

# CORONAVIRUS RESPONSE

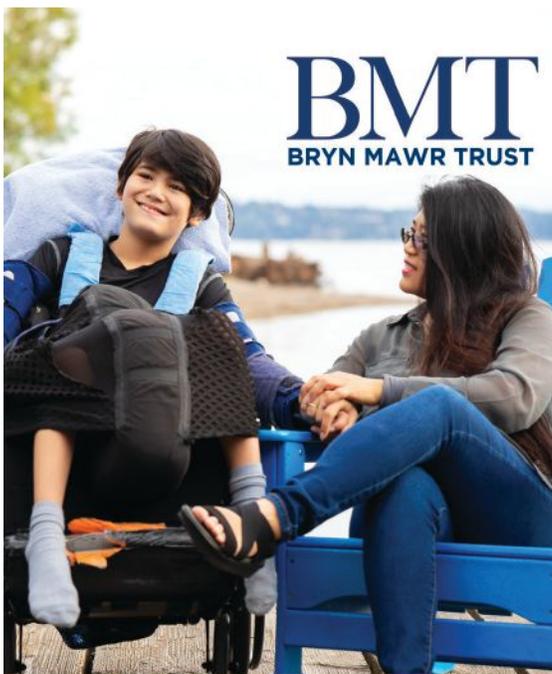


## A Note on the COVID-19 Pandemic

### Dear Readers:

The content of this issue of *The Philadelphia Lawyer* was decided before the outbreak of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), now declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization. Because this magazine takes seriously the safety and health of its readers/Bar Association members, we strongly encourage you to stay tuned to the Philadelphia Bar Association's website, as well as the websites for the U.S. Centers for Disease Control, World Health Organization, Pennsylvania Department of Health, City of Philadelphia, and when appropriate, other public health authorities, for the latest developments on this pandemic. In addition, please frequently check the Association's website at <http://philadelphiabar.org/page/HomePage> for updates from the Association and the courts on COVID-19 and related measures. Be vigilant and protect yourself as we deal with this pandemic.

*Emmanuel O. Ihekweumere*  
Editor-in-Chief | *The Philadelphia Lawyer*



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# Political Corruption: A Bane on Justice and Societal Improvement

EMMANUEL O. IHEUKWUMERE

**F**ew high-profile incidents and allegations of corruption in our government over time, including, but not limited to, the recent impeachment of President Donald Trump by the U.S. House of Representatives for, among other counts, abuse of power, his subsequent trial and acquittal by the U.S. Senate, and his pardoning of former Democratic governor of Illinois Rod Blagojevick, who was convicted in 2009 for lying to the FBI and in 2011 for attempting to auction off the senate seat of newly elected President Obama, have fueled a rampant belief among Americans that government in the United States is rife with corruption, and that the average politician is corrupt. Other high-profile examples of public corruption include the guilty plea in 1996 of the powerful chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, U.S. Rep. Daniel “Dan” Rostenkowski of Chicago, following his indictment in 1994 for corruption, and close to home, the conviction in 2016 for corruption of then-influential Philadelphia U.S. Rep. Chaka Fattah.

In fact, the public’s belief of widespread corruption within our government resulted in about 75% of respondents in a 2015 Gallup poll believing that corruption was widespread within the government. Thankfully, the evidence does not bear out that widespread belief of government corruption in the U.S. In the global scheme of things, the U.S. is a well-run society where corruption is relatively rare, contrary to the prevailing public belief. For example, Transparency International—the global non-profit organization headquartered in Berlin, Germany, which gauges corruption around the world—for most of the last two decades, has ranked the U.S. among the 20 least corrupt countries—until 2018, when the U.S. was ranked 22.

However, corruption remains a bane on justice and societal improvement. Corruption impedes the fair administration of justice, including contributing to unfair and unequal treatment of persons, and engenders a sense of hopelessness within societies (for more on effects of corruption in Africa, see my law review article, co-authored with Chukwuemeka A. Iheukwumere, “Colonial Rapacity and Political Corruption: Roots of African Underdevelopment and Misery,” 3 Chi.-Kent J. Int’l & Comp. Law (2003)). Corruption in the narrow context, as Transparency International puts it, is “the abuse of entrusted power for private gain.” Corruption in the broader sense, includes, as we argued in our law review article, “moral perversion, depravity, and

rotteness.” (citation omitted).

Due to the destructive effects of corruption around the world, few examples of which are set forth below, it is imperative that we, especially lawyers, continue to fight to eradicate and lessen corruption in our society.



After European leaders—including the highly corrupt and morally bankrupt King Leopold, II, of Belgium—, with the help of the British, and German leader Kaiser Wilhelm II, used the pretext of bringing Christianity and civilization to native Africans in order to subjugate them and inflict upon them cruelty of the worst kind—including enslavement, murder for slight infractions, rape, torture, amputations, and stealing of their assets and resources—independence was granted to the various African colonies. Using their newfound freedom, many so-called African leaders continued the brutal corruption of their colonial masters by enriching themselves through abuses of political offices.

In Congo, a young colonel named Joseph-Desire Mobutu, who later changed his name to Mobutu Sese Seko and was then chief-of-staff to the young and newly elected 36-year-old first prime minister of the Congo Patrice Lumumba, came to power through the brutal assassination of Lumumba. Mobutu renamed the Congo Zaire, and then began enthroning corruption within his country by continuously looting the public treasury with impunity. Mobutu exploited ethnic divisions, sowed disunity among the populace, and encouraged apathy in challenging corruption. Mobutu appointed individuals to key government positions without the necessary qualifications and experiences. Loyalty to Mobutu and being a member of his ethnic group became the major considerations for appointments to government positions. As a consequence, despite its vast natural resources, the Congo devolved into abject poverty and misery, which continues to the present—23 years after Mobutu died in September 1997 from prostate cancer.

In Nigeria, military dictator General Sani Abacha treated the national treasury as his personal piggy bank, killed off his opponents with impunity, and squandered his country’s precious resources on excesses, including on prostitutes. Abacha ensured that only his cronies and family members secured and held on to high government positions. Appointments to government ministries were made without regard for qualifications, competence, and experience. Loyalty to Abacha became the dominant qualification for plum government jobs. Phantom

contracts with exorbitant amounts became the Abacha government's way of stealing and siphoning away massive public funds to European and American financial institutions. By the time Abacha died, reportedly in the midst of a Viagra-fueled orgy with three Indian prostitutes, he had siphoned off billions of dollars of public funds to foreign bank accounts, enthroned corruption as the object of his government, plunged his country into economic ruin, and punished and killed his opponents with impunity.

Meanwhile, in South America's Chile in 1973, General Augusto Pinochet seized power in a military coup that deposed elected President Salvador Allende. For the next couple of decades until 1998 when he ceased his position as commander-in-chief of the Army, Pinochet ruled with an iron fist that included torture, murder, and exile of thousands of Chileans. Although some of his early free market programs led to economic growth, his regime was marred by suppression of dissent, killings and torture of opponents with impunity, and his personal starving of millions of dollars in foreign bank accounts.

In Asia, Cambodia's Saloth Sar, who took the name Pol Pot, came to power in April 1975 after his rebel army, the Khmer Rouge, captured the capital Phnom Penh. Pol Pot masterminded the brutal enslavement, torture, starvation, and deaths of millions of Cambodians, later highlighted in the critically acclaimed 1984 movie "The Killing Fields." With unchecked power, Pol Pot's regime destroyed families, stifled dissents, systematically killed off educated people, particularly physicians, and essentially decimated the fabric of his society until his regime was ousted in 1979 by an invading Vietnamese army.

In Europe, after the fragmentation of Yugoslavia into different countries, Slobodan Milosevic rose to power in 1989 in Serbia after deposing his mentor and then President Ivan Stambolic. Aggressively fanning the flames of ethnic and religious divisions, Milosevic engineered the brutal ethnic cleansing

of Bosnian Muslims, culminating in concentration camps, mass rapes, torture, and massacre by the Serbian army of thousands of Bosnian men and boys in Srebrenica in 1995. Ultimately, NATO, led by the U.S., intervened in the brutal civil war to end the ongoing genocide. In the midst of the unspeakable suffering, Milosevic and his family corruptly enriched themselves until he was defeated in a 2000 election. Milosevic was indicted for war crimes in 1999 and died in March 2006 in his prison cell while awaiting trial.

Hopefully, these examples of the destructive effects of corruption noted in this editorial will encourage some, especially within our esteemed profession, to continue fighting corruption within our American government. Effective ways of fighting governmental corruption include voting in both primary and general elections and encouraging others to do likewise as a means of having a say in selecting our leaders; forcefully and consistently speaking out against injustice and inequality, which thrive in the midst of corruption, including moral perversion, depravity, and rottenness; and generally advocating for the powerless, traditionally disfavored groups, and others lacking the power to advocate for themselves. As lawyers, we have the training—and the obligation—to ensure a fair administration of justice, and by doing so, continue to chip away at governmental corruption. For corruption—if left unchecked, as shown by the few examples in this column—leads to misery, poverty, injustice, and moral depravity. ■

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