

The Impact of Audit Failures and Corruption on the Performance of the Public Sector in Iraq.

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Abstract: *This paper aims to examine the effect of audit failures and corruption on the Iraqi public sector performance and determine quantitative estimates of such effect on the firms in the said sector. Corruption is a phenomenon that exists on a global scale and that arises in different manner notwithstanding the development level of the country. Corruption also hinders the performance of organizations in the public sector. This study employed a questionnaire distributed to 143 respondents to determine the effect of audit failures and corruption on the firms. In the study's theoretical framework, Iraqi public sector performance was considered as a dependent variable while audit failures and corruption was considered as the independent variables. Therefore, The result of this study show significant and negative relationship between Audit Failures and corruption with performance of the Iraqi public sector. The findings also highlighted the need for an extensive anti-corruption strategy backed by political strength that will be accountable for the consequences. The strategy should consist of institutional and administrative reforms of public-financial management and control system, and it should guarantee the participation of civil society as well as citizens. Moreover, through international cooperation, productive outcomes in terms of gaining knowledge from successful or bitter experiences of countries can be learned from. Consequently, this will develop mutual understanding of the corruption phenomenon and required measures can be adopted in international law, with the international society taken into consideration throughout the strategy process.*

Keywords: *Audit failures, corruption, performance, public sector.*

I. Introduction

The expected major role of the public sector and its connection with other sectors in satisfying societal needs have evolved throughout the years (Rankokwane, 2008). In addition, firms in the public sector are deemed to hold higher accountability compared to the private firms owing to the appropriated budget on the former that is considerably made up of public funds (Archbold, 2005). The phenomenon of business globalization has led to the public's need for auditing firms in all countries to satisfy the least level of auditing competence (Alkafaji, 2007).

Generally speaking, auditing provides the required services to maximize the trust of users in the financial report. Such services serve to provide value to financial statements as the information contained within is used by the users to make informed decisions (Suyono, 2012). In a pioneering study, DeAngelo (1981) examined the auditing quality and the factors that affect it and found a positive auditing quality-audit firm size relationship. Also, in the past few years, audit quality has increasingly been considered as a tool to enhance audit service and more currently, to evaluate the adherence with the established quality standards (Karapetrovic & Willborn, 2000). On the basis of the scandals that occurred, it has become important, more than ever, to decrease the failure of audit through the analysis of factors affecting audit quality. More importantly, corporate scandals like Enron and WorldCom have led to the stress on the need to employ strict audit with high quality (Lennox, 2005).

Firms in the public sector hold more accountability compared to the private firms owing to the government budget allocated for the former that mostly consists of public funds (Cukier et al., 2012). In recent times, there has been increasing stress on SAIs to enhance the audit services provided. Auditing in the public sector falls under the responsibility of the SAIs, whose fundamental role is to carry out audit and assurance services to improve the public sector and accountability of government. In other words, SAIs have a key role in guaranteeing the continuous chain of accountability between parliament and government that covers government agencies, authorities, firms and government-controlled entities (Funnell, 1997). This indicates that the Supreme Audit Institutions (SAIs) like auditors, auditors' courts and government have a key role to play in improving public sector auditing and to safeguard it against corruption (Clark et al., 2007).

II. Importance of Public Sector Performance

The public sector performance comprises the actual output of the firm in relation to its objectives (Tseng, 2007). Performance refers to the facilitating activities that adhere to the professional standards, and the uses of governance arrangements in a way that they enhance overall performance and effectively deliver goods,

services or programs (Wong, 2012). Additionally, the most important factor to the stakeholders of an organization is its performance (how well it accomplishes its mission). Therefore, performance is a key aspect in the operations of the organization and is core to the organization. There are three organizational performance aspects that an auditor has to consider and they are effectiveness, efficiency and economy.

In addition, performance in the public sector indicates the accomplishment of a specific task of the firms measured against established accuracy standards, completeness, cost and work speed and it is considered to be the achievement of an obligation (Richards et al., 2008). According to past findings, organizational performance comprises of goals and objectives, the achievement of an obligation, and the performance and functions adherence to the professional standards with the main objective of increasing the professional level in the face of threats in the environment.

III. Anti-Corruption Mechanisms in Public Sector

The environment of the public sector audit generally has a monopolistic nature with the SAIs responsible for government auditing (Clark et al., 2007). The SAIs have different roles and functions that are important to the public, the legislature as well as the government and they have different audits and inspections roles in different entities of the government. The audits can be conducted through requests or on a spontaneous manner (Ibrahim, 2010). SAIs are basically independent, non-political entities that perform auditing for governments in order to make sure that public funds are effectively and properly used, administrative activities are properly executed and communication of information to relevant public authorities and the public through reports publication are ensured (Rankokwane, 2008). SAIs also play a significant role in reinforcing accountability and good governance by assisting governments in their enhancement of transparency and accountability, combat corruption, maintain public trust and promote the efficient and effective receipt and employment of public resources for the citizens of the country (Odia, 2014). According to Sevilla (2005), a decentralized environment has to have disciplined public spending, positive institutional relationships, a maintained negotiation platform, management cooperation, permanent and transparent reporting as well as cooperative control structures throughout different government levels. In establishing the key role in SAIs in the context of financial management and control system, it should be kept in mind that such entities have the essential legal powers/tools to audit the entire public funds, resources and activities and relay audit findings to the parliament to assist parliamentary monitoring over executives and to make it known to the public (Kayrak, 2008).

In a related study, Power (1997) stated that independent auditing is required in majority of modernist conceptions of accountability as it improves the information in terms of its credibility and legitimacy upon which formal financial accountability is based on. Stated clearly, SAIs auditing activities should be devoid of executive intervention that would employ the audit reports in supporting public-financial management (Kayrak, 2008). Studies in literature dedicated to SAIs independent of different jurisdictions focused generally on the evaluation of the independent level obtained by the institutions and the effect of such independence on the public officials' discharge of accountabilities (Fan et al., 2012).

Therefore, it is crucial that SAIs become the linchpin of the integrity of the country as they are responsible for auditing government income and expenditure, the watchdog over financial integrity and the credibility of information provided (Dye & Stapenhurst, 1998). In fact, the SAIs efforts to lessen corruption are its major contribution in preventing corruption and in supporting accountability and transparency with the main aim of supporting a robust financial-management system (Borge, 1999).

IV. The Responsibility of Combating Corruption in The Iraqi Public Sector

In the Iraqi public sector, the Federal Board of Supreme Audit of Iraq (FBSA) is the main entity responsible of combating corruption. It is professional independent and neutral institution established in 1927 and it plays a key role justifying public funds and promoting the auditees' efficiency in government institutions as well as public officers. The FBSA holds the responsibility of auditing the Iraqi government accounts and monitoring public contracts. It is deemed to be one of the pioneering institutions in the country. Moreover, the Board mandate has gone through evolution throughout the years and was last modified in 2011 (Federal Law 31). It is basically an independent institution in terms of financial and administrative duties and it reports to the Parliament.

Moreover, the FBSA is responsible for safeguarding public interest as it identifies and refers cases of fraud, waste and abuse to the anti-corruption entities. In its participatory role in fighting corruption, it makes use of the principles of transparency and accountability and ensures that public funds are efficiently used, the efficiency of institutions are increased, and public sectors are audited, audits are enhanced, and standards of accounting and management are aligned with international standards. It also ensures that accounting and auditing professions and systems are developed. Its other responsibilities include the control and auditing of parties' accounts based on control and financial laws, regulations and instructions, conducting investigations

into expending efficiency and use of public wealth and reporting it as required by the national legislative authority.

V. The Relationship Between Audit Failure And Corruption

In the past few years, audit quality has attracted attention as a tool used to assess the auditing effectiveness and in recent times increasing importance has been placed on SAIS to conduct quality auditing (Karapetrovic & Willborn, 2000). In a related study, Nuri and Al-Lahibi (2013) revealed some barriers to achieving effective auditing in the level of Federal Board of Supreme Audit of Iraq. FBSA auditing in Iraq is linked to the competence, experience and independence of the auditor and his ability to determine material errors and misstatements (Salih & Hla, 2015). In this regard, auditing failures have led to debates concerning the new requirement in place (Hamdan, 2011) to reinforce quality auditing (Hagman & Persson, 2014).

In prior studies, audit failures have been evidenced to tarnish auditor reputation through loss of market share (Fafatas, 2010). In this background, quality of audit may be considered conceptually as a continuum that ranges from very low to very high audit quality. In addition, audit failures arise on the lower quality continuum, while audit quality is at the opposite, with the former having the possibility of leading to business failure, corruption as well as other negative consequences. Moreover, audit failures lead to minimized perceived audit quality of firms (Francis, 2004; Bing et al., 2014; Hagman & Persson, 2014; Fafatas, 2010; Beattie et al., 2010). According to Kayrak (2008), corruption happens on a global level in different ways and forms notwithstanding the development level of the country. More recently, there is increased public outcry in Iraq since 2003 on the government's wastage of public spending, corruption, high recurrent expenditures, governance costs and ineffective budget performance by different government entities. In this regard, Tas (2012) evidenced that public sector corruption is rife in Iraq, especially among the public officials in the higher echelons and it has the potential to lessen economic development and good country governance.

VI. Impact of Audit Failures and Corruption on The Performance of The Public Sector Firms

Corruption encapsulates different activities ranging from petty bribery to grand corruption and is deemed to be a destructive element that destroys the political culture of nations, the just appropriation of resources, the well-being of societies, and the citizens' trust on their governments. Therefore, it is imperative to control corruption in order to promote economic development, increases the country's competitiveness, enhance social conditions and resolve the country's poverty issue (Kayrak, 2008).

In study of the same caliber, Alkafaji (2007) revealed several indicators that confirm the significant relationship between poor quality review and audit failure or corruption. On the basis of the majority of the business scandals that occurred, it is imperative to enhance audit quality by conducting an analysis of the factors that influence effective auditing. In contrast, audit failures and corruption are costly to investors, auditors and to the society as a whole as this may lead to loss of public funds and weaken the economy and societal welfare.

In the context of Iraq, corruption is rife among senior public officials in a manner that it may be considered as a threat to the development of the country's economy and its good governance (Sharman, 2008). In fact, failure to minimize corruption is related to the lack of access to anti-corruption entities among Iraqi ministries to examine allegations concerning corruption, making investigations dependent on information that has to be provided voluntarily upon the minister accused of corruption. This type of information gathering is evidently a flawed and weak one and as such, it is important to identify another method of exposing public sector corruption (TAS, 2012).

The relationship between corruption and reduction of performance lies in the fact that performance refers to the achievement of task measured against established standards of accuracy, completeness and cost in the achievement of organization goals (Richards et al., 2008) while corruption prevents performance. According to Morrison and Shough (2009), audit failures have to be reduced to increase organizational performance. Performance initiative programs can enhance and improve the service quality provided by organizations and thus, the following hypothesis is proposed;

H: *Audit Failures and corruption have a significant and negative effect on the performance of the public sector.*

VII. Methodology

The size of the sample in the present study was 143 auditors working in the Iraqi Federal Board of Supreme Audit. The study employs a quantitative method of data collection through email survey, with all the items within the questionnaire adopted from Fadzil (2003) and Svensson (2005). More specifically, 13 items were used to measure the availability of the variables in the public sector performance. Six items measured auditing failures and corruption, while performance was measured by 7 items. All the items were gauged through a 5-point Likert scale that ranged from 1 denoting strongly disagree to 5 denoting strongly agree to identify the determinants of audit quality assurance.

The present study made use of the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) - a relatively new method in development. SmartPLS3.0 via PLS Algorithm was employed to test the hypothesized model – it is a software having graphical user interface for variance-based structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM). It is useful in empirical studies to analyze data gathered from surveys and to examine the proposed hypotheses. Because it is originally programmed in Java, it is possible to run it on Windows and MacOS operating systems.

VIII. Construct Reliability And Validity

Reliability refers to the estimate of the consistency level of multiple construct measurement (Hair et al., 2010). It is the measurement instrument’s ability to provide the same results in repetitive measurement sessions in the same circumstances (Golafshani, 2003). Hence, reliability analysis was carried out to measure the items consistency of measuring the constructs.

The dominant method of measuring and testing reliability among science researchers is the Cronbach’s alpha (Al-Dhaafri, 2014) and along this mainstream trend, this study used Cronbach’s alpha to assess the reliability of constructs measures separately.

Table 1: Construct Reliability and Validity

	Cronbach’s Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
COR	0.848	0.893	0.683
PFC	0.824	0.889	0.660

For exploratory research, the minimum standards for Cronbach’s alpha as established by Nunnally and Bernstein (1994) is 0.7 and as clearly tabulated in Table 1, the alpha coefficient values for the entire constructs obtained acceptable levels. Other studies established the following good level of reliability of measurement; COR of 0.848 and PFC of 0.824 (Sekaran, 2003), alpha levels above 0.70 (Gibbons, 1985).

IX. The Cross-Loadings of Factors

The factor loadings indicate the level that the factor is capable of explaining a variable in factor analysis. The content validity of the measure refers to the level the items generated to measure a construct is capable of measuring the concept they are meant to (Hair et al., 2010). In other words, the items designed to measure a specific construct should load on their respective construct more than the other constructs in the model.

Table 2 presents the factor analysis of construct items and their outcomes. According to Hair et al. (2014), the minimum level should exceed 0.708 and this is aligned with the results obtained where the minimum level is 0.832.

Table 2: The Cross Loadings of Factors

	COR	PFC
COR1	0.832	-0.651
COR2	0.915	-0.762
COR3	0.926	-0.919
PFC1	-0.943	0.899
PFC2	-0.752	0.856
PFC3	-0.573	0.848

Corruption (COR) performance of the public sector (PFC)

X. The Assessment of Hypotheses and The Testing Procedures

After the goodness of the outer model was established, the testing of hypotheses was conducted. The hypothesized model was examined through the use of SmartPLS3.0 through PLS Algorithm. The path coefficients were confirmed for their statistical significance through the use of bootstrapping method in SmartPLS 3.0 with T values of each path coefficient generated along with their P values (see Table 3). The empirical results indicated interesting and invaluable findings regarding the impact of corruption and the audit failure on public sector performance.

It is clear from table 3 that COR was found to have a negative significant impact on PFC ($p < 0.01$, $\beta = -0.881$) at the level of significance of 0.01 level. Therefore, The result of this study show significant and negative relationship between Audit Failures and corruption with performance of the Iraqi public sector. but it is aligned with the results reported by Sohail et al. (2014), where a significant effect was found from audit failure and corruption to organizational performance. This pointed to the crucial need to develop the economic situation of the organization via implementation of laws and effective audit.

Table 3: The Cross Loadings of Factors

Hypothesis Statement	Path Coefficient	T Value	P Value	Decision
COR-PFC	-0.881	43.842	0.000	Supported

The R-squared is primarily utilized to determine the significance of a specific beta or alpha – with higher R-squared revealing a more useful beta value and a lower one, a low beta value to the firm's performance. In Table 4, R-squared is listed to be 0.677 for PFC indicating that the independent variable (corruption) explains 67.7% of the dependent variable (performance of public firms).

Table 4: R-Squared of PFC

Model	performance of the public sector
R Square	0.677

XI. Discussion

Audit failure and corruption is among the top factors that influence organizational performance. According to Sohail et al. (2014), a significant impact exists from audit failure and corruption to the performance of the organization, and as such, the economic situation has to be developed through laws and effective audit. In a related study, Kis (2005) also evidenced that auditing failure prevents effective auditing and in turn, low-quality auditing can result in business failure (Kayrak, 2008). Based on the obtained results, 67.7% of the Iraqi public sector performance is influenced by audit failure and corruption, where a negative relationship exists between them as the latter mitigates the performance of the public sector organizations in Iraq.

XII. Conclusions

The present work examined audit failure and corruption and its influence on Iraqi public sector firms. Based on the findings, the following conclusions are reached – effective auditing is frequently related to the auditors' competence and independence of detecting material misstatements and issuing audit reports devoid of errors. The public sector firms are more accountable compared to their private counterparts owing to the significant budget allocated to them from public funds (Cukier et al., 2012).

In the above background, effective auditing can be described conceptually as a continuum that runs from very low to very high auditing, with audit failures at the low end. Effective auditing is negative related to audit failures, with such failures leading to business failure and other negative consequences (Francis, 2004).

With regards to corruption, it is a global phenomenon that takes on different ways and forms notwithstanding the development level of the nation. It can be reduced with the help of political will, administrative reforms (anti-corruption commissions, Federal Board of Supreme Audit of Iraq), parliaments, public awareness/participation, the judiciary, the media and the private sector.

On the basis of a systematic method of examination, the need for an extensive anti-corruption strategy strongly supported by political entities is highlighted. The strategy should consist of institutional and administrative reforms on public-financial management and control system that promote the participation of civil society and citizens. More importantly, as international cooperation is expected to lead to fruitful outcomes (gaining knowledge over success or experiences of other countries), a mutual understanding of corruption and the employment of the required measures in international law calls for international society contributions throughout the strategy implementation.

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