

British colonial past no protection from corruption

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Former British colonies are just as likely to suffer from bribery and sleaze as any other country according to an international study.

The analysis of survey data from up to 107 countries goes against previous research which argues that countries with a British colonial past inherited systems of administration and governance which guard against corruption.

Professor Reyer Gerlagh from The University of Manchester and Dr Lorenzo Pellegrini of the Institute of Social Studies in the Netherlands also found that countries with higher populations of Protestants are associated with lower levels of corruption.

Widespread access to the press is associated with low levels and exposure to democracy also has a mitigating effect - though over long periods of time.

The team analysed data which complies with the general definition of "abuse of power for personal gains" from the World Bank and Transparency International.

After making an initial analysis of World Bank data, they successfully repeated the test on Transparency International data to verify the findings.

Professor Gerlagh said: "According to our estimates, we find that having

been a British colony has no association with a country's corruption levels.

"This contradicts current thought influenced by Professor Daniel Treisman from the University of California, who found that a British colonial past offers protection from present levels of corruption.

"The analysis also revealed that it takes a while for the establishment of democracy to have an effect of lowering levels of corruption.

"This goes against the two main streams of current opinion: one argument is that current democracy helps reduce corruption and the other is that it takes 45 years for democracy to have an effect.

"The conversion of 20 per cent of the population from a non-protestant religion to the protestant religion is associated with a reduction of corruption with one fifth of a standard deviation of our data.

"This finding seems to confirm theories which suggest that religion has a fundamental role shaping culture.

"Our findings also support the commonly held hypothesis that countries with better access to the press are less corrupt."

Dr Pellegrini said: "Different countries are marked by large differences to the extent of corruption.

"In some societies, no transaction is finalized without corruption having an effect, while in other countries it is considered an exception and rarely tolerated.

"While theoretical literature on this subject abounds, empirical studies are scarce.

"Since several indexes of corruption perception have become available over the last few years, it is now possible to test statistically some of the ideas from the theoretical literature."

Source: University of Manchester

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