

Global Corruption Barometer 2007
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Welcome to the launch of the Global Corruption Barometer 2007.

This year's Barometer, a public opinion poll covering 60 countries, offers clear evidence that corruption affects ordinary people everywhere. It also shows that the poorest households, whether in developing or developed nations, are hit hardest by demands for bribes – often for access to services that should be free. For these low-income households this may mean choosing between medical care for a sick child and the family's next meal.

Entrenched bribery inflicts deep and lasting wounds on a society, destroying belief in public institutions and those who govern. The citizens polled for the barometer reported that its incidence is increasing – at 17 percent the average number of respondents asked for a bribe in the past year during contact with a service provider has nearly doubled since the Barometer was introduced in 2003. In some countries the figure exceeds 70 percent.

For institutions that the public has direct contact with, perceptions of endemic corruption create the belief that bribes are necessary to obtain services such as access to medical care, education for their children or to move a case through the courts. If people assume that they have to bribe, they will become more ready to do so. Corruption in the system then becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Globally, bribe demands were found to be particularly widespread in interactions with the police and the judiciary. For those who came into contact with the police, an average of 17 percent reported being asked for a bribe. In Africa, the figure is significantly higher at 47 percent, as it is in the Asia Pacific region at 33 and for Newly Independent States (Russia, Moldova and Ukraine) at 34 percent.

Globally, eight percent of respondents who had contact with the judiciary reported bribe demands, but, for African respondents, the figure jumps to 24 percent, and Asia-Pacific scores only marginally better at 23. These results cast serious doubts on the guarantee of the basic rights to equal treatment before the law. It also means that the very enforcement mechanisms crucial for fighting corruption are rendered ineffective.

It is disturbing, but perhaps not surprising then, that the public in 2007 was markedly gloomier than in years past. At 54 percent, over half of all respondents felt that corruption would increase in the near future, compared to just 43 percent in the first Barometer, published in 2003. Over 50 percent felt their government's efforts to fight corruption were ineffective. Citizens are dissatisfied and are increasingly demanding change.

This pessimism is very pronounced, including in wealthy countries of the north, with over 60 percent of respondents in many countries expecting to see corruption increase in the next three years. In an interesting contrast, respondents in some of the African countries polled, such as Nigeria and Ghana, were relatively positive both about the future development of corruption and their governments' efforts to fight it, with only 29 and 32 percent of respondents, respectively, expecting corruption to increase – although these countries report relatively high levels of petty bribery.

It is clear that corruption has become a major concern for citizens in developed countries. Years of scandals have taken their toll. And despite laws and regulations that have been introduced to curb corruption in the north, the public is not convinced. It may be the preponderance of large-scale scandals that have hit the news. It may be a lack of appropriate enforcement. But it is certainly a signal to government to step up their anti-corruption efforts and to make these part of a broader anti-corruption platform, where they have not already done so.

In addition to being asked which institutions most frequently demand bribes, the survey also asked where citizens generally perceive corruption to be most rampant. As in past editions of the Barometer, citizens pointed at political parties and parliaments as the institutions they saw as being most compromised by corruption.

This is a troubling finding indeed, with these bodies entrusted with the highest-level of decision-making power. These institutions, which represent the public interest, face a crisis of accountability.

This year's Global Corruption Barometer has made it clear that people do not see enough commitment when they look to their governments and leaders. We are heartened, though, that the public is increasingly demanding accountability from the institutions that most affect their lives. This demand is a powerful driver of change.

Turning promises into action is essential if anti-corruption efforts are to have an impact on the lives of ordinary people. Governments bear the greatest responsibility for following through on commitments to fight corruption. But governments are not alone in their responsibility. We need to see concerted action from civil society and the private sector too.

Bribery hurts people and they are disgruntled by the corruption they see plaguing key public institutions and services. They deserve a future without corruption. The Global Corruption Barometer 2007 is a wake-up call – a reminder that people around the world are increasingly demanding an end to corruption and will no longer accept its terrible cost.

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