

Transparency in politics can lead to greater corruption

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Why are some countries more prone to political corruption? Viviana Stechina from Uppsala University, Sweden, has investigated why corruption among the political elite was more extensive in Argentina than in Chile during the 1990s. Among other things, her research shows that greater transparency does not necessarily lead to less corruption.

In her comparison of Chile and Argentina, Viviana Stechina focuses on the rules of the game of politics and on the actions of the political elite in situations that offer many incentives and opportunities for corruption. Through detailed examination of several privatization processes in the two countries, she identifies the institutional circumstances that heighten or reduce the risk of elite corruption. In her analysis she concentrates on four institutional aspects that corruption experts often put forward as relevant to understand the occurrence of corruption: the extent of intrastate accountability, the extent of transparency in policy-making, and the respective degrees of concentration of power and discretion among decision-makers.

The dissertation shows that political institutions play a major role in terms of how vulnerable the two countries are to corruption. Chile's political system, with stronger intrastate accountability and less power concentration, proved to be more resistant to corruption than the Argentine system. However, the extent of discretion among decision-makers proved to be less of a factor than corruption researchers normally claim.

The most remarkable finding is that the greater transparency found in Argentina did not lead to less corruption in the short run.

"Thanks to the extensive coverage by the press, the public in Argentina had greater access to information about political decisions and actions than in Chile, but this did not prevent the occurrence of corruption and abuses of power. Instead, media reports increased the public awareness not only of the extent of corruption but also of the impunity that politicians enjoyed. In the short run, this probably increased the incentives for corruption. In the long run, on the other hand, there have been advantages with greater transparency," says Viviana Stechina.

Source: Uppsala University

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