

ANTI-CORRUPTION RESEARCH QUARTERLY

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Welcome to the twelfth issue of Anti-Corruption Research Quarterly. Here you will find recent insights and activities in anti-corruption research, synthesised for scholars, policy-makers and practitioners. This newsletter is part of the Anti-Corruption Research Network (ACRN), an initiative of Transparency International to strengthen a knowledge community and information service for anti-corruption research. **Subscribe today!**

MEASURING THE PAYMENT OF BRIBES

By Prof. Richard Rose and Dr. Caryn Peiffer*

A wise man's question is half the answer, especially when it comes to measuring popular experience of corruption. The key questions to ask in a survey are: Have you had contact with any of the following public services in the past year or two? If so, have you paid a bribe? Simply asking people about paying a bribe can lead to the wrong conclusion: that the political system is honest. The other reason for not paying a bribe is that people have not had contact with corrupt public officials.

Since the payment of bribes is a behavioural act, in principle it can be measured by sample surveys. To do so properly requires including in the questionnaire appropriate measures of the chief determinants of bribery: contact with public services, social characteristics and attitudes of individuals and their household and national context. Our current review of hundreds of surveys conducted on different continents, including TI's Global Corruption Barometer (GCB), provides empirical evidence of the importance of covering all these determinants and the risk of misunderstanding if any of these points are left out.

Bribes Buy Services

Bribes are paid for specific public services but contact with public services is contingent. A nationwide survey should ask about "retail" services that public employees deliver locally and a significant portion of the population is likely to use. Five services are normally covered: health, education, police, courts, and official permits. The 2010 GCB adds public utilities, taxes, land contracts and customs. By concentrating on contacts with familiar services one avoids the uncertainty of meaning associated with general and abstract ideas such as "government" or distant institutions such as parliament. Questions normally restrict the time span for paying bribes to the past 12 months to avoid problems of faulty memory.

The Payment of Bribes

Generalizations about corruption in public services imply that the number of bribes paid is the same for every service. This is not the case. Bribes are most often paid for health care, education and the police rather than for services few people use, such as the courts and customs.

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SPOTLIGHT: MEASURING THE PAYMENT OF BRIBES



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Contact and Payment of Bribes for Public Services

	No Contact	Contact and No Bribe	Contact and Bribe
	(percentage of respondents)		
Health	38	53	9
Utilities	46	50	4
Education	54	40	6
Tax	69	29	2
Permits	70	25	5
Police	76	16	8
Land	84	13	3
Courts	86	11	3
Customs	91	7	2

Source: Transparency International Global Corruption Barometer, 2010. Total number of respondents in 81 countries: 87,787

Every national population divides into three groups: those who do not have contact with a service and thus pay no bribe; those who have contact and pay no bribe; and bribe-payers. The Global Corruption Barometer finds that of the 85 percent of citizens who have contact with one or more public services, only 21 percent pay a bribe, compared with the 64 percent receiving services free of corruption. Africa is the only continent in which a majority of people having contact with public services report paying bribes.

Life Cycle and Household Size

An individual's place in the life cycle influences his/her contact with public services.

Older people are more likely to need health care than healthy young adults, while middle-aged people are more likely to have contact with education services because they have school-age children. Across the life cycle, almost everyone will have contact with a full range of public services.

The household is a 'common pot' for sharing such services as utilities, and a bribe for education will be paid by an adult family member. Since households share information as well as income, the Global Corruption Barometer asks respondents to report bribes paid by their household and not just by themselves. Household size should increase the number of contacts with public services, and therefore the likelihood that a bribe is paid. The post-Communist Life in Transition survey (LiTS) is unusual in including detailed household data. As the size of a household increases, so does the experience of paying bribes-but not in proportion to the increase in household size. According to LiTS, in single-person households, only 15 percent report paying at least one bribe, whereas in four-person households 25 percent do so, and in households with seven or more persons, payment rises to 34 percent.

Perceptions

There are two rationales for asking about perceptions. Firstly, it serves as a proxy for the actual payment of a bribe. Secondly, perceptions of corruption are likely to affect trust in government, satisfaction with democracy or demand for regime change. Early questionnaires tended to muddle the two phenomena by asking about perceptions of corruption in distant institutions of which respondents had no firsthand knowledge, and they were expected to trust and support in a good democracy system.

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Photo: Alexandr Tovstenko

“Two-thirds, although perceiving the police as very corrupt, have had no contact with it. These findings strongly challenge the probative value of using perceptions of corruption as evidence of the actual payment of bribes.”

People who see services as corrupt may be more likely to pay bribes because they assume it is expected and “everybody” does it. When questions about the payment of retail bribes are asked, then questions about perceptions should cover the same institutions; however, this is not always done.

The GCB consistently finds a substantial gap between those who see a public service as corrupt and those who pay a bribe. For example, bribe-payers account for only one-sixth of those viewing the police as extremely corrupt and another sixth are very negative but they have had contact with the police without paying a bribe. Two-thirds, although, perceiving the police as very corrupt, have had no contact with it. These findings strongly challenge the probative value of using perceptions of corruption as evidence of the actual payment of bribes.

Bribery Not the Only Way to Break Laws

Bribes are not the only way in which public services can be delivered in means inconsistent with the Weberian norm of bureaucrats impersonally providing public services strictly in accord with the rule of law. As part of a research project on “negative social capital”, the Centre for the Study of Public Policy developed for use in Russia a battery of scenarios asking people what they would do if they faced difficulties in securing health care, a government permit, housing or a university place.

The most commonly endorsed individual strategy is to use connections, to go to a friend or to a friend of a friend with informal access to officials in the relevant public authority. The go-between may negotiate the amount of bribe to be paid or, if the radius of friendship extends far enough, the service can be delivered free as a favour.

References

For a full discussion, see R. Rose and C. Peiffer (2012), [Paying Bribes to Get Public Services: a Global Guide to Concepts and Survey Measures](#). Glasgow: U. Of Strathclyde in Studies Studies in Public Policy (SPP) series No. 494

Lots of Variation to Explain

Social science surveys invariably collect data about age, gender, income, and education; each characteristic may influence whether a bribe is paid or not. In developing countries, it is also relevant to collect data on informal social capital networks to see whether they facilitate or substitute for a bribe. Contact data can be supplemented by data about the community in which respondents live, for people are less likely to have contact with a hospital or secondary school if they live in relatively isolated rural or mountainous areas.

Identifying the services where bribery is most frequent and the people most vulnerable to being asked to pay bribes can help establish clear and specific priorities for reform. Modelling the process of collecting bribes calls attention to points of intervention where a change in service delivery may make it harder to collect bribes, for example, by computerizing claims for entitlement. By contrast, focusing solely on the perception of corruption may encourage passive acceptance of corruption on the grounds that it is a pervasive feature of the political system and, at worst, may encourage bribery on the grounds that this is the way the system works.

* The authors are conducting a four-year project studying individual experience of bribery worldwide financed by the British Economic & Social Research Council grant ES/13482X/1. Richard Rose has been a member of TI’s Research Advisory Committee from its start. For further details, see www.cspp.strath.ac.uk/corruptgov.html