

## Why good government matters

**Bo Rothstein, *The quality of government: corruption, social trust, and inequality in international perspective*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011**

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In this relatively short (225 pages) but very ambitious book, the Swedish political scientist Bo Rothstein begins with a somewhat abstract, formalist criterion of “quality of government” (or QoG, as he calls it) and proceeds to describe the many implications and important results—both theoretical and practical—of accepting this criterion of QoG. Readers of this journal may be especially interested in Rothstein’s book because corruption is one of the most serious factors that undermine QoG. Rothstein’s theory of good governance helps to illuminate what corruption is, how pervasive are the harms it generates, and why it is so difficult to prevent or eradicate. But Rothstein goes further in an attempt to show how quality of government affects levels of trust within societies and how levels of trust determine whether countries are or are not capable of supporting welfare state institutions that have the potential to provide significant benefits to their citizens.

In developing his views, Rothstein employs a wide array of research methods and strives to meet high standards of methodological rigor. Among the various social science methods he employs are large scale correlation studies, scenario experiments, historical case studies, and game theory. For value and conceptual questions, he draws on and responds to the theories and arguments of political philosophers.

Because the book contains discussions of so many important topics, I cannot do justice to it by attempting a crude overview. Instead, I will briefly describe the main focus of each chapter.

In Chapter 1, Rothstein presents his criterion for determining the quality of government (QoG). His basic idea is that the level of quality of a government is determined by the extent to which its officials implement laws and policies in an impartial way. Impartiality is the central value. By implementing laws and policies impartially, governments avoid cronyism, nepotism, and other corrupt practices that channel valuable resources and special treatment toward favored individuals or groups. The ideal of the “rule of law” is one aspect of this impartiality.

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