

# Public Administration and Corruption

---

## How to Get the Institutions That Work

Anders Sundell

Göteborg Studies in Politics 142

2015



GÖTEBORGS UNIVERSITET  
STATSVETENSKAPLIGA INSTITUTIONEN

Avhandlingen baseras på följande delstudier:

Sundell, Anders (2014): "Understanding informal payments in the public sector: Theory and evidence from 19th century Sweden." *Scandinavian Political Studies* 37(2):95-122.

Sundell, Anders (2014): "Are formal civil service examinations the most meritocratic way to recruit civil servants? Not in all countries." *Public Administration* 92(2):440-57.

Sundell, Anders (2014): "Nepotism and meritocracy." Unpublished manuscript.

Akademisk avhandling för filosofie doktorsexamen i statsvetenskap som med tillstånd av samhällsvetenskapliga fakultetsnämnden vid Göteborgs universitet framlägges till offentlig granskning fredagen den 5 juni 2015, kl. 10.15 i hörsalen Dragonen, Sprängkullsgatan 19, Göteborg.

Sundell, Anders. 2015. *Public Administration and Corruption. How to Get the Institutions That Work*. Göteborg Studies in Politics 142, edited by Bo Rothstein, Department of Political Science, University of Gothenburg, Box 711, 405 30 Göteborg, Sweden. ISBN 978-91-628-9445-0, ISSN 0346-5942.

## **Abstract**

Corruption is a global problem, impacting on both economic and human development. The last few decades, social science research has paid increasing attention to the problem, but it remains limited in many aspects, not least because of the lack of reliable data. As a result, there are no reliable approaches to eliminate corruption, and most reform attempts fail. Still, some countries have apparently managed to reduce corruption to manageable levels. What did they do right? This dissertation aims to contribute to the understanding of how a non-corrupt and effective public administration can be implemented. The three papers in the dissertation approach the problem from different angles, taking the Swedish case as their point of departure.

Special emphasis is placed on the issues of remuneration and recruitment of civil servants. Previous research and theory suggests that a meritocratically recruited and salaried civil service is an important deterrent of corruption, and a prerequisite for efficiency. In contrast, civil servants are in many countries recruited on the basis of political loyalty or personal connections, and insufficiently paid. This was also the case in Sweden until, at least, the middle of the 19th century. The story in the papers is however not one of a single defining moment where corruption was rooted out and effective government implemented. The processes studied in the papers stretch over centuries.

The main conclusion of the dissertation is that the relationship between public administration, corruption and good government in general is complicated and context-dependent. Some, seemingly corrupt, practices may be functional given the administrative constraints. For instance, informal payments may function as an automatic way of financing the administration, albeit with important drawbacks. Theoretically optimal institutions may also be impossible to implement given political constraints, if politically powerful groups stand to lose from their implementation. In that case, a less ambitious but feasible reform is preferable. Furthermore, some institutions may serve a country well, but later become obsolete in the face of new challenges. It is thus important to take local context into account, both to identify the institutions that will work best given the circumstances, and to determine how to implement them.

Keywords: Public administration, corruption, quality of government, Sweden.