cooperation with government while maintaining autonomy and credibility. Government, for its part, has sought to channel its dealing with the group through the national attorney general’s office. GACC’s long-term effectiveness is thus unclear, but its persistence in less-than-ideal circumstances since 1999 and its success at keeping a variety of civil society groups as allies make it a particularly important case to watch. It is worth noting that Kufuor’s New Patriotic Party claims links with GACC among its successes (GhanaWeb.com 2005; Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2003).

Parliaments and Coalitions Together

Social action coalitions can enhance parliaments as anticorruption forces by building a sound social and political foundation for reform with minimal risks and increased incentives for, Members, parties, and leaders. Coalitions support anticorruption legislators in their activities and provide a powerful political weapon for confronting corrupt or indifferent officials. Likewise, anticorruption legislators benefit by using the coalition to filter constituent sentiments about corruption, and a chance at real success as the coalition works with good-governance oriented citizens. All the while, the parliamentary representatives are rewarded for helping accomplish results.

Coalitions can be challenging to sustain, particularly in low-income environments. Still, social action coalitions allow partner constituencies to borrow resources from each other and reduce costs. While it is difficult to simplify, a successful coalition requires that its partners spell out their interconnections, strengths and the resources provided by each side. Participation must be honest, with strong leadership – particularly between elections—and have broad-based social backing of anti-corruption parliamentarians, including feedback on reform efforts.

If it becomes clear that families are no longer paying bribes for utility connections, business people are experiencing less bureaucratic harassment, and farmers are able to bring their goods to market without having to buy their way past police roadblocks, reform not only will have succeeded but also will have been seen to do so, allowing political and coalition leaders to take credit. Citizens working through social action coalitions will be better able to help shape policy priorities, while parliaments provide essential backing to the coalitions. Finally, a coalition helps parliament to provide broader information to the public. In addition to coalitions and oversight, an active anticorruption parliament provides political access and recourse from corrupt treatment. Thus, parliament must be equipped to investigate and follow-through on specific complaints and protect citizen whistleblowers, with the coalition identity behind them.

Reform Synergy

Parliament and social action coalitions gather strength and confidence from each other's efforts, and together outweigh corrupt interests, transcending the performance of specific legal,

political, or constitutional functions, and embedding reform in the energies of society and the political process. All those in the fight against corruption must share basic values about the sources, uses, and interconnections between wealth and power. Like any good business plan, the consensus of ideals motivating a coalition must be reaffirmed annually.

When society is well controlled, there is less abusive behavior due not only to a fear of punishment or embarrassment, but more largely because they have a greater faith in the institutions and people governing society and risk public disapproval. Those interactions will not happen unless people participate and leaders lead in ways that address their shared interests and well-being.

Unit 2 Questions

Please answer each of the following questions. If you are taking this course in a group you may then meet to discuss your answers.

1. Explain how social action coalitions are different from civil society organizations.
2. Explain how citizens can compliment the work of parliaments.
3. Why is it important for coalitions to act autonomously?
4. How have you seen solidary incentives work in your parliament?
5. What coalitions exist in your parliament? Explain how they operate.

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Note:

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