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The Surprising Case of Police Bribery Reduction in South Africa

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The Developmental Leadership Program (DLP) is an international research initiative based at the University of Birmingham, and working in partnership with La Trobe University in Melbourne.

DLP aims to increase understanding of the political processes that drive or constrain development. Its work focuses on the crucial role of home-grown leaderships and coalitions in forging legitimate institutions that promote developmental outcomes.

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Summary

This case study examines police-related bribery in Limpopo province, South Africa. It asks why such bribery reduced by almost 15% between 2011 and 2015, while the rate in the rest of the country reduced by on average less than 4%.

This bribery reduction in Limpopo's police took place during the time that the national government led an unprecedented high-level anticorruption intervention in several provinces, but a specific intervention in Limpopo, unrelated to the police, affected bribery levels dramatically and quite quickly. The research suggests the police in Limpopo may have been especially reluctant to engage in bribery then because of uncertainty as to whether they were also under investigation and because of the heightened anticorruption action. The bribery reduction in the police was likely an unanticipated 'benign side effect' of a separate intervention.

This case shows that certain types of disruption may reduce bribery patterns, but only for a relatively short time. For longer-term impact, disruption strategies likely need to be continuously inventive and re-inventive, and/or to be driven by strong leadership that can and will continually disrupt corruption patterns.

The research also highlights how new insights can emerge from anticorruption research that focuses on specific forms of corruption in a specific place, sector and time.

Characteristics specific to the police sector—such as a high degree of discretion, peer solidarity and regular contact with criminals—can make fighting entrenched corruption particularly difficult. While the long-term sustainability of the impact of this unusual intervention is questionable, the case teaches a wider lesson: a disruptive event can counteract sector-specific factors that likely enable entrenched patterns of corruption, and this can happen more quickly than expected.

Introduction

'A new dawn is upon us … This is the year in which we will turn the tide of corruption in our public institutions'
(South African President Cyril Ramaphosa in his maiden speech to parliament, 15 February 2018)

When South African President Cyril Ramaphosa took office following the resignation of Jacob Zuma in early 2018, he quickly identified fighting corruption and restoring the integrity of public institutions as one of his priorities. This was celebrated in the world's media, even as the scale of the challenges facing him were set out in detail (see, for example, Cotterill, 2018; Frum, 2018; Mde, 2018; Onishi, 2018). Perceptions of how South Africa compares with other nations on corruption have worsened in the past decade: the country ranked 43rd out of 179 countries on Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index in 2007, on which a lower ranking indicates a control of corruption, but had risen to 71st out of 180 countries a decade later, in 2017 (Transparency International, 2007, 2017). Indeed, South Africa has recently been described as possessing a 'unique political-criminal climate of corruption' (Faull, 2007: 3; Basson & De Toit, 2017).

Fifteen years ago, Transparency International's Global Corruption Barometer (GCB), a household-level survey, posed a question to its South African respondents: if you were given a 'magic wand' that could eliminate corruption from one institution in the country, what institutions would you wave it at? The police garnered the most votes: almost a quarter of South Africans volunteered this as their first choice. By comparison, only 4% named the courts (Transparency International, 2003). Faull (2007: 1) writes that police corruption is such a salient issue because 'the police represent the only visible point of support and hope for a safer future'.

The South African Police Service (SAPS) is mandated by Section 205 of the South African Constitution (Republic of South Africa, 1996) to prevent, combat and investigate crimes, including corruption. However, South Africa's public has little faith in the SAPS's ability or willingness to do this. According to the South African Social Attitudes Survey—a nationally representative household-level survey of citizens' attitudes—two-thirds of South Africans believe that it is in the national police service that the most corrupt government officials are located (as reported by Corruption Watch, 2012).

Perceptions of corruption in the police have likely been shaped by the many high-profile cases of corruption right at the top of SAPS. For example, in June 2001, the National Head of Organised Crime, Assistant National Commissioner Albert Eksteen, was arrested and faced more than 100 charges related to fraud (IOL, 2001). A year earlier, KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Head of Organised Crime, Piet Meyer, was charged with bribes and protecting criminal syndicates (Newham, 2002). Former Head of Crime Intelligence Richard Mdluli was also arrested on corruption and murder charges; although he was eventually not convicted, he was relieved of his duties after six years on suspension, throughout which he received his salary (Mahlati, 2018).

Few cases, though, are as infamous as that of Jacky Selebi, the former National Police Commissioner (2000–2009). In 2010, Selebi was found guilty of corruption, fraud and racketeering for contravening Section 4(1)(a) of the Prevention and Combating of Corrupt Activities Act (12 of 2004) (Selebi v State, 2010). He was convicted of corruption after accepting bribes from drug dealer Glenn Agliotti in exchange for, among other things, top secret police reports (Basson, 2010). The track records of those following Selebi in the role of national police commissioner are almost as impressive. Bheki Cele (2009–2012) replaced Selebi but was removed under suspicion that he too was involved in corruption (BBC, 2012). Rhiah Phiyega (2012–2015) was removed because of her lack of fitness to hold office rather than for corruption (Khoza, 2017). Khomotso Phahlane (2015–2017), Phiyega's replacement, was recently removed for involvement in corruption (Serrao, 2018).

In terms of the lower ranks of the police, SAPS annual reports show that relatively few officers are ever arrested for corruption. From 2013/14 to 2015/16, only two dozen police officials were arrested for engaging in corruption, registering only eight corruption-related criminal convictions (IPID, 2013/14; 2014/15; 2015/16).

Corruption Watch, a South African anticorruption advocacy organisation, receives reports of corruption from citizens across the country, which it collects in person, or more frequently by means of telephone, e-mail, regular mail and social media platforms. According to its 2017 annual report, Corruption Watch received 2,700 reports of police corruption between 1 January and 30 June 2017. Reports of police corruption accounted for the second highest number of corruption reports received, with bribery the leading type of corruption reported among the police (see Corruption Watch, 2017).

If police officials can engage in corrupt activities with impunity, there will inevitably be low arrest rates alongside high levels of corruption. According to Corruption Watch's 2017 annual report, this seems to be exactly the case.

So imagine our surprise when the police sector emerged as a potential 'positive outlier' of bribery reduction as part of our research project on 'islands of integrity'.[1] The term 'positive outlier' is used here to describe an unexpected reduction in bribery in a specific sector within a country. Our search for positive outliers contributes to a growing literature that examines how different types of subnational developmental progress can occur in challenging national governance environments (Leonard, 1991; Tendler, 1997; Donaldson, 2008; Roll, 2011; Melo et al., 2012; Andrews, 2013, 2015; Naazneen et al., 2014).

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1   For details of the wider project, see dlprog.org/research/islands-of-integrity-understanding-the-politics-of-corruption-reduction.php

It was through our use of a novel case identification methodology that we unearthed the surprising and previously unrecognised case of bribery reduction in the SAPS and, as we will see, in Limpopo province in particular. The methodology employed is unique to the field in its ability to identify cases of 'hidden' developmental progress that have not been documented before.

The police sector, at a national level, was initially identified as a potential positive outlier because, according to data from the GCB, the bribery rate to the police had reduced dramatically, far more than in other sectors the survey asked about. However, it was survey data from Afrobarometer, disaggregated by province, that illuminated the curious case of police-related bribery reduction in Limpopo.

The provincial data showed that national figures on police-related bribery were likely disguising an especially impressive provincial story. Police-related bribery rate had not fallen in all provinces of the country, but it had done so most dramatically in Limpopo. Specifically, Limpopo's provincial police-related bribery rate reduced by almost 15% between when the nation was surveyed by Afrobarometer in 2011 and 2015, while the rate for the other eight provinces reduced by on average less than 4%. We therefore focus on explaining why it is that police-related bribery likely reduced in Limpopo between 2011 and 2015.

Our research highlights the role of an unprecedented—if unrelated—national government anticorruption intervention in the province. From 2011 to 2015, the national government intervened in Limpopo by effectively taking control of five influential provincial departments—none of which was directly related to the police sector. As part of this effort, many high-profile corruption investigations were conducted—albeit, again, not directly targeted at the police. This points to a potential 'benign side effect' on police bribery rather than a direct intervention effect. As Perri 6 (2010: 53), describes: 'Benign side effects are relatively common. Not infrequently, governments – or at least, lucky ones – undertake a policy for one reason and find that its implementation turns out to be useful for other goals.'

We apply a 'sectored' lens to understand how it is that an ostensibly unrelated intervention in Limpopo influenced the behaviour of the province's police. The lens illuminates the various police sector-specific characteristics—such as a high degree of discretion in police work, police solidarity and the regular engagement police have with criminals—that can make fighting entrenched corruption within the sector so difficult. We suggest that, in light of the intervention, the police in Limpopo likely perceived that the national government had taken effective 'command and control' over anticorruption, and that a new fear of being held accountable disrupted bribery patterns that were previously relatively commonplace and enabled.

The research therefore suggests that bribery reduction in this case was likely an *unanticipated* consequence of this unprecedented high-level intervention. While the long-term sustainability of the impact of this unusual intervention is questionable, the case teaches a wider lesson that a disruptive event can counteract sector-specific factors that likely enable entrenched patterns of corruption, and that this can happen more quickly than the field generally anticipates.

Methodology used to identify bribery reduction in Limpopo as a potential 'positive outlier'

Our attention was called to police bribery reduction in Limpopo through a three-stage methodology. This aims to identify sectors within a country where bribery has reduced far more than what could be expected, given the bribery patterns observed in other sectors in the same country.

Most studies aiming to examine exceptional developmental progress choose cases based on their reputations for being success stories (Leonard, 1991; Grindle, 1997; Owusu, 2006; Roll, 2011; Melo et al., 2012; Andrews, 2013, 2015; Naazneen et al., 2014). In contrast, the methodology we used promises to identify impressive bribery reduction in sectors that may not have previously been brought forward (Peiffer & Armytage, 2018). If we had followed the reputational sampling path as well, a reduction in police-related bribery in South Africa would likely never have come onto our radar, given the sector's abysmal reputation.

The methodology's three stages involve 1) statistical analyses of sectoral bribery rates and statistical identification, 2) desk research that is used to vet statistically identified cases and 3) qualitative fieldwork that aims to examine how it is that bribery reduced in the cases scrutinised (see Peiffer & Armytage, 2018 for a full description of the methodology). Our execution of the first stage of the methodology highlighted the fact that bribery had likely significantly reduced in the police sector across South Africa; it was in the execution of the second stage of the methodology that we became aware of a possible reduction of police related bribery in Limpopo specifically. We describe this methodological journey below.

Statistical analyses

The statistical analyses that led to the identification of South Africa's police sector as a potential positive outlier used simple regression analyses of sector-specific bribery rates in over 100 countries, which were constructed from Transparency International's GCB. Comparatively, the GCB dataset contains the largest geographic and temporal reach of individuals' responses

to questions probing their experiences with bribery, across multiple sectors (Peiffer, 2012). The latest wave (2015) surveyed 162,136 adults in 119 countries (Transparency International, 2018). The results of the analyses identified several statistically significant outlying cases—that is, country sectors that had experienced a statistically unexpected change in bribery, given bribery patterns associated with other sectors in the same country over the same period of time.

South Africa's police sector was one of 18 potential positive outliers identified in this stage of the methodology. According to the GCB, in 2013 over a quarter of all South Africans paid a bribe to the police but by 2015 the police bribery rate was less than 2%.

While the GCB records that the bribery rate for all other sectors in the country over the same time period also reduced, other sectors' bribery rates reduced on average only 8 percentage points. Given other sectors' more modest reduction in bribery, the 25.5% reduction in the police-related bribery rate was flagged by the analyses as extraordinarily exceptional; our analyses estimated that there was less than a 5% chance of police bribery in South Africa reducing to the extent recorded by the GCB.

Vetting the case

The second stage of the identification methodology involved vetting the case using desk research. It was in this stage that we noticed that police-related bribery in Limpopo, specifically, had fallen dramatically. The aim of this second stage is to assess whether, using additional information, it is possible to prove inaccurate the bribery reduction that is recorded statistically. This step is important, because statistical outliers are sometimes a product of errors in the underlying quantitative data. We carried out three activities to vet the case.

First, we compared GCB data on bribery in South Africa to data from Afrobarometer. Like the GCB, Afrobarometer routinely asks a nationally representative sample of South Africans whether they have paid a bribe to the police. Afrobarometer data also showed an impressive reduction in bribery for the sector. A comparison between Afrobarometer's 2011 and 2015 survey waves suggests bribery to the police fell 6.1% in South Africa in this period. Although the reduction Afrobarometer highlighted is not nearly as dramatic as what the GCB documented, the trend found in Afrobarometer data supports the idea that bribery reduced significantly in the sector over a similar timeframe.

Afrobarometer's dataset also proved useful for another reason. Unlike the GCB, Afrobarometer records the province that each South African respondent resides in, and this information allowed us to scrutinise the extent to which the reduction in police-related bribery, as documented by Afrobarometer, was concentrated provincially. Our comparisons across provinces showed Limpopo as experiencing the most dramatic reduction in police bribery, by far.

As noted earlier, according to Afrobarometer, Limpopo's provincial police-related bribery rate reduced by almost 15% between 2011 and 2015, while the average rate for the other eight provinces reduced by only 3.9%. Notably, in North West province, according to Afrobarometer, police-related bribery *increased* by 2% over the same period. The scrutiny of the provincial-level data, therefore, highlighted the curious case of police-related bribery reduction in Limpopo specifically.

In addition to vetting the case by examining Afrobarometer data, we reviewed newspaper articles, journal articles and grey literature, and in doing so found no conclusive evidence to suggest bribery had not reduced in the sector, nationally or in Limpopo. However, we also found very little evidence in these sources to support the notion that bribery had reduced in the sector. We did not uncover any media coverage of the bribery reduction as documented in the GCB and Afrobarometer, and the South African chapter of Transparency International did not highlight the reduction. We also did not uncover any research on the topic at any of South Africa's excellent centres for crime and policing research.

Finally, we consulted with experts familiar with South Africa's police sector. Experts were identified using a snowball sampling technique that started with contacts drawn from the research teams' personal networks of colleagues and academic contacts, as well as e-mails to scholars who have published academic research on corruption in South Africa's police. The experts were academic criminologists, anticorruption non-governmental organisation (NGO) staff and SAPS practitioners.

A few of the experts offered tentative hypotheses as to why bribery may have reduced across the nation, but none was fully convinced that the data reflected reality. Rather, a majority of those we consulted expressed a deep scepticism that the bribery rate had reduced. Moreover, none of the experts we initially consulted with, at this stage, offered a hypothesis specific to Limpopo that could help explain the acute reduction in police bribery there. It is important to note that, conversely, none of these experts was able to present compelling evidence that suggested that the reduction recorded in either the GCB or Afrobarometer was inaccurate.

Despite these reservations of experts and NGOs and the lack of coverage of the bribery reduction trend in academic and news sources, we continued to investigate the case. This is because the identification methodology promises to identify previously unrecognised cases of surprising developmental progress (Peiffer & Armytage, 2018). As such, we were interested in testing the identification methodology, to see if the statistical data had indeed pointed us to a hidden reform story that could withstand more fine-grained qualitative analysis.

Fieldwork

We conducted six weeks of fieldwork in South Africa. The identification of respondents again partially relied on the extended research team's contacts and the snowball sampling initiated in the second stage of the identification methodology. The process uncovered a large pool of expert respondents willing to share their expertise and experiences. Once in-country, we used these informants to provide suggestions and introductions to sector practitioners. We sought to engage academics and researchers, relevant government representatives and journalists, while concentrating most interviews on the practitioners best placed to explain changes to bribery-related behaviours within the South African police.[2]

The fieldwork was conducted in Johannesburg, Pretoria, Cape Town, Polokwane (the capital of Limpopo province) and several small towns (which will not be named to preserve the anonymity of respondents) in the province of Limpopo. A total of 35 key informants, including senior police leadership, station commanders, mid-ranking police, constables and members of the specialised policing unit known as the Hawks were interviewed through in-depth, semi-structured interviews, with some informants interviewed several times. Interviews were also conducted with journalists reporting on policing and crime, policing researchers, retired police and key government officials. One member of the research team (Trevor Budhram) is also a police trainer and former police officer.

The 'Limpopo Intervention'[3]

Afrobarometer's fifth- and sixth-wave results highlighted that police-related bribery had reduced most dramatically in Limpopo. Afrobarometer's data also showed that perceptions of corruption in the police had also fallen in Limpopo between 2011 and 2015, suggesting that a wider shift had taken place in the police–community relationship in the province. In 2011, according to Afrobarometer, more than half of those surveyed in Limpopo said that 'most or all police are corrupt'; in 2015 that figure had nearly halved (28%). In fact, by 2015 people in Limpopo were the least likely in the country to judge their police as being mostly or all corrupt. In 2015, 43% of South Africans outside of Limpopo judged their police as being mostly or all corrupt, with those from Gauteng province the least trusting: nearly 70% of respondents from Gauteng thought of their police as mostly or all corrupt. What could have affected police bribery and community–police dynamics in Limpopo during this timeframe?

The province was pushed into the national spotlight in December 2011, when South Africa's National Cabinet surprised many by announcing that it would invoke Section 100(1)(b) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa of 1996 to put five key Limpopo provincial departments under national government administration (Uwizeyimana, 2014). The move effectively meant that the national Executive Branch would take over the executive functions of the province normally performed by members of the provincial Executive Branch (Republic of South Africa, 1996: 57).

Section 100(1)(b) mandates that the national government will intervene to fulfil a provincial government's constitutional or legislative obligations when it is clear that the provincial government will not be able or is not willing to do so (Munzhedzi, 2014). The national government argued that it had no choice but to intervene because the province was technically bankrupt; it claimed that it was almost R2.7 billion in the red when Section 100(1)(b) was invoked (Uwizeyimana, 2014).

The departments put under national administration were the provincial Treasury, Education, Transport and Roads, Health and Public Works. These are the biggest drivers of service delivery in the province, together consuming the largest percentage of the provincial budget (Seopela, 2012: 8). While putting spheres of government under administration is not a new phenomenon in South Africa, invoking Section 100(1)(b) in Limpopo attracted significant media attention and some public outcry; it was the first time a province had had as many as five provincial departments put under administration at the same time (Uwizeyimana, 2014).

The national government cited the following issues found in the province as reasons for the intervention: supply chain management violations (tenders awarded without bidding processes being followed); poor budget practices; poor asset management; unauthorised expenditures (including over-expenditure, or spending far more than what was budgeted or legislated for); and irregular expenditures (expenditures not at all related to any applicable legislation) (Munzhedzi, 2014). In the 2011/12 financial year, the National Treasury reported that the provincial government had accumulated unauthorised expenditures of over R2.5 billion, and by October of 2011 it had exhausted its overdrafts with both the commercial and the reserve banks (PMG, 2012).[4]

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2   Our interviewees also offered other hypotheses as to why police-related bribery had reduced nationally. However, our focus here is on what we found regarding bribery reduction in Limpopo specifically.

3   Most recent figures suggest Limpopo is the poorest province in the country; it has the lowest average household income, for example, and the highest proportion of citizens living below the poverty line (SSA, 2017a). It also has the smallest proportion of white South Africans in the country and the largest proportion of black South Africans. About 10% of South Africa's population lives in Limpopo (SSA, 2017b).

4   Some suspicions were voiced about the government's motivations. The government claimed it had invoked Section 100(1)(b) because of the province's poor financial position and poor management, with significant evidence to support this. Some, however, claimed the move was politically motivated, rather than a genuine response to the province's financial crisis. These included Cassel Mathale, the Limpopo Premier and African National Congress (ANC) Limpopo Chair. Mathale and Julius Malema, the former ANC Youth League President, who was from Limpopo, fell out of favour with President Zuma following their public criticism of him and their very public

The intervention proved extremely disruptive for the province. Not only had the national government descended on the province to straighten up provincial offices, but also the intervention required South Africa's Directorate of Priority Crime Investigation (DPCI, also known as the 'Hawks')—whose mandate it is to target organised crime, economic crime, corruption and other serious crimes—and the Anti-Corruption Task Team (ACTT)—an executive-controlled institution, tasked with dealing with serious cases of corruption—to probe allegations of corruption that were uncovered during the investigations that led to the intervention (DPCI and ACTT, 2013). Forensic accounting and other tools were used to demonstrate the poor and sometimes corrupt financial practices rife in the institutions (ibid.).

By the end of the intervention, the ACTT alone had filed 43 corruption cases that were directly related to the Limpopo Intervention (DPCI and ACTT, 2015). However, the total shake-up was likely wider. In his 2014 State of the Province Address, Limpopo Premier Chupu Mathabatha claimed that nearly 300 people had either charged or faced corruption-related charges since the start of the intervention (Mathabatha, 2014: 22). Official figures may also underestimate the extent of the overhaul, as many officials resigned before the conclusion of their respective disciplinary processes (DPCI and ACTT, 2013).

Aside from the anticorruption drive, the intervention also saw the establishment of an electronic accounting system, a review and update of the provincial supply chain management policy and stabilisation of the budget (Treasury, 2014). By many measures, the intervention appeared to be successful. Province Premier Matabatha thanked President Zuma for 'salvaging Limpopo from a next to collapse of corporate governance' (Mathabatha, 2014: 24). By the end of January 2014, the province was in a positive cash position of R4.4 billion (Uwizeyimana, 2014). Out of the red, pressure was put on the national government to exit the province. The national intervention in Limpopo ended in early 2015, with full executive powers returned to the premier of the province and to departmental heads (news24, 2015).

How the Limpopo Intervention influenced police bribery

The size of the national government's intervention in Limpopo was unprecedented (Uwizeyimana, 2014). It resulted in many corruption investigations, led by national anticorruption bodies, into relatively high-level corruption. However, the intervention itself did not probe SAPS in the province. We did not unearth any evidence to suggest there was an interest in focusing on corruption in the police in the province.

Even if such an interest was expressed, Section 100(1)(b) may not have been appropriate for such a matter. This is because Section 100(1)(b) provides for an intervention specific to a province and not into a national agency—and SAPS is a national agency. How could this intervention—focused on relatively high-level corruption and general financial mismanagement—have influenced the behaviour of the ordinary police officers who interact with the public in the province?

Interviews with several officials involved in and deeply familiar with the intervention suggested the intervention likely reduced the willingness of the police in Limpopo to ask for bribes. The highly visible and disruptive intervention—albeit focused on other forms of largely high-level corruption—likely raised awareness of a general push to fight corruption in the province. The intervention also received a high level of coverage in the media, which could have reduced the willingness of the police to engage in bribery. In the words of one police official interviewed (August 2017), who had worked on the intervention, there was

> … a lot of hype around it, there were a lot of initiatives from the Special Investigations Unit, from the Police Joint Chiefs, on that, so obviously [the intervention] created some awareness, so people became a bit more intent that they wouldn't accept or solicit bribes… there was a fear factor from Section 100. There were a lot of activities and clampdowns that were localised. They weren't necessarily orchestrated, but the anticorruption vibe was there. It's a perception that I might be caught…

The disruption of the intervention was likely felt most in Polokwane, the province's capital, where the province's departmental offices are based. About 12% of the people in Limpopo reside in Polokwane's municipal district. Despite it being the capital, Polokwane was described to us by one interviewee as having an almost 'small town' feel, with most people knowing each other or each other's families. In the words of one police official involved in the intervention (August 2017), Polokwane is a '*place where you still greet the neighbours… whereas here [Pretoria] you don't even know the neighbours*'.

During the intervention, an influx of administrators and investigators from Pretoria descended on the provincial capital. According to a senior police official (August 2017) who travelled in and out of Limpopo during the intervention,

> … there were a lot of senior people from government travelling to Polokwane on a daily basis because they were mostly situated [in Pretoria]… So in town, or in the city, there were a lot of strange faces moving around, in government places. And then, besides that, the Hawks also started an investigation there. And even though we don't wear uniforms or drive marked cars, in a small town like that, you notice strange faces.

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show of support for Kgalema Motlanthe, then Deputy President and a challenger to the president's rule over the ANC (news24, 2011; Seopela, 2012). They argued that the move to intervene in Limpopo was retaliatory, and designed to politically discredit them. Of course, the two motivations are not necessarily mutually exclusive; it is entirely possible that the government both was concerned about the weak financial position of the province and sought to use the intervention to politically harm its detractors.

Moreover, police based in Polokwane would have had many opportunities to interact with many of the ACTT and DPCI investigators and prosecutors. The city boasts only one police station. A joint operation centre was set up in a designated space provided at the police station. According to one senior police officer (August 2017) involved in the intervention,

> [Polakwane is] the main name or station under which we register cases... So there were a lot of us going in and out of there [the police station] as well.

Indeed, a 2015 Parliament Committee Report shows that all of the ACTT's corruption cases associated with the intervention were processed in Polokwane (DPCI and ACTT, 2015).

In addition to the anticorruption drive being highly visible, there may have been a generally low level of knowledge on the mandate of the intervention itself. Some of our interviewees observed that police officers in Limpopo may not have understood the scope of Section 100(1)(b). One senior public servant (August 2017) who had been involved in the intervention noted,

> You must understand the people in South Africa, they don't understand how the government is arranged, including those who are working in government. The police will think they are next on the line, and only much later find that they are not as they're not part of the provincial administration. They wouldn't realise they aren't part of the provincial government because they are stationed in a province. They think that they are part of the province. They don't see a difference between a national government, the provincial government and a local government, or a municipality—they don't see the difference. It's just one government to them.

A number of informants involved in this research echoed this view. According to a senior police officer (August 2017) who was engaged in the intervention, local police were largely unaware of what the DPCI and ACTT were investigating; this was taken to mean that they were fearful that they too may be affected. This is partly because the ACTT and the DPCI based themselves in offices that were closed off from regular SAPS in the province.

The same senior police officer suggested that, because of this uncertainty, local police may have resorted to unusual tactics to understand the nature of the investigations; she reported that the local police installed a monitoring device in the house she was renting in Limpopo during the intervention, and she suspected this was done to gain insights into the investigations.

Finally, it was also suggested that traffic police in the province may have been more reluctant to pull over and request bribes from drivers during the intervention. In the words of one senior police official involved in the intervention,

> 'because we don't drive marked cars and wear uniform, there's now the risk that [they] might pull over a Hawks officer or Special Investigating Unit member or a senior government official' (August 2017)

It was suggested that, fearful of unknowingly pulling over a high-ranking officer and/or someone investigating corruption, the traffic police in the province may have stopped fewer cars during the intervention; when they did pull cars over, they would have been less likely to request a bribe because they would have been fearful that they would be doing so to an officer working on the intervention.

This particular dynamic would likely have influenced officers patrolling the N1, the province's main highway; this directly links Polokwane to Pretoria. It is the highway national agents would have frequented most in their commute to Polokwane.

Arguably, traffic police in South Africa have the greatest opportunities of all police to request bribes. They can find cause to charge drivers for infractions, can use pulling over cars in low traffic areas to gain privacy as they request a bribe and can use legitimate official fines as leverage to ask for a bribe or as an incentive for drivers to offer bribes.

If the intervention indirectly deterred traffic police from asking for bribes, this may have significantly affected the total provincial police-related bribery rate. This, in turn, we expect, would also affect public perceptions of police bribery.

It is also worth mentioning that there may also have been a wider sense in the province that the police were under extraordinary scrutiny. Rumours circulated across Limpopo's mainly rural police stations that traps had been set to catch police officials involved in bribery (Shange, 2015). These rumours were further fuelled by evidence that the national office of the SAPS conducted intelligence-driven operations in the province. During the 2011–2015 period, 19 police officers were arrested for corruption in Limpopo district—all arrests that were unconnected to the national intervention (ibid.).

Taken together, the visibility of the national-level intervention, the influx of national agents investigating and prosecuting corruption in the province and lack of awareness about the mandate of the intervention may have led many police officers in the province to be especially cautious. Perceptions of concentrated anticorruption activity and fear of being caught out by the unprecedented intervention may have made many police officers act with caution and avoid engaging in bribery.

Sector characteristics that helped make bribery reduction in the Limpopo SAPS a positive unanticipated consequence

In his recent assessment of the state of research on corruption, Paul Heywood (2017, 2018) reports that much of corruption research has been focused on the nation state as a unit of analysis, and, in doing so, has largely failed to differentiate between different types of corruption, different localities of corruption and the differences in how corruption behaves across sectors. With respect to the latter of these observations, Heywood (2017: 42) calls for a more 'meso-level approach' that can draw attention to corruption's sector-specific characteristics, so as to provide better understanding about the 'modalities of corruption and corruption related risks in key areas'. Heywood (2017: 42) argues that

> … although there have been some attempts to explore the link between particular sectors and corruption (notably, for example, public administration, the energy sector, the judiciary, defence and security and so forth), these have often taken the form of seeking to account for the extent or overall level of corruption within a given polity. What is needed now is a more detailed understanding of how and why corruption takes place within these sectors: what it looks like in practice, what particular characteristics it has, and how we can better identify risks.

To this end, Mcloughlin and Batley's (2012; see also Batley & Mcloughlin, 2015) 'sector characteristics' approach argues that the specific characteristics of a service shape a range of issues surrounding the provision of the service; accountability with respect to service quality; the power dynamics between policy-makers and other actors in relationship to the service; and the extent to which citizens can make demands on how services are delivered. They argue that the 'measurability, transaction-intensity and level of discretion involved in performing different functions influences the degree to which policymakers and bureaucrats can control the behaviour of delivery organisations' (Mcloughlin & Batley, 2012: v). In addition to the unique role they play in terms of anticorruption, the police are set apart as a sector in a number of ways. For example, they operate with a clear command and control hierarchy; they engage regularly with criminals as part of their day-to-day work; and their work, by its very nature, can be extremely dangerous. A sectored lens helps shed light on why—unlike in other sectors—police bribery reduced as a positive unanticipated consequence of the Limpopo intervention.

Like the military, the police operate with a clear command and control hierarchy that—in theory—starts at the top, with a national commissioner, and finishes up with junior desk officers. As a general in the SAPS (August 2017) explained to us, regarding his experience in exerting command and control over several stations,

> At the end of the day, it boils down to command and control, whatever you're trying to do … You take stock of people, supplies, and close the loopholes. Corruption has many forms … So the commander has to be vigilant. They must be hands on and make sure that you as an officer they control everybody.

An academic and expert on South Africa's police (August 2017) also noted the critical nature of strong leadership:

> It's all about command and control. If you have a good commander who is able to pull the command structure together at the police station—and that includes regular inspections, simple stuff … this creates conditions where it is more difficult to be corrupt.

In most police work, station commanders, given the level of control and authority they can exercise within stations, are very important. Specific environments for station commanders shape their interests and incentives to try to control corruption. If corruption is widespread at lower levels, it is unlikely (if not impossible) that it is occurring without senior officers knowing about it. Such widespread corruption would not, however, necessarily imply that station commanders and other senior police approve of such corruption. Gareth Newham, a leading researcher at the Institute for Security Studies (August 2017) explained,

> There are many station commanders who wouldn't take bribes and are deeply concerned with the fact there is bribery going on at the station, but they don't have the support from their juniors to deal with it. If they start taking action against these guys, they are threatened. Cops have been killed. While I was in the [redacted] police station, a detective investigating a colleague involved in organised crime was shot dead. And according to the research I did in the early 2000s, every internal investigation officer I worked with had been intimidated, threatened, their cars vandalised, their offices vandalised, getting threats on their cell phones. And that was investigating the relatively petty stuff sometimes. So, if you're a station commander who wants to fix corruption, you kind of have a death wish.

The responsibility that senior officers hold for the activities of their juniors can create a disincentive for even well-meaning senior officers to report or prosecute corruption among their ranks. In exposing the corruption that happens 'under their noses', they also admit their own inability to maintain effective 'command and control'.

Police work also uniquely involves, by necessity, close engagement with criminals and criminal networks, through investigations, informants, arrests and so on. This both can provide the police with unique opportunities to engage in corrupt activities and makes police much more vulnerable to claims of abuse of power. Vigneswaran and Hornberger (2009: 1) write about the 'informality and ethical ambiguity of real police work'; in order to do effective police work, officers arguably need 'immense discretionary power' (Faull 2007: 3) relative to other sectors: they need to make judgement calls on a regular basis about whether or not following the rules to the letter is the best decision. According to Newham (interview, August 2017),

> Policing is a very particular kind of profession, and it comes with a lot more risk than other kinds of professions— teachers, doctors, etc. Because of the powers they have, they also have great discretion. When they're out on the streets they are not being directly monitored or supervised, and so [they] face very low levels of accountability.

Neither discretion nor informality is, in and of itself, a bad thing, but, as police work also involves close interactions with criminals, the combination of these factors creates a challenging environment for ethical behaviour.

Another unique characteristic of police work is that it is inherently dangerous and high risk. This comes through the interviews we conducted as well: police respondents expressed frustration that the public perceived them all as corrupt but did not adequately appreciate that every day they went to work they literally risked life and limb. They flagged that this was the case for the police everywhere but that police work was especially dangerous in South Africa. One senior police officer (August 2017) explained:

> We read about the corrupt policeman or the policemen who are committing robbery. That sells newspapers. But on a daily basis there's good work being done by policemen in South Africa. Really, to put on a uniform and go rescue the life of people you don't know, in a situation where you don't know what's coming … You're called to a domestic violence incident, and when you get there, it's a house robbery, and they start shooting at you. These guys are putting their lives on the line.

Because of this particularly violent and dangerous working environment, group solidarity among the police can be especially strong, with suspicion of outsiders and codes of silence prevalent (Faull, 2007: 3; Crank, 2015). Crank (2015: 198) summarises the 'dangerous-solidarity hypothesis', which suggests that 'the sheer danger of police work, like combat, encourages strong loyalties, an "all for one and one for all" sense of camaraderie, and a military sense of combat-readiness and general spiritedness.'

Solidarity can also translate into a perceived sense of insularity for the sector. This is because solidarity among the police is also commonly sourced from a shared sense that several societal and governmental groups, including citizens, the courts and the press, wrongfully challenge police authority (Crank, 2015: 198). A professor of policing described the seemingly universal sense that the police were an insular sector (August 2017):

> Within all police services in the world you get this culture of a closed unit, a sense that we are separate from the public. It becomes a culture, and if they think they can get away with it, if they can protect each other, they will get along irrespective of what is being said in the media. They will take the opportunity. Police officers, by virtue of the fact that they are enforcement officers, do have a lot of power.

Solidarity can be expressed positively, through protecting other officers from harm or attending funerals of colleagues (Crank, 2015: 197). However, it can also make anticorruption work particularly difficult. Lester and Brink (1985), for example, found that, in certain contexts, police solidarity might lead to greater tolerance for misbehaviour by fellow police officers. When police are primarily loyal to their colleagues, and their colleagues engage in corruption, the duty the police have to enforce anticorruption laws can become compromised. Moreover, given how tight-knit social relationships between police officers can become, there can be real social consequences to exposing corruption committed by 'one of their own'. Newham (2000: 27), for example, talks about the importance of 'a fear of both personal and professional retaliation' for any anticorruption activity in the SAPS. Retaliation can be threatened against one's family, with spouses also isolated from social relationships. The cost of stepping outside the social networks and violating the codes around solidarity and silence can be high.

When viewed through a sectored lens, the challenges in fighting corruption and in reducing bribery, specifically among the SAPS, can seem almost insurmountable. The sector has suffered from several high-profile corruption scandals, and ordinary South Africans, who are the most likely to interact with the sector's rank and file, rate the sector as one of the country's most corrupt. In combination, the seemingly systemic corruption within the sector and the more generic sector-specific factors discussed here—that police enjoy a high degree of discretion and engage regularly with criminals and that there is often a sense of insularity and solidarity among the police, which can express itself in the police 'protecting their own'—highlight why fighting police corruption in the South African setting is so difficult.

The sector-specific factors discussed imply that the SAPS may be especially tempted to engage in bribery. Their work is both difficult to monitor and there may be a lack of will to enforce anti-bribery mandates within the sector because of the strong loyalties actors are prone to having to each other in the police. As all of these factors represent a challenge to accountability within the sector, they also make clear why it is that effective 'command and control' can be difficult to achieve within a station, and, beyond the station environment, further up the sector's hierarchy.

The Limpopo Intervention's likely unanticipated impact on police behaviour suggests, however, that seemingly entrenched bribery patterns can be disrupted, and the sectored lens helps us understand why. While the Limpopo Intervention did not alter the official SAPS command and control structures in the province, it seems likely to have introduced a perception among the local police that national-level actors had effectively taken command over corruption concerns in the province and were taking salient steps in this regard. Solidarity may also have meant that officers were restrained in their own behaviour so as not to have negative impacts on their fellow officers. In such a fearful environment, which officer would want to endanger the others in their team by getting caught asking for a bribe? The visibility of the Hawks and other anticorruption actors, and the multiple corruption cases being processed in the Polokwane police station, as well as the uncertainty among the police about the intervention's mandate, likely all worked to produce this perception of effective command and control. Any perceived impunity to engage in bribery may have dissipated for a period of time because of the disruption that the intervention caused among the police. Indeed, the case suggests that—despite the sector's unique challenges with regard to bribery and corruption—it was surprisingly easy to disrupt these practices. Whether the impacts on corruption caused by such an unusual disruption are sustained over a longer period of time, however, is questionable—and worthy of future research.

Conclusion

Police-related bribery reduction in Limpopo occurred at the same time that the national government led an unprecedented high-level anticorruption intervention in several provinces. Our research suggests the police in Limpopo may have been especially reluctant to engage in bribery during this time because of an uncertainty as to whether they were also under investigation for corruption and because of the heightened anticorruption action that took place.

The drivers of bribery reduction in this case were likely indirect and unanticipated, a 'benign side effect' of a separate anticorruption intervention. The intervention in Limpopo was not targeted at local police, yet police likely feared they were under greater scrutiny as part of the perceived efficient degree of 'command and control' national-level agents were exerting.

The sustainability of the intervention's impact on bribery reduction in Limpopo is therefore questionable. The intervention was unprecedented and has since ended. We found no expectation that it will have a long-lasting effect on police-related bribery patterns in the province. This case demonstrates that certain types of disruption may work to reduce bribery patterns, but only in a relatively short timeframe. For longer impact, disruption strategies likely need to be continuously inventive and re-inventive, and/or to be driven by strong leadership that can and will continually disrupt corruption patterns.

The research also highlights how new insights can be garnered from an approach to anticorruption research that focuses on specific forms of corruption in a specific place, sector and time. As Heywood (2017: 39) notes, corruption has far too often been researched at the nation state level; however, 'if we are to address corruption for the purposes of effective policy, we need to disaggregate into different types, as well as between different levels and locations in which it occurs.' This call to researchers builds on what is common knowledge in the field—that different types of corruption likely have different drivers and consequences, anticipated or otherwise. And that corruption patterns take different shapes in different locales. Corruption occurring in an urban area, for example, can look very different to corruption occurring in a largely rural province.

To this end, we focused on a specific type of corruption, bribery, in a specific location, Limpopo. We applied a sectored lens to help us understand why the Limpopo Intervention likely had a welcome, if unanticipated, impact on the behaviour of local police. A sectored lens helps highlight 'the pathologies of corruption risks in specific fields' (Heywood, 2018: 11). Bribery in the police is understandably difficult to control, and especially so in a country where bribery more generally is relatively commonplace. This is because there is a high degree of discretion in police work; the citizens police engage with who have committed infractions are more prone to want to pay a bribe to avoid a harsher punishment; and police solidarity and insularity may make officers reluctant to investigate or turn in 'one of their own' for engaging in bribery.

Our research suggests, however, that a sufficiently significant disruptive event—in this case the Limpopo Intervention—can push back against these specific enabling factors that are likely ever-present in police sectors plagued by seemingly entrenched patterns of corruption. This is especially the case if such an event is able to use the sector's own unique characteristics to support this.

It was only by using a novel three-stage identification methodology that we were able to locate the unexpected and previously unrecognised impressive case of police-related bribery reduction in Limpopo. By explicitly scrutinising sector-specific bribery patterns, the methodology provides one way for researchers to adopt the 'meso-level approach' to researching corruption that Heywood describes as needed (2017: 42). Further, by not relying on reputational assessments to identify progress, the methodology was able to identify a positive trend that was 'hidden' or unrecognised. The case therefore also shows that the methodology can usefully identify progress where we would least expect it. While the field has learnt a great deal from well-recognised and well-researched cases of corruption reduction, it is perhaps from these unexpected places—which we perceive as fraught with intractable problems in the fight against corruption—that lessons about how corruption can effectively be disrupted are arguably most valuable.

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