

Small Caribbean islands, big corruption cases?

The impact of 'small country size' and 'islandness' on corruption in the Caribbean

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1. INTRODUCTION

Small islands often do not only have the reputation of being places with idyllic beaches and sunny tourist resorts, but are not seldom also associated with fraud, corruption, money laundering, tax havens, prostitution, gambling and other forms of crime. In the daily news, the literature and the different crime-reports from intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations about the Caribbean (IGO/NGOs) [1], every imaginable criminal activity is mentioned in the last decades: Drug trafficking, homicide, domestic violence, money laundering, terrorism financing, fraud, corruption, trafficking- and smuggling in human beings, organ trafficking, etcetera. Crime throughout the Caribbean has moved to the forefront of attention. The geographical position and the small size of the islands is often a blessing and a curse at the same time. 'A blessing' because of the pleasant climate and beautiful beaches which attract investors and tourists. 'A curse' because of the limited number of people and opportunities for and the vulnerability to criminal organizations.

Inhabitants of the islands and more in particular businesspeople and politicians have had enough of those stories about the Caribbean as 'Pirate islands' and as 'Mafia nest'. They think the stories are not substantiated and are causing damage to the foreign trade, the tourist industry and the financial business. At the same time it is the politicians and other officials who are accused of a leading role in corruption cases. Journalists and academics report about sinister organized crime syndicates in the Caribbean [2]. In Antigua, Barbuda, the Bahamas, Montserrat and the Turks and Caicos Islands, government ministers have been implicated or convicted for involvement in the illicit drug trade [3]. In 1994 in Sint Maarten, the former leader (since 1951) of the Democratic Party was charged with corruption, fraud and being part of a criminal organization. Cases against other prominent politicians in Sint Maarten followed in subsequent years. In Curaçao several politician of different political parties (Workers Liberation Front, National People's Party) were convicted of fraud, embezzlement and corruption in 2003. Public companies were misused to commit financial irregularities. In the criminal case in 2008 on Aruba Fondo Desaroyo Nobo officials and politicians took bribes for the procurement of construction projects. 25 million Aruban

guilders would have been disappeared. After an extensive investigation, officials and contractors were convicted. A former Prime Minister was acquitted, but the former minister of finance was convicted of corruption.

Although the above examples suggest otherwise, fraud and corruption must not be seen as an exclusive problem of small islands. These forms of criminality also occur in other places. The fraud and corruption issues in small islands exhibit both similarities and differences with large countries. It is interesting to see what combination of factors is specific to small islands. How do small island states differ from large states in ways that might be relevant for understanding fraud and corruption? Although much research has been done on corruption, there is still little known about the impact of country size and islandness. It is of recent date that scientists show interest in 'good governance' and 'corruption' in small states. What we know will be addressed in this paper.

This paper is structured as follows. In paragraph 2 the methodological framework and the main concepts which are used in this paper are explained. Paragraph 3 explores the recent research findings on 'small scale' and 'islandness' and good governance and corruption. This paper will review the literature on 'size' and 'islandness' in paragraph 4. In the 5th paragraph other crucial factors causing corruption are mentioned. This paper ends with a conclusion.

2. METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK AND MAIN CONCEPTS

Since the sixties there have been plenty of academic studies attempting to explain the causes and consequences of corruption. These studies have their starting point in different academic fields such as anthropology, criminology, development, economics, financial management, international relations, public administration, political science and sociology. These studies have adopted a variety of theoretical approaches and show different causal factors. As Fijnaut and Huberts say: *Research shows that*

a conglomerate of social, economic, political, organizational and individual causal factors are important to explain cases of public corruption' [4a]. Causes mentioned are at individual, organizational and system level. It goes too far here to treat the various causes of corruption. But before we are going to look if 'smallness' and 'islandness' are crucial factors in causing corruption, we should start with a proper definition of corruption. What do we mean by corruption? The definitions of corruption vary across both jurisdictions and academic disciplines that study corruption. Moonlighting and political funding practices may be legal in one place, but may be illegal in another. In the international discussion, the concept corruption is used as an umbrella concept, covering all or most types of integrity violation or unethical behavior and corruption as a type of integrity violation [4b]. Forms of corruption vary, but in spite of their great diversity, they share a set of common characteristics. The most commonly used definition of corruption refers to the abuse of a public power for private gain. Corruption affects both the private and public sectors and is often subdivided into petty and grand corruption which ranges from petty 'gifts' at the lower levels to the misuse of authority and public assets at the highest levels in the government. Corruption is facilitated by bribery, extortion, embezzlement and theft, but also by nepotism, patronage and cronyism [5].

What do we mean exactly with 'small states' and with 'islands'? In this paper the definition of 'small state' of the Commonwealth Secretariat is used [6]. In that definition countries with a population of 1.5 million or less are seen as 'small'.

Three major island groups can be divided: The Pacific islands (the smallest Naurau, the largest Papua New Guinea), the Caribbean islands close to the United States and the Latin American market and the Indian Ocean islands (between East and South Asia). According to the Commonwealth Secretariat these states possess unique special development challenges – limited diversification, limited capacity, poverty, susceptibility to natural disasters and environmental change, remoteness and isolation, openness, and income volatility. In this paper we focus mainly on the Caribbean islands. Several Caribbean islands can be considered as mini-states (identified as those with a population of 200,000 or less) and micro-states (population of 100,000 or less). The Leeward Islands of the Dutch Antilles can be seen as mini- or micro states. The six islands together have 300,000 inhabitants.

3. COMPARATIVE STUDIES

What do we know about the nature and extend of corruption cases in the Caribbean? The best-known international source for corruption indicators is the Transparency International (TI) Corruption Perception Index (CPI) [7]. This index scores countries on a continuum based upon surveys among business persons and analysts. Besides that, TI monitors a Corruption Barometer which tracks public opinion on bribery and corruption, with detailed analyses on many countries and regions that cover most of the world. The CPI is considered as a solid measurement tool of perceptions of corruption. The surveys used in the CPI ask questions relating to the misuse of public power for private benefit, like bribery of public officials, kickbacks in public procurement, embezzlement of public funds. The CPI also tries to measure the strength and effectiveness of anti-corruption efforts. Repeating results of Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index (CPI) show a poor performance of the Caribbean

island states. Countries with the highest scores (up to is 10) on the index are viewed as having the least corruption; countries with the lowest scores, the most. The index of 2010 shows Denmark, New Zealand and Singapore at the first rank of the list with a score of 9,3. The list includes 178 countries with at the bottom Somalia with a score of 1,1 just below Myanmar (1,4) and Afghanistan (1,4). The scores of the participating Caribbean Islands are as follows:

Rank #	Country Territory	Score
17	Barbados	7,8
33	Puerto Rico	5,8
44	Dominica	5,2
69	Cuba	3,7
73	Trinidad and Tobago	3,6
87	Jamaica	3,3
101	Dominican Republic	3,0
146	Haiti	2,2

Besides the Caribbean islands Barbados and Puerto Rico there are other small (island) states on the CPI-list with a relatively high ranking like, Luxembourg (rank 11, score 8.5), Estonia (rank 26, score 6.5) and Mauritius (rank 49, score 5.4). What do we learn from this? In general there is a poor performance of small (island) states, but not all small (island) states have a bad score. The islands of the Dutch Antilles, like Curaçao, Sint Maarten, Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius and Aruba cannot be found on the international list of transparency international because of their constitutional status as part of the Dutch Kingdom.

In 2004 *Transparency International* examined the integrity systems of eight CARICOM¹ States (Antigua-Barbuda, the Bahamas, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, St. Kitts-Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines) and observed ineffective procurement systems, completely unregulated political parties and 'winner-take-all' majoritarianism that seriously undermines the quality of democratic governance [8]. Another finding: 'petty corruption associated with administrative corruption is pervasive in a culturally permissive context.' According to Transparency International a proper anticorruption legislation and regulation framework is also essential in preventing and combating corruption. Only three states, the Bahamas, Dominica and St. Lucia, among the states mentioned above require ministers and high government officials to disclose assets and financial interests. Transparency International states: "This is essential in reducing conflict of interest, particularly in the micro-states where it is often difficult to distinguish between nepotism and market necessity due to close family links. Despite efforts to reduce conflict of interest, not all states have the pertinent laws and regulations in effect. Also, even when the laws exist, follow-up investigations by the responsible commission have been insufficiently systematic and relatively ineffective'." [9]

Another well known international index with indicators to measure 'good governance' is developed by the *World Bank* and is called *The Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI)*. The WGI

¹ The Caribbean Community (CARICOM). CARICOM's main purposes are to promote economic integration and cooperation among its members (15 Caribbean states), to ensure that the benefits of integration are equitably shared, and to coordinate foreign policy.

project reports aggregate and individual governance indicators for 213 economies over the period 1996–2009, for six dimensions of governance:

1. *Voice and Accountability (VA)* – capturing perceptions of the extent to which a country's citizens are able to participate in selecting their government, as well as freedom of expression, freedom of association, and free media.
2. *Political Stability and Absence of Violence (PV)* – capturing perceptions of the likelihood that the government will be destabilized or overthrown by unconstitutional or violent means, including politically-motivated violence and terrorism.
3. *Government Effectiveness (GE)* – capturing perceptions of the quality of public services, the quality of the civil service and the degree of its independence from political pressures, the quality of policy formulation and implementation, and the credibility of the government's commitment to such policies.
4. *Regulatory Quality (RQ)* – capturing perceptions of the ability of the government to formulate and implement sound policies and regulations that permit and promote private sector development.
5. *Rule of Law (RL)* – capturing perceptions of the extent to which agents have confidence in and abide by the rules of society, and in particular the quality of contract enforcement, property rights, the police, and the courts, as well as the likelihood of crime and violence.
6. *Control of Corruption (CC)* – capturing perceptions of the extent to which public power is exercised for private gain, including both petty and grand forms of corruption, as well as "capture" of the state by elites and private interests.

These indicators are based on hundreds of specific and disaggregated individual variables measuring various dimensions of governance, taken from 35 data sources provided by 33 different organizations. The data reflect the views on governance of public sector, private sector and NGO experts, as well as thousands of citizens and firm survey respondents worldwide. According to the WGI small states appear to have a reasonably good record of governance, specially European and Caribbean small states [10].

The *Commonwealth Secretariat's Composite Vulnerability Index* [11] is another useful instrument which can be used as an operational tool in determining whether small states are vulnerable and should be accorded differential treatment by the international community. It is intended as an additional criterion to augment other factors, such as per capita income, which are taken into account in reaching decisions on the treatment of certain developing countries by international organizations. The findings of the index are quite positive for small states.

Another source from which we know that the relation between size and corruption does not hold, is the survey of National Integrity Systems (NISIPAC) conducted in 2003–2004 in 12 Pacific Island countries. Small islands such as Niue tend to have less corruption than larger ones such as the Solomon Islands or Papua New Guinea [12].

The assumption that 'small size' and 'islandness' in itself is a hindrance to good governance, is often taken for granted. This turns out to be not quite right when we look at the most recent research findings.

4. THE IMPACT OF COUNTRY SIZE AND ISLANDNESS

Researchers often argue in contradiction with each other that small states differ from large states. As far as research has been done, the literature on the consequences of size and islandness on corruption falls into two general categories. The first group of researchers argue that size does not matter and the second group of academia argue that size is a crucial factor.

Supporters of the first group are D. Bräutigam and M. Woolcock [13]. They examined various hypotheses about the reasons for the development performance of small developing countries between 1960–1998. They used an aggregated data set on governance, growth, social development and inequality. Bräutigam and Woolcock argue that studies of small states tend to focus on the nature of their vulnerabilities, but that smallness not always need to be a liability. They say that the differences between small and large countries are real, but concentrated in relatively few variables. Small countries experience for example more volatile growth rates and are more aid and trade dependent, but there should be no significant difference between small and large countries in terms of the quality of their institutions.

Also S. Knack and O. Azfar argue that size does not matter. They demonstrate in *'Trade intensity, country size and corruption'* [14] that empirical links between corruption and country size and trade intensity are sensitive to sample selection bias. They state: "*Most available corruption indicators provide ratings only for those countries in which multinational investors have the greatest interest: these tend to include almost all large nations, but among small nations only those that are well-governed. We find that the relationship between corruption and country size weakens or disappears using samples less subject to selection bias.*"

A. K. Rose of the University of California published a study with the title *'Size really doesn't matter, In search of a national scale effect'* [15]. He used data that includes 200 countries over 40 years and linked the population of a country to a host of economic and social phenomena. Using both graphical and statistical techniques, he searched for an impact of size on the level of income, inflation, material well-being, health, education, the quality of a country's institutions, heterogeneity, and a number of different international indices and rankings. The main finding of the study was: small countries are more open to international trade than large countries, but are not systematically different otherwise. Rose states that there seems to be no strong visual relationship between a country's population and a host of social phenomena of relevance. According to Rose larger countries do not seem to be much richer, healthier, better educated, more diverse, or better off than smaller countries. There should also be little evidence from any of the graphical evidence as presented by Rose that one or two outlier countries dominate the data. Rose' findings confirm the impression that size simply does not matter.

On the other hand academia argue the importance of size. Small states should differ from larger states on economic, social and political factors. Different studies mention characteristics which are typical for small states. Small states should have higher per capita incomes and productivity levels; better human development indicators; proportionately larger governments; higher poverty and inequality; greater economic openness; higher volatility in growth rates; higher levels of aid intensity per capita; greater

political centralization; possibly higher corruption levels; weaker state capacity; and higher unit cost of public service [13].

Katzenstein [16] examined small countries, with regard to smaller states in Western Europe and stated *'political centralization tends to be greater and political arrangements tend to be more closely knit'*. The small countries in his analyses all tended toward corporatist political arrangements, integrating major stakeholders in important government policy deliberations. Although Bräutigam and Woolcock [13] generally consider that size doesn't matter, they confirm the possibility that these close-knit political arrangements and centralization can lead to higher levels of corruption in small countries, as their officials may be more accessible to clientism and 'old boy network' pressures. Other studies confirming this assumption are done by B. Ray [17], Nauta & Van Gennip [18], M. Goede [19], G. Oostindie & P. Sutton [20], R. Römer [21] P. Schotborgh-van de Ven [22]. In those studies small states are characterized by a high level of bureaucrats, 'closely knit' and 'highly personalized' relationships which may promote clientism and rent-seeking. On the whole, those academica explain those characteristics of small scale states as follows:

- The small distance between the politicians and the civil society is often mentioned as a good breeding-ground for corruption. Personal ties are likely to be strong, particularly if people are educated in the same schools and basically all know each other. Often personal factors are more important than substantive and ideological factors. Oostindie and Sutton call this 'exaggerated personalism'. The pressure that goes out of friendship or family relationship to an administrative decision should not be underestimated. As Huberts argues: *"The closer the organizational relationships between politicians and bureaucrats and between those functionaries and business, the higher the public corruption and the more corrupt the country"* [5] (Huberts, 2010: 187);

- Intellectual capacity of a small society is limited. This brings the following risks with it. In the first place the danger of the concentration of powers. Duties are fulfilled by the same people which easily leads to conflict of interest. In the second place, individuals can obtain official positions which in a large context would not be allocated. In the third place, small countries tend to hire the necessary expertise from abroad, from large countries. Those 'large countries experts' tend to look to governance in small countries as merely 'scaled down' versions of governance in large countries;

- The ability to influence elections illegal is in small-scale societies considerably higher than in large-scale societies. In those situations where only with a few more votes a seat can be conquered, there is a real risk that politicians buy votes;

- The government is often the largest employer in small-scale societies, formally and informally involved in everything. In small countries this 'governmental pervasiveness' often brings the risk of patronage with it. Everybody depends on the government for something. In a society with little economic alternatives and where anonymity is not possible, people get resigned. The tendency to account the government or each other for irregularities, is not large.

Small states are often islands. As far as empirical data exist, studies show that it is methodologically difficult to distinguish the effects of small scale and islandness. Oostindie and Sutton state

that smallness and islandness reinforce each other. They mention 'insularity' as the most obvious characteristic about islandness. The scope of the political culture is often strongly inward. The preservation of the island's own sovereignty and autonomy is often raised above political alternatives.

Another characteristic about islandness which is frequently mentioned in the literature is 'homogeneity'. Islanders share the same values, feel solidarity and tend to unit against 'the world' [18, 20].

All these characteristics can have positive or negative effects on the society, depending on other features. Literature shows that it is important to be aware of the diversity of the islands. They all have unique history, different economic sources and different politics. The literature that has been studied to write this paper shows that the effects of the above mentioned characteristics, will positive or negative depending primarily on two factors, namely the geographic position of the island and the administrative model which is handled.

5. CRUCIAL FACTORS: GEOGRAPHICAL POSITION AND THE ADMINISTRATIVE MODEL

In several crime reports and academic studies the arise of the drugs market in the Caribbean in the nineties is seen as the main cause of crime, including corruption [23]. According to research done by Collier [25], the Caribbean has a real political corruption problem that is significantly retarding the region's development. Several Caribbean islands have barren land, few have energy sources, besides tourism and international financial activities there are few economic alternatives. The islands cannot take advantage of cross-border trade by land routes as can continental states. The island states are dependable on costly air and sea transport. The strategic position of the Caribbean islands between North and South America, being a gateway to Europe, made this geographical part of the world very attractive for illegal activities. The majority of crimes, committed in the Caribbean is drugs related. The majority of the convicts in the region has been convicted for drugs or related offences. The temptation of earning money with drugs is overpowering. Some take the risk to obtain large amounts of money quickly and illegally rather than earn small amounts slowly [24]. Being an island means having a seaport and beaches, a long coastline, all important for the supply of drugs or other illegal goods. The weak economy in the Caribbean region formed a good breeding-ground for the drugtrade and a considerable increase in corruption [1, 5, 19]. Corruption is what allows the illegal trade to flourish. Payments to government officials, police officers, and justice system officials cause the officials to 'look the other way'.

Most Caribbean islands do not have a clear crime picture of corruption. Available (hard) knowledge is limited, fragmented and, according to experts, only the tip of the iceberg. The dark number in corruption is high because this type of crime is difficult to prove, often secretly conducted, there are no direct victims making a declaration. Discovery is often addressed internally. For example in Curaçao, registered offenses that may constitute corruption can be counted on almost two hands over the past 10 years. But at the same time there are signs of contacts between (offender) criminals, officials and politicians in the form of help for drug trafficking, immigration and document fraud. In 2003, Curaçao was flooded with drugs. In almost all investigations the

police noticed corruptive contacts between officials of the government and the criminals [26].

The resources that are spent on combating crime in the Caribbean islands are substantial. The Caribbean islands are faced with legal, administrative and linguistic diversity, limited numbers or insufficiently qualified or trained personnel. Caribbean law enforcement is faced with a number of challenges: coordination of activities and actions within individual countries and throughout the region.

In other words small island states in the Caribbean are particularly vulnerable to corruption by drugs money. Collier states that the mixture of corruption and drugs creates a vicious circle of crime and violence that is engulfing many of the small Caribbean states.

To be able to resist these threats for the Caribbean region, a tightly organized government is important. The analyses of Oostindie and Sutton about small scale and quality of governance with special reference to the Caribbean, is impressive and clear in this respect. They made a distinction between small independent states and small non-independent territories and concluded that the Commonwealth Caribbean has better records on good governance. The Commonwealth Secretariat based in London has been supporting activities for 'good governance' in the Caribbean for many years. The British and French models in the Caribbean are more hierarchical than the Dutch. There is a stricter supervision of the local government. The Dutch model is the most complex and least transparent and offers room for oblique marching managers. The research results of Nauta and Van Gennip [17] are in line with this. In their study of *Checks and balances in the Caribbean operating systems, an evaluation of Aruba, the Netherlands Antilles, Barbados, Anguilla and Saint Martin* they conclude that the British and the French overseas government has put the parliamentary and legislative powers in their overseas territories under constant supervision to reach good government. The role of CARICOM is also mentioned by Nauta and Van Gennip as very important to reduce corruption in the Caribbean.

6. CONCLUSION

The Caribbean basin is a complex arena in many ways. The islands are characterized by their small scale, particularly geographic situation, unique history, different governance models, languages and jurisdictions. The recent efforts of Transparency International and the World Bank give us insight in the empirical evidence concerning good governance and corruption.

A lack of academic research, problems of definition, operationalization and measurement have thus far not led to unambiguous insights. Nevertheless there are similarities between the various studies which are used for the writing of this paper. Most academics agree about typical characteristics which come along with smallness and islandness. If those factors have a positive or a negative effect depends on the environment and administrative model of the island. The particularly geographic situation of the Caribbean islands in a drugs transit zone between producing and consuming countries makes corruption necessary to facilitate the illegal activities. The administrative model of the small island state determines whether the prevention and combating of corruption is effective.

This paper is far from a final study of the effects of small size and islandness on corruption in the Caribbean. Hopefully a start has been made with this paper.

7. REFERENCES

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