Fighting corruption with cultural dynamics: when legal-origins, religious-influences and existing corruption-control levels matter

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Abstract

Are there different determinants in the fight against corruption across developing countries? Why are some countries more effective at battling corruption than others? To investigate these concerns we examine the determinants of corruption-control throughout the conditional distribution of the fight against corruption using panel data from 46 African countries for the period 2002-2010. Our findings demonstrate that blanket corruption-control policies are unlikely to succeed equally across countries with different legal-traditions, religious-influences and political wills in the fight against corruption. Thus to be effective, corruption policies should be contingent on the prevailing levels of corruption-control and tailored differently across the best and worst corruption-fighting countries especially with respect to democracy, population growth and economic prosperity.

JEL Classification: C10; H10; K10; O10; O55

Keywords: Corruption; Democracy; Government quality; Quantile regression; Africa

1. Introduction

Corruption remains one of the most daunting institutional challenges for majority of African countries. As supported by several studies and surveys, it is a major impediment to economic progress, social welfare, service delivery and good governance in the continent. In
accordance with the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA, 2009, p.1), it is estimated that in 2004, the continent lost more than $148 billion to corruption; approximately 25% of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP). More so, the African Development Bank (ADB, 2006, p.7) suggests that 50% of tax revenue and $30 billion in aid for Africa ends up in corrupt pockets. In line with the UNECA (2005), corruption ranked as one of the three most serious national problems confronting African countries, the other two being unemployment and poverty.

Many African countries have enacted laws, adopted policy measures and established institutions in attempts to address the concern. Still corruption continues to be a lingering issue in governance and economic life. Though some consensus is gradually emerging on the determinants of corruption across countries, a number of aspects remain unsolved. Today policies in the fight against the scourge embraced by national governments and international organizations happen to be similar across countries. Yet the effectiveness of some of these measures remain ambiguous (Billger & Goel, 2009). In the present paper we attempt to explain determinants in the fight against corruption. Its contribution to the literature is threefold. (1) By focusing on the distribution of the dependent variable, we examine if corrupt and ‘clean’ nations respond differently to factors that deter corrupt activity. Contrary to mainstream literature, we are able to provide an assessment of corruption-control contingent on the distribution of corruption-control. (2) The use of much recent data (2002-2010) based on majority (46) of African countries provides findings with inclusive and updated policy implications. (3) Disaggregation of the dataset into four homogenous panels, reflecting legal-origins (Common-law and Civil-law) and religious-influences (Christianity and Islam) could provide more targeted policy implications. Though studies have focused on legal and cultural determinants of
corruption (La Porta et al., 1999), to the best of our knowledge this is the first paper that examines these determinants when existing corruption levels matter. Thus by examining the determinants of corruption-control throughout the conditional distribution with particular emphasis on the best and worst fighters of corruption, policy measures could focus beyond legal-origins and religious-influences if determinants of corruption-control differ across the conditional distribution of the fight against corruption.

2. Data and Methodology

2.1 Data

We assess a panel of 46 countries with updated data (2002-2010) from African Development Indicators (ADI) of the World Bank (WB). To allow for more options in policy implications, the dataset is disaggregated into legal-origins (English common-law and French civil-law) and religious-influences (Christianity and Islam). The endogenous variable is the ‘control of corruption’ indicator; in line with the corruption literature (Billger & Goel, 2009; Okada & Samreth, 2012; Asongu, 2012). Five control variables are used: level of economic prosperity, population growth, democracy, regulation quality and government effectiveness. These measures have been used collectively or separately in a significant bulk of the corruption literature (Bardhan, 1997; Treisman, 2000; Billger & Goel, 2009).

2.2 Methodology

Borrowing from the literature (Billger & Goel, 2009), to determine whether existing levels of corruption-control affect how various determinants in the battle against corruption come into play, we use Quantile Regression (QR). The \( \theta \) th quantile estimator of the outcome variable is obtained by solving for the following optimization problem.
\[
\min_{\beta \in \mathbb{R}^p} \left[ \sum_{i \in \{i \mid y_i \leq x_i \beta \}} \theta_i |y_i - x_i \beta| + \sum_{i \in \{i \mid y_i > x_i \beta \}} (1 - \theta_i) |y_i - x_i \beta| \right]
\]

(1)

Where \( \theta \in (0,1) \). Contrary to Ordinary Least Squares(OLS) that is founded on minimizing the sum of squared residuals, with QR we minimize the weighted sum of absolute deviations. The conditional quantile of \( y_i \) given \( x_i \) is:

\[
Q_i(\theta / x_i) = x_i \beta_{\theta}
\]

(2)

where unique slope parameters are derived for each \( \theta \) th quantile of interest. For the model in Eq.(2) the dependent variable \( y_i \) is the corruption-control indicator while \( x_i \) contains a constant parameter, GDP growth, population growth, democracy, regulation quality and government effectiveness. In comparison to OLS, the QR approach is more robust in the presence of outliers when the distribution of the dependent variable is a highly non-normal pattern (Okada & Samreth, 2012). We also report results of Least Absolute Deviations (LAD) which correspond to the 0.5th quantile.

3. Empirical results

3.1 Legal origins: Common-law and Civil-law countries

The findings presented in Table 1 entail OLS, LAD and QR estimates. While Panel A presents results for English common-law countries, findings for their French civil-law counterparts are captured by Panel B. OLS estimates provide a baseline of mean effects and we compare these to estimates of LAD and separate quantiles in the conditional distributions of the outcome variable.
Table 1: Legal-origin determinants of Corruption-Control (CC)

Panel A: English Common-Law Countries (17)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specification 1</th>
<th>OLS</th>
<th>LAD</th>
<th>Q 0.1</th>
<th>Q 0.25</th>
<th>Q 0.50</th>
<th>Q 0.75</th>
<th>Q 0.90</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.029</td>
<td>-0.007</td>
<td>0.069</td>
<td>0.020</td>
<td>-0.007</td>
<td>0.068</td>
<td>0.323**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.731)</td>
<td>(0.949)</td>
<td>(0.540)</td>
<td>(0.743)</td>
<td>(0.928)</td>
<td>(0.615)</td>
<td>(0.040)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Prosperity</td>
<td>-0.003</td>
<td>-0.004</td>
<td>0.012</td>
<td>0.005</td>
<td>-0.004</td>
<td>-0.007</td>
<td>-0.005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.607)</td>
<td>(0.611)</td>
<td>(0.109)</td>
<td>(0.231)</td>
<td>(0.367)</td>
<td>(0.434)</td>
<td>(0.065)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population growth</td>
<td>-0.149***</td>
<td>-0.134***</td>
<td>-0.328***</td>
<td>-0.254***</td>
<td>-0.134***</td>
<td>-0.065</td>
<td>-0.050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.000)</td>
<td>(0.008)</td>
<td>(0.000)</td>
<td>(0.000)</td>
<td>(0.000)</td>
<td>(0.000)</td>
<td>(0.178)</td>
<td>(0.364)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democracy</td>
<td>0.026***</td>
<td>0.025**</td>
<td>0.005</td>
<td>0.019***</td>
<td>0.025***</td>
<td>0.027**</td>
<td>0.035**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.002)</td>
<td>(0.034)</td>
<td>(0.627)</td>
<td>(0.002)</td>
<td>(0.001)</td>
<td>(0.044)</td>
<td>(0.025)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Regulation Quality</td>
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<td>0.644***</td>
<td>0.664***</td>
<td>0.649***</td>
<td>0.644***</td>
<td>0.628***</td>
<td>0.731***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.000)</td>
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<td>(0.000)</td>
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<tr>
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Panel B: French Civil-Law Countries (29)

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<th>Q 0.50</th>
<th>Q 0.75</th>
<th>Q 0.90</th>
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<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-0.095</td>
<td>-0.083</td>
<td>-0.332***</td>
<td>-0.325***</td>
<td>-0.083</td>
<td>0.178**</td>
<td>0.321***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.157)</td>
<td>(0.592)</td>
<td>(0.000)</td>
<td>(0.000)</td>
<td>(0.257)</td>
<td>(0.018)</td>
<td>(0.006)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Prosperity</td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td>-0.002</td>
<td>0.025***</td>
<td>0.018***</td>
<td>-0.002</td>
<td>-0.003</td>
<td>0.004</td>
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<tr>
<td>(0.491)</td>
<td>(0.822)</td>
<td>(0.000)</td>
<td>(0.000)</td>
<td>(0.623)</td>
<td>(0.546)</td>
<td>(0.616)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population growth</td>
<td>-0.011</td>
<td>-0.005</td>
<td>-0.094***</td>
<td>-0.063***</td>
<td>-0.005</td>
<td>-0.053*</td>
<td>0.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.680)</td>
<td>(0.915)</td>
<td>(0.001)</td>
<td>(0.000)</td>
<td>(0.858)</td>
<td>(0.074)</td>
<td>(0.877)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democracy</td>
<td>0.011</td>
<td>0.006</td>
<td>0.007</td>
<td>0.017***</td>
<td>0.006</td>
<td>0.009</td>
<td>0.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.134)</td>
<td>(0.542)</td>
<td>(0.337)</td>
<td>(0.000)</td>
<td>(0.397)</td>
<td>(0.260)</td>
<td>(0.719)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Government Effectiveness</td>
<td>0.828***</td>
<td>0.841***</td>
<td>0.796***</td>
<td>0.773***</td>
<td>0.841***</td>
<td>0.797***</td>
<td>0.862***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.000)</td>
<td>(0.000)</td>
<td>(0.000)</td>
<td>(0.000)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Notes. Dependent variable is the Control of Corruption index. ***, ***, *, denote significance levels of 10%, 5%, and 1% respectively. Lower quantiles (e.g., Q 0.1) signify nations where the Control of Corruption is least. OLS: Ordinary Least Squares. LAD: Least Absolute Deviation.

The following findings could be established. (1) While economic prosperity increases corruption-control (hence CC) in countries with English legal tradition (with significance at bottom quantiles), it does the contrary in French civil-law countries (with increasing significance across the distribution). (2) Population growth is a negative tool for CC with decreasing...
magnitude for English common-law countries. However its corresponding increasing magnitude in French civil countries turn to make population a positive tool in CC at top quantiles. (3) While democracy is a positive tool for CC in English common-law countries with increasing magnitude, French countries experience a negative effect at the top quantiles of their distribution. (4) Government effectiveness and regulation quality increase CC in both legal systems. (5) OLS estimates are significantly different from those of QR across the distributions; confirming the hypothesis that OLS estimates maybe a misleading policy basis, when countries with the same legal traditions have different levels of CC. (6) The LAD findings correspond to the 0.50th quantile results across specifications.

3.2 Religious-influences: Christian and Islamic countries

The findings presented in Table 2 depict religious-influences in the fight against corruption. While Panel A presents results for Christianity dominated countries, findings for their Islam oriented counterparts are captured by Panel B. OLS estimates provide a baseline of mean effects and we compare these to estimates of LAD and separate quantiles in the conditional distributions of the outcome variable. The following findings could be established. (1) Economic prosperity decreases CC in both religious traditions with the magnitude of the negative effect increasing(decreasing) in Christianity(Islam) oriented countries. (2) While population growth is a tool for CC only at the top quantile of the Christian distribution, its effect is unclear in their Islam oriented counterparts, as the sign changes across specifications. (3) While democracy is a tool for CC from the 0.25th quantile across the distribution(with increasing magnitude) in Christian oriented countries, only bottom quantiles of Islam oriented countries experience the democratization process as a measure of reducing corrupt practices. (4) Government effectiveness and regulation quality increase CC in countries with both religious traditions. (5)
OLS estimates are significantly different from those of QR across the distributions; confirming the hypothesis that OLS estimates maybe a misleading policy basis, when countries with the same religious traditions have different levels of CC. (6)The LAD findings correspond to the 0.50\textsuperscript{th} quantile results across specifications.

### Table 2: Religious determinants of Corruption-Control (CC)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Specification 1</th>
<th>OLS</th>
<th>LAD</th>
<th>Q 0.1</th>
<th>Q 0.25</th>
<th>Q 0.50</th>
<th>Q 0.75</th>
<th>Q 0.90</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-0.158**</td>
<td>-0.046</td>
<td>0.004</td>
<td>-0.025</td>
<td>-0.046</td>
<td>-0.096</td>
<td>-0.155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Prosperity</td>
<td>-0.014***</td>
<td>-0.006</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>-0.003</td>
<td>-0.006*</td>
<td>-0.017***</td>
<td>-0.036***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population growth</td>
<td>-0.048</td>
<td>-0.115***</td>
<td>-0.268***</td>
<td>-0.210***</td>
<td>-0.115***</td>
<td>0.016</td>
<td>0.200**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democracy</td>
<td>0.028***</td>
<td>0.027***</td>
<td>0.012</td>
<td>0.022***</td>
<td>0.027***</td>
<td>0.035***</td>
<td>0.055***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regulation Quality</td>
<td>0.550***</td>
<td>0.627***</td>
<td>0.654***</td>
<td>0.632***</td>
<td>0.627***</td>
<td>0.596***</td>
<td>0.489***</td>
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<table>
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<td>Constant</td>
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<td>-0.313***</td>
<td>-0.127**</td>
<td>-0.048</td>
<td>0.076</td>
<td>0.327***</td>
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<tr>
<td>Economic Prosperity</td>
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<td>-0.013***</td>
<td>-0.001</td>
<td>-0.004</td>
<td>-0.013***</td>
<td>-0.018***</td>
<td>-0.026***</td>
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<td>0.011</td>
<td>-0.030</td>
<td>-0.059**</td>
<td>0.011</td>
<td>0.069*</td>
<td>0.134***</td>
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<tr>
<td>Democracy</td>
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<td>0.003</td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td>0.008</td>
<td>-0.007</td>
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<tr>
<td>Government Effectiveness</td>
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<td>0.799***</td>
<td>0.829***</td>
<td>0.787***</td>
<td>0.790***</td>
<td>0.844***</td>
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### Panel B: Islam Oriented Countries (16)

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<td>0.063</td>
<td>0.140</td>
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<td>0.0007</td>
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<td>-0.001</td>
<td>-0.004</td>
<td>-0.009***</td>
<td>0.008</td>
<td>0.006***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population growth</td>
<td>-0.094***</td>
<td>-0.087*</td>
<td>-0.130***</td>
<td>-0.103***</td>
<td>-0.087***</td>
<td>-0.093*</td>
<td>-0.085***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democracy</td>
<td>0.008</td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td>0.015**</td>
<td>0.012**</td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td>0.005</td>
<td>0.002</td>
</tr>
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<td>Regulation Quality</td>
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<td>0.831***</td>
<td>0.865***</td>
<td>0.851***</td>
<td>0.831***</td>
<td>0.741***</td>
<td>0.821***</td>
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<td>-0.199***</td>
<td>-0.142***</td>
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<td>-0.010***</td>
<td>0.001</td>
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<td>0.101***</td>
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<td>0.081***</td>
<td>0.096***</td>
<td>0.108***</td>
<td>0.114***</td>
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<tr>
<td>Democracy</td>
<td>0.008</td>
<td>0.006</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>0.006</td>
<td>0.005</td>
<td>0.013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Effectiveness</td>
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<td>0.906***</td>
<td>0.831***</td>
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<td>0.895***</td>
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</table>

Notes: Dependent variable is the Control of Corruption index. *, **, *** denote significance levels of 10%, 5% and 1% respectively. Lower quantiles (e.g., Q 0.1) signify nations where the Control of Corruption is least. OLS: Ordinary Least Squares. LAD: Least Absolute Deviation.
4. Conclusion

Our findings demonstrate that blanket corruption control policies are unlikely to succeed equally across countries with different legal-traditions, religious-influences and political wills in the fight against corruption. Thus to be effective, corruption policies should be contingent on the prevailing levels of corruption-control as we have elucidated above. As a policy implication, corruption-control initiatives should be tailored differently across the best and worst corruption-fighting countries especially with respect to democracy, population growth and economic prosperity.
Appendices

Appendix 1: Summary Statistics

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S.D</th>
<th>Min.</th>
<th>Max.</th>
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<td>Control of Corruption</td>
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<td>0.561</td>
<td>-1.694</td>
<td>1.086</td>
<td>414</td>
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<td>Economic Prosperity</td>
<td>4.602</td>
<td>5.254</td>
<td>-31.30</td>
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<td>Population Growth</td>
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<td>-0.143</td>
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<td>414</td>
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Appendix 2: Correlation Analysis

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Reference


