

Supplement to:

Prasad, Monica. 2022. "Proto-Bureaucracies." *Sociological Science* 9: 374-405.

The IITs have a strong reputation for being relatively free of corruption and patrimonialism, both in student selection and in hiring (Mistree 2015). When I say relatively free of corruption, I mean that corruption may exist within the IITs, but if so, it seems to exist at the level of developed countries, rather than at the level of developing countries. For example, in the United States it would be highly unusual to ask or offer a bribe in even the bureaucracies with the least effective reputations, such as the Department of Motor Vehicles. This does not mean, however, that there is no corruption in the United States. Corruption occurs and corruption scandals occur. Similarly, actors at the IITs have also occasionally been caught in corruption scandals.

Nevertheless, I feel confident in calling the IITs relatively free of corruption and patrimonialism for three reasons. First, scholars have shown that where corruption is widespread, people do not hesitate to talk about it and admit to it. This is because when there is a culture of corruption, those who participate in it see nothing wrong with it. For example, in Russia, bribes given to doctors are understood as gifts of appreciation for good service, and no one tries to hide the fact that they do it—indeed, they would be embarrassed to admit to not giving these gifts, as that would be seen as violation of a norm of reciprocity (Rivkin-Fish 2005). Marina Zaloznaya (2017) conducted interviews in corrupt universities in Ukraine and Belarus and found respondents did not hesitate to describe their corrupt practices in detail, precisely because everyone in their social world engaged in those same practices. Thus, in a context in which people do not admit to giving “gifts” in return for help or better treatment, we can conclude that there is no culture of corruption in this sense—there is no taken-for-granted practice in which unofficial payments are seen as appropriate. This is the case for the IITs (Mistree 2015). For example, in my research one respondent was quite open in mentioning instances of bribery she had heard about in her undergraduate university, but had not heard of any at IIT, where she was conducting graduate research (N01).

Second, certain forms of corruption create victims who may be willing to speak about what has happened to them. The victims may include colleagues who have not received a promotion that was given to another as a result of nepotism or bribery; clients of the organization who do not appreciate having to give a bribe to get a service that should be theirs by right; and suppliers and distributors whose difficulties and uncertainties are magnified by corruption. Thus, even if people may be reluctant to describe their own participation in corruption, they are often aggrieved and willing to describe others'. But there are in general no such reports of corruption in the IITs. (Mistree 2015) In my interviews, I was particularly impressed by the testimony of several interviewees who, from the beginning of the interview to the end, criticized the university relentlessly, for small reasons as well as large ones—but nevertheless agreed that it was not a site of corruption. A faculty member spent the entire interview complaining about delays in the procurement process, disrespectful campus neighbors, incompetent and unhelpful staff, lack of facilities, and even how professors dress. Everyone on campus was unhappy, this professor concluded, and there was corruption outside the gates—but even this professor did not find corruption to be a problem inside the gates (N12). A graduate student was extremely unhappy about restrictions placed on graduate

students, comparing the new IIT unfavorably to his prior (non-IIT) university and explaining in detail and at length his dislike of the IIT, how hierarchical it is, how higher socio-economic groups dominate it, how it unthinkingly reproduces privilege. But he had not heard of instances of corruption at the IIT, and thought that corruption was unlikely because the kind of people who become IIT faculty are not primarily motivated by money (N03). A third interviewee, a faculty member who gave the most critical picture in the set, worried about the power of the director and caste and regional preferences in hiring, and gave instances of things he found suspicious (e.g. the curtains at the home of one of the faculty members looked suspiciously like the curtains that faculty member had been responsible for procuring for the university), but even he did not give examples or suggestions of exchanges of money for grades or positions (N41). Of course, many faculty and students critical of the university may have been unwilling to speak to me. But this organization does not seem to exhibit the kind of culture of corruption where corruption is taken for granted, or where those who suffer from corruption complain about it.

Third, a reputation for corruption, or for integrity, is in many important ways a self-fulfilling prophecy. As Zaliznaya (2017) has shown, the reputation itself has consequences, because in institutions with reputations as corrupt, people seek out information from informal networks about precisely how to conduct a corrupt exchange, thus becoming capable of performing one; in institutions without such a reputation, they do not seek out such information and therefore do not become capable of performing one. Instead, students at the new IIT told us of being taught by older students how to recognize and resist corrupt solicitations from beyond the walls (N27, N33, N01). One of my faculty respondents told about an instance when he had been an external member of a recruitment committee at another university, not an IIT:

R: So I can give you very, maybe very nice anecdote. So I was expert in one of the state universities, where I was called as an expert, and this director of that institution was-- vice chancellor of that institution--was from [an IIT] so he knew me. And when I was sitting there and he was, faculty recruitment happening and he was continuously getting calls from various powerful people including ministers, recommending one candidate or the other. And in front of me, he told this person, whoever was calling him saying that "you know that we have an expert from IIT, another committee, and these people are mavericks...You know, they're crazy people and we can't do anything." So after this call ended, he told me that this is one reason I make sure that at least one IIT professor whether the...Whether the person contributes anything to their selection is not important for me. But I can get lot of people off my back by saying that there is a professor like this and you know, and we can't sort of make him agree on something like this. (O02)

Thus, whether or not corruption exists at the IITs, it is clear that they have a reputation as non-corrupt, and this reputation itself is an important social fact.

I do note, however, worries that the expansion of the IIT system may lead to changes in its nature: “With more campuses spread out across many states, professors and students were expressing interest in returning to new IITs in their home states. This is a real threat to the IITs: if a Kerala naval architecture professor no longer has to go to Kharagpur in West Bengal, but can instead join an IIT in Kerala, then local factions may form and parochialism may emerge. This was not a problem when there was a limited number of IITs and each IIT had its own specialties, but one gets the sense that it will be a growing challenge for the IITs in the years to come. Strategies must be adopted to maintain the cosmopolitan culture across the IIT system or else the system is in danger of becoming overtaken by regional and parochial influences” (Mistree 2021).