1 *Corruption and the Relevance of Political Science*

In an article entitled, 'Medical Care in Romania Comes at an Extra Cost', the *New York Times* (9 March 2009) reported the following story:

> Alina Lungu, 30, said she did everything necessary to ensure a healthy pregnancy in Romania: she ate organic food, swam daily and bribed her gynaecologist with an extra $255 in cash, paid in monthly instalments handed over discreetly in white envelopes. She paid a nurse about $32 extra to guarantee an epidural and even gave about $13 to the orderly to make sure he did not drop the stretcher. But on the day of her delivery, she said, her gynaecologist never arrived. Twelve hours into labour, she was left alone in her room for an hour. A doctor finally appeared and found that the umbilical cord was wrapped twice around her baby's neck and had nearly suffocated him. He was born blind and deaf and is severely brain damaged ... Alina and her husband, Ionut, despair that the bribes they paid were not enough to prevent the negligence that they say harmed their son, Sebastian. 'Doctors are so used to getting bribes in Romania that you now have to pay more in order to even get their attention,' she said.[1]

Another example comes is a 2010 study from the World Bank entitled 'Silent and Lethal: How Quiet Corruption Undermines Africa's Development Efforts'. This study reports that nearly four out of five children in Tanzania who died of malaria had been taken by their parents to modern health facilities. The reason behind the very high mortality rate, of this often easily curable disease, is, according to the report, a 'range of manifestations of quiet corruption, including the absence of diagnostic equipment, drug pilfering, provider absenteeism, and very low levels of diagnostic effort'.

These are just two of what nowadays seem to be an infinite number of 'reports from the field' about the devastating consequences of corruption for the well-being of people around the world. The idea for this book is inspired by a statement made by the current President of the

[1] www.nytimes.com/2009/03/09/world/europe/09bribery.html?pagewanted=all.

World Bank, Jim Yong Kim, who in his speech of 19 December 2013 stated, 'In the developing world, corruption is public enemy no. 1.' As reported by Reuters,[2] this announcement showed how much this world-leading development organization had changed since the 1990s when the issue was taboo in the bank because it should not interfere in the internal politics of member states. By redefining corruption as also an economic problem, former World Bank President James Wolfensohn brought corruption into the limelight in the mid-1990s. Since then, many international aid and development organizations have become interested in issues related to the problem of corruption. Since corruption tends to be a sensitive issue, the 'coded language' for this policy re-orientation has been to stress the importance of 'good governance'. A typical statement comes from former United Nations General Secretary Kofi Annan: 'Good governance is perhaps the single most important factor in eradicating poverty and promoting development' (UN 1998). In academic circles, concepts such as 'institutional quality', 'quality of government' and 'state capacity' have also been used (Rothstein 2011; Smith 2007). However, as pointed out by Fukuyama (2013), a central problem in this discussion is a serious lack of conceptual precision. In the introduction to a recently published *Handbook of Political Corruption*, the editor writes that although corruption has attracted a lot of attention during the last twenty-five years, '[T]here remains a striking lack of scholarly agreement over even the most basic questions about corruption. Amongst the core issues that continue to generate disputes are the very definition of "corruption" as a concept' (Heywood 2015, p. 1; cf. Heywood 1977). The purpose of this book is to contribute to what seems to be an obvious need for conceptual clarification in this area. This, we want to underline, should not be seen as a purely intellectual or 'academic' enterprise. As stated by Sartori (1970, p. 1038), '[C]oncept formation stands prior to quantification.' Without conceptual precision, operationalization in order to find empirical measures for the level and degree of corruption in different societies becomes impossible. It follows that without being able to measure the problem, we cannot compare the level of corruption between societies or study changes over time. If so, we will not be able to find out what may work as remedies for corruption (cf. Møller and Skaaning 2014).

[2] www.reuters.com/article/us-worldbank-corruption-idUSBRE9BI11P20131219.

However, we would like to underline that apart from the specific research and policy interests in such a conceptual project, there is another important rationale for why a discussion about how to theorize, define and measure corruption and what may constitute the opposite of corruption is important. This argument is basically empirical and has to do with unexpected and, for many, including the authors of this book, also normatively unwelcome results.

The problem pertains to the effects of democratization. The waves of democracy that have swept across the globe since the mid-1970s have brought representative democracy to places where it seemed inconceivable fifty, thirty, or even ten years ago. More countries than ever are now, by the most sophisticated measures used, classified as being democratic, and more people than ever live in what counts as democracies (Teorell 2010). This is certainly something to celebrate, but there are also reasons to be disappointed. One such example is South Africa, which miraculously managed to end apartheid in 1994 without falling into a full-scale civil war. As Nelson Mandela said in one of his speeches, the introduction of democracy would not only liberate people but also greatly improve their social and economic situation. The slogan that his political party, the African National Congress (ANC), used in the first democratic elections was 'a better life for all' (Mandela 1994, p. 414; cf. Greenberg 2009). However, available statistics give a surprisingly bleak picture for this promise. Since 1994, the country has not managed to improve the time that children on average go to school by a single month. Economic inequality remains at record levels, life expectancy is down by almost six years and the number of women who die in childbirth has more than doubled.[3] Simply put, for many central measures of human well-being, the South African democracy has not delivered (Rothstein and Tannenberg 2015). Another example is provided by Amartya Sen in an article comparing 'quality of life' in China and India. His disappointing conclusion is that by most standard measures of human well-being, communist-autocratic Peoples' Republic of China now clearly outperforms liberal and democratically governed India (Sen 2011). Using a set of thirty standard measures of national levels of human well-being from between 75 and 169 countries, Holmberg and Rothstein (2011) find only weak, or no, or sometimes even negative, correlations between these standard measures of

[3] Data from the Quality of Government Data Bank (Teorell et al. 2013).

human well-being and the level of democracy as just defined. Maybe the most compelling evidence about the lack of positive effects of democracy on human well-being comes from a study about child deprivation by Halleröd et al. (2013) using data measuring seven aspects of child poverty (i.e. access to safe water, food, sanitation, shelter, education, healthcare and information) from sixty-eight low- and middle-income countries for no less than 2,120,734 cases (children). The result of this large study shows that there is no positive effect of democracy on the level of child deprivation for any of the seven indicators.

This bleak picture of the effect of democratization on measures of prosperity, population health and other central aspects of human well-being is confirmed by many other studies (for reference to this literature, see Rothstein and Tanneberg 2015). The picture that emerges from the available measures is this: representative democracy is not a safe cure against severe poverty, child deprivation, economic inequality, illiteracy, being unhappy or unsatisfied with one's life, infant mortality, short life expectancy, maternal mortality, access to safe water or sanitation, gender inequality, low school attendance for girls, low interpersonal trust or low trust in parliament (Rothstein and Tannenberg 2015). Why is this so? Larry Diamond gave one explanation in a paper presented at the National Endowment for Democracy in the United States as it celebrated its first twenty-five years of operations:

> There is a spectre haunting democracy in the world today. It is bad governance – governance that serves only the interests of a narrow ruling elite. Governance that is drenched in corruption, patronage, favouritism, and abuse of power. Governance that is not responding to the massive and long-deferred social agenda of reducing inequality and unemployment and fighting against dehumanizing poverty. Governance that is not delivering broad improvement in people's lives because it is stealing, squandering, or skewing the available resources. (Diamond 2007, p. 19)

If we follow Diamond's shift of focus from representative democracy and turn to various measures of corruption, quality of government and 'good governance', the picture of what politics can do for human well-being changes dramatically. For example, the aforementioned study on child deprivation finds strong effects from measures of quality of government on four of seven indicators on child deprivation (i.e. lack of safe water, malnutrition, lack of access to healthcare and lack of

access to information), controlling for gross domestic product (GDP) per capita and a number of basic individual-level variables (Halleröd et al. 2013). Other studies largely confirm that various measures of control of corruption and quality of government have strong effects on almost all standard measures of human well-being, including subjective measures of life satisfaction (aka 'happiness') and social trust (Holmberg and Rothstein 2011, 2012, 2015; Norris 2012; Ott 2010; Rothstein and Stolle 2008). Recent studies also find that absence of violence, in the form of interstate and civil wars, is strongly affected by measures of quality of government and more so than by the level of democracy (Lapuente and Rothstein 2014; cf. Teorell 2015). In addition, as Sarah Chayes (2015) points out, corruption is an important cause behind the rise of terrorist and insurgent military groups that has hitherto been ignored both by research and in the academic analyses of security policy.

Some may argue that the normative reasons for representative democracy should not be performance measures such as the ones mentioned earlier but political legitimacy. If people have the right to change their government through 'free and fair elections', they will find their system of rule legitimate (Rothstein 2009). Here comes maybe an even bigger surprise from empirical research, namely, that democratic rights do not seem to be the most important cause behind people's perception of political legitimacy (Gilley 2006, 2009). Based on comparative survey data, several recent studies show that 'performance' or 'output' measures such as control of corruption, government effectiveness and the rule of law trump democratic rights in explaining political legitimacy (Dahlberg and Holmberg 2014; Gilley 2009; Gjefsen 2012). As stated by Bruce Gilley, '[T]his clashes with standard liberal treatments of legitimacy that give overall priority to democratic rights' (2006, p. 58). Our argument is certainly not that representative democracy is unimportant but that without a reasonably competent, impartial, uncorrupted, honest and effective public administration, representative democracy is unlikely to deliver or increase human well-being.

Our normative starting point follows the principles of justice launched by the economist and philosopher Amartya Sen. His capability approach to justice is based on two basic ideas. The first is that the freedom to achieve well-being is of central moral importance, and the second is that this requires that individuals have resources that can be converted into capabilities so that they have real opportunities to do and be what they

themselves have reason to value (Sen 2009). This has been translated into various metrics of what should count as 'human well-being'. This is not the place for a lengthy discussion or comparison of these metrics. Instead, we choose to assume that most of us would prefer to live in a country where few newborn babies die, where most children survive their fifth birthday, where almost all ten-year-olds can read, where people live a long and reasonably healthy life, where child deprivation is low, where few women die when giving birth, where the percentage of people living in severe poverty is low and where many report being reasonably satisfied with their lives. We may also like to live in a society in which people think that the general ethical standard among their fellow citizens is reasonably high, implying that they perceive corruption to be fairly uncommon and that they think that 'most people in general' can be trusted (Holmberg and Rothstein 2015). If this is the case, then the question of whether political science can be relevant becomes a question of the extent to which the discipline can contribute to increased human well-being or, to paraphrase the title of another book in this approach, whether the discipline can contribute to our understanding of why some societies are more 'successful' than others (Hall and Lamont 2009). Our purpose is thus to deliberately cross the line between the normative (value) and empirical (fact) approaches in the social science. As argued by Gerring and Ysenowitz (2006, p. 105):

> [W]e cannot conceptualize the scholarly significance of a theoretical framework or a particular empirical puzzle without also contemplating its relevance to society, its normative importance. This underlying feature of social science provides the missing organizing element, without which the activity of social science is, quite literally, meaningless.

Thus, if the relevance of research in the social sciences in general (and particularly for political science) is understood as how it may improve human well-being and/or improve political legitimacy, research has to a large extent been focusing on the least important part of the political system, namely, how 'access to power' is organized (i.e. electoral and representative democracy and processes of democratization). This focus on 'input' variables (e.g. elections, democratization processes, party systems) ignores what we consider to be the more important part of the state machinery for increasing human well-being, namely, how power is exercised or, in other words, the quality of how the state manages to govern society (Rothstein 2011). As argued by Fukuyama

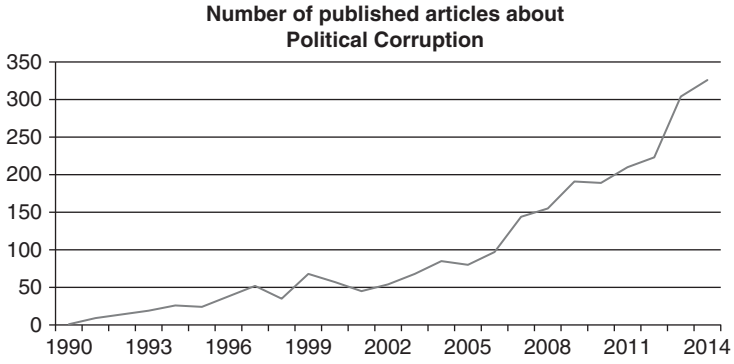

Figure 1.1 Articles published on political corruption. (Source: Thomson Web of Science 2015.)

(2013), this seems to have been driven by an underlying ideological view inspired by neoclassical economics, particularly strong in the United States, that emphasizes the need to limit, check and control (and often also minimize) the state, which is basically seen as a 'predatory' organization. In other words, how to 'tame the beast' has been the central focus, not what 'the animal' can achieve. The result is that the quality of the administrative part of the state, which we now know is of the outmost importance for increasing human well-being, has been severely under-studied, under-theorized and under-measured both in economics and in political science. One effect of this was that until the late 1990s, the interest in researching political corruption in political science and related disciplines such as economics, public administration and policy analysis was very modest. As shown in Figure 1.1, the total number of articles published in journals listed in one of the major bibliographical databases (Thomson ISI) containing the term 'political corruption' in the title, as keyword or in the abstract for the year 1992 was fourteen. Since the database covers about 1,700 scholarly social science journals, each publishing about fifty articles per year, this is a surprisingly low number.

As stated as late as 2006 by one of the most prominent political scientists in this field, Michael Johnston: 'American political science as an institutionalized discipline has remained steadfastly uninterested in corruption for generations' (2006, p. 809). This seems to be a correct observation shown by the fact that the discipline's flagship journal – the

American Political Science Review – in total contains only two articles about political corruption for the years 1992–2006 (out of a total of 666 published articles in the previously mentioned database). This lack of an interest in issues about corruption can also be observed from the many handbooks in political science that have been published during the last decade. None of the following ten *Oxford Handbooks* published between 2006 and 2014 have a chapter, a section of a chapter or even an index entry for the term 'corruption':

1. *The Oxford Handbook of Political Science*
2. *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics*
3. *The Oxford Handbook of Public Policy*
4. *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Institutional Analysis*
5. *The Oxford Handbook of Political Theory*
6. *The Oxford Handbook of the Welfare State*
7. *The Oxford Handbook of Political Institutions*
8. *The Oxford Handbook of Law and Politics*
9. *The Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology*
10. *The Oxford Handbook of Political Leadership*

This lack of interest in research about corruption in political science stands in sharp contrast to what seems to be the opinion of the 'general public'. According to a British Broadcasting Company (BBC) poll in 2010 surveying 13,353 respondents in twenty-six countries, corruption is the most talked about issue globally, surpassing issues such as climate change, poverty and unemployment (Katzarova 2011). Or type the search word 'corruption' on the BBC News website, and a staggering 8,972 hits are reached. The same search on the well-known journal *The Economist's* website gets you over 48,000 hits for 'corruption'. The overwhelming presence of the topic of corruption is not limited to the realm of the Internet – suffice to mention that the 'Arab Spring' started with an incident about corruption (Chayes 2015). Additionally, the huge demonstrations and protests in Brazil in 2013 were to a large extent concerned with issues of 'clean' government.[4] Thus, from a very modest position lasting until the second half of the 1990s, political corruption has now become a very central topic for many leading international organizations and has grown considerably in academia. Corruption has been recognized as a valid and challenging subject,

[4] 'Taking to the street', *The Economist*, 22 June 2013.

putting it high on the priority agenda of both political/social scientists and policymakers (Chayes 2015; Heywood 2014; Jain 2001). This is evidenced by corruption's treatment hand in hand with the 'good governance' agenda promoted by various international bodies such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and so on. Further evidence is in the form of the establishment of anti-corruption units (as well as campaigns) within many international organizations such as the United Nations, the European Union and the African Union. Important non-government organizations (NGOs) such as Transparency International and the Natural Resource Governance Institute work hard to bring attention to the detrimental effects of corruption. Several new legal instruments have also been established by national governments as well as at the international level[5]. During the last fifteen years, it is fair to say that the number of international and national policy organizations that are engaged in various types of anti-corruption programmes have reached the point where it is possible to speak about an international anti-corruption regime (McCoy and Heckel 2001; Mungiu-Pippidi 2011, 2015; Wedel 2014). However, this presence has taken its time to reach the state it is at today.

In contrast to the current hype surrounding corruption, the *concept* itself has until recently received surprisingly little attention (Miller 2011). Most papers begin with a brief, typically one-sentence definition and then move on to discussing its aspects. A thorough exploration and discussion at the conceptual level remains scant. However, lately, the discussion of what should be considered the opposite off corruption, such as 'good governance', 'state capacity' and 'quality of government', has become intense (Agnafors 2013; Andrews 2013; Fukuyama 2013; Heywood and Rose 2015; Philp 2015; Rothstein and Teorell 2008). Recognizing this lacuna in the scholarship pertaining to the conceptualization of corruption, our intention is to map the landscape of different conceptualizations of corruption and related concepts such as clientelism, patronage, particularism, state capture and patrimonialism. In

[5] The United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC), 2003; European Council Convention against Corruption (both criminal and civil), 1997; Inter-American Convention against Corruption, 1996; African Union Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption, 2003; OECD Convention on Combating Bribery of Foreign Public Officials in International Business Transactions, 1997; Southern African Development Community Protocol Against Corruption, 2001.

this, a central ambition is to specify how this family of concepts is connected. Secondly, we want to specify what is to be considered as the opposite of corruption. If corruption is a special form of decay of the political system, we need to know what the opposite of this process is. Thirdly, we aim to fill the gaps that can be identified in the absence of a single unified definition of corruption. This is a daunting task because a large number of policy organizations and academics – we dare say the absolute majority – work with a relativistic and multidimensional definition (see e.g. Agnafors 2013). A fourth task is that we will also analyze the under-developed link that we have found between the anti-corruption discourse and the human rights agenda and suggest avenues of exploration/direction for the future of the conceptual development of corruption. Lastly, the Peoples' Republic of China has been a notorious troublemaker in this field of research. The reason is that while the country has had exceptional economic growth and massive improvements in the standard measures of human well-being, during the last three decades, it is also known for having fairly high levels of corruption. Our analysis will show that while corruption is a problem in China, the way the country's public administration works for producing valued outcomes has to a large extent been misunderstood.

Corruption as Taboo

The emergence of corruption as a subject matter within academia has been a long journey. Until about the mid-1990s, corruption as a topic was more or less taboo – both in research and in policy circles, substantiated by the fact that the use of the word itself was referred to as the 'c-word' (Shah 2007, p. 249). In the late 1960s, Swedish economist (and Nobel Laureate) Gunnar Myrdal pointed out that the term 'corruption' was 'almost taboo as a research topic and was rarely mentioned in scholarly discussions of the problems of government and planning' (Myrdal 1968, p. 937). In his research about social and economic development in India, Myrdal pointed at the problem of the 'soft state', a concept that included both corruption and ineffectiveness. Although Myrdal's focus in the quoted article was on South Asia, this reasoning can be extrapolated to understand the hesitance, until at least the late 1990s, of doing research on corruption. There are different reasons forwarded for the lack of an academic focus on corruption, especially for research concerning developing countries – one being