Why the Worst Get on Top
Corruption in Democracies

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This paper was accepted by The Independent Review *in January 2018 but was delayed until the Fall 2018 issue due to the journal's symposium on drones in its Summer 2018 issue. As we predicted would occur, Turkey's President Erdoğan indeed called early elections (on April 18, 2018) to take place on June 24, 2018 despite repeatedly insisting the elections would be in 2019 as scheduled. The June 24 election took place under the "nationwide state of emergency" rules instituted because of the 2016 coup attempt. Erdoğan was able to campaign with all the government's resources at his disposal. The state-owned media outlets severely limited the opposition voices as one recent analysis revealed that Erdoğan and his coalition received a total of about 68 hours of media coverage compared to the opposition's seven hours. (See Daragahi 2018 for this and a detailed analysis on Erdoğan's profligate means to maintain his power.) For 2016 and 2017, Turkey led the world with the highest number of jailed journalists (50 and 73, respectively, see www.cpj.org for the data). For these reasons, the June 2018 elections were neither fair nor free from fraud.*

In *The Road to Serfdom* ([1944] 1994), Friedrich Hayek argues that leaders who dominate totalitarian regimes are willing to "do what it takes" to rule, with rent-seeking competition for leadership positions resulting in the worst contestant winning. Democratic regimes, with less power at the center and fewer functions under state control, tend

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to offer smaller "prizes" to the political contest's winner. But both democratic and totalitarian processes are rent-seeking games, though played by different rules. Corruptible politicians become lower-cost competitors even in democracies because they do not feel there are psychic costs to breaking rules. In addition, they accrue more from winning elections because they are willing to line their own pockets. Thus, they have stronger incentives to invest in campaigns for election or reelection to office and not only "bid" more for office (by investing in more electioneering effort) but also stand to benefit from changing the rules of the game that increase the winner's prize by diminishing the democratic process. The main takeaway is that it is not only in dictatorships but also in democracies that there is a propensity for "the worst get on top." This thesis is demonstrated by examining recent events in Turkey.

Starting around 10:00 p.m. (local time) on July 15, 2016, some soldiers took positions on a suspension bridge over the Bosporus, a maritime channel dividing Europe from Asia, intending to overthrow Turkey's elected president, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, and his ruling party, the Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (AKP, Justice and Development Party). After hours of fighting, which included the coup plotters' bombing of the Turkish National Assembly building and the presidential palace, the "uprising" was defeated by Turkish armed forces and even ordinary citizens, who defiantly confronted the perpetrators in the streets of Istanbul. Was the swift repudiation of the coup an example of commitment to the democratic way of life or of support for President Erdoğan or of both?[1] Since that time, Erdoğan has pursued policies and exercised authority in ways that are not consonant with the democratic way of life; rather, they are consistent with a de-democratization (Huq and Ginsberg 2017) of Turkish society.[2]

Erdoğan has blamed the Pennsylvania-based Gülenist movement (or, as Erdoğan calls it, the Fethullahist Terrorist Organization) for plotting the failed coup d'état. Within weeks of suppressing the planned overthrow, the Erdoğan regime jailed hundreds and thousands of people who took part in or were suspected of taking part in the plot as well as those who were even remotely associated with the Gülenist movement. From the viewpoint of Turkey's security forces, police, and judicial system, unsubstantiated allegations of being connected to the Gülenists were more than enough to jail anybody. More than a year after the event, expressing any disagreement with

1. At the start of the attempted coup, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, the leader of the main opposition party, the Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (Republican People's Party), came out strongly against the military coup. Moreover, First Army General Ümit Dündar made it clear that the plotters were a small rogue faction within the Turkish armed forces. Subsequent demonstrations against the attempted coup revealed that the support for the "democratic way of life" was very strong (S. Jones 2016). However, it is possible that some chose to take part in these demonstrations out of the fear that not taking part would have precarious consequences.

2. One can argue that Erdoğan's authoritarian proclivities date back to May 2013, when what started as a small demonstration against a proposed shopping mall to be possibly built in place of Gezi Park, a small municipal park in Istanbul, turned into massive nationwide demonstrations against the AKP government. It looked as if the Turkish voters understood that their individual liberties had been in jeopardy for a long time. A wide spectrum of the society, from leftists to right wingers, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender citizens to Islamists and football fans, was on the streets demonstrating against the perceived injustices (see MacCormaic 2016).

Erdoğan's policies is a cheap ticket to prison. Today, some commentators suggest that the attempted coup was perhaps a veiled attempt by the regime itself to suppress any opposition to Erdoğan's increasingly autocratic policies.[3]

How can such circumstances emerge in a democracy? Don Lavoie bemusedly raises the point that democracy does not provide a fail-safe to the totalitarian problem because there is no reason why such political changes would not lead to a drastic centralization of economic and political power (1985, 137). Hayek argues in the chapter "Why the Worst Get on Top" in *The Road to Serfdom* that in totalitarian regimes it is quite likely that the very people wanted least as political leaders are those who seek out such positions most vigorously: "Just as the democratic statesman who sets out to plan economic life will soon be confronted with the alternative of either assuming dictatorial powers or abandoning his plans, so the totalitarian dictator would soon have to choose between disregard of ordinary morals and failure. It is for this reason that the unscrupulous and uninhibited are likely to be more successful in a society *tending toward totalitarianism*" ([1944] 1994, 149, emphasis added).

What Hayek suggests here is the special application in politics of two general principles. The first principle is that individuals will compete against others for access to returns through political means that exceed the cost of capturing them—that is, the principle of rent seeking.[4] The second principle is that low-cost producers prevail over higher-cost producers—that is, the principle of efficiency. Taken together, these principles imply that it is economically efficient for politicians with an aptitude for using their governmental position for personal advantage to pursue and win public office. Indeed, Geoffrey Brennan and James Buchanan argue in *The Reason of Rules* (1985) that access to rent seeking in a democracy motivates political actors who value the "power of discretion in the furtherance of their personal projects" and demotivates political actors who are partial to genuine public interest (64). They voice the concern that individuals who are thus motivated to pursue political office and its concomitant power may not be the "best" for society as a whole. How might this be so?

In politics, candidates for public office with proclivities to engage in corrupt practices are more likely to undertake illegal or immoral actions that others will not, and the net gains to them from corruption therefore will be larger. Indeed, Gordon Tullock argues that "putting people on the payroll . . . in terms of their contribution to the entrepreneur would be a quite sensible way of capturing profits not available under the fixed fee" (1965, 462). He describes the elected politician as an entrepreneur in an industry characterized as a natural monopoly. One desirable prize of holding office is the continued opportunity to exercise control through incumbency. Nevertheless, the extent to which political competition leads to corruption depends on the effectiveness of the constraints imposed on it by existing institutions. Of course, advocating or campaigning for political

3. See Rubin 2017. Dani Rodrik (2016), in contrast, believes that the coup was staged by the Gülenists.

4. Note that this action differs from profit seeking, wherein an agent competes with others through the creation of new wealth.

institutions that are less rent-seeking-"friendly" raises a public-goods problem. Good public policy *is* a public good and, hence, tends to be undersupplied.

Most economists readily recognize that Hayek's warning of the negative effects of the competition for political power anticipates some of the implications of Tullock's (1967) rent-seeking insight. In competing for a prize that only one contestant can win, each contestant has incentive to invest time, money, and effort in winning until one of them barely outbids the next highest bidder.[5] The ruthless and corrupt have no qualms about intimidating the truly just-minded out of the competition. In politics, with more than one ruthless or corrupt politician competing for a valuable political office, the winning politician is a bit more ruthless or corrupt than the next most ruthless or corrupt politician.

In this study, we examine the links between Hayek's discussion of the process of becoming a dictator and public-choice work on democratic competition for office. Although competition for leadership in the latter setting takes place at the ballot box, we argue that in both institutional settings untrustworthy leadership is likely to emerge. Moreover, both autocrats and democrats have incentives to bend the rules of the game in their own favor. Adam Martin and Diana Thomas (2013) characterize this surreptitious behavior as a form of political entrepreneurship whereby political actors take steps to extend their stay in power or expand their powers in office or both.

To be clear, we make no claim that the most corrupt candidates *always* win electoral contests for political office. We instead argue, first, that more corrupt candidates, because they are lower-cost competitors, have stronger incentives to invest in campaigns for election or reelection to office. They spend more of their own funds, devote more time to amassing campaign war chests, and exert more effort in getting their supporters to the polls than do rivals who are less corrupt. Moreover, corrupt candidates are likely more willing to make more "backroom deals" than the honest ones. More intense competition for positions of political power elevates voter-turnout rates in contests for control of short-run or in-period political decision making. Then we employ public-choice and constitutional analyses to focus on efforts by corrupt politicians to alter toward totalitarianism the political powers granted to them in the governance system. Next we present the case study of Turkey currently playing out on the international stage. This case serves to establish links among public-choice analysis on democratic competition for office, corruption, and Hayek's discussion on totalitarianism. The final section offers conclusions and admonitions.

The Corruptible Market for Votes and Election

For a corruptible politician, the higher the value of holding public office is, the greater is the derived demand for votes by incumbents wanting to obtain or keep

5. More precisely, in the symmetric Nash equilibrium of the simplest of Tullock's (1980) N-player rent-seeking contests, each person's bid is the same as every other's, and the winner is chosen randomly.

governmental positions that can be made lucrative through power (see Tullock 1965). The office also is more valuable to challengers seeking to replace incumbents. Larger payoffs from officeholding, whether in legal or illegal forms, lead to more electioneering effort and more voter participation in the corrupt constituencies, ceteris paribus.

One can observe Turkey's electoral activity in 2015 as a paragon of the corruptible market for votes. In June 2015, despite the electioneering efforts by the "impartial" president encouraging citizens to support AKP candidates, the AKP lost its parliamentary majority.[6] Undeterred by these results and emboldened by the inability of the three other parties to form a ruling coalition,[7] Erdoğan called for an early reelection in November 2015, in which the AKP regained its parliamentary majority through controversial circumstances.[8]

Paolo Mauro (1995) suggests that corruption leads to high-status, high-technology goods being produced by only a handful of firms, thereby supplanting less-visible but perhaps more-productive public spending, leading to slower economic growth. To mask corrupt activity, venal public officials are apt to "choose goods whose exact value is difficult to monitor" (Mauro 1998, 264). High-cost projects with difficult-to-monitor values invite or suggest the possibility of corruption. For an underdeveloped or developing country, it is likely that some of these projects may be funded partially or entirely by a foreign donor government or a nongovernmental organization. Depending on the lender's or funding agency's political worldview, some of these projects may not pass a benefit–cost test because of either the sheer incompetence of the parties involved or the informational asymmetries that exist between that country's elected officials and voters.

By the same token, in *The Road to Serfdom* Hayek discusses how a ruthless, power-seeking politician develops a core group of similarly ruthless supporters: "The chance of imposing a totalitarian regime on a whole people depends on the leader's first collecting round him a group which is prepared voluntarily to admit to that totalitarian discipline which they are to impose by force upon the rest" ([1944] 1994, 151). Under a democratic regime, candidates and campaign organizations or political parties arrange transfers to the members of key supporting special-interest groups. We can see in loyal interest-group members who will "do what it takes" to help secure victory a situation wherein the advantage goes to the side whose supporters will go farther down that path. But Hayek suggests that having the support of a core group of special-interest

6. According to Çiğdem Toker (2015), President Erdoğan spent approximately $40 million ($1 = 2.7 lira at that time) of taxpayers' funds from the Discretionary Fund or Covert Appropriations Fund to campaign for the AKP in the June 2015 elections, despite constitutional restrictions preventing a sitting president from doing so for any political party.

7. These parties included the Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, the Halkların Demokratik Partisi (Peoples' Democratic Party), and the Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi (Nationalist Movement Party).

8. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (2015) declared the November 2015 reelection process "unfair," with security issues, censorship, and fraud cited as contributory factors.

beneficiaries is necessary but not sufficient to gain control or to change the rules. In addition, others must be persuaded to accept the new system by being led to think that the new system or rules "sound good" and to be rather uncritical of that characterization ([1944] 1994, 153). This persuasion is, of course, easily accomplished because of what public-choice economics has come to refer to as "rational ignorance" (Downs 1957, 244–46, 266–71).

Hayek suggests that a third requirement for a leader pursuing a totalitarian state is the ability to marshal a supporting coalition: the leader must be able to invent a common enemy. Politicians in the post–Civil War U.S. South made poor blacks and "carpetbaggers" the enemy. Some politicians unite their coalitions against foreigners or minorities, as Hitler did with the Jews. Politicians can often unite supporters against a common enemy who is perceived to be economically better off, as is the case of the "Occupiers" against the so-called one-percenters, wherein we see division into "we" and "they." Because the prize is larger when transfers go from rich to poor rather than the other way around, the rich are often targets.

Public-choice economists' early analysis of voter participation examined the determinants of the supply of votes. Beginning with Anthony Downs (1957), it was noted that the voter's decision to vote hinges on its instrumentality in securing desired outcomes (electing the preferred candidate or passing or defeating a ballot proposition). In that model, voting is rational only when the benefits of changing an election's outcome multiplied by the probability of being decisive (the marginal expected benefit of voting) outweigh the costs (such as of traveling to the polls and the value of time sacrificed when voting). Such a rational-choice perspective raises what has come to be called the "paradox of voting." Even though it seems as if the costs of voting almost always exceed its benefits, people nevertheless vote in unexpectedly large numbers.[9]

The "paradox of voting" suggests not only that rational people will not vote but also that the probability of one's vote altering the outcome is extremely minute: "saying that closeness increases the probability of being pivotal . . . is like saying that tall men are more likely to bump their heads on the moon" (Schwartz 1987, 118). Indeed, the evidence that electoral closeness affects voter turnout is mixed.[10] And if it is unlikely in the extreme that one vote will be decisive, the incentives to gather and process information about the candidates and issues on the upcoming ballot are likewise weak.

One solution to the paradox of voting is expressive voting. Geoffrey Brennan and Loren Lomasky (1993) argue that people can express their views against a common enemy (see the third requirement given earlier) through voting, even if the act of voting is not instrumental in the outcome. Moreover, they state, it is "only in the act of

9. But turnout rates in local elections tend to be abysmally low even though the probability of being decisive in them is much larger than in mass national elections.

10. See Matsusaka and Palda (1999), Fauvelle-Aymar and François (2006), Geys (2006), and Rallings and Thrasher (2007).

choosing that an individual discovers what he wants" (1993, 39), indicating that voting against a disfavored policy or candidate can be valuable for a voter who wishes to express such a preference.

Our approach to explaining voter turnout under these conditions follows Gary Cox and Michael Munger (1989) and John Aldrich (1993), who focus on the demand for votes on the part of candidates for political office and of the supporters/opponents of ballot propositions. This demand-side approach to voter turnout examines candidates' and other political elites' incentives to provide inducements for actual and prospective members of their voting bases to physically go to the polls on election day. Candidates compete in elections because of the value of winning to them personally. The value of a political office can take many forms, including salaries and perquisites; fame, power, and prestige; brand-name political capital; opportunities for advancement up the governing hierarchy; and, what is key in our model, the prospects for capturing corruption rents. To achieve such gains, candidates must cater to their voter bases and win over others by providing positive information about themselves and negative information about their opponents as well as by supplying "core" and "swing" voters with sufficient incentives to get them to cast their ballots.

We view candidates as buyers (or demanders) of votes and view the electorate as suppliers of those votes. Candidates can then offer what Mancur Olson (1965) refers to as "selective incentives" to motivate voters to participate in an election. A candidate's demand for votes is, in turn, determined by the value of the office and the change in the probability of winning by means of "buying" one more vote, given the expected votes for the opponent(s) and the ways in which the opponent(s) can respond to the incentives for voting that the candidate offers to his or her likely supporters. The more valuable the prize of office, the more effort the candidate is willing to invest in winning that office. In addition, the larger the marginal impact of one more vote on the chances of victory is, the more the candidate will be willing to pay for another vote of support for that office. Critics may argue that the strength of this selective incentive for any one voter is very weak given the paucity of benefits that accrue to that voter. Perhaps we can more modestly claim that a combination of selective incentive and expressive voting explains voters' participation. As mentioned earlier, more vigorous competition for political office dissipates more of the office's expected value, which is a classic prediction of rent-seeking theory (Tullock 1967, 1980). One by-product of the rent-seeking game in the context of democratic politics we highlight is larger voter-turnout rates in contests for political offices that offer winning candidates access to corruption rents.

These corruption rents often take the form of centralized government planning, which in democracy requires both the discretion to deal with unknown circumstances and planners' comfort with imposing their preferences on others. This section has explained which type of people are going to rise to the top given these prerequisites. Next we explore the mechanisms through which the corruptible politician extracts enhanced powers.

Changing the Rules of the Game after Election

Hayek did not see voting as having an inevitable end that would lead inexorably toward the loss of all individual liberty. In chapter 7 of *The Constitution of Liberty* (1960), on majority rule, Hayek portrays democracy as a dynamic discovery process, a process of civic learning. He discusses the process by which one majority displaces the preceding one, an instability that public-choice scholars have come to call the "cyclical majority problem," emphasized by Tullock in an appendix to *The Calculus of Consent* (Buchanan and Tullock 1962, 323–40). Instability, of course, may not be a "problem" when it corrects prior errors in choices. However, when a democratic choice is the product of rent-seeking behavior, it is unlikely to be overturned owing to what Tullock (1975) calls "the transitional gains trap," wherein the recipients of rent-seeking gains will strongly oppose any attempt to reverse their parochial benefits.[11]

In addition to its multiple elections during 2015, discussed in the previous section, Turkey under Erdoğan petitioned its citizens to alter the rules of the political game in 2016. When it comes to proposals to change the rules of the system, rent-seeking behavior on the part of the leader and his or her core supporters will work to increase the amounts of political transfers and the values of public offices, thereby making winning more valuable. Peter Boettke warns that the political process, unlike the economic process, lacks the incentives and appropriate mechanism for error detection when the rules of the system are changed (1995, 20–21).

The analysis of constitutional stages or long-run collective choice suggests that more corruptible individuals have a stronger incentive to change the rules of the political game to create additional opportunities for future corruption rents. Martin and Thomas (2013) distinguish between policy entrepreneurship and institutional entrepreneurship at the preconstitutional, constitutional, and postconstitutional levels. A political actor effecting change through institutional entrepreneurship may exploit the level most prone to alteration at a given time.

Because a group public-goods problem exists with changing the system—other politicians stand to gain from the effort made by one politician—the problem is more severe when the politician pushes for a less-corrupt system. That conclusion follows from observing, first, that the gains from reductions in corruption are likely to be broad and less concentrated—hence, opponents of corruptible systems are more likely to shirk. Second, the gains from a more corrupt system are likely to be concentrated on corruptible individuals with political ambitions and on those to whom corrupt politicians offer "selective incentives" to turn out on election day. Hence, we expect stronger

11. Some may argue that the fact that some leaders act with impunity may mean that the institutional structure is likely not strong enough to prevent ill behavior. This may indeed be the case in Turkey in that the process of changing the rules was effectuated easily. With a three-fifths majority, the governing party could easily bring referendum measures before the Turkish voters. The U.S. system is in that sense a bit rigid but likely will not give rise to the situation observed in Turkey (Elster 1991).

support overall for a special-interest-group public "bad" (corrupt government) than for more a general public good (honest government).

Buchanan and Tullock (1962) and Buchanan (1975) highlight the difference between short-run or in-period choices within a given set of rules, such as electing a senator or passing a referendum, and the long-run or constitutional issues involved in choosing among rules, such as changing from requiring a simple majority to requiring a supermajority for specific collective decisions. With greater control over the society in a system where collective decision is made through concentrated political power rather than through less-concentrated voluntary trade, more discretion over who gets what lies in the hands of those with political power. If rules exist for amending a constitution, then rent-seeking competition will result in changing how rules are changed. Competition for political power to alter the rules ultimately takes place outside of the rules, with those who are willing to go the farthest winning. This is precisely what took place in Turkey in December 2016, when the Turkish Grand National Assembly voted to allow a referendum measure to vote on a new "presidential system."

The Transformation of Turkish Society

What is the consequence of corruption when the national level lacks a functioning system of checks and balances? A close look at the ongoing current political situation in Turkey offers insights regarding how an official elected at the highest perceived government level may successfully pursue continued, long-run, "gradual" rent seeking (and "unreined" corruption), which in turn may lead to a totally different institutional structure that is more amenable to further rent seeking and control—that is, a shift away from a true democracy toward totalitarianism. Andre Alves and John Meadowcroft argue that, in contrast to Hayek's slippery-slope argument of gradual and incremental change, the move toward a totalitarian regime is sudden and fortified with concomitant propaganda and force (2014, 856). As we discuss in this section, Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has adopted a combination of these two approaches by validating his authoritative policies through a plebiscite granting an enhancement of presidential powers.

Before Erdoğan's "ascendancy" to the presidency, Turkey had maintained a political system headed by a prime minister and possessing strong checks and balances. The president of Turkey was merely a ceremonial figurehead with a charge of impartiality. As the head of the AKP, Erdoğan was the prime minister of Turkey between 2003 and 2014. He was elected to become the "ceremonial" president of Turkey in 2014. Following Martin and Thomas (2013, 29–30), it can be said that Erdoğan's seemingly limitless term in office lends itself to a characterization as postconstitutional entrepreneurship.

In December 2016, the Turkish Grand National Assembly voted to allow a referendum measure in mid-April 2017. The referendum would "let" voters decide on whether Turkey should be ruled by a "strong" presidential system, to be instituted with specific constitutional amendments, or remain with the status quo. To prolong the ruling power

that he had held since 2003 (while serving as prime minister) and to capture and consolidate possibly more corruption rents well into his old age, President Erdoğan pushed hard to change Turkey's system of governance by *any* means. Turkey's Constitution at the time required the president to be "impartial" and, more importantly, to be no more than a figurehead with no political affiliation and not much political power. However, ever since Erdoğan became president of Turkey in 2014, he had been exercising powers that were not constitutionally granted to him. An example of this violation took place on August 27, 2014, a few weeks after he was elected president. Erdoğan decided to call for a meeting of the AKP National Congress to designate the new "head" of AKP. Turkish voters had been primed for more than two years on the virtues of this "new" presidency, and in 2016 the AKP-led government took the first step toward consolidating these "extended" powers and, with a great deal of backroom dealing, passed specific constitutional amendments in the Grand National Assembly, which Turkey's voters would vote on in April 2017. On April 17, 2017, President Erdoğan claimed 51.4 percent of the popular vote to retain his tenure technically until 2029.[12] The Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (Republican People's Party), the main opposition party, claimed that as many as 2.5 million votes may have been manipulated. Given that the winning margin was only 1.4 million votes and the ruling government's own agency, the Supreme Electoral Council, made a last-minute call to accept about 1.5 million *unstamped* votes in favor of Erdoğan, readers will clearly appreciate the characterization of Erdoğan's and the AKP's efforts in this matter as doing "whatever it takes"! A rough analysis of these amendments as well as actions taken since April 17, 2017, makes one think that Turkey elected someone with more aspirations than even the strongest presidential system would allow. It is ironic that this is the same politician who, as mayor of Istanbul in 1993, was rumored to be very critical of the "extended-power" presidencies, calling them the tools of "U.S. imperialism." As an old Turkish saying goes, "One who handles honey licks his fingers." Apparently, this honey licking has been intensifying since 2013: Turkey's Transparency International score experienced a considerable decline between 2013 and 2016, when it went down from fifty-third place (out of 175 countries) to seventy-fifth place (out of 176 countries).[13]

Stakeholders from different cross-sections of Turkish society were very critical of the proposed constitutional changes. One constitutional scholar summed up the referendum as a "farewell to the concept of the separation of powers . . . farewell to the constitution" (Gözler 2016). Erdoğan could ultimately become the ruler, chooser, judge, and jury. To obliterate all conventional rules of democratic expression and freedom of thought, Erdoğan and his campaigners went beyond a distinction between "us" and "them." Labeling citizens who voted no to his autocracy as "enemies of state"

12. The end date 2029 presumes that Erdoğan (who was born in 1954) will win presidential elections in 2019 and 2024. Given the power of incumbency and his history of successfully navigating Turkey's voting process, the presumption appears safe. In fact, there is some chance that he may call for an "early" election in 2018 to take advantage of some recent good economic news as well as to make sure that an up-and -coming opposition party will not become a credible threat to his supremacy.

13. Transparency International's ratings can be seen at http://www.transparency.org.

or, at worst, "on the same side as terrorists" was common during the days leading up to the referendum in 2017.[14]

This is the third major constitutional referendum since the early 1960s in Turkey. Immediately following the military coup of 1960, a new constitution was voted on, with 61.5 percent of voters affirming their acceptance of the draft constitution. In 1982 (again after a military coup), another constitution was voted on, this time with 91 percent acceptance. The Constitution of 1961 affirmed the principle of separation of powers and the "above parties and ideologies" requirement of the presidency. This principle and requirement were once again affirmed in the Constitution of 1982. Even though there were a few changes to the latter constitution, the more crucial parts regarding separation of powers, rights, and so on remained the same until 2017. In 2013, to suppress corruption investigations against himself, his family, four of his government ministers, some businessmen, bankers, and real estate and construction magnets, Erdoğan used his power to fire thousands of civil servants from the judiciary and police force, claiming that they belonged to the Gülenist movement. According to Erdoğan, the investigations were nothing more than *an attempted coup*. One of the ministers accused of corruption, who resigned from his ministerial post, demanded that Erdoğan, prime minister at the time, should also resign because whatever the minister had done had been with Erdoğan's knowledge. Erdoğan's own AKP establishment widely accepted the evidence, especially that against the corrupt ministers. In the end, however, the AKP-led parliamentary commission investigating the corruption allegations against the four ministers decided there was not a strong enough case against these ministers. It also decided to destroy once and for all the evidentiary audio files detailing the alleged corrupt activities (see Orucoglu 2015).

Citing "metal fatigue" in local governments, Erdoğan asked some democratically elected mayors of the AKP townships and cities in October 2017 to resign their posts. The list of mayors included those for the largest two cities (Istanbul and Ankara), with a combined population of more than 20 million citizens (D. Jones 2017). It is ironic that Erdoğan himself has always "advocated" the democratic process of getting elected to and being removed from office. He has always admonished his political opponents by saying that they should, if they can, rally the 51 percent needed to remove him from power. It appears that the motive behind this recent "house cleaning" is to ensure that he will have a revitalized electoral force to carry him to yet another presidency in November 2019, this time unifying the heads of the state, the government, and AKP with extended powers.

Conclusions and Implications

The good news is that corruption in democracy is not inevitable, nor is it fatal if the system of checks and balances is sufficiently robust to overcome its presence. The

14. Lisel Hintz and Melissa Dunham (2017) show that Erdoğan was facing "a potential existential threat" and thus that the "whatever it takes" approach perhaps was necessary to win the referendum.

United States has multiple checks on individual units of government. At the federal level, the three branches of government—executive, legislative, and judiciary—serve as mutual checks. The president may veto proposed legislation that is unconstitutional; likewise, the Supreme Court may strike down legislation that violates the Constitution; and Congress may impeach a president who has violated the oath of office. Moreover, federal agencies may serve as ancillary safety nets against corruption at the state or local level. Thus, controls at the national level can root out corruption at the state and local levels. What would happen if corruption occurred at the national level without an overarching organization to prevent or at least minimize its manifestation? Notwithstanding the spirited debate regarding the current political climate in the United States, separation of powers has been sustained successfully throughout the American experiment.

Some newer democracies, however, may not be as well equipped to resist those rulers who limit or destroy individual liberties in their quest to garner more rents. Aziz Huq and Tom Ginsberg (2017) warn of corruption in nascent democracies such as Poland, Hungary, and Turkey through a gradual de-democratization of the institutions and rights that are taken for granted in countries such as the United States. Backsliding toward illiberal policies (e.g., jailing of political enemies, stacking media with political allies) has the imprimatur of democracy because leaders in these newer democracies understand how to play to a Western press less circumspect in its use of political terms.

A more worrisome prospect for the extension of corruption is that it need not be constrained by national borders. Christopher Coyne and Abigail Hall-Blanco (2016) contend that illiberalism is or becomes a characteristic of a politician bent on foreign intervention. As argued earlier, three conditions are required for a political leader to be able to rise to power, through elections or force, and to change the system and thus transform society. First, the leader must assemble a coalition of active "volunteers" through the exchange of voluntary political action and special-interest favors. Second, this exchange must benefit many voters, and the transfer to the special-interest group must be indirect and accomplished using the rational ignorance of the voters. Third, a common enemy must be created, the outsider "they." What better way to unify a nation than to create a foreign foe? This desire for empire may serve as the logical next step for Erdoğan as he looks to consolidate his power and enhance his authority.

In this light, our study goes beyond the traditional public-choice dilemma of rent seeking within the context of the current rules of the game and presents the actor's modification of the game through gradual de-democratization efforts.[15] Quite

15. Contrary to Hayek's thesis that continued interventions by the government in a mixed economy will lead to totalitarianism, Alves and Meadowcroft (2014) show empirically that mixed economies are much more stable. Did Hayek fail in his assessment, then? The answer is no, as Peter Boettke (1995) argues. He states that Hayek understood the ultimate implication of rent seeking: interventionism. The question is how far this interventionism goes. Does it go to the point of changing the "rules of the game?" Does it have a chance to change the "institutional structure and incentives"? In Turkey's case, it seems it does.

cynically, the political actor abuses the democratic process as the means to shift the political system toward totalitarianism. The greater danger in this phenomenon is the adaptability of the political actor sufficiently well versed in the Western perceptions of democracy to know when to take and when to ask. If public or global sentiment becomes alarmed, the change toward totalitarianism slows. Once the watchers' attention goes elsewhere, the political actor can resume actions toward consolidation of power.

Our analysis does not at all equate the types of regime(s) alluded to by Hayek and what we see in today's presumed democracies. In other words, what Hitler did and what today's pseudodemocratic regimes are doing are not necessarily the same thing. Unfortunately, a reversal of the corrupt practices in question may not be possible because the institutions and "democratic" processes have gradually eroded, and these changes have produced a generation that will not appreciate or has no will power or incentive to preserve what has been lost. Driving down that road to serfdom is like driving down the Autobahn. Knowledge, awareness, and vigilance—not passive "rational" ignorance—provide the only off-ramps.

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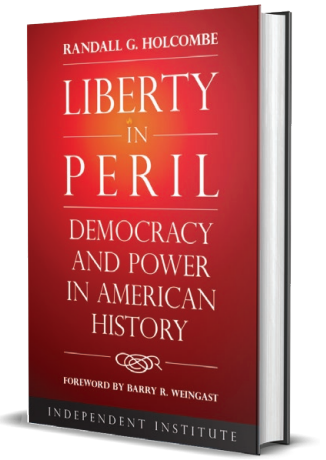

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