

## Anticorruption Resilience: Why Some Countries Succeed Against the Odds

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What makes some countries able to overcome high levels of corruption, while other countries get worse over time? There have been few systematic analyses to identify and understand how and why countries have bounced back from periods of extensive corruption. What are the secrets of their resilience in the face of corruption?

Human resilience is a powerful phenomenon that enables people to bounce back from adverse conditions. Psychologists have studied the conditions that facilitate and promote resiliency to help people overcome difficult life situations. As well, political scientists have examined resiliency in the behavior of countries and societies—their capacity to extricate themselves from stalemates and deadlocks under crisis situations – so that they can achieve their national interests and political stability.

But what about a country’s capacity to bounce back successfully from high levels of corruption? What are the conditions that help promote this turnaround? If we understand these conditions, countries and international donors can target their efforts more directly toward building resilience capacity to reduce the impacts of corruption.

To begin our analysis, we developed a database using the World Bank’s Control of Corruption (CoC) score for 214 countries, covering a 10-year period (2005-2015). We compared country scores in 2005 and 2015 and calculated the percent change



over time. Based on this, we identified countries that have shown high levels of improvement in their corruption levels, as well as those that have shown major declines.

### Here are some results:

- **Most resilient:** 47 countries showed significant improvement in their CoC score of 10% or more in 2015 over their 2005 score. These include, for example, Georgia (47% improvement), Indonesia (24% improvement), and Zambia (22% improvement).

- **Most failing:** 42 countries showed major relapses in their CoC score, indicating a worsening of 10% or more. These include, for example, Libya (50% worse), Yemen (39% worse), and Venezuela (24% worse).
- **Minimal change:** 125 countries showed minimal change (less than 10% change in either direction).

**These country groupings led us to ask four questions.**

- 1. How can we characterize the most resilient countries?** Of these 214 countries with CoC scores between 2005 and 2015, we found a modest, but significant, correlation of -.244 between a country's CoC in 2005 and its level of resiliency between 2005 and 15. This means that *countries with the worst CoC indexes in 2005 tended to show the greatest improvement over time in good governance*. In other words, the most corrupt countries tended to improve and show the greatest resilience in fighting corruption.
- 2. Did donor assistance play a role in making countries more resilient in fighting corruption?** In part, a country's resilience can be explained by how international donors target corruption problems in these most affected countries. We found a strong correlation between a country's CoC in 2005 and the subsequent inflow of Overseas Development

Assistance (ODA) in 2010 (-.390) and in 2015 (-.384). In other words, *the countries with lower CoC scores tended to get the larger ODA inflows*. This assistance, focused on fighting corruption explicitly and other good governance initiatives indirectly, appears to have had a positive impact in terms of reversing the rise of corruption and supporting greater resilience to fight corruption in these countries.

- 3. What other conditions make countries more resilient?** We correlated changes in other World Bank Governance Indicators between 2005 and 2015 with changes in the CoC index to see if they constitute friendly conditions for anticorruption resilience to exist and prosper. Indeed, we found that *anticorruption resilience increased over this 10-year period as citizen voice and political participation increased (correlation=.336), political stability improved (.312), government effectiveness increased (.533), the rule of law increased (.464), and regulatory quality increased (.491)*.
- 4. Does a country's resilience in the face of corruption have an impact on larger development goals?** We found that it does. We found a modest, but significant, correlation of .222 between our anticorruption resilience index and the annual percent of GDP growth in 2015. This means that *as a country's resilience in the face of corruption improves, so does its economic growth potential*.

### **How do these findings reinforce the value of development assistance?**

- There is evidence that countries – even among the worst affected by corruption – can rebound to fight corruption and improve their governance and accountability standing. To observe such changes, one often has to look at longer term trends, beyond the typical USAID 5-year project.
- Donor assistance to these poor scoring countries is not a lost cause. In fact, donor support appears to be a significant contributing factor in boosting a country’s resilience capacity to fight corruption.
- Governance conditions – many that donors often support, like improved rule of law – seem to set the stage for stronger anticorruption resilience.
- There are measurable dividends to such development assistance. Anticorruption resilience is often accompanied by economic growth.

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