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The corruption perception index and the political economy of governing at a distance

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Abstract

The corruption perception index (CPI) compiled by Transparency International (TI) ranks countries by perceived levels of corruption. It is a reformist rather than a radical form of 'statactivism'. I use Rose and Miller's analytical framework to explain how corporate concerns come to dominate the CPI: how a neoliberal rationality is translated into a programme to govern corruption and then a technology – the CPI. A comprehensive survey of sources used to compile the CPI 2001-2016 shows that the vast majority were either produced for sale to corporate clients or were based on surveys of business elites. Secondly, I embed the index's production into a wider political economy: TI workers are Gramscian intellectuals who put forward an interpretation of corruption that is non-threatening to corporate capital. This Gramscian framework holds wider relevance for analyses of the politics of global benchmarking.

Keywords: governance indicators, corruption, corruption perception, Transparency International, Foucault, Gramsci

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Introduction

The corruption perception index (CPI) compiled by Transparency International (TI) ranks countries by perceived levels of corruption.[1] The CPI is central to the work of the non-governmental organisation (NGO). When it was first published in 1995, the CPI was the first non-commercial global corruption ranking. The NGO used the index to promote its cause, gain attention, and hold states to account. The CPI is a composite index that aggregates the results of other rankings. The index has proven highly effective as a public relations tool but its methodology has come under critical scrutiny.[2] The CPI is an expression of reformist 'statactivism'[3] and a reformist benchmark[4] that governs corruption 'at a distance'[5] by 'responsibilising' states.[6] In this article I explain how and why the CPI underplays the responsibility of corporations in corruption. In the process, I develop a Gramscian analytical framework for looking at the politics of benchmarking, which has wider relevance beyond the particular case of the CPI.

I rely on the analytical framework by Rose and Miller to explain *how* corporate bias seeps into the CPI:[7] how a neoliberal rationality is translated into a programme to govern corruption and then a technology – the benchmark that is the CPI. A comprehensive survey of sources used to compile Transparency International's (TI) corruption perception index (CPI) 2001-2016 shows that the vast majority were either produced for sale to corporate clients or were based on surveys of business elites. Both of these types of sources primarily reflect the corruption concerns of business. Importantly, the history of the methodology shows that this bias remained unmentioned from 1997 until 2011. This made it appear more 'radical' than it was. Secondly, I explain *why* TI has a corporate bias by embedding the index's production into a wider Gramscian political economy: TI workers are Gramscian intellectuals who put forward an interpretation of corruption that is non-threatening to corporate capital. They are not necessarily 'organic intellectuals' but better understood as what Eagleton-Pierce had called 'critical technicians' who deploy 'scientific capital' in a political economy of competition with other civil society organisations, including more radical ones.[8] The reformist nature of TI's work, as well as the CPI's corporate bias have been widely noted.[9] In a case study of the CPI and Tunisia, Baumann also suggested that the production of the CPI should be embedded in a wider political economy but stopped short of conducting such an analysis.[10] This article is thus the first sustained attempt to do so systematically. As benchmarks become an increasingly important means of governing the global political economy 'at a distance', I therefore make the case for Gramscian interpretation of their role in either reproducing or challenging hegemonic ideology.

To be clear, I am not claiming that TI wilfully distorts the CPI. The influence of methodology is much more subtle. The article should also not be read as a denunciation of TI's work as a whole.[11] As the politics of benchmarking receives greater attention in the international relations literature, analyses that focus on the politics of benchmarks alone, rather than assessing all aspects of the work of the organisation that compiles it, is becoming more common.[12] The first section of this article looks at ways of theorising benchmarks in general and the CPI in particular, the second section sets out the empirical analysis of CPI sources 2001-2016, a third section looks at the political economy of producing the CPI, and a final section concludes.

Theorising the corruption perception index

The corruption perception index is a governance indicator that ranks countries by their perceived level of corruption. It is a benchmark, where 'benchmarking involves the classification of relative performance or value' and 'is used as an umbrella term for a wide range of comparative evaluation techniques – such as audits, rankings, indicators, indexes, baselines, or targets – which systematically assess the performance of actors, populations, or institutions on the basis of standardised measurements, metrics, and rankings.'[13] The explosion in the number of governance indicators and other benchmarks has raised academic interest in the 'politics of numbers' as an aspect of global governance.[14] The CPI is an important measure because of its media exposure and its influence on policy making in both donor countries and developing economies. The methodology of the CPI has come under extensive criticism.[15] One recurring aspect of this critique is that the sources of this composite index give far greater weight to forms of corruption that concern large corporations than alternative forms that concern ordinary citizens.[16] One contribution of this article is to document how this comes about by analysing the CPI sources 2001-2016. Producers of benchmarks such as the CPI claim objective and impartial social scientific expertise but the compilation of the indicator is not value neutral, it reflects a wider theory of the 'good society',[17] and the inclusion of 'dodgy data' or practices of 'bad science' have consequences for global governance.[18] A second puzzle is the obfuscation of this bias. When the CPI was first published by TI in 1995 the organisation acknowledged that the index reflected mostly a business perspective.[19] By

1997 the range of sources had been expanded and TI wrote in the press release that the index 'is based on seven international surveys of business people, political analysts and the general public and it reflects their perception of corruption in 52 countries'.[20] Only in 2012 did the CPI's 'frequently asked questions' section return to acknowledging that the index does not 'tell the full story of corruption in a country' because the 'CPI is limited in scope, capturing perceptions of the extent of corruption in the public sector, from the perspective of business people and country experts.'[21] As my analysis of CPI sources 2001-2016 will show, the preponderance of sources reflecting corporate concerns over corruption persisted throughout.

My critique of the CPI adopts what Desrosières had referred to as a 'constructionist' attitude to measurement, where measurement shapes the object.[22] Measurement is shaped by context: 'Statistical production results from power relationships. It is ideological'.[23] This stands in contrast to most previous critiques of TI's methodology which tended to adopt an attitude of what Desrosières had called 'accounting realism' by asking how TI could tweak its measurement methodology to better depict reality. TI itself often defends the CPI methodology using a 'proof in use' attitude by arguing that, while imperfect, corruption perception is the best means of measuring illicit corruption, which, by definition, is difficult to capture.[24] Desrosières was sceptical of 'constructionist' critiques which could slip into 'the language of denunciation' and over-emphasise the 'external' aspect of the production of statistics – the wider social context – over the 'internal' history of measurement – the statistical conventions employed by those who measure.[25] This articles highlights how 'external' factors, especially the cost associated with the 'work' of measuring, introduced corporate bias into the CPI, but it also pays close attention to the 'internal' workings of the CPI methodology.[26]

For Foucault 'government is the right disposition of things, arranged so as to lead to a convenient end.'[27] Abstract 'things' such as the economy or a population are 'governed'. The objects to be governed do not simply exist but are constructed in the very process of government. They need to be made visible, and one way of doing so is to measure a phenomenon. When TI measures corruption, it makes it visible. Liberal IR remains state-centric in its conception of the way liberal norms and institutions are created while welcoming global civil society's check on state power, and its civilising influence on the public sphere.[28] Liberal international relations theory regards the CPI as a means for global civil society to hold corrupt states to account.[29] TI conceives of the CPI in this liberal vein. Foucault, in contrast, finds that social science research attaches 'excessive value' to the state. What matters to him is the state's role in 'government' rather than the myth of the state as the sole centre of power.[30] Civil society is no adversary to keep the state in check, nor is it necessarily separate or subordinate to the state. It shares a role in 'government', thus breaking down the state-civil society binary.[31] Global governance indices are a way for global civil society organisations to contribute to global 'government'. The indices do not exert 'hard power' by punishing errant behaviour but focus on the 'self-optimisation of subjects through individual liberty and freedom of choice.'[32] This goes beyond the outside 'social pressure'[33] that liberal IR assumes is exerted through these indexes. Foucauldian governmentality makes the stronger claim that states internalise the logic of the index and act on it. Benchmarking and 'responsibilisation' produce 'the examined state as an ethical subject responsible for what occurs within its borders.'[34] Jaeger points to the de-politicising effect this has. Individuals become 'partners' in solving intractable problems of government rather than being treated as political subjects, for instance partisans of a political cause.[35] Governance indicators 'normalise' neoliberal government.[36] States and civil society are both implicated in the exercise of Foucauldian governmentality.

I will trace how corporate bias entered the CPI by applying Rose and Miller's Foucauldian analytical framework for 'governing at a distance'.[37] At the most abstract level governmentality works by formulating a 'rationality of government' such as liberalism or neoliberalism.[38] Experts then apply these rationalities to specific problems, formulating 'programmes of government'. Formulating a programme involves claims of knowledge about the issue, whether it is the economy, nature, health – or indeed corruption. Technologies of government operate at the most practical level. They are 'humble and mundane mechanisms' by which programmes are translated into social reality: surveys, techniques of notation and computation, statistics, standardization, specialist vocabularies, building designs etc. 'Techniques' of government make a problem visible for it to then be governed. In a final step, states 'self-govern', which means that they internalise the logic of the indicator and act accordingly.[39]

I follow Garland who argues that 'it becomes essential to explore the real practices and processes in which these programmes and rationalities and technologies are selectively and sometimes unexpectedly used, with all of their compromise formations and unintended effects.'[40] How is neoliberal rationality translated into a programme to govern corruption? This means that any analysis of the 'governmental' work of governance indexes such as the CPI must take methodologies into account. Methodologies are not merely technicalities and the point is not to achieve perfect measurement, but an understanding of the process of translation from rationality to programme to technology of government. My work builds on recent efforts by authors such as Baumann; Broome and Quirk; Broome, Homolar and Kranke; as well as Davis, Kingsbury and Merry who have started including the methodologies of governance indexes in the analysis of 'governing at a distance.'[41] In the past, several Foucauldian theorists consciously eschewed any analysis of the methodology of governance indicators.[42] This was probably out of fear that the discussion would move to technicalities of how to measure better, rather than the politics of measuring per-se. With regard to the CPI, this neglect of methodology misses the corporate bias which is potentially central to the index's function in global governance. Loewenheim notes correctly that the CPI involves a blame game, 'responsibilising' the examined state.[43] Global corporations are not exactly let off the hook, but in the gaze of the CPI they appear marginal to corruption.

Foucauldian analysis tells us how the corporate bias comes about. My survey of CPI sources 2001-2016 is the first one to document this process. The more novel contribution of this article, however is to ask why the bias comes about by embedding the production of the CPI in a Marxist – or more specifically a Gramscian – political economy. Marxist critics of Foucault argue that he evaded political economy by focusing on the diffusion of 'capillary power' across society. They detect a deliberate exclusion of the macro-social structures at the heart of Marxian analysis, namely classes, mode of production, and the state.[44] Poulantzas found that Foucault 'tends to blot out power by dispersing it among tiny molecular vessels.'[45] He argued that Foucault's ideas were useful only if (re-)grounded in a wider analysis of the political economy of capitalism and the institutions that arise from it.[46] Similarly, Jessop and Sum find that 'Foucault can tell us something about the *how* of power but far less about the *why* of power and its role in reproducing particular forms of social domination.'[47] They contrast Foucault's diffuse account of power with Gramsci's, who grounds power in specific political and ideological and economic apparatuses. Selby transposes these arguments about the complementarity of Marx and Foucault to international relations, echoing

Jessop and Sum's suggestion to use Foucault to study the 'how' of power and Marx for the 'why'.[48] This is what I am doing with regard to the CPI: Rose and Miller's Foucauldian analysis reveals how corporate bias seeps in, while Gramsci can tell us why: The TI workers who produce the CPI are Gramscian 'intellectuals' who operate in the force field of the neoliberal global political economy.

Gramscian IR relates social relations of production, forms of state, and world orders.[49] The important difference between Foucauldian and Gramscian approaches is that, while the latter share the former's concern for civil society and ideas, they ground all practices and discourses in a wider story of social relations of production – in other words, class. Gramsci found that revolution involved not just a struggle for the state but for ideological hegemony, the 'common sense' that either reproduces or challenges the prevailing social order. Civil society is the terrain on which this 'war of position' is being fought. For the Italian Marxist intellectuals provide coherence to both dominant group and – potentially – subalterns and shape 'common sense' in a 'war of position' which is fought on the terrain of civil society. [50] He wrote that 'the intellectuals are the dominant group's "deputies" exercising the subaltern functions of social hegemony and political government'.[51] This notion of the 'deputy' is rather nebulous and can take many forms and we will return to this notion in the discussion of the findings.

A judgement whether the CPI reproduces or challenges the ideological hegemony of neoliberal capitalism is the starting point for a Gramscian analysis. Bruno, Didier, and Vitale had distinguished between 'reformist' and 'radical' statactivism. For instance, they give the example of an alternative inflation measure as 'reformist' because 'it […] adopted the architecture of economic concepts that make such an index pertinent', which a 'radical' critique would call into question. [52] This is echoed by Seabrooke and Wigan who distinguish between benchmarks which 'create change within the dominant system' as opposed to those which 'seek to challenge how the basic units of the system, and the logic of the system, is perceived.'[53] They argue that the CPI is very much 'reformist' because 'the index fails to capture the supply side of corruption and the culpability of the private sector.'[54] They contrast the CPI with the Financial Secrecy Index (FSI) of the Tax Justice Network (TJN) which ranks jurisdictions by the degree of financial secrecy and weight in the global economy. Where the former puts the onus on public officials, the latter regards the issue of financial transparency as systemic. The FSI flips the CPI on its head: Where the latter chastises developing countries for their high levels of public sector corruption, the former fingers leading industrialised nations for their role in tax secrecy. Countries that do well in the 'reformist' CPI do badly in the more 'radical' FSI.[55] The FSI is thus much more disruptive of existing social relations that govern corruption than the CPI. Rose and Miller's Foucauldian account tells us *how* corporate bias creeps into the CPI but tells us less about the *why*. In Gramscian terms, the corporate bias in the CPI reproduces rather than challenges the hegemonic ideology underpinning neoliberal capitalism. TI workers who translate a neoliberal 'rationality' into a 'programme' to govern corruption and subsequently deploy the CPI as a 'technology' can be understood as Gramscian intellectuals.

TI's methodology

Corruption is an 'essentially contested concept'. It is strongly normative, multidimensional, and its meaning changes over time.[56] It has been related to legality, cultural norms, or the moral health of society at large.[57] Analysing 'narratives' of corruption enables 'a rich analysis of ideology, hegemony and legitimacy'.[58] Benchmarks such as the CPI contain a corruption narrative, too, dividing states into 'good' and 'bad', corrupt and clean. Herein lies the hidden ideological power of indicators measuring corruption: Simplification, quantification, and evaluation are not impartial and objective scientific processes but are based on a theory of the 'good society' and they 'cannot be separated from political values and policy reform preferences'.[59] Measures 'alter relations of power by affecting how resources, status, knowledge and opportunities are distributed'.[60] As I argue here, we can understand indicators and benchmarks as weapons in a war of position over common sense and those who produce them as intellectuals in civil society, the terrain of this struggle.

The Transparency International 'Sourcebook', written by then-managing director Jeremy Pope in 1996 and updated in 2000 translates a neoliberal 'rationality' into a 'programme' to govern corruption, as Hindess explains.[61] Although the Sourcebook is now rarely cited by TI, it illustrates the thinking that guided the NGO's work at the time the CPI was developed. The Sourcebook's paradigms remain embedded in the index's methodology.[62] I follow Hindess' analysis which showed that Pope's Sourcebook had the effect of 'normalising' neoliberalism.[63] Hindess ties this into a wider critique of TI's non-confrontational approach with both bribe-payers and -takers in favour of what the NGO calls National Integrity Systems (NIS) in which private sector, state, and civil society all come together in a coalition against corruption.[64] The Sourcebook subscribes to a 'clean' capitalism free of corruption: 'Corruption strikes at the heart of the market economy, distorting decision-making, and rewarding the corrupt and manipulative rather than the efficient and the productive.'[65] Corruption is bad because it is economically inefficient. The effect of corruption on private sector development in general and foreign investment in particular is a priority concern for Pope. Corruption introduces uncertainty and takes up valuable time that business leaders could use to run more efficient companies. The Sourcebook focuses exclusively on bribes at the expense of other forms of corruption, using the terms bribes and corruption almost interchangeably.[66] It focuses on bribe takers in the public sector and has little to say about bribe payers in the private sector. The Sourcebook argues that the analysis of corruption – meaning bribes to the public sector – has to start from incentives of individual public sector officials.[67] Bureaucrats are framed as perpetrators, private businesses as extorted victims. Transparency International seeks to fulfil the role of liberal global civil society of holding states to account, in this case curbing state corruption. TI stresses that corruption is serious in developed countries but at crisis point in developing states.[68] Pope's conception of corruption chimes with a neoliberal analysis of the phenomenon. The source of corruption is excessive state intervention in the workings of the market, leading to 'rent-seeking'.[69] The anti-corruption fight must therefore focus on the incentive structure that pushes bureaucrats into becoming corrupters.[70] Alternative accounts of corruption contextualise the causes and the effects of corruption, focusing on state-business relations rather than just state intervention, including compatibility of rapid growth with some types of corruption.[71] The Sourcebook also speaks to a Foucauldian conception of neoliberalism, as Hindess notes, in that it offers a 'programme of government' to 'normalise' neoliberalism.[72]

Step two in the analysis traces the translation from a programme to a technology of government, from the conception of corruption in Pope's Sourcebook to the measurement of corruption in the CPI. Transparency International currently defines corruption as 'the abuse of entrusted power for private gain.'[73] When it comes to the CPI. TI focuses exclusively on public sector corruption, mirroring the Sourcebook's focus on public administration as the source of corruption. TI stresses that the CPI is not its only measure of corruption. Its bribe payers' index, for instance, maps the 'supply side' of corruption rather than the public sector recipients of graft.[74] However, the CPI remains its flagship publication and the ideological stance on 'clean' capitalism remains embedded in the index's methodology. This is a case of what Broome, Homolar, and Kanke had called 'paradigm maintenance by other means', where benchmarking practices continue neoliberal normalisation even after institutions move away from this ideology in other parts of their work.[75]

The CPI is a composite index.[76] TI does not conduct its own surveys but aggregates the results of corruption rankings published by other organisations. Data sources must be from credible institutions that regularly produce indices, the sources must quantify corruption in the public sector, they must have a valid and reliable methodology, and allow for sufficient variation in scores to distinguish between countries. TI then standardises the data sources so they score all countries on a scale from 0 to 100, from low to high corruption.[77] A country must be covered by at least three sources to be included in the ranking. TI then calculates the average of the scores that sources provide for a country. TI also reports a standard error and confidence interval as measures of uncertainty. The CPI aggregates existing sources. It is these sources which narrate the CPI's corruption story. One of the advantages often cited in favour of composite indexes is that they aggregate a wide variety of perspectives and definitions on corruption and hence capture the phenomenon in great breadth, including multiple definitions of the phenomenon and the corruption concerns of multiple social groups.[78] This breadth leads to greater reliability than possibly flawed individual sources.[79] TI makes this claim itself. In the press release for the first CPI in 1995, then-chairman of TI Peter Eigen acknowledged that the index was based on polls of business interests and financial journalists and said: 'It is thus a picture of how international business sees the levels of corruption.'[80] However, by 1997 the CPI press release claimed explicitly that the inclusion of a public opinion survey made 'the index less biased against developing countries than in the first two years when the index was solely based on the perceptions of foreign business people, most of them from Western industrialised countries.'[81] TI thus denied corporate bias. Only in 2012 did the CPI's 'frequently asked questions' section again acknowledge that the CPI captures 'the perspective of business people and country experts.'

A closer look at CPI sources reveals that most reflect a business perspective at the expense of alternative concerns over corruption that affects ordinary citizens. This is not to say that business concerns over bribery risk are illegitimate. It is also not possible to determine the 'correct' balance between different perspectives on corruption. Corporate concerns over corruption relate to the risk of having to pay bribes, cronyism preventing market entry, as well as market inefficiencies that arise in deeply corrupt polities. There is no one single unified business perspective on corruption but overall business does share a set of concerns that revolve around the risk of having to pay a bribe. If the CPI gives greater weight to sources that reflect business concerns, other forms of corruption receive less attention. The range of the phenomenon that is being captured becomes narrower without consumers of the index being fully aware of it.

Sources used in the CPI apply varying definitions of corruption. These matter for our purposes: Do they address the corruption concerns of large corporations over the risk of bribery or do they embrace a wider view? It is difficult to coherently code these definitions used in CPI sources but several features stand out.[82] Some definitions include accountability, transparency, and effectiveness of government anti-corruption action. Some sources use a very general definition of corruption. However, the most widely used definition in CPI sources concerns bribery and the costs of bribe-paying to doing business, whether with regards to permits, licenses, or public procurement. TI's sources do indeed cover a wide variety of corruption definitions, but what is striking is the preponderance of corruption definitions which concern large multinational corporations – namely the risk of paying bribes. Other perspectives are by no means excluded, but the dominance of business concerns is evident.

The sources that are aggregated into the CPI do the job of narrating the index's corruption story. My analysis suggests that the majority of sources that flowed into the CPI 2001 to 2016 were aimed at paying customers in the corporate world. They would therefore have reflected the corruption concerns of this customer base. In order to code the sources that TI uses, I applied Broome and Quirk's typology of benchmarks produced by either:[83]

- national government agencies,
- international organisations and regional institutions,
- profit-based institutions, including financial services and consultancy firms,
- civil society organisations, think tanks, media organisations, and academics.

I use this classification to code the sources that TI was using to put together the CPI between 2001 and 2016, the years for which the NGO makes the data available on their website.[84] Sources from for-profit consulting companies are likely to reflect the corruption concerns of their corporate clients. 9 sources were international organisations, 9 were for-profit consulting companies, and 11 were civil society or media organisations from 2001 to 2016. The CPI did not include rankings by national governments. However, not all sources were used each year. Furthermore, most sources only cover a limited number of countries and not all countries covered by a source are also taken into account by TI to calculate the CPI score. TI requires input from at least three sources to include a country in the CPI, excluding countries that are covered by only two sources or fewer. Furthermore, TI was relying on two types of surveys: of business elites, or country experts. Whenever TI was using sources based on surveys of business elites, it would include either the previous three (for the CPI 2001 to 2005) or two years (for the CPI 2006 to 2011) to even out year-on-year fluctuations on such surveys.[85] This also meant that from 2001 to 2011, business surveys carried greater weight. From 2012 onwards, TI only counted one year of each source.

I added up the number of times a source was used for an individual country analysis. For instance, in 2009 Argentina was covered by seven sources, three of which were produced by civil society organisations and four by for-profit consultancies. Of the surveys TI referenced between 2001 and 2016, international organisation reports were used for 1,819 country assessments, civil society organisation reports went into 6,412 country assessments, and for-profit consultancies influenced 8,362 country assessments. Of all the times that sources were taken into account for a country assessment from 2001 to 2016, 50.4 percent came from for-profit consultancies, while 38.6 percent came from civil society organisations and 11.0 percent from international organisations. The for-profit reports are predominantly aimed at large corporations. The producers of these reports must therefore speak to their corruption concerns. From 51.1 percent in 2001 to 48.1 percent in 2015, for-profit reports were the single most influential type of sources for country assessments (see figure 1). Only in 2016 did civil society organisations (45.5 percent) have a slight edge over for-profit consultancies (45.5 percent).

Large corporations are not only the consumers of reports from for-profit providers, their views also shape the surveys from non-profit providers. Several international organisation and civil society organisations were using business surveys as the basis for their rankings. These were used 3,764 times for country assessments between 2001 and 2016. This means that for 73.1 percent of times a source was used for a CPI country assessment 2001 to 2016, the source was either produced for sale to corporate customers or reflected the perceptions of business people who had been surveyed. The most prominent business survey used in the CPI is the World Economic Forum's (WEF) executive opinion survey. The WEF is funded by hundreds of corporate members and blurs the line between civil society and business lobby. In their 2012 assessment of CPI methodology, Saisana and Saltelli note that the WEF has a great effect on the ranking. They ran tests excluding each individual source in turn to see how this affects the overall result of the CPI. Excluding the World Economic Forum Executive Opinion Survey had the greatest effect.[86] The sources that do not survey business elites instead rely on country experts.

The use of business-oriented sources fluctuates over time. In 2001, for profit-consultancies accounted for 51.1 percent while another 46.1 percent came from civil society- and international organisation sources which were based on business surveys. Business-oriented sources were thus used almost all of the time for individual country assessments. They remained above 80 percent until 2006, close to or above 70 percent until 2011, above 60 percent until 2015, before falling to 57.6 percent in 2016. Business-oriented sources used to overwhelmingly dominate the CPI. While their dominance in the ranking has declined, business concerns still shape the majority of individual country assessments.

Figure 1: Percentage of sources used for individual country assessment 2001-2016

Source: Transparency International CPI methodological briefs, various years

The political economy of producing the CPI: TI workers as Grasmscian intellectuals

Pope's Sourcebook translated neoliberal rationality into a programme to govern corruption. By measuring corruption in accordance with this programme, the CPI became a technology of government. My findings suggest that the methodology is integral to the 'governmental work' that the CPI does. Loewenheim had argued that the CPI's 'responsibilisation' of the state obscured the culpability of other actors in corruption.[87] By focusing on corruption in the public administration, and relying primarily on business-oriented sources – both for-profit providers and business surveys – the methodology mirrors Pope's neoliberal anti-corruption programme that sees business as the unwitting victim of state extortion. The methodology of the CPI is no incidental side-issue but is central to the act of translating the governmental programme into a technology and narrating a story of corruption shaped by business concerns. In order to understand how this corporate bias comes about, I will analyse the 'translators' of neoliberal rationality into programme – Pope and his Sourcebook – and from programme into technology – the TI workers who developed the CPI's methodology. The analysis throws a light onto the ideological but also technical mechanisms by which these Gramscian intellectuals tell a corruption narrative amenable to corporate concerns. Empirically, I will draw on some of the secondary literature on the work of TI, especially the research of anthropologist Steven Sampson.[88]

Gramscian IR proceeds in its analysis from social relations of production, to forms of state, and finally world orders. Intellectuals play a role in these attempts at forming a 'historic bloc' in which the world order articulates social relations of production. In the 1980s Cox and van der Pijl both noted that a transnational capitalist class had come into being.[89] Gill found that the 1990s brought substantial changes to the global order: Transnational capital was not yet hegemonic but a 'new constitutionalism' was cementing a 'disciplinary neoliberal project' through global institutions such as the G7. 'Market civilisation' was normalised through extensive and often coercive methods of discipline and surveillance.[90] Civil society is the terrain in which this new order is trying to establish hegemony: 'Civil society is both shaper and shaped, an agent of stabilisation and reproduction, and a potential agent of transformation.'[91]

Intellectuals for Gramsci were not just those at the highest level of science and philosophy but also 'at the lowest the most humble "administrators" and divulgators of pre-existing, traditional, accumulated intellectual wealth.'[92] Or as Crehan puts it: 'those labouring in the vineyards of knowledge production.'[93] The 'organic intellectuals' of transnational capital – those who provide coherence to what may become the foundation of its hegemonic project – are identified as technocrats in international financial institutions or private sector clubs such as the World Economic Forum (WEF), which, as shown above, provides a prominent input into the CPI.[94] Others have expanded the field of organic intellectuals to include technocratic 'functionaries' and empirical cases include such varied examples as an East European regional development bank or Egyptian think tanks.[95] Citing Cox, Shields finds that these economic functionaries in state and international organisations 'perform the function of developing and sustaining the mental images, technologies, and organizations which bind together the members of a class and of a historic bloc into a common identity.'[96] The further the analysis move away from transnational corporations and the commanding heights of global economic governance – for instance the international financial institutions – the more difficult it becomes to identify the 'organic' class linkage between 'intellectuals' in civil society and capital. Things become particularly interesting when we reach civil society organisations that embrace causes that may disrupt the workings of global capital – the fight against poverty, fair trade, anti-corruption – and who would deny any linkage to capital. The interesting puzzle that the CPI then throws up is how an anti-corruption NGO ended up promoting a corruption narrative that ultimately reflected the concerns of global corporations: How to reduce the risk of having to pay a bribe. How did capital end up 'deputising' an anti-corruption pressure group?

The analysis in the previous section of this article on 'how' corporate bias entered the CPI provides a clue: The translation of a neoliberal rationality into a programme to govern corruption and the subsequent translation of this programme into the technology of 'governing at a distance' that is the CPI. TI workers produced a corruption narrative amenable to global corporations due to two main factors. The first is ideological affinity. The discussion of Jeremy Pope's Sourcebook showed that the purpose of anti-corruption was a 'clean' capitalism and the way to this was to 'responsibilise' states – the belief in corruption as exception and putting the onus of 'cleaning up' capitalism on the state. However, there is also a second aspect which emerges during the act of translation of Pope's programme into the technology that is the CPI: The political economy or producing the CPI, both in terms of the monetary cost of compiling the CPI and the deployment of 'scientific capital' in the field of tension between 'insider' and 'outsider' strategies.[97]

The anthropologist Steven Sampson highlighted the competing moral and economic impulses driving TI's work by variously charactising it as a 'movement' of 'integrity warriors' and a participant in the 'anti-corruption industry'.[98] On the one hand TI derives its legitimacy from the moral indignation that corruption creates, on the other hand TI seeks to work with the powerful elites that perpetrate corruption – states, corporations – because they control access to both material and symbolic resources that allow TI to persist in the 'industry'. Eagleton-Pierce highlights this dilemma: NGOs need to 'speak the same language' as those they seek to influence but risk being co-opted; or they can choose a radical path and risk not being listened to by the powerful elites which are the targets of advocacy.[99] There is a tension between 'insider' and 'outsider' strategies. Eagleton-Pierce notes that this leads to an activist subjectivity he characterises as those of 'critical technicians' who 'mimic established experts' in order to show off the 'scientific capital' that allows their advocacy to be heard. Note the importance of technical know-how, which might cover expertise such as the mastery of compiling a methodologically sophisticated global index. Critical technicians display a 'cautious temperament' due to 'pressure to conform'.[100] Crucially, they also need to 'appeal to alternative sources of authenticity, notably by reactivating the historical critique of capitalism as a system which undermines the realisation of social justice.'[101]

This second impulse may explain why TI was keen to disavow the exorbitant influence that business-oriented sources had on the CPI as well as the fluctuations in the NGO's willingness to acknowledge a possible bias in this direction except at certain points in time and buried in the annexes, methodological notes, and FAQs that come with the CPI. Acknowledging the weight of corporate concerns in the making of the CPI would undermine the index's credentials. TI derives its legitimacy from a fundamental critique of prevailing practices in the global economy – corruption – but it must also work with those who practice corruption in order to influence their behaviour. As Eagleton-Pierce notes, expertise builds a bridge to policy circles and what better bridge than an index which tells a corruption narrative shaped primarily by the concerns of corporations. The tension between insider and outsider strategies, moral crusade and the moderation of expertise thus explains how TI became the ‘deputy’ of capital, although whether this qualifies as an ‘organic’ connection to capital is open to debate. Eagleton-Pierce certainly does not think so. While he notes the affinity of the concept of ‘critical technicians’ with Gramscian organic intellectuals, especially the willingness to participate in the struggle for hegemony, he also argues that ‘in contrast to classical Gramscian analysis, the category [of critical technician] does not presume a class-bound foundation of self-awareness’.[102] The tension between insider and outsider strategies was playing out in TI’s internal deliberations about the CPI. One external evaluation of TI’s work noted that ‘The status of the CPI is regular source of debate at Annual Membership Meetings’ but that the organisation was holding on to it ‘because there is no single alternative with the same power to capture the attention both of journalists and decision-makers’.[103] These internal discussions confirm Shields’ observation that the bodies of ‘functionaries’ who act as collective intellectuals are not bureaucratic monoliths but sites of ‘micro-disputes’.[104]

Another aspect that shapes the CPI methodology is the economics of compiling it. Sampson had noted that the work of Transparency International is shaped by the budgetary constraints of modern NGO management.[105] TI’s work is embedded in a political economy of aid in which moral crusades are being ‘projectised’. TI needs to conduct projects funded by third parties to survive financially. Economic considerations of an NGO with a tight budget were also driving the production of the CPI. Compiling global rankings on corruption is expensive because it requires surveys of business elites or country experts. As Espeland and Stevens note: ‘Rigorous, defensible and enduring systems of quantification require expertise, discipline, coordination and many kinds of resources, including time, money, and political muscle.’[106] The agencies which compile global corruption rankings are primarily very large international organisations such as the World Bank or private business information providers who sell their expertise to large corporations. Transparency International needs as many corruption rankings as possible to compile the CPI and most of them come from for-profit providers. These are more likely to reflect what their corporate clients need to know about corruption.

When TI first compiled the CPI in 1995, the small and relatively unknown NGO would not have had the resources to conduct global surveys of corruption perception and yet it became the first non-commercial provider of such a ranking. This is why it is important to take into account the history of how rankings are compiled because early methodological choices become baked in. Commercial providers had these resources, and they did compile the data. TI therefore obtained these commercial rankings and aggregated them into the CPI. A collection of reports that were designed to enable corporate elites to navigate potentially corrupt public administrations in 'emerging markets' was effectively rebranded as global civil society's go-to anti-corruption tool. In the press release for the first CPI, then-chairman of TI Peter Eigen acknowledged that the index was based on polls of business interests and financial journalists and said: 'It is thus a picture of how international business sees the levels of corruption.'[107] By 1997 the press release accompanying the CPI was claiming that methodological changes meant that business sources were now being balanced by other sources.[108] Non-commercial alternatives have since proliferated, not least because the internet made it easier to gather data. TI's methodological tweaks further reduced the share of business-oriented sources, for instance ending the triple- and then double counting of business surveys in 2012. These are the reasons why the share of sources produced for corporate clients, or based on business surveys, has fallen from 97.2 percent in 2001 to 57.6 percent in 2016. These sources still dominate the CPI but to a lesser extent than they used to.

Once a governance index is produced, it needs to reach its consumer. The main avenue are the media. Broome and Quirk describe the competition of NGOs and international organisations (IOs) over 'issue expertise' in a 'benchmarking market':[109]

> 'The popularity of benchmarking as a strategic tool for producing authoritative expertise – or at least the public appearance of expertise – is most notable in relation to NGOs and some IOs, which frequently find themselves in competition with their peers for allies, attention, and resources.'

The CPI is TI's primary publicity instrument. Every year around the date when the CPI is published, google searches for the term 'corruption' skyrocket.[110] The more countries the CPI covers, the more publicity it is likely to attract. In 2012 TI commissioned an assessment of its methodology. It recommended that TI include only countries in the CPI for which it can use at least six sources.[111] Currently the CPI requires only three sources. Using more sources per country would also potentially reduce the reliance on private sector-oriented sources. This would have cut the number of countries covered in the 2012 CPI from 174 to 58. Few global media outlets would have been interested in such a small ranking. There are potential trade-offs between methodological rigour and media attention.

Conclusions

The CPI is a reformist benchmark. This article documented that surveys that reflect the corruption concerns of global corporations outnumbered sources that reflected other concerns in the making of the CPI. The novel contribution the article made was the interpretation of TI workers as Gramscian intellectuals. There was a degree of ideological affinity between those who formulated TI's original anti-corruption strategy and corporate interests, namely the desire for a 'clean' capitalism expressed in Jeremy Pope's Sourcebook. The other aspect that shaped TI workers' role was the 'markets' they were facing. They can be understood as 'critical technicians' deploying 'scientific capital' and balancing this with the legitimacy of being 'integrity warriors'. Another 'market' aspect of the index's production was a cost calculation: A resource-poor NGO had to rely on commercial surveys that reflected the concerns of their paying customers – the risk of having to pay a bribe.

The wider relevance for the analysis of the politics of global benchmarks is twofold. Firstly, methodology matters in Foucauldian analyses of 'governing at a distance'. The way in which neoliberal rationality is being translated into a programme and then into a technology is political and contains tensions and contestations that shape the outcome. Secondly, these acts of translation are embedded in a wider global political economy, which can be understood by interpreting the workers who produce these benchmarks as Gramscian intellectuals. They may not be 'organically' linked to capital but as 'critical technicians' they remain close to the hegemonic ideology proposed by those closer to corporate interests. The political economy of governing at a distance developed in this article is a useful tool for understanding the politics of global benchmarks.

[1] A previous version of this article was presented at the International Studies Association (ISA) annual conference in 2017 at a panel organised by the IPE section. The author would like to thank the organisers Andre Broome, Alexandra Homolar, and Joel Quirk for encouraging me to pursue this topic, the participants for their constructive comments, and Alexandra Homolar for her detailed feedback, as well as the three anonymous referees.

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[10] Hannes Baumann, 'A failure of governmentality: why Transparency International underestimated corruption in Ben Ali's Tunisia', *Third World Quarterly* 38 (2), 2017, pp. 467-482.

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[16] Galtung, ‘Measuring the immeasurable’; Knack, *Measuring Corruption in Eastern Europe*, pp. 10-11.

[17] Davis, Kingsbury, and Engle Merry, ‘Indicators as a technology’, p. 77

[18] Broome and Quirk, ‘Governing the world’, p. 828; Broome, Homolar, and Kranke, ‘Bad Science’.

[19] Transparency International, ‘Press Release: New Zealand best, Indonesia worst in world poll of international corruption’, 15 July 1995 < https://www.transparency.org/files/content/tool/1995_CPI_EN.pdf > (6 March 2018).

[20] Transparency International, ‘Press Release: Transparency International publishes 1997 Corruption Perception Index’, 31 July 1997 < https://www.transparency.org/files/content/tool/1997_CPI_EN.pdf> (8 September 2019).

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[24] ; Espeland and Stevens, ‘A sociology of quantification’, p. 418; Transparency International, ‘Corruption Perception Index 2016: Frequently Asked Questions’, 25 January 2017 < file:///C:/Users/Admin/Downloads/CPI_2016_FAQs_EN%20(1).pdf > (5 November 2018) Galtung, ‘Measuring the immeasurable’.

[25] Desrosières, *Politics of large numbers*, pp. 4, 336-7.

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[33] Kelley and Simmons, ‘Politics by numbers’, p. 55.

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[35] Jaeger, 'Global civil society', p. 261.

[36] Fougner, 'Neoliberal governance of states'.

[37] Rose and Miller, 'Political Power beyond the State'.

[38] The following paragraph is based on Rose and Miller, 'Political Power beyond the State'.

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[42] Fougner, 'Neoliberal governance of states', p. 314; Larner and Le Heron, 'Global benchmarking', p. 219; Hansen, 'The power of performance indices', p. 509.

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[52] Bruno, Didier, and Vitale, ‘Statactivism’, p. 204.

[53] Seabrooke and Wigan, ‘How activists use benchmarks’, p. 889

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[60] Espeland and Stevens, “A sociology of quantification”, p. 412.

[61] Hindess, ‘International anti-corruption’; Jeremy Pope, *TI Sourcebook 2000: Confronting Corruption – the Elements of a National Integrity System* (Berlin: Transparency International, 2000).

[62] The phenomenon of paradigms being maintained in benchmarks long after institutions have abandoned them as stated policy was noted by Broome, Homolar, and Kranke, ‘Bad Science’.

[63] Hindess, ‘Investigating international anti-corruption’.

[64] Hindess, ‘Investigating international anti-corruption’, p. 1391.

[65] Pope, *TI Sourcebook*, p. 2.

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[66] See for instance the list on the "anatomy of corruption' (p. 14-15) and the typology of bribery (p. 16-17)

[67] Pope, *TI Sourcebook*, p. 14.

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[75] Broome, Homolar, and Kranke, 'Bad Science', p. 15.

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[79] Saisana and Saltelli, 'Corruption Perceptions Index 2012', p. 5.

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[81] Transparency International, 'Press Release: Transparency International publishes 1997 Corruption Perception Index', 31 July 1997 < https://www.transparency.org/files/content/tool/1997_CPI_EN.pdf> (8 September 2019).

[82] TI lists the definitions in the overview of sources that accompany each CPI.

[83] Broome and Quirk, 'Governing the world', p. 834.

[84] The data are drawn from the methodological briefs that accompany the CPI. The reports 1997 to 2000 were not included in the survey. While the methodological briefs for those years were detailing the country coverage of the sources, they did not set out the countries for which the source was actually used: Countries may be covered in a source but not in the CPI.

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[88] Hindess, 'International anti-corruption'; Sampson, 'Integrity Warriors'; Steven Sampson, 'Corruption and anti-corruption in Southeast Europe: Landscapes and sites', in L. de Sousa, P. Larmour and B. Hindess (eds), *Governments, NGOs and Anti-Corruption: The new integrity warriors* (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 168-184.

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[99] Eagleton-Pierce, 'Professionalising protest', p. 244.

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[103] NORAD, *Evaluation of Transparency International* (Oslo: NORAD, 2010), p. 32

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[105] Sampson, 'Integrity Warriors'.

[106] Espeland and Stevens, "A sociology of quantification", p. 411.

[107] Transparency International, 'Press Release: New Zealand best, Indonesia worst in world poll of international corruption', 15 July 1995 < https://www.transparency.org/files/content/tool/1995_CPI_EN.pdf > (6 March 2018)

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[110] Kilkon Ko and Ananya Samajdar, 'Evaluation of international corruption indexes', p. 509.

[111] Saisana and Saltelli, ‘Corruption Perceptions Index 2012’, p. 15.