

Political and Governmental Corruption Is a Feature, Not a Bug

Written by Robert Higgs.

People do not oppose corruption in politics and government. They oppose only the corruption that does not steer loot and social domination to them. After all, the entire process of so-called democratic government is nothing but corruption writ large and backed by the threat of violent force.

Political partisans in particular are utterly unprincipled in regard to the corruption of the political process. If the Republicans are exposed as receiving unlawful campaign contributions or perpetrating political dirty tricks, the Democrats howl to high heaven, and vice versa. Of course, neither major party has a lock on corruption. In Washington, the state capitals, and the county and city councils, corruption is an equal-opportunity practice. Indeed, it's why the massive federal, state, and local governments exist in the first place. If governments confined themselves to protecting people's natural rights, à la John Locke, they could operate with a tiny fraction of the money and personnel they now command.

So why is anyone shocked or even surprised when corruption is revealed? Is it not entirely to be expected that the chiefs and functionaries in a system should act in a way that the system is designed to facilitate and encourage? If a society has a governmental system in which the operatives are endowed with great power over people's lives, liberties, and property and also allowed to sell their specific exertion of this power (or lack thereof) to the highest bidder—indirectly if not directly, legally if not illegally—then such sales will take place. If the money, power, and sadism were removed from politics and government, there would be nothing left but hollow promises and childish make-believe.

One man's patriot is another man's traitor. One man's crook is another man's dedicated public servant. The number of people who prefer that a strict standard of honesty and upright behavior be enforced across the political board is so small that it might as well be zero. People who wouldn't consider stealing a nickel from their neighbor's loose-change jar will support politicians who bankrupt entire countries while enriching and empowering their political supporters and pals.

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