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Corruption, Accountability, and Discretion Edited by Nancy S. Lind and Cara E. Rabe- Hemp

Tyler J. Klatt – University of South Dakota

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“Government is corrupt” is an oft-cited refrain for critics of political and policymaking institutions. However, the origins, governance implications, and policymaking effects of this refrain are not well understood. In *Corruption, Accountability, and Discretion*, editors Nancy S. Lind and Cara E. Rabe-Hemp assemble twelve important articles to address the key themes found in the title of the collection. The collection takes a holistic approach to understanding the meaning, prevalence, policy implications, and oversight and accountability ramifications of corruption in government.

Part I, titled *Etiology*, looks at causes of corruption. In chapter 1, April K. Clark asks if it is even possible to measure political corruption. Despite objective approaches to measuring corruption (e.g., Transparency International’s Corruption Perception Index) as well as subjective approaches (e.g., public perception), Clark admits that “the precise levels of corruption will never be known” (p. 7). Regardless of the true amount of corruption, though, Clark finds that American cynicism of government is attributed to corruption, which largely contributes to public concern regarding government performance.

In chapter 2, Michael J. Pomonte and Scot Schraufnagel examine how corruption influences governance; specifically, they explore how corruption influences the ability of Congress to do its job. To do so, the authors review five congressional scandals: “Koreagate,” ABSCAM, the Keating Five scandal, the House banking scandal, and the Abramoff/DeLay lobbying scandal. They examine these scandals to determine whether any of them caused a drop in congressional approval. The authors find that corruption in Congress is associated with negative congressional approval and a negative impact on the public policy process.

Part II, titled *Permeation of Corruption in Governance*, begins with Kerri Milita and Jaclyn Bunch's (chapter 3) review of how the Abramoff/DeLay lobbying scandal altered the lobbying environment in America. By examining three common pathways of lobbyist influence: the revolving door, campaign finance, and gift giving, the authors find that despite overwhelming evidence of corruption related to the scandal relatively little has changed in terms of lobbyist influence over the policymaking process. Thus, the authors argue that in order to make impactful change we need stronger rules regarding the employment of congressional staff by lobbying firms and bans on lobbyist sponsored gifts and fundraisers.

Chapter 4 focuses on the role of campaign contributions and the perception of "vote buying." In this chapter, Renee Prunty and Mandy Swartzendruber view the rapid growth in election spending as being fueled by Political Action Committees (PACs) so that special interest groups can buy votes in their favor. The authors present a number of possible reforms that they believe are capable of leveling the playing field (e.g., stricter enforcement by entities overseeing campaign finance law). The authors concede, however, that without a more substantial change (e.g., publicly financed elections) lobbyists will continue to find and exploit loopholes.

In chapter 5, Thomas E. McClure reviews how campaign contributions to judicial elections create the appearance of corruption and damage the legitimacy of the courts. What is especially unique for judicial races, McClure argues, is that whether or not corruption takes place the public still tends to perceive that corruption stems from donations to judicial campaigns. Thus, McClure recommends recusal laws, anonymous donations, and publicly financed campaigns as methods to rectify the appearance of unfairness created by campaign donations in judicial elections.

Chapter 6 looks at how media coverage and related "dramatic fantasy" themes influenced the 2016 presidential election. In this chapter, John P. McHale points to the two most recognizable themes from the 2016 election, "Crooked Hilary" and "Corrupt Businessman Trump." Media coverage surrounding corruption charges painted a specific image of both candidates and had a direct negative impact in terms of vote share. As such, McHale describes the influence of media coverage (especially negative coverage) as disheartening to voters and a source for cynicism concerning politics in general.

Part III, titled *Policy Issues*, begins with Cara E. Rabe-Hemp, Philip Mulvey, and Morgan Foster (chapter 7) exploring the role that politicians play in framing and constraining crime policy. The role of corruption in setting this type of policy, the authors argue, is based on public perceptions of the criminal justice system. If the public views the criminal justice system as corrupt, they find, then they are less likely to cooperate with the system and more likely to question its legitimacy. The authors also find that political elites are able to socially construct crime as a worthy policy issue, despite crime rates being historically low.

Eric E. Otenyo and Earlene A. S. Camarillo (chapter 8) examine sexual harassment in local police departments; and, they explore reasons why sexual harassment is largely ignored within these departments. The authors find that organizational culture, the relatively diminished role of women in police departments, and inadequate processes for handling cases of harassment all contribute to the persistence of sexual harassment in law enforcement offices. As such, the authors propose various organizational, legal, and cultural adjustments that they believe are needed to eliminate sexual harassment in police departments. Ultimately, though, the authors suggest that it is the responsibility of authority figures (e.g., mayors and police chiefs) to change organizational cultures that allow sexual harassment to occur.

In chapter 9, Eric E. Otenyo and Parwez Basmal discuss why corruption in defense spending has not yet become a prominent campaign issue. Despite nearly \$60 billion in defense contract waste, they argue, defense spending is largely relegated to larger issues that focus on war and the results of war. One explanation as to why corruption in defense spending has not become a prominent campaign issue, the authors suggest, can be attributed to the culture of the military. This is a culture they describe as averse to whistleblowing on issues of corruption. The authors find that the culture of the military is complicit in corruption surrounding defense contracting. However, if military personnel were to reject corruption, they argue, there is a possibility that this topic may become more salient as a campaign issue. Finally, the authors argue that if the US is unable to effectively administer its own contracts, the country's ability to champion good governance will be diminished.

Part IV, titled *Oversight and Accountability*, begins with Benjamin Brickers' (chapter 10) analysis of the *Citizens United* (2010) court case and its impact on the system of accountability in American democracy. The accountability in question here stems from the money donated to political campaigns and the American public's ability (or inability) to follow the trail of donations. The *Citizens United* ruling gave rise to Super PACs, which have the ability take in unlimited amounts of money to push specific policy positions forward. Since PACs (and Super PACs) cannot be held accountable like individuals can, the *Citizens United* case created an accountability gap that led to difficulty in the public's ability to account for campaign spending. Brickers' discussion of *Citizens United*, thus, is especially important as it highlights the fact that since the current campaign finance environment was created *by* the courts it is now up to the courts to reintroduce regulation in campaign spending.

In chapter 11, Elizabeth E. Wheat explores the relationship between judicial review and policymaking. Citing landmark cases (e.g., *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) and *Brown v. Board* (1954)), Wheat argues that judicial review alters Congressional decisions. These decisions then heavily influence which laws are passed and how they are implemented. Wheat reviews examples of judicial review in three areas: in statutes, of the executive branch, and of Congress. This review is used to highlight how judicial review holds agencies accountable and its influence over policymaking.

Finally, in chapter 12, Maria A. Moore, John Huxford, and Jennifer B. Bethmann review the relationship between whistleblowers and journalists. Whistleblowers, they argue, represent a valuable tool for holding government accountable. Whistleblowers favor the media as an outlet for their story as they are able to make documents public while still retaining their anonymity. Whistleblowers are also able to utilize the media when they fear retaliation from their supervisors. Moore and colleagues provide an important clarification in the case studies that they examine. That is, whistleblowers only turn to the media after internal attempts fail. This is in contrast to the argument of some that whistleblowers seek personal notoriety. As a form of accountability, whistleblowing is chastised only when it jeopardizes issues of national security. It is championed, however, when it is related to other issues. Thus, those who decide to become whistleblowers have a unique ability to hold government agencies accountable and influence policy decisions.

In summary, this collection provides a broad overview of the role of corruption in government. It is important to note, though, that the influence of corruption, accountability, and discretion in lower levels of government (such as municipalities) was not discussed. This is unfortunate given a number of recent cases of local government corruption (e.g. Flint, Michigan's water crisis). Still, Lind and Rabe-Hemp's edited volume is a useful resource for academics; and it is potentially an even more useful resource for the general public. The editors have provided an

important survey of the work on corruption that serves as an accessible introduction to the topic by exploring the role that corruption plays in modern government.

Author Biography

Tyler J. Klatt is a doctoral student at the University of South Dakota. His research interests include local government ethics, public service motivation, and gambling policy.