

INTERNATIONAL ANTI-CORRUPTION CONFERENCE 2024

Vilnius, Lithuania 18-21 June 2024

SESSION REPORT

Please know you may design the structure of this report to better suit the session. It's important to capture the key outcomes and solutions proposed for the future.

New Frontiers in Using Leaked Data for Anti-Corruption Research

Date: 18 June 2024

Time: 5PM - 6:30 PM (GMT +3)

Report prepared by:

Michael Hornsby
Impact Manager
Anti-Corruption Data Collective

Moderated by:

Zoe Reiter
Director for Combatting Kleptocracy
National Endowment for Democracy

Panellists:

- David Szakonyi
Associate Professor of Political Science
George Washington University
- Jimmy Kande
Director for West and Francophone Africa
PPLAAF
- Alexandra Gillies
GACC Director
OCCRP
- Annalise Burkhart
Board Member
DDoSecrets

Share the thematic focus of the session, its purpose and corruption risks?

New Frontiers in Using Leaked Data for Anti-Corruption Research

In an age where data breaches and leaks are increasingly common, their potential use for anti-corruption research is growing. A panel at the International Anti-Corruption Conference (IACC) explored this topic, revealing new insights and strategies for leveraging leaked data to combat illicit financial flows (IFFs) and corrupt regimes.

The Role of Investigative Journalism

Investigative journalists have been at the forefront of raising awareness about IFFs and the financing of kleptocratic regimes. Moderating the workshop, Zoe Reiter (ACDC co-founder and Director for Combatting Kleptocracy at the National Endowment for Democracy) highlighted the importance of these investigations as the first line of defence against corruption. However, despite the depth and breadth of available data, the anti-corruption community often find ourselves in a perpetual game of whack-a-mole, constantly addressing emerging threats, said Reiter.

Academic and Journalistic Collaboration

Alex Gillies, Director of the Global Anti-Corruption Consortium project at the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, emphasized the necessity of collaboration in tackling the enormous scope and complexity of anti-corruption challenges. The immense quantity of data requires sophisticated big data analysis, which investigative journalists are beginning to scratch the surface of. Academic collaboration is a growth area, although ad hoc requests from academic researchers can add pressure to already overworked journalists.

Handling Large Data Sets

Annalise Bukrhart, board member of Distributed Denial of Secrets (DDOSecrets) discussed the challenges of managing large, unstructured data sets. Many newsrooms and organizations lack the capacity to handle such volumes of data, which can create additional problems. DDOSecrets provides custom software and support to ensure data reaches the right hands.

Synergizing Efforts

Jimmy Kande, West and Francophone Director at the Platform to Protect Whistleblowers in Africa spoke about the potential of synergizing efforts between journalists, civil society, and academics to fully exploit available data. In regions like Africa, where some civil society groups may be seen by government as aligned with the opposition, it's crucial to bring all stakeholders together for comprehensive data analysis. Journalists aim to break stories quickly, while academics focus on meticulous methodologies, making their collaboration beneficial for deeper understanding.

Addressing Collaboration Challenges

David Szakonyi, described how the Anti-Corruption Data Collaborative (ACDC) was designed from the outset to address the challenges of collaborative investigations, such as the lack of initial academic engagement in the Panama Papers investigation. Collaborative projects from the outset can lead to simultaneous publications targeting different audiences. Understanding each other's value adds is essential, despite differing paces and focuses.

Case Studies and Projects

Alexandra Gillies detailed projects involving corruption's professional enablers. A project with Exeter University, supported by the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth & Development

Office (FCDO), leverages AI to analyze data from various repositories, aiming to map out enablers connected to politically exposed persons (PEPs).

Annalise Burkhart highlighted notable investigations, such as the 29 Leaks involving UK corporate service provider Formations House and into the Myanmar bank's corporate structure supporting the military junta. These cases demonstrate the broad impact of data when placed in the hands of experts.

Protecting Whistleblowers

Jimmy Kande from PPLAAF stressed the importance of protecting whistleblowers to enhance the impact of their revelations. The Congo Hold Up investigation, involving 3.5 million documents from BGF Bank in DRC, showcased the critical role of media in understanding and disseminating corruption cases.

Policy and Ethical Considerations

Describing the collaboration between PPLAAF and ACDC on a new project delving into the Congo Hold Up investigation, David Szakonyi pointed out the need to focus on policy improvements, particularly in trade-based money laundering. Derisking, while a concern for facilitating IFFs, might push illicit flows into darker channels. It's crucial to understand the impact of whistleblower revelations on internal bank operations and the broader anti-corruption landscape.

Building Effective Partnerships

Alexandra Gillies discussed the factors that make partnerships successful: shared priorities, complementary skills, adequate resourcing, coordination, and trust. Ethics and confidentiality are paramount, and all parties must navigate these complexities to move projects forward.

Annalise Burkhart mentioned the forthcoming rollout of a new system from DdoSecrets to manage data access requests securely, emphasizing the importance of following legal protocols and data privacy regulations.

The Academic Perspective

David Szakonyi highlighted the differences in incentives and cultures between academics and journalists. While gaps exist, both sides must strive for mutual understanding and cooperation. Academic research, informed by data science, can offer objective advocacy and influence policy.

The Future of Anti-Corruption Research

Zoe Reiter concluded with reflections on the experimental nature of these collaborative projects. The non-profit nature of journalistic organizations often aligns better with such collaborations than commercial media. Effective collaborations require managing resources wisely and maintaining a shared vision.

In summary, the IACC panel underscored the transformative potential of using leaked data in anti-corruption research. By fostering collaboration among journalists, academics, and civil society, we can harness the power of big data to expose corruption and drive meaningful change.

Key recommendations for the future and concrete follow-up actions

OCCRP and ACDC are exploring possible further collaborative projects in this area.

What can be done to create opportunities for scaling up the solutions discussed in the session? And by whom?

Investigative newsrooms can initiate collaborations and share data with academics.

Donors can support collaborations.

Academics can build relationships with investigative journalists and seek opportunities to collaborate.

Is there a specific call to action to key stakeholders, such as governments, businesses, funders, civil society, young people, journalists or any other stakeholder that should be noted? Please specify if relevant.

See above.

Rapporteur's name

Michael Hornsby
Impact Manager
Anti-Corruption Data Collective

Date submitted

25 June 2024

Action! This report needs to be emailed to iacc-av@transparency.org within 24 hours of the session. If you wish to update the report, please do so by 21 July. Thank you.