

Exploring the Impact of Access to Information Laws on Corruption in Malawi: A Vector Error Correction Approach

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Abstract

Malawi's access to information (ATI) law culminated in an advocacy of over two decades, with political leaders opposing and tactically delaying its implementation. While politicians construed the law as a media law, the core policy belief of the advocacy coalition was to eliminate the culture of secrecy in public offices and ensure government openness and accountability, with the control of corruption as a means to an end. This study employs a time-series positivistic approach to analyse data from 1996 to 2022. Additionally, the study employs the autoregressive distributed lag (ARDL) approach, bounds cointegration, and the overall error correction model (VECM) to establish the long-run relationship between public access to information and corruption indices. Parameter estimates reveal that any initiative to boost public access to information will reduce corruption by 0.374%, with the impact manifesting after two years. In the long run, however, improving Access to Information laws reduces corruption by 0.264%, ceteris paribus. The results of this study imply that the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) holds true in its hypothesis that the altruism of advocacy groups should not be precluded. Indeed, without at least one shared policy core belief, it would have been hard or otherwise impossible for professionally varied actors to be glued together for a frustrating period of 22 years in pursuit of access to information law.

Keywords: Access to Information; Corruption; Advocacy Coalition; Policy Core Belief; ARDL; VECM

Introduction

This study examines the policy core belief of Malawi's pro-transparency coalition that public access to information will eliminate the culture of secrecy in public offices and ensure government openness and accountability with a means to an end of reducing the scourge of cancerous corruption. On September 11, 2020, the government of Malawi officially released the access to information (ATI) legislation (Masina 2022; Kasoka 2022). The ATI bill was passed in the Parliament on December 14, 2016. On the 10th of February 2017, the President (Peter Mutharika) assented to the ATI bill. It was published in a gazette on the 17th of February 2017 and became operational on the 30th of September 2020 during President Chakwera's led Tonse Alliance government. The regulations for implementing ATI legislation were published on the 14th of January 2021 (Malawi Human Rights Commission 2022). However, the implementation of the law encountered severe political oppositions in Malawi. The advocacy for the bill began as early as 1999, and the first draft of the bill came into being in 2004 (UNHCR 2004; CHRI 2005).

The pro-transparency coalition led by the Malawi chapter of the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) encountered several years of frustration with political elites who appeared to ignore or thwart the law's implementation. For example, the second president in Malawi's democratic era, Professor Bingu wa Mutharika, implemented an antithetical legislation that gave the information minister more power over information (Gondwe 2011), bringing back Kamuzu Banda's unpopular media censorship.

However, the advocacy group did not give up on the quest of implementing the ATI law. The policy core belief held by the pro-transparency coalition for the ATI law was that it would reduce secretive dealings on the part of the government and public institutions (Mambulasa, 2016; Open Government Partnership, 2016). More so, government openness and accountability would help reduce endemic corruption in the country. In contrast, political elites and public officials often misquoted the ATI law as a media law driven by the self-interest of media houses other than for the general public (Mambulasa 2016; Masina 2020; Kasoka 2022).

This study matters because corruption is an evil canker that has corroded the fabric of society and undermined the trust and confidence of social and political institutions and public officials therein (Adu 2008). Corruption continues to flourish in Malawi's public sector (Mtuwa and Chiweza 2023; Msoma et al. 2020). The government's acknowledgement of corruption in Malawi dates to the inception of the Anti-Corruption Bureau in 1995, a year after independence. This move was followed by the National Anti-Corruption Strategy in 2008. The government of Malawi also subscribes to several internationally adjudicated mechanisms to reduce corruption and

its endemic effects on development. For example, Malawi signed the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) for public access to information (Hansen 2002). Malawi is also a member of the United Nations and the African Union (Banda 2023), whose respective 2030 and 2063 goals strive for undisputed public access to information, as stated in SGG 16.10.2.

Still, Malawi has continued to face a monotonic increase in corruption. Notable cases include the 2013 “Cashgate”—the largest financial scandal in the history of Malawi that witnessed the disappearance of over US\$100 million from government coffers at Capital Hill (Riley and Chilanga 2018; Chinsinga 2014; Dulani et al. 2021). Other major scandals include the misappropriation of US\$34.5 million in Maize procurement at the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Water Development (Oxford 2017), as well as the 2019 re-election of the Democratic Progressive Party. Both instances represented a clear sign of corruption that saw masses of people joining demonstrations to protest those malpractices. Although it is difficult to monetise the actual cost of corruption, it is estimated that Malawi lost approximately US\$723 million to corruption between 2009 and 2014 in the name of dubious contracts between state agencies and private sector companies (Nyasa Times 2021; Kateta 2021).

We note that a single study cannot easily capture the complex story of corrupt practices in Malawi. The 2019 Integrity Assessment Survey, for example, revealed that 44.4% and 75.7% of public service users confirmed that they paid bribes to the Directorate of Road Traffic and Safety Services (DRTSS) and the Department of Immigration and Citizenship Services (ICS) (Anti-Corruption Bureau, ACB 2019). Other public service entities perceived as fertile grounds for corruption in Malawi include the Malawi Police Service, Malawi Revenue Authority, Office of the President, and the Judiciary (Chinga and Chiweza 2023; Chinga and Ned 2022). Despite the unceasing corruption cases in Malawi, there are few empirical studies on the drivers of corruption and anti-corruption, such as access to information; hence, the current study.

Literature Review

We adopt Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith’s (1999) Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) as it deals with the goal conflicts, technical disputes, and the multiplicity of actors in public policy processes (Nwalie, 2019; Sabatier, 1988; Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1999; Sabatier & Weible, 2007). The framework constitutes three primary premises: (1) policymaking occurs among specialists within a topical area, geography, or actors; (2) individuals who participate in the policymaking process have their beliefs turn into policy; and (3) aggregating a diversity of policy lobbying actors into coalitions is the best way to simplify the policymaking process. That is, actors with common

beliefs form alliances and strive to prove their beliefs are better for policy conversion than those held by adversarial coalitions (Sabatier and Weible 2007; Heinmiller et al. 2021). While there has been a monotonic increase in ACF research, the two distinct utilisations of the framework include those that seek to validate the applicability of the ACF in a specific political context (see Heinmiller et al. 2021; Nwalie 2019) and those that use the ACF's pathways and hypotheses to understand policymaking processes, such as coalition formation, emergence, or development of policies, policy change, and policy learning (see Sengchaleun et al. 2022; Osei-Kojo, Ingold, and Weible 2022). In this paper, we do not focus on unpacking the complexity of the ACF. Rather, we use this framework to explain the altruistic or purposive goals of the pro-transparency coalition. Meaning, we keep our use of the ACF simple to avoid terminologies requiring further elaboration.

The ACF embeds the possibility of altruistic or purposive coalitions as opposed to the rational choice framework, which assumes that all advocacy coalitions are self-interested or materialistic. Although the pro-transparency coalition in Malawi was assumed to be material rather than purposive by politicians and public entities (Masina, 2020), we note that the coalition was purposive or otherwise altruistic enough as it included lawyers, academics, researchers, journalists, politicians (though only those in opposition parties), and Civil Society Organisations (Gondwe 2011). All these actors shared a common belief that the ATI law would reduce secretive government dealings and corruption in general (Masina, 2020), making it an undisputable policy core belief that glued different actors together for over two decades of advocacy for the law.

The ACF is like a spaghetti bowl, consisting of overlapping theoretical foci. For this reason, proponents of the framework urge students and researchers to refrain from testing the totality of the framework and instead focus on theories in the framework that are narrower in scope and answer specific questions, variables, and interactions (Jenkins-Smith et al. 2017). Therefore, we adopted this framework because of its theoretical foci on the purposive or altruistic aspects of coalitions, which, in the case of Malawi's pro-transparency coalition, constitute eliminating the culture of government secrecy with a means to an end of reducing the scourge of corruption. The argument disputes rational choice theory, which argues that all coalitions are material or self-interested.

Corruption is a worldwide development issue that persists in surviving the tests of time and place. This phenomenon remains aboriginal in both developed and developing countries, notwithstanding the multiplicity of governance and social models (Laureti et al. 2018; Laureti et al. 2022). While governments and policymakers strive to reduce corruption, research investigations exist to guide the policymaking process. Implementing access to information laws is among the

various corruption control measures, and it is seen as a powerful tool for reducing corruption in Africa (Kasoka 2022). However, less than 60% of countries have implemented an ATI legislation in Africa (Salau 2017; UNESCO 2023). As of 2024, only 29 out of 54 African countries have implemented access to information laws, representing 53.7% of country coverage in Africa (Africa Freedom of Information Centre, AFIC, 2024).

Noteworthy, many countries have experienced struggles in getting political actors to implement access to information laws, not only in Africa but globally. The law was first adopted in Sweden (including Finland) in 1766 and passed in the United States (US) in 1966. Evidence shows that US President Lyndon Johnson and all federal agencies rigorously opposed the move (Berczewski 2024). Similarly, the law was miserably rejected in the United Kingdom's House of Commons in 1975 (Birkinshaw 2002) until its adoption in 2000. Nevertheless, the UK's political leaders delayed implementation until 2005 (Birkinshaw 2002). In Asia, government control circumvents any initiative to implement access to information laws (Bhatta 2016). In Africa, Malawi, Kenya, Ghana, and Mozambique among other African countries, pro-transparency advocacy coalitions endured a series of advocacy extending over a decade to convince and sometimes collaborate with political actors to implement ATI laws (Shyllon 2018; Mambulasa, 2016; Heinmiller et al. 2021; Ukaigwe 2018)

Various international and regional organisations with some technical or financial support or both have supported the pro-transparency advocacy coalition. Regionally, the African Union's Commission on Human and People's Rights (The African Commission) developed a Model Law that integrates international and regional standards for best access to information practices. The African Commission, through the Center for Law and Human Rights at the University of Pretoria, facilitated a series of debates, research seminars, and webinars to assist member states with evidence-based formulation of ATI laws.

Empirical evidence confirms the effectiveness of ATI laws in reducing corruption. Studies from sub-Saharan Africa and other regions consistently show that public access to government-held information serves as a significant deterrent to corrupt practices (Forson et al. 2016; Cariolle 2018; Gok 2021; Elbahnasawy and Revier 2012; Triesman 2007; Gokcekus and Knoric 2006; Brunetti and Weder 2003; Abu and Staniewski 2019). These studies also highlight a wide array of corruption determinants, which can be classified into four major categories:

- Governance indicators: government effectiveness, regulatory quality, voice and accountability, rule of law, political stability, and bureaucratic cost;

- Institutional and legal factors: property and civil rights, freedom of information or press, education, democracy, tax revenue, and the durability of the political system);
- Economic factors: economic prosperity measured by GDP, public spending, natural resource rents, size of government, trade openness, economic freedom, aid inflows, bureaucratic wages, and income distribution;
- Sociocultural factors: ethnic fractionalisation, dominant religions such as Islam, Catholicism, or Protestantism, colonial history such as British colonisation, military expenditure, and the ratio of working women.

Table 1 summarises recent empirical studies, showing how these variables influence corruption dynamics in diverse regional contexts.

Table 1: Summary of Recent Empirical Studies on the Determinants of Corruption

<i>Study</i>	<i>Coverage, Sample and Methods</i>	<i>Corruption Index</i>	<i>Governance Indicators</i>	<i>Institutional/Legal</i>	<i>Economic Factors</i>	<i>Sociocultural</i>
Forson et al. (2016)	22 SSA, 1996–2013, OLS	CPI	–*	–*	+	
Ghanity and Hastiadi (2017)	92 countries, 2014, OLS	CPI	+, –*		+, –, +	+, +, +
Cariolle (2018)	71 developing & transition economies, HLM	WBES	–*		+, –	
Abu and Staniewski (2019)	Nigeria, 1984–2016, ARDL	ICRG		+, –	+, –	
Blaise and Massil (2019)	SSA, 2006–2013, BMA	WGI			+*	
Tyburski et al. (2019)	50 USA states, 1976–2012, HLM & GMM	PCL	–*	+*	–, +	
Sunčana et al. (2020)	14 EU countries, 2018, OLS	WGI	+	+		
Gok (2021)	42 SSA countries, 1996–2016, GMM	WGI	+, –	+*		
Lucio et al. (2022)	193 countries, 2011–2020, OLS, FE, RE, WLS	WGI			+, –, +*	
Zouaoui et al. (2022)	Tunisia, 1998–2018, BMA	CPI			–, +	
Ahmad & Issa (2022)	MENA, 2008–2018, OLS				–, +	

Legend:

“+” indicates a positive influence (i.e., increases corruption).

“–” indicates a negative influence (i.e., reduces corruption).

“*” denotes statistical significance.

Data and Methods

This country-specific study uses yearly data for Malawi from 1996 to 2022. The independent variable was the corruption index, and the primary independent variable of interest was the right to the information index. Legal capacity and government effectiveness indices were used as control variables and are also important determinants of corruption. Table 2 summarises these variables.

Table 2: Variable Description and Expectations

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Code</i>	<i>Parameter</i>	<i>Source</i>	<i>Expectation</i>
Public Access to Information	ATI	Right to Information	Center for Law & Democracy	+
Control of Corruption	COC	Control of Corruption Index	WGI	+
Government Effectiveness	GVE	Government Effectiveness Index	WGI	+
Legal capacity	ROL	Rule of Law Index	WGI	+

Source: Authors' analysis

The Control of Corruption variable reflects perceptions of the extent to which public power is exercised for private gain, including petty and grand forms of corruption and “capture” of the state by elites and private interests. Control of corruption is the most widely used comparative indicator of the degree of corruption worldwide, and its research usage has continued to accelerate (Lustrilanang et al. 2023; Satrovic et al. 2018; Serra 2006).

This study employs the Right to Information (RTI) index as the primary independent variable of interest, as it reflects the degree to which the public can access information held by government authorities. The RTI index evaluates the robustness of national legal frameworks governing the right to access public information. It is widely utilized by intergovernmental organizations, RTI advocates, policymakers, legislators, legal professionals, academics, and other stakeholders (Center for Law & Democracy 2023).

This study incorporated the Rule of Law and Government Effectiveness indicators as control variables. The former reflects perceptions of the extent to which agents have confidence in and abide by the rules of society, particularly the quality of contract enforcement, property rights, the police, and the courts, as well as the likelihood of crime and violence. Many previous studies use the index as a proxy for the function of the

institutions of the rule of law or the strength of a nation's legal framework (Banda 2023; Banda 2024; Ozpolat et al. 2016; Ogbuabor et al. 2020; Ata et al. 2012). On the other hand, the World Bank (2023) defines government effectiveness as the perception of the quality of public services, the quality of the civil service and the degree of its independence from political pressures, the quality of policy formulation and implementation, and the credibility of the government's commitment to such policies (Kaufmann and Kraay 2023).

Empirical specification

Our baseline specification model is derived from Forson et al. (2016), who examined the institutional causes of corruption in Sub-Saharan Africa. His study included information freedom, government effectiveness, regulatory quality, and the rule of law.

$$COC = f(ATI + ROL + GVE) \quad (1)$$

Two reasons entail that the Autoregressive Distributed Lag (ARDL) model is deemed appropriate for analysing our data. First, the estimation technique is valid for small sample sizes and produces authentic t-statistics even in the presence of endogenous regressors (Pesaran et al. 2001; Harris and Sollis 2003). For example, Pemba (2022), Udoh et al. (2015), Naseem (2021), Anderson et al. (2022), Chirwa (2023), Banda (2021), Banda & Kassam (2023), Jeke and Wanju (2021) employed 22, 32, 17, 28, 24, 31, 31, and 25 annual observations in their usage of the time series ARDL model. Secondly, the model can be applied even when the study variables are integrated in order one, zero, or both. This scenario is unlike the Johansen cointegration approach, which requires series integrated in the same order (Johansen and Juselius 1990).

The generalised ARDL model, therefore, is presented as follows:

$$Y_t = \sum_{j=1}^p \lambda_j Y_{t-j} + \sum_{j=1}^q \delta_j X_{t-j} + \varepsilon_t \quad (2)$$

Where X_{t-j} are the $K \times 1$ vector of explanatory variables, and the Y_{t-j} is the lagged dependent variable. Specified as an unrestricted ECM, the ARDL model can be represented as:

$$\begin{aligned}
\Delta \ln COC_t = & \alpha_0 + \sum_{i=1}^p \alpha_{1i} \Delta \ln COC_{t-i} + \sum_{i=1}^{q1} \alpha_{2i} \Delta \ln ATI_{t-i} \\
& + \sum_{i=1}^{q2} \alpha_{3i} \Delta \ln ROL_{t-i} + \sum_{i=1}^{q3} \alpha_{4i} \Delta \ln GVE_{t-i} + \beta_1 COC_{t-i} \\
& + \beta_2 ATI_{t-i} + \beta_3 ROL_{t-i} + \beta_4 GVE_{t-i} + V_{1t}
\end{aligned} \tag{3}$$

Where the mathematical triangle notation (Δ) denotes the first difference operator, and the V_{1t} is the white noise disturbance term. Upon the establishment of cointegration relationships, the above ARDL approach of order (p, q1, q2, q3) can be presented using vector equilibrium or error correction model (VECM) as follows:

$$\begin{aligned}
\Delta \ln CPM_t = & \alpha_0 + \sum_{i=1}^p \alpha_{1i} \Delta \ln CPM_{t-i} + \sum_{i=1}^{q1} \alpha_{2i} \Delta \ln INF_{t-i} \\
& + \sum_{i=1}^{q2} \alpha_{3i} \Delta \ln CTY_{t-i} + \sum_{i=1}^{q3} \alpha_{4i} \Delta \ln CON_{t-i} \\
& + \sum_{i=1}^{q4} \alpha_{5i} \Delta \ln BDEP_{t-i} + \theta ECT_{t-1} + \varepsilon_t
\end{aligned} \tag{4}$$

In this specification, θ represents the model's speed of adjustment parameter, while the ECT denotes the error correction term. The coefficient's sign is expected to be negative and statistically significant to confirm the existence of a cointegration relationship. The ARDL model uses a generalised likelihood estimation method whose lag length is obtained from various information criteria, such as the Akaike Information Criteria (AIC).

Results and Discussions

Table 3a below presents the characteristics of the raw data used in the study. To begin with, the average perception that public power was used for personal gain by public and private sector officials is 35.58% for the study period. The public held the highest perception of corruption at 51.92% and the minimum of 14.81%. Government effectiveness and the institution of the rule of law depict a weak performance, with an average of 44.53% and 31.13% between 1996 and 2021. On the other hand, the right to information has

averaged 50.18%, and a standard deviation of 22.05 suggests that data points in the index are heavily dispersed from point to point.

In addition, the pairwise correlation matrix in Table 3b indicates that improving the right to information reduces corruption in Malawi. However, correlation does not entail causation. Therefore, the study engages in further statistical analyses to find the impact of the right to information on corruption in Malawi.

Table 3a. Descriptive Statistics

	COC	ROL	GVE	ATI
Obs.	27	27	27	27
Mean	35.58	44.53	31.13	50.18
Std. dev.	10.21	5.09	9.35	22.05
Min	14.81	37.02	20.67	15
Max	51.92	52.40	45.90	73.59

Source: Authors' calculations

Table 3b. Pairwise Correlation Analysis

	COC	ROL	GVE	ATI
COC	1.0000			
ROL	0.1477	1.0000		
GVE	0.7018*	0.0860	1.0000	
ATI	-0.0634	-0.5159*	-0.2034	1.0000

Note: Pairwise correlation computed at 5% significance level

Source: Authors' calculations

Ensuring data stationarity is a crucial prerequisite for time-series modeling, as non-stationary data—particularly those with a unit root—can lead to persistent shocks and spurious regression results (Banda and Kassam, 2023; Granger and Newbold, 1974). Table 4 reports the outcomes of the Augmented Dickey-Fuller (ADF) and Phillips-Perron (PP) unit root tests. Both tests confirm that the raw data are non-stationary but become stationary after first differencing. These findings indicate that all variables used in this study are integrated of order one, denoted as I(1).

Table 4. Unit Root Test Results

Variable	ADF		PP		Decision
	Level	1 st Difference	Level	1 st Difference	
Control of corruption	-0.111	-3.554***	-1.921	-4.913***	<i>I</i> (1)
Access to information	-0.212	-3.148***	-2.090	-4.317***	<i>I</i> (1)
Rule of law	0.550	-2.326**	-1.484	-5.002***	<i>I</i> (1)
Govt effectiveness	-0.982	-2.181**	-1.810	-4.659***	<i>I</i> (1)

Note: ***= 1%, ** = 5%, * = 10% levels, ADF = Augmented Dickey-Fuller, PP = Phillips-Peron.

Source: Authors' computations

The study employs the Bounds cointegration test to check the existence of a long-run relationship among the study variables. The test is applicable for series that are either purely in levels, integrated of order 1, or both. As Table 5 shows, the decision criteria for the bounds test is to reject the null hypothesis when t is less than the upper bound or $I(1)$. In our case, $t = -10.481$ is less than $I(1) = -3.78$. Guided by the Akaike Information Criteria (AIC) maximum lag length of 4, we conclude that there is a cointegration or long-run relationship among the variables in our specified equation. The results imply that we run an ARDL vector error correction model (VECM) over a vector autoregressive (VAR) model.

Table 5. Bounds Cointegration Test Results

Dependent Variable	Lag	Matrix List	t-Stat.	I(0) (5%)	I(1) (5%)	Final Decision
$\Delta \ln \text{COC}$	4	(4 4 4 4)	-10.481	-2.86	-3.78	Cointegration
H_0 :	no levels relationship					
Criteria	accept if $t >$ critical value for $I(0)$ regressors					
	reject if $t <$ critical value for $I(1)$ regressors					

Source: Authors' calculation

Note: The asymptotic bounds are obtained from Table C2 of case III unrestricted intercept, with no trend for $k=3$ (Pesaran et al., 2001). Lower bound $I(0) = 2.86$ and upper bound $I(1) = 3.78$ at 5% significance level. Δ = first differenced operator.

Normalised on corruption as a dependent variable, we employ an ARDL-VEC model based on equation 4. The long-run and short-run estimated coefficient of public Access to

information is negative and statistically different from zero. It implies that a one-unit improvement in national legal frameworks for accessing information held by public authorities minimises chances of utilising public authority for personal gain by 0.264% and 0.37% points in the short-and long-run. The results are consistent with our a priori expectation and other studies from different regions that also empirically observed a negative influence of public Access to information on corruption (Forson et al. 2016; Cariolle 2018; Blaise and Massil 2019; Gok 2019).

Table 6. VECM ARDL Results for COC

Regressor	Coefficient	Standard Error	t-statistic	Prob
Long-run results				
Dependent Variable: $\Delta \ln \text{COC}$				
Constant	0.135	0.024	5.68	0.030
$\Delta \ln \text{ATI}$	-0.264	0.078	-3.40	0.017
$\Delta \ln \text{ROL}$	-0.286	0.211	-1.35	0.309
$\Delta \ln \text{GVE}$	1.957	0.156	12.54	0.006
Short-run results				
Dependent variable: $\Delta \ln \text{COC}$				
$\Delta \ln \text{ATI}$				
D1	-0.110	0.121	-0.91	0.457
LD	0.008	0.092	0.09	0.939
L2D	-0.373	0.077	-4.84	0.040
L3D	-0.108	0.053	-2.03	0.179
$\Delta \ln \text{ROL}$				
D1	2.186	0.575	3.80	0.063
LD	3.218	0.538	5.98	0.027
L2D	1.022	0.507	2.02	0.181
L3D	1.981	0.383	5.17	0.035
$\Delta \ln \text{GVE}$				
D1	-3.015	0.543	-5.55	0.031
LD	-3.760	0.714	-5.27	0.034
L2D	-3.683	0.642	-5.73	0.029
L3D	-2.398	0.367	-6.54	0.023
ECT_{t-1}	-2.845	0.271	-10.48	0.009

Source: Authors' calculations

However, it is important to note that the autoregressive lags are significant only at the second lag. The implication is that Malawi's Access to information laws will only be effective after some few years, a minimum of two years. The finding justifies the reason why the pro-transparency coalition advocated for an independent commission body to oversee the implementation of the Access to Information law. According to the Access to Information Act (2017), the Malawi Human Rights Commission (MHRC) is mandated to carry out awareness campaigns and conduct capacity-building training for information officers and public officers to ensure an effective rolling out of the legislation. That is, the means to an end for the law will be realized only when these strategies are effectively implemented and the public is fully informed about the Act and the procedures for requesting information. However, this is challenging in Malawi, with the oversight commission frequently underfunded during each subsequent fiscal year.

We conducted diagnostic tests to check the authenticity of our findings. First, the Durbin Watson (D-W) checks serial correlation. Second, the Skewness-Kurtosis test is used to check for normality of the specified model. Third, we use the Breusch-Pagan test to test heteroscedasticity, and lastly, model specification test is done by the Ramsey Regression Equation Specification Error Test (RESET). Since all p-values in Table 7 are higher than 0.05, it entails the absence of serial correlation, no model misspecification, and data is desirably homoscedastic and normally distributed. Normality of our variables is further ascertained by distribution plots in Figure 3 (Appendix). The recursive Cusum square test is used to test for model stability. Figure 1 (Appendix) validates that our model is stable since the series lies inside the 5% boundary throughout the time covered in the study. In addition, the residuals-fitted values plot in Figure 2 (Appendix) ascertains the absence of heteroskedasticity since there is no systematic change in the spread of residuals over the range of measured values.

Table 7. Model Authentication Tests

Model Authentication Tests (p-values)						
R-squared	Adj. R-squared	Serial Correlation Test (Durbin-W)	Specification Test (Ramsey RESET)	Akaike Information Criteria	Normality Test (Skew-Kurt)	Heteroscedasticity Test (BP)
0.997	0.973	2.425	0.233	-6.119*	0.2188	0.532

Source: Authors' calculations

Conclusions and Policy Implications

Policymakers and researchers prescribe Access to information as a legal framework to combat corruption in Africa. Most African countries still need to implement the ATI legislation. The current study, therefore, explored the role of the right to public Access to information in the fight against corruption in Malawi. The study employed data from the Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI) and the Center for Law & Democracy from 1996 to 2022. We used the bounds cointegration approach, autoregressive distributed lag (ARDL) and error correction model (VECM) to analyse data. Results showed that improving the Access to information legal framework in Malawi will reduce corruption from the second year, and the impact will persist in the long run. The results are in tandem with the assertion of the advocacy coalition framework (ACF) that we should not assume that all groups are materialistic or self-interested like the rational choice theory does. The current study confirms that the pro-transparency coalition in Malawi was driven by the policy core belief that a guarantee of Access to public information will reduce the propensity for corruption in the country. Furthermore, we deny the materialistic aspect of the group as we have shown that the coalition comprised actors from all sectors, public and private sectors, lawyers, academicians, international organisation representatives, and not just actors from the media fraternity.

These results suggest that the government of Malawi should be committed to ensuring the full operationalisation of the Access to Information legislation by supporting the oversight of the Access to Information legislation – the Malawi Human Rights Commission. We also suggest that the Malawi Human Rights Commission should use various means to conduct awareness campaigns among the public on all existent Access to public information-related laws. Since government effectiveness depicted a negative association with corruption, we also urge the government of Malawi to improve the quality of public services and the civil service and ensure that public service agencies are independent of political influence. Improvement in government effectiveness will also be realised if there can be an improvement in the quality of policy formulation and implementation, as well as government commitment to achieve those policies.

Furthermore, the pro-transparency coalition of Malawi need to fervently continue pressing the government for increased support for greater transparency in the public sector. After the implementation of the law, one research commissioned by the Youth and Society (YAS) organization with Oxford Committee for Famine Relief (OXFAM) revealed several gaps and other laws that speak against maximum disclosure of information. After four years

since implementation, it is high time that the government and all relevant stakeholders consider reviewing the Act to assess where it has worked well and not and make amendments accordingly. Doing so will help to strengthen the legislation and foster a more open government that is accountable to its people.

Nonetheless, this study is not without limitations. The utilisation of secondary data and quantitative methodology denied us an opportunity to explore lived experiences of various actors from the pro-transparency coalition, the public and political elites. This case study can help researchers understand Malawi's policy process, including the types of actors, policy venues, policy entrepreneurs, and brokers. This case study may also help researchers probe the pressures that the Malawi government confront before and after policy implementation. Further, the ATI legislation is still in its nascent stages of operationalisation. For this reason, we encourage future researchers to take a qualitative approach to address these concerns.

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Appendix

Appendix contains three diagnostic figures used to evaluate model robustness and statistical assumptions. All figures are based on the authors' analysis and computations.

Figure 1. CUSUM and CUSUM of Squares (CUSUMSQ) Plots

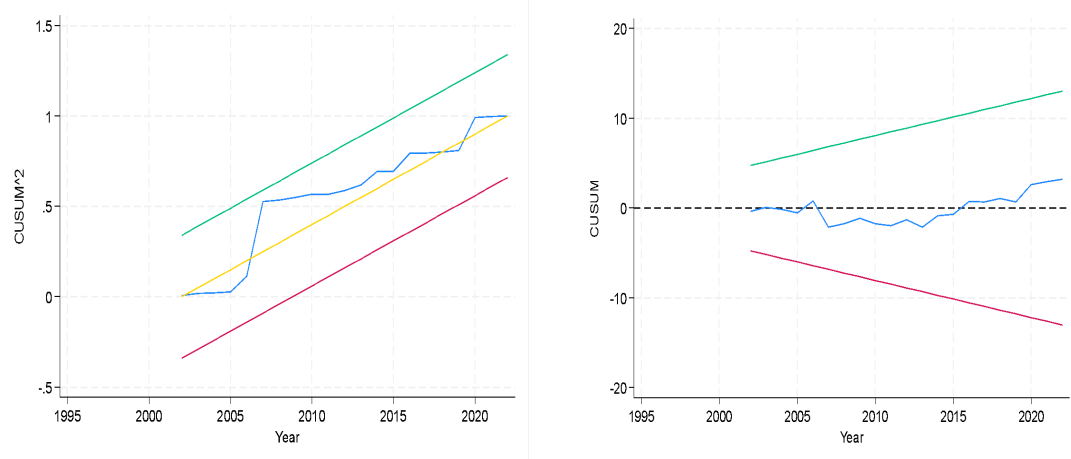


Figure 2. Residuals vs. Fitted Values Plot

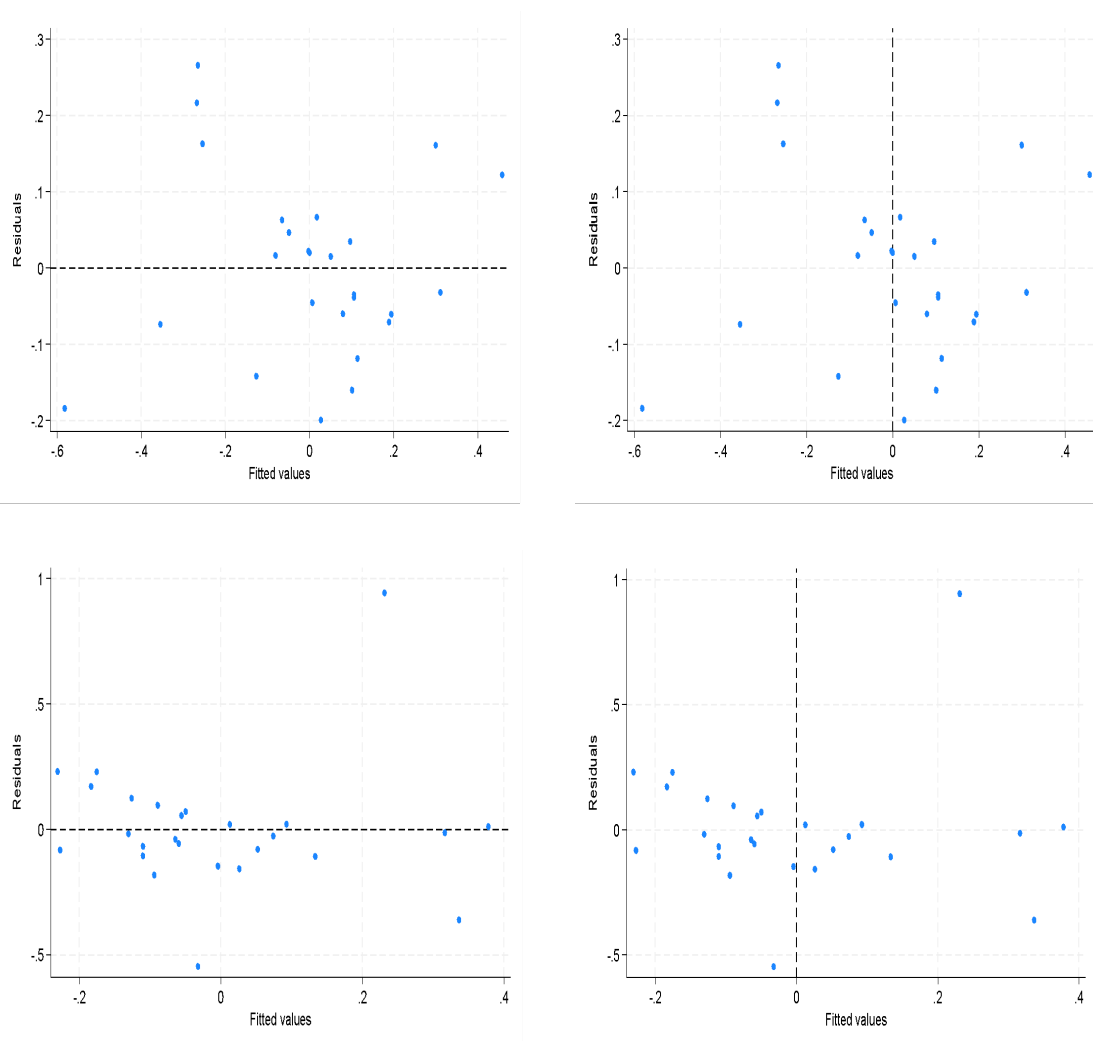


Figure 3. Distribution of Residuals

