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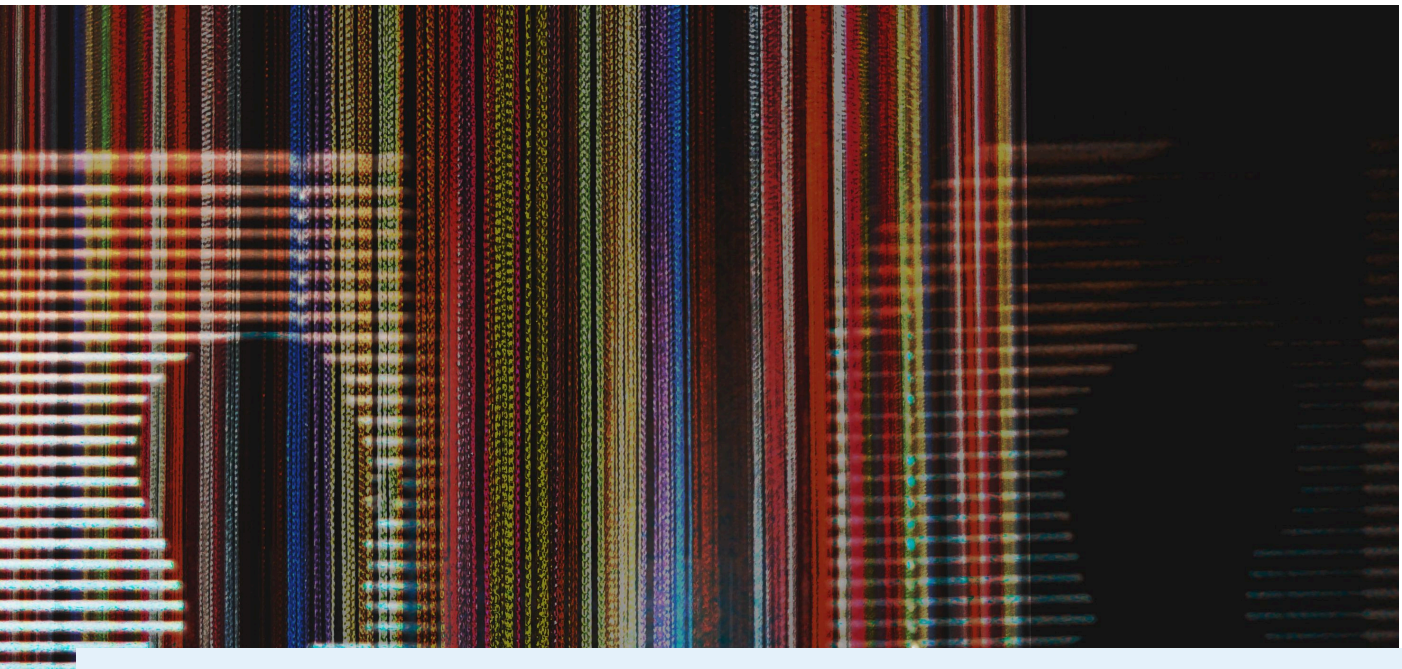

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Capacity building for politicians in contexts of systemic corruption: Countering 'wasta' in Jordan

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The design of one common integrity-building intervention – capacity building for politicians – can be adapted to respond effectively to systemic forms of corruption. In the context of Jordan, systemic corruption is often bound up in the concept known as 'wasta' – a practice of exchanging favours. Wasta is difficult to counter with capacity-building programmes that seek to strengthen conventional anti-corruption frameworks. Alternative strategies may challenge the incentives and norms that sustain the system of corruption.

Main points

- Systemic corruption exists when a corrupt act recurs consistently and is connected to other corrupt acts through an underlying system that enables and encourages the corruption. In designing all types of interventions, practitioners need to consider whether the corruption they seek to address is systemic – and how. Tackling systemic corruption requires alternative approaches; these need to go beyond the sorts of standard interventions that target more isolated forms of wrongdoing.
- We consider how the design of one common integrity-building intervention, capacity building for politicians, can respond effectively to systemic forms of corruption. We explore this question in the context of Jordan, where systemic corruption is often bound up in the concept known as 'wasta.'
- Wasta, in basic terms, is about pulling strings. Wasta-practices normally involve an exchange not of money but of favours, and typically represent not a single occurrence but many exchanges over time. Wasta in Jordan has three qualities that make it systemic: it is functionally, normatively, and politically embedded in the society.
- Forms of systemic corruption, like wasta, are difficult to counter with capacity-building programmes that seek to strengthen conventional anti-corruption frameworks but neglect to address the system underlying the corruption. Anti-corruption in this context requires alternative strategies that challenge the incentives and norms of the system.
- To address systemic corruption, capacity-building programmes for parliamentarians could focus on supporting them to: (1) Improve the equity and efficiency of public service delivery institutions; (2) Use their leadership positions within social networks to build up normative constraints against the most pernicious forms of wasta; and (3) Build a coalition of parliamentarians to oppose the most pernicious forms of wasta.

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Systemic corruption requires a different approach

Many corrupt practices occur with some degree of regularity, even predictability. Paying bribes in hospitals can be normal in some settings, and public officials frequently seek kickbacks for public contracts. Systemic corruption exists when a corrupt act recurs consistently and is connected to other corrupt acts through an underlying system that enables and encourages the corruption. If, for example, police find a hospital director with one million dollars in his suitcase, it may be just an act of isolated corruption. If they find ten directors with similar loot, it could still be ten isolated cases. We can only classify the corruption as systemic when there is a system connecting the ten suitcases. For example, the directors could be part of a political network that is using embezzlement to bankroll election campaigns. In this case, the underlying system is political in nature. However, the nature of systemic corruption will vary from context to context and practice to practice.

> *Tackling systemic corruption requires alternative approaches that go beyond standard interventions.*

Tackling systemic corruption requires alternative approaches; these need to go beyond the sorts of standard interventions that target more isolated forms of wrongdoing. Systemic corruption can only be curbed effectively by seeking to challenge, counterbalance, or provide alternatives to the underlying system, rather than by trying to 'catch' individual acts of corruption. For example, a programme that introduces new monitoring tools or legal sanctions will not motivate the hospital directors to behave with integrity unless it also challenges the system that provides them with impunity and with incentives to be corrupt. Dealing with systemic corruption requires collective, multilayered change. In designing all types of interventions, from supporting anti-corruption commissions or civil service reform to supporting civil society and education campaigns, practitioners need to consider whether the corruption they seek to address is systemic – and how.

In this U4 Issue, we consider how the design of one common integrity-building intervention, capacity building for politicians, can respond effectively to systemic forms of corruption. We explore this question in the context of Jordan, where

systemic corruption is often bound up in the concept known as *wasta*. We mainly consider female parliamentarians, who are a common target of capacity building in many countries. Based on our findings, we suggest a markedly different approach to systemic corruption than those that are typically pursued.

We build this approach through a two-step analysis. The first step is to develop a thorough understanding of systemic corruption as it exists in the area under study, so that capacity-building interventions can be designed around the nature of the problem in that specific setting. This means moving away from monolithic understandings of corruption that expect it to function the same way everywhere. A common critique of capacity building for politicians that it relies too much on 'off the shelf' ideas that are sometimes generated by international best practice and conveyed by 'fly-in experts' who are not always familiar with the cultural or national context.[1]

> *Aligning capacity building with agency allows it to be emancipatory, helping to change societal conditions.*

The second step is to make an explicit link between capacity building and agency. It is not sufficient to build the anti-corruption capacity of politicians; there must be an opportunity structure in place that allows them to deploy this capacity. Capacity development should not be seen as an end in itself. Rather, we must focus on the agency of participants and seek to understand how this agency may be encouraged or denied in a particular context. This means giving up the notion that the agency of parliamentarians is rooted entirely in their formal oversight or lawmaking roles. Many programmes that support parliamentarians are 'naïve about the incentive structures that [shape] political activity,' and improving parliamentary effectiveness means understanding the informal norms and structures that determine how much agency politicians have to act.[2] Aligning capacity building with agency allows it to be emancipatory, helping to change societal conditions, rather than a limited exercise in providing the 'right knowledge.'[3]

1. Carothers 2008; Power 2008.
2. Power 2008.
3. Clarke and Oswald 2010.

Jordan as a case study

Jordan provides an interesting setting in which to assess how capacity building for parliamentarians, especially women lawmakers, can be enhanced in contexts of systemic corruption. The swearing in of a new Jordanian government in the summer of 2018, following popular protests and calls for reform, opened a window of opportunity to focus on corruption and integrity issues. Unlike some of his predecessors, the new prime minister is perceived to be serious in his pledges to combat corruption and to make communication with the people a priority.

Jordan (together with Palestine) is often praised for its efforts to promote women's rights and gender equality, especially when compared with other states in the region. In local elections in Jordan in August 2007, a gender quota was applied for the first time.[4] In recent years, different international organisations and development agencies have worked with Jordanian counterparts on capacity-building measures to empower the expanding ranks of female parliamentarians. This approach is supported by some evidence suggesting that women may be particularly well suited to counter corruption and push for greater integrity and accountability in public institutions.[5]

To gain insights from Jordan, we spoke to prospective, current, and former politicians of both genders, including members of Parliament (MPs), local councillors, and prospective candidates. Other interviewees were associated with non-governmental organisations (NGOs). In total, we conducted 12 interviews and two focus groups in various parts of Jordan in April 2018. We also conducted an extensive desk review and drew from various secondary sources. The list of interviewees is appended to the reference list, though names are omitted for reasons of privacy and security.

Organisation of the paper

Following this introduction, the first section of the paper describes the wasta system, which has both corrupt and legitimate aspects and which is functionally, normatively, and politically embedded in Jordanian society. The second section explains why conventional frameworks may be an inadequate response to wasta

4. The quota reserves 15% of seats for women in the House of Representatives and governorate councils, 25% of seats in the municipal councils, and 20% of seats in local councils. (Jordan is divided into 12 governorates, administrative subdivisions akin to states or provinces.)
5. Dollar, Fisman, and Gatti 2001; Swamy et al. 2001; Bauhr, Charron, and Wängnerud 2018.

and suggests that efforts to build the agency of parliamentarians should be grounded in a new theory of change that emphasises indirect approaches to fighting corruption. Section 3 outlines three strategies for building the capacity of parliamentarians to address systemic corruption, with policy pathways and suggested activities for practitioners to consider.

Wasta as a form of systemic corruption in Jordan

Corruption is not a standardised phenomenon, but encompasses a range of practices and logics that are shaped by particular features of a society. To design capacity-building programmes aimed at curbing corruption, it is important first to identify and assess the nature of systemic corruption in the specific context where the intervention will take place. This section outlines why wasta persists as the main form of systemic corruption in Jordan.

Not all forms of corruption in Jordan can be described as systemic. In fact, some types of corruption erupt only sporadically, occurring as isolated incidents. On the whole, these are relatively infrequent and do not seem to form the basis of the corruption problem in Jordan. A Jordanian journalist suggested to us that in general, cases of 'big' public sector corruption, such as embezzlement, are rare in Jordan, especially compared to some other Arab countries. Jordan does better than its neighbours on most corruption measures. For instance, Transparency International's 2017 Global Corruption Barometer found that the percentage of people who paid a bribe for a public service in the last 12 months was less than 5% in Jordan, putting this country in the category of low-bribing nations.[6]

Even so, in the last few years Jordanians have taken to the streets to protest against corruption. While the new government has pursued anti-corruption initiatives, there appears to be a widespread perception that these efforts do not adequately address a form of systemic corruption that many Jordanians consider to be the crux of the corruption problem. Doughan (2017) observes that paying attention to local discourses around corruption can help practitioners identify which specific corrupt practices are considered most egregious in a particular setting. Researching these discourses in Jordan, Doughan shows that when Jordanians protest entrenched corruption, they are usually referring not to conventional forms such as bribery, embezzlement, or extortion, but rather to

6. Jordan is in 58th position on TI's 2018 Corruption Perceptions Index, a better-than-average ranking for countries in the Arab world.

wasta, a form of reciprocal exchange.[7] So while public surveys show that Jordanians believe corruption is one of the country's most serious problems, it is wasta that tends to be identified as the essence of that corruption challenge. The interviews we conducted in Jordan corroborate Doughan's argument. Summing up this consensus, one politician, a leader of the Ma'an movement, described the Jordanian state apparatus as a 'state of wasta.'

> *Wasta is about 'pulling strings' to get what you want or need.*

Wasta, in basic terms, is about pulling strings. Using, invoking, or calling in wasta means asking someone to intervene or mediate for you to obtain some kind of advantage from a third party. That 'someone' might be a relative, friend, or colleague, but it could also be your elected representative. This occurs in public administration, schools, hospitals, businesses, or any other kind of service.[8] While the specific term has its origin in Arab societies, the phenomenon exists in similar forms all over the world.[9] Yet these kinds of practices are often neglected in anti-corruption thinking, partly because they differ in nature from typical corruption. While bribery, embezzlement, and fraud generally involve some kind of 'one-off' monetary transaction, wasta practices normally involve an exchange not of money but of favours, and typically represent not a single occurrence but many exchanges over time. Wasta is a complex practice, one channelled through social networks and supported and sustained by social norms.

Wasta is seen as both corrupt and legitimate

Although Western development agencies and international organisations often condemn the practice as a form of corruption, not all instances of wasta qualify as a formal violation of the law or fulfil 'abuse of power' definitions of corruption.[10] Moreover, while many Jordanians see wasta as key to the corruption problem, they do not necessarily see all forms of wasta as corrupt. In keeping with these somewhat contradictory attitudes, wasta is *broadly condemned, but widely used*. While attitudes towards wasta have not been systematically collected, Doughan cites a 2015 family status report which found that 83% of Jordanians view wasta as a form of corruption. At the same time, 64.9% believe that wasta is necessary

7. Doughan 2017, 2.
8. Cunningham and Sarayrah 1993.
9. Lackner 2016.
10. Doughan 2017.

for finding a job, and 42.8% believe they need to use it to get their bureaucratic paperwork done. Wasta is part of the natural flow of daily life; yet for most Jordanians, addressing corruption means addressing wasta. What is corrupt, then, about wasta?

Addressing this inconsistency means understanding wasta as spanning a spectrum between legitimate and illegitimate. While some wastapractices may be considered acceptable, there seems to be a social consensus that wasta becomes corruption when it leads to excessive and unfair favouritism. This crosses a red line. A director of an NGO in Jordan identified the point at which wasta becomes corruption as follows: 'when someone more deserving loses out.' For example, using personal connections to obtain an earlier date for a surgery is pernicious and therefore corrupt because it pushes someone else – possibly someone with greater medical need – down the queue. But using such connections to obtain readily available medicine from the central ministry is not corrupt because, presumably, no one else will be denied their medication just because one person jumped the bureaucratic hurdles to speed the process.

While wasta provides opportunities and services, it does not guarantee equal opportunities. There is a sense that the practice can leave people 'out in the cold'– that those without sufficient social or familial connections will be unable to access state-based resources. Barnett, Yandle, and Naufal (2013) describe the scope of possible injustices that fuel the sense of wasta as corrupt:

Those who have wasta can jump the queue in acquiring public services while those who do not will struggle through the "normal" bureaucratic process. Those with wasta get job interviews and jobs, while those who do not suffer through calls that are not returned and letters that go unanswered. Those with wasta get favorable rulings from agencies and courts while those who do not often wade through red tape in processes that are not well defined and where outcomes are often unpredictable. Those who have wasta get government contracts and are the beneficiaries of government rules that limit competition, while those who do not find it difficult to enter markets.

The corrupt tendencies within wasta, therefore, are those that create and sustain unequal treatment by the state and other organisations with respect to the distribution of resources to which all citizens, in principle, should have equal access. This gives rise to what can be understood as violations of bureaucratic and distributional justice.[11] These violations often concern minor matters, but they can

11. Doughan 2017.

also involve more blatant, large-scale abuses. Wasta-basedinterference in administrative practices in Jordan has been blamed for widespread nepotism, fraud in procurement processes, and the selling of public land, as well as miscarriages of justice.[12] There are allegations that MPs have used wasta to free people with criminal records from jail.[13] For many of those living in the country, tackling corruption in Jordan necessarily means addressing the most pernicious forms of wasta. This lays down a challenge for capacity-building programmes, which rarely focus on this less conventional form of corruption.

The pillars of wasta

Describing corruption as systemic serves to emphasise its complexity and interconnected nature, but it does not tell us *what* is connecting the acts of corruption. The term 'systemic corruption' should not be used lightly (though it often is). Rather, it must be accompanied by an understanding of the character of the corrupt system, which in many cases will be multifaceted. From our interviews and from the broader literature, we find that wasta in Jordan has three qualities that make it systemic: it is functionally, normatively, and politically embedded in the society. Understanding the nature of the wasta system can help practitioners design interventions to challenge it.

Wasta as functionally embedded

Like other institutions that allocate resources in society, wastahelps people find work, obtain public documents, solve administrative issues and disputes, and access health and education services. Formal administrative channels exist to serve these same purposes. But attempting to complete these tasks through formal processes, by making an official application, visiting a public agency, or voicing concerns to an official, is often considered ineffective. For many Jordanians, it is more efficient, more *functional*, to use wasta. Simply put, wasta 'can get the job done.' It persists because it 'provides for better solutions to a set of social problems' than the formal processes, which are seldom trusted.[14]

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12. Al-Saleh 2016.
13. Obeidat 2016.
14. Barnett, Yandle, and Naufal 2013.
Wasta can also enhance representation, helping those who may face prejudice gain access to the system. Thus, while there are few Palestinians and few female members in the Jordanian judiciary, many Palestinians and women in Jordan hope to utilize wasta to obtain justice through connections to these judicial operators (Costello, Gold, and Henderson 2013).

A World Bank study concluded that this lack of trust in public institutions is at the heart of the continued use of wasta. The authors' analysis of survey data demonstrates a basic dynamic: as citizens experience poor service quality, they increasingly regard the government as corrupt and ineffective; their trust in public institutions suffers, leaving them with few options other than turning to informal social networks and other means to fulfil their individual needs.[15] The continued functionality of this system means that citizens have few incentives to stop demanding wasta.

Wasta as normatively embedded

Wasta also persists because it accords with certain expectations in society about what is appropriate – in other words, with certain social norms. These norms can override individual attitudes, so while someone may personally disapprove of wasta, he or she may still engage in the practice because the influence of the broader social rule is stronger. Adherence to norms is rooted in a sense that a particular practice is expected and socially appropriate. Moreover, non-compliance with social norms can lead to social sanctions, creating pressures to fulfil wasta requests[16]

Social pressures to fulfil wasta are rooted in the nature of Jordanian society, or much of it, which emphasises the importance of kin-based and tribal (clan) attachments. Individuals have an obligation to support the group – the extended family, tribe, or other social network – and can expect to receive support in turn (Kropf and Newbury-Smith 2016). Nearly everyone in Jordan is part of at least one suchnetwork. This means that most people subscribe to an implicit social contract that obliges those within the group to provide assistance and preferential treatment to others within the same group (Barnett, Yandle, and Naufal 2013). This norm exerts an intense pull, despite the existence of legal sanctions to the contrary. Wasta is grounded in group loyalty, and refusing to participate can be seen as jeopardising one's identity as member of a group.[17] Empirical studies suggest that the use of wasta is closely linked to traditional values and social norms and is necessitated by cultural factors.[18] Summing up the imperative of collective loyalty, an NGO director and former public employee stated that if you do not provide wasta then you are seen as 'frankly weird, asocial and a loner who doesn't want to play along with the group.'

15. Brixi, Lust, and Woolcock 2015.
16. Jackson and Köbis 2018.
17. Cunningham and Sarayrah 1993.
18. Tlaiss and Kauser 2011.

Viewing wasta as a social norm also helps reconcile the contradiction of people condemning yet practising wasta. Certain individuals may see wasta as an anathema, yet still act according to shared expectations and beliefs. From this perspective, invoking (Western) legalistic standards to condemn wastamisses the point. Instead of being considered a deviation from an institutional norm, that of integrity, fulfilling a wasta request may be seen as complying with a social norm, that of support for and from the family or tribe.[19]

Wasta as politically embedded

Wasta also persists because it has become entwined in a system of power preservation. In the words of one observer, the director of a development agency, 'Wasta is a structural issue. It is about how the cake in society is divided.' It drives a system of patronage that helps maintain stability between different groups, dampening demands for reform from below.[20]

Those who would stand to lose from a decrease in reliance on the wasta system occupy the centres of power in the Jordanian state: the tribes, the security services, the civil service, and legislators.[21] The extent to which wasta serves the interests of elites was illustrated in 2006, when then Prime Minister Bakhit pushed for an independent committee that would have absolute freedom to investigate corruption across government, including that pertaining to wasta. One might expect this to be something MPs would welcome, yet most of them opposed the measure because it might have weakened their own ability to dish out the patronage spoils they use to maintain their support base.[22] Insofar as wasta is used to maintain influence among elites, it can be seen as 'affirmative action for the advantaged.'[23]

Responding to wasta: Why conventional frameworks may be inadequate

Anti-corruption programmes for politicians often aim to build their capacity in relation to their formal legislative and oversight roles. Because politicians have formal authority over the executive and bureaucracy, the logic goes, capacity

19. Schlumberger 2004.
20. Lust 2009.
21. Jones 2016.
22. Al-Ramahi 2008.
23. Cunningham and Sarayrah 1993, 95.

building can help them positively influence the laws and institutions relevant to curbing corruption. These assumptions frame the kinds of activities that are part of typical programmes: training parliamentarians with specialist anti-corruption knowledge, facilitating peer-to-peer learning, and developing skills around anti-corruption practice.

This approach makes two basic assumptions about agency: first, that institutional frameworks of accountability and integrity are effective against corruption, and second, that individual parliamentarians are able to exercise influence to support such frameworks. Only if both are true can we expect that persuading and training parliamentarians to support these frameworks will be an effective anti-corruption strategy. Can these assumptions about agency be applied in contexts of systemic corruption?

In this section, we assess the likelihood that a typical anti-corruption approach can provide an effective response to wasta. We examine the broader anti-corruption structure, of which parliamentarians are part, as well as the constraints and opportunities for individual parliamentarians.

Formal anti-corruption frameworks have limited effectiveness against wasta

Many policy documents advise the use of legalistic and enforcement tools to address wasta. For example, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development has recommended using a set of standard legal tools, such as conflict of interest provisions and strict rules for hiring and firing, to control wasta in Jordan.[24] The implied theory of change is that if anti-corruption laws and enforcement organisations are brought to bear more explicitly on wasta, it will diminish. But various observers have noted that legalistic and enforcement tools are less effective against wasta than against other forms of corruption. This suggests that the conventional 'refine and apply the law' framework is unlikely to prove fruitful, at least not on its own.

Despite egregious form of wasta having been criminalised for over a decade, there have been no convictions for wasta in Jordan.[25] This is in part because, as Doughan points out, '*wasta* intercessions do not necessarily entail violating any law or bypassing the required bureaucratic procedures; rather, they exploit

24. OECD 2010.
25. Doughan 2017.

uncertainties and indeterminacies that naturally exist within formal laws and procedures' (2017, 4). Wasta thrives on administrative ambiguity, taking place not through formal rules and procedures but through apparently ordinary social exchanges: telephone conversations, meetings in a café, encounters at social occasions. As wasta is often not formally illegal and is hard to prove, it is difficult to amass sufficient evidence to support a prosecution. This can have the effect of making witnesses think twice about reporting cases of wasta, one female councillor told us. Witnesses fear being accused of making false accusations, which would bring repercussions.

There is a more fundamental reason why legalistic strategies, in and of themselves, are likely to be ineffective in targeting wasta: namely, that wasta is socially embedded and thus very difficult to 'trap.' As the preceding section showed, wasta is a social institution, one that is functional, underpinned by norms, and rooted in the political economy of the society. For many Jordanians, it makes practical, normative, and political sense to practice wasta rather than shun it. Wasta therefore represents a social equilibrium, a situation in which – given the choices that others make – no one can be better off by doing something different.[26] Engaging in wasta is the best choice, an equilibrium that empties legal enforcement of key ingredients for success. It is difficult for the enforcement institutions to achieve autonomy from wasta, for public officials to report on it, for judicial processes to prioritise it, and for citizens to stop demanding it.

Wasta is simply too widespread and entrenched for it to be 'surgically removed' via laws and enforcement agencies, and for this reason repeated attempts to deal with wasta through legalistic strategies over the past few decades have achieved very little.[27] In 1999, for example, the Civil Service Bureau launched a pilot project to control wasta in the recruitment processes of the Ministry of Education by decentralising the recruitment system. This initiative 'failed' because it didn't address the underlying reasons for wasta's persistence.[28] More recent evidence suggests that standard enforcement mechanisms have met with little success. For example, interviews conducted with managers working in public administration reveal that the Anti-Corruption Commission has had little influence on reducing wasta in human resources procedures.[29] Moreover, the amplification of corrupt practices is a serious possible unforeseen consequence of trying to systematically eliminate wasta, because when people cannot call upon wasta to solve a problem

26. Fisman and Golden 2017.
27. Al-Ramahi 2008.
28. Al-Ramahi 2008.
29. Al-Saleh 2016.

they may try to bribe instead. One of our interviewees, an NGO director, suggested that this is already happening in Amman, where urban growth means social ties are weakening and bribery is substituting for wasta.

This is not to say that legal strategies are not important; rather, they are not sufficient to push collective behaviour away from wasta. The roots of wasta will be maintained unless ordinary people have alternative means to solve daily problems and express their kin and social loyalties, and elites have ways to maintain their influence. Hence, in thinking about where the 'agency' lies in relation to wasta, we should place less emphasis on legalistic tools and instead think about how to create the functional equivalents of wasta, so that actors can move away from it together.

Politicians have little agency to counter wasta through formal channels

How can parliamentarians address something like wasta? Answering this question requires us to look beyond the formal roles and expectations of lawmakers. While parliamentarians' formal job descriptions call for them to spend their working hours monitoring legislation, our interviews with MPs, political analysts, and voters confirmed an open secret: the formal roles are trumped by informal expectations that set the rules of the game for parliamentarians. The main rule was described by a seasoned parliamentarian, a female independent MP, as follows: provide wasta or face being cast out of your job by the people you represent.

> *For parliamentarians, formal roles are trumped by informal expectations that set the rules of the game.*

These rules of the games are underpinned by normative pressures, a shared understanding that providing wasta is not just a political transaction but a duty for parliamentarians. One NGO official suggested that wasta 'is culturally inscribed. We are told from an early age to help family and friends, creating a heightened pressure on parliamentarians to provide for constituents.' An inability to provide wasta is likely to be met with social derision. One former MP explained, 'You are seen as stupid if you do not cut deals. You are seen as not witty [smart]. There is a social pressure to be witty.' Social and political status is also bound up in

providing wasta. The female independent MP quoted above further explained, 'People look to strong MPs, who are champions of their community. If you can bend and exert pressure to make government do something for your community, you will receive respect. All Jordanians know this.'

> *Many Jordanian politicians spend their working hours generating and distributing wasta.*

Thus, many Jordanian politicians spend their working hours generating and distributing wasta, according to the director of a development agency. An MP representing a north Bedouin tribe lamented that at least 70 percent of the demands on his time entail dealing with wasta requests: 'hundreds of calls a day, dozens of visitors to my home … I cannot escape wasta, it is part of our blood.' A senior advisor to a development agency described how the role of a parliamentarian is to intercede in public administration on behalf of his or her constituents: 'MPs are generally found marching around ministries with a list of demands from the tribe.' As a result, political parties are not so much organisational bodies that debate and generate programmatic platforms as they are networks for trading of favours – 'factories for wasta,' as one NGO official explained.

In fact, the pressure to generate wasta is so widespread that formal roles of legislative supervision can be subverted by it. An NGO official explained that a recent enquiry into cases of mismanagement in Amman's transport system yielded few sanctions because the MPs investigating the situation were bought off by the promise of patronage spoils. Kicking up a fuss around certain legislation can lead to MPs being appeased with resources to be disbursed as wasta. This is the only way MPs are incentivised to deal with legislation, according to a female former MP. Even trainings, seminars, and mentoring programmes intend to strengthen capacity building can be subverted by wasta. An employee of a prominent NGO that provides these programmes in Jordan explained, 'We organise workshops for parliamentarians. Initially there is a lot of enthusiasm when they turn up, [but] they are constantly having to leave the workshop to get on the phone to deal with wasta-related issues. Even the side talks during the workshop are about wasta. Who do you know, how can I get access here or there.'

Parliamentarians are caught in a normative and electoral bind. For the most part, they have no autonomy from a system of wasta that is embedded in their expected roles and responsibilities. This has implications for how we conceive of

the agency of elected officials in relation to anti-corruption interventions. In particular, they are unlikely to play effective anti-corruption roles through formal institutions. The general sense is that 'legislation and monitoring is the last thing MPs think about,' in the words of a development agency officer.

Alternative channels may provide more effective means for parliamentarians to exercise agency. To think about these alternative channels, we need to understand agency as not mainly accorded by formal roles. Agency, rather, is a relational concept, meaning that capacities are developed through social relationships. The nature of those relationships has profound consequences for the ability of an agent, an organization, or a system to get things done.[30] Investigating the potential of parliamentarians as part of social networks provides a perspective on alternative paths.

Addressing wasta effectively requires us to envision a new road map in terms of both the general strategies to diminish wasta and the roles that parliamentarians can play.

Strategies to address the underlying drivers of wasta

As we have seen, forms of systemic corruption, like wasta, are pernicious and difficult to counter with capacity-building programmes that seek to strengthen conventional anti-corruption frameworks but neglect to address the system underlying the corruption. Addressing the underlying drivers requires alternative strategies that go beyond legal and enforcement tools and instead challenge the incentives and norms of the system. This section describes what these strategies could look like in Jordan. The ideas presented here could also be adapted to other contexts, an adaptation that should be based on a prior analysis of the situation in that country.

Above, we identified these incentives and norms as shaped by the core qualities or drivers of wasta: that it is functional, accords with broader cultural and social norms, and bolsters a system of power preservation. We therefore address each of these underlying drivers with a specific recommendation. For each one, we suggest a broad policy path that may help to change incentives and norms. The emphasis is on indirect strategies, in line with some recent thinking that suggests transitions from endemic corruption may be best achieved via indirect methods.[31]

30. Denney and Mallett 2017.
31. Mungiu-Pippidi and Johnston 2017; Rothstein 2018.

We then consider parliamentarians' roles in each policy path and suggest supporting measures that could help them fulfil those roles. We adhere to a key learning point, namely that effective interventions should be designed to capitalise on agency where it exists, including informal forms of agency.[32] In generating these recommendations, we use a 'threshold' of agency to assess the extent to which there is an opportunity structure to pursue the recommendations. Table 1 summarises the suggestions for different ways that parliamentarians could be supported to address wasta. These specific strategies are relevant to the Jordanian context, but the approach could inspire alternative strategies in other contexts.

Table 1. Overview of possible approaches to countering egregious forms of wasta

Aspect of wasta	Policy path	Activities to be supported
Functionality	Animate public institutions	• Development of credible manifestoes • Public projects • Increase in technical knowledge
Social norms	Change norms within social networks	• Dialogue between female MPs and constituents • Communication and outreach capacity • Connections with ongoing efforts
Political economy	Support parliamentarians in building coalitions	• Network-building infrastructure • Regional peer-to-peer learning • Network-building skills

Strategy 1: Challenge the functionality of wasta

Policy path: Animate public service delivery

In the context of weak or dysfunctional institutions, wastacan get the job done. Because it is functional, wastais embedded and normalized in the running of most areas of organisational life. The more people see wasta as the only means of problem solving, the more the formal public institutions decay[33] An anti-corruption policy path is about trying to arrest and ultimately break this unvirtuous circle.

32. Combaz 2018; Power 2008; Denney and Mallett 2017.
33. Brixi, Lust, and Woolcock 2015.

To do this, the formal public institutions need to show that they can carry out basic processes – hiring people, delivering public goods – efficiently and effectively. People must come to see these formal channels as more reliable than using wasta. Once initial trust in a particular institution has been established, the incentives for citizens change. Rather than demanding wasta, citizens may begin to demand further improvements in those institutions and to channel their demands in a more public-oriented way: from 'find a way to get my operation' to 'provide universal health care and better hospitals for all.'

Parliamentarians as champions of programmatic agendas

For such a policy path to succeed, political office holders need spend less time looking after wasta-based interests so they can devote more time and effort to improving the equity and efficiency of public service delivery institutions. This means more than just helping to establish new rules and procedures; it means animating these institutions so they operate day-to-day in an efficient and rule-based way that builds trust. Helping build up functional, public-oriented institutions that can meet people's needs would result in fewer wastarequests and reverse the gradual hollowing out of institutions. This is partly in line with Doughan's (2017) view that more welfare-based interventions are necessary to mitigate wasta.

> *Parliamentarians need to develop programmatic agendas around public, collective services rather than individual favours.*

To do this, parliamentarians will need to find a way to articulate the idea of representation in broader terms and to develop programmatic agendas around public, collective services rather than personalised services and favours. While this will take time, it is worth the effort, as a more virtuous circle can emerge: the more politicians ground their appeal in programmatic promises, the more likely they are to actively work to ensure that the administration is functioning properly and is free from pernicious forms of wasta. Research by Cruz and Keefer (2015) demonstrates that politicians organised into parties that appeal to voters on a programmatic basis have a stronger incentive to pursue policies that require a well-functioning administration. These authors present clear empirical evidence: the more politics is organised along programmatic lines, the better functioning the public administration is likely to be.

Interviews with parliamentarians in Jordan confirmed that the development and enactment of policy plans is an important – and feasible – anti-corruption intervention. One former independent MP, a journalist, pointed out that 'there has been a normalisation of corruption because politicians enter Parliament without any clear policy direction, then seek their own wasta rather than oversee the public institutions.'

Support activities

Support building of credible manifestoes: Jordan seems to have limited experience with developing public policy manifestoes. According to an NGO official, 'There is very little awareness [among parliamentarians and voters] about the role of government in creating policies for all.' Donors could help parliamentarians develop credible party manifestoes by connecting them with research institutes in the country or with peers in the region.

Support public projects: Another role for aid partners is to build public trust in the ability of female parliamentarians to represent broader groups. A GIZ-financed project in Jordan, described by an NGO director, has supported 18 elected female officials by helping them launch community projects. They first receive training and then can apply for a small grant to develop projects in the community. During the project development phase, participants are mentored and coached, providing additional support that builds on the training received in the first phase. This empowers female political leadership and sends a signal that the parliamentarian is fighting for the whole community.

Support increasing technical knowledge on public administration: Parliamentarians also need to know how public administration can be managed in a more efficient and equitable way. Aid partners can support politicians with advisory services on technical issues around policy and institutional development. Such services should be delivered by personnel with expertise in public management, rather than by anti-corruption experts. Evaluations of past initiatives have found technical advisory services to be one of the most effective ways of supporting female parliamentarians and helping them achieve impact.[34]

34. Combaz 2018.

Factors favouring agency

In settings where wasta is deeply rooted, with little scope for collective action against it, the creation of public-oriented representation may be difficult to achieve. Very few parliamentarians in Jordan base their appeal to constituents on public service delivery. Yet there are features of Jordanian society and politics that may provide lawmakers with agency to move in that direction.

First, such an initiative would seem to be in line with the vision set out by the country's leader, King Abdullah II, in his plan for political reform in Jordan, announced after the Arab Spring protests in 2011.[35] Implicitly attacking wasta, the king made a direct call for a politics oriented to the public good. He insisted that citizens have the right to expect their parliamentarians to advocate for impartial policies and programmes that benefit everyone, rather than pursuing gains for themselves or other individuals.[36] Providing further impetus for parliamentarians to move to a non-wasta style of politics, the king suggested that orientation to the public good must become the norm, with neglect of the public interest considered an abdication of duty.

Second, female office holders may have particular advantages in driving this agenda. The director of a development agency suggested that women may be more trusted on certain public policy issues, such as education and health, that are seen as their domain. Indeed, our research showed that female parliamentarians have at times been successful in diminishing wasta requests through broader representation and plans for the whole community. An independent MP demonstrated her public orientation through years of community development work with her constituency in the city of Jerash. For example, she was instrumental in convincing the government to invest in building a factory that now employs 200 people. Actions like this impart a sense that the lawmaker is committed to the betterment of her entire community. As a result, constituents generally no longer ask her for typical wasta goods such as jobs, because they know the MP does not provide jobs through wasta but rather by fighting for job creation on a large scale. Despite saying no to wasta-based requests, this MP has nevertheless won the support of her community and has twice been re-elected.

35. Jones 2016.
36. Jones 2016.

Strategy 2: Challenge the normative strength of wasta

Policy path: Change norms within social networks

Another reason why wasta persists is that it is a social norm, which creates pressures on parliamentarians to continue providing wasta. This policy path is about helping MPs shift norms around wasta so they will be under less pressure to perpetuate the system. This requires strengthening alternative norms around public integrity, but it also entails a basic coordination problem. Why should one group refrain from demanding resources, jobs, and favours from their representatives in the public service when they cannot be sure other groups will do the same? Part of the challenge lies in getting all actors to move away from this norm at the same time, a shift that requires some kind of coordination mechanism around which collective change can take place.[37] With adequate support, parliamentarians could provide this coordination mechanism.

Parliamentarians as norm entrepreneurs

Wasta is based on social networks, which operate according to social norms. Wasta is not a static phenomenon but has evolved over time. Its modern form differs from past variants, as the character of wasta depends on how it is viewed and evaluated within a particular social network at a particular point in time. Parliamentarians, especially female office holders, could use their leadership positions within social networks to become 'norm entrepreneurs,' who work to build up normative constraints against the most pernicious forms of wasta. This would involve much more than engaging in a public anti-wasta campaign; such campaigns may shift individual behaviours but rarely affect underlying social norms. Rather, it is about activating the potential of social change that lies in networks by demonstrating how alternative ways of interacting with public administration can be effective; by acting with integrity and expecting others to do so as well; and by invoking local values to support integrity practices.

Evaluations of past programmes suggest that seeking norm change through networks is a particularly promising approach for those interested in women empowerment strategies.[38] Indeed, successful capacity building is tailored to women's ongoing networks of support and influence, to strengthen 'the network of enabling agents in which women are embedded' in their families and

37. Tadros 2011, 9.
38. Combaz 2018.

communities.[39] This approach treats capacity as a relational concept, rooted in relationships rather than individual abilities.[40]

The mobilisation of networks has been successful in the health sector in Jordan. Examining the case of the Sakhra Comprehensive Health Center, which is in one of the poorest parts of Jordan, a World Bank report showed how standards of care, including around access to treatment, improved due to the mobilisation of social networks.[41] The active engagement of community leaders and their capacity to motivate local residents inspired new norms for service delivery, especially around stronger accountability and better access to services.

Support activities

Support dialogue between female MPs and constituents: Capacity building could help encourage dialogues between elected representatives and their constituencies around issues of wasta. Capacity development for leadership may also integrate a gender perspective to address both male and female community actors who, in a coalition, would be influential in creating an enabling environment to challenge hierarchies.[42] In programmes aimed at women only, families and communities, which rarely feature in capacity development programmes for women, may be included as well, as they are likely to be important. In fact, an evaluation of programmes sponsored by UN Women suggests that interventions to support relations between women MPs and constituencies are often the most successful and should be considered more often.[43] This may involve providing physical spaces for these interactions.

Support communication and outreach capacity: Norm entrepreneurship requires leadership skills and a willingness to lead. In interviews, strong investment in leadership was cited as a critical area where donors could provide support. For cultural and social reasons, women may be reluctant to project strong leadership, a tendency that should be addressed in programmes. Interviewees suggested that female parliamentarians could enhance their agency if they are trained to communicate through more independent channels, such as YouTube or other social media platforms. This can provide a normative space within which new behaviours can emerge, according to a female former MP. Using innovative social

39. Tadros 2011, 9.
40. Denney and Mallett 2017.
41. Brixi, Lust, and Woolcock 2015, 151.
42. Tadros 2011, 9.
43. Combaz 2018.

media to connect female elected leaders to their constituents and the public, thereby enhancing their voice, is an increasingly prominent feature of these strategies.[44] Similar measures can also be beneficial for men.

Support connections with ongoing efforts: Capacity building could also involve connecting leaders with ongoing efforts to change norms around wasta. For example, Leaders of Tomorrow, an Amman-based NGO, has launched a programme that provides training for individuals on how to get a job without resorting to wasta.[45] Such connections would also offer parliamentarians role models and opportunities to build strong networks and coalitions.

Factors favouring agency

The decentralisation of service delivery from ministries and centralised bureaucracies to local elected councils offers impetus for MPs at the central level to reach out to constituents. The king has also called for a stronger culture of engagement between politicians and constituents. He wants MP-constituent relations to be the backbone of a stronger public sphere where political norms can be debated and contested.[46]

Adopting a gender perspective and focusing on women's empowerment is key in this context. There is much potential for female leadership in Jordan. A director of an international development agency suggested that 'there are strong women in communities who need help to lead.' It was noted that women have traditional roles as leaders in Jordanian society. This self-image can be revived and used to afford current politicians more normative influence, according to the executive director of an NGO.

In a review of capacity-building programmes around the world, Carothers argues that women practitioners are often more skilled at maximizing opportunities for outreach. This is in part because women officials are often able to connect with women constituents to pursue issues of mutual interest. Another reason may be that women officials often receive less support from their own parties than their male counterparts do; as a result, they work harder at constituency outreach as an alternative.[47]

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44. Combaz 2018.
45. Jones 2016.
46. Jones 2016.
47. Carothers 2016, 12.

Strategy 3: Challenge the political economy of wasta

Policy path: Support parliamentarians in building coalitions

A third reason for wasta's longevity is that it enables powerful actors to stay in power. Satisfying their constituents' demands for favours helps lawmakers hold onto their seats. Moreover, when parliamentarians who practice wasta form a majority within the legislature, this discourages other legislators from opting out of or challenging the wasta system. One strategy to mitigate wasta, then, is to build up alternative coalitions horizontally, within or close to the centre of power, to gradually challenge the actors whose majority influence maintains wasta.

An example comes from the Democratic Republic of Congo, where the Kuleta Haki project built a network of like-minded actors to challenge systemic corruption in the criminal justice sector. The theory was as follows: 'If people from within the [criminal justice sector] who act with integrity can establish strong relationships with each other, then they will feel added protection and empowered to act against corruption more openly and often, because they will have support (eg emotional, hierarchical, tactical) from those inside the system.'[48]

Parliamentarians as political network builders

A coalition of parliamentarians could be the backbone of a movement to oppose the most pernicious forms of wasta and build more impartial and effective public institutions. Such a network could take different forms. It could be composed exclusively of parliamentarians, or it could be a broad-based coalition of a various actors, including those outside parliament, from civil society and the private sector. It might also include elected representatives serving on local, municipal, and governorate councils. Network building as a form of capacity building has shown some promise in other contexts. For example, some of the most successful women-empowerment interventions undertaken by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and UN Women, among others, have focused on creating and institutionalising networks that bring together elected women (eg caucuses), elected women and men, or elected women and other stakeholders, such as women's rights groups.[49] For UN Women, support for women's networks has been among the more successful interventions.[50]

48. Scharbatke-Church, Barnard-Webster, and Woodrow 2017.
49. Combaz 2018.
50. UN Women 2018.

Support activities

Support network-building infrastructure: MPs could be supported with infrastructure to build up the sorts of networks described above. The aforementioned Kuleta Haki project constructed a network within the criminal justice sector, but a similar approach could also be tried with parliamentarians. Kuleta Haki brought together disparate justice sector actors, including lawyers, magistrates, police, clerks, judges, and civil society members, in a network of around one hundred members, forging relationships across offices and jurisdictions. The project used trainings and workshops, speakers, participatory theatre, and team-building activities to enhance knowledge of corruption and strengthen attitudes about the value of group resistance.[51]

Support regional peer-to-peer learning: Connecting a coalition in Jordan to a regional network focused on wasta issues may provide space for mutual learning. An evaluation of UN Women's activities suggests that connecting female parliamentarians to each other for exchanges and mutual learning is a way to provide high-impact support.[52] Peer-to-peer learning could be extended to allies outside of Parliament, including elected representatives at the local, municipal, and governorate levels. Several of the local councillors we interviewed in Jordan stressed their interest in international exchange programmes, to learn from colleagues abroad and share experiences.

Support network-building skills: This means going beyond imparting anti-corruption best practices to focus on soft skills, such as developing organizational procedures and establishing relationships, which are more important for challenging power.[53] Capacity building by specialists in facilitation and network building may prove fruitful.

Factors favouring agency

Carothers, surveying the past few decades of democracy promotion efforts around the world, argues that female politicians have a 'perceptual advantage' in mobilising against corruption.[54] The potential for female political leadership in Jordan has already been demonstrated by a small group of female former parliamentarians, who have taken the initiative in demanding changes to the way

51. Scharbatke-Church, Barnard-Webster, and Woodrow 2017.
52. UN Women 2018.
53. Venner 2014.
54. Carothers 2016, 13.

public services are delivered. They have established parliamentary committees to push that agenda forward, according to a political party spokesman and a journalist who is a former MP. But working with both men and women is key, as women continue to be marginalised in many areas.

Advice for practitioners

Many societies are burdened with forms of corruption rooted in some kind of system. The more deeply rooted the system, the more the corruption tends to exist in equilibrium. The nature of the corrupt system will differ between and within countries, and across sectors and levels of government. It may be embedded in the society, to a greater or lesser extent, based on its functionality, on social norms of reciprocity, or on political-economic interests – or, as in the case of wasta, on a combination of all three.

This study has focused on how capacity building for politicians can address wasta. By evaluating the nature of wasta corruption and the potential agency of politicians, especially female parliamentarians, to counteract it, the analysis suggests that wasta can only be sufficiently addressed by seeking to balance against and provide alternatives to the underlying system. It is not enough to try to 'catch' individual acts of wasta through legalistic frameworks and enforcement mechanisms. The ideas suggested here are based on a diagnosis of the Jordanian context, but the same basic message applies in other settings: addressing systemic corruption requires a reconsideration of how typical integrity-building programmes are designed.

Tackling systemic corruption entails risks. It may disturb political stability, undermine social cohesion, and weaken forms of welfare. To take these risks into account, practitioners should undertake a context-specific analysis of the nature of the corruption they seek to address. This can be based on formative research and local experiences and should assess what kind of system maintains the regularity of corruption. The analysis should also focus on the agency of those who are expected to be part of the intervention. All programmes should be locally grounded and should work with a broad set of stakeholders, so it is important to map who these potentially supportive partners may be. Finally, practitioners should set realistic programme objectives and timelines. Changes to systemic corruption are likely to be gradual and may take many years, so programme evaluation should reflect a step-by-step approach and long project horizons.

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Development agency director
Development agency officer
Director of a civil society organisation
Former MP
MP, independent
MP, Muslim Brotherhood
Journalist/former MP
Leader of Ma'an movement
NGO executive director
NGO official
Political party spokesman