





**CORRUPT**

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**ILLINOIS**

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**Patronage, Cronyism,  
and Criminality**

Thomas J. Gradel  
and Dick Simpson

Foreword by Jim Edgar

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make no promises but one:  
serve just, just promise.

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Foreword by Jim Edgar

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# Foreword

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I HAVE KNOWN MANY GOOD MEN AND WOMEN in politics and government over my career. They have served the public interest well.

However, as Tom Gradel and Dick Simpson conclusively prove in *Corrupt Illinois*, there is a dark side to our political history as well. Corruption has too often flourished. More than two thousand people in government in Illinois have been convicted on corruption charges in federal court over the last few decades. It is shameful that the Chicago metropolitan region is the most corrupt in the nation and that the state of Illinois is the third most corrupt state.

We have made some progress in adopting more restrictive laws and regulations to curb some of the worst abuses, but the authors show us how much more we need to do.

*Corrupt Illinois* is the most comprehensive account of corruption in our state ever published. It proposes cures, which will take decades to implement fully, but which deserve our attention now. We can only move forward by understanding our past and the culture of corruption that has too often pervaded our state.

Public service is an honorable profession when ethics guide it. The great accomplishments of the past cannot be allowed to have corruption overshadow them. There are real costs of corruption in tax dollars and in loss of faith in government.

*Corrupt Illinois* is a clarion call to action. It illustrates the many patterns that corruption has taken and its root causes in machine politics and an individualistic political culture that has allowed corruption to flourish. But in the twenty-first century we can take a different road and create a better future.

Jim Edgar

*Former Illinois Governor*

# Preface

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SINCE THE LATE 1960s, as one public-corruption exposé after another dominated the front page of daily newspapers and led the evening TV news, we expected heads to roll; corrupt practices to be eliminated; and those responsible to be voted out of office. But substantial reforms didn't happen. The most recent scandal was soon forgotten. Then after a year, another government unit was investigated, different bureaucrats were indicted, and a few additional politicians were convicted and sent to jail. Like Bill Murray's day in the movie *Groundhog Day*, it keeps happening, again and again. But we not only observed chronic corruption, we also experienced firsthand the impact of machine politics as we struggled with others to pass laws to reform politics.

Our experiences have led us to question why corruption scandals keep happening, why the general public seems so resigned to corruption, and why effective correction measures are so rarely taken. Although the general public hears about specific instances of corruption, it is not aware of its extent, its underlying causes, or its cost to our daily lives. Thus we have set out to document the severity of corruption, which we had planned to publish in an *Encyclopedia of Illinois Corruption*. That was not entirely practical because there were so many public crooks to catalog—more than two thousand since 1976. Court records, inspectors general's reports, biographies, and, most of all, thousands of juicy news reports were not easy to locate and systematize. But with the help of an ever-changing team of student researchers, we achieved part of our goal by creating a substantial database now available on the Internet at <http://www.uic.edu/depts/pols/ChicagoPolitics/chicagopolitics.htm>.

However, simple lists of corrupt officials do not stir souls and will not motivate the public to demand significant reforms. So we began to analyze the assembled stories of corruption in all its myriad forms. We wanted to know what caused sometimes good and honest men and women to fall prey to so many schemes. As we looked at the database and at the stories of public betrayal, we began to discover distinct patterns. How governors and high-state officials steal is different from the patterns of aldermanic, suburban, or police corruption, for example. Moreover, the patterns of corruption in the nineteenth century have evolved considerably by the twenty-first century.

In this volume, we present a case study of corruption of a single state from its beginnings as a territory two hundred years ago. Our hope is that by providing these examples we will also expose the root causes. We further provide, based upon this study and the studies of others around the world, a plan of action to create a positive political culture and to curb the culture of corruption that has become our inheritance.

Our basic conclusions are inescapable. Illinois is among the most corrupt states and Chicago undoubtedly the most corrupt city in our nation. There is a severe cost to this corruption at many levels. We can no longer afford to sustain these moral, political, and monetary costs. Change is both possible and desirable. It is our hope that our book can contribute to that end.





Following his arrest by the FBI for extortion and trying to sell a vacant U.S. Senate seat, Governor Rod Blagojevich was impeached and removed from office. In 2011, he was convicted of wire fraud, bribery, attempted extortion, and conspiracy. *Photo courtesy Sun-Times Media.*

## Corrupt Illinois

PUBLIC CORRUPTION HAS BESMIRCHED Illinois politics for a century and a half. Even before Governor Rod Blagojevich tried to sell the vacant U.S. Senate seat to the highest bidder, the people of the state were exposed to outrageous corruption scandals. There was, for instance, Paul Powell, a downstater, former secretary of state, and old-style politician. He died leaving hundreds of thousands of dollars from cash bribes hoarded in shoeboxes in his closet. There were the thirteen judges nabbed in Operation Greylord who were convicted for fixing court cases.

Four of the last nine governors of Illinois went to jail—Otto Kerner, Dan Walker, George Ryan, and Rod Blagojevich. They were preceded by other governors such as Joel Matteson, Len Small, and William Stratton, who were indicted or found culpable in civil or legislative hearings but were not convicted in criminal courts and were not sent to jail.

Kerner was the first governor to be convicted of bribery, conspiracy, and income-tax evasion in a case involving racetrack stock improperly acquired while in office. Dan Walker was convicted after leaving office for bank fraud at a savings-and-loan bank he acquired.

The case of George Ryan, a pharmacist and former chairman of the Kankakee County Board, involved felonies by high-ranking officials as well as bribery committed by frontline clerks and inspectors. He was convicted of eighteen counts of corruption for leading a scheme in which bribes were paid to his campaign funds as both secretary of state and governor. Secretary of state employees sold truck-driver licenses in return for bribes that were partially given to the Ryan campaigns. This led to fatal accidents by unqualified truck drivers.

The last governor (still in prison) is Rod Blagojevich, who has become the face of Illinois corruption. Even before he was convicted, he was impeached by the Illinois legislature and thrown out of office. Similar to former Governor Ryan, he was convicted on multiple counts. He had established a corrupt network of businessmen, political appointees, and politicians. He shook down businessmen and institutional leaders for bribes. He appointed corrupt individuals to various boards and commissions to shake down hospitals, racetracks, road builders, and government contractors. He is most remembered for trying to sell off Barack Obama's U.S. Senate seat after Obama was elected president in 2008.

But it is not only governors who are corrupt. Corruption pervades every part of the state—not even town and government office, but too many. Among the convicted congressmen, perhaps the most colorful was the swaggering Dan Rostenkowski, Mayor Richard J. Daley's man in Washington.

Among state officials, the most well-known was the "good old boy" Paul Powell. Secretary of State Powell grew up in Vienna, Illinois, in downstate Johnson County. He was first elected to the state legislature, where he rose through the ranks to be elected speaker by a downstate coalition of legislators. From there he ascended to the secretary of state position, where, like later Secretary of State George Ryan, he would use that post to enrich himself. Although Powell never earned more than thirty thousand dollars a year, his estate was worth \$4.6 million, including racetrack stocks like those Governor Kerner took as bribes. The most memorable aspect was the eight hundred thousand dollars found in shoeboxes in his hotel room in Springfield.

To round out a more modern corruption montage, there is the strange tale of Rita Crundwell, the comptroller and treasurer of downstate Dixon, Illinois. Dixon is most famous as the home of former President Ronald Reagan. Crundwell's story illustrates that corruption is not necessarily limited to high state officials or denizens of big-city Chicago. She managed to steal an amazing fifty-three million dollars to fund a very high lifestyle over a number of years. She persisted even in recession years, when the town had to make severe cutbacks in public services. She accomplished this by the simple expedient of opening a fake checking account and transferring city funds to that account. For her crimes, she received a twenty-year prison sentence, and her horses and jewelry were auctioned off to reimburse part of the stolen funds. The media, particularly television, prominently displayed pictures of her swimming pool, home, horses, and jewelry, which average citizens in Dixon could not afford.

Corrupt politics in Illinois have always been colorful. At the beginning of the twentieth century Chicago aldermen were paid a stipend of less than two hundred dollars a year. Yet the *Chicago Record*, a newspaper of the time, revealed: "In a fruitful year the average crooked alderman has made \$15,000 to \$20,000"—big money in those years.<sup>1</sup>

Most Chicago aldermen were on the take. In the famous "Council of the Gray Wolves," which lasted from 1871 to 1931, the journalist and crusader William Stead wrote that no more than ten of the seventy aldermen in the council "have not sold their votes or received any consideration for voting away the patrimony of the people."<sup>2</sup> As the leading Democratic paper, the *Chicago Herald*, put it, aldermen in "nine cases out of ten [are] a bummer and a disreputable who can be bought and sold like hogs are bought and sold at the stockyards."<sup>3</sup>

Things were no better in the state legislature. In the second decade of the twentieth century, for example, state lawmakers accepted bribes to elect William J. Lorimer to the U.S. Senate. He was later thrown out of the Senate. The scandal contributed to the passage of a U.S. constitutional amendment in 1913 establishing the direct election of senators by the people rather than by the state legislatures. In the following century, Illinois residents seemed resigned to government corruption.

Times may be changing, however. Since Governor Rod Blagojevich's indictment and conviction, a groundswell of public support for ending corruption has developed. A 2009 Joyce Foundation public opinion poll showed that more than 60 percent of Illinois residents list corruption as one of their top concerns, even higher than the economy or jobs. More than 70 percent of Illinoisans favor a number of specific reforms. Yet such reforms get enacted only after long, drawn-out battles, if at all, because of the pervasive culture of corruption.

Separately, an Illinois Ethics Commission and a Chicago Ethics Reform Task Force have met and issued reform recommendations, and some of these have become state law or city ordinances. But corruption persists. Taming corruption in Illinois will take changing the culture of corruption in addition to the passage of ethics and campaign-finance regulations.

## **The Most Corrupt City in One of the Most Corrupt States**

Public or political corruption occurs whenever public officials use their insider information or their official position for public gain. In some cases, infractions may seem minor, but cover-ups or the failure of officials to take corrective action only increase corruption and underline Illinois' culture of corruption. A lot of corrupt deals in this state occur with a "wink and a nod," overlooking the corruption that is hidden underneath.

Whether specific misdeeds by government officials can successfully be prosecuted changes over time. Generally speaking, the laws become stricter, and investigators and prosecutors improve the methods. But despite changes in law and prosecution, using a public position for private gain has always been wrong and is usually illegal. Yet, such corruption has reigned in Illinois for over 150 years.

Chicagoans, like bragging Texans, tend to revel in being the biggest or first at anything. It is part of our inferiority complex about being the “Second City.” For many years, but more intently since the colorful Blagojevich trials, we have been known as the most corrupt city in the United States. Based upon the corruption convictions in U.S. federal courts, Chicagoans can legitimately boast that we are the most corrupt metropolitan region in America.<sup>4</sup> Nonetheless, it is shameful to be first in corruption.

The corruption-conviction statistics by which we measure these crimes are from the Federal Judicial District of Northern Illinois, which means that Chicago’s corruption data covers the suburbs, not just the evil city. In [chapter 7](#), we report on the shocking extent of suburban corruption, which includes far more than the usual notorious suburban towns like Cicero and Rosemont.<sup>5</sup>

Much like its largest city, Illinois is also corrupt. It is the third most corrupt of the fifty states. Illinois’ main competitors for the most-corrupt title are other havens of machine politics like Louisiana, New Jersey, and Florida.<sup>6</sup> And you have to go a long way to be worse than Louisiana, with their rich corruption-gumbo legacy of the infamous Long family. Louisiana’s crooked governors like Edwin Edwards and its racist gubernatorial candidate, the tax cheat David Duke, closely rival Illinois’ convicted governors. Whether or not Illinois is more crooked or has more colorful rogues than our erstwhile rivals, by anyone’s account we are one of the most corrupt states in the nation.

Our title of most corrupt doesn’t only rest with statistics. Here, as they used to say on the TV program *Dragnet*, are “Just the facts, ma’am.” Of the last nine Illinois governors, four have been convicted of corruption—getting bargain-priced racetrack stock, manipulating savings-and-loan banks, covering up the selling of driver’s licenses to unqualified drivers, shaking down contractors for campaign contributions, and trying to sell a U.S. Senate seat.

**Table 1.1** Federal Public Corruption Convictions by Judicial District 1976–2012

Rank for Convictions	District (Major cities)	Total				
		2010–12	2000–2009	1990–99	1976–89	1976–2012
1	Illinois-Northern (Chicago)	112	367	610	508	1597
2	California-Central (Los Angeles)	95	383	595	268	1341
3	New York-Southern (Manhattan)	57	242	398	550	1247
4	District of Columbia	127	342	393	239	1101
5	Florida-Southern (Miami)	62	404	437	108	1011
6	New Jersey (Newark)	102	410	264	202	978
7	Ohio-Northern (Cleveland)	109	333	314	173	929
8	Pennsylvania-Eastern (Philadelphia)	76	252	246	291	865



9	Virginia-Eastern (Richmond)	105	303	213	189	810
10	New York-Eastern (Brooklyn)	35	204	237	308	784
11	Texas-Southern (Houston)	86	267	205	116	674
12	Florida-Middle (Orlando)	62	230	179	159	629
13	Louisiana-Eastern (New Orleans)	84	230	173	117	604
14	Massachusetts (Boston)	59	187	159	193	598
15	California-Eastern (Sacramento, Fresno)	36	200	203	156	595

Chicago's city hall is a famous political-corruption scene as well. Thirty-three Chicago aldermen and former aldermen have been convicted and gone to jail since 1973. Two others died before they could be tried. Since 1928 there have been only fifty aldermen serving in the council at any one time. Fewer than two hundred men and women have served in the Chicago city council since the 1970s, and the federal crime rate in the council chamber is higher than in the most dangerous ghetto in the city. In [chapter 4](#) we detail the aldermanic corruption, and in [chapter 5](#) we cover the rank-and-file corruption of City Hall bureaucrats.

**Table 1.2** Federal Public Corruption Convictions Per Capita for Top Thirteen States with the Most Convictions 1976–2012\*

Rank for Convictions Per Capita	State	Convictions 1976–2012	Population 2010	Convictions Per 10,000 Population
1	District of Columbia	1,101	601,723	18.30
2	Louisiana	1,031	4,533,372	2.27
3	<b>Illinois</b>	<b>1,913</b>	<b>12,830,632</b>	<b>1.49</b>
4	Tennessee	899	6,364,105	1.42
5	New York	2,631	19,378,102	1.23
6	Pennsylvania	1,597	12,702,379	1.26
7	Ohio	1,454	11,536,504	1.26
8	Virginia	942	8,001,024	1.18
9	New Jersey	978	8,791,894	1.11
10	Florida	1,865	18,801,310	.99
11	Georgia	899	9,687,653	.93
12	Texas	1,742	25,245,561	.69
13	California	2,498	37,253,956	.67

NOTE: This table was constructed using the top thirteen states with the most number of convictions. The cutoff point was 899 convictions. The population for each state, according to the 2010 census, was divided by 10,000. This figure was divided into the total number of convictions to derive a "per 10,000" conviction rate. Using the top thirteen states with the most convictions helps avoid skew from states with much smaller populations. If a conviction rate of all fifty states were calculated this way, the top ten would be (in order): District of Columbia (18.30), Louisiana (2.27), South Dakota (2.00), Mississippi (1.99), Alaska (1.94), North Dakota (1.81), Kentucky (1.50), Illinois (1.49), New Mexico (1.49), Montana (1.33).

In other chapters, we detail many aspects of corruption throughout the state. Altogether, 1,913 individuals were convicted of corruption in federal court between 1976 and 2012; of those, 1,591 convictions were in the greater Chicago metropolitan region. But there is plenty of corruption spread

throughout the state at all levels, from small suburban town halls and county criminal courts to the halls of the legislature and state government in Springfield. We do not have a few “rotten apples”; we have a rotten-apple barrel and a pervasive culture of corruption.

In our studies, we often refer to officials convicted of corruption. But for each of them, there are many other public officials who did the same thing but didn't get caught or didn't go to trial in federal court. There are only three U.S. Attorneys in Illinois, and they have to focus on all federal crimes, not just political corruption. State's attorneys and attorneys general for the most part don't prosecute corruption. Therefore, much of it goes undetected. Inspectors general at the state, county, and city levels have shown conclusively in their reports that corruption in government is more pervasive than just the cases of those convicted would indicate.

Corruption is committed not only by those who break the law. Conflicts of interest are rampant even when they aren't illegal. It may be legal to give your brother-in-law a government job, but it is still a conflict of interest because you are not objectively determining who is the best qualified for the position. It may be legal to be a public official and have government contractors hire your law firm because they want to influence your decision on future government contracts, but it is a direct conflict of interest. These types of conflict of interest—when an official's economic interest rather than the public interest is served—occur much more frequently than outright crimes.

Nonetheless, the governor's mansion, Chicago city-council chambers, the state legislature, and quiet suburban city halls house more criminals and have a worse crime rate than most bad neighborhoods or towns. And we have elected and reelected officials in Illinois even after we knew they were corrupt. We reelected Dan Rostenkowski to Congress after his conflicts of interest were well known, and we reelected Rod Blagojevich as governor after the indictment of many of his cronies for corruption schemes.

## Theories of Corruption

To understand corruption, its causes and possible cures, we can learn from other studies. Rasmussen Karklins in her work on corruption in former Soviet countries created a general typology of corruption with three classifications:

1. Everyday interactions between officials and citizens (such as bribery for licenses, permits, zoning changes, and to pass inspections).
2. Interactions within public institutions (such as patronage, nepotism, and favoritism).
3. Influence over political institutions (such as personal fiefdoms, clout, secret power networks, and misuse of power).<sup>7</sup>

We have all three types of corruption in Illinois, and each reinforces the other. In addition, Karklins found that many people in corrupt societies participate in and accept a low level of corruption because, they say, “everyone else does it” or, as in her book title, “the system made me do it.”

We accept Karklins's typology of corruption, but we are left with the question of why the corruption is committed. Robert Klitgaard, in his book *Controlling Corruption*, argues that “[i]llicit behavior flourishes when agents have monopoly power over clients, when agents have great discretion, and when accountability of agents to the principal is weak.” He offers this stylized formula: Corruption = Monopoly + Discretion - Accountability.<sup>8</sup> Thus, we begin our study of corruption in Illinois with the understanding that the use of public office for private gain occurs mo

frequently when there is a monopoly of power, great discretion in the hands of elected and appointed officials, and a lack of accountability. In Chicago and Illinois, this occurs at many levels, including everyday interactions between officials and the public, interactions within public institutions, and control over our governmental institutions.

Transparency International, which rates the corruption level of over 170 countries, has developed a model that they call the National Integrity System.<sup>9</sup> As Transparency understands it, a society of integrity is built upon a foundation of values and public awareness that evolves in politics, the economy, and culture. If the public values supporting honest government are strong and public awareness of possible corruption is high, various institutions, such as the three branches of government, the media, anticorruption agencies, and civil society, will create the rule of law, sustainable development, and a good quality of life. When these institutions work well, there will be less corruption and more integrity. Unfortunately, in Illinois the public values that support honest government are too weak, and therefore our institutions and laws are unable to prevent corruption.

There have been few quantitative studies to test the various hypotheses about corruption. One recent study of corruption in the United States is by Dartmouth Professor Emeritus Richard Winters. He used thirty-five years of the Justice Department's public-integrity data on corruption convictions in all fifty states. He finds that corruption, including corruption in Illinois, is predicted by the number of corruptible governmental bodies (and Illinois has by far the most units of government of any state in the union); the level of demographic population diversity; the size of the state; the number of college graduates; the level of civic involvement or civic culture; the level of civic distrust; and the existence of traditional (or machine) party organizations.<sup>10</sup> Civic distrust, in his study, is measured by national surveys asking respondents: "Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted, or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people?" As expected, states with a high level of political-corruption convictions tend to have a higher level of civic distrust.

In this model, there are many things that cannot be controlled or changed. Illinois will continue to be a large state with its state capital many miles away from the Chicago metropolitan region, where most citizens and their media watchdogs reside. When the state capital is so removed from media scrutiny and public contact, politicians are freer to engage in corrupt acts.

Illinois also will continue to have population diversity, which in Winters's analysis means that officials will perceive acts of malfeasance as largely affecting a population that is unlike themselves.<sup>11</sup> As a city and state, we want to attract as many college graduates as possible, but we have somewhat limited ability to keep our college and university graduates with our state's current poor economy. Better-educated people help control corruption because they generally pay more attention to politics and government and are more likely to hold politicians accountable. To the degree that size, distance from the state capital, population diversity, and number of college graduates affect the level of public corruption, we have limited control over those contributing factors.

If we could eliminate some of the many separate units of government and several thousand government officials, it would leave fewer unmonitored officials to commit corruption. There are more than 540 governments with the power to tax in Cook County, 1,200 in the Chicago metropolitan region, and more than seven thousand in Illinois. Examples of governments that could be merged or eliminated include the four Mosquito Abatement Districts in Cook County, township governments that duplicate town governments, and school districts that govern only a single school. But efforts to merge or eliminate such units of government have mostly failed. When Evanston recently tried to merge its town and township government (since both have the same boundaries and the same governing board), it required passage of a separate state law to make that possible. While there have been a few small government mergers, the number of separate governments in Illinois is not

decreasing, and that leaves open opportunities for unaccountable government officials to engage various corruption schemes.

Contributing factors that we can affect are the civic or political culture, the level of civic distrust, and the existence of machine or traditional political-party organizations. We hope to show in this book that these factors matter, and that making smart changes has the promise of greatly reducing the level of corruption.

## Our Culture of Corruption

Beyond corruption of an individual or Illinois' numerous scandals, there is a broader culture and history of corruption. Political culture involves the expectations of both citizens and public officials as to proper behavior. A good political culture is one in which citizens obey the laws, and public officials enforce them fairly and uniformly. A reformed political culture is one in which both citizens and officials abhor corruption and expect good government without bribes, patronage, nepotism, or any of the other common forms of corruption. Negative and positive political cultures are built by actions over time, from the time of original settlement to the current day.

The political scientist Daniel J. Elazar was the leading scholar of political culture as it shapes politics and government in midwestern states like Illinois.<sup>12</sup> He concluded that settlers of Illinois brought with them three different strains of political culture: *traditionalistic*, which believed that government should be limited to securing the existing social order; *moralistic*, which believed that government should promote the public good and public service; and *individualistic*, which sees politics as a marketplace where individuals and groups can promote themselves socially and economically, including by profiting from government activities.<sup>13</sup>

While elements of the traditionalist and moralistic reform-minded political culture are present in Illinois, the dominant political culture, especially in Chicago, is individualist. As Elazar puts it: "Politics in Illinois came early to be centered on personal influence, patronage, distribution of federal and later state benefits, and the availability of economic gain to those who were professionally committed to politics as their 'business.'"<sup>14</sup> The late, well-known acerbic newspaper columnist Milton Royko captured it best when he wrote that Chicago's official slogan should be "Where's mine?" We have yet to change this dominant culture.

Following Elazar, Jim Nowlan and his coauthors describe the individualistic political culture of Illinois this way: "[G]overnment and politics compose a marketplace in which participants exchange credits and debits as they pursue their goals. . . . [Illinois citizens] consider government not as an instrument for doing good but, rather, as a necessary evil."<sup>15</sup> The individualistic political culture may have begun with the original settlers of Illinois, but over nearly two hundred years it has been reinforced by the corrupt actions of elected officials, bureaucrats, businesspeople, and citizens.

For corruption to be rooted out in our state, government must be seen as an instrument for doing good, not a marketplace in which government goods, services, jobs, and contracts are given out as payoffs and patronage.

The former U.S. Attorney Patrick Fitzgerald has written about an additional aspect of our history and culture of corruption:

Undoubtedly the most harmful consequence of endemic public corruption in a community is the apathy that it engenders—a culture of acceptance. Over many years of seeing corruption in almost every facet of government, many residents of a community begin to simply accept corruption as the immutable status quo. They come to assume government is broken and ineffective and



destined to function corruptly. The consequences of this culture of acceptance in a community are many. Some residents simply disengage from the political process and no longer trust their government to function well or in their interest. Other residents may come to believe they must engage in corruption in order to gain government benefits themselves. Still others will begin to look for another way when they witness corrupt transactions. And honest folks are discouraged from entering politics or suffer from the skepticism engendered by others' misdeeds.<sup>16</sup>

He goes on to argue that vigorous investigation and prosecution of corruption can diminish Illinois' culture of acceptance of corruption. It is clear, however, that prosecution alone is not a sufficient cure.

Our book is animated by the theory that Illinois' corrupt political culture has been rooted in the individualist political culture from the early days of its founding, but it has been nurtured by the political machines and machine-like politics throughout the state. In the next chapter we will further define political machines, show how they have evolved over time, and how they perpetuate the culture of corruption.

## History of Illinois' Culture of Corruption

Corruption in all its forms has a long history in Illinois. Each corrupt act has had the effect of reinforcing the culture of corruption that some of the original "individualistic" settlers brought with them. The first stolen elections were in 1833, when the town of Chicago was incorporated. The settlers voted to elect five trustees when they met at a hotel tavern. At the first town meeting, they decided by a vote of 12–1 to incorporate, but later research showed that two of the voters didn't meet residency requirements. Later in 1833, they voted 28–1 to elect a slate of trustees. But there were fewer than twenty-nine citizens living in Chicago at the time.<sup>17</sup> The ballot box was stuffed when the city was born. Other stolen elections were to follow.

There were problems in downstate Illinois at the time as well. In 1841, Governor Duncan had legal troubles, and Governor Matteson left office in 1856 owing the state a quarter of a million dollars for selling false script.

The first public-corruption prosecution in Chicago occurred in 1869, when fourteen Chicago aldermen and Cook County commissioners were tried for rigging a contract with the city and county government to paint city hall.<sup>18</sup> This period was characterized by other examples of corruption, including a city-council "ring" of aldermen on the take. They were known as McCauley's Nineteen and they could be bribed as a group either to pass or defeat legislation. Later, at the turn of the twentieth century, politicians like "Hinky Dink" Kenna, "Bathhouse" John Coughlin, and Johnny "D. Pow" Powers formed similar rings of crooked aldermen in the city council.

The courthouse, which also served as city hall and the county building, was a wooden structure in 1869. A contract was given to a private contractor to have it painted. The contractor, in turn, paid bribes to the aldermen and commissioners to get the profitable \$128,500 contract. The contractor used a whitewash of chalk and water instead of paint, so after it rained it became obvious to all that the job was a scam. As a result of a criminal trial, four of the fourteen accused officials were convicted and given jail terms. Many of the others were defeated in the 1871 election, when reformers briefly came to power at city hall.

There have been occasional elections of reformers who fought for government reforms from time to time, but never with long enough control over the government to eliminate political corruption, or to change Illinois' underlying corrupt political culture.

This "culture of corruption" over the last century and a half exists largely because there are

institutions that promote and support it. The chief institutions are the Democratic and Republican political party machines in the city, suburbs, and downstate. And business and labor unions were tolerant of this corruption. Indeed, they often contributed to it through bribes or campaign donations.

Various investigations by the FBI and prosecutions by the U.S. Attorney have provided a road map of city and state patterns of corruption. The Hired Truck investigation of crooked contracts in the 1990s (in which unneeded trucks were hired from private companies) led to the trial of Mayor Daley's patronage chief Robert Sorich. The prosecutors in that case described a flourishing political-party machine where it was possible to get a patronage job as long as the candidates had the right political or labor-union connections. Then the politically connected insiders gave out crooked contracts such as the trucking contracts.

Machine politics and corruption extend far beyond Chicago, as illustrated by successful prosecutions in investigations like Operation Safe Roads into the office of the Republican secretary of state and, later, Governor George Ryan, in which driver's licenses were sold for bribes. Lack of a strong reform movement and notoriously weak campaign-finance laws in Illinois perpetuated the politics of personal favors throughout the state.

A small sample of notable corruption cases in Illinois illustrates the scope of the problem:

- Operation Safebet, an FBI investigation that targeted political corruption and organized crime control of illegal gambling and prostitution throughout the Chicago metropolitan area, resulted in the conviction of more than seventy-five individuals.
- Operation Gambat, a federal investigation into Chicago's First Ward's connections with organized crime, resulted in twenty-four individuals convicted or pleading guilty. Among the convicted were the First Ward alderman, a city-corporation counsel, the assistant majority leader in the Illinois Senate, and a judge convicted for fixing a murder case.
- Operation Greylord, a federal probe into the Cook County court system, brought convictions and guilty pleas from eighty-seven court personnel and attorneys, including thirteen judges.
- Cicero Town President Betty Loren-Maltese was convicted in 2002 of a scam that swindled the suburb out of twelve million dollars in insurance funds. Before his death, her husband, Cicero assessor Frank Maltese, had been convicted of serving as a bookmaker and warning the mob about police raids.
- Operation Board Games, which was centered on Governor Rod Blagojevich, ended up convicting fifteen people of rigging state contracts and shaking down campaign contributors, especially through the appointment of corrupt individuals to state boards and commissions.

To end the continuing corruption detailed in these investigations and others we describe in later chapters requires a comprehensive, long-term anticorruption strategy. It will be necessary to create a new political culture in which public corruption is no longer tolerated. We must evolve from machine politics to a more advanced form of democracy.

We must eliminate corruption at different levels, as Rasma Karklins's typology indicates. We must pass, and enforce, laws that limit the authority of public officials as to their discretion and monopoly of power if we are to hold them accountable, as Robert Klitgaard has suggested. We must build up the public values to support the institutions necessary for integrity in government, as Transparency International has advocated. Most of all, we must eliminate the political machines and machine-like political organizations that perpetuate corruption.

There are human costs of corruption. At least six deaths were caused by truck drivers who got their licenses by bribes during George Ryan's term as secretary of state. There were also deaths caused by

fires and porch collapses because Chicago building inspectors were bribed.

The financial cost of corruption to taxpayers is estimated to be at least five hundred million dollars a year. There are costs of nepotism, patronage, and ghost payrollers. We pay employees who do no work. Inflated crooked contracts bilk the government and the taxpayers. There are all the costs of investigating and prosecuting corrupt officials. The greatest cost of all is the loss of citizens' faith in government.

We can change Illinois' political culture, but it will not be easy. We don't have to remain the most corrupt city in one of the most corrupt states in the union. Other cities in the world, like Hong Kong and Sydney, have changed from corrupt to clean. We can too. Nations do move up on Transparency International's index as they become less corrupt. In the same way, Chicago and Illinois can move from being the most corrupt to less corrupt over time if we have the political will to do so.

We know how to end corruption; we know how to clear our city's and state's besmirched name. But as Mayor Richard J. Daley taunted reformers in the 1970s, you just ain't got the votes. At least not yet. Unless Chicagoans and Illinoisans decide to give a damn, we never will. But if a few—determined few—really care, we can overcome our addiction to corruption and leave the hall of shame.



Richard J. Daley was Chicago's mayor and chairman of the Cook County Democratic party from 1955 until 1976. These dual roles allowed him to thoroughly dominate the Democratic machine. He controlled patronage, appointed public officials, and slated all the party's candidates. He professed that he had no knowledge of the rampant corruption right under his nose. *Photo courtesy of Sun Times Media.*

# Machine Politics and Stolen Elections

JIM NOWLAN AND HIS COAUTHORS in their book on Illinois politics repeat the story told by the former congressman and judge Abner Mikva to the University of Illinois at Chicago professor Milton Rakove about his experience as a college student. He was trying to volunteer to work in elections for the Democratic party, so he went to see his local Chicago Democratic ward committeeman. “I came and said I wanted to help. Dead silence. ‘Who sent you?’ the committeeman said. I said, ‘Nobody.’ He said, ‘We don’t want nobody nobody sent.’ Then he said, ‘We ain’t got no jobs.’ I said, ‘I don’t want no job.’ He said, ‘We don’t want nobody that don’t want a job.’”<sup>1</sup>

This story illustrates several aspects of political machines. They are built on loyalty and around patronage precinct workers to deliver the votes necessary to get party candidates elected. The winning candidates then control the government and distribute the spoils of patronage jobs and city contracts and hand out city services as political favors to voters who vote for the party slate of candidates.

Chicago and Illinois have had a history of machine politics since at least 1871. Machine politics has been based first and foremost on winning elections. To win elections, it has often been necessary to use illicit means, such as paying voters or stealing votes. There are many stories of vote stealing in Illinois elections.

In 1972, the *Chicago Tribune* did a series on vote rigging in Chicago’s skid-row area. It demonstrates one of the ways machine precinct captains stole elections. Reporter Bill Recktenwald dressed as a bum of the area, with a several-day-old beard. In his skid-row hotel lobby, he witnessed “[P]recinct workers arrived at the hotel to sign up new voters. ‘It didn’t take long to see that something was wrong, because no one was there in front of the desk when they were registering people.’ When [Recktenwald] checked the registration rolls, he saw that he had been among those involuntarily signed up to vote [under the fictitious name with which he had registered at the hotel]. ‘James Joyce became a registered voter at the McCoy Hotel.’”<sup>2</sup>

In that same election, Recktenwald witnessed a precinct captain using the voting machine *seven times* to fraudulently record votes that purportedly were cast by registered voters. In fact, those voters did not come to the polls and did not vote themselves. While vote-stealing techniques have changed since the methods witnessed by Recktenwald, election fraud has remained throughout Illinois’ history.

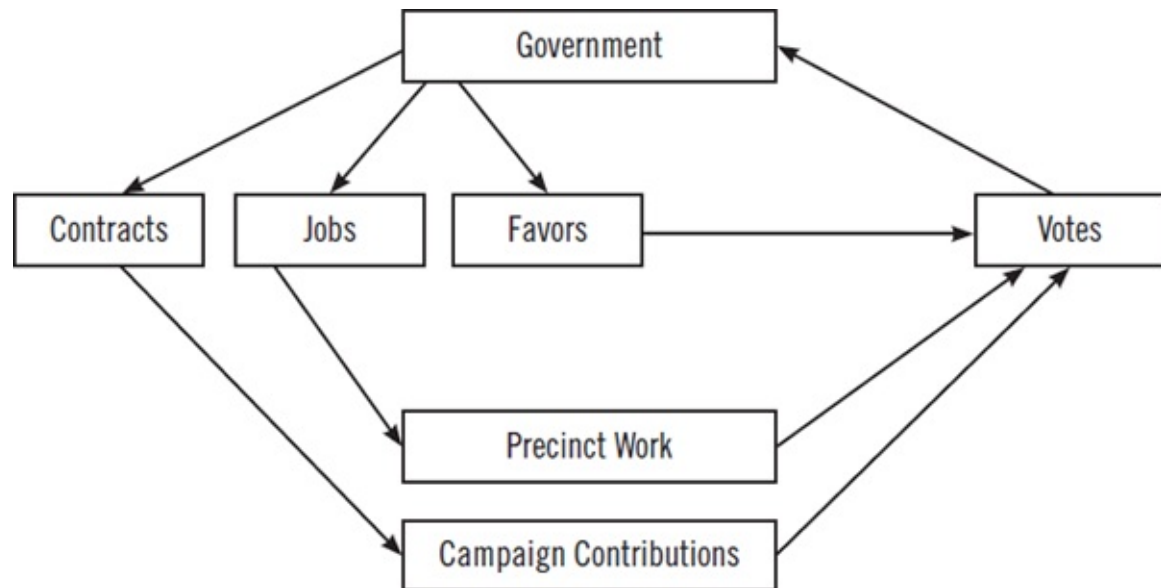
In the twenty-first century we have touch-screen and Scantron ballot voting, and most precinct captains (other than those who engage in voter-registration fraud and ghost voting for missing residents) haven’t learned to scam the system yet. The most common form of massive vote fraud now is rigging absentee voting in precincts, especially at nursing homes, where the elderly are easily manipulated by unscrupulous precinct captains who mark the seniors’ absentee ballots for them. While election fraud may have lessened in Illinois in recent years, there continue to be election-fraud cases. Vote stealing provides a bedrock for the other forms of corruption we recount in our book.

Richard Winters, in his study of corruption, found that machine or traditional political parties were statistically a predictor of the difference in corruption convictions among states.<sup>3</sup> In our book we define such political machines as political organizations whose goal is to win elections and control

the government by means of patronage jobs for precinct workers, favors and government services for party voters, and contracts and licenses for businesses who contribute money to campaigns. Figure 2 shows how machine politics worked under the legendary party boss Richard J. Daley from 1955 to 1976. It worked much the same way in suburban DuPage County or in downstate Vienna under party bosses like Paul Powell.

Several aspects of this political system are critical. First of all, it depended upon winning elections so the spoils of government can be distributed. Second, it was an economic reward system. Although it provided symbolic recognition to ethnic groups as a reward for party support, it did not depend upon ideology or psychological rewards as reform political organizations do.

**Figure 2.1** Richard J. Daley Machine.



Source: Created by Dick Simpson, based on course lectures by Milton Rakove.

If you worked your precinct, you got a job at city hall or with other governments. If you voted for the machine, you got more government services delivered as favors than your neighbors. If you were a businessman you gave money to fund campaigns, you got crooked contracts on which you made a handsome profit. So machine politics was primarily an economic exchange system—a perpetual motion machine that didn’t depend on ideals or personalities, although party leaders could be charismatic and inspire loyal supporters.

Milton Rakove, in his classic book on machine politics, *Don’t Make No Waves, Don’t Back No Losers*, describes machine politics this way:

The machine believes with Machiavelli that men in politics are greedy, emotional, and passionate, and are not governed by reason, morality, or concern for their fellow man. It believes that men can be co-opted, bought, persuaded, or frightened into subservience to or cooperation with the machine. Every man has his price, according to the machine. . . . The Chicago Democratic machine is dedicated primarily to gaining and retaining office. . . . Its primary demands on its members are loyalty and political efficiency. In return, it carries out its obligations by providing its members with jobs, contracts, and its own “social security” system.<sup>4</sup>

A successful political machine stays in power for a long time. While it may occasionally lose an election, it projects an aura of invincibility. It is able to use the powers of incumbency and control of the electoral machinery to stay in power. New York’s Tammany Hall party boss George Washington Plunkitt declared that reformers were only “morning glories” who had a brief bloom, but a political machine is like a giant oak that lasts a long time.<sup>5</sup>



It is the central thesis of our book that the individualistic culture of much of Illinois is translated into the institution of political-party machines. Control of the many governments throughout the state by political machines inevitably leads to a corrupt political culture in which corruption and the use of public office for private gain becomes accepted and pervasive.

If it is publicly accepted that it is all right to trade government jobs for precinct work, votes for favors, and campaign contributions for inflated government contracts, how is a party worker to distinguish “honest graft”<sup>6</sup> from taking a bribe for a zoning change or fixing a parking ticket? Machine politics always begets corruption—or, in the telling phrase from Rasma Karklins, the system makes them do it!<sup>7</sup>

## The First Political Machines

James Merriner wrote in his book about Illinois corruption, “The advent of Chicago’s first crooked politician . . . is undocumented and open to interpretation. Perhaps some members of the town’s first elected board of five trustees in 1833 were corrupt. That is, they were land speculators who did not operate entirely aboveboard.”<sup>8</sup> Generally speaking, however, the era from 1833 until the Civil War in 1861 was one of booster government and relatively corruption-free. During the Civil War, government became partisan, as “civic wars” between Democrats and Republicans broke out in local and state government.<sup>9</sup>

After the Civil War, the political system changed once more. The first corruption court case in Chicago occurred in 1869, and corruption and machine politics soon spread throughout the state. That year, fourteen aldermen, county commissioners, and former aldermen were indicted for accepting bribes to rig a \$128,500 contract to paint city hall. Four of the public officials were convicted, and a number lost their positions in the next elections.

The city council of this time was controlled by McCauley’s Nineteen, named after Alderman James McCauley, who headed a “ring” of corrupt aldermen. The *Tribune* characterized the McCauley Nineteen “as dishonest and corrupt as any that has ever disgraced any municipal government.”<sup>10</sup> As a result, Roswell Mason, a civil engineer, was elected on a reform Peoples’ Ticket in November 1869, and many of the crooked aldermen were defeated. More were ousted in the 1871 election, “but not enough to prevent thirteen Republicans and eight Democrats from organizing a new ring [of crooked aldermen].”<sup>11</sup>

In this post-Civil War era, Michael Cassius McDonald ascended. He was a gambler, saloon keeper, and the first party boss in Chicago. McDonald had been a successful card shark on trains and in New Orleans before permanently settling in Chicago in 1861. He avoided the Civil War draft and rose to the underworld “as the principal supplier of dice, cards, and political patronage.”<sup>12</sup> McDonald soon owned a bar inside the Richard House Hotel, before opening his infamous Store tavern and gambling den at the corner of Clark and Monroe.

After the Chicago Fire of 1871, McDonald “was the first to detect the common bonds of interest between the criminal element and politicians and introduce one group to the other. The *Chicago News* gave McDonald credit ‘for electing aldermen who lorded it in the city council and county commissioners who stole everything in sight, and for providing contracts for public works that had thievery written between the lines.’”<sup>13</sup> The alliance between crooked businessmen and politicians was simple. The houses of prostitution provided bribes and campaign contributions for ward committeemen and aldermen. The saloons, taverns, and bars went further and provided free lunch and beer to patrons who

would climb onto horse-drawn wagons that went from polling place to polling place allowing saloon patrons to vote multiple times for favored politicians. This helped corrupt aldermen and ward committeemen to win their elections. Along the way, the political boss Mike McDonald and his successors obtained the power to prevent the police from raiding these fine business establishments.

After he became the biggest political boss of the city, McDonald was able to use his political clout as he “assigned locations for houses of prostitution, granted licenses for gambling, and distributed money from criminals to police officials, court employees and judges.”<sup>14</sup> Among many long con schemes, which were crooked deals that would continue over years, McDonald supplied building stones to city construction crews who were replacing the old courthouse and city hall. It had burned down in the Chicago Fire of 1871. The resulting city hall building would be destroyed in turn and rebuilt in 1905 because of cheap materials and shoddy deals. In the interim years, McDonald and his allies made a fortune building and repairing city hall.

Mike McDonald’s greatest period of political influence came with the election of Carter Harrison as mayor in 1879. As Richard Lindberg records:

McDonald reached the apex of his political power under . . . [Mayor] Harrison. In the fall of 1879, Mike took over as chairman of assessments for the Democratic Central Committee—responsible for fee collection and revenues levied against the myriad of ward clubs scattered across the city. In August, the First Ward organization [which would later be run by the rogue aldermen “Bathhouse” John Coughlin and “Hinky Dink” Kenna], with the blessing of the mayor, formally sanctioned Mike’s behind-the-scenes contribution to the party by anointing him precinct committeeman. . . . McDonald deserved credit for the restoration of the Democratic Party and the success of his political cohorts in the recent election.<sup>15</sup>

McDonald would remain active throughout the nineteenth century to inaugurate what would also be called the “Era of the Gray Wolves.” The end of the nineteenth and the early twentieth century was a time of political bosses in Chicago wards with their own little fiefdoms in the Democratic and Republican parties. Aldermen then gathered into “rings” to take bribes and distribute the spoils in the Chicago city council. In short, political parties and their graft, boodle, nepotism, and patronage jobs were decentralized into mini-machines from 1871 to 1931.

This changed again with Anton Cermak and later Democratic party machines of the twentieth century. Then new party bosses centralized power into a single party, often with a single strong leader like Richard J. Daley, who ruled Chicago as mayor and party boss from 1955 to 1976.

The rest of the state was organized into political fiefdoms by county as well. In some, good government was the dominant form of politics, but many suburban and downstate counties were run by political machines. Reformers, or “Goo Goos” (good government types), did arise to challenge various political parties locally or even statewide.<sup>16</sup> In Chicago, there were reform mayors like Edward Dunne and William Devers. Dunne would go on to become a reform governor like John Peter Altgeld. Each held office for a time, but in the long run political machines prevailed in Illinois.

## Stolen Elections

Over the years, many elections in Chicago and in Illinois were stolen. The key for machine politics was continuing to win elections. Winning elections was critical to controlling government and its jobs, contracts, and policies. It is likely that the very first elections in Chicago in 1833 were rigged, as more votes were counted than there were voters. And that tradition of election fraud has continued to the present day.

The most famous “stolen” election was the presidential election of 1960, when the kingmaker

Richard J. Daley is said to have stolen the election for John F. Kennedy. Even more importantly, from a local-politics standpoint, he was able to defeat Ben Adamowski, the Republican candidate for state attorney, and elect instead Democrat Daniel Ward, who would protect machine politicians from prosecution.

Kennedy won the state by 8,858 votes out of 4,657,394 cast, and Dan Ward beat Adamowski by 25,000 votes. Adamowski “charged that Daley had stolen 100,000 Democratic votes in 10 machine-dominated Chicago wards and had become ‘the most powerful political boss in America through a rigged election contest.’”<sup>17</sup>

Democrats and Republicans differed in their interpretation of the election. Based upon a canvass of less than one-third of Chicago precincts and only one kind of voting irregularity, Republicans erased more than half of the margin of victory for Kennedy and Ward. But Daley, probably correctly, countered in his testimony at the Illinois Election Board hearing that the same kinds of vote fraud were committed in Grundy and DuPage Counties by the Republicans.<sup>18</sup> Votes were stolen in the 1964 election by Democrats in Chicago and Republicans in the suburbs. Apparently, Democrats were just better at stealing votes.

Election fraud during the Council of the Gray Wolves period from 1871 to 1931 is well documented. To give one example of the scope of the election fraud in this period, in 1935, “more than one hundred election officials were sentenced to jail for fraud.”<sup>19</sup>

The various techniques for stealing elections in the later twentieth century were also well known. Up until the last decades of the century, most polling places used paper ballots. With such a system, it was relatively easy to steal votes. If a voter died or moved before the election, the precinct captain with the help of the election judges that he appointed, would simply vote in their stead. He would just fill out the paper ballot and put it in the ballot box.

Chicago Alderman Ed Burke is fond of telling the story of an elderly woman who lived all her life in a small Indiana town. She goes to her lawyer to draw up her will and specifies that when she dies she is to be buried in Chicago. Her lawyer asks why on earth she would do this, since she had always lived in this small Indiana town. Well, she explained, “I want to continue to vote Democratic after I die.” Certainly there are many documented election-fraud cases in which the dead vote, or like in Bruce Recktenwald’s *Tribune* exposé, fraudulent, nonexistent voters like James Joyce do.

In some of the paper-ballot precincts, the precinct captain would simply steal a single paper ballot when the polls opened. He would then stand outside campaigning. When one of his voters came up, the captain would give the voter the ballot he had already marked for the favored candidates. The voter would take the marked ballot with him into the polling place and obtain a new blank ballot. Once the voter drew the curtain to vote in secret, he would substitute the marked ballot for the blank one and place the marked one in the ballot box. When he left the polling place, he would give the new blank ballot to the precinct captain as proof he had cast the premarked ballot. In return, the precinct captain would either give him money—a five-dollar bill in the later years—or send him to the local tavern around the corner where he could get beer or liquor for doing his civic duty the Democratic machine way. The captain would then mark the blank ballot for the next voter. This technique was known as the paper-ballot chain. And without poll watchers for opposing candidates or honest election judges, it was unbeatable.

In a special election in 1969, Dick Simpson was helping coordinate the campaign of John Steven, an African American social worker who was a reform aldermanic candidate in Committeeman George Dunne’s Forty-second Ward. The machine candidate he was running against was Raymond Fried, a white machine precinct captain whose turn had come. However, Fried had cancer and made no



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