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Information Technology and Government Corruption in Developing Countries: Evidence from Ghana Customs

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Abstract

The literature on information technology (IT) and government corruption in developing countries indicates contradictory evidence about the realization of anti-corruption effect. So far, there is no theoretical explanation of why the anti-corruption potential of IT that is demonstrated in some countries is not realized in many other countries. Drawing evidence from a case study of information systems interventions at Ghana customs over 35 years, we investigate how and why the anti-corruption potential of IT may be curtailed in the context of developing countries government and society. We focus on IT-mediated petty corruption practices of street-level officers, which we consider to be socially embedded and institutionally conditioned phenomena. We find that conditions of possibility for the IT-mediated petty corruption practices are created during the implementation of information systems. The configuration of IT and organizational processes of a government agency are constrained by the broader government administration system and influenced by vested interests of government officers, politicians, and businesses. Subsequently, the co-optation of IT for petty corruption practices is enabled by networks of relationships and institutions of patronage that extend across government, business, and society. We thus explain the often-limited effects of IT on petty corruption as the inability of localized information systems implementations to change modes of government administration that are embedded in the enduring neopatrimonial institutions of many developing countries.