Why do ‘Teeth’ Need ‘Voice’? The Case of Anti-Corruption Agencies in Three Australian States

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Abstract

Interactions between horizontal accountability agencies (e.g., anti-corruption agencies) and social accountability actors (e.g. journalists, civil society activists and complainants/whistleblowers) are recognised as important to horizontal agencies’ performance, but the reason(s) is not clear. This study therefore explores why horizontal accountability agencies need social accountability actors in performing their functions. The study analyses data from 30 key stakeholders in Australia, including anti-corruption agencies’ (ACAs) staff members, social accountability actors, and other observers to report on the specific support roles social actors play to anti-corruption agencies’ activities and operations. Through the conceptual lens of social accountability, evidence show that social actors play four key types of support roles to anti-corruption agencies’ activities and operations: activate ACAs’ investigations; ‘amplify’ ACAs’ operations; guard ACAs’ activities and operations; and defend ACAs’ independence and powers. These findings support the need for interactions and, also, affirm the potential for research into how these support roles can better be provided for effective anti-corruption outcomes. The research is of value to public accountability agencies in Australia, and internationally.

Key Words: horizontal accountability, social accountability, anti-corruption agencies, support roles, Australia.

Introduction

Accountability is one of the most important approaches to fighting government corruption. In Robert Klitgaard's famous formula –'corruption equals monopoly plus discretion, minus accountability' (Klitgaard, 1988, p. 75) for instance, accountability serves as the main anti-corruption approach. In this accountability approach, two main mechanisms are established outside election periods. The first is horizontal accountability; for example, through other state agencies (e.g., Ombudsmen and Anti-corruption Agencies) that are expected to be independent and are vested with powers and resources to hold other public officials to account (Brown & Head, 2005; O'Donnell, 1999). The second is social accountability, normally exacted by civil society, media, and the general public in demanding accountability from public officials (Malena et al., 2004; Smulovitz & Peruzzotti, 2000; Smulovitz & Peruzzotti, 2003). While both of these accountability mechanisms have been recognised as important for fighting government corruption, recent studies showed that their interactions are more promising for effective anti-corruption outcomes (e.g. Ankamah, 2016; Fox, 2015; Heinrich & Brown, 2017; Lagunes, 2017; O'Donnell, 2003; vaz Mondo, 2015).

But when and why do horizontal accountability agencies need social accountability actors, is not clear. Specifically, what are the important support roles that social accountability actors play to horizontal accountability agencies? Findings from this exploratory qualitative multiple case studies provide empirical evidence on the important support roles social actors play to horizontal accountability agencies in the performance of their accountability functions. As Fox (2015) rightly stated, both research and theory, including conceptual work, lag significantly behind practice in the area of accountability. Consequently, this study is important because it reinforces the need for interaction and also affirms the potential for research into how these support roles could be better provided to horizontal agencies for enhanced accountability outcomes.

Using evidence from three Australian anti-corruption agencies' (ACAs) staff members, social accountability actors, and other observers, the current study will show that social accountability actors play four important and necessary support roles in enabling ACAs to effectively perform their accountability functions. The paper proceeds as follows: The first part explains the concept of social accountability as the main conceptual frame of this paper. Thus the concept of social accountability, some empirical background, and limitations are presented to provide the context for the analysis in this paper. In particular, the way in which social accountability works in fighting government corruption is highlighted. The second part explains the research approach, including case selection, the sources of data, and analysis. The third part presents the research findings and discussion. The final part draws a general conclusion, discusses some implications, and highlights future research directions.

Social Accountability as an Anti-corruption Approach

Social accountability has become popular in contemporary governance, especially in 'contexts where traditional mechanisms of political accountability have largely failed to deliver' (Joshi & Houtzager, 2012, p. 146). Social accountability initiatives have continued to increase in the transparency and accountability field (Fox, 2015). A number of studies have attempted to conceptualise social accountability initiatives and their relevance (e.g. Ackerman, 2005; Malena et al., 2004; Peruzzotti & Smulovitz, 2006). Others have also focused on social accountability practice (e.g. King et al., 2013; McNeil & Malena, 2010; Sirker & Cosic, 2007) and the relationship between social accountability and state-oriented accountability in fighting corruption (e.g. Ankamah, 2016; Goetz & Jenkins, 2001; Smulovitz & Peruzzotti, 2003).

According to O'Meally (2013, p. 1), social accountability improves public accountability by relying on the actions of 'citizens and non-state actors' (see also Malena & McNeil, 2010; Sirker & Cosic, 2007; Walker, 2009). This method makes social accountability 'an especially relevant approach for societies in which representative government is weak, unresponsive, or non-existent' (Fox, 2015, p. 346). Accordingly, social accountability is a crucial feature of democratisation (Bousquet et al., 2012).

Social accountability, on one hand, engages citizens and civil society in government policy and decision-making regarding the use of public resources (Bousquet et al., 2012; Brinkerhoff & Wetterberg, 2015; Fox, 2015; Grimes, 2013; Malena & McNeil, 2010; Walker, 2009). On the other hand, social accountability involves the media and other actors in society who work to hold public officials accountable (Grimes, 2013; Malena & McNeil, 2010; Sirker & Cosic, 2007; Walker, 2009). According to Smulovitz and Peruzzotti (2003, p. 150) social accountability is a

nonelectoral, yet vertical mechanism of control that rests on the actions of a multiple array of citizens' associations and movements and on the media, actions that aim at exposing governmental wrongdoing, bringing new issues onto the public agenda, or activating the operation of horizontal agencies.

The underlying premise of governance concerns maximising public resources for the betterment of citizens. Therefore, since citizens are victims of poor government decision-making, they should have not only the right, but also the power to participate in such decision-making according to this governance approach (Ankamah, 2016). Consequently, there has been a renewed interest in scholarship regarding social accountability to complement horizontal accountability (Ackerman, 2004; Marquette & Peiffer, 2017; Smulovitz & Peruzzotti, 2000). This approach is important because it is practically impossible for elites to corrupt the whole of society, which makes this form of accountability 'much less inclined to the problem of complicity' (e.g. Schatz, 2013, p. 162).

Social accountability tools may include citizen report cards and social audits. They may also involve the institution of public reporting and the use of public panels (Bovens, 2007). Social accountability therefore is ‘an umbrella term for diverse approaches to exercise voice, ranging from the simple exposure of government failures to participatory performance monitoring, expenditure tracking, budget analysis and participatory budgeting among others’ (Schatz, 2013, p. 162). In the Philippines, for instance, Yilmaz et al. reported that the local government code allows for the maximum participation of social groups and civil society organisations in public procurement processes (Yilmaz et al., 2008). Comparably, Malena and McNeil (2010) documented that community scorecards are used by both users and service providers for such accountability arrangements in Malawi.

However, most instances of social accountability showcase reactive efforts mostly targeted at ending a particular case of abuse (Grimes, 2013). Grimes further noted that such ex post efforts used in holding public officials accountable operate in two main ways: ‘mobilizing public protest and assisting in the collection of relevant information and evidence’ (2013, p. 384). In this way, social mechanisms operate to activate formal state-oriented institutions of accountability and reflect what McCubbins and Schwartz (1984) call fire alarms that work to alert such oversight bodies. Thus social accountability mechanisms use both institutional and non-institutional tools, that activate legal claims in institutions of oversight and ‘encompass social mobilization and media denunciation’ respectively (Smulovitz & Peruzzotti, 2003). This approach is utilised because social accountability alone is able to ‘expose misdeeds but do not impose material consequences’ (Schedler, 1999, p. 16) since they lack judgement and sanctioning powers (Bauhr & Grimes, 2014; Bovens, 2007). This lack of judgement is particularly so because accountability relationships are, often, power relationships (Jenkins 2007 cited in Schatz, 2013). Consequently, social accountability alone may not be successful in exacting accountability (Olken, 2007) but often depends on

state-oriented accountability agencies to effectively hold public officials to account (Bauhr & Grimes, 2014; Fox, 2007; Schatz, 2013).

More importantly, state-oriented accountability agencies such as ACAs may not “bite” without the support of social accountability actors (Fox, 2015). To this end, social accountability is perceived as an ‘antidote’ to the weakness in state-oriented accountability (Brinkerhoff & Wetterberg, 2015), and its effectiveness in and impacts on accountability relationships have received much attention. This increased attention is even more so because, empirically, ‘forum drift’ appears prevalent, and the inherent challenge remains of how to stimulate such failing forums to effectively hold public officials to account (Schillemans & Busuioc, 2014). However, to date, few studies have tried to map out the roles that social accountability actors play in accountability relationships.

For instance, Smulovitz and Peruzzotti (2003) conceptualised, by broadly using two anti-corruption cases, the role of social accountability mechanisms – civil society, citizens, and the media – in exacting accountability into four key roles. These are: exposing and denouncing wrong doing by instilling public interest in a particular phenomenon; imposing symbolic sanctions on public officials – and in the case of political officials, such sanctions may hinder their electoral success; activating the operations of horizontal accountability mechanisms; and serving as a guardian to horizontal mechanisms (see also Peruzzotti & Smulovitz, 2006, p. 11). Jacobs and Schillemans (2016, pp. 27-28) also broadly conceptualised the roles of the news media, in exacting accountability into four key roles using documentary (newspaper) evidence from the Netherlands. These include: ‘sparking’ formal accountability forums as they cover issues of misconduct in public administration; acting as accountability forums by uncovering abuse of power mainly through the works of investigative journalists; acting as an ‘amplifier’ to the works of formal accountability forums for public information dissemination; and triggering formal accountability forums.

Although these studies serve as an important departure point, none has actually sought the views of key stakeholders in the anti-corruption landscape to map out the specific support roles social accountability actors play in relation to horizontal accountability agencies – for example ACAs. This gap in accountability scholarship is filled by this study. It draws on the above concepts to explore and conceptualize the specific support roles social accountability actors play in relation to horizontal accountability mechanisms, using anti-corruption agencies in three Australian states.

Research Approach

This research adopts a qualitative multiple case study approach as it provides an in-depth understanding of the cases (Creswell, 2013). The qualitative approach is mostly appropriate for accountability research because as public officials create, and are often constrained by, accountability structures, it causes a change and shift in accountability as actors act and interact (Yang, 2014). This change, according to Yang, is more so due to the understanding of accountability as a virtue or institutional arrangement. Therefore, the way accountability manifests and is implemented cannot be separated from ‘actors’ values, perceptions, interpretations, and strategic responses’ (Yang, 2014, p. 162), which are critically significant to this study. Therefore it is best to study these support roles and processes in perspective (Yin, 2009). Accordingly, an interpretive research paradigm was used to ‘frame the inquiry, consistent with the exploration’ and purpose of this study (Williamson et al., 2017, p. 380).

Three anti-corruption agencies in three states – New South Wales Independent Commission against Corruption (ICAC), Queensland Crime and Corruption Commission (CCC), and Victoria Independent Broad-based Anti-Corruption Commission (IBAC) – were used as the main horizontal accountability agencies. Horizontal accountability agencies are

state agencies that are mandated to oversee other state agencies (O'Donnell, 1999). Although they may be located within the executive branch, they normally have a statutory mandate to hold the executive to account (Appleby, 2017). In contemporary governance, anti-corruption agencies have mostly been the lead agency tasked to fight government corruption and misconduct. Some development donors even tied grants to the establishment of ACAs (Ankamah & Manzoor E Khoda, 2018; Doig et al., 2006), regardless of existing agencies such as Ombudsmen and Supreme Audit Institutions. In Australia, for instance, every state now has an anti-corruption agency of some kind (see Table 1).

Almost all of these ACAs were set up based on recommendations after investigations were launched in relation to government corruption (Callinan & Aroney, 2013; Grabosky & Larmour, 2000; Heilbrunn, 2004; Johnston, 1999; Maor, 2004; Prenzler & Faulkner, 2010). Accordingly, investigating and conceptualising the important support roles that social accountability actors' play, specifically, to ACAs may not only be beneficial to Australian ACAs but to public accountability theory and practice more generally.

Table 1: Anti-Corruption Agencies in Australian States

Jurisdiction	Dedicated Anti-corruption Agency
Victoria	2004–2013 — Office of Police Integrity (OPI) 2012 — Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission (IBAC)
New South Wales	1988 — Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) 1996–2017 — Police Integrity Commission (PIC) 2017 — Law Enforcement Conduct Commission
Queensland	1989–2002 — Criminal Justice Commission (CJC) 1997–2002 — Qld. Crime Commission (QCC) 2002–2014 — Crime and Misconduct Commission (CMC) 2014 — Crime and Corruption Commission (CCC) 2000 — Integrity Commissioner
Western Australia	1966–2004 — Anti-corruption commission 2004 — WA Corruption and Crime Commission (WA CCC)
South Australia	2012 — Independent Commissioner Against Corruption (SA ICAC)
Tasmania	2010 — Integrity Commission

Source: Adapted from Masters and Graycar (2015)

Thirty in-depth interviews were undertaken with ACA staff members, journalists, civil society activists, complainants/whistleblowers, and other observers from three Australian states – New South Wales, Queensland, and Victoria – between June 2016 and July 2017. The purposive sampling technique was used in selecting research participants. Table 2 shows the number of interviewees from each participant pool.

Table 2: Number of Interviewees

Category	No. of participants
ACA Leadership	4
ACA Operational	5
Media (Journalists)	8
Civil Society Groups	4
Complainant/Whistleblowers	4
Oversight bodies	4
Other observers	1
Total number of interviewees	30

Each interview lasted for a period of one hour, on average, and was recorded with the prior consent of interviewees. Interviews focused on how social accountability actors interact with ACAs and how such interactions specifically support ACAs to perform their accountability roles effectively. The current study adopted Creswell’s process of qualitative field data analysis to ensure the credibility and reliability of findings and discussions (Creswell, 2013). *First*, the recorded data were organised and transcribed verbatim. *Second*, the transcripts were transferred into NVivo 11 software for coding. *Third*, issues appearing in the transcript were coded into categories according to how they provided evidence to the research question – both deductively and inductively. This practice was completed twice to enhance the ‘test-retest’ reliability (Joffe & Yardley, 2004). In order to help protect the anonymity of interviewees, pseudonyms were used in the text. For instance, interviewees

were cited as ACA_1 or Journalist_1, which represent anti-corruption agencies' interviewees and journalists respectively. *Last*, data within the various categories were analysed using the thematic qualitative data analysis approach (Boyatzis, 1998; Joffe & Yardley, 2004). This was done by grouping the categories under various themes depending on how they related to each other in answering the research question.

Findings and Discussion

This current study provides evidence to address why anti-corruption agencies need social accountability actors to enable them to effectively perform their accountability functions. The analysis revealed the multiple support roles social actors play to ACAs' activities and operations. For instance, one ACA interviewee stated that the role of social actors is 'absolutely critical' to their work and that if one were to 'draw a map of a jigsaw of how everything comes together' social accountability actors will definitely be big pieces of that jigsaw (ACA Staff_6). These multiple support roles are grouped into four main themes below.

Figure 1: Key Support Roles Social Actors Play to ACAs

(i) Activate ACAs' investigations

Interviews showed that, one of the important support roles that social actors such as complainants/whistleblowers and investigative journalists play is activating ACAs' investigations. *First*, it was evident that complainants and investigative journalists are important sources of information to ACAs, on where corruption occurs in government. This is because, ACAs' investigations are mostly reactive than proactive as acts of corruption are normally conducted 'undercover'. Accordingly, ACAs can only learn of such hidden acts when they receive complaints. ACA interviewees admitted that they can only be effective in investigating government corruption when they receive complaints:

I think [whistleblowers and complainants] are exceptionally important because they are often the best source of information. You have members of the public who work in public sector agencies that could bring us information. They could make public interest disclosures [PIDs]. They often are the complainants that come to us. So, very important, and I think everyone in society has a role to play to stamp out corruption, and we can only do one part of it once it comes to us. (ACA Staff_6)

Interviews further showed that another way that social actors activate ACAs' investigations is through the work of investigative journalists. The media's role is to 'ventilate' problems as they occur in public administration and, in most instances, investigative journalists are aware of 'unsavoury' events happening in public agencies before ACAs become aware of them. For instance Kate McClymont – a prominent investigative journalist - was very instrumental in the exposure and subsequent jailing of Eddie Obeid (e.g. McClymont, 2016). Accordingly, ACAs treat exposes by investigative journalists as important sources of information that enable them to effectively perform their investigative functions. Due to this perception, ACAs desist from inviting such journalists for questioning – in order not to antagonise them – unless it is necessary. See excerpts from interviews below:

Our whole history of this organisation [CCC] started with just that, with an investigative journalist doing that so I acknowledge that...The one on the wall is exactly that and it first started in *The Australian*. There was a story about the last elections and donations about a mayor up here on one of our councils...What we would do is look at that as information coming to us to say, well, what do we do with it? (ACA Staff_5)

I would read stories that I think are worth investigating and those stories can be an incentive to commence investigating some issues. In what was called Operation Jasper, which involved members of the Obeid family, the media had been investigating the Obeid family much longer than ICAC, and they had more material than we did. (ACA Staff_1)

There's been several times where I have published stories about members of parliament and then they have become subjects of hearings in the ICAC. The Australian border case is one; the Circular Quay Café is another. I did an investigation into the Sydney Harbour Authority that led to public hearings and corruption findings. So from time to time, yes, I think the works of investigative journalists is picked up upon by investigative bodies. (Journalist_3)

Second, interviews revealed that social actors, mainly investigative journalists, continue to conduct investigations alongside that of the ACAs to provide more evidence for ACAs to effectively perform their investigative function. For instance, one journalist stated that

I did a big project on what is called the Boiler Room Fraud on the Gold Coast. So the guy who is the main target of that investigation for our work was a former police detective who became a private investigator and his specialisation is to provide advice to the boiler room operators on how not to get caught. That was an example of a parallel investigation where I and one of my colleagues in the media were investigating and the CCC were investigating the same thing ... Him, his wife and son and, in fact about 29 people in total, are now facing serious charges as a result of the investigation we did and that of the parallel investigation with the CCC. (Journalist_6)

ACA interviewees acknowledged that sometimes in the course of their investigation, 'a really good investigative journalist would publish a material' that ACAs may not know about; and 'this gives them new leads into what to look for' (ACA Staff_1). These findings are consistent with earlier studies that social accountability actors operate by activating the operations of horizontal accountability agencies (e.g. Ankamah, 2016; Jacobs & Schillemans, 2016, p. 27; McCubbins & Schwartz, 1984; Smulovitz & Peruzzotti, 2003). However, findings go beyond activation by also showing that social actors continue to provide ACAs

with evidence in the course of their investigations to help them effectively perform their functions. Interviews revealed that the continued publication of corruption stories often creates significant public interest, which sometimes puts pressure on ACAs to investigate a particular case. This finding substantiates O'Donnell's assertion that 'a media that does not shy away from reporting cases of encroachment and corruption, provide crucial information, support, and political incentives for the often uphill battles that agencies of horizontal accountability may wage against powerful transgressors' (O'Donnell, 2003, p. 48).

(ii) 'Amplify ACAs' Activities and Operations

Analysis of interviews showed that the news media serves as a communication channel for ACAs' activities and operations. Although this finding confirms that of Jacobs and Schillemans (2016), it shows the various ways the media does this and why interviewees perceive it as a support role to ACAs' activities and operations. It was evident that ACAs normally provide copies of their reports and findings to journalists through their 'media release' portals on their websites. This is done to provide journalists with access to these documents for public information dissemination (McMillan, 2016). When the CCC released its report on "*making allegations of corruption public: Is it in the public interest*", the CCC even called for a press conference after their media release to discuss the findings and recommendations of the report, in order to ensure the media disseminated this information. Although some journalists stated that they are only doing what is expected of them by the public, ACA interviewees confirmed that this is an important support role to their operations:

Their role is to push information. So when we put information on our website and release media statements and things like that, I mean we do that so that that information can get pushed. (ACA Staff_5)

The media assist in broadcasting [ACAs'] work. If the commission makes findings against a member of parliament of corruption, and I knew about it, I will report on it ... The media is doing their job, which is to report on corruption, and that is essentially the central role of the fourth estate. Here you have agencies that

make corruption findings where we as a media report them ... for the purpose of disseminating information that is in the public's interest. (Journalist_3)

Further analysis revealed that, another way the media serves as a conduit for ACAs' operations is by covering ACAs' public hearing proceedings. Some ACAs even go to the extent of paying for advertisements to inform the public about their public hearings. Thus, during public hearings, ACAs heavily depend on journalists to broadcast and write stories on proceedings. Accordingly, ACAs provide the needed support and allow journalists to participate in such hearings as observers, mostly with their equipment that enables them to communicate with their newsroom staff as hearings proceed (ACA Staff_1, 2). This approach, according to ACAs, builds public support for and acceptance of the findings of such hearings; and consequently, sometimes, it flushes out more evidence for ACAs. This practice of 'government in the sunshine' gives the wider public some ability to oversee parts of the ACAs' operations as they directly participate as active or passive observers (Meagher, 2005, p. 93):

During the public hearings, [we] report what is going on and the members of the public read this and they get in touch with ICAC or with journalists. One of the interesting ones was the inquiry into the Wollongong City Council, and that involved developers paying bribes to council officers. Because the inquiry was public, a lot of people reading from the media obviously became interested ... because of what they see. (Journalist_2)

When we have our public hearings, of course, the media come along and it's all open, and we get great reviews out of that. They've got a lot of information and that serves a huge purpose because those people who weren't at the public hearings can read about it later. So I think they should continue to play that role. (ACA Staff_6)

The evidence presented above, in relation to the media's role as an 'amplifier' of the ACAs' activities and operations is even more critical because the public know much of what happens in public affairs through the media (McCombs, 2013). In an ICAC annual report, for instance, the Commission confirmed that news media reports on the works of ICAC help to

inform the wider community on why the ICAC's work is relevant, and of the need for society to have confidence in them (ICAC, 1993).

(iii) Guard ACAs Activities and Operations

Drawing on the historical dilemma of 'who guards the guardians' posed by Juvenal since the Roman empire (see Hurwicz, 2008), this section will show that social accountability actors can act as guards to the guardians to some extent. Analysis of interviews surprisingly revealed that another important support role that social accountability actors play to ACAs is serving as informal accountability forums to their operations. ACA interviewees specifically acknowledged that sometimes the support roles work more effectively in the form of critiques – constructed in a way that is not perceived by ACAs to antagonise them. This informal oversight role by social actors is important because ACAs mostly operate in autonomous fashion and may act corruptly themselves when freed from accountability, and may abuse their powers or perhaps infringe on the rights of citizens (Gregory, 2015; Kpundeh, 2004). Analysis established that this support role is particularly important because both sides of politics are often terrified about appearing to be (or accused of being) 'soft' on corruption, which makes it difficult for them to criticise ACAs even when they act wrongly.

Social actors' critiques of ACAs' operations and activities, delivered mostly through media commentary – although informal, sometimes inform parliamentary questioning of ACAs during parliamentary committee hearings (see e.g. Van Aelst & Vliegthart, 2014). Accordingly, social actors practice their accountability role although they normally lack the power of holding ACAs 'by the neck and dragging them' (CSO_3):

I think when the media write articles that our investigations are taking too long or that why we aren't investigating a particular matter over another matter. Often they may not know the full picture. However, when they raise those types of questions I think it's good. I think ... it makes us think about that criticism at times and think how could we do things better? (ACA Staff_7)

Some of the mistakes this agency made in the past – I think they deserved the negative media coverage. I've been around for a long time and seen much worse things than that, that agencies have done. Sometimes you have to wear the negative criticism. But the way to do that is to have a professional working relationship with the media. (ACA Staff_6)

Findings indicate that although both social accountability actors and ACAs have a common goal of fighting government corruption, social actors perceive ACAs as other public agencies that require social actors' informal oversight to make them effectively fight government corruption (Persson et al., 2010). However, analysis highlighted that, in New South Wales for instance, the media landscape appears polarized. It is believed by some sections of society that one faction of the media has an agenda to discredit the works of ICAC for their own interest. It is also believed that the other faction is treating the ICAC with "kids' gloves". These findings suggest that, in order for social actors to effectively play this support role to ACAs, they need to be constructive and cautious with their critique of ACAs' operations and activities. In any case, as far as social actors play their oversight role in relation to ACAs, it could be said that some prominent journalists such as Chris Merritt were instrumental in the restructuring of the NSW ICAC (e.g. Merritt, 2015; Merritt & Markson, 2015).

(iv) Defend ACAs' Independence and Powers

In a democracy, horizontal accountability agencies such as ACAs are fundamental pillars; therefore, social actors have a responsibility to protect and defend these pillars. Although social actors acknowledge that ACAs should be criticised when they appear to be acting wrongly, the public wants and values ACAs. Accordingly, any threat to these fundamental notions may be fiercely resisted, although social actors may not always be successful in defending these formal attributes of ACAs. The reason is that politicians normally hate to see ACAs operate effectively, although they often rhetorically argue for stronger accountability institutions (Ankamah, 2016; Fitzgerald, 2014; Lakha, 2011). For

instance, one interviewee stated that *'a big reason for much of the controversy surrounding the NSW ICAC in recent times is that many of the targets of ICAC's investigations are politicians'* (Journalist_2), and another opined that Victoria's Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission (IBAC) is *'considered successful because it has not yet investigated any politician'* (ACA Staff_1).

In Queensland, for instance, the Newman LNP government renamed the Crime and Misconduct Commission (CMC) to Crime and Corruption Commission (CCC). The Newman government, among others, sought to make corruption a secondary function, take away the commission's corruption prevention function, and reduce the independence of the commission's research function. These attempts met with fierce public resistance from key social actors, including public accountability and integrity policy experts:

There was a lot of commentary around what was seen as the dilution of the research function. So there was ... what I considered to be quite a significant public and media backlash around the undermining of the independence of the research function of the agency. So that was, I think, very powerful. (ACA Staff_7)

Similarly in NSW, an example that respondents often referred to regarding how social actors rise up to defend the ICAC was the ICAC vs Margaret Cunneen¹ case. Respondents indicated that although the High Court ruled that the ICAC had no jurisdiction to investigate Cunneen, most prominent key social stakeholders argued in favor of ICAC and called for the commission's jurisdictions to be widened:

...around the Margaret Cunneen case, obviously it is a clear case where sections of the media said ICAC has an important role in society and we shouldn't allow its powers and jurisdiction to be lowered in such a way that it's going to make it unable to do its work effectively. (Journalist_4)

Likewise, the ICAC inspector's recommendation and subsequent submission to parliament by the NSW government to consider denying ICAC of its public hearings' powers

¹ Ms Cunneen is a NSW Crown Prosecutor who was accused by ICAC of advising her son's girlfriend to fake chest pains to avoid a breath test after a car accident in May 2014.

on the grounds that it damaged people's reputations also received strong public resistance. For example, the Accountability Round Table (ART) strongly opposed the refusal of the ICAC to hold public hearings, and argued that it is in the public interest to hold hearings because they promote public trust in the ICAC (Accountability Round Table, 2016). Comparably, Geoffrey Watson, a senior lawyer; Harvey Cooper, a former inspector of ICAC; David Ipp, a former commissioner of ICAC; and Anthony Whealy, former chair of Transparency International Australia (TIA) were all critical of the inspector's recommendations (Ipp, 2016b; Kelly, 2016; Watson, 2016).

Further examination of interviews revealed that whenever powerful political elites attempt to meddle with the independence of ACAs, social actors would rise up and protest. This protest is premised on the fact that ACAs are created to serve the public interest, and they can only do that if they are independent of government. Respondents cited the restructuring of the ICAC by the Baird government to having three commissioners as a clear case of meddling with the independence of the commission since it automatically required the commissioner to reapply for her position – from which she eventually resigned. Respondents believed that the government's decision was a retaliatory measure against the commissioner – for investigating liberal MPs for electoral misconduct. The investigation had led to the resignation, or moving to the crossbenches, of eleven Liberal MPs (Godfrey, 2014). Consequently, respondents argued against the proposed changes and so were prominent key stakeholders of NSW's elites (see e.g. Ipp, 2016a; Whealy, 2016).

However, closer examination of interviews also established that it is not only when government tries to establish legal or policy reforms to strip ACAs of their independence that social mechanisms need to engage to defend and protect ACAs, but the same must happen when government and ACAs operate too closely:

I think the more insidious danger to these agencies is ... when government seeks to use them, to co-opt them... When government gets too close to these agencies; not when they're at odds with the government but when government gets too close to them. It's too powerful an agency and can be too easily manipulated to achieve political ends. (Journalist_1)

These findings affirm the need for ACAs to build a strong alliance with social accountability actors, and also ensure strong internal controls to prevent ACAs integrity from being discredited (Kuris, 2014). This finding implies that where ACAs themselves do not exhibit high levels of integrity, social actors may not be willing to play this role.

Conclusion

This paper has presented an exploratory account, based on the views of key stakeholders, on why anti-corruption agencies need social accountability actors. This study is distinctive in that it is the first exploratory study that specifically uses the views of key stakeholders within the anti-corruption landscape in an advanced liberal democratic setting – Australia – to investigate the important support roles that social accountability actors play to anti-corruption agencies. The paper showed that social accountability actors play four key support roles to anti-corruption agencies' activities and operations – activate ACAs' investigations; amplify ACAs' activities and operations; guard ACAs' activities and operations; and defend the independence and powers of ACAs. However the paper also acknowledges that social accountability actors may not always be supportive of ACAs as portrayed in this paper and in some instances ACAs may get some pushback from social actors, and this could be the focus of future research.

Findings in this study imply, as noted by Schillemans and Busuioc (2014), that forum drift is common because unlike the traditional principal-agent models where the direct principal may have a strong interest in how their resources and powers are used, the delegated

forum such as ACAs may not have such strong interests. The reason is that delegated forums do not stand to directly benefit or lose from the bureaucratic agent's actions. Accordingly, Schillemans and Busuioc suggested that the forum needs some incentive to stimulate their interest in protecting the public good (2014). This paper suggests that such support roles that social mechanisms play, or should play, to ACAs' activities and operations are some of the important incentives required to stimulate the interest of ACAs to effectively perform their accountability functions. Although such support roles may not be sufficient, the paper suggests they are necessary to stimulate ACAs' interest in fighting government corruption. This nature of delegated forums (check and balance institutions) may challenge assumptions of the principal-agent model and could be a major area for future research. The findings also provide empirical evidence and substantiation to Jonathan Fox's contention that '*teeth may not bite without voice*' (Fox, 2015, p. 357). However, such support is best won by ACAs when they acquire a 'reputation for boldness, impartiality and competence' in addition to 'good communication and public relations' (Dixit, 2016, p. 18).

Given the recent prominence of the need for accountability mechanisms to interact as a better approach to achieving favourable anti-corruption outcomes, the current study will be of value to anti-corruption agencies and other accountability institutions in Australia and internationally. However, what is needed as a frontier for research in relation to the findings of this paper is how these support roles could better be provided in order for ACAs to effectively perform their accountability functions.

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