Global levels of entrenched, systemic corruption continue to undermine the rule of law and the capacity for durable economic development. According to Transparency International’s latest global corruption survey, the situation is dire: more than two-thirds of the 175 countries covered show very high levels of corruption (Transparency International 2014). From sophisticated state-corporate crime and the gross misuse of public funds to the more petty forms of bribery, corruption plagues our daily existence and undermines the integrity of entire social systems. How can we curb the plundering and misappropriation of resources where the abuse of power is so manifestly present? Although traditional anti-corruption approaches have focused on the implementation of top-down accountability measures such as legal mechanisms and anti-corruption bodies, these elite-driven strategies have failed to single-handedly tackle the intractable problem of corruption. Fighting corruption through commissions or ethics agencies or the drafting of new laws and codes of conduct has had minimal impact (Kaufmann 2005). In her pioneering book *Curtailing Corruption: People Power for Accountability and Justice*, Shaazka Beyerle provides penetrating insights into citizen-led engagement as a transformative force for generating genuine reform.

**A “Paradigm Shift”: Harnessing Civic Power**

Beyerle presents a powerful complementary approach to the more conventional administrative efforts in fighting corruption: civil resistance through organized, strategic grass-roots campaigns. Through detailed case studies, she provides an insider’s perspective on how mobilized citizens engage in non-violent tactics that can exert...
social pressure on “power-holders” to effectuate meaningful social change. These tactics range from the “blacklisting” of corrupt politicians and digital resistance to the creative use of street theatre and humour. Strikes, boycotts, demonstrations, non-cooperation techniques and the use of distinctive symbols are also a central part of the civil resistance repertoire of tactics employed by activists to alter power relations. Beyerle makes compelling arguments about how such methods ultimately serve to disrupt the status quo in the fight against entrenched graft.

As a senior adviser to the International Center on Nonviolent Conflict (ICNC), with years of expertise in citizen empowerment, Beyerle is uniquely positioned as a scholar-practitioner to further our understanding of the dynamics behind popular anti-corruption struggles. She identifies, documents and analyses 16 contemporary non-violent campaigns and movements that highlight collective acts of defiance against systems of oppression. The book harbours a rich compendium of case studies spanning the globe (Korea, Brazil, Indonesia, Italy, India, Afghanistan, Uganda, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Egypt, Mexico, Turkey) that challenge common assumptions about normative anti-corruption approaches. The cases provide insightful narratives about ordinary citizens with shared grievances wielding their collective “people power” to pressure self-serving power-holders to curb corrupt practices. Moreover, Beyerle persuasively shows how corruption is a cross-cutting phenomenon that does not occur in a vacuum as she skilfully brings to the forefront everyday issues such as the “denial of a right, an entitlement, a wage, medicine” (p. 26). Beyerle reveals that such deprivations that are linked to “real issues” create the sense of urgency, outrage and solidarity necessary for effective civic campaigns (see also Roy n.d.).

Each case study is replete with contextual background, campaign strategies that highlight tactical innovations, interviews with key activists, case outcomes and an analysis of the lessons learned. Beyerle emphasizes that combining both institutional (legal) and extra-institutional pressure is essential – meaning that both top-down and civic power are complementary and not mutually exclusive. While she credits the international anti-corruption community with their increasing focus on the importance of civic initiatives, there are profound ideas to be cultivated and explored from these inspirational (and not widely circulated) case studies. An entire chapter titled “The International Dimension” brings into focus invaluable policy implications and recommendations distilled from the case studies that are bound to have a measurable impact on the future of the anti-corruption discourse.

Case Study Highlights: Global Civil Resistance and Anti-corruption Strategies

With discriminating detail, Beyerle focuses on the power of human agency to confront and change systems of injustice. For example, a fascinating study
recounts the birth of a dynamic grass-roots campaign against one of the most entrenched systems of corruption in the world. In the Italian city of Palermo, the Sicilian Mafia crime syndicate, *Cosa Nostra*, controls the economy through commercial exploitation where over 80 per cent of the shops pay *pizzo* (a form of extortion). In return for this payment, the Mafia allegedly “proteces” the business. In 2004, a group of seven friends initiated an anti-Mafia resistance movement by plastering neighbourhood lampposts with a distinctive sticker that looked like a Sicilian obituary notice. It read, “An entire people who pays pizzo is a people without dignity.” What emerged over the coming years was a robust campaign titled Addiopizzo (Good-bye, protection money) inspired by fair-trade products and the notion of “ethical consumerism”.

The Addiopizzo campaign emboldened and inspired a formerly apathetic community to launch daring non-violent resistance actions. Over time, Beyerle stresses that tactics such as anti-Mafia slogans at soccer matches were critical in awakening the Palermian social conscience and stirring a sense of collective shame. As the campaign gained momentum, Addiopizzo strategically brought together businesses that refused to pay the pizzo and customers who supported them. The Mafia retaliated by torching a designated “pizzo-free” distribution company. Despite this setback, Addiopizzo exerted enough pressure on the Sicilian government to secure a bigger warehouse for the targeted business owner through anti-Mafia compensation laws. The Mafia’s attack backfired. It not only generated more support for the movement, but people came to understand the power of unified resistance against an endemic system of oppression, extortion and corruption.

Other cases of “ingenious benevolent protests of everyday defiance” (p. 255) reveal a blend of tactical creativity and uncommon resilience in the face of repression (also see Bartkowski 2013). In Turkey, the “One Minute of Darkness for Constant Light Campaign” mobilized 30 million citizens in synchronized low-risk mass actions (turning off lights for a minute as a symbolic protest) to pressure the government to address its deep linkages with crime syndicates. India’s “5th Pillar” movement, inspired by the Gandhian tenet of non-cooperation with oppressors, empowers citizens to refuse to pay bribes by arming them with a “non-violent weapon”: a pseudo-currency, zero-rupee note. In Brazil’s culture of gross impunity, the Ficha Limpa or clean-record movement used an innovative digital resistance campaign in partnership with Avaaz1 to elevate citizen engagement and push for legislation barring politicians from running for office if they were convicted of certain crimes. Egypt’s women-led Shayfeen.com (a play on words meaning “we see you in Arabic”) monitored the government by exposing judicial and electoral fraud – and when charged with incitement, the group successfully sued the government proving their activities were valid under the United Nations Convention against Corruption, to which Egypt is a signatory. In conflict-ridden Afghanistan...
where corruption is pervasive, Integrity Watch Afghanistan’s monitoring programme developed impressive community-led initiatives to bring more transparency and accountability to reconstruction efforts.

These highlights represent only a fragment of the rich tapestry of case studies in Beyerle’s timely book. Both inspirational and practical, this well-researched work fills a major gap in helping us better understand the critical patterns in building robust bottom-up non-violent movements to challenge existing systems of entrenched corruption. *Curtailing Corruption* will prove to be a valuable resource for civil society, academics and the broader global anti-corruption community. It is also highly recommended for anyone who feels powerless in a system that conspires to perpetuate malfeasance, injustice and impunity. There is much inspiration and hope brimming between the pages of these case studies. As Beyerle reminds us, the “voices of many” can be harnessed for the common good in even the most oppressive corners of the world: “When one person speaks of injustice, it remains a whisper. When two people speak out, it becomes talk. When many tell of injustice, they find a voice that will be heard” (p. 32).²

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**Notes**

1. Avaaz (http://www.avaaz.org) is a worldwide digital movement with the goal of bringing “people-powered politics to decision-making everywhere”. Their mission statement is to “organize citizens of all nations to close the gap between the world we have and the world most people everywhere want”.

2. This quote, without attribution, is from a video presentation uploaded on the CIVICUS (International Civil Society Alliance) homepage in 2006. Also see http://civicus.org.

**References**


Reviewed by Kris Christmann

The way that the police deal with protest and dissent is becoming more militarized, and the controversial tactic of “strategic incapacitation” is more widespread. To challenge the legitimacy of our leaders in North America (or indeed Western Europe) is to be confronted with fortified summit sites, phalanxes of paramilitary “Robocop” units, an array of “non-lethal” weapons, escalated coercive strategies, pre-emptive arrests and indiscriminate intelligence gathering. While this account is depressingly accurate, how should we explain these changes?

In answering this question, Wood argues against explanations which simply demonize the police, reduce their behaviour to an epiphenomenon of capitalism, or rely on micro-sociological level accounts. What is required is to locate the militarization of protest policing within the logics and practices of neoliberal restructuring. This means adding more actors and a more richly dimensional account. What we are offered here is an original argument which outlines an overlooked research agenda in protest policing. I cannot do full justice to its complexity in a brief review, but the author charts how periodic political and economic crisis has given rise to waves of protest, which in turn has led to increasingly polarized interactions between the police and protestors, and a hardening of the “police identity”. In attempting to maintain their power and legitimacy when “on the job” trouble occurs, policing agencies have turned to a range of private sector actors and defence industries who offer a range of “best practice” solutions, all of which prioritize militarized strategies and equipment. This dynamic is driven by the increasingly globalized field of policing, where police professional organizations promote, share and generate said “expertise” through international conferences and training deployments. Moreover, the dominant logic of intelligence-led policing and anti-terrorism initiatives has redefined the calculus of threat and security, where the unpredictability of organized and determined protestors can be conceived as “somehow similar to terrorists”. The end result of this integration and diffusion of innovation has resulted in a drive towards strategic incapacitation, one which handily serves vested corporate interests.