Contents

Preface

I decided to write this book after I had been teaching a course on political corruption at the University of Salford for a number of years; and in doing so I have sought to achieve two things. First, I wanted to add to my own knowledge of the field and thereby become a better teacher. Second, in sharing it with others, I wanted to add to their knowledge; for corruption is a serious problem whose effective resolution requires understanding.

Obtaining understanding is often a challenging process in an age when everyday life for most people in Western societies is becoming increasingly time pressured, and the sheer quantity of available information to have to sift through has expanded to a degree unimaginable two or three decades ago, thanks to the advent of the internet. The problem looms especially large in a field such as political corruption, where the volume of scholarly literature is now vast. But for those outside academia in particular, much of what is available is of little use. First, there are a number of edited collections aimed at exploring corruption from a variety of angles, but which are often unhelpful because contributors take widely differing approaches to what counts as corruption and to its measurement. Second, there are a range of policy-oriented publications, such as those of Transparency International; but these often have a narrowly prescriptive focus. Finally, there are several research monographs; but these are often confined to a single facet of the problem or to one geographical area. Those wanting an accessible overview of the field are, to my knowledge, likely to struggle to find one. So a third purpose in writing this book has been to seek to meet the needs of those falling into this category, in the hope that it might be useful to – for example – journalists and others outside academia, as well as to students and academic colleagues researching matters on which political corruption has a bearing.

The sequence of chapters is intended to take the reader on a journey beginning with what corruption is, why its study might be important and how it can be measured. From there we move on to explore its causes, its consequences and how it can be tackled, before finally discovering how these things are playing out in the established liberal democracies, in the former communist regimes and in what used to be commonly referred to as 'the third world'. On the way we take a couple of detours: since corruption is a type of illegitimate transaction – meaning that the parties to it are likely to be unable to trust one another to the degree necessary to make it possible at all – we pause in the realm of causes to ascertain how this trust is established and underwritten (Chapters 4 and 5). Because the corrupt transaction is illegitimate, its potential effects fall into two categories: those that arise when it remains hidden and is successfully concluded, and those that arise when it is unmasked – thus inviting us to survey in the realm of consequences the phenomenon of scandal and the potential for reform that flows therefrom (Chapter 6).

So the book is offered as a (hopefully) informative 'travel guide', not as a dry and exhaustive 'textbook'. It is offered as something akin to the travellers' tales of old in which the authors' descriptions of the places they discovered were as significant for readers as were their interpretations of the behaviour and customs of the people they found there.

My own interpretation of corruption is that it is an exercise of power that infringes rules concerning the separation of the public and the private, with potential consequences for people generally (as when an apartment block collapses because its construction contravenes building regulations), but especially for the poor (because when it impacts on public spending decisions it can thwart development and redistributes resources from the poor to the rich). As a type of rule infringement it is therefore a social construct – which is not, however, to say that definitions of corruption vary from place to place. People in different locations have, at least at a general level of abstraction, the same understandings of what corruption is; where they differ is in terms of whether specific acts *fit* this understanding or not. As a type of rule infringement, corruption is inseparable from norms and from laws, the purpose of which is to maintain social order. And since the social order is highly unequal in terms of the distribution of resources, both material and non-material, norms and laws are products of conflict over such distribution. For the advantaged, wealth and power cannot be pursued and maintained safely unless their acquisition takes place by means perceived by others among the advantaged, and by the disadvantaged, as legitimate. So, since corruption is about rules defining legitimate and illegitimate modes of the

acquisition of wealth and the exercise of power, it is of concern not only to the poor but also to the rich.

Since the collapse of the Berlin Wall, this concern has been growing among mass publics and I see this as being closely related to the emergence of the neo-liberal consensus. By establishing that all institutions, public or private, are to be governed according to the assumptions and priorities of the private sector, the consensus has enhanced the incentives and opportunities for corruption. By decreeing the end of ideology, it has reduced party competition to a competition over the competence and integrity of its leading protagonists. In this it has been helped by the growing political significance of the mass media of communications and by the emergence of better-educated and more critical mass publics.

One of the institutions one might have expected least likely to succumb to the neo-liberal consensus is the university. Having originated as a community of scholars pursuing knowledge for its own sake, it is now typically a business, subject to detailed, top-down management. Its students are the customers and its scholars are workers pursuing knowledge in many cases only to hit Research Excellence Framework targets. One might say that the university has become corrupt in the original sense of the word as having undergone a process of decay. Consequently, this book, and especially its later stages, were written in difficult circumstances created for me by my employer and 'line manager', whose acquiescence in the process can be seen, from one point of view, as part of a general syndrome whose more specific features are explored in this book. I thought it important to draw attention to this as a tiny opportunity to encourage a fight against the corruption underlying it; for one of the things my research for this book has taught me is that the powerful will pursue anti-corruption measures only in so far as they serve their interests. Ultimately, the elimination of corruption will depend on the struggles of ordinary people. If this work makes some tiny contribution to empowering people in that way, then it will have served a useful purpose.