



# Corruption and Reform in India: Public Services in the Digital Age

By Professor Jennifer Bussell

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This book asks why some governments improve public services more effectively than others. Through the investigation of a new era of administrative reform, in which digital technologies may be used to facilitate citizens' access to the state, Jennifer Bussell's analysis provides unanticipated insights into this fundamental question. In contrast to factors such as economic development or electoral competition, this study highlights the importance of access to rents, which can dramatically shape the opportunities and threats of reform to political elites. Drawing on a sub-national analysis of twenty Indian states, a field experiment, statistical modeling, case studies, interviews of citizens, bureaucrats, and politicians, and comparative data from South Africa and Brazil, Bussell shows that the extent to which politicians rely on income from petty and grand corruption is closely linked to variation in the timing, management, and comprehensiveness of reforms. The book also illuminates the importance of electoral constituencies and coalition politics in shaping policy outcomes.

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## Corruption and Reform in India: Public Services in the Digital Age By Professor Jennifer Bussell Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #1732000 in Books
- Published on: 2013-08-01
- Released on: 2013-08-01
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.02" h x .71" w x 5.98" l, 1.04 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 322 pages

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## **Editorial Review**

### **Review**

"Throughout the developing world, administrative reforms, such as the introduction of electronic public service delivery systems, have been hailed as necessary to improve democratic accountability and responsiveness. By increasing access to public services and reducing politicians' control over this access, such progressive policies promise to improve the lot for poor citizens in countries like India, Brazil, and South Africa. Yet politicians' incentives are different. Jennifer Bussell shows that when such policies threaten politicians' ability to garner "rents" from petty corruption, they block reform. Fascinatingly, however, some of these reforms are implemented in other states by equally corrupt politicians who are less dependent on petty theft and specialize in 'grand' corruption. This compelling - if disturbing - analysis of the difficulties facing grassroots reform in the Third World uses case studies, field experiments, interviews, and statistical data to make its case. It is academic detective work at its very best."

Irfan Nooruddin, The Ohio State University

"Corruption and Reform in India is an insightful and politically sensitive work that demonstrates how corruption operates in practice and when political actors support reform. Bussell's work will push reformers to take the political environment seriously and to recognize the deep difference between petty and grand corruption. The book will be of interest to scholars of comparative politics, public administration, and corruption as well as to experts on India."

Susan Rose-Ackerman, Yale University

"Jennifer Bussell has written a fascinating study on an important topic: technology-enabled public service reform across Indian states. This study will be pathbreaking and resonant for its linkages between political incentives, the nature of corruption, and possibilities of reform within India and beyond. It offers a nuanced portrayal of India in which digital reform and innovative techniques for public service delivery coexist with newer kinds of rent seeking, rather than one to the exclusion of the other. Her research design is unique in analyzing a large set of states across India and will be an important methodological contribution to the literature."

Aseema Sinha, Claremont McKenna College

"Corruption and Reform in India is valuable not only for its novel findings but also for the questions that it raises. It should be widely read by scholars of comparative politics and public administration."

John Echeverri-Gent, Perspectives on Politics

"Corruption and Reform in India provides a new opportunity to understand the politics behind the setup and implementation of computerized service centers. Bringing together a comparative, subnational analysis of centers across 25 states between 2005 and 2009, this book is a bold attempt to identify the reasons for the difference in the quality of centers across states."

Nafis Hasan, Governance

### **About the Author**

Jennifer Bussell is an Assistant Professor of Public Affairs in the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas, Austin. Her research focuses on comparative politics, the political economy of development, and technology policy and has appeared in journals including Comparative Political Studies, International Studies Quarterly and Studies in Comparative International Development. She

received a PhD in political science from the University of California, Berkeley, in 2009.

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