Visions of Corruption Control
and the Evolution of
American Public Administration

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What has been the impact of corruption control efforts on the development and operation of public administration? Frank Anechiarico and James B. Jacobs describe the evolution of "anticorruption project" over four eras since the 19th century. Each era is characterized by a particular vision of corruption control, and each vision has had a formative effect on the practice of public administration and its development as academic discipline. The impact of the anticorruption project is cumulative; each generation of reformers has added rules, procedures, and institutions. Most recently, a "panoptic" vision of corruption-proof government has promoted corruption control to a top priority, competing successfully with other government functions for influence and resources. The very success of the contemporary anticorruption project has triggered a powerful revisionist critique that highlights the tension between corruption control and administrative efficiency and effectiveness. The panoptic vision, in some cases, has come to dominate the business of government; it has also contributed to the antibureaucratic sentiment of the current reinvention movement.

Changing Visions of Corruption and Corruption Control

The anticorruption project has been an integral part of the intellectual and political reform movements that have shaped American federal, state, and local governments throughout the 20th century. The anticorruption project includes the ideology, laws, regulations, and administrative strategies and inter- and intra-organizational checks, balances, and institutions aimed at defining, identifying, preventing, and punishing official corruption. This project has been cumulative. Each new stage of the anticorruption project ratchets-up the quantity and intensity of corruption prevention in government and increases the project's impact on public administration. The absence of scandals is attributed to anticorruption strategies already in place; the occurrence of scandals is cited as proof that additional anticorruption laws, administrative strategies, and organizational prophylactics are needed.

In this article, we describe the evolution of the anticorruption project, especially its assumptions, ideologies, and goals. From 19th century civil service reformers to contemporary inspectors general, prosecutors, comptrollers, and loss-prevention specialists, pursuit of the public good has included an image of governmental operations free from corruption. Despite the expansion of the definition of corruption, multiplication of anticorruption strategies, and intensification of control techniques, more intervention always seems to be required. We argue that a new, panoptic vision of corruption control now influences and shapes public administration; while it can be traced to earlier anticorruption reforms, it has a distinct agenda and has a distinct impact on the operation of American government.

Our observations are drawn from the large scholarly literature on corruption and from our own on-going empirical research in New York City. Because of New York City's gargantuan government, tradition of machine politics, visibility in the media, and corps of good government reformers, it has always been a laboratory for corruption-control experiments (Anechiarico and Jacobs, 1992, pp. 580-603). However, our observations about New York City should be relevant to public administration more generally, particularly large state and local governments.

Perhaps surprisingly, while municipal corruption has received a good deal of attention from political scientists and urban specialists, the connection between anticorruption reform and public administration has not been systematically examined. Empirical studies of urban public administration hardly point to, much less emphasize, the extent to which government is organized to prevent public officials from engaging in bribery, embezzlement, nepotism, favoritism, conflicts of interest, and even the appearance of these species of dishonesty. To a significant extent, the organization, rules, and energy of urban government are focused on surveilling and controlling officials rather than on the production of government outputs.
We identify four visions of corruption control: antipatronage, progressive, scientific management, and panoptic. We also consider a revisionist critique of the policies implementing these visions. Revisionism, although first appearing in the Progressive era, has been forcefully articulated in reaction to the emergence of the modern panoptic vision. Although these four visions of corruption control significantly overlap, they correspond roughly to parallel stages of American public administration. Thus, this article reconstructs the discourse that has taken place in public administration and in the larger society over the problem of governmental corruption, the possibility of solving it, and the most efficacious remedial strategies.

A vision, as we are using it, is a paradigm or weltanschauung (worldview) that includes assumptions about the nature and control of human behavior and the role and potential of government institutions. The vision that now predominates in large governments in the United States is panoptic. It assumes that officials will succumb to corrupt opportunities and advocates comprehensive surveillance, investigation, and target-hardening strategies. It is built on 100 years of ideology, rules, institutions, legal techniques, and reformist ideas. Although the powerful set of law enforcement techniques that make up the panoptic vision are distinct from earlier anticorruption efforts, they reinforce many of the goals that were articulated by the Progressives at the beginning of the 20th century and subsequently elaborated and expanded by successive generations of reformers. Like its predecessors, the panoptic vision has critical implications for government organization and public administration. If anything, its implications are even more significant, because its adherents urge a much broader definition of corruption and much greater authority for corruption-control institutions.

### The Antipatronage Vision of Corruption Control, 1870-1900

Civil service reformers in the last quarter of the 19th century believed that government could be managed for the public good by experts rather than by patronage, cronyism, and graft. Corruption and graft, according to civil service reformers like Carl Schurz and Leonard White, was the result of the party-dominated, informal, unprofessional organization of urban administration. According to the reformers, public service should be the repository and showcase of the highest public principles, and public servants should be exemplary citizens. Patronage was inimical to everything the reformers thought the public service should be; it corrupted the moral fibre of government and disgraced American democracy.

The movement to end the spoils system and to create an American civil service began in earnest during Reconstruction. As legal historian William Nelson points out, the attack on the spoils system was the second phase of a powerful moral movement that began with the abolition of slavery (Nelson, 1982, p. 121). Senator Schurz’s reflections on the moral impetus of civil service reform makes this point:

> The question whether the Departments at Washington are managed well or badly, is, in proportion to the whole problem, an insignificant question after all. Neither does the question whether our civil service is as efficient as it ought to be, cover the whole ground. The most important point to my mind is, how can we remove that element of demoralization which the now prevailing mode of distributing office has introduced into the body politic (Nelson, 1982, p. 121; Bancroft, 1913, p. 123).

The desire to change the nature of leadership in American government centered on what Schurz called demoralization, the moral debasement of character by patronage. Creating a civil service would “make active politics once more attractive to men of self-respect and high patriotic aspirations” (Schurz, 1893, p. 121; Rosenbloom, 1985, p. 7).

Julius Bing, another important proponent of civil service reform, clearly saw the antipatronage campaign as a moral imperative.

At present, there is no organization save that of corruption; no system save that of chaos; no test of integrity save that of partisanship; no test of qualification save that of intrigue...we have to deal with a wide-spread evil, which deprives the country in the collection of taxes on a scale so gigantic that the commissioners of revenue, collectors, assessors, and Treasury officers—at least those of them who are honest—bow their heads in shame and despair. We have to deal with an evil that is manifest here and there and everywhere (Hoogenboom, 1961, p. 1; Bing, 1868, pp. 233, 236).

The desire to transform government by reforming governmental personnel administration powered one of the most significant movements in the history of American public government. The belief that
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A professional civil service will assure the integrity and competence of public employees has not diminished during the past century. Consider the way a recent New York State Commission on Government Integrity expressed its obeisance to the antipatronage vision:

As the perception of patronage spreads, it reduces the attractiveness of city government service as a career and can have a negative long-term impact on the quality of public service that cannot be measured. The existence of patronage saps incentive for meritorious service and diminishes penalties for substandard performance. Career employees can become demoralized and cynical about their work. When they are committed to the mission of the agency, they see that mission frustrated by political considerations. The cynicism may be accompanied by resentment or resignation; in either case, employees' sense of professionalism is demeaned because it receives limited reward or recognition. Worse, employees see themselves compromised because they are required to participate in the patronage practices they find offensive. And, inevitably, their motivation to oppose corruption is lessened (New York State Commission on Government Integrity, 1991, p. 542).

After decades of civil service reform, the antipatronage vision has become accepted political wisdom and even constitutional dogma. Wilson proposed integrity as the first principle of public administration. Similarly, Frank Goodnow argued that politics had debased administration and limited its utility. His solution was to separate political from administrative functions and to centralize government so that procedures and rules of conduct might be standardized (Goodnow, 1900). These reforms, in his view, would make public administration responsive to the public interest rather than to the political and pecuniary interests of party bosses.

The Scientific Management Vision, 1930-1970

Although its goals were rooted in the Progressive period, the 1930s generation of scientific managers emphasized bureaucratic control over more general political reforms. It considered the Progressive philosophy to be "outmoded and insufficient to meet the problems of an industrialized, urbanized world power" (Feinman, 1981, p. 208). Seeing themselves as engineers of corruption control and armed with theories of scientific management, they approached corruption as a problem in the design of organizations, rather than as a problem of politics or morals.

This vision of corruption-free government gained strength and adherents by taking hold of the new profession of public administration. The "science" of administration moved from ideology to practice, as public administration emerged as a professional discipline. Leonard White of the University of Chicago, along with Frank Goodnow, was responsible for bringing the principles of scientific management to the public sector (White, 1948a, 1948b, 1954, 1958).

The bureaucratic reformers embraced theories of scientific management, optimal spans of control, perfection of hierarchy, and new auditing and accounting techniques. They believed that government integrity would flow from sound organization. Their basic premise was that the correct deployment of administrative authority, coupled with comprehensive monitoring and evaluation, would prevent corruption or quickly bring it to light.

Leonard White expressed this scientific management vision as follows:

Out of reform, moral in its motivation, came reorganization, technical and managerial in connotation. Expertness, once assured its place, could continue a steady drive for better standards from within rather than from without (White, 1948b, p. 16).

[We] note the further development of the technique of large-scale management, especially overhead direction, long-range planning, and the effective coordination of the parts of a constantly expanding machine. Here government may learn from the methods of great industrial organizations, where similar problems exist (White, 1942, p. 597).

Clearly, scientific management had goals other than corruption control, specifically organizational efficiency and rationality. Nevertheless, this vision was shaped by the belief that administrative integrity could be achieved through administrative control. As administrative tasks became more complex in ever-larger bureaucracies, it became more difficult to guarantee integrity through such Progressive innovations as peer review, professional ethics, and voter accountability. As Luther Gulick put it, a management vision parallel to hierarchical (scalar) control was needed. Gulick argued for an administrative strategy called external control (Gulick, 1941, p. vii-xi), which he defined as investigative evaluation of government operations by specialized officials external to the agencies. Gulick identified external control as a central component of scientific management in his introduction to Harold Seidman's 1941 study of the New York City
Gulick and Seidman saw no contradiction between corruption control and efficiency.

Department of Investigation (DOI), an agency that Gulick held out as capable of providing the kind of scrutiny that administration practice required in order to ensure efficient government operations. Gulick and Seidman saw no contradiction between corruption control and efficiency; indeed they saw external control as a necessary condition of efficient public administration.7

The Panoptic Vision: Law Enforcement as Public Administration, 1970—Present

Two major events gave anticorruption policy added strength. First, the Watergate scandal sparked a new round of ethics laws and led to additional powers and resources for prosecutors and investigators targeting official corruption. Second, the fiscal crisis of the mid-1970s in New York City and elsewhere added fiscal accountability to the purview of administrators. Graft and bribery were no longer an adequate definition of corruption, which by the 1970s came to include fraud, waste, and abuse. In times of fiscal austerity, it became corrupt to waste resources or abuse authority.8 The level of scrutiny of management behavior was raised considerably in order to assess compliance with stringent ethics laws and fiscal procedures.

In 1979, John Bollens and Henry Schmandt called for a national commitment to corruption control.

It is time that we as a nation face up to the fact that political corruption is a problem of major proportions calling for our serious attention and full commitment to its amelioration. Up to this time our approach has lacked determination and will. We have shown too little awareness of the magnitude and impact of official wrongdoing and too little concern for its solution.... Support for remedial measures and their vigorous enforcement has been less than enthusiastic, and the public anger displayed intermittently when outrageous abuses of office come to light has quickly declined. The failure to proceed more decisively against wrongdoing by government personnel may reflect an unwillingness on our part to examine critically the norms that govern our private behavior (Bollens and Schmandt, 1979, pp. 249-250).

If the Progressives generated moral theory and scientific managers engineered control structure, contemporary corruption controllers emphasize law enforcement strategies.9 The political, legal, and institutional legacies of past visions remain, but the vision of contemporary reformers is of public administration fraught with corruption vulnerability that can only be addressed by comprehensive administrative, organizational, and law enforcement strategies. They have adopted or invented technologies, institutions, and routines that strive for intensive scrutiny of public employees. Although these techniques are clearly successors to external control and other earlier approaches, when taken together, they constitute a difference in kind from earlier methods.

The newest vision of corruption control calls to mind the panoptic ideal described by Jeremy Bentham and Michel Foucault.10 Bentham’s design for a prison in which all inmate activity would be observable from a louvered and unobservable central tower was used by Foucault as a metaphor for the aggressive gaze of the modern state; a gaze that translates knowledge into power. The latest, contemporary anticorruption project seeks to extend and transform the Progressive mission and New Deal engineering into a machine that controls politicians, bureaucrats, and street-level public employees via surveillance and the enforcement of expanding criminal and administrative sanctions.

Instead of theorists like Woodrow Wilson, or administrative engineers like William Hetlands, the central figures in the contemporary fight against corruption are prosecutors, inspectors general, corruption vulnerability experts, auditors, and fraud specialists. Their anticorruption project is extraordinarily ambitious, having radically expanded the definition of corruption to include appearance of conflict of interest, failure to fully disclose all financial interests, misstatements on job applications, unauthorized use of government telephones, leaving work early, accepting favors and gifts, and entering into public contracts with morally tainted private companies.

With each corruption exposé, the corruption-hunting apparatus lobbies for both greater resources and a broader definition of its mission.11 The inevitable result is that more corruption is uncovered.12 Thus, the panoptic vision of corruption control feeds on corruption scandals, and generates initiatives that have a more and more profound impact on municipal government.

Corruption in the panoptic vision is no longer primarily attributed to incompetence, absenteeism, laziness, and partisan influence but to inadequate rules, threats, and controls. This panoptic vision of corruption deemphasizes issues of governmental accountability,13 recruitment, and training. It proceeds from a view of public officials, politicians, managers, and rank and file personnel as seekers of corrupt opportunities and of government as an organizational form that generates abundant opportunities for corruption (Marx, 1992, pp. 151-172). Corruption is to be expected, and all public employees are suspect. New York reform commissions in the late 1980s concluded that systemic strategies were inadequate (Green and Feerick, 1991; New York State Organized Crime Task Force, 1991), and the time had come to apply the criminal law model based upon surveillance, investigation, punishment, and deterrence. At the same time, accounting, auditing, and diverse other controls have also expanded and intensified. The priorities of investigation and prosecution now determine the structure of authority and control in administrative agencies. The kind of structural changes that motivate, and are expected to result from, the panoptic approach should not be confused with the political reforms demanded by the Progressives or by today’s advocates of reinvented government. Instead, the purpose of administrative reform is to deter and prevent corruption by establishing a system of thorough and efficient observation.

The panoptic vision regards public employees as akin to probationers in the criminal justice system. Their routine is to be governed by a comprehensive system of administrative/criminal laws, enforced by law enforcement agencies using a full array of investigative tools, including covert operations. This system is to be backed by threat and sanctions, including jail, fines, and job and pension forfeiture.

The panoptic vision has led to the expansion of anti-corruption institutions and strategies, and to enhancement of the authority of anti-corruption units and personnel. The following examples are illustrative of various components of the contemporary anticorruption project.

Corruption Vulnerability Assessments

Corruption vulnerability assessments are an excellent example of how the apparatus of modern-day corruption control has become more penetrating. Several agencies of New York City government conduct corruption vulnerability assessments, which measure the
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Performance Auditing

In the past, government accounting centered on the verification of expenditures. Until the late 1970s, comptroller audits mostly involved checking invoices against appropriations and contracts or purchase orders. The revolution in auditing initiated by the federal General Accounting Office (GAO) focused on performance: did the agency get what it paid for and, if not, why not? Shortly thereafter, the goal expanded to include prevention of waste, fraud, and abuse,14 and the line between corruption by the government and corruption against the government blurred.15

According to the modern-day anticorruption project, it is no longer sufficient for government auditors merely to certify that there was authorization for all expenditures. The comptroller's office and other auditing agencies are responsible for assessing the strengths and weaknesses of each agency's internal control system. This task closely resembles the DOI's corruption vulnerability audits (it is not unusual for a particular agency, once it has come under suspicion, to be audited by two or three agencies at the same time.)

Internal Surveillance

A number of agencies conduct covert observations of municipal operations. The DOI, the FBI, the New York State Police, and the New York State Organized Crime Task Force all have conducted undercover operations in city agencies, usually focusing on low-level employees. The techniques vary, but often include "sting" operations in which investigators pose as contractors or private citizens offering bribes (for example, to building inspectors), electronic surveillance of interactions between city employees and citizens, and the use of undercover agents and field associates. The former are placed temporarily in the targeted agency and the latter are "moles," regular agency employees who are recruited to operate as long-term informants. In 1990, DOI conducted one investigation for every 150 city employees.

These techniques and the panoptic vision that activates them have a profound impact on administrative operations and culture. It might not be an exaggeration to say that in some agencies corruption control is given a higher priority than governmental outputs such as service delivery and infrastructure maintenance. As one former commissioner put it, "It's more important to look honest than to get anything done."16

Interest in linking the discovery of crime to more basic political and administrative flaws in agency organization has waned. The connection between external control and better administration has eroded; corruption control is now a basic service competing for resources.

For example, after the scandals in the third term of Mayor Edward I. Koch's administration (1985-1989), the panoptic vision came to dominate all areas of municipal administration that may have been vulnerable to corruption. In the area of contract regulation, many services and goods that were procured through "request for proposal" were required to convert to "lowest responsible bidder" systems. This anticorruption reform caused major disruptions of long-term relationships between the city, and its consultants, vendors, and contractors. As a former contract official told us:

The City thinks it wants to ensure purity of all contracts, but lacks the capacity to administer contracts adequately. The product is lawfully bickering. The City has never been clear on this. There is some notion of mimicking business, but the balance between efficiency and anti-corruption is out of whack. It's difficult to do business with the City which...
The Evolution of the Panoptic Vision: A Case Study of the New York City Buildings Department

To demonstrate how the panoptic vision has built upon the earlier visions of social control and corruption control and taken them to new levels, it is useful to examine the way in which the anticorruption project has evolved in a particular context: construction regulation in New York City. At the turn of the century, hearings held by legislative committees revealed that municipal officials were taking payoffs to ignore building and sanitation codes. The Tenement House Act of 1901 and the New York City Tenement House Department under Robert DeForest and Lawrence Veiller were classic examples of antipatronage reform (DeForest and Veiller, 1903). To replace the party hacks who were serving as inspectors, DeForest hired experienced physicians and public health specialists under New York State civil service rules. The reformers claimed success in transforming what had been the epitome of machine corruption and neglect into a model of integrity and professional efficiency.

The next stage in the evolution of construction regulation reflected with the Progressive reform movement. The early reports of the Tenement House Department indicated an effort to develop regulatory expertise. DeForest frequently referred to the growing body of knowledge about the health and safety of residential construction and maintenance. The department extended its objectives to raising living standards and general city planning.

In the 1930s, when corruption reared its head in several agencies engaged in construction regulation, housing reformers sought to implement the teachings of Goodnow and White by centralizing administration and incorporating the principles of scientific management. The Department of Housing and Buildings, into which the Tenement House Department was merged, would no longer rely on the credentials and crusading spirit of carefully selected professionals. The new agency was more than twice the size of the old one and its mission now included slum clearance and inspection of existing structures as well as regulation of the construction process.

Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia, who more than anyone else implemented the scientific management vision in New York City, reformed the city charter and pushed through a modern municipal administrative code. The comprehensive New York code covered such matters as the proper procedures for residential sewer connections, civil service grievances, and disputes between contractors, vendors, or citizens and city agencies. The law and science of procedure and routine was designed as a check on employee discretion, but also allowed managers and administrators actively to monitor behavior for compliance.

To enforce the administrative code and to ensure public probity, in 1938, LaGuardia appointed William Herlands to be Commissioner of the Department of Investigation, an agency that was beginning to play a central role in the anticorruption project. With its investigatory and research capabilities and authority over all government agencies, DOI perfectly effectuated the bureaucratic vision of external control. DOI was a creation of the scientific management school of corruption control. Its centralized, investigatory and research capabilities implemented the bureaucratic vision of honest government. Herlands, a former chief assistant to Thomas E. Dewey in the special racketeering investigations, focused on dishonesty, waste, inefficiency, and neglect of duty.

In a 1938 DOI report, Herlands explained how corruption control furthered the goal of efficient administration:

While no one knows how much, if any, corruption has been prevented, there has been a nearly 30 percent reduction in inspector productivity because of the time it takes to return to the office every afternoon. This policy perfectly illustrates the abandonment of the Progressive ideal of a trusted, professional corps of public servants.

In making investigations, the Department does not limit itself to the particular abuse uncovered or the specific complaint. It treats the individual irregularities complained of as symptomatic of broader underlying deficiencies in municipal government and administration. The suggestions and recommendations contained in these reports are designed to remove the deficiencies (New York Department of Investigation, 1938, p. 14).

The linkage between corruption control and administrative efficiency lead to DOI investigations, which in turn lead to periodic restructuring and change in supervisory processes. The Department of Buildings instituted hierarchical control and route rotation. Even the wording and review of inspection cards were designed in response to DOI corruption investigations and recommendations.

By the 1970s, when well-established patterns of corruption erupted in recurrent scandals, the DOI became a prime target of the panoptic approach to anticorruption control. DOI agents posed as contractors offered bribes to inspectors to overlook violations or to expedite code approvals. Time and again the inspectors failed the integrity tests. The agency promulgated scores of recommendations for reorganizing and administering the Department of Buildings. In addition, the state comptroller and the state Organized Crime Task Force piled on even more recommendations. Pursuant to the recommendations, the department instituted several versions of "double check" and route rotation that included virtually all of the strategies of earlier generations of reformers, as well as the addition of powerful new techniques. By the 1980s, the agency was completely absorbed in responding to external criticism and attempting to prevent corruption, even at the expense of decreased efficiency.

The most recent anticorruption protocol, pursuant to a city comptroller's audit, requires all field inspectors to return to borough headquarters at the end of the day, instead of leaving for home from their last inspection site. The policy is meant to ensure that personnel do not defraud the city by leaving work early, perhaps filling out inspectional reports while sitting at home. While no one knows how much, if any, corruption has been prevented, there has been nearly a 30 percent reduction in inspector productivity because of the time it takes to return to the office every afternoon. This policy perfectly illustrates the abandonment of the Progressive ideal of a trusted, professional corps of public servants.

Revisionist Strategy: New Perspectives on Control and Service Delivery

Although there exists no systematic assessment of the impact of anticorruption reforms on public administration, critics and revision-
Both the moral/political and law enforcement focus on "bad men," according to Buchanan and Tullock, inhibit government without reaching the roots of corruption.

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Conclusion

Recognizing that the inexorable accretion of the anticorruption apparatus is an important dynamic of public administration, deepens understanding of how and why large government units are organized and operated. It also reveals how important the reaction to corruption scandals has been in the evolution of public administration as a discipline. As Peter Self put it, "The tensions between the requirements of responsibility or 'accountability' and those of effective executive action can reasonably be described as the classic dilemma of public administration" (Fesler and Kettl, 1991, p. 321).

To an extent that has rarely been appreciated, the anticorruption project has shaped the evolution of urban public administration especially, and accounts for much of municipal structure and operations. The vision of a corruption-free city has animated reformers throughout the 20th century; each generation has contributed its own corruption ideas and institutions. The resulting anticorruption project has been cumulative; old reforms are not discarded but supplemented by newer ones.

Since the 1970s, a panoptic vision of corruption control held by prosecutors, inspectors general, and other law enforcement and quasi law enforcement personnel has taken hold in large governments, like New York City's. Their targets include the lowest level city employees as well as politicians and top administrators. They advocate a total mobilization of governmental resources in the service of an enforce-ment oriented anticorruption project. They have marbled significant resources and expanded the legitimate scope of the anticorruption project to all management operations. Thus, while the focus of corruption control is no longer as broad as the system-wide vision of the Progressives, it is far more intensive and comprehensive regarding its chosen targets. Indeed, panoptic reformers are so occupied with corruption that they ignore the goals of administrative efficiency.

It is not surprising that the sheer magnitude and ambition of the panoptic anticorruption project has provoked a revisionist response from economists and political scientists who instinctually look for costs as well as benefits. Previously, the compatibility of governmental efficiency and anticorruption control was rarely questioned. Now, a number of critics point out that efficiency and corruption control are conflicting goals. The revisionists have not, however, provided administrators a formula for calculating the optimum amount of corruption control, nor have they explained how a cost/benefit approach to corruption that would treat some corruption as not worth worrying about could be sold to the public and the media.

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The authors are completing a book tentatively titled The Anticorruption Project and Its Impacts.

Notes

1. In identifying these visions, we followed Herbert Kaufman's seminal work of 30 years ago in which he identifies three conflicting values that dominate public administration in successive eras.

   In the evolution of the structure of state and local governments in the United States, there is discernible a search for an accommodation among three values (or objectives): representativeness; technical, non-partisan competence; and leadership. The first refers to the demand for election of public officials by some (at first) and many (later) or virtually all (a 20th-century innovation) adult citizens over whom the officials exercise jurisdiction. The second refers to the demand for officials having training and experience qualifying them for the jobs they do, and to the insistence that their official decisions and actions be based on technical and professional considerations rather than on partisan political premises. The third refers to the demand that the actions and decisions of officials be coordinated at some central point so that government programs are reasonably consistent and efficient (Kaufman, 1963, p. 34).

   Our work also parallels a more recent typology by Wilbur Rich. "Civil Service reformers have...been divided into three groups: the genteel reformers, the academic reformers, and the fiscal managers" (Rich, 1982, p. 5).

2. The conventional view of the Progressives as organizationally oriented is presented by R.H. Wiebe (1967). A critique of this view holds that while organization may be the legacy of the Progressives, it is an ironic one, since their method was highly moralistic and situational (McCormick, 1981, pp. 247-274).

3. The statement from which the system gets its name, "To the victors belong the spoils," is credited to Senator William Marcy around 1850 (Hoogenboom, 1961, p. 6).

4. In 1976, in Elrod v. Burns, and in 1990, in Raevs v. Republican Party of Illinois, the Court held unconstitutional (on First Amendment grounds) hiring, firing, transfer, promotion, or recall on partisan affiliation for all but a few, top administrative jobs.

5. Goodnow's view was that "As soon, however, as the administration became somewhat centralized, this control of the political parties became unnecessary, except to the highest officers, since these could control more fully the actions of their subordinates, and being themselves subject to party control, might bring about the necessary harmony in the governmental system" (Goodnow, 1990, p. 129).

6. One study of the post-Progressive period found that "[t]he promising development of public administration as a profession during the Progressive era has dissipated..." (Ostrom, 1973, p. 142).

7. The post-Progressive era was an age in which concern for the practical use and application of administrative techniques extended beyond any theoretical or normative standard for application.... Attention turned to more narrow technical problems rather than broader concerns" (Stever, 1988, p. 66).

8. In isolating the anticorruption element in scientific management, Gulick found support in a section of Woodrow Wilson's famous essay, "The Study of Administration," from which Gulick quotes: "All sovereigns are suspicious of their servants.... How is suspicion to be allayed by knowledge? Trust is strength in all relations of life and, as it is the office of the constitutional reformer to create conditions of trustfulness, so it is the office of the administrative organizer to fit administration with conditions of clear-cut responsibility which will insure trustworthiness (Quoted in Gulick, 1941, p. vii).

9. An official of the New York City Department of Investigation explained to us that the department's definition of corruption since the 1970s included the "subversion of fairness, of distributive and common justice, and of equal opportunity." Under this definition, even acknowledged error leading to maldistribution would be corrupt.

10. A recent history of the New York City Department of Investigation concluded it is with the fight against corruption that "the defense of democracy and the struggle for a decent life begins and continues" (Winlow and Buche, 1992, p. 87).

11. In Discipline and Punish, Michel Foucault argued that the panoptic architecture and organization were paradigmatic of a 19th century vision of a disciplinary society in which surveillance, monitoring, and control would make undetected deviance a practical impossibility (Foucault, 1979, p. 204). However, perhaps the first Panop-tic, built by Jeremy Bentham's brother, was not a prison, but a Russian factory (Zuboff, 1988, pp. 320-332).

12. Dennis F. Thompson argues that, in light of the scandal surrounding the Kasting Five, the definition of corruption should be expanded to include "mediated corruption" which "links the acts of individual officials to effects on the democratic process" (Thompson, 1993, pp.369).

13. DOI Table of Arrests by year.

14. The Generally Accepted Government Audit Standard (GAGAS) issued by GAO have been adopted by New York City and many other state and local governments.

15. By corruption against the government we mean fraud perpetrated by contractors,
17. Another example of an administrative innovation in the New Deal that reflected Progressive ideals was the refinement and standardization of rulemaking in administrative agencies. The idea that there would be formal rulemaking hearings preceded by public hearings to provide a fulfillment of the Progressive notion of professional governance by policy specialists. Administrative rulemaking is legislation by specialists and experts who have been delegated policy discretion by elected officials. This is as close to scientific administration as far as the ward politician's smoke-filled room as the Progressives might have dreamed possible.
18. The Tenement House Committee staged a major exhibition of tenement house conditions in early 1900. The exhibition, held in a building on Fifth Avenue, contained scores of maps and charts and five models of tenements including a detailed scale model of an entire block on the lower east side of Manhattan. The reactions of the thousands of people who saw the exhibit were an inducement to the legislature and the governor to establish the Tenement House Commission (DeForest and Veiler, 1903).

References


19. After taking the oath of office, LaGuardia turned to face city hall, shook his first and announced, “I remove la concupiscencia (no more free lunch).
20. Downs offers the “Law of Counter Control: The greater the effort made by sovereign or top-level officials to control the behavior of subordinate officials, the greater the efforts made by those subordinates to evade or counteract such control” (Downs, 1967, p. 262).
21. Peter deLeon also criticizes the impact of corruption controls on the federal government:

We need initially to reject the traditional recommendations that more laws or regulations or inspectors general provide the answer. Instead, one can argue that the only result of more regulations and inspectors would be greater temptation for the vulnerable public servant (deLeon, 1995, p. 223).


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What Does Corruption Mean in a Democracy?

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Despite a growing interest in corruption, the topic has been absent from democratic theory. The reason is not a lack of normative issues, but rather missing links between the concepts of corruption and democracy. With few exceptions, political corruption has been conceived as departures by public officials from public rules, norms, and laws for the sake of private gain. Such a conception works well within bureaucratic contexts with well-defined offices, purposes, and norms of conduct. But it inadequately identifies corruption in political contexts, that is, the processes of contestation through which common purposes, norms, and rules are created. Corruption in a democracy, I argue, involves duplicitous violations of the democratic norm of inclusion. Such a conception encompasses the standard conception while complementing it with attention to the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion within democratic politics. By distinguishing the meanings of inclusion and exclusion within the many institutions, spheres, and associations that constitute contemporary democracies, I provide a democratic conception of corruption with a number of implications. The most important of these is that corruption in a democracy usually indicates a deficit of democracy.

When compared to other pathologies of politics—violence, authoritarian or totalitarian control, caste-based exploitation, oppression, stagnation—political corruption ranks as one of the lesser evils. It is, however, the pathology most likely to be found thriving in democracies. It is not surprising, then, that the third wave of democratization would produce a burgeoning and increasingly sophisticated literature on corruption in economics, public administration, crime, professional ethics, and comparative politics.

What is surprising is that the topic of political corruption has gone missing from democratic theory (cf. Euben 1989; Thompson 1995). It is possible, perhaps, that problems of corruption do not involve interesting theoretical issues. At first blush, the common scandals of democracy—centered on campaign finance, contracting for public goods and services, conflicts of interest, betrayed public trust, and weak professional ethics among public officials—raise a multitude of practical issues but few theoretical ones. Yet even a cursory survey of the possibilities suggests that such a judgment would be wrong. It has long been argued that the little bit of corruption that comes with democracies makes them work better—by lowering transaction costs, reducing the inefficiencies of cumbersome rules, and generally making things happen (Anечiaricco and Jacobs 1996; Huntington 1968, 59–71; Leys 1965). But most who study corruption now argue that it is a symptom as well as a cause of dysfunction within democracies (de Leon 1993; della Porta and Vannucci 1999; Elster 1989, 263–72; Rose-Ackerman 1999; Thompson 1995). Corruption, it is increasingly noted, breaks the link between collective decision making and people's powers to influence collective decisions through speaking and voting, the very link that defines democracy. Corruption reduces the effective domain of public action, and thus the reach of democracy, by reducing public agencies of collective action to instruments of private benefit. Corruption creates inefficiencies in deliveries of public services, not only in the form of a tax on public expenditures, but by shifting public activities toward those sectors in which it is possible for those engaged in corrupt exchanges to benefit. And when public officials put prices on routine government transactions, then the rights and protections citizens should be able to enjoy become favors, to be repaid in kind. Moreover, corruption undermines the culture of democracy. When people lose confidence that public decisions are taken for reasons that are publicly available and justifiable, they often become cynical about public speech and deliberation. People come to expect duplicity in public speech, and the expectation tarnishes all public officials, whether or not they are corrupt. And when people are mistrustful of...
government, they are also cynical about their own capacities to act on public goods and purposes and will prefer to attend to narrow domains of self-interest they can control. Corruption in this way diminishes the horizons of collective actions and in so doing shrinks the domain of democracy. Finally, corruption undermines democratic capacities of association within civil society by generalizing suspicion and eroding trust and reciprocity.

That corruption has not become the topic it should in democratic theory has to do not with the lack of normative issues. The problem, I shall argue, is that our received conception of political corruption—the abuse of public office for private gain—has been outgrown by contemporary democracies. The received conception is not irrelevant; abuse of public office for private gain remains a central issue, but does little to identify and clarify common intuitions into the corruption of democratic institutions and practices, or so I shall argue.

From the perspective of conceptual history, this is not surprising: our received conception did not develop from democratic norms and expectations at all, but rather from early modern liberal ones. It developed in response to liberal concerns with defining, rationalizing, and limiting public duties and responsibilities against the background of what had come to be seen as pervasive corruption within absolutist regimes, especially in England and France (Arendt 1965, 100–02). As I shall note, the early liberal project had to do with securing the dividing lines between state and society, public and private. The concept we have inherited, still bearing the marks of these origins, has been molded, ex post and with a certain clumsiness, to democratic politics and institutions. I next suggest that the robust conceptual link between democratic theory and corruption can be found in the fact that corruption is always a form of duplicious and harmful exclusion of those who have a claim to inclusion in collective decisions and actions. Corruption involves a specific kind of unjustifiable disempowerment. This normative link between democracy and corruption can be mapped onto democratic institutions and practices if we recognize that today’s democracies have evolved into ecologies of complementary and competing institutions and associations. It follows, I then argue, that corruption in democracies has become differentiated by domain in such a way that its logic of exclusion will assume forms and meanings in specific to each. Finally, I develop these forms and meanings as they appear within the state, public spheres, civil society, and markets, while relating each back to the encompassing democratic theory of corruption as duplicious exclusion. I conclude by noting a number of broader implications of a democratic conception of corruption.

The Modern Conception of Corruption

Prior to the early modern period, there was no widely accepted and politically practicable concept of political corruption. Concerns about the misuse of public office did exist among the Greeks (Phil 2002, 48). Classical distinctions between, say, monarchy and tyranny turned on the contrast between the public responsibility of kings and their private gains. Still, it would be an anachronism to define, for example, the sale of public offices in early modern absolutist monarchies as corruption; this was simply the way these regimes did their business and they did not pretend to do otherwise (Scott 1972, chapter 3). It was not, of course, that the concept of corruption did not exist, but rather that the most recognizable lineages, handed down from Plato, treated corruption in ways that were broadly cosmological, and so served less as guides for institutional reform than as moral indictments of individuals, peoples, and cultures. These tendencies persisted within early modern republicanism: Machiavelli (1950, 166–70, 252–55), the period’s most perceptive student of corruption, understood it primarily as a moral condition, measured by the distance between a people’s collective character and moral standards of everyday conduct as defined by their Christian context. For Rousseau (1985), corruption was the centerpiece of a philosophical anthropology that tracked the corrosion of a natural moral empathy among humans and the emergence of a bourgeois egoism.

As often noted, these moral conceptions of corruption were both too broad and too focused on individual character to serve the institutional engineering that accompanied the liberal revolutions. Limiting political corruption required standards of conduct specific enough to indict specific behaviors. The development of a politically practical conception of corruption was facilitated by two developments associated with the liberal revolutions. First, as Friedrich has observed, the notion of a deviation from office required the development of rationalized bureaucracies, that is, institutions with explicit, written, and publicly available codes that define offices. As bureaucracies rationalized, corruption came to be conceived as “a particular form of political pathology rather than global degeneration.” As such, it could “be defined in behavioral terms, and the activities objected to [could] be outlawed” (1989, 21).

Second, as Euben (1989) has pointed out, the modern conception of political corruption depended upon the notion that an institution can be better than the individuals who constitute it. Madison, the first thorough-going
modernist in this regard, understood that public roles could be circumscribed by broadly distributing powers of decision making, providing officials and citizens alike with the motives and capacities to flush out conspiracies against the public interest. Under this emerging conception, then, it was not necessary to define corruption in moral terms at all. Indeed, it is best to assume that individuals naturally pursue their own interests, even against the public interest (Hamilton, Jay, and Madison 2000, no. 51). A good political system follows from power distributions that motivate self-interested individuals to check the abuses of other individuals, thus giving each a stake in defining norms of public office. The modernist approach thus penetrates character just enough to solidify the definition of corruption in terms of a conflict between private and public regarding motivations. As Friedrich argues, corruption is not simply a “kind of behavior which deviates from the norm actually prevalent or believed to prevail in a given context, such as the political. It is deviant behavior associated with a particular motivation, namely that of private gain at public expense” (1989, 15). Most contemporary conceptions—what I shall summarize, loosely and not entirely accurately, as “the modern conception of corruption”—follow this logic, conceiving political corruption as individual departures from rules and norms of public office for reasons of private gain (Huntington 1968, 69; Nye 1967; Transparency International 2000, 1).

The advantages of this now-entrenched conception of corruption are many, not the least of which is widespread agreement among professionals that this defines political corruption. By measuring individual behavior against norms operationalized into laws, offices, and rules, the modern conception lays out markers for how to design institutions to resist corruption. Assuming, with Madison, that officials are likely to be self-interested, institutions should be designed to ensure that no official has monopoly control over resources; the power they do have should be linked to mechanisms of accountability; and the rules under which they operate should be relatively clear and minimize room for discretionary judgment (Gardiner and Lyman 1978; Rose-Ackerman 1999; Transparency International 2001). In Klitgaard’s concise formulation, institutions can be designed to resist corruption if we understand that Corruption = Monopoly + Discretion — Accountability (1988, 75).

Without diminishing these important advances, however, we need to ask what features of politics in a democracy—and thus potentials for political corruption—fall outside the modern conception. Its democracy-excluding attributes are as follows:

The Modern Conception Is Normatively Static. Perhaps the most serious failing of the modern conception is not (as sometimes charged) that it is normatively empty, but rather that it is normatively static. It provides little insight or guidance into the corruption of norm-creating processes at the heart of democratic politics. It is unique to democracy—in particular, its deliberative aspects—that normative claims are contested in ways that are themselves regulated by the norms of openness, publicity, and inclusion of those affected. Ideally, democratic contests are regulated by second-order norms such as these, which issue in first-order norms and goals—the public purposes, interests, and goals that are entrusted to public officials and codified into public offices (Habermas 1996). Thus, on the one hand, standards of public office in a democracy evolve, sometimes rapidly, so that what is not corrupt one day becomes corrupt the next, as happened in the period of reform following Watergate (Thompson 1993, 3–6). On the other hand, in a democracy such evolutions reflect, at least ideally, second-order norms of process that can quite properly bring new meanings of corruption in their wake. This is why democratic theory—the discipline that identifies and justifies these norms—is essential to conceptions of corruption.

Among commentators who have written about the normative elements of corruption concepts, few have asked whether, perhaps, the changeable normative referents might be embedded within a normative logic of democracy. Some treat democracy as itself the problem, since it enables public opinion to destabilize the codes that define political corruption (Anechiarico and Jacobs 1996). More ethically robust approaches refer the rules and norms of public offices not to democracy, but to the public interest (e.g., Friedrich 1989). These approaches recall classical and early modern republican approaches by noting that what counts as corruption depends, ultimately, on a conception of a “naturally sound condition of politics” (Philp 2002, 51; Johnston 1996; Dobel 1978). As I shall argue below, there are some important insights within these earlier, more overtly ethical conceptions of corruption. In particular, classical insights into the role of language in public judgment as well as the notion that a society, not just its government, can be corrupt will find key roles in a democratic conception of corruption. But these selective insights should be distinguished from a more encompassing republican nostalgia. Indeed, comparing our pluralistic and ethically reflexive society to those with certain but static normative references can reinforce the view that without these static references political corruption is simply a relative matter, blown this way and that by the changeable winds of public opinion.
A second approach, favored by those seeking empirical measures, views conceptions of political corruption as dependent upon regime type and political culture. Comparative analysis should, in this view, focus on studying prevailing norms, which can then be used to specify context-dependent understandings of political corruption (Heidenheimer 2002; Peters and Welch 1978; Scott 1972). From the perspective of democratic theory, these approaches are interesting, since they refer corruption to public opinion, the ultimate source of judgment and legitimacy in a democracy. But rather than treating public judgment as a dynamic process that, ideally, is structured by democratic norms and institutions, these approaches treat norms as static, given by a background culture of expectations.

A third approach, market-based conceptions of corruption, appears to give up normative references altogether for a behavioral description of incentives and opportunity structures. Corruption, in this view, is rent-seeking behavior facilitated by the monopoly powers of government (Anechiarico and Jacobs 1996). Unlike government, markets check potential abuses because they disperse power. So rather than define ethical constraints into public offices, it is better to minimize the powers of government, in this way reducing opportunities for corruption. As Philp has pointed out (2002, 49–50; see also Johnston 1996, 27), market-oriented approaches take for granted conceptions of public office that enable market mechanisms and measure corruption against these norms.

The Modern Conception Focuses on Behavior Rather than Integrity. If the strength of the modern conception is that it is rule-based, allowing for an even-handed application of norms and standards to the behavior of individuals, it is also its weakness. There are limits to what rules can encompass, especially when officials’ tasks require creativity, as do many bureaucratic positions and all political positions. Rule-based approaches to controlling corruption tend toward rigidity, while devaluing integrity and professionalism (Anechiarico and Jacobs 1996, 193, 202; Philp 2001, 362–63), which in turn undermines democracy by hamstringing the capacities of government to serve as a collective agent of the people. Market-oriented approaches are particularly culpable in this respect: reducing problems of corruption to flawed incentive structures removes any responsibility for integrity from individuals and market-oriented organizations (Thompson 1995, 67; Johnston 1996).

Closely related, the modern conception of corruption fails to encompass a particular kind of integrity central to democratic processes. Under the modern conception, integrity means simply that an official’s behavior reflects the norms of her office. While such a conception of integrity makes some sense within bureaucratic arenas, it is less meaningful in politicized arenas where expectations for behavior are less settled. Democracies make up for this quality of politics by placing a premium upon promises, which are conveyed in speech: a politician has integrity when his decisions and actions reflect the speech that justifies them. Conversely, as I shall suggest below, duplicitous speech corrupts the currency of promises and justifications that is the life-blood of democracy, a meaning of corruption that has antecedents in classical political thought and is common in everyday use.

The Modern Conception Is Individualistic. In part because the modern conception of corruption is intertwined with legalistic understandings of individual corruption, it focuses on individual behavior (Johnston 1996, 13). As Thompson (1995) has persuasively argued, however, an individualist focus makes it difficult to conceive of institutional corruption, in which covert norms of exchange within the institution—access in exchange for campaign donations, for example—corrupt the overt purposes of the institution. Focusing on individual behavior detracts attention from institution-defining norms with corrupt consequences.

The Modern Conception Is State-Centric. In seeking to avoid overly broad conceptions of corruption, modern conceptions have identified the objects of corruption, “public office,” with the state (Friedrich 1989, 15; Huntington 1968, 69; Nye 1967). Even Thompson, who has provided the only theoretical approach to the corruption of democracy to date, identifies the domain of democracy as coextensive with government when he writes that “[p]rivate interests contaminate public purposes in a democracy when they influence the government without the warrant of the democratic process” (1995, 28). But it is far from necessary for corruption to involve government for corruption to be political in nature. This point is especially important in today’s democracies, in which politics is increasingly decentralized, and the political work of democracy takes new forms (Dryzek 1996; Johnston 1996; Warren 2001, 2003; Young 2000). In the developed democracies, public purposes are more and more farmed out to nongovernmental organizations and profit-seeking businesses. Private auditing firms are charged with ensuring that publicly traded companies provide accurate information on their finances; scientific research teams, drug companies, and hospitals are
Corrupting Democracy

The broadest meaning of political corruption is not in dispute: political corruption is the inappropriate use of common power and authority for purposes of individual or group gain at common expense. Virtually all meanings of political corruption, ancient and modern alike, share the following propositions:

A. An individual or group of individuals is entrusted with collective decisions or actions.
B. Common norms exist regulating the ways individuals and groups use their power over collective decisions or actions.
C. An individual or group breaks with the norms.
D. Breaking with the norms normally benefits the individual or group and harms to the collectivity.

Differences among conceptions of corruption have to do with how these core propositions are interpreted, especially with respect to norms regulating collective action. The highly moralized ancient and early modern conceptions made sense for solidarity-based societies with low levels of differentiation, while modern conceptions presupposed the higher levels of normative differentiation associated with constitutional state-building.

Likewise, a democratic conception of corruption would require that we interpret each element in ways meaningful for democratic societies. With regard to A, in today’s democracies, it is not only public officials who are entrusted with collective power, but also associations, corporations, and any number of other entities that contribute to collective decision-making and collective action. A democratic conception of corruption should thus extend to any person or group in a position enabling them to make use of collective powers or make collective decisions. For any individual, a “public” matter is any in which a collectivity has the capacity to affect her life. Relative to the modern conception, then, a democratic conception should broaden the domain to which the notion of political corruption applies, so that it includes not only the state (as does the modern conception), but also any collectivity with control over resources that people need or want. A corollary involves the broadening of the concept of collective power to include not only state power, but also (a) the “force” of collective judgment and argument (as in the ancient conception), and (b) control over economic resources sufficient to generate harms. That is, the possible domain of political corruption should be coextensive with the domain of politics, which takes on multiple forms in contemporary democracies.
With regard to B, the defining norm of a democracy is a second-order norm of process: a political system should maximize rule by and for the people. In the tradition of liberal democracy, this second-order norm is based on the first-order norm that the individuals constituting “the people” are of equal moral worth, such that each is entitled to benefit from and participate in collective self-rule. The norm of democratic political equality follows: every individual potentially affected by a decision should have an equal opportunity to influence the decision. The corollary action norm is that collective actions should reflect the purposes decided under inclusive processes. In short, the basic norm of democracy is empowered inclusion of those affected in collective decisions and actions (see, e.g., Habermas 1996, chap. 3; Young 2000, 5–6). Democracy requires that individuals have an equal opportunity to affect such collective matters and that these opportunities be effective in two dimensions, power and judgment. In the dimension of power, democracy requires institutionalized empowerments of individual participation in collective decisions, such as the right to vote. The corollary action norm implies trustworthy and effective collective agents, such as governments, to convert collective decisions into collective actions. In the dimension of judgment, democracy requires equal chances to influence public judgment, actualized in rights and effective opportunities to speak and to be heard in those deliberative processes that define the agendas, choices, and public framing of issues (cf. Dahl 1998, 37–38). Thus, relative to both the ancient and modern conceptions, a democratic conception of corruption should narrow the normative referents with respect to first-order norms, leaving only the principle of equal moral worth of individuals, while broadening its reference to second-order norms, those having to do with the processes by means of which collective judgments about first-order norms are made.

With regard to C, then, the norm violated by corruption is that of inclusion in collective decisions and actions of all affected. Indeed, the very logic of corruption involves exclusion: the corrupt use their control over resources to achieve gains at the expense of those excluded in collective decision making or organization of collective actions. Although every form of corruption of democracy involves exclusion, not every form of exclusion is corrupt. A regime may be exclusive, and the exclusions may produce the most despicable evils. But where an exclusive elite simply holds to different norms than the broader public, however odious, we would not usually say that they are “corrupt.” They have not departed from, violated, or undermined public norms, for to speak in this way is to assume that they recognize these norms. Corruption does not imply normative disagreement fought out in public, but rather a corrosion of public norms by those who profess them. Corruption involves hypocrisy. For an elite (or group or individual) to be corrupt in the democratic sense, it must both profess and violate the democratic norm of inclusion. Thus, corrupt exclusion is distinguished by duplicity, a characteristic that implies not just the possibility of condemnation, but also the possibility of immanent critique: the corrupt can be called to account by their own standards.

The duplicity condition also explains why corrupt decisions and actions in a democracy are always covert: they could not be justified in public—that is, to those affected—if they were to become known. Corruption of democracy is about actions being taken out of public view, as a means of excluding those who have rightful claims to be included. The corrupt hide their actions because they know, or at least intuit at some level, that they are violating collective norms. The very covertness of corruption pays tribute to the violated norms.

In short, although moral approaches since Plato view corruption as a matter of individual greed corroding the moral horizons that constitute the collectivity and its common purposes, specifically democratic corruption resides not in the greed per se, but in serving this greed by excluding those affected from the processes of collective decision making that might justify the actions.

Finally, with regard to D, the corruption of democracy is a way of indicating one way in which the practices of democracy fall short of the norms defining those practices. To say that a democracy is corrupt is not, of course, a general charge that the democracy is imperfect. There can be many reasons why democratic norms might not be perfectly realized, such as the limitations that follow from scale, size, complexity, and the scarcity of political resources such as time. Rather, “corruption of democracy” is a charge directed against those who derive benefits at the expense of those they exclude from their relationship owing to the imperfect realization of democratic norms. These norms could be better realized were it not for the actions of those who gain from undermining, subverting, or otherwise blocking these norms.

For a decision, action, or exchange to count as corrupt, then, it must cause gains for those included in the decision or action and harm for at least some of those who are excluded. The gains may be personal or private—such as gaining money or the freedom to conduct business while externalizing costs onto others. Or, as Thompson (1995) argues, the gains may be professional, as when a member of Congress exchanges influence for campaign contributions, enabling his reelection. A corrupt exchange that benefits both parties does not have to benefit both equally: any exchange is premised on need, and different
parties have control over different resources. In U.S. cities, for example, political machines thrived by using the powers of government to raise revenues, which they used to buy votes from those with marginal livelihoods. So corrupt relationships may also involve dramatic inequalities of power, even as they produce benefits for those who would not have otherwise been included.

While the gains of corruption are often easily identifiable, harms to specific goods are often more difficult to detect, since they are often small, incremental, and randomly distributed, borne by abstract and unorganized others: environments are marginally degraded, governments are less efficient, officials less competent, buildings somewhat less safe, consumer products a bit more expensive, and opportunities less equal.

But the harms to democratic processes are more straightforward: it is the fact of exclusion and the duplicity of justification that corrupts democracy, whether or not specific harms can be identified. What suffers corruption are the political processes and institutions that would, ideally, expose and limit potential harms by including those affected in making collective decisions and organizing collective actions. Importantly, because a democratic conception of corruption focuses on processes, it also highlights institutionalized corruption. Duplicitous, corruption can become routine within institutions, usually in the form of dual cultures, one of which pays lip-service to the norms of democratic inclusion, and the other which facilitates and justifies corrupt exchanges. Arguably, the U.S. Congress involves a corruption through the campaign finance system that has become part of its culture, so much so that individual members feel justified in doing favors or granting access in exchange for support "because everyone does it," even as they speak the language of inclusion (della Porta and Vannucci 1999, 249–55; Thompson 1995, 27–28).

In sum, corruption of democracy is a violation of the norm of equal inclusion of all affected by a collectivity (unjustifiable exclusion). Exclusion (a) is a necessary but not sufficient condition for corruption. In addition, two other conditions are necessary:

(b) A duplicity condition with regard to the norm of inclusion: The excluded have a claim to inclusion that is both recognized and violated by the corrupt.

(c) A benefit/harm condition with regard to the consequences of exclusion: the exclusion normally benefits those included within a relationship and harms at least some of those excluded.

Together (a), (b), and (c) are necessary conditions for corruption of democracy: forms of exclusion that do not have these qualities may be undemocratic, but they are not corrupt; (a), (b), and (c) are also sufficient to identify the corruption of democracy.

**Domain Differentiated Corruption**

The norm of empowered inclusion identifies a distinctively democratic conception of corruption. But as developed so far, the concept remains abstract in relation to the institutions and practices of democracy. Because democracies consist in differentiated and complementary institutions and domains, the means and meaning of inclusion will vary by domain. Thus in order to relate a democratic conception of corruption to the institutions and practices of democracy, I distinguish meanings of the concept according to the domain-specific types of inclusion and their norms. If successful, this strategy should develop as well as relate familiar concepts of corruption.

I conceive of these domains in what is becoming the conventional way. Idealized, these include:

- The state, whose executive powers represent the ultimate location of collective agency, and provide the securities and powers necessary for the rights, protections, supports, and freedoms necessary for democracy. The legislative branches enable representation within the state, as well as provide a venue of deliberation focused on law and policy. The judicial branches provide for due process and the rule of law.
- The public sphere or spheres, the web of communications through which public opinion and judgments are developed, and upon which the legitimacy of state decisions, laws, and actions are ultimately based.
- Civil society, the associations of which serve many democratic functions, including cultivating the democratic capacities of citizens, enabling citizens to pressure government, underwriting the public sphere, and providing alternative venues of collective action and conflict resolution.
- Market economies, with which democracies are ambivalently associated (Dahl 1998; Dryzek 1996; Lindblom 2001). Democratic functions of markets include handling billions of relatively trivial matters of economic coordination in ways that reduce demands upon state and associative venues.

While a complete development is beyond the scope of this article, it is possible to sketch what is distinctive about corruption within each domain by asking similar questions of each:
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What are the democratic functions of the domain? That is, in what ways is the democratic norm of inclusion actualized? This question identifies the modes of inclusion in each domain potentially subject to corruption.

What are the regulative norms of each domain as they relate to democratic inclusion? This question identifies the domain-specific norms subject to corruption.

Is the domain primarily one of consensus or conflict, with conflict denoting the more “political” of domains? This question helps to specify whether the norms of the domain are first-order, as they will tend to be in domains where there is consensus about goals, or whether they are second-order, regulating political processes of decision making under conditions of conflict over first-order goals.

Answers to these questions will provide preliminary answers to the questions:

- What is the corruption-defining mode of exclusion characteristic of the domain?
- What are the harms to democracy?

These questions and their domain-specific answers are summarized in Table 1.

**Corruption of the State**

Although states with liberal-democratic constitutions typically differentiate institutions according to functions—legislatures legislate and courts adjudicate, for example—here I refer only to idealized functions and not to institutions. That is, I am bracketing the question as to whether, for example, courts and executive agencies engage in the political work of law making. Insofar as they do, the democratic norms of legislative functions should also apply to executive agencies and courts.

**Corruption of Executive Functions**

From the perspective of democracy, the executive branch of the state is not the only location of collective agency, but it is often the ultimate location, owing to the state’s monopoly over legitimate means of coercion (Table 1, column 1). In a democracy, a people’s confidence in its executive is a confidence that it can act in response to collective problems. Thus, ideally, the mode of inclusion in executive functions is passive, consisting in a trust that officials will abide by the goals and rules that have been legitimately decided within the more political of domains.

The reason trust is an appropriate mode of inclusion is that executive functions are, in theory, relatively settled: they are the consequences of political processes that have produced enough consensus to support binding goals, on the basis of which offices with defined purposes can be constructed. Trust presupposes trustworthiness, which can be hedged by institutionalizing oversight, auditing, sunshine laws, an active media, and public interest groups that engage in monitoring. When such devices and activities exist, then trust is warranted (Warren 1999, Forthcoming).

The notion that corruption involves violating a “public trust” is thus most applicable to the domain of executive functions. Consistent with the modern conception, corruption consists in activities by public officials that depart from the norms, laws, and expectations of their offices, from which they realize gains. Government as the trustee and executor of collective purposes is corrupted (della Porta and Vannucci 1999, 10, 261). Democracy is directly harmed when people lack a collective agent they can trust to execute collective decisions because they are effectively disempowered. Indirect harms to democracy also result: corruption not only leads to inefficient and ineffective government (della Porta and Vannucci 1999, 256–58; Rose-Ackerman 1999, 9–26), but also produces an atmosphere that is arbitrary, permeated by differential treatment. Under these circumstances, individuals lack the securities necessary for association, pressure, voice, and other modes of citizen participation that underwrite democracy. An atmosphere in which even everyday acts of democratic participation require heroism can induce or reinforce passivity and distrust among citizens.

**Corruption of Judicial Functions**

Democracy depends upon public procedures that have the force of law, combined with the rights and securities that enable individuals to use these procedures by voting, speaking, organizing, and pressuring (Table 1, column 2). The democratic norm of inclusion thus depends upon a judicial system that provides actionable civil rights and liberties, equal standing, equal protection, access to counsel, even-handed prosecutors—and assumes, of course, that the police functions of the executive branch are subject to judicial control and oversight. The importance of this kind of judicial system to democracy is not just institutional, but also psychological: knowable securities, equally distributed, are necessary for a confident and active citizenry.

As custodians of law, judicial institutions ideally function to ensure that it is applied with fairness and equity. But because cases are brought where there are conflicting interests and uncertainty about what constitutes fairness and equity, the norms of judicial institutions are
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<td>Severed relationship between collective decisions and public judgments</td>
<td>Loss of capacity for nonstate collective action, loss of capacity for disciplining the state, loss of generative capacities of democracy</td>
<td>State is used for private purposes; loss of confidence in fairness of market rules; reduced market efficiency</td>
</tr>
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procedural rather than based on particular outcomes. Thus, the corruption-defining norms of judicial systems are not first-order norms as with executive functions, but rather second-order procedures of adjudication. Owing to this quality, judicial institutions indicate something of the nature of corruption within more openly political arenas, and, for the same reason, the modern conception of corruption is less adequate. Judicial institutions do benefit from relatively clear functions and expectations: the laws are known beforehand, even if their demands are not entirely clear in particular cases. Likewise, the roles of judges, lawyers, and juries in deliberation and judgment are clear. These roles, however, are designed to enable procedures that approximate truth when the truth is unknown, and fairness and equity when their demands are ambiguous, under conditions of conflict. The integrity of the process involves a confidence that, when the truth is unknown and the demands of fairness and equity ambiguous, argumentation and advocacy are the best ways of approximating true, fair, and equitable outcomes.

Thus what are subject to corruption are not, in any immediate sense, the outcomes (truth, fairness, equity), but rather the processes through which they are achieved—that is, argument. The process is corrupted when motivations for gain other than those of winning the argument enter the process. If jurors are bribed, then their decisions follow from the bribe rather than from the arguments placed before them. If lawyers have conflicts of interest, they may lack the motivation to make the strongest arguments they can. If judges seek political or ideological gains, they can use their considerable influence over the proceedings to affect the outcome for reasons unrelated to the truth-finding and equity/fairness-seeking goals of the process. The harm to democracy is that the rule of law becomes less certain, eroding legal rights, protections, and securities. When arguments no longer carry the burden for determining truth, fairness, and equity, judicial decisions become illegitimate, which in turn corrodes not only the culture of law, but also the democratic idea that conflicts are best settled by talk structured by fair procedures.

Corruption of Legislative Functions

Within democratic systems, legislatures function to make laws under conditions of conflict (Table 1, column 3). The legislative domain is highly political, in the sense that it often works at the limits of consensus about collection actions. Its norms are therefore second-order—those of democratic process. People are included in this domain through their votes for representatives in competitive elections, as well as though communications and deliberations enabled by political associations, letter writing, demonstrations, and other ways of conveying opinions and interests to representatives. The objects of corruption are, therefore, these representative linkages.

The most familiar corruption of representation is the buying and selling of votes, in elections as well as legislative processes. Vote buying and selling corrupts by breaking the link between the expression of interests and opinions and the enforcement mechanism represented by the vote. Voting is, however, a notoriously poor means of inclusion: it is low in information, episodic, and conveys at best the preferences of the winners. Elections and legislative votes mostly serve to structure democratic processes and finalize decisions, while the creative work of democracy consists in deliberation and bargaining. The legitimacy of outcomes depends upon justifications resulting from the deliberative process. Thus, the deliberative dimension of representation should be even more actively inclusive than voting: even those who lose can try to persuade their representatives or mobilize debates in the public domain through which they hope to influence their representative—if not directly through persuasion, then indirectly by changing the minds of those likely to vote in the next election.

The more elusive dimensions of legislative corruption, then, have to do with inclusion in deliberation—elusive because, in contrast to the bureaucrat’s performance standards, a representative’s key role is to create agreements in the face of conflicts over goals. So whatever trust constituents place in them cannot be based on outcomes: no representative can deliver, not least because even under the best of circumstances outcomes will reflect a mix of competing interests and voices. Rather, trust in a representative is well placed when the reasons he gives for a position are, in fact, the reasons that motivate his vote, bargain, or compromise. Individuals should be able to trust that representatives’ decisions are not the result of the whispered voices of those who have bought access through their campaign contributions. This is why, as Thompson insightfully argues (1995, 126–29; see also Stark 2000, 230–32), the “appearance of integrity” standard for representatives is not simply about appearance. In a democracy, policymaking ought to be a public process, and, under conditions of representation, can only be a public process if citizens can have confidence not just that the deliberative process is inclusive, but also that it provides the motivational force behind the decision. Legislative norms should therefore reflect not just the integrity of voting, but also the integrity of inclusive deliberation. Following Thompson (1995, 114–26), representatives should be fair: that is, open to arguments from all potentially affected by the decision. They should be independent: their decisions should reflect due
consideration of the arguments. And they should be accountable: they should be able to provide reasons to constituents for their decisions. This is partly a matter of character: a representative has integrity with respect of matters of common concern when words are consistent with deeds. But it is just as important that the institutions support a close relationship between deliberations and decisions.

Legislative corruption should therefore be conceived as short-circuiting these aspects of the democratic process (Thompson 1995, 103). The distinctive marks of corruption in the legislative domain are those that contravene inclusive public deliberation, namely, secrecy in decision making and duplicity in speech. Secrecy can have many motives—some quite proper—but in legislative matters it is often a sign that influences are improper and voices are excluded for reasons that could not be justified in public. Duplicity in speech, what many people call a "lack of sincerity" in politicians, is a sign that the deliberative process has been corrupted: the arguments made and displayed are not those motivating the decisions. The harms to democracy are direct and extensive: corruption of this sort severs representative linkages, breaks the relationship between deliberation and decision making, and undermines the creative elements of democratic conflict resolution.

Corruption of the Public Sphere

As I suggested above, the modern concept of corruption is a state-based concept. But if contemporary conceptions of democracy refer increasingly to forces outside of the state that "make democracy work," should not the concept of corruption follow democracy beyond the boundaries of the state? Certainly there is warrant within democratic theories at least since Jefferson and Kant, where it has long been noted that liberal-democratic constitutions constitute not just governments, but also publics through rights and protections such as freedom of speech and association. Representation of "the people" within the state presumes that the people are constituted apart from the state; that they have some autonomy from the state; that they are represented in an ongoing process of public opinion formation carried by various media and forums; and that, as a result, public opinion has its own kind of integrity and influence (Habermas 1996, 329–87; Preuss 1995). In a democracy, public opinion should not only guide, limit, and legitimate the state, but also stand vigilant over the accumulated powers of businesses and other organizations.

Whatever influence the public sphere has, it exerts by means of symbolic and discursive forces: through images, narratives, and symbols that portray lives and emotions, through collective interpretations of facts, and through deliberations about right and wrong (Table 1, column 4). These elements of public discourse enable people to form conceptions of their interests and values and to connect them to their political actions. For these reasons, inclusion in the public sphere is necessary for all other democratic forms of inclusion. From a democratic perspective, the integrity of the public sphere depends upon including all affected by collective matters by providing individuals with the opportunities and spaces to argue and persuade—that is, to exert "discursive force." Discursive force resides in people's capacities to move others through normative and factual claims and to be moved in turn. In a democracy, discursive force should be the dominant force—indeed, the constituting force—of public spheres, which should in turn guide, limit, correct, and legitimate spheres within which administrative power (the state) or money (the market) are dominant (Habermas 1996; Young 2000).

What counts as corruption of public spheres does not, then, refer to corruption of rightness or truth. Politics is, in part, constituted by disagreements about what counts as right or true. What matters, rather, are deliberative processes: they have integrity when people can make claims to rightness and truth, and hope to motivate others with their claims in ways that are not reducible to the interests of power or money (Habermas 1987). From the perspective of motivations, speech is corrupt not when it is wrong or untrue, but when it is strategically duplicitous, intended to deflect, dissimulate, distract, or otherwise obscure the claims of those who speak, in order to secure private or professional gains.

No doubt strategic duplicity is an unavoidable part of public deliberations; it is impossible to imagine institutions that could police motivations without eliminating deliberation itself. But is it possible to contain strategic duplicity by disempowering it. Institutions can be (and often are) designed so it is difficult for those who control resources to get their way without public justification. Most of these designs are already well-known in principle if not always appropriately applied in practice: conflict of interest rules, campaign financing strictures, sunshine laws, public information, ethics oversight, auditing units, and external watchdog groups, to name a few. In addition, competitive political processes supply actors with motivations to catch their opponents' duplicities. The results are often not savory, but they do place a premium upon reputation for integrity while increasing the risks and costs of duplicity (Thompson 2000). In these ways, the corruption of speech that is unavoidable in politics might be limited in its harms to democracy.
Although the modern conception offers no guidance to this kind of corruption, there are ancient as well as popular precedents. Thucydides complained that in corrupt Athens, men were so riddenn with “ambition, envy, greed, and lust for power” that they became “oblivious to the importunements of justice, honor, mercy, and common laws . . . to which all alike can appeal for salvation should they be overtaken by adversity.” Used strategically to further individual gains, “[w]ords were forced to change their ordinary meaning” (Euben 1989, quoting from Thucydides, 224–25) to such an extent that public deliberation lost its force. And in popular usage today we have no problem referring to, say, newspapers or other media as corrupt. We do so when we suspect them of hiding or altering the news or images under the influence of power (as with state-controlled media), money (as with media beholden to corporate sponsors), or ideological agendas that systematically hide or distort facts (Arendt 1968, chapter 7). Likewise, those professions such as the sciences whose force depends upon the public veracity of their claims can become corrupt, as when researchers alter their study designs or findings to suit the financial interests of their sponsors. Corruption in this sense damages democracy by severing the relationship between public judgments and collective decisions.

**Corrupt Civil Societies**

Democracy does best, it seems, in places where civil society is constituted by horizontally structured groups, a certain proportion of which bridge social cleavages (Putnam 2000, 336–49; Warren 2001, chapter 7). “Civil society” is the domain of associations built from common values and shared goals. While there are countless purposes of association, they all depend upon horizontal trust and reciprocity. Trust multiplies individual efforts and accounts for much of the generative power of association, while reciprocity enables cooperation for mutual advantage.

The democratic functions of associations follow from these qualities: they provide individuals with means for representation and voice, with alternatives to state-centered collective action, and resources for resistance and counterhegemony. In addition, many kinds of associations provide for political socialization by enhancing individuals’ political capacities, their sense of efficacy, and their knowledge. They will usually learn the value of reciprocity and trust, and some associations may enhance tolerance and other civic virtues (Warren 2001).

The democratic norm of inclusion cannot apply directly to the associations of civil society. Wherever there is freedom to choose associates, there is also freedom to exclude (Rosenblum 1998). What counts for democracy, rather, is inclusion in three other senses. First, among the variety of associative possibilities, individuals should be able to find the social attachments and memberships that provide opportunities for voice, representation, collective action, and socialization into the habits of democratic agency. Second, exclusions should not combine with resources in ways that enable the associations to externalize costs onto others who lack recourse. And third, these memberships should overlap sufficiently so that, in aggregate, civil society does not consist in mutually exclusive and segmented associations (Warren 2001, 207–16).

Can corruption mean anything in relation to these kinds of associational exclusion? The first mode of exclusion, differential distributions of memberships, might intersect with corruption, but there are many other possible causes of associational exclusions, such as differences in education and effects of class and race (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). The second and third possibilities for exclusion, however, do have meaningful senses of corruption attached to them. To see why, however, it is important to note that some kinds of trust and reciprocity can function to support corruption. The literatures on trust and reciprocity increasingly distinguish between generalized and particularized versions of trust and reciprocity (Uslaner 2002; Putnam 2000, 22–24). Generalized trust is the propensity trust strangers. Generalized trusters find it easier to form associations, and they are more likely to join associations that cross cleavages of family, clan, race, ethnicity, religion, and class. In contrast, particularized trusters are mistrustful of strangers and tend to use indicators of clan, race, ethnicity, religion, and class as cues about whom they should trust. Those who generalize reciprocity will help others not because they expect a particular return, but because they believe that, should they need help in the future, someone else will exhibit the same spontaneous generosity. Generalized reciprocators will find it easier to form associative connections that span groups and generations. Those who characterize reciprocity—that is, demand that any favor be reciprocated in kind—will tend toward exclusive exchanges within associations, since associative attachments function as guarantees of the exchange. Particularized reciprocity thus tends toward exclusive rather than inclusive attachments.

Generalized trust and reciprocity are good for democracy because they enhance inclusiveness within civil society. Particularized trust tends to be bad for democracy, since it builds on and reinforces group cleavages. Particularized reciprocity is not necessarily bad for democracy and is often quite appropriate: in market exchanges and greetings, for example. But it is the particularized rather
generalized kinds of trust and reciprocity upon which corrup
forms of associations build when (a) they function to secure an asso
iation’s hold over power or money, and (b) the exclusivity of the bond serves the interests of those
within the relationship while harming those who are ex
cluded. Masonic lodges in Italy, one of the exclusive social
venues that supported Italian political corruption, exem
plified these conditions (della Porta and Vannucci 1999,
165–70).

It is possible to stretch the concept of corruption to
include the notion that a civil society might be corrupt,
however, only with the addition the duplicity condition.
It only makes sense to apply the condition in aggregate,
in those societies in which the overall weight of particu
larized trust and reciprocity cause people to form purely
exclusive social attachments. Under these circumstances,
each group seeks benefits for its own members without
regard for the harms of its group activities, while por
traying its interests as those of society. This description
comes close to capturing the meaning of corruption in
ancient political theory: Thucydides and Aristotle, for ex
ample, held that in a corrupt society “each part pretends
to be the whole; each interest to be the common one; each
faction to make its view and voice exclusive. Under such
circumstances the common good is seen (and so comes
to be) a ruse for fools and dreamers while the political
arena is a place where factions, like gladiators, fight to the
death” (Euben 1989, 223). This ancient conception res
onates with contemporary literatures that find, vario
usly, that societies high in generalized trust have low levels of
official corruption (Uslaner 2001); that mistrustful and
anomic societies provide conditions for official corrup
tion (Banfield 1958, Rose-Ackerman 2001); and that so
ieties high in social capital are more democratic in their

The harms to democracy of a corrupt civil society are
extensive, including loss of capacity for nonstate collec
tive action, loss of capacity for disciplining and guiding
the state, and loss of the generative capacities of democ
racy in favor of a zero-sum game between competing and
mutually suspicious groups.

Markets and Corruption

The democratic functions of markets are ambiguous:
markets tend to support democratization of authoritarian
and totalitarian regimes by pluralizing the sources of eco
nomic power. Global markets provide incentives for such
regimes to become more open, while pressures of competi
tion provide incentives for corrupt officials to limit their
takes. In developed democracies, markets enable high lev
els of economic complexity and economic development,
as well as a tax base that enables government to undertake
collective projects and responsibilities.

But markets are, and will continue to be, a force tend
ing toward corruption of democracy as well (Table 1, col
umn 6). The dynamics of exclusion are at work in every
capitalist market: profit-seeking businesses always seek
to internalize benefits and externalize onto others costs
for such things as education of workers, infrastructure,
and environmental integrity. These dynamics of exclu
sion are undemocratic—but not necessarily corrupt—in
the sense that there is no direct appeal to the power hold
ers. But market exclusion may become corrupt if mar
ket actors covertly seek to use economic power to in
fluence democratic processes and agencies of collective
action.

Tendencies toward corruption in this sense are in
herent within capitalist market democracies. The very
differentiation between economic and political power
that limits state power and creates an energetic econ
omy also creates incentives for wealthy actors to buy
the resources they do not control—the assent, protec
tion, and assistance of government (Scott 1972, 28–34;
Rose-Ackerman 1999). As Adam Smith recognized, no
capitalist has an interest in the health of capitalism, but
each does have an interest in transforming profit-seeking
into rent-seeking. Powerful actors are motivated to pen
etrate government wherever possible, if not to gain priv
ileged access to government contracts, then—and more
commonly in the developed democracies—to affect the
rules of competition in ways favorable to them. More
over, when a market exists for their cooperation with
economic actors, public officials have incentives for cor
rupt exclusion: they can use the rules and regulations
they control to create bottlenecks that increase the price
of their services to the wealthy (Johnston 1982, 20–23;
de Leon 1993, 28).

These tendencies are cultural as well as structural: in
capitalist societies, a single-minded, instrumental focus
on moneymaking is often so admired that the ethics ap
propriate to the public domain of democracies—the stew
ardship of common goods and inclusive processes—are
constantly vulnerable to the culture of entrepreneurship
that surrounds them (Arendt 1965, 254–56; Eisenstadt
1989; della Porta and Vannucci 1999, 7–9, 195).

The harms of market-induced corruption to democ
racy are clear and well documented: when equally dis
tributed rights and powers are for sale, the ethic of demo
cratic equality is undermined. And when agents of the
state sell their regulatory and monopoly powers, they use
the powers that belong to the people to enhance the pow
ers of economic elites. Not only is the key collective agent
of democracy, the state, corrupted, but so also are the very rules that enable markets to function.

Conclusion

Our standard conception of corruption—what I have called the "modern" conception—does some things very well, such as identifying official misdeeds in arenas of government with clear definitions of office. But the modern conception has been outpaced not only by the democratization of the state-building project, but more recently by diffusions of politics that are changing the very forms of democracy. Since conceptions of political corruption depend upon conceptions of appropriate politics, it should be no surprise that the standard conception underplays some contemporary intuitions into corruption, while missing others altogether.

By making an explicit connection between democratic theory and the concept of corruption we can make sense of the diffusion of meanings of corruption within today’s democracies. By conceiving corruption through the democratic norm of empowered inclusion, we can identify the harms to democracy quite precisely, domain by domain. This is a conceptual rather than an empirical claim: whether or not such a democratic conception of corruption ultimately makes sense depends on whether it illuminates the evolving normative intuitions within democracies as to what counts as corrupt.

It may be, however, that a democratic theory of corruption can shed light on other features of political corruption as well. First, a democratic concept of corruption reveals why charges of corruption can be so often misplaced. The concept of corruption carries with it a moral accusation. In the United States, with its political culture heavily influenced by Protestantism, moral accusations are too often aimed at failings of individual character, thus distracting from institutional and structural patterns of corruption (Eisenstadt 1989; Thompson 1995). Causes, locations, and meanings of corruption are consistently misidentified, often with the help of opportunistic political elites, so that remedies often miss and sometimes aggravate the problems. A democratic concept of corruption not only reveals the opportunities for domain slippage, but also the challenges for devising solutions that speak to each domain.

Second, a democratic concept of corruption raises a warning flag about the dominant metaphor for cures to corruption, transparency. If corruption in democracies has assumed multiple, complex patterns, then the metaphor may be limited its usefulness to particular devices, such as public access to information and sunshine laws. There is an irony here: modern technologies promise the power to expose all. But two other powerful forces challenge the promise of universal visibility. First, owing to its complexity, contemporary social and political organization remains opaque as a whole, even if it can be unraveled at some points, at some times, and at some places (Beck 1997). Second, with global market integration outpacing political integration, the possibilities for secret transactions are multiplying faster than the possibilities for oversight (Johnston 1996). Money is hard to see and trace. In addition, market-oriented reforms aimed at lowering transaction costs also make transparency ever harder to achieve. The metaphor of transparency may also remain too closely linked with the modern conception of corruption, with its strategies of institutional oversight and policing. A democratic conception of corruption suggests that it may be time to experiment with a different approach, namely, empowering those harmed by corruption to expose and police abuses (della Porta and Vannucci 1999, 270–72; Rose-Ackerman 1999; de Leon 1993).

Finally, a democratic concept of corruption should help to sort out some of the current confusion as to whether democracy does or does not foster corruption (Moran 2001; Philp 2001). The confusion in almost every case stems from incomplete characterizations of democracy, enabling, for example, the common observation that countries adopting competitive elections and market liberalization ("democratization") also experience a rise in corruption. On a democratic conception of corruption, such correlations should not be surprising. Incomplete democratization often puts into place incentives for corruption, while lacking those elements of democracy that would enable those harmed to fight back. In particular, these effects suggest a deficit in the protective element of democracy, an old rationale based on the notion that citizens should have the political tools to resist predatory governments and officials (Macpherson 1977). If corruption involves harms caused by exclusion, a key means for fighting corruption will involve empowering those harmed to protect themselves by democratic means: with information, arguments, organization, and votes. In short, more democracy is likely to be a central part of any cure, as long as what counts as "more democracy" aligns with the norms of empowered inclusion embedded within each domain.

References


