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## **CORRUPTION AS A SOCIAL PHENOMENON IN THE CONTEXT OF GLOBAL CHALLENGES**

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**Abstract.** *The effective fight against corruption should be based on understanding how and why corruption occurs in a particular area and in developing specific mechanisms that could reduce corruption risks in this area. The purpose of this article is a comprehensive analysis of the problem of corruption, and the definition and analysis of anti-corruption policies in the countries of Eastern Europe, on the example of Poland. The main study methods were surveys of social groups and focus group tools. At the first stage, survey of entrepreneurs (400 people) and interviews (1800 people) were carried out. At the second stage focus groups in 5 cities of Poland were conducted. According to the results of the study, the necessity of continuous modernization of the tools of anti-corruption policy of the state and their supplementation with new elements, adoption of ethical codes of conduct of officials (both at the state level and at the level of a certain institution), conduct of anti-corruption educational activities, etc. was substantiated. In conclusion, corruption is a systemic problem that needs to be addressed systematically, requires ensuring information openness and effective media work (uncensored coverage), changing perceptions and attitudes towards corruption at the cultural level.*

**Keywords:** *social group; corruption; anti-corruption policy; financial management; digital economy.*

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### **Introduction**

The problem of corruption and anti-corruption policy is one of the most discussed since the end of the XX century, and work on the analysis of corruption and possible steps to prevent and combat it is becoming increasingly important. Numerous studies of the phenomenon of corruption and its prevention make it possible to state that the main reason for its emergence and development is the low level of income and development of social and economic spheres of the state as a whole. It should be noted that corruption is a threat to democracy, the level of public confidence in government is declining, there occurs a deformation of social values and, as a result, the possible destruction of society as a whole.

Corruption as a social phenomenon originates from the manifestation of power relations in human life.

In conditions when the nature of corruption is so multifaceted and when it permeates all spheres of society, the modern scientific community and practices are trying to identify the basic principles, methods, standards for combating it. However, as practice shows, there is still no clear mechanism for combating corruption. In some countries, developed and implemented anti-corruption programs are more effective, which is reflected in the reduction of corruption in government, business.

### Literature Review

The analysis of the phenomenon of political corruption was conducted using many approaches, namely:

*Moralistic*: opposition of corruption to the ideal state due to inefficient activities of public authorities, corruption was considered an integral part of policy (Gutmann et al. 2020).

*Normative*: the behaviour of the rulers, which was motivated solely by the purpose of their personal enrichment, was studied, the emphasis was placed on the analysis of deviations from standards, norms and values (Brusca et al. 2018).

*Theory of games*: the more widespread corruption is in some environment, the less likely it is that a corrupt person will be exposed and punished, while the risk of being excluded from the system is higher for those who do not break the law and “play by the rules” (Gründler and Potrafke, 2019); one of the studies was to determine the minimum amount of money for which an official would agree to break the law for mutual benefit (Huang, 2016).

*Theory of social changes*: as a result of changes in international relations (including economic), a number of authoritarian regimes were destroyed, but at the same time the countries of Western Europe faced more than one crisis, which led to an increase in corruption in these countries (Bauhr and Charron, 2020).

*Behavioural*: the main focus was on the behaviour of voters and those they actually elected; researchers sought to identify and streamline the main forms of corruption, as well as to determine the consequences of such activities for those who practices it (López-Iturriaga and Sanz, 2018).

*Networking*: proponents of this approach have analysed political parties, connections within and outside them, as well as the interrelationships of a number of power-forming relations with the civil society environment (Kubbe and Engelbert, 2018). According to this approach, a politician is a businessman who is able to effectively create networks with other politicians, to establish interaction within and between these networks, mainly for their own benefit (Potrafke, 2019). The politician is also focused on strengthening his political influence and creating “insurance”, i.e., a favourable attitude to himself and in his party, and in others, as well as in society as a whole (Neshkova and Kalesnikaite, 2019).

*Structural and functional*: there were studied the activities of various authorities, their effectiveness, attitude of politicians to the problem of corruption (Escresa and Picci, 2017). Researchers also tried to identify key actors in corruption and find out what prompted these individuals to resort to the latter (Ceresia and Mendola, 2019).

*Comparative*: comparison of corruption depending on political regimes in different countries, at different periods of time, the classic opposition of the United States and the USSR (Sihombing, 2018).

*Institutional*: the concept of “institutionalized shadow reality” was introduced, which was formed by both the shadow economy, politics and law together with corruption (Wang and Sun, 2016). That is, corruption has ceased to be just a phenomenon, it has become the most important element of the new system, which is inextricably linked with the daily life of society (Ionescu, 2016).

*Pluralistic*: researchers proposed to consider corruption not only in the context of economics or moral aspects, but also from the point of view of other subjects: history, culturology, political economy, and this was often based on the use of a systematic approach (Valle-Cruz et al. 2016).

*Sociological*: researchers analysed the attitude of citizens to violations of the law, compared the attitude to corruption in the circles of those in power and the common people; the concept of

“moral loss” (for example, the loss of honour, spirituality, respect for the law) due to corruption was often mentioned (Alexandre, 2018).

Modern studies on corruption and its perception can be divided into three groups:

- 1) surveys of households or individuals and organizations about their experience of corruption (Epaphra and Massawe, 2017);
- 2) expert surveys on the level of corruption in a particular country (Bosco, 2016);
- 3) comprehensive indicators combining surveys of experts, politicians and civil servants (Li, 2016).

Difficulties in measuring a phenomenon such as corruption relate to validity and reliability. Most researchers believe that it is impossible to measure the actual level of corruption, and moreover, it is impractical (Klašnja et al. 2016).

There is also a problem with the use of composite indicators (indices) in the analysis of corruption, as such indicators include the results of several studies. Sources describing the phenomenon of corruption are often interdependent, which in turn leads to the fact that previous studies to some extent influence the responses of respondents in the future. It is impossible to determine the degree of “dependence” of the above sources, and as a result, the benefits of indicators are reduced.

Despite the wide range of scientific studies on the phenomenon of corruption, the specifics of corruption in certain spheres of public life, its disorganizing and reorganizing impact on society remain insufficiently studied. This highlights the need to develop mechanisms to overcome this catastrophic situation through the implementation of effective measures of anti-corruption policy of the state.

The purpose of this article is a comprehensive analysis of the problem of corruption, and the definition and analysis of anti-corruption policies in the countries of Eastern Europe, on the example of Poland.

## **Methods**

The problem of corruption is one of the most painful points in the development of Poland. A sociological survey was conducted in Poland in 2022. For the purpose of discussion, our guide is divided into blocks, each of which will be described below. In general, the questions should reveal the respondents' knowledge of corruption as a phenomenon (including information on its level in Poland, on state institutions that should curb/oppose this phenomenon, as well as on the effectiveness of the latter). After finding out how much respondents are aware of the theoretical components of corruption as a phenomenon, we tried to use projective methods to find out what experiences of perception, counteraction or passive observation were revealed during online focus groups. Further questions were aimed at identifying various strategies that, according to respondents, could be successfully implemented to combat corruption (or at least significantly reduce its level). One of the key questions concerned the reasons for a person's unwillingness to “break” the so-called “corruption chain” of which he is a member. Status qualification questions are deliberately presented almost at the end, so that at the beginning of the interview the respondents do not get the impression that they want to de-anonymize them.

*The first block of our guide is conceptual.* It includes questions on the general definition of the phenomenon of corruption by respondents, namely what they consider corruption, what manifestations of this phenomenon, as well as the probable causes of its occurrence they can indicate. This will help to determine how well the participants of the online focus groups are aware of this topic and to find out exactly how they operationalize the phenomenon of corruption.

This block is also aimed at finding out whom (or what) the respondents make responsible for the level of corruption and the fight against it in Poland. As corruption in general has a negative impact on the state budget, reduces GDP, reduces the number of jobs, the consequences of all this are a decrease in tax revenues and a decrease in the level of trust in public authorities (Park and Lee, 2017). These aspects, institutional and systemic, include an analysis of laws and institutions for

defects, as well as an understanding of the phenomenon of corruption as a result of problems at the level of communication and interaction between government and society.

*The second block is experimental.* This block contains questions about the participation of respondents or their acquaintances in corruption. This block also includes questions related to the analysis of respondents' perceptions of the incentives and motivations of those people who in one way or another have experience of corruption (or observation of the latter).

*The block of questions to clarify the position of respondents on corruption.* This block contains questions aimed at finding out exactly how respondents see the further fight against corruption in Poland, as well as to find out what actions, in the opinion of the respondents, exactly will not help to overcome this phenomenon. It was important to find out what, in the opinion of the respondents, contributes to the "continuity" of the corruption chain, and what ways the respondents suggest for a more effective fight against corruption in Poland in the near future.

Focus groups are also used in the sociological study (Tobar-Pesántez and Solano-Gallegos, 2019). Before conducting such focus groups, the researcher has only a guess about what people are guided by before taking a certain position and forming an appropriate point of view. In this case, the purpose of focus groups is to develop a list of criteria for further confirmation or refutation of previous assumptions of the researcher (Vadlamannati et al. 2017; Shchekhovska et al. 2022).

Tasks (based on experience) allow to observe the "natural attitudes" of focus group participants. Natural attitudes are learned types of behaviour that are perceived by people as established. The closer people are related in public life (behaviour, preferences), the more common experience they will have.

At first glance, studies based on qualitative methodology seem quite straightforward and simple. This creates a false illusion about the use of quality methods: many people think this is not difficult, but in reality all is different (Jha and Sarangi, 2017). Before using the tools directly, the researcher must be thoroughly familiar with all aspects of data collection. As a result of the development of technologies, new tools have come to the aid of quality methods: digital video cameras and voice recorders, software for transcripts; this facilitates the transformation of data from one type to another and significantly saves the time of researchers. The today development of Internet platforms allows to use virtual online communication formats, which has significantly changed the ways of collecting quality data.

One of the most significant disadvantages of offline focus groups is the limited time and space, as it is necessary to determine the respondents who will be included, prepare and ensure their stay in the place of focus group study. There are a number of reasons why a large number of respondents are difficult to access: physical and economic inability of some respondents to be present, the lack of a single time period that would be comfortable for all focus group participants, or the lack of a location, which would be convenient for all in terms of logistics, respectively.

Studies conducted online has revealed the existence of a relationship between the respondent's behaviour in the virtual environment and in real life (Lisciandra and Millemaci, 2017). This is proof that the differences between the real and virtual worlds are blurring and becoming less significant. This allows to consider conducting online studies as "equal" to offline studies, i.e., the social interactions and benefits of focus group studies in the traditional sense can be transferred to the online environment.

Potential anonymity can help respondents to be more willing to express their views, especially when it comes to sensitive topics. On the other hand, one should take into account the fact that people may not pretend to be who they are, or not everyone will be willing to share online certain personal information with strangers. These factors should be taken into account, so if one pre-selects respondents, identifies them and carefully checks the questions (whether some of them are sensitive) one can avoid unwanted problems with online focus groups. Another advantage of the online format is that in this way it will be possible to involve in discussion respondents with whom it is difficult to organize live meetings (top-level specialists, government officials, in general, people who hold high positions and have very little free time).

In the case of online focus groups, as in the case of “face-to-face” focus groups, the method is to conduct a moderated discussion of a particular topic (Fazekas and Kocsis, 2020). At the same time, during offline focus groups, respondents may feel uncomfortable due to the constant awareness that they are being watched by someone they do not see. Online focus groups do not face this problem, although they also require all ethical requirements to be met, as do “face-to-face” focus groups.

Surveys of online focus group participants showed that respondents prefer to participate in this type of studies because it is much more convenient, as there is the possibility of flexible scheduling, and participation in the discussion can be taken directly from home or work.

Respondents of online focus groups noted that they remained anonymous during the online discussion, and noted a better focus on the topic of discussion than in the usual (offline) format, and the absence of visual factors associated with group discussions, which are usually distracting. Some participants claimed that the online discussion process itself was not as lively as during “face-to-face” focus groups. Online focus group studies have been criticized to a greater extent for their complexity (in terms of technological support of the discussion process), but over time technology has evolved and today there are many services that provide the possibility to conduct online focus groups, as well as software for collection and processing of the received information.

Most of the services for online focus group studies (VisionsLive Limited, Frieden Qualitative Services, Civicom) are not free, but instead they provide useful tools for both researchers and the client or observer. For example, these services propose the recruitment of researchers, assistants, moderators, and they also have software that helps to create guides, make transcripts, ask “quick questions”: if the focus group is conducted in the format of BBFGs, which will be described below, the program will offer pre-prepared incentive questions such as “Can you explain this in more detail, please?” or “Did you understand the question?”; researchers will be able to send with one click one of the required questions to the respondent when necessary. Additionally, such services make it possible to divide the screen into zones so that researchers and clients or observers can exchange information, comment on certain aspects in individual chats, without being distracted from observing the discussion and moderation.

In our study, several free services were combined and the researcher's screen was divided into zones (for each open program) in such a way as to create an environment similar to the interface of some paid services. This includes the simultaneous operation of Zoom (software for online video conferencing with the ability to record), Telegram (the free messenger for smartphones and personal computers will provide chat between the researcher, me, my supervisor and potential observers), and Safari (web-browser) for quick access to the Internet, if you will need any additional information during the discussion: translation, normative act, quantitative data). For convenience and to save space on the desktop of a personal computer, the guide will be printed out and pre-sent to the supervisor and observers.

The advantages of the selected method (online focus groups) are relatively more convenient and faster recruitment of respondents, more informal environment, which probably contributed to a more lively discussion, and respondents were more willing to give answers to sensitive questions due to higher anonymity of online focus group studies. One of the main disadvantages of online focus groups is the need for a stable and high-speed Internet connection (fortunately, in the process of the study this condition was met and there were no communication interruptions), as well as the need to provide respondents with means of communication (a smartphone or personal computer/laptop with a webcam and microphone). There were also no problems with this equipment, as each respondent had one of the above-mentioned gadgets, which they used to participate in online focus groups.

The sociological study includes the following components.

Survey of the population of Poland intended to study the general attitude of the population to corruption, to identify the prevalence of this phenomenon in general and in the area of provision of administrative services to the population. A total of 1,800 respondents were interviewed in all

voivodships in a sample representing the adult population of Poland (over 18 years of age) on such indicators as gender, age, education, type and region of residence.

Survey of entrepreneurs, in which entrepreneurs were asked to assess corruption risks in different situations of their activities and identify which of the proposed measures can reduce this corruption risk. A total of 400 entrepreneurs from different areas of entrepreneurial activity were interviewed, 50 entrepreneurs from each of the cities. Certainly, the sample does not represent the total number of Polish entrepreneurs (since a representative survey should be based on a single register of entrepreneurs, which, firstly, is absent, and secondly, such a survey would take a lot of time and money). However, the conducted survey of entrepreneurs is quite statistically convincing, as it represents entrepreneurs from different areas of entrepreneurial activity and from key regions of Poland.

Focus groups in 5 cities of Poland: Warsaw, Krakow, Lodz, Wroclaw, Poznan. The focus group discussions revealed the motivation of attitude of entrepreneurs to taking certain measures designed to reduce the risks of corruption in the areas of regulatory and supervisory activities.

## **Results**

In the current realities of world development, among the huge number of global problems on which the evolution of society depends, the problem of corruption is one of the main problems. This problem today is a hyperparasite that has many forms and manifestations and which infected almost all areas of society activities— management, production, finance, etc. Quite often one has to face this problem on the road, in schools, in medical institutions, in the work of the administrative staff, etc. As a result of the corruption of these institutions, citizens are, in fact, pushed out of the sphere of free mandatory public services, and such services become paid for them.

Corruption is becoming a serious deterrent significantly slowing down social, economic and political transformations and hampering the goal of sustainable development, the introduction of European living standards and gaining a leading position in the world. Also, corruption manifestations are an antagonist of a law-governed and democratic state, makes it impossible to implement the principle of priority of human and civil rights, adversely affects the spiritual component of society, exacerbates the ideological crisis, affects vital institutions, one of which is undoubtedly the civil service, and the actions of corrupt officials deal a devastating blow to the national system of human potential development.

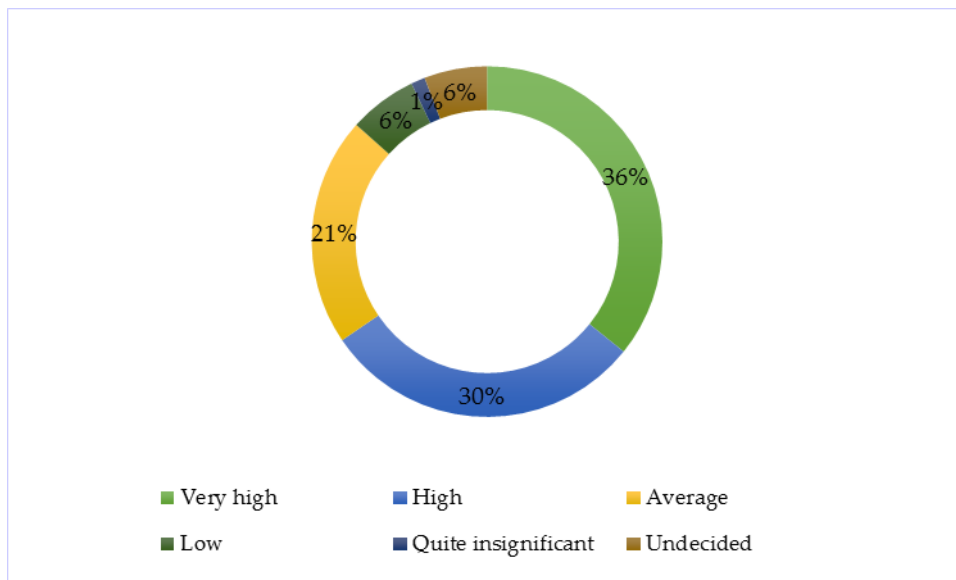
The absence of effective levers to fight corruption, the spread of corruption risks in almost all areas of public life, the loyal attitude of most citizens to corruption have led to the fact that corruption at all levels of government has paralysed reforms identified by the government as urgent and large-scale ones.

Today the problem of corruption exists in almost every country, and it poses a threat to both countries with stable economies and countries experiencing economic crisis. There is wide enough world experience in combating corruption, but society has not been able to cope with this serious problem. Even when states focused their efforts on building a constructive anti-corruption policy in the process of building civil society and were willing to fight it, the results of this work were not always positive and effective. However, without constant opposition, corruption tends to spread. That is why the implementation of a permanent anti-corruption policy, which should become an independent function of the state, is becoming more and more obvious for any state.

Of course, such a high level of corruption as recorded by international organizations is only a reflection of the perception of corruption within the country, which, in turn, reflects the objective situation of the spread of corruption.

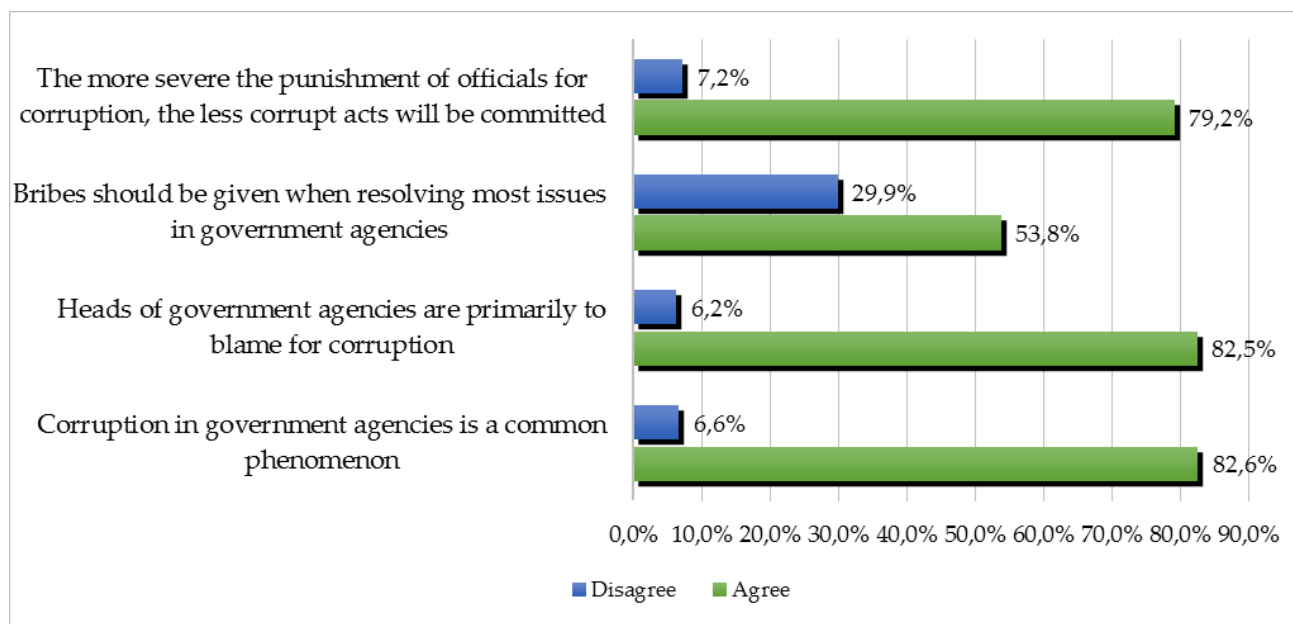
Public opinion polls confirm the fact that the perception of the prevalence of corruption in Poland is very high and remains stable.

Figure 1 presents the results of a social study — a survey of Polish entrepreneurs on the level of assessment of corruption in Poland.



**Figure 1. Results of a survey of entrepreneurs regarding the question “How would you assess the level of corruption in Poland?”**

As can be seen from Figure 1, the population consistently rates the level of corruption as “high” and “very high”. But the level of corruption is not decreasing, moreover, public opinion is increasingly inclined to assess corruption as “very high”. It turned out to be quite interesting that entrepreneurs assess the level of corruption more restrainedly, one in five entrepreneurs considers the level of corruption to be “average”, although among entrepreneurs the percentage of those who gave bribes during the year is significantly higher than among the general population. This may be explained by the fact that the assessments of the level of corruption by population were lower than the assessments of entrepreneurs related to personal experience of bribery. Among the population, 56 % of those who had to pay bribes in the last year identified the level of corruption in administrative bodies as very high, and among those who did not give any bribes during this time 44 % also consider the level of corruption to be very high.



**Figure 2. Public assessment of the situation with corruption in Poland**

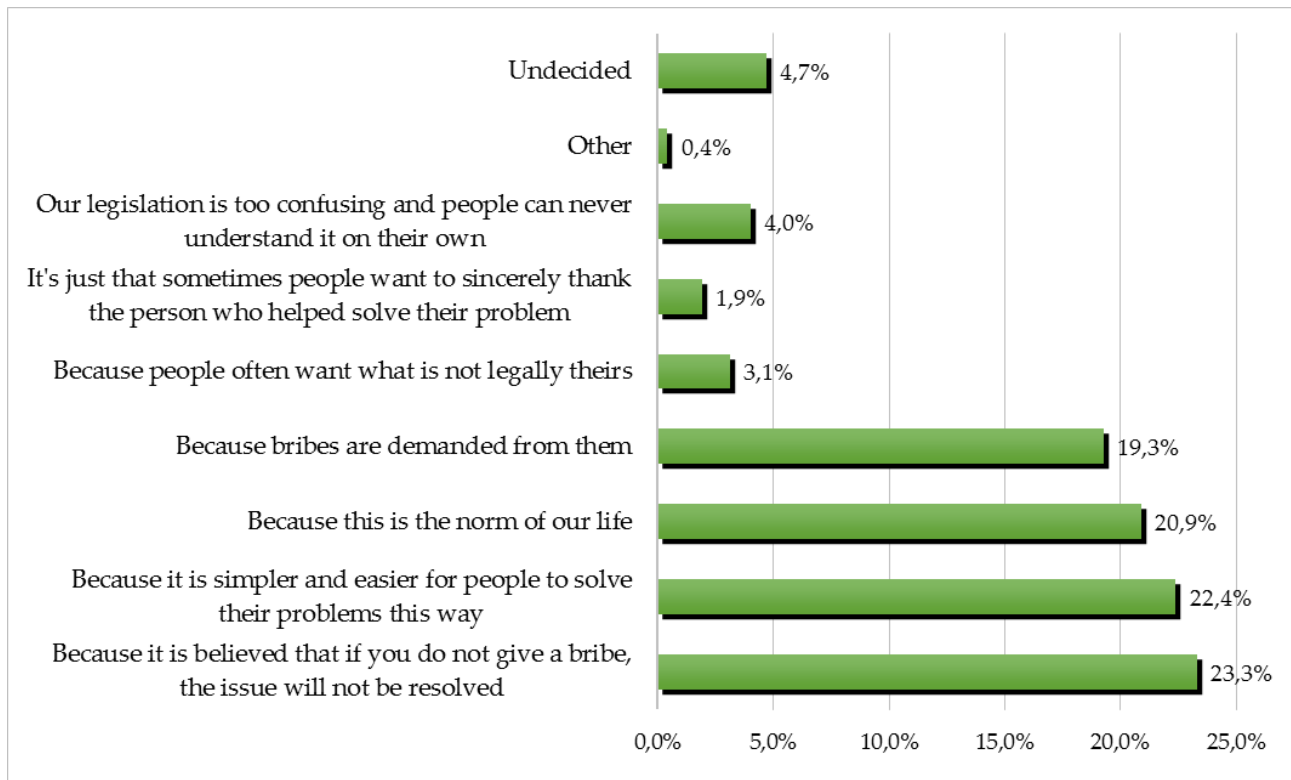
Among entrepreneurs, the assessments are much more dependent on their own experience: among those who gave bribes during the year, 53 % consider the level of corruption to be very high,

and among those who did not have to give any bribes — only 15 % do so. Among those entrepreneurs who did not give bribes during the year, 27 % rated the level of corruption in Poland as average, and 15 % — as low. It can be concluded that the assessments of entrepreneurs are based more on their own experience, and those of the population — on stereotypes.

At the same time, experts involved in the study also believe that the level of corruption in Poland is very high, and some of the experts described the situation as “critical” and “favourable to corruption”. The population is already used to seeing corruption as a usual and almost common phenomenon, as part of their lives. This is evidenced by a comparison of the results of public opinion polls (Figure 2).

The population believes that corruption in government is a usual phenomenon and that it is primarily the fault of government officials. At the same time, it is extremely positive that there is a significant reduction in the belief that it is necessary to give bribes to solve most issues in government authorities. Intransigence in the attitude to corruption of officials whom the population seeks to punish as severely as possible has also increased, with punishment being seen as the main method of combating corruption.

It should be stressed that the population mainly blames the government and its representatives for bribery. At the same time, the question of why people give bribes has revealed a wide range of motivations, which go far beyond the usual accusation of officials. Actually, the answer “because they demand” was given only by 19 % of respondents (Figure 3).

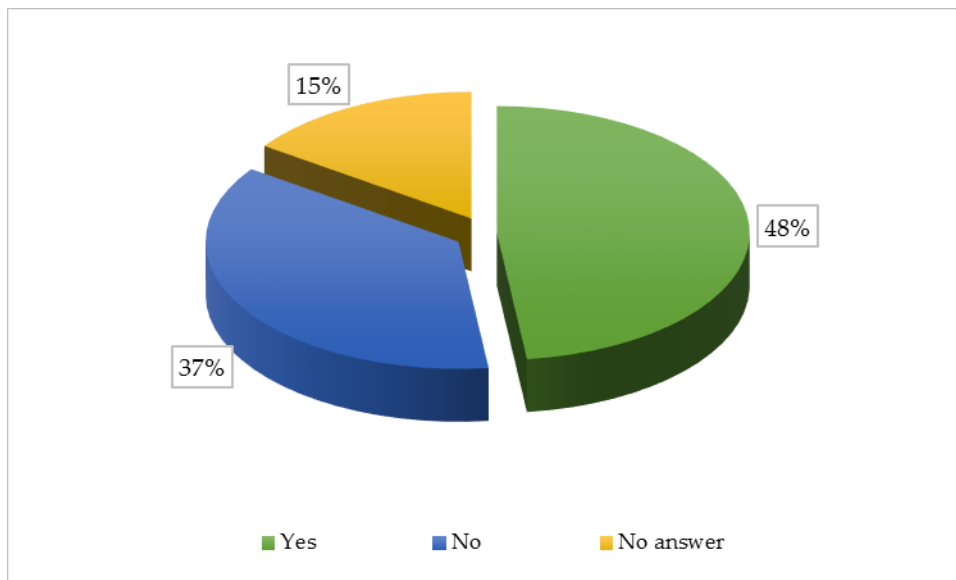


**Figure 3. Results of survey regarding the question “Why do you think people give bribes?”**  
(%, answers are ranked)

And the reasons cited by more than two-thirds of respondents are not forced, but “initiative” bribes, when people on their own initiative give a bribe in advance, because it is “normal”, because it is “faster and easier to solve the problem” this way. So, the causes of corruption are much deeper and more serious than just the dishonesty of officials. Large-scale corruption changes the very culture and morals of society, when bribery, even if it does not turn into a positive phenomenon, but is generally tolerated. Corruption is prevalent primarily where bribery is a tradition, and it is very difficult to fight corruption where people are simply accustomed to solving problems with the help of bribes.



The notion that corruption is the “norm” of life and the usual way of solving problems did not arise out of nowhere. The study found that the scale of bribery is extremely large in the country: during the last 12 months, 28 % gave a bribe (either forced services or forced gifts) in a survey of the population and even more people (48 %) did so in a survey of entrepreneurs (Figure 4).



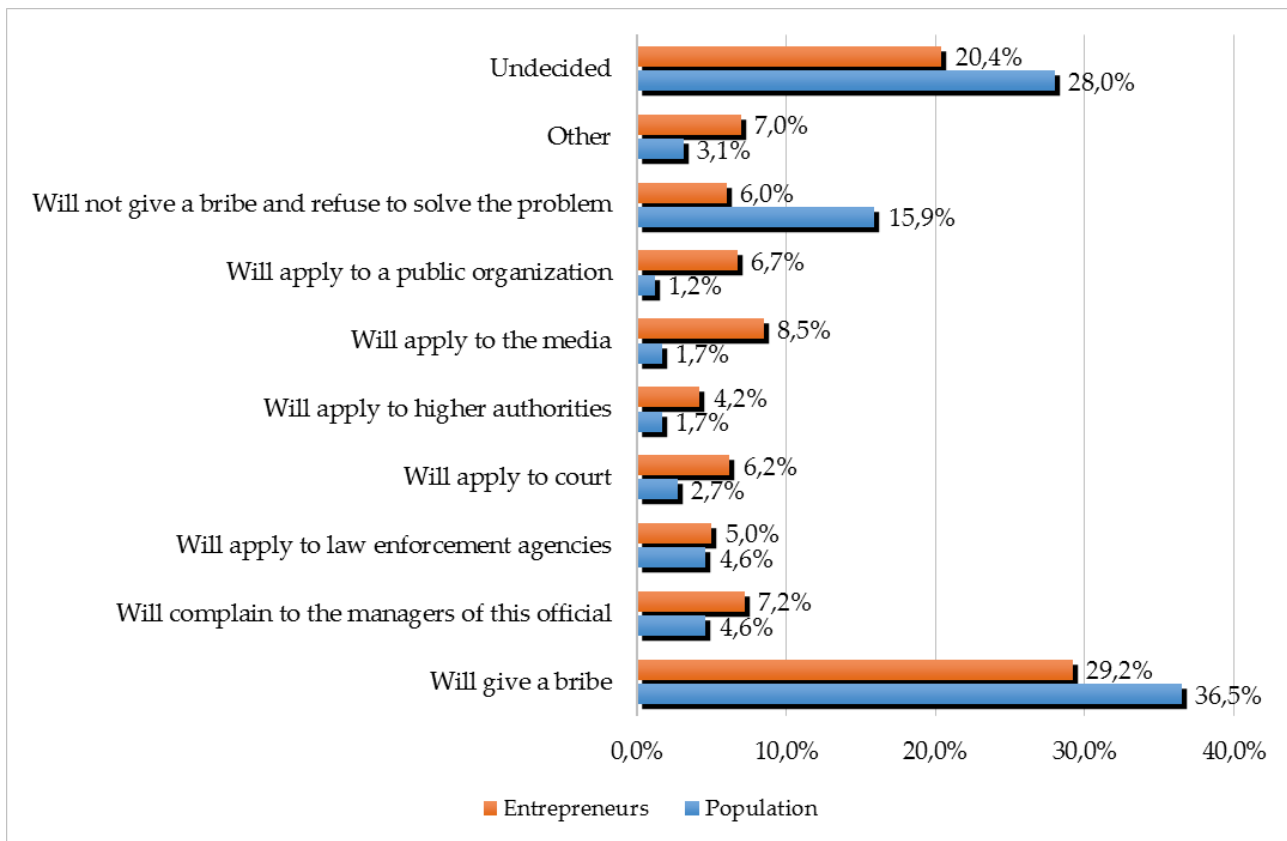
**Figure 4. Results of survey regarding the question “Have you personally or your family members had to give bribes within the last 12 months** (forced to provide some services on the principle of “you — me, I — you” or “give any gifts”, etc.)

It should be noted that the “corruption activity” is evenly distributed among the population of different regions, in urban and rural areas. Young and middle-aged people are somewhat more noticed in bribery, while the oldest ones are less so. The spread of bribery is slightly higher among the population with average financial status, but even people with the lowest financial status also have to give bribes or forced gifts.

In the national-wide survey, among all social groups entrepreneurs had to give bribes most often (44 %), which is almost the same percentage as evidenced by the survey of entrepreneurs (47 %). So, the main focus on entrepreneurs and the conditions of their activities in the fight against corruption and bribery is fully justified.

Entrepreneurs were not asked about “household” types of corruption, as regarding this group it was important to find out which types of corruption are most common in their business activities. It is obvious that bribes and forced “gifts” or “services” are also often observed in the most common business situations: Obtaining certificates and various permits from the authorities, registration of cars, interactions with the tax inspection, inspections. In other situations bribery is less frequent, and not all entrepreneurs resort to these types of services: When obtaining a building permit and when obtaining land, in courts and prosecutor's office, when passing customs control. At the same time, it is noteworthy that only a small number of entrepreneurs paid bribes when renting premises, possibly due to the fact that in the current crisis the deficit for this type of services has disappeared and the premises can be rented without a bribe. Allocation of land plots and building licensing has been identified by experts as the most “corrupt” areas. In the field of control activities as an area of “increased risk” standardization bodies were mentioned, because in most cases there are no state-approved standards, so “you can always find fault with something”.

The survey also included this important question: what will the respondents do if they are asked to give a bribe? The question is important to find out how much people are willing (at least in their intentions) to fight bribery.



**Figure 5. Results of the survey of the population and entrepreneurs for the question “If you are asked to give a bribe to solve your question, how will you act”**

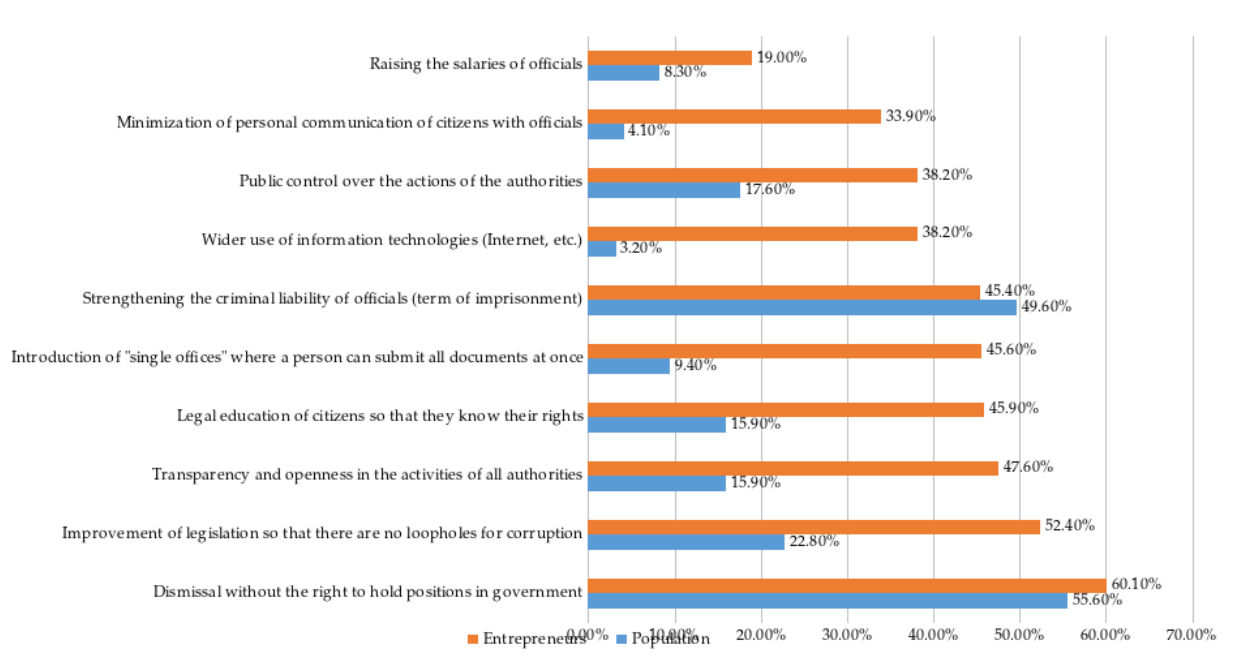
The results presented in Figure 5 are impressive. Among the population, more than a third unequivocally, without any resistance, will give a bribe, another third does not know what to do in this case, and 16 % will not give a bribe, but will not do anything, just refuse to solve their problem. And even for such actions as a complaint to the management, appeals to the media or to public organizations, only a few percent are ready. That is, it can be stated that the population is practically unwilling to do anything at all in the fight against corruption, even such non-threatening actions as appealing to the media or to higher authorities.

The main advantages of the developed tools are that we were able to identify the specifics of the perception of corruption, as well as to learn ways to solve the problem with this phenomenon in Poland (with justifications), which are proposed. Compared to other tools, such as those used by Transparency International (through which they learn the assessments of corruption by experts and entrepreneurs), the one we have developed takes into account the views of social groups.

Transparency International has developed global and universal recommendations for all governments to reduce corruption and respond more effectively to future crises, which are as follows: ensure the independence, capacity and funding of supervisory and anti-corruption institutions so that resources reach those who need them; ensure open and transparent contracting for the sake of fair prices, the fight against illegal actions and the identification of conflicts of interest; protect democracy and promote the development of civil society in order to create conditions for government accountability; publish relevant data and guarantee access to information so that the public receives simple, accessible, timely and meaningful information.

It should be noted that standardized questionnaires do not allow the use of projective methods (although not the type of average portrait of a corrupt official, as shown by the testing of our tools). The method of selecting respondents is also an advantage (when everyone selects a partner to discuss corruption in online focus groups). This provided a comfortable atmosphere for discussion, which facilitated the free expression of opinions and allowed to better identify the

perception of corruption by respondents, as well as provided an opportunity to share own experience in the context of this phenomenon.



**Figure 6. Results of the survey of the population and entrepreneurs for the question “What do you think can be the most effective methods in the fight against corruption?”**

(the number of answers was not limited, the results were ranked by the answers of entrepreneurs)

The advantages also include the fact that, despite the quarantine restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we were able to test the tools in a way, which is not quite usual for national sociology (namely, with the help of online focus groups). The “guessed acquaintance” method proved to be effective, as respondents felt more relaxed when talking not about themselves but about others (or projecting their experience on others). The disadvantage of our methodology, in my opinion, is that online focus groups require special equipment and access to high-speed Internet (which is not always possible). Disadvantages also include questions in the guide that need to be refined, changed or removed altogether, for example, the question of a typical corrupter has proved ineffective, so there is no need to use it in future studies.

According to the results of a study of the experience of the least corrupt countries of the world (Ricardo and Muñoz, 2019), it is safe to say that if society has no public demand to fight corruption and citizens perceive it as perfectly acceptable, then any way to solve corruption problems on the side of the state will not provide the expected effect, moreover, will clearly demonstrate the inability of state institutions to solve them. Therefore, when taking anti-corruption measures, it is important to keep in mind that the success of combating corruption and the shadow economy is possible only with the conscious mass support of society itself, which can be achieved only with a high level of trust in the government.

In the context of updating research on the moral aspects of corruption, it should be stressed that the moral and ethical atmosphere prevailing in society has a strong influence on its level.

Accordingly, when considering the situation with corruption as a moral phenomenon, socio-political institutions should use tools and methods aimed at changing thinking and public consciousness. In countries where bribery and other acts of corruption are rare, in the public consciousness corruption is associated with great harm to the state and its citizens and has no significant impact on public life (Charron, 2016). And in countries where corruption is widespread, corrupt relations are increasingly displacing legal, ethical relations between people, corruption from a social anomaly is gradually becoming a “rule” and is a common way of solving life's problems, is becoming the norm of government and the way of life of much of society (Ariely and Uslaner,

2017). The most dangerous consequence of this state of affairs in society is that as a result of the displacement of legal and ethical relations by corrupt relations there occurs a significant break in social psychology: from the very beginning people in their behaviour are psychologically set up for illegal ways of solving problems.

The particularly dangerous impact of corruption is manifested in the undermining of the moral foundations of society by distorting the ethical values, interests and needs of individual citizens and persons performing public functions (Li et al. 2016). This property is the basis and negative background for further determination of corrupt behaviour.

In the practical implementation of anti-corruption mechanisms of moral and ideological orientation, it is important to understand the fact that corruption begins to surrender when the influence of the law is reinforced by moral condemnation and moral intolerance towards those who use their official position for personal gain. Only then corruption phenomena acquire a pronounced negative emotional colour.

### **Discussion**

Accordingly, the prospects for development, viability and legitimacy of the political system of a country largely depend on the extent to which public institutions and civil servants meet the moral and ethical values and ideals formed in society, and their behaviour meets the norms of public morality.

In the conditions of introduction of the basic elements of market economy, technological and methodical integration and interaction of public authorities with commercial structures, civil servants should not lose the specific features qualitatively distinguishing them from representatives of other organizations and public institutes — to serve public interests and interests of citizens, do good to people and faithfully defend the interests of the country.

In order to avoid conflicts of interest and to ensure such “service” in the conditions of change, it is necessary to pay special attention to the processes of formation of moral principles and values of employees (Wang, 2016). Otherwise, the civil service is inevitably subject to corruption and other abuses related to the ability to dispose of economic and administrative resources.

In addition, for a long time in Poland there is a crisis of confidence in almost all state institutions, which necessitates increasing attention to the moral aspect of civil service. As the trust of citizens is one of the fundamental foundations of democracy.

It is quite unfortunate that in Poland many officials have a vague or distorted view of the professional ethics of a civil servant, or treat it with contempt. Those who seek to be guided by the norms of office morality and direct internal and external resources to achieve the desired result for the benefit of society are forced to constantly resist the destructive phenomena of the existing bureaucratic system.

Therefore, it was very important to create a special mechanism for monitoring compliance with ethical standards, which takes into account the specifics of the moral regulation of behaviour.

### **Conclusion**

Researchers usually define corruption as abuse of office, intervention in the mechanism of government, as well as a phenomenon that destroys human values. Corruption is also characterized as a person's desire to satisfy his ambitions by gaining power and improper advantage, which pushes the values and norms of morality into the background.

A toolkit for the study of the perception of corruption has been developed, which corresponds to modern Polish realities and also includes elements that, as of today, determine the objective component of this phenomenon. The developed guide consists of three blocks: a conceptual block, experimental block, and a block of questions to clarify the attitude of respondents to corruption. Each block helps to better understand and describe the multifaceted phenomenon of corruption from different points of view: beginning from general information on corruption, and ending with own experience and particular proposals for combating (partial or complete) corruption in Poland.

From the testing of our method, we learned that Poles share similar beliefs about how to define the phenomenon of corruption, and, in their view, it is mainly an abuse of power, often for own benefit. Respondents generally do not approve of appointments to relatives, friends or acquaintances; they are ready to accept it positively only on condition that the candidate passes the transparent selection procedure provided by the legislation. Respondents tend to consider a person who is prone to bribery in exchange for receiving or providing services that depends on the authority granted to that person to be corrupt, with the majority of respondents sharing the opinion that almost all citizens were involved in corruption in one way or another. The prevailing opinion among the respondents was that corruption is a systemic problem, so it requires a systemic solution: improving legislation, ensuring openness of information and effective work of the media (coverage of events without censorship), changing the system of distribution of goods, changing the perception and attitude to corruption at the cultural level.

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