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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 (Anechiarico 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 dysfunctions 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

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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 duplicitous 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 duplicitous 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 (Philp 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 1995, 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 decentered, 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

charged with furthering public health; professional associations such as the American Bar Association are charged with regulating its members in the interest of the rule of law, and nonprofit development corporations are charged with revitalizing urban neighborhoods. All such organizations can become corrupt in a generically political sense, since political corruption is possible whenever a collectivity has within its power—because of its control over resources—to produce harms for which they seek to avoid accountability in order to benefit its members.

The Modern Conception Fails to Encompass Democratic Capacities to Associate. Finally, in seeking to avoid global, moralizing concepts of corruption, modernists shed the ancient and early modern view that a people or society may be corrupt. To be sure, the ancient and early modern views were so encompassing as to be useful only in relatively undifferentiated societies (Johnston 1996, 13). But these views did tap an attribute of society that has a new relevance in today's democracies: namely, that democracies work when their people have capacities to associate for collective purposes—a capacity now commonly referred to as social capital. While the ancient and early modern views must be recast to be relevant, unlike the modern view, they did include the idea that corruption in a democracy involves, somehow, the mistrust, lack of reciprocity, mutual suspicion, and greed that undermine people's capacities to associate.

In making these indictments, I am suggesting that we lack a conceptual guide to the question of what corruption means in a democracy, mostly because the damages of corruption have not been related systematically to democratic norms. A conceptual strategy for doing so would involve two steps. Since all concepts of political corruption are specified by reference to a good political order, the first involves identifying a general norm of democracy—its defining good—that can be corrupted. I shall refer to this good as *empowered inclusion*, which specifies corruption as a form of *duplicitous exclusion*. Second, because democracies today are *differentiated* in structure—most importantly, among state, spheres of public judgment and opinion, society, and markets—the meanings of empowered inclusion differ by domain. Accordingly, meanings of corruption reference domain-specific meanings of empowered inclusion. If successful, this conceptual strategy will produce a differentiated conception of corruption, within which domain-specific meanings of corruption are related through their common reference to empowered inclusion. The remainder of this article sketches this two-step strategy for developing a democratic conception of corruption.

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:

- 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

TABLE 1 Locations and meanings of corruption in democracy

		Domains				
		State				
Characteristics	1. Executive Departments and Agencies	2. Judiciary	3. Legislatures	4. Public Sphere (Media and Other Discursive Venues)	5. Civil Society (Associations)	6. Markets (Money-Based Exchange)
Democratic functions	Collective agency	Rule of law	Representative law making	Formation of public opinion	Collective agency and representation regulated by norms and voluntary agreements; socialization of citizens	High levels of complexity and efficiency in some domains
Domain specific norms of inclusion	First-order norms embedded in program goals, mission, and performance; efficiency	Second-order norms: due process aimed at maximizing truth-finding, fairness, and equity	Second-order norms: openness, independence, accountability	Second-order norms: persuasion based on the discursive force of truth-telling, rightness, and sincerity	First-order norms embedded in trust and reciprocity	Second-order norms: instrumental reciprocity, fair terms of exchange, open information for investors and consumers
Level of consensus	Convergent interests or consensus formalized into programs	Conflicting interests operating under consensus about legal norms	Conflicting interests interacting under consensus about political procedures.	Conflicting opinions operating under conditions of free speech and association	Convergent interests within associations, conflicting interests among associations	Conflicting interests based on differential control over resources
Corruption-defining modes of exclusion	Divergence from legitimately decided norms of office for private gain; betrayed public trust	Decisions motivated by gains other than winning through argument	Secrecy and duplicity: decisions responsive to money or power in ways that could not be justified publicly	Duplicity, deception, dissimulation under the influence of power or money	Particularized trust and reciprocity crowd out generalized trust and reciprocity	Unjustified monopolies; unfair trading practices, penetration of market norms into other domains
Harms to democracy	Erosion of powers of collective agency, resulting from inefficiencies, inequities, arbitrariness, mistrust of gov't	Erosion of rights, protections, securities; illegitimate judicial decisions undermine rule of law	Failed representation, loss of creative dimensions of deliberation, illegitimate decisions	Severed relationship between collective decisions and public judgments	Loss of capacity for nonstate collective action, loss of capacity for disciplining the state, loss of generative capacities of democracy	State is used for private purposes; loss of confidence in fairness of market rules; reduced market efficiency

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 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 through communications and deliberations enabled by political associations, letter writ-

ing, 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 ridden 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 toleration 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 particularize 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 corrupt forms of associations build when (a) they function to secure an association'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 excluded. Masonic lodges in Italy, one of the exclusive social venues that supported Italian political corruption, exemplified 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 particularized 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 portraying its interests as those of society. This description comes close to capturing the meaning of corruption in ancient political theory: Thucydides and Aristotle, for example, 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 resonates with contemporary literatures that find, variously, that societies high in generalized trust have low levels of official corruption (Uslaner 2001); that mistrustful and anomic societies provide conditions for official corruption (Banfield 1958, Rose-Ackerman 2001); and that societies high in social capital are more democratic in their governance (Putnam 1993, 2000; Lin 2001).

The harms to democracy of a corrupt civil society are extensive, including loss of capacity for nonstate collective action, loss of capacity for disciplining and guiding the state, and loss of the generative capacities of democracy 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 economic power. Global markets provide incentives for such regimes to become more open, while pressures of competition 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 tending toward corruption of democracy as well (Table 1, column 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 exclusion are undemocratic—but not necessarily corrupt—in the sense that there is no direct appeal to the power holders. But market exclusion may become corrupt if market actors covertly seek to use economic power to influence democratic processes and agencies of collective action.

Tendencies toward corruption in this sense are inherent within capitalist market democracies. The very differentiation between economic and political power that limits state power and creates an energetic economy also creates incentives for wealthy actors to buy the resources they do not control—the assent, protection, 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 penetrate government wherever possible, if not to gain privileged access to government contracts, then—and more commonly in the developed democracies—to affect the rules of competition in ways favorable to them. Moreover, when a market exists for their cooperation with economic actors, public officials have incentives for corrupt 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 appropriate to the public domain of democracies—the stewardship 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 democracy are clear and well documented: when equally distributed rights and powers are for sale, the ethic of democratic 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 powers 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.

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