**JOURNAL OF ANTI-CORRUPTION LAW**

**2024 Volume 8 Pages 199 - 204**

**BOOK REVIEW:**

***DIGITAL MEDIA AND GRASSROOTS ANTI-CORRUPTION: CONTEXTS, PLATFORMS AND DATA OF ANTI-CORRUPTION TECHNOLOGIES WORLDWIDE***

**Ntandokayise Ndlovu[[1]](#footnote-1)\* & Arthur van Coller[[2]](#footnote-2)\*\***

**Alice Mattoni (Editor)**

**(2024)**

**Edward Elgar Publishing**

**ISBN: 978 1 80220 209 0**

**286 Pages**

Alice Mattoni’s *Digital Media and Grassroots Anti-Corruption: Contexts, Platforms and Data of Anti-Corruption Technologies Worldwide*, published in 2024, explores the design, creation, and use of various Anti-Corruption Technologies (ACTs) to combat corruption in different jurisdictions. It introduces the concept of ACTs and addresses critical questions about the opportunities and challenges established and emerging digital media present to practitioners. This comprehensive edited book, published by Edward Elgar Publishing, comprises three parts and 12 chapters written by various experts, each examining the intricate relationship between digital media and anti-corruption, using different methodological lenses and comparing case studies worldwide.

The authors confirm that civil society and social movement organisations increasingly rely on digital media to counter corruption. These initiatives are employed to sustain massive mobilisations or to denounce petty corruption in public offices. Nonetheless, there is still uncertainty regarding using social media platforms, instant messaging applications, data management platforms, and other types of digital media in anti-corruption efforts. Therefore, the publication seeks to understand the challenges, opportunities, and outcomes inherent in using digital media to counter corruption. It considers how activists might use digital media within grassroots mobilisations against corruption, embedding digital media in their repertoire of contention, mobilising supporters, increasing public awareness, and sustaining collective action and communicative strategies.

Each chapter presents a case study, theoretical frameworks, and empirical data, illustrating the diverse ways digital media can be harnessed for anti-corruption efforts in different parts of the world. The book provides a critical understanding of digital media’s challenges to anti-corruption practitioners in various contexts, linking these challenges to different conceptions of democracy. Chapter 1 “Digital Media and Technologies in Grassroots Struggles against Corruption”, is written by Alice Mattoni. It establishes the framework for understanding the significance of digital media in anti-corruption movements. It introduces fundamental concepts such as grassroots activism, digital technologies, and corruption and outlines the historical context of anti-corruption efforts. The author analyses the concept of ACTs, including the material, symbolic, and social dimensions of ACTs. Notably, the chapter refers to anti-technologies’ typology and dimensions, such as increased awareness, organised mobilisation and sustained participation. The chapter emphasises the role of citizen engagement and the potential of digital platforms to foster collective action and mobilisation against corruption. The editor concludes by previewing the contributions of the volume.

Part 1 of the book deals with the context and contains three chapters. Chapter 2 by Fernanda Odilla on “Concerned Citizens to Civic Bots: The Bottom-Up Fight against Corruption in Brazil from a Longitudinal Perspective” presents various theoretical approaches by Odilla to understanding grassroots anti-corruption initiatives in Brazil. The author examines frameworks such as social movement theory, digital activism, and network theory, providing a lens through which to analyse the effectiveness of digital media in promoting transparency and accountability. This chapter sets the stage for subsequent discussions on how these activities in Brazil may apply elsewhere. The activities in Brazil show the importance of non-linear patterns of interaction between anti-corruption and digital media when assessing the role of technology in restricting corruption. Germán Bidegain considers “Civic Bots in Brazil Anti-Corruption and Transparency in Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in Uruguay: The Challenges of Fostering an Agenda when the Attention is Elsewhere” in chapter 3. The author considers the development of CSOs and the challenges they face in their anti-corruption work. The author also evaluates the use of digital media by CSOs. Chapter 4, titled ‘Anti-Corruption ‘From Below’ and Digital Media During Regime Change: A Comparative Analysis of Two North African Countries”, by Ester Sigillò investigates digital media’s role during regime changes in North African countries, especially during the Arab Spring, and its implications for anti-corruption efforts. Chapter 4 investigates various digital platforms and their roles in facilitating anti-corruption efforts and civil discontentment by the polity in Algeria and Tunisia. The author discusses how platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and specialised applications are designed for whistleblowing and reporting corrupt practices and how they played a vital role during the transition process. The chapter also explores the implications of platform algorithms, censorship, and the digital divide, emphasising the need for inclusive access to technology for effective grassroots movements to ensure that they expose corruption, especially in Africa.

Part 2 of the book considers the platforms and contains four chapters. Chapter 5 evaluates the “Potentialities and Affordances of Grassroots Civic Tech Platforms as Effective Anti-Corruption Tools: Decoding the Story of I Paid A Bribe, India”. In this chapter, Anwesha Chakraborty examines how data collection, analysis, and dissemination are crucial for transparency and accountability in India. This is mainly because India is arguably a difficult terrain in which to obtain such sensitive information. The chapter focuses on Janaagraha, an Indian CSO engaged in creating civic tech platforms and its platform, I Paid A Bribe, that allows citizens to report incidents of bribery anonymously. Chapter 6 concerns “The Social Construction of ACTs: Analysing the E-Participation Platform Rahvaalgatus.ee in Estonia”. Oksana Huss investigates the rapid transformation towards good governance and pioneering in e-governance and e-voting, as well as the legitimacy crisis of representative institutions in Estonia due to exposure to illicit political finance in 2012. This chapter focuses on the social practices after the corruption scandal and the Estonian Citizens’ Initiative Portal, rahvaalgatus.ee. The author concludes that e-participation can become an indirect anti-corruption measure in response to political corruption. Chapter 7 on “Digital Whistleblowing Platforms for Anti-Corruption: The Transparency International Italia Case” by Philip Di Salvo discusses the role of digital whistleblowing platforms in Italy, emphasising the balance between activism and whistleblower protection. Di Salvo discusses the strategies brought about by cryptography-based software and tools concerning whistleblowers and the organisations cooperating or relying on their contributions. The chapter also deals with the open-source software GlobaLeaks as a technical choice of reference for journalists and activists interested in launching whistleblowing platforms. This chapter further provides information on the potential of digital whistleblowing platforms in the context of anti-corruption purposes and activities. Chapter 8 deals with “Digital Technology, Citizens’ Engagement and Electoral Corruption in Colombia”. It was written by Manoel Gehrke, who examines innovations by Colombia’s civil society to counter electoral corruption. The author evaluates the effect of digital technologies on the activities performed by the Mission of Electoral Observation, an organisation created by Colombian activists in 2006.

Part 3 of the book focuses on data and contains four chapters. Chapter 9 on “Data Practices and Informative Activism in the Grassroots Struggles against Corruption” by Alice Fubini explores how data use in grassroots struggles against corruption can act as a watchdog, with a focus on investigative journalism. The chapter investigates the Italian civil society organisation Fondazione Openpolis, an independent and non-profit foundation based in Italy that promotes access to public information, transparency and democratic participation practices by deploying data-driven web applications and journalistic techniques. Thus, it acts as a watchdog while considering the hallmarks of journalism. The author explains how anti-corruption activists can act as watchdogs, data journalists, and sources of data and information. Chapter 10 considers “Involving Citizens through Multi-Platform Strategies: Transparency Watch in North Macedonia”. Dale Mineshima-Lowe evaluates increased citizen participation in anti-corruption efforts through digital platforms in Macedonia. This is done by exploring citizens’ involvement through multi-platform or pronged approaches. The chapter critically views increased citizenry participation in matters affecting them. The interaction is through digital platforms, ensuring civil activism in fighting corruption. The biggest challenge is to sustain these platforms to ensure that corruption is fought till the end.

This chapter specifically examines Transparency International Macedonia's work and how it employs digital media and digital tools to raise awareness of corruption in North Macedonia. Chapter 11 on “Artificial Intelligence as a Weapon to Fight Corruption: Civil Society Actors on the Benefits and Risks of Existing Bottom-Up Approaches” was co-written by three authors, Julia Forjan, Nils Köbis, and Christopher Starke. The authors explore the use of AI in fighting corruption, including the risks and opportunities it presents. Literature on this topic is still in its infancy. Thus, the chapter is a good starting point primarily because it also considers the risks associated with AI, including AI hallucinations and data bias, among other things. The authors conducted five semi-structured interviews with experts in pioneering AI projects to assess the benefits and risks of existing bottom-up approaches.

The editor wrote chapter 12 on “The Challenges of ACTs from the Grassroots”. The last chapter reflects on the future of digital media in grassroots anti-corruption movements, identifying emerging trends such as blockchain technology and AI. Mattoni identifies emerging trends, such as the rise of blockchain technology and artificial intelligence, and their potential implications for transparency and accountability. The chapter calls for continued research and collaboration among scholars, practitioners, and activists to harness the power of digital media in the fight against corruption.

The primary issues addressed throughout these chapters relate to ACTs, digital media and technology, civic participation, artificial intelligence, open data, digital and data activism, and social movements. The book also considers issues such as democracy, electoral fraud, crowdsourcing technology, whistleblowing, hacking, information security, transparency, anonymity, and accountability. It includes a comprehensive index for ease of reference.

Mattoni’s work is crucial for understanding the complexities of grassroots movements in the digital era and provides a roadmap for future endeavours in the fight against corruption worldwide. This publication is an open-access title and is free to read, download, and share on the Edward Elgar Publishing website under the political science and public policy subject collection. The publication will be useful for students and scholars of corruption studies, digital sociology, law and politics, public policy, regulation and governance, and the study of social movements. It will also benefit anti-corruption practitioners and policymakers interested in the work of CSOs at the grassroots level.

1. \* Dr Ntandokayise Ndlovu, Senior Lecturer, Department of Public and Constitutional Law, University of Fort Hare, South Africa, email address ntandokayise.ndlovu@gmail.com/nndhlovu@ufh.ac.za, Orcid-ID:0000-0003-3570-6081. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. \*\* Prof Arthur van Coller, Associate Professor, Department of Public and Constitutional Law, University of Fort Hare, South Africa, avancoller@ufh.ac.za, Orcid-ID:0000-0003-3362-6707. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)