

The Challenges in the Anti-Corruption Efforts by the Government Agencies in Southeast Asia

Abdul Faruq Abdul Manan, Mohd Sabri Md Nor, Zatul Himmah
Adnan & Mohd Mahadee Ismail

Department of Government and Civilization Studies, Faculty of Human Ecology, Universiti
Putra Malaysia (UPM), 43400 Serdang, Selangor.

Email: faruqmanan@gmail.com, zatul@upm.edu.my, mahadee@upm.edu.my

Corresponding Author Email: msabri@upm.edu.my

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Abstract

This article focuses on the challenges and possible means to the best practices in combating corruption in Southeast Asian countries as the case study. While Singapore listed as the most successful countries in the region, the countries such as Laos, Myanmar and Cambodia were less effective to govern corruption situations. Based on systematic reviews on combination of keyword in a wide range of literature, the study identifies the problem of governance and rule of law in those countries afflicted the government efforts undertake thus far. The published evidence on selected articles highlights main challenges in Southeast Asia are related to reporting and punishing alleged corrupt individual at high ranks of senior government official and political leader. The findings reveal the close connection of anti-corruption agencies under the political executive limiting the agency power, independence and the implementation capacities in enforcement of the law of those found guilty of corruption. The current study suggests the reform such as re-locating anti-corruption agency from the political executive or parties in power, strong public support in a reform programmed and whistle-blower protection, as well as the continuous political support from country leaders on agency work, especially on grand corruption are proves to be significant.

Keywords: Anti-Corruption Agency, Good Governance, Political Interference, Political Will, Southeast Asia

Introduction

As corruption occurs in public and private sectors in Asian countries, it refers to “the misuse of public or private power, office or authority for private benefits through bribery, extortion, influence peddling, nepotism, fraud, speed money or embezzlement” (Quah, 2011). Research by other scholar demonstrated that corruption have a toxic consequence for a country’s development, undermines formal hierarchy of authority, distorts policies by impose unauthorized control or fees on the population or changed target beneficiaries (Otusanya,

2011). Corruption jeopardise legitimacy of democratic government and closely linked to failed public institution and public policies that negatively impacts patriotism values. It degraded governing system, threaten hope of people for better quality of life and more promising future. The government and international agencies diverted much efforts to search for effective measure through various policies and legislation to reduce opportunity structures for corruption and to punish deviant or unlawful actions (Duasa, 2014).

As with other regions in the world, the fight against corruption in Southeast Asian countries remains one of the key challenges, despite vast socioeconomic and political differences. On governance, the region presents a mixed picture in terms of levels and control of corruption, with some countries faring much better than other (Schoeberlein, 2020). The progress on composite indices such as Corruption Perception Index (CPI) and World Bank's Control of Corruption presents a clear stratification of governance performance by Southeast Asian countries. Table 1 shows that CPI scores for these countries in 2020 ranging from 85 for Singapore, which is ranked fourth among 180 countries, to 21 for Cambodia which is ranked 160th. The average CPI scores for these Southeast Asian countries is 41.7, with only three countries having CPI scores exceeding 50. Similarly, Table 1 also confirm that Singapore, Brunei Darussalam and Malaysia are the three countries with highest score and percentile ranks for Control of Corruption indicator in 2020.

While, the Global Corruption Barometer in Asia reveal 38 percent of respondent think corruption have increase in their country. For example, a large number of respondents in Thailand (55 per cent), Indonesia (49 per cent), Malaysia (39 per cent) and Vietnam (39 per cent), perceived that corruption in their country had increased in the past year (GCB, 2020). The survey also reported that one in three citizens think most member of parliament or senate involved in corruption, followed by local government councilor, government official, police, and president or prime minister office. In Indonesia, more than half of citizen (51 percent) think most parliamentarian is involved, while in Thailand, 47 percent perceived police institution where bribe most commonly paid (GCB, 2020). Table 2 show institution evaluated in Global Corruption Barometer - Asia on public perception to indicate that most or all of them were corrupt.

Table 1

The Performance of 10 Southeast Asian Countries in the Corruption Perceptions Index and Control of Corruption indicator, 2020

Country	Corruption Perception Index (CPI)		World Bank's Control of Corruption	
	Ranks	Scores	Percentile Rank	Scores
Singapore	4th	85/100	99.0	2.16
Brunei	35th	60/100	86.5	0.80
Malaysia	57th	51/100	62.5	0.25
Indonesia	102th	37/100	38.0	-0.42
Thailand	104th	36/100	36.5	-0.41
Vietnam	104th	36/100	42.8	-0.51
Philippines	115th	34/100	33.7	-0.57
Laos	134th	29/100	14.9	-1.06
Myanmar	137th	28/100	27.4	-0.63
Cambodia	160th	21/100	10.6	-1.30

(Source: Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index (CPI), <https://transparency.org.my/pages>; World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI))

Table 2

The Perceived Extent of Corruption by Institution in Asian Region, 2019 - 2020

Institutions	Percentages of Respondents Saying Most or All are Corrupt	Ranking of Institution
Members of Parliament / Senators	32%	1st
Government Officials	30%	2nd
Local Government Councilor	26%	3rd
Police	26%	3rd
President/ Prime Minister's Office	26%	3rd
Business Executives	24%	4th
Judges and Magistrates	18%	5th
Religious Leaders	13%	7th

(Source: Transparency International's Global Corruption Barometer (GCB), 2019-2020 <https://transparency.org.my/pages>)

A Transparency International (2015) report found that ASEAN countries, and Asia in general, lagged behind on access to information, partially because secrecy in the interest of national security was applied too widely. Across the region, there is a range of instances where intimidation, trials influence by political motivation and against political rival and journalist who provide critical perspective that affect the citizen comfort to report instances of public official engaging in bribery. Some countries in the region such as Thailand and Philippine, have seen backsliding into authoritarian form of government, while other such as Cambodia, Malaysia, Myanmar and Vietnam had never fully democratized (Quah, 2020). These country fare particularly badly with regards to citizen ability to make their voice heard such as press

freedom, access to information and whistle-blower protection. There were six out of 10 ASEAN countries perform badly in World Bank's Voice and Accountability with Brunei Darussalam (-0.9), Laos (-1.8), Malaysia (-0.1), Singapore (-0.2), Thailand (-0.8) and Vietnam (-1.4) (World Bank, 2020). While the report by Freedom House strikes a similar tone, with Brunei scoring 28 out of 100, Cambodia (25), Laos (14), Myanmar (30), Thailand (32) and Vietnam (20) with the self-censorship of media, intimidation and incarceration of journalist, legal restriction and sometimes, physical attacks are common (Freedom House, 2020). Table 3 show the country performance in the World Bank's Voice and Accountability and Freedom House in Southeast Asia in 2020.

Table 3

World Bank's Voice and Accountability and Freedom House in Southeast Asia, 2020

Countries	World Bank's Voice and Accountability		Freedom House	
	Scores	Percentile Ranks	Scores	Country's Status
Singapore	-0.2	38.2	50/100	Partly Free
Brunei	-0.9	22.7	28/100	Not Free
Malaysia	-0.1	40.1	52/100	Partly Free
Indonesia	0.1	52.2	61/100	Partly Free
Thailand	-0.8	25.6	32/100	Partly Free
Vietnam	-1.4	11.6	20/100	Not Free
Philippine	-0.1	41.1	59/100	Partly Free
Laos	-1.8	3.4	14/100	Not Free
Myanmar	-0.9	22.2	30/100	Not Free
Cambodia	-1.4	12.6	25/100	Not Free

(Source: World Bank's Voice and Accountability, <https://databank.worldbank.org/source/worldwide-governance-indicators>; Freedom House, <https://freedomhouse.org/reports>)

This article highlights the challenges in the fight against corruption in Southeast Asian countries and concludes with several policy recommendation while pointing out the pertinent areas for further research. Southeast Asian countries shares an absence of strong institutions, independent of the state, which are essential to combat pervasive corruption (Dini Djalal, 2001). The performance has been disappointing as corruption remained a serious problem in these countries, as reflected in their low scores in Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index and World Bank's Control of Corruption indicator. As such, what are the factor that can assist the government in addressing this problem of corruption? Studies on previous research being conducted in this respect to identify factors that can assists in tackling corruption cases and best practices for effective governance in Southeast Asian countries. This article examines a cross disciplinary literature review of article from peer-reviewed and trusted publisher to present comprehensive picture on anti-corruption research in Southeast Asia.

The Countries in Focus

Southeast Asia is exceptionally dynamic and diverse region that has seen remarkable level of regional integration, starting with formation of the Association of South East Asian Nation

(ASEAN) in 1967 (Schoeberlein, 2020). ASEAN members are Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippine, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. As such, it encompasses all sovereign states of the Southeast Asian region, except East Timor. For one, while there may be pockets of similarities among majority in some countries, with such diversity are much easier to spot. For example, dominant religion in Indonesia, Brunei Darussalam and Malaysia is predominantly Muslim and, Buddhism in Singapore, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, Myanmar, and Lao PDR. On the other hand, Roman Catholic Christianity is most common religion in Philippine.

The politics of the region also seem to swing from one end of the spectrum to another (Tapia, 2012). In Thailand, Brunei Darussalam and Cambodia are constitutional monarchy, while Indonesia and Philippine reverted to democracy after many years of authoritarian rules under the (President Suharto, 1966-1998; President Ferdinand Marcos, 1965-1986). Vietnam and Lao PDR are communist countries, and Malaysia and Singapore being parliamentary democracy. Myanmar has been under military rule for 53 years and is transitional democracy after the introduction of political reforms in 2011 and landslide victory of opposition National League for Democracy in 2015.

The Pattern of Corruption Control

As corruption is a serious problem in many Southeast Asian countries, it is not surprising that their government relied on many anti-corruption measures, including anti-corruption agencies during the past seven decades. Almost all countries have established dedicated anti-corruption agencies in line with United Nation Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) and ratified by ASEAN countries. Some countries have endowed their agencies with investigative and prosecutive power, whereas other have preferred more preventive, educational and informative role (De Sousa, 2010). There are also differences with regard to their scope of action, resources, and accountability requirements. The anti-corruption agencies are durable publicly funded organisation entrusted with objectives to fight corruption and to reduce opportunities for corruption by means of preventive and/or repressive measures. The Asian region display variety of corruption control and some nations enacts the specific anti-corruption law without independent bureau to implement them. There is an absence of designated anti-corruption agency, yet the task shared among police, General Prosecutor Office, and the court (Quah, 2006). For example, in New Zealand and Papua New Guinea.

A second pattern involves a combination of anti-corruption laws and several anti-corruption agencies. The ACA perform both the anti-corruption and non-corruption related functions of administrative adjudication and public assistance (Quah, 2017). For example, the Philippines have the most anti-corruption measures in Asia, with seven law and 14 anti-corruption agencies in place since 1950s. The proliferation of ACA in Philippine is the results of frequent changes in political leadership because of these ACA either created or abolished by incoming presidents. In Vietnam, General Inspectorate (GI) is not dedicated ACA because it performs function of ombudsman in addition to investigation of corruption complain by Anti-Corruption Bureau.

The third strategy involve impartial implementation of comprehensive anti-corruption laws by a specific anti-corruption agency. Singapore initiated it. Malaysia became the second Asian country to adopt it, creating an anti-corruption agency in 1967. Twenty-five years later, Thailand established new anti-corruption bureau to replace ineffective commission.

Indonesia followed suit in 2003 to formed its Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK). The effectiveness of CPIB in curbing corruption in Singapore led to proliferation of ACA in the region (Quah, 2010). For example, Brunei’s Anti-Corruption Bureau in 1982, Thailand’s National Counter Corruption Commission in 1999, Cambodia’s Anti-Corruption Unit in 2010 and Myanmar’s Anti-Corruption Commission in 2014. Table 4 summarise the primary institution responsible and their functions in different countries in the Southeast Asian.

Table 4

The Primary Institution Responsible and its Functions in Southeast Asia Countries

Country	Primary Institution Responsible	Functions
Singapore	Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau (1952)	Investigation of corruption cases, corruption prevention and education
Brunei	Anti-Corruption Bureau (1982)	Investigation of corruption cases, corruption prevention and education
Malaysia	- Anti-Corruption Agency (1967) - Replaced by Malaysia Anti-Corruption Commission (2009)	Investigation of corruption cases, corruption prevention and education
Thailand	- National Counter Corruption Commission (1999) - Renamed National Anti-Corruption Commission (2008)	Investigation of corruption cases, corruption prevention and education
Indonesia	Corruption Eradication Commission (2003)	Investigation of corruption cases, corruption prevention and education
Philippines	- Office of the Ombudsman (1979) - Special Anti-Graft Court (1979) - Inter-Agency Anti-Graft Coordinating Council (1999) - Presidential Commission on Good Government (1986) - Office of the Deputy Secretary for Legal Affairs (2010)	- Investigation of complaints in the delivery of public services - Prosecution of graft cases in the special anti-graft court - Disciplinary control over all elective and appointed officials - Public assistance and graft prevention
Vietnam	- Government Inspectorate (1956, 2005) - Central Steering Committee for Anti-Corruption (2007) - People’s Procuracy (2006)	- Investigation of corruption and Ombudsman - Coordination of anti-corruption activities - Investigation and prosecution

Laos	Government Inspection Authority (2005)	Inspections, prevention, investigate and prosecute, corruption-related complaints
Myanmar	Anti-Corruption Commission (2014)	Investigation of corruption cases, corruption prevention
Cambodia	Anti-Corruption Unit (2010)	Investigation of corruption cases, corruption prevention and education

(Sources: Jon Quah, 2020: 2016: 2017; De Sousa, 2010).

While the Southeast Asia differs quite substantially in their economic performance, political stability and perceived level of corruption, it's still possible to identify certain shared core governance challenges in government capacities to tackle corruption. The factor accounting for their institutional failure are varied. Some are internal to the agency such as internal governance problem, weak leadership, inadequacy or absence of management strategy, while others are external such as political will, unsustainable budget, tense relationship with public and media (De Sousa, 2010). These shared core governance challenges affect the ACA credibility and willingness to tackle corruption. Even for those countries that have a fully functioning ACA, role of the agency is often weak given that implementation of anti-corruption strategy often rests with numerous agencies within and outside state and relies on long-term financial commitments.

Methodology

Systematic review approach is used to reduce biases in selection and inclusion of the studies, while seeking to include all published evidence on the topic and to summarize them objectively (Petticrew, 2001). At the beginning, keywords are used in electronic databases such as Taylor and Francis, Elsevier, Sage, Springer, and Wiley Online Library as a predominant sources of published literature collections. These databases provide a high-quality content of articles and ordered according to the number and pertinence of search hits yielded. The forward and backward citation identification strategies were also used to search through cited articles and bibliographies (Webster & Watson, 2002). The former identifies original articles or work that have since cited article reviewed, while the latter used the list of references at the end of the articles.

Initially, quite a number of publications obtained through the combination of keywords such as (Anti-Corruption Agencies AND Southeast Asia) OR (Corruption Prevention AND Southeast Asia) OR (Good Governance AND Anti-Corruption Policies). The umbrella term of "corruption" was used to ensure that other crime or deviance are not erroneously inflating the search results. Both published and unpublished studies were searched on the basis of specific combination of keywords to systematically navigate the necessary articles (Lame, 2019). Such keywords are conducted in accordance to analysis of titles, abstracts and cursory reading of relevant section in introduction and theory (Xiao & Watson, 2019). However, when a title or abstract could not be included or rejected with certainty, the full text of the article was reviewed.

The sorting process of literature consists of applying inclusion and exclusion criteria in the primary pool of article. The database is recorded if the article underlined empirical effects or impacts from the corruption prevention or studied conditions for successful implementation. The selection criteria are based on the article that treated subject of corruption prevention in systematic and exclusive fashion, and if a specific tool of corruption prevention is identified. Some of the studies were excluded at the titles or abstract stage because they neither evaluate anti-corruption intervention, but simply assessed the relationship between corruption and other phenomena. Most of technical reports and on-line presentation are excluded from the review because of the lack of peer-reviewed process. In addition, the grey literature including the conference proceeding, thesis and report might not be employed in such syntheses because they are usually deemed inferior in quality compared to peer-reviewed studies and fall beyond the scope and contribution of this systematic review. Table 5 summarises the criteria for inclusion and exclusion in the literature searches.

Table 5

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria in Literature Searches

Literature Searches	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Topic	Empirical effects or impact of corruption prevention and condition for successful implementation	- Prevention of crimes other than corruption - The word “prevention” were used in a passing manner, only to cite the anti-corruption law
Formats	Scholarly and social-scientific literature	Theses, conference proceedings, essays, reviews, unpublished papers, official reports, books and books chapters
Subjects Area	Political Corruption, Administrative Corruption	Private to Private Corruption
Nature of Articles	Definitions and Concepts in Corruption Prevention	Gray Literature such as reports from non-governmental agencies and international organizations (OECD, World Bank or Transparency International)

(Source: Xiao & Watson, 2019; Guillaume, 2019; and Mugellini, et. al., 2021)

What are the main findings of this systematic review?

This systematic review provides an in-depth synthesis of available evidence on governance performance in corruption prevention in Southeast Asia country. Majority of selected studies explain the anti-corruption agencies encounter various constraint to their mandate including the difficulty in technical, statutory and cultural to unveiled information as well as to institute good working relationship with political sphere. A central corruption challenges in the region is overall relatively poor performance in terms of governance and the rule of law (Schoeberlein, 2020). Severe governance challenges hampered the sustainable development in the region, most notably in the form of autocratic government, low levels of accountability

and highly politicized public sector. These significant governance challenges affect government willingness to curb corruption and questioned the credibility of their anti-corruption effort, despite the vast of economic growth in foreign direct investment and regional integration. The gaps remain in insufficiently resourced and the independent anti-corruption agencies, high level of state capture and a lack of protection for whistle-blowers. Table 6 show the result of systematic review of the literature on corruption prevention in Southeast Asia countries.

Dini Djalal (2001) observed that in her analysis of corruption situation in Southeast Asia, there are increasing trend of employing corruption charges as a tool to discredit opponents, rather than as a genuine endeavor to clean up politics. Indeed, corruption accusation have been used as a political tool in Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia and Vietnam to settle a political score (Quah, 2016). The anti-corruption agencies in these countries frequently adopted by corrupt political leaders to conduct a witch hunt with intention to discredit the opposition party or to disciplined their own party member who strays from established party lines (Meagher, and Voland, 2006). The ACA credibility will be undermined if it devotes its effort to petty corruption by convicting small fries only, and ignores grand corruption by the rich and powerful in the country. The government intervention in a legal battle has not helped and if this trend continues, it will obstruct or slows down for effective response and, doubly difficult to pursue prosecution. This is by no means would compromise the drives for good governance and impacting the sustainable implementation in corruption prevention.

Table 6
The Report on Systematic Review Approach

No.	The Challenges of Government Agencies in Corruption Prevention	The Consequences in Corruption Prevention	The Best Practices in Corruption Prevention
1.	Lack of Autonomy of Anti-Corruption Agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Discredit opposition parties or political rivals - Selective enforcement against favoured individual or groups - Low trust environment and less encouraging rates for whistle-blowing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Limiting the executive or parties in power in making decision - Consideration of all corruption complaint investigated by the anti-corruption agencies - Impartiality in the enforcement of the laws without protecting the interest of particular individuals
2.	Inadequate Law and Regulation of the Anti-Corruption Agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Existing institutions become powerless to prosecute or investigate corruption cases 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Specific agency without being distracted by non-corruption related functions

		- Limited resources in the implementation of anti-corruption activities	- Continuous political support throughout its existence with adequate staff and funding, and operational independence
3.	Institutional Arrangement of the Anti-Corruption Agencies under executive or minister's department	- Subjects to political control or direction, partisan in making decision - Increased the probability of the agency being manipulated to circumvent the laws	- Accountable to the Parliament rather than Head of State - Limiting the political appointment and recruitment procedures
4.	Democratization process and anti-corruption campaigns	- Suppressed the public to check the official discretion - Undisclosed information to public inquiry	- Include participation by general public in making decision - Increased the accessibility of political information for public inquiry

(Sources: Jon Quah, 2010, 2021; Wescott, 2003; Djalal, 2001)

Furthermore, studies by Jon Quah (2010; 2016) argued most anti-corruption agencies in the region lacks the necessary authority and resources, institutional and operational independence to fulfil their roles. The structural weaknesses in their anti-corruption agencies such as power to investigate and/or prosecute corrupt official have increased probability of ACA to act as a window-dressing institution and defunct the function as a governmental anti-corruption discourse mechanism. In other words, it is futile to establish the anti-corruption agencies without investigative power if the government's sincere intention is to minimize corruption. This mistake reflects the weak political will of the government to provide required power and adequate resources for anti-corruption agencies to minimise the problem of corruption. For example, probability of detection and punishment of corrupt offence is low in Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand as the public in these countries perceive corruption to be a low risk, high reward activity.

Besides that, many corruption scandals are in fact brought to light by whistle-blowing. Out of all ASEAN countries, only Malaysia has dedicated whistle-blower protection law. While other countries such as Cambodia and Indonesia have some protection for whistle-blowers and/or witnesses outside of a dedicated law, however, they are often inadequate by lacks of clarity or overly broad penalty for false reporting (Quah, 2020). The respondents feared reprisal in reporting corruption, given that some countries lack whistle-blower protections laws and freedom of information acts, very few would dare to face the odds and affect the citizen comfort in reporting on a public official for bribery. For example, in Indonesia, Thailand and

Cambodia have highest percentage of citizen fear of reprisal in reporting corruption, with 61 percent, 59 percent and 57 percent, respectively (GCB, 2020).

The Lesson for Combating Corruption in Other Countries

The most prominent development in Southeast Asian over the years has been the prosecution of many of its heads of government and other high-rankings officials for alleged corruption. For example, the President Suharto of Indonesia, and the President Ferdinand Marcos and Joseph Estrada of the Philippine among the most corrupt world leaders. Neither the leader was committed to eradicate corruption for a simple reason as they and their families and cronies were themselves plundering their countries (Quah, 2021). No country in Southeast Asia can make better claim than Singapore, whose 40-year-old anti-corruption campaigns often hailed as a model for the region. Once burdened with corrupt police forces and custom office, the country is now efficient commercial hub envied by its neighbors. The country rejects British colonial government method of relying on police for corruption control instead on independent ACA like the CPIB.

To put an end to the cycle of failure of anti-corruption endeavors witnessed in numerous Asian countries over past 70 years, the political leaders not only from a country head (President or Prime Minister) but also from a broad array of national political leadership as a central player to promote an effective functioning of government agencies. The effectiveness in corruption prevention in the Southeast Asia countries include the independence of anti-corruption agencies, accountability of judiciary and transparency in political institutions.

Independence of Anti-Corruption Agencies in Corruption Prevention

Independence does not mean free will or absence of reporting or external control, but refers to the capacity to carry out its mission without political interference, that is, operational autonomy (De Sousa, 2010). Across the region, a legal framework is often reasonably adequate to tackle corruption related challenges and many countries have seen relevant amendments in recent year. Almost all countries in the Southeast Asia established dedicated anti-corruption agencies, which are in line with United Nation Convention on Anti-Corruption (UNCAC). However, as with other aspects, the extent to which they operate varies across the region.

The anti-corruption agencies in the region suffered a lack of independence and experienced undue influence and political obstruction to effectively tackle corruption. For example, Philippine's Presidential Anti-Corruption Commission operating under president, have limiting its independence from executive and suffered a great deal of political interference (Schoeberlein, 2020). While in Vietnam, the anti-corruption institution are usually headed by ruling party official giving the institution, little to no independence from executive and senior party member. Inadequacies in legislation or procedural requirement inhibit for effective execution of anti-corruption law and inconsistent in court sentencing of those found guilty of corruption.

The anti-corruption agencies are separate from the others government agencies but is accountable to parliament, justice ministry or the executive. For example, Singapore's CPIB located in the office of Prime Minister. Such arrangement often run the risk of limiting commission independence and even facilitating corruption, but Singapore has avoided this in part through personal commitment of its Prime Minister (Quah, 2009). However, this option

is not feasible for those countries with relatively high level of corruption and poor governance environment due to close connections with political executive. There is tendency ACA to be manipulated or subjected to political controls, directly or indirectly, to a degree that obstructs or slows down its effective response.

Provision of Adequate Resources and Budget of Anti-Corruption Agencies

As the incumbent governments in Singapore are committed to curbing corruption, it is not surprising that they have provided the CPIB with required personnel and budget as reflected in their favorable staff population ratios, per capita expenditure, and expenditure as percentage of their country's GDP (Quah, 2010). The staff and funding are critical factors in agency performance because control agencies cannot operate effectively without qualified personnel and adequate resources. It is precisely in terms of these two factors that the incumbent government is co-responsible for an agency's success or failure. The inadequacy results in a delay in the work process and damage the cases under investigation. This will ultimately lead to a lower prosecution rates and eroded the public confidences in government commitment to eradicate the problem of corruption.

Focusing the agency's work on grand corruption cases such as political corruption or financial crime may be an advantage from the point of view of resource allocation, institutional visibility, and public support. Bad scoring on large cases may prove fatal to the agency's initial phase of institutionalisation. In other words, the incumbent government must be sincerely committed to anti-corruption strategy and not just pay lip-service to it. The quality of an ACA reflects the quality of the incumbent government and the state of governance in that country (Quah, 2010). While experienced of Singapore CPIB are not perfect and can still improve its performance, their experiences demonstrate to other ineffective ACA that fighting corruption is not an impossible task if they are supported by their governments in terms of required personnel and funding and if they are willing to follow in the footsteps of their more successful counterparts by avoiding their mistakes and replicating their achievements.

Strengthening the Democratic Institutions as Key Component for Accountability

In a number of countries in the region, public exasperation with corruption is widespread. A successful anti-corruption campaign requires not only a free press and strong civil society organisation, but also a wide public support. The factors such as transparency, accountability and access to information are essential ingredients in building public trust and support in the fight against corruption. Public support, often in the form of strong pressure group, in compelling government and ACA to bring an end to impunity and zero-tolerance toward corruption. Whether as election monitoring crews or micro-credit teams, grassroots groups can provide the social, economic and political education the population needs to demand change. The pressure from civil society will make it difficult for powerful sectional interests to demand resources and make it more difficult to satisfy them without public scrutiny (Kpundeh, 1997). In many places the anti-corruption movement such as civil society can boast victories, and these are important reminders to the public that the battle against corruption is not in vain.

The ASEAN countries lagged behind on access to information, partially because of secrecy in the interest of national security was applied too widely (Transparency International, 2015). In both Indonesia and the Philippine, there is an allegation that section of the media is politically partisan and subjective about which corruption scandal they report to. This is because across

the region, there is a range of instances where intimidation, trials influence by political motivation and against political rival and journalist who provide critical perspective that affect the citizen comfort to report instances of public official engaging in bribery. Some improvements have been renowned in recent years, including the passing of access to information laws in Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam, and an executive order in the Philippines that provides partial access rights (Schoeberlein, 2020).

Conclusion

If Southeast Asian nations want to eradicate corruption, they must not only tighten the legislation, but also to ensure both watchdog agencies and judiciaries' capacity and independence to investigate comprehensively and, in turn to prosecute wherever appropriate. The systematic review on corruption prevention in Southeast Asia reveals that the anti-corruption agencies often prove ineffective due to lack of autonomy in organization and operation, inadequate allocation of resources, and limited mandates and authority. In spite of pressure being applied by UNCAC and World Bank and revelation of high-profile corruption scandal, corruption remains huge challenge across ASEAN countries. The enforcement action in fact illustrated the manipulation of the powerful anti-corruption agency as a weapon against political foes to shore up political support and served as an effective way of silencing the opposition.

The overall low enforcement rates of anti-corruption law may have negative effect on reporting rates as citizens more likely to think that no appropriate action would be taken as the result of a report. This has led to erosion of citizens trust in their government to tackle corruption as result show trust in government is lower than in court or police across Asia. Within the region, a significant governance challenges are evident, most notably seen in the lack of government accountability and prevalent politicization of public sectors. The cycle of failure in combating corruption in Asian countries can only be broken if and when their citizens abhor corrupt leaders and elect honest and competent political leaders who would use the anti-corruption agencies as independent watchdogs instead of abusing public trust as attack dogs or paper tigers.

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