



Good Apples on Bad Trees

Explaining Variation in Levels of Corruption in South-European Local Government

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Abstract

The phenomenon of corruption presents exceptional resilience in contemporary societies. Yet, empirical research shows that there are countries, regions, and cities that have been able to reverse their fate and managed to bring corruption under control. By taking up this issue, my doctoral thesis attempts to determine: a) the ways in which a negative (corrupt) institutional equilibrium can be reversed; and b) in areas of widespread corruption, why some cities and their politicians decide to opt out from corruption and to limit it. I explore a puzzling variety of levels of corruption across and within different levels of government (national, regional and local). I aim to explain why in some cities there is corruption, collusion and bad government, while in other cities within the same institutional framework we observe non-corruption and good government. In other words, I aim to assess if the possibilities exist for corrupt cities to alter these negative tendencies and become "good apples on bad trees". I thus focus on well-performing cities in highly corrupt regions and countries, in an attempt to understand what lies behind the variation in levels of corruption between and within regions.

I argue that the answer to this question lies in the cost of corruption for government, combined with the capacity of the business sector to cooperate and press the government to invest in administrative capacity. The methodology to probe this question is twofold: qualitative analysis using process tracing on eight cases of local government in Spain and Italy, and a historical analysis of the evolution of the economic circumstances and quality of government in these eight cases. My thesis contributes to the burgeoning literature on corruption and anti-corruption but also to the wider literature on political economy and collective action, by modeling endogenous institutional change and cooperation, even in the absence of trust and strong institutional control.



Jury: Victor Lapuente (University of Gothenburg), Eliska Drapalova (Candidate), Donatella della Porta (Scuola Normale Superiore, formerly EUI), Pepper Culpepper (EUI, Supervisor), Alina Mungiu-Pippidi (Hertie School of Governance, by videolink)

Bio

Eliška Drápalová is a Postdoc at Hertie School of Governance. She has studied in Spain and in Ireland, in Trinity College Dublin. She holds her Degree (cum laude) in Sociology and Political Science from the University of Murcia, in Spain.

Her research interests include political economy, local government, corruption, comparative politics and experimental research on corruption. Her PhD thesis research focused on explaining causes of different levels of political corruption under the same institutional and cultural settings. She participated in several research projects on corruption in Spain and in 2014 was a Visiting Fellow at the Quality of Government Institute in Gothenburg with Professor Bo Rothstein.