

[As I mentioned a few days ago](#), Bombay has 55,000 taxicabs that all run on CNG. (And as I updated, the municipal buses do, too — something else that India does better than the United States.).

But Bombay's taxis present India-watchers and scholars with something of a problem: if you believe the standard story about India, this simply shouldn't be happening.

Talk to anyone about governance in this country, and the first word you will hear will be "corruption." India is notoriously corrupt. [Transparency International](#) regularly lists it as extremely corrupt, and journalists regularly decry the infamous corruption of its bureaucracy, its police force, its politicians — everyone. Do yourself a favor and read Arvind Adiga's spectacular new Booker Prize-winning novel [The White Tiger](#): in it, he details the myriad ways in which Indians bribe officials to get around the rules.

But if that is the case, how did we get to a point where 55,000 taxicabs actually retrofitted their engines when the law said that they were supposed to? And make no mistake: they did. Every time I got into a cab, I asked the driver to see the CNG cylinder. There it was. Typically cynical Indians all tell me that the cabs are following the law.

Auto fuel compliance figures to be a pretty easy thing to buy your way out of. It's easy to buy regular gasoline in Bombay, so all you have to do is bribe the local police officer to get out of the retrofit. And it's not as if someone in the car next to you will know that you are still using gasoline.

What's going on? How can one of the most corrupt countries on the planet suddenly be transformed into Switzerland?

Perhaps it's because the rule is local and its impacts are local, so citizens feel a much greater stake in enforcing it and following it. That does not bode well for effective climate change regulation in the developing world.

In any event, answer the question and you might be able to see a way to the drastic improvement of governance generally and environmental governance in particular.