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THE RISE AND FALL OF GOOD-GOVERNANCE PROMOTION

Alina Mungiu-Pippidi

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Like many other young East European intellectuals in the 1980s, I did not see freedom coming. In November 1989, living in Ceaușescu's Romania, my friends and I focused on philosophy and culture, not politics. We did not read Marx—we loathed that his works were taught in mandatory political-indoctrination sessions. Not until 1990, after the dictator's fall, did I read my first book about politics. It was Seymour Martin Lipset's *Political Man*. I read Lipset before I read Aristotle's *Politics*. Lipset's classic, which first appeared in 1960, has stayed with me ever since, and his writings regularly appear on the reading lists of the course on "Transitions to Good Governance" that I teach in Berlin. My students, who come from many different countries, need to learn what Lipset has to say about the historical preconditions of democracy, as it helps them to put in perspective some of their disappointments with the slow advance of democratization.

Although Lipset was one of the great scholars of modernization, he did not write extensively about the issue of corruption. Yet the struggle to control corruption has led to the worldwide endorsement of the norms of good governance, one of the more striking achievements of modernization.

This was underlined when the United Nations General Assembly voted on 31 October 2003 to adopt the UN Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC). Unlike the more famous Universal Declaration of Human Rights that the UN adopted in 1948, UNCAC met with almost

unanimous support. There have never been any official expressions of dissent against the document, or claims that it imposes Western hegemony on the rest of the world. There is no UNCAC equivalent of the

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reservations regarding universal human rights expressed by Saudi Arabia and Iran, which later led to the 1990 Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam.¹ Instead, UNCAC has to date attracted 186 ratifying parties, including 181 of the 193 UN member states, plus entities such as the Holy See and the European Union.²

Although it is called a convention against corruption and uses that word more than a hundred times in its text, UNCAC never defines the term. In-

stead, the document spells out corruption's opposite—norms of good governance such as transparency, accountability, equality of all persons before the law, and respect for what the preamble calls “the principles of proper management of public affairs and public property.” With UNCAC, good-governance norms have achieved—on the formal level at least—a degree of recognition that can fairly be called universal.

This little-known treaty did not land in the twenty-first century fresh from Mars. Instead, it came as the result of a long struggle against all odds that has occupied the last quarter of a millennium. Over those two and a half centuries, the moral principle that “all persons ought to be treated with equal and impartial positive consideration for their respective goods or interests”—a view that the moral philosopher Alan Gewirth called “ethical universalism”—has triumphed in principle, if not in practice.³

While controversies remain in the area of human rights (over the rights of women, for instance), the right to noncorrupt governance enjoys worldwide assent, even though no treaty enshrines it as a human right. Every extant constitution, even in countries without an elected government, promises fair and nondiscriminatory treatment. This represents, in many ways, the West's greatest success in shaping the world: Some countries may resist market institutions or free elections, but since the fall of apartheid, ethical universalism is at least nominally embraced by everyone.

The West's success in promoting this norm in various forms and guises, such as state modernization and anticorruption, has been extraordinary. The norm still has a lot of unrealized transformative potential, but it also carries with it significant risks. The first is that adoption of ethical universalism will remain merely *nominal*, not only in the world at large but even in the countries that promote ethical-universalist norms.

THE SEYMOUR MARTIN LIPSET LECTURE ON DEMOCRACY IN THE WORLD

Alina Mungiu-Pippidi delivered the sixteenth annual Seymour Martin Lipset Lecture on Democracy in the World on 4 November 2019 at the Canadian Embassy in Washington, D.C., and on 6 November 2019 at the Munk School of Global Affairs at the University of Toronto. The title of her lecture was “The Rise and Fall of ‘Good-Governance’ Promotion.”

Seymour Martin Lipset, who passed away at the end of 2006, was one of the most influential social scientists and scholars of democracy of the past six decades. A frequent contributor to the *Journal of Democracy* and a founding member of its Editorial Board, Lipset taught at Columbia, the University of California–Berkeley, Harvard, Stanford, and George Mason University. He was the author of numerous important books, including *Political Man*, *The First New Nation*, *The Politics of Unreason*, and *American Exceptionalism: A Double-Edged Sword*. He was the only person ever to have served as president of both the American Political Science Association (1979–80) and the American Sociological Association (1992–93).

Lipset’s work covered a wide range of topics: the social conditions of democracy, including economic development and political culture; the origins of socialism, fascism, revolution, protest, prejudice, and extremism; class conflict, structure, and mobility; social cleavages, party systems, and voter alignments; and public opinion and public confidence in institutions. Lipset was a pioneer in the study of comparative politics, and no comparison featured as prominently in his work as that between the two great democracies of North America. Thanks to his insightful analysis of Canada in comparison with the United States, most fully elaborated in *Continental Divide* (1990), he has been dubbed the “Tocqueville of Canada.”

The Lipset Lecture is cosponsored by the National Endowment for Democracy and the Munk School, with financial support this year from Johns Hopkins University Press, the Schar School of Policy and Government at George Mason University, the Canadian Embassy in Washington, and the Donner Canadian Foundation. To view videos of the Lipset Lecture from this and past years, please visit www.ned.org/seymour-martin-lipset-lecture-on-democracy-in-the-world.

Perhaps one reason why UNCAC met with so little opposition was the perception that ratifying it was a way for countries to improve their reputations at no cost—the convention is formally a treaty, but spells out no sanctions for violating its canons.

A second risk is that popular demands for ethical universalism in governance might outstrip what any democracy can supply, and may become

so intense and far-reaching that they undermine trust in the democratic system itself. As Montesquieu (1689–1755) noted three centuries ago, the principle of democracy may be corrupted “not only when the spirit of equality is extinct,” but also by the opposite situation, when a “spirit of extreme equality” takes hold, such that “each citizen would fain be upon a level with those whom he has chosen to command him.”⁴ For more than a decade now, the governing classes in developed and developing countries alike have had to contend with the collapse of their moral authority and the decline of public trust in them. In 2017, Transparency International’s Global Corruption Barometer found that people around the world rated political parties and legislatures (along with police) as the most corrupt of all institutions.⁵ Social media have intensified mistrust and stimulated a “revolt against expertise”—as symbolized, for instance, by the antivaccination movement. While the decay of representative democracy surely has more than one cause, the rise in global demands for “anticorruption” has likely played a role, and not a small one.

Governance in the General Interest

As a concept, ethical universalism brings together the ideas of 1) *equity*, providing equal outcomes to people who make equal contributions; 2) *reciprocity*, calling for fairness to be responded to in kind; and 3) *impartiality*, entailing the observance of rules and the rejection of favoritism.⁶ Control of corruption—or in other words, a state’s capacity to operate free of private interest in order to pursue the greatest possible social welfare—is ethical universalism applied to the distribution of public goods and the allocation of public resources.

The basic principles of equal and impartial justice, and with them the rule of law, have been grasped since time immemorial. In Book III of the *Politics*, Aristotle (384–322 B.C.E.) taught that every rightful form of government, whether ruled by one, the few, or the many, aims at promoting the common interest and not some private or factional interest.

Centuries later, Cicero (106–43 B.C.E.) in his *De Re Publica* (*On the Commonwealth*) appealed to practical considerations, asking his compatriots in the Roman Republic: “By what rule can the association of citizens be held together, if it be not by the equal condition of the citizens?”⁷ Cicero synthesized earlier Greek and Roman thought when he explained in his *De Officiis* (*On Duties*) that those charged with governing must “make their every action conform” to the good of the people, and must “care for the welfare of the whole body politic” rather than some part of it. “For the administration of the government, like the office of a trustee, must be conducted for the benefit of those entrusted to one’s care, not of those to whom it is entrusted.”⁸ The intuition that unchecked power leads to partiality in governance emerges very early. A recognition of the need to restrain corruption has long been central to political thought.

Modern views of good governance as being above partial interests, and of the good state as being free from subservience to private concerns, are in fundamental continuity with the classical and medieval view. The newer ideas about political legitimacy that began to appear during the Renaissance, whatever their variations from one another or from past thought, all took as a basic premise these principles of good governance. A historian would no doubt point out that the canon and feudal law of Europe contained many particularisms and special privileges; one could retort, however, that it was precisely the contradiction between these and the principles underlying ethical universalism that lent power to early-modern critiques of the various forms of particularism inherited from the Middle Ages.⁹

Today, everybody uses as the operational definition of corruption “the abuse of public office for private gain,” although that definition is never attributed to its rightful source—the classics. The story of the state becoming autonomous vis-à-vis private interests, and thus able to treat citizens equally and impersonally, often seems like a side plot in the grand narrative of rising political equality as chronicled by students of political development. But this should be reconsidered. History shows that before any grand ambitions to secure equality of opportunity can be realized, the baseline conditions of ethical universalism, including the elimination of favoritism, must be made to apply. This in itself is a mighty achievement, as it requires the state to acquire a remarkable capacity to enforce the public interest over any private or particular interests.

This fundamental feature of governance goes a long way toward defining and determining a state’s level of institutional quality, which can be measured along a continuum. At one extreme will be states that serve as little more than tools for the private interests of ruling elites. At the other will be states that function consistently in the broader public interest. Scholars have come up with an array of names to categorize states along this continuum: Max Weber’s “patrimonialism” typifies the former extreme, for example, while what Douglass C. North and his colleagues call the “open-access order” typifies the latter. Beneath the varied nomenclature, the substance is essentially the same: We are talking about a spectrum with particularism at one pole and ethical universalism at the other. Any given country will fall somewhere between the two, and its quality of governance will reflect its position on the scale.

How Ethical Universalism Became Universalized

The story of political development is the tale of a constant struggle to build a mode of governance that grows ever more respectful of ethical universalism. This does not happen in a vacuum, but must be implemented in opposition to the particular interests of privileged

groups who own the most lucrative rents and are endowed with superior political resources and status. The advance of ethical universalism is a story of conflict. Political challengers used it to support their power bids. The battles to turn this principle into actual practice seem to have led to its theorization and advocacy, and not the other way around. Cicero, for instance, built his fame as a lawyer and politician fighting corruption in the famous case of Gaius Verres, the former Roman governor of Sicily.¹⁰

Cicero was a provincial from the equestrian class, which ranked below the senatorial class. Arguing on behalf of Sicilians victimized by Verres before a jury wholly composed of senators, Cicero needed to find a way to win in the patrician-controlled court. He opted for what today we would call “naming and shaming”—in other words, he increased the reputation costs to the patrician class of defending a notoriously corrupt man against irrefutable evidence of his derelictions. Verres, suitably shamed, took his lawyer’s advice and went into voluntary exile at Massilia (modern-day Marseilles). Cicero’s victory was a triumph for equality before the law. The court had proven to be a forum where a high-ranking miscreant, despite his connections, could be successfully challenged “from below” by someone able to bring evidence to bear—a landmark advance for ethical universalism.

The elimination of legal privileges came next. Privileges in Europe were not solely the province of the clergy and aristocracy: Towns, various groups of people, and even entire regions enjoyed particular privileges as well, some to the detriment of other people (mostly peasants). The battle to eliminate privilege, waged from above by kings hungry for more tax revenues and from below by a rising middle class chafing at the power of hereditary landowners, was protracted. That perfect Enlightenment disciple and archetypal “enlightened despot,” the Habsburg emperor Joseph II, came to power in 1780 seeking to transform society in the name of social equality, uniform treatment by the law, and the autonomy of the state from private interests. While dying in 1790, he reportedly asked that his tomb in Vienna bear the epitaph: “Here lies Joseph II, who failed in all he undertook.”

Although Joseph had eliminated some privileges and discriminatory laws—for instance, by loosening the legal bonds on serfs—his reforms mobilized too many who stood to lose and too few who stood to gain. Enlightened despotism made some strides in separating religious from political authority and in building a merit-based bureaucracy loyal to the crown rather than to private interests. Yet the constituency for ethical universalism in the Habsburg Empire was too small, and scraping away old particularisms in order to construct an empire based on reason and equality was more than even an absolute monarch could accomplish.

The French Revolution was more effective at promoting a similar

agenda. This was due not only to revolutionary brutality, but also to decades of extensive advocacy on behalf of ethical universalism that had paved the way. Historian Daniel Mornet documented that campaign

As Tocqueville noted, hatred of inequality was the deeper and older of the two profound motives that drove the French Revolution—love of liberty was the newer and weaker driver.

in his study of the Revolution's intellectual origins.¹¹ By the 1780s, the view that the Third Estate was being overtaxed to pay for all the exemptions enjoyed by clerics and nobles had become widespread. The uneven, patchwork quality of France's traditional taxation system (which varied by regions as well as by classes) made the absence of equal treatment and the lack of accountability easy targets for radical criticism. The system was less corrupt by present-day standards than it seemed

to contemporaries. The inequality of the complex, organically grown system bothered people more than did the taxes themselves or even the embezzlements committed by tax farmers. As Tocqueville noted, hatred of inequality was the deeper and older of the two profound motives that drove the Revolution—love of liberty was the newer and weaker driver.¹²

By the early twentieth century, Max Weber was arguing that a new type of authority, which he called rational-legal, had already emerged in several European states as a byproduct of the struggle against patrimonialism and feudalism. By that time, various groups in Western Europe had found the promotion of ethical universalism and rationalization of the state to be both in their own best interests and inherently just.¹³ The market and capitalism, despite their obvious limitations, gradually emerged as the main means of allocating resources, replacing the previous discretionary allocation by means of more or less organized violence. The process required the state to become impersonal.

While rationalized bureaucracies had proven useful to some early-modern absolute monarchs and so preceded the French Revolution, it was France after 1789 that really gave modern bureaucracy its historical kick-start. Aided at times by the bayonets of French troops, Napoleon Bonaparte promoted this model of public administration—often with the zeal of an Enlightenment missionary—from Egypt to the German principalities.¹⁴

Switzerland, often wrongly credited with blazing its own fully independent trail to the successful governance that it enjoys today, was transformed by Napoleon. In the mid-eighteenth century, the Old Swiss Confederacy was dominated by privileges and restrictions on economic freedom. Religious, ethnic, and political conflicts were rife. Offices were bought and sold; embezzlers might be dismissed

but were seldom punished. Without centralized authority, the then-thirteen Swiss cantons often faced the same collective-action problems that vex developing countries today: Nobody wanted to pay for public benefits. Roads, schools, and hospitals were scarce. Yet somehow, around the start of the nineteenth century, the contentious and self-centered Swiss interest groups managed to form a nation that over the next hundred years would take off and achieve extraordinary levels of industrial development.

Rational governance as the solution to social dilemmas was not a homegrown Swiss invention. Instead, the impetus came from Revolutionary France, whose troops invaded Switzerland in 1798, spurred by General Bonaparte and his desire to control key Alpine passes that linked France to his recent conquests in Northern Italy. The French replaced the Old Swiss Confederacy with a new Helvetic Republic based on the ideas of equal rights, separation of powers, centralization, and bureaucracy.

By 1802, this arrangement was falling apart amid renewed turmoil, and Napoleon, now first consul of France, stepped in to stabilize things. He brokered a new Swiss settlement via a meeting in Paris of representatives from the relevant cantons (now numbering nineteen). He urged the Swiss to give each canton equal rights, to end patrician privileges, and to adopt a federal scheme that would leave each canton in control of its own religious and cultural affairs.

These ideas, embodied in the Act of Mediation (1803), gave Switzerland a largely federal constitution and kept the country on the course of modernization. Switzerland today closely resembles the Act's blueprint. In a society dominated by inequalities between town and country, patricians and commoners, and various linguistic and religious groups, ethical universalism could hardly have come easily; in fact, it took a long time to take root. But the French intervention, even if pursued by France for its own reasons, brought with it Enlightenment political principles that gave Swiss liberals something they could fight for. And fight they did—for decades. In time, particularistic "trust networks"¹⁵ were transformed into a polity based on civic equality, public policy was insulated from categorical inequalities, and "veto players" were neutralized.

During the Revolutionary and Napoleonic eras, France invaded and occupied many other parts of Europe beyond Switzerland. In these occupied areas and in France itself, the drive to promote ethical universalism drew considerable support from the Napoleonic Code (1804). Before the Revolution, French law mixed Roman and canon law with local customs, and featured many exemptions, privileges, and special charters granted by kings or other feudal lords. The process of replacing this motley legal particularism with a single civil-law code began in 1793, and culminated under Napoleon's chairmanship after 1800. The result-

ing Code introduced transparency, since laws became valid only upon publication. The Code also made all male citizens equal and abolished primogeniture, hereditary nobility, and class privileges. Civil institutions were removed from ecclesiastical control, while freedom of the person, freedom of contract, and the inviolability of private property were enacted.

The Code was adopted in many countries (such as Poland) that the French had occupied during the Napoleonic Wars. Thanks to its inherent qualities as a legal text, it had a lasting impact on civil codes in other world regions where top-down modernization by constitutional means was desired. The Code still forms the basis of some legal systems in Central and Eastern Europe and in Latin America,¹⁶ as well as in the Middle East (where it was combined with Islamic law).

Even in Britain, the paradigmatic case of state modernization based on ethical universalism, it took time for meritocracy and equality to displace patronage and privilege.¹⁷ What seems in retrospect a seamless story of steady progress toward legal equality and impartiality was much messier and more halting in real time. It took a string of costly and highly publicized administrative blunders during the Crimean War (1853–56) to give Chancellor of the Exchequer William Gladstone a chance to create a Civil Service Commission and start the British bureaucracy down the path toward entrance examinations and merit-based promotions. For long afterward, however, officials still mostly came from privileged backgrounds.

The U.S. Congress passed civil-service reform (in the form of the Pendleton Act) in 1883, two years after the assassination of President James A. Garfield by a disappointed office seeker. The law created a Civil Service Commission to oversee an open selection process in which citizens could compete for federal appointments without regard to politics, religion, race, or national origin.¹⁸ Only about a tenth of federal posts were covered at first, but presidents found ways to broaden the law's reach. Today, more than nine-tenths of federal employees serve under the terms of the Pendleton Act.

These reforms by Britain and the United States inspired much emulation by countries eager to copy the organizational methods associated with Western prosperity and influence. China, for instance, abolished its 1300-year-old Confucian examination system in 1905 and reorganized its bureaucracy to hew more closely to Western models.

Beyond the West

How universal is the reach of ethical-universalist ideas? There are ancient Chinese teachings on governance that urge impartiality. The eclectic text from around 240 B.C.E. known as *The Annals of Lü Buwei* contains chapters titled “Honoring Impartiality” and “Dispensing

with Selfish Partiality.”¹⁹ Confucianism and Islam teach concepts of virtue, integrity, trust, social cohesion, and the like that are relevant for good governance. A number of remarkable personalities have spoken eloquently against the idea that liberal democracy is incompatible with religions such as Buddhism, Confucianism, Hinduism, or Islam.²⁰ Yet there is no claim that a system of governance based on equal and fair treatment of every individual originated anywhere else than the source shown here—that is, the French Revolution and the administrative revolution to which it gave rise.

To be clear, this did not mean that the full ethical-universalist norm immediately became a reality anywhere. But the Napoleonic Code and the administrative codes derived from it set up the norm of ethical universalism in public life. Both the norm and the practices shaped by it then advanced country by country on specific paths that could vary by timeframe (revolutionary versus gradual change) or by the degree of formality in the measures adopted. The spread of ethical universalism to countries such as Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and Uruguay shows its ability to take root in varying societies and cultures.

The Swiss story is thus just the first in a long series of Western “interventions” with the self-avowed goal of promoting ethical universalism. Immediate goals can vary and have varied, ranging from the abolition of slavery or feudalism to the restoration of constitutional order and the rule of law. Legal systems based on the Napoleonic Code and ideas about individual rights based on British common law both have contributed to the spread of ethical universalism.

The reforms that accompany the promotion of ethical universalism have ranged from land reform (which the United States, for instance, promoted in South Korea and Taiwan) to efforts to build the rule of law and control corruption (here one thinks of the EU’s involvement in the Balkan countries). By and large, such reforms aim to eliminate privilege, favoritism, and discrimination in order to pave the way for “modern” governance. The tools employed can include development aid, conditionality and sanctions policies, offers of privileged trade status, and even, in extreme cases, direct control by outside powers (as in Kosovo and Iraq).

The record of such interventions varies greatly, but they indisputably have succeeded at inscribing universal norms in constitutions, codes of ethics, and administrative rules the world over. Modern constitutions as a rule declare at least a formal end to traditional privileges. Writing constitutions, however, is an easy task compared to the gargantuan challenge of making bureaucracies function in a truly impersonal and impartial manner. Even the rise in recent decades of enabling conditions such as literacy and urbanization has not led to big gains in bureaucratic modernization.

Modern bureaucracy came into being as a byproduct of the ambitions

of kings and emperors who wanted a tighter grip on society along with deadlier fleets and armies and the taxes to pay for them. Where free elections preceded the development of bureaucracy, as in the United States, state modernization took far longer, even when the rule of law was present. The path of democratization and the path of ethical universalism are not entirely congruent.

Triumph and Revenge

Corruption emerged as a focus of international concern in the wake of the controversial “Washington Consensus” reforms of the last decade of the twentieth century. James Wolfensohn, World Bank president from 1995 to 2005, and former World Bank official Peter Eigen, a cofounder of Transparency International (TI), put corruption control on the international agenda. A normative framework began to develop, followed by proposals for an international corruption court, the specification of the right to be free from corruption as a human right, and so on. Although UNCAC, as noted earlier, never defines corruption, the document does offer a full range of good-governance goals and means that comport not only with modernization but with democracy. Trade pacts and aid-conditionality agreements now commonly require adherence to antibribery standards. The expectation seems to be that the more international actors signal their concern about corruption and the more it is regulated on paper (by everything from voluntary pledges to criminal statutes), the less corruption there will be.

Current trends, however, confound this expectation. The nominal triumph of ethical universalism is not the same as real adherence to integrity practices. Moreover, unintended consequences are beginning to appear.

The whole exercise was based on the idea that stages of governance succeed one another sequentially and necessarily, with the rest of the world fated eventually to follow in the footsteps of the West. This line of thought implies that the West is genuinely noncorrupt and that it has reached a high and nonreversible quality of governance capable of being spread throughout the world by commerce and globalization. Aid, trade, and technical assistance—extend these and the problem of sound, ethical-universalist governance will be solved.

But trade, it appears, does not operate that way. Instead, there appears to be a kind of Gresham’s Law at work in which the bad drives out the good: Exchanges between countries perceived as corrupt and countries perceived as noncorrupt (both according to TI’s Corruption Perceptions Index) seem to lead to an increase in corruption in the noncorrupt states rather than its decrease in the corrupt ones. Companies based in economies perceived to be clean pay bribes to enter the markets of countries perceived to be corrupt. There are echoes of the story of the British East

India Company, with corruption blamed on a “corrupt” local culture but actually fueled by the foreign country (in that case, imperial Britain) that is supposed to be “clean.”

Over the years, a more balanced language has emerged for describing international corruption, with talk of both the “supply” and “demand” sides sharing blame. In a similar vein, great effort has gone into increasing the side costs to multinationals of paying bribes in poor countries: There is now a whole industry dedicated to “compliance” with laws against bribery. The U.S. Foreign Corrupt Practices Act (1977) carries the strongest penalties of any anticorruption law. As of 2019, the ten largest fines ever levied under this statute had all been imposed on businesses from “clean” countries. Only recently did a company from the developing world (the Brazilian construction firm Odebrecht) crack the upper reaches of fines.

Dramatic leaks of confidential banking information such as the Panama Papers have cast further doubt on the success of ethical universalism in the West: Banks and rich individuals place their wealth offshore, while ordinary working stiffs are left to pay taxes. Kleptocrats do not exist only in autocracies. The evidence shows that they can also be found within the borders of democracies. Early-stage democracy in particular brings more potential “spoilers” into the political process and thereby increases their opportunities for demanding bribes.

What the economist James M. Buchanan called a Samaritan’s dilemma now vexes the anticorruption cause. The few success stories of the last thirty years (Botswana, Estonia, Taiwan, Uruguay) were domestically driven. Direct good-governance interventions, by contrast, have had poor results. Francis Fukuyama took stock of U.S.-led interventions in 2004, and I have more recently surveyed 127 countries to which the EU has applied some sort of good-governance conditionality. Places under direct international rule such as Bosnia and Kosovo were the worst performers, but the top recipients of good-governance funding (such as Turkey, which got almost a billion dollars to build the rule of law) also did poorly.²¹

Clearly, even when we mean well we do not know how to promote good governance. It is not merely a matter of the West lacking sufficient power—there is a genuine intellectual gap here. How do good-governance practices come about? Can they be engineered? We do not know. A recent paper based on a survey taken in Vietnam concludes that signatories of the OECD Anti-Bribery Convention paid less in bribes after implementation was stepped up, but nonsignatories paid more. The overall result was that the same amount of money changed hands corruptly, but with fewer actors involved.²²

Not helping matters has been the rise of an anticorruption “industry” that has its own interests to promote. Instead of agent-based theories of change, it pushes a standardized “copy-and-paste” approach

that transfers five-year anticorruption plans from one country to another. Evidence-based lessons of the most basic kind are not learned because they go against “industry” interests. Whistleblower-protection laws are unlikely to do much good in countries without freedom of the press; financial disclosures by officials will yield little meaningful information in nonfiscalized economies; special anticorruption agencies set up in countries without the rule of law will produce more discrimination than integrity; and so on. Assessments of perceived corruption stretching back to 1984 have found no sign of a global reduction in the problem. Indicators can lag, of course, and progress in the building of integrity frameworks has not been imaginary. Yet cookie-cutter five-year plans are not the answer. Too often, they replace homegrown reform agendas aimed against gatekeepers and rent-seekers with nominal ethical universalism and integrity policies that exist only on paper.

Anticorruption and Populism

The underperformance of the global anticorruption movement is not unrelated to the democratic backsliding of recent years. The authoritarians who rule Rwanda and Uganda receive anticorruption awards from donors and even from TI. Gaming corruption scores has become common practice. According to TI’s Corruption Perceptions Index, Qatar is less corrupt than Spain, and Belarus has made more progress than Romania. In Moldova and Senegal, anticorruption measures have been used to repress political opponents; last year they played a role in helping an extreme rightist to win the presidency of Brazil. Both the global anticorruption movement and populist politicians have raised expectations without delivering results, creating a gap in which frail young democracies may fall.

Anticorruption has helped populists such as Mexico’s Andrés Manuel López Obrador, Ukraine’s Volodymyr Zelensky, and Brazil’s Jair Bolsonaro far more than it has helped politicians genuinely committed to fighting corruption. Both populism and anticorruption describe the elite as a parasitical class that thrives on undue profits and systematically ignores the people’s grievances. Anticorruption helps populism to flourish as an alternative to representative democracy, which is already struggling to cope with social media and the new modes of participation that they are introducing.²³ Critics of corruption are not necessarily antidemocrats, but the unfulfilled expectations they encourage do make it more likely that decreases in support for democracy will show up in the Global Corruption Barometer data. Eurobarometer data show that, across the EU as a whole, more than half the public thinks that excessive favoritism is now a problem. Survey data showing that a majority around the world sees government as doing too little to fight corruption

suggest that mistrust of both democracy's institutions and its political class will continue to intensify.²⁴

Is anticorruption promotion, then, a bad idea that we should abandon? We cannot do so, and we should not. All attempts to change the world on the basis of the Western model (whether or not that model actually fits the "real existing" West itself) have generated counteractions. Anticorruption is no exception. The important thing is that good-governance promotion should follow in the footsteps of human-rights promotion and deliver more than just unintended consequences. But this happy outcome will not occur unless we learn the lessons of both the past twenty years and the last two and a half centuries.

NOTES

1. The Cairo Declaration conditions human rights on their accordance with *shari'a* (Islamic law). For an English text, see <http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/instreet/cairodeclaration.html>.

2. The countries that have yet to ratify UNCAC are Andorra, Barbados, Eritrea, Monaco, North Korea, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, San Marino, Somalia, Suriname, Syria, and Tonga.

3. Alan Gewirth, "Ethical Universalism and Particularism," *Journal of Philosophy* 85 (June 1988): 283.

4. Charles Louis de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws* [1748], bk. 8, ch. 2, "Of the Corruption of the Principles of Democracy," <https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/montesquieu-complete-works-vol-1-the-spirit-of-laws>.

5. *People and Corruption: Citizens' Voices from Around the World* (Berlin: Transparency International, 2017), www.transparency.org/whatwedo/publication/people_and_corruption_citizens_voices_from_around_the_world.

6. James Q. Wilson, *The Moral Sense* (New York: Free Press, 1993), 70.

7. Marcus Tullius Cicero, *The Political Works of Marcus Tullius Cicero: Comprising His Treatise on the Commonwealth; and His Treatise on the Laws*, trans. Francis Barham (2 vols., London: Edmund Spettigue, 1841–42), 1:179; <https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/546>.

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