

## Understanding corruption

Protection of, and by, powerful politicians and institutional elites in a culture where there is tolerance of corruption can extend to include organised criminal groups in return for financial and non-financial favours.

When such a corrupt relationship exists between formal and legitimate institutional leaders and organised crime bosses, organised crime penetrates the political power of the state (state capture) and creates what is called "a penetrated state", even threatening national security (Klitgaard). Other forms of security also affected can include food security and health security (e.g. Ethiopia) and investment security.

Closer to home, international criminal groups such as the Italian, Indian, Israeli, Russian and Triad (Chinese) mafia are attracted to the protective climate or culture of South Africa. The country provides a "safe haven" for these mafias to operate with political and police protection (Sipho).

The depth of such penetration is illustrated by the former head of the South African Police Service and Chief of Interpol, Jackie Selebi, who allegedly received millions of South African rands (in kickbacks) from a drug boss, Glen Agliotti, in exchange for police protection and to ignore the drug deals of his group, making organised criminal actions immune from detection and punishment. Selebi justified his corrupt relationship with Agliotti, calling him "my friend, finish and klaar".

### SAFE HAVENS

In some cases the state is not only penetrated by organised crime; political leaders take control of organised crime, transforming a penetrated state into a criminal and/or failed state, as happened in Somalia.



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Such a state is doomed for death, with the presence of terrorism, revolutions and military coups that hollow out the legitimate power of the state and create a deficit of trust in the government. Penetrated and criminal states with a high level of organised crime suffer symptoms of severe or systemic corruption with low levels of trust not only in the government and political leaders, but also between people. The symptoms of organised crime and its impact extend to high levels of smuggling of contraband, theft, violence and murder, making a penetrated state extremely difficult to rule in the absence of legitimate state institutions. Contraband includes "prohibited articles, illegal imports, illegal exports, smuggled goods, unlicensed goods" (Shepherd).

These mafias can make it extremely difficult for legal businesses with whom they compete, especially if they have the protection of political leaders and the police. They destroy legal businesses and create monopolies with no competition and in effect an increase in prices for basic products and services.

### • References

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Shepherd, S. (2006). *Reader's Digest Family Word Finder. A Family Guide to English Words, their Meanings, Synonyms and Antonyms*.

Sipho, D. (2009). *Understanding Organised Crime and Corruption in South Africa*.

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