



# PUBLIC OPINION ON CORRUPTION

NATIONAL PUBLIC OPINION CENTRE

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## Sociological analysis

### The Public Concepts of Corruption

Recently corruption turned out to be a modern topic of discussion. Transferring the outbursts of public energy to corruption is actually making use of a hyper effective social vent. However, one should be careful when handling the data from public opinion surveys. There is a substantial difference between “statements” and “assumptions”, between “it is said that corruption exists” and “corruption is proved to exist”. Not that corruption does exist, but it is often being mythologized. Mass public perceptions are often formed indirectly. Living in corrupt environment as well as being a side in the corruption process are factors that strongly influence one’s concepts about this phenomenon. The interpretations of the corruption issue are sometimes used in favor of political forces.

#### The most common definitions of corruption

The most often used definitions of corruption have taken the place of the cliches from the time when corruption was thought a convention, a well hidden “alternative way of living”. Nowadays conventions are pointless and associations are direct and clear-cut: a lie, an abuse, a theft, bribe taking, a speculation, blackmailing. The sides in the corruption process are clearly defined: the one offering the bribe and the one taking the bribe. Vulgarization of corruption itself brings archetypal and pragmatic notions of it.

Nowadays corruption is most often interpreted by the general public as a series of interactions: “they want – I give”, “I want – I get”. 97% of the people interviewed believe that the most precise definition of corruption is “accepting a bribe”. Other two follow this definition: “soliciting a bribe” and “offering a bribe”. Less possible definitions of corruption are such as: “general decay of morals” – for 60% of the interviewed or “misusing information” – for 52% of the interviewed. Hardly 39% are inclined to accept “exchanging favors” as a definition of corruption.

While part of the interviewed is aggressively disposed against corruption, the other larger part lives with the awareness of helplessness and reconciliation to corruption.

90% of the interviewed agree with the statement that: “Most people reject corruption but pay bribes in order to be served”. More than 80% think that people, who accept bribes, do so because they don't feel subjected to punishment.

The reasons for these public perceptions are substantially different. Poor and less educated people overestimate corruption as an out of reach privilege. People with high standard of living, education and position form their opinion on the basis of being better acquainted with the corrupt environment.

#### 2/3 of Sofia residents is familiar with corruption as a phenomenon

When answering the question “Since when does corruption exist in our country” the interviewed residents of Sofia say that it has always existed. For 1/5 of the interviewed corruption dates back to 1989 and 9% believe that corruption has come into being for the last 2-3 years.

Poor people consider corruption a kind of a privilege for surviving. Besides, the public opinion shares more traditional notions about corruption, considering it a privilege of the rich and the authorized.

In the corruption process there are always two equally guilty sides. That is what 52% of the interviewed residents of Sofia believe. The greater part of the rest (those who do not share the assertion of the “equal guilt”), are inclined to blame the person accepting the bribe, rather than the one offering the bribe.

Which is a better cause for a person to be corrupt – the lack of morals or the lack of money? Most of the interviewed find it difficult to make a choice. 43% point both the lack of morals and money as equally sound causes for being corrupt. A greater part of the rest, who do not share the latter statement, assesses the lack of money a much better reason for a person to be corrupt as opposed to the lack of morals.

Half of the poor think that poverty itself is the reason for corruption in Bulgaria. The interviewed, working in the field of administration and the judicial system however think that corruption originates from the lack of morals.

Hardly 0.4% consider corruption limited.

### **The expectations for the future spread of corruption are not optimistic**

44% of the interviewed do not expect any change in the rate of corruption occurrence in the near future. Among the ones forecasting some change dominate the residents of Sofia who estimate that corruption is going to spread.

The expectations for the corruption levels in the future are strongly influenced by the assessment of its intensity at present. Half of the people assessing today's rate of corruption as "very high", expect it to increase in the near future.

According to the data from this survey, being optimistic about the limitation of corruption is actually forecasting its staying at the present level.

Half of the people assessing that corruption is going to decrease are aware of the relation between this tendency and the necessity of quick integration of the country in the European structures.

### **Corruption practices are legitimate in the eye of the public**

The public opinion shares the notion that the most common way for soliciting a bribe in Bulgaria is by deliberately delaying the service you have asked for and thus prompting you to pay. 22% believe that a bribe is being most often solicited by telling you directly how much and to whom to pay. 12% claim that a bribe is being solicited through an intermediary. However every tenth person usually "knows that we have to pay".

Two are the most frequently mentioned reasons for corruption: the possibility for public officials to obtain illegal benefit as well as the lack of effective anti-corruption measures and sanctions. However 19% of the interviewed consider the "weaknesses of the legislation" as the most important reason for corruption, for 18% such reason is "the possibility for public officials to obtain illegal benefit" and for 17% - "the lack of effective measures and sanctions".

According to the interviewed "weaknesses of the legislation", means: legal imperfections, which make it possible to adopt corruption generating practices in the newly enforced laws and the regulations for their implementation (that is why part of the interviewed talks about

"corruption by condition"); the extremely feeble sanctions provided for violating the laws; the lack of a law directly treating the process of combating corruption.

It is indicative that 79% of the people believing that the weaknesses of the legislation are the most significant reason for corruption share the opinion that the Parliament itself can play a decisive role in the process of decreasing corruption.

### **Zones of effect of corruption**

Referring to the data one can define the zones of effect of corruption by fields and activities.

To the zone of "the very high levels of corruption" belong the following fields and activities: judicial system - 90%, trade - 90%, the police - 90%, import and export of goods - 89%, privatization - 89%.

To the zone of "the high levels of corruption" belong healthcare - 83%, tax administration - 81%, license issuing - 75%, education - 68%, sport - 63%.

To the zone of "the mediocre corruption" belong the media.

### **The image of the corrupt civil servant**

In the mass public notions the corrupt civil servant is young, usually “politically backed” and by rule having private business. The assessments vary significantly from generation to generation. Young people interviewed claim that older civil servants are more corrupt, while older people interviewed on the contrary claim young servants as more corrupt.

### **Corruption practices and personal strategies of reaction against corruption**

54% of the people interviewed point out that no bribe was solicited neither from them personally nor from a relative of theirs for the last year. In this respect people working in the field of education and science can be defined “clean”.

Half of the residents of Sofia however live in an extremely aggressive corrupt environment. 19% point out that they were personally asked a bribe, 18% - that bribes were solicited from relatives of theirs, and 10% report that for the last year bribes were solicited both from them and from relatives of theirs. For the last year most bribes were personally solicited from those of the interviewed who work in the fields of trade and tourism. Every third person occupying managing position claims that they were personally solicited a bribe. Most often bribes were solicited from people with high living standard and in active workable age - between 30 and 50.

There exists a straight dependency between the assessments of the corruption occurrence rate and the personal experience of the people interviewed.

2/3 of the people who were solicited a bribe share the opinion that corruption in our country is of “very high” rate of occurrence. While at the same time hardly 40% of the interviewed who were never solicited a bribe estimate corruption occurrence rate as “very high”.

Most often the interviewed have paid bribes for healthcare - 36%, for license, certificate or other kind of documentation issuing - 33%, to avoid a police sanction - 26%. Most rarely the residents of Sofia have paid bribes for a customs service - 9% and to disengage from military service or the reserve troops - 3%.

### **Citizens' participation and/in the process of combating corruption**

76% of all interviewed wouldn't undertake any action if they were found to witness an act of bribery. This is quite a clear argument in favor of the assertion that the awareness of helplessness and reconciliation to corruption has become dominant to the active attitude and the process of combating corruption.

Those who have after all decided to give publicity of a witnessed act of corruption prefer the anonymous letter to the direct contact with the police or the media. Hardly 4% would dare to announce the act of bribery they have witnessed in the media.

To the question: “How would you react if you were offered a bribe?” 18% give no respond by actually hiding themselves behind the answer: “Cannot assess”. Hardly 7% of the interviewed confess that they would accept the bribe, while another 18% would also accept the bribe if only it were worth the risk. Therefore every fourth person does not reject the possibility of directly taking part in the corruption process.

Which people wouldn't definitely reject taking a bribe? These are in the first place the people living in misery and in the second place - the young people.

90% of the people who would take a bribe claim that if they unintentionally witnessed an act of bribery they wouldn't undertake any action (because of distrust that it could produce an effect, because of apathy or because they fear being affected/coming to harm).

### **How should corruption be penalized?**

The answers of this question are being derived from the opinion of the sanctions to be imposed in three example situations of corruption. 1/2 of Sofia residents appeal to dismissal and a prohibition from holding public office for a policeman if he has taken money from a drunken driver instead of depriving him from his driving license. 1/3 wants a head of a state company appointing relatives to be dismissed and

prohibited from holding public office. 1/5 however shares the opinion that no penalty is needed in this case.

Besides a dismissal and a prohibition from holding public office an imprisonment is also recommended in the case of a public official accepting money in exchange of a permission for privatization of business establishment/firm.

### **Possibilities for curbing corruption**

2/3 of the interviewed think that should state institutions be willing enough to work and exercise their authority, the present level of corruption can be kept unaltered and even decreased.

To this end new laws for combating corruption should be adopted first. Secondly, fixed charges for administrative services should be determined and third - the civil society should be engaged in the process of combating corruption and the media should reflect civil society's interests.

### **Who could possibly decrease corruption in Bulgaria?**

The public opinion primarily confides in the judicial system - 83%, the government - 75%, the Parliament - 74%, the police - 70%. There also exist high expectations for the media's potentialities. According to 42% yet the media could contribute to the process of combating corruption.

The general public expects from those having in their possession the levers of governing to cope with corruption. On the other hand however the authorities are thought to be a typical corrupt environment. In this respect the general public's opinion gravitates towards the one or the other face of power. Equal percentage of the residents of Sofia think that the state is going to stay within the power of corruption and that the state is going to stand for the process of combating corruption. However, for the time being Sofia residents are not ready to identify themselves as a side in this process. The probable reason for this is because they do not know whom are they going to cooperate with.

Figure 1

Did anyone solicit a bribe from you or from your relatives last year?

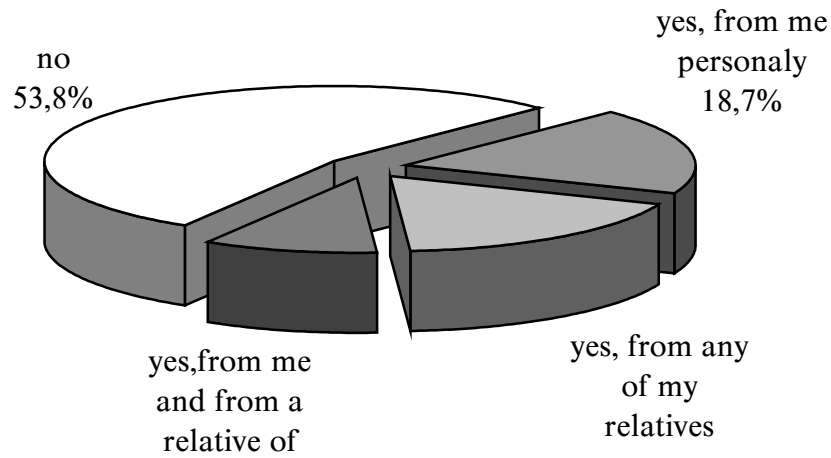


Figure 2

Have you ever paid a bribe for:

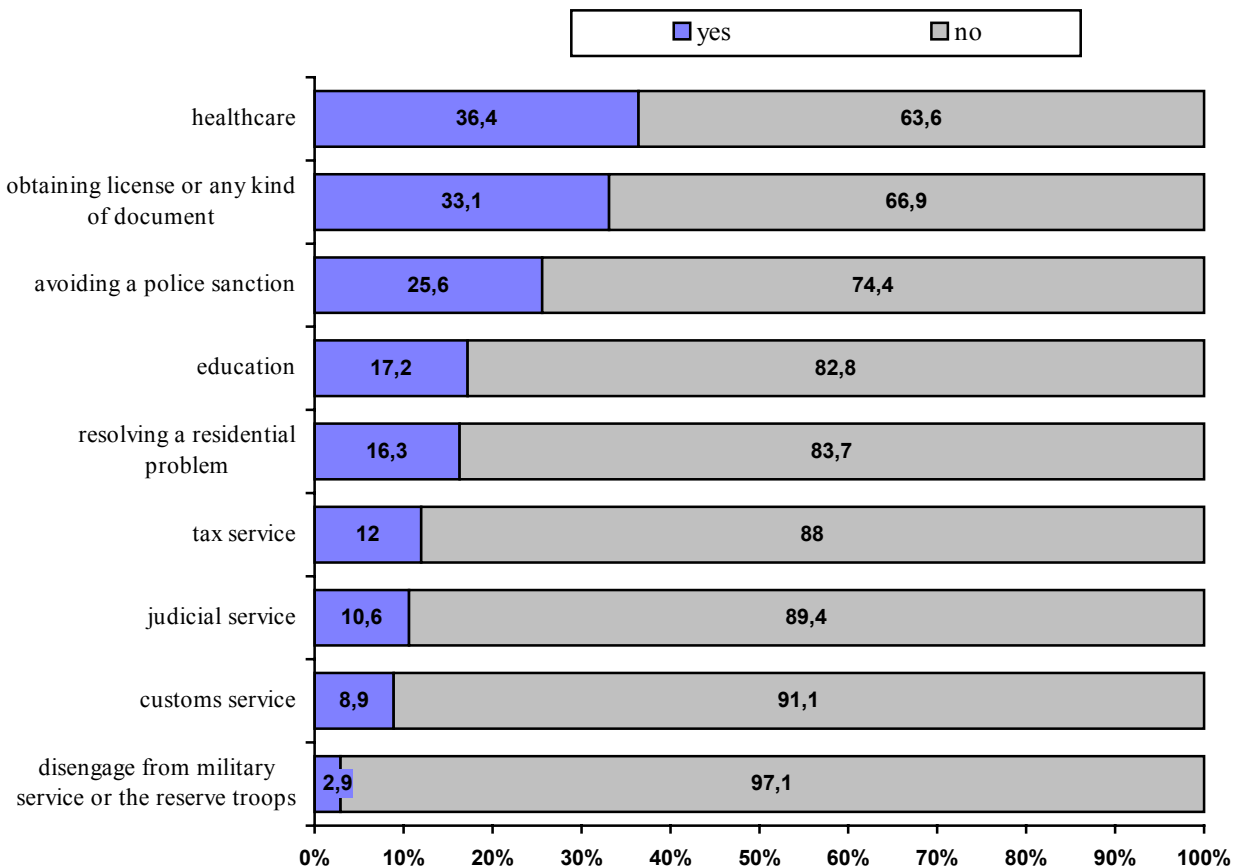


Figure 3

According to you what is the rate of corruption occurrence in our country?

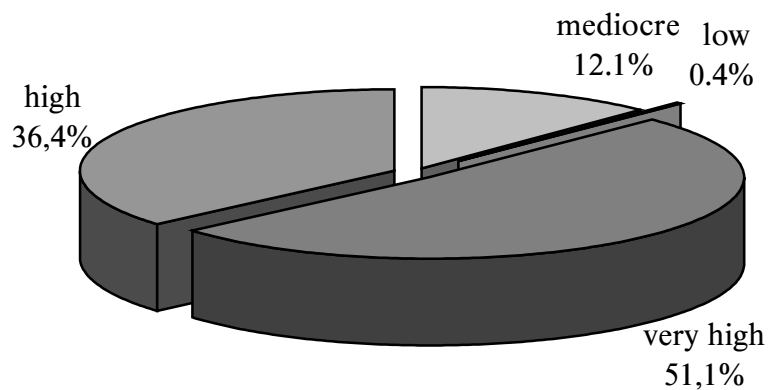


Figure 4

Is corruption going to spread or is it going to decrease in the near future?

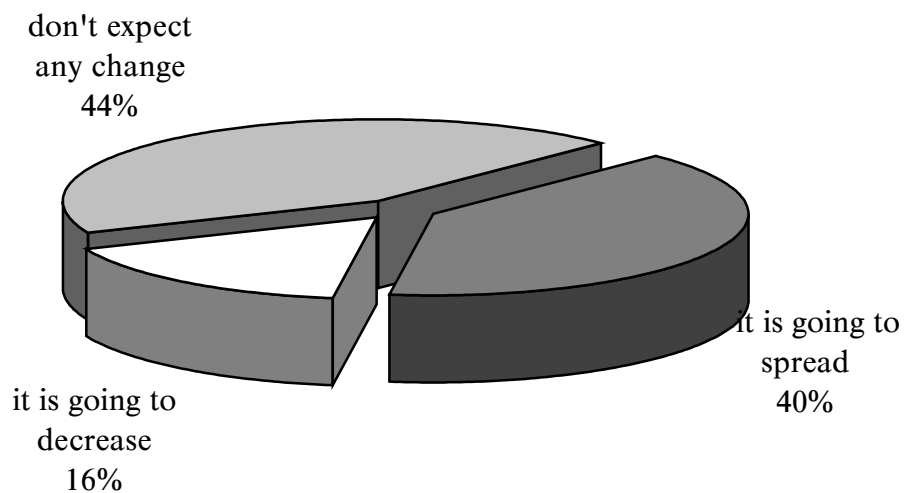


Figure 5

Which is the most important reason for corruption?

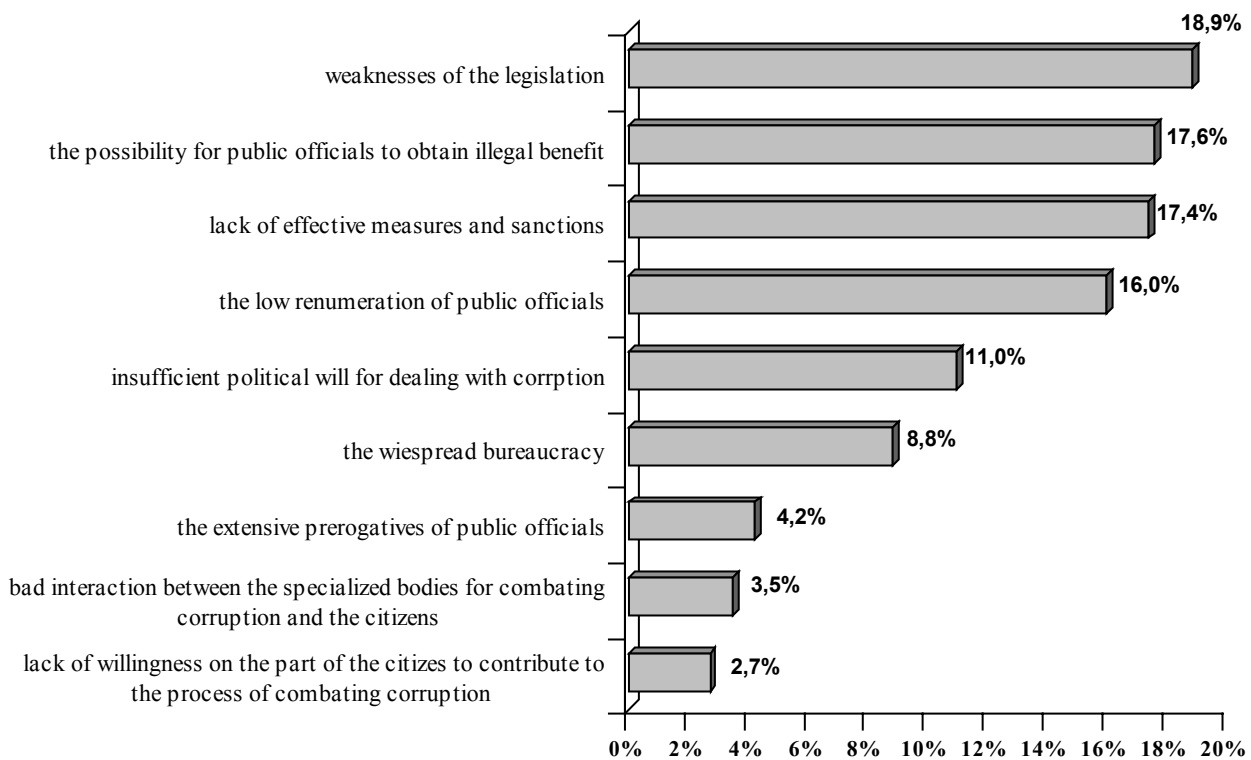




Figure 6

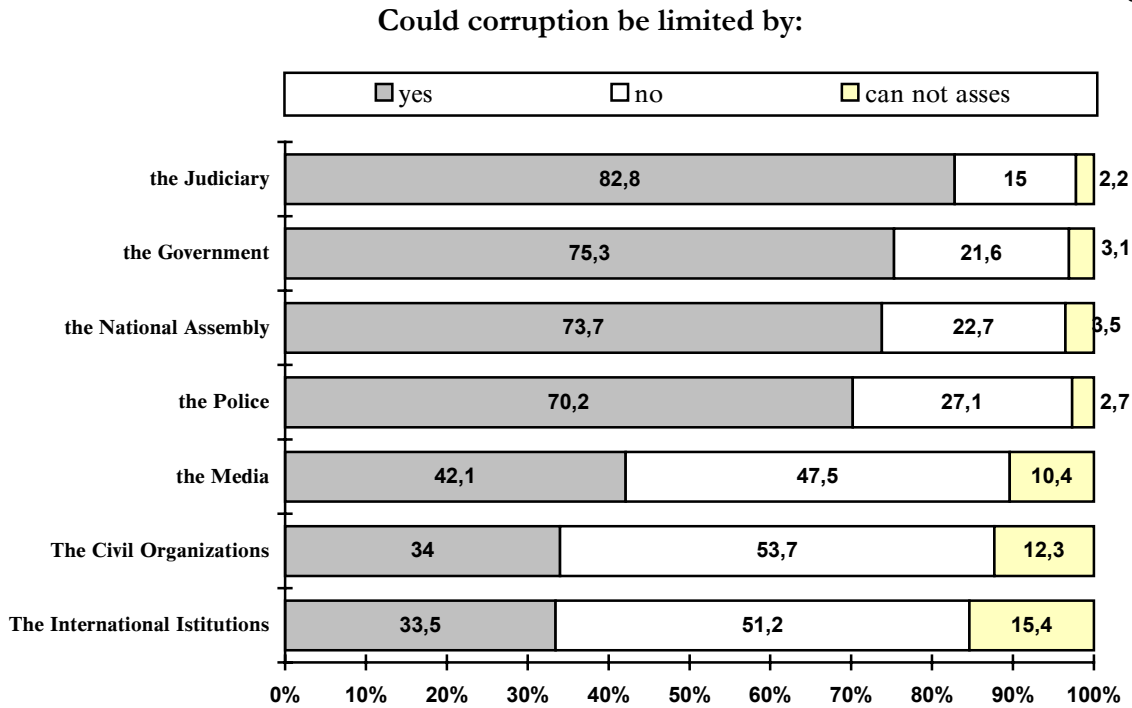


Figure 7

The person offering the bribe or the person taking the bribe is guiltier?

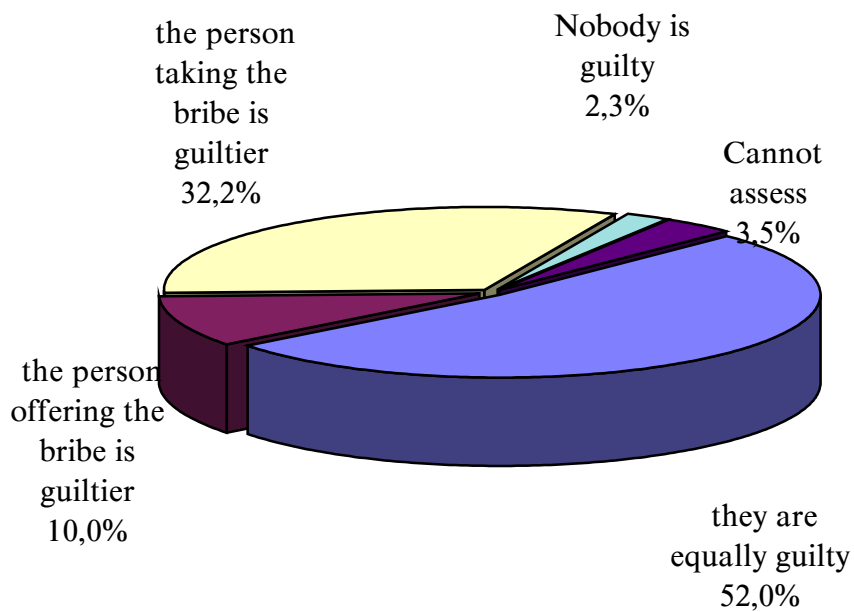


Figure 8

Which do you think is the most common way for soliciting a bribe?

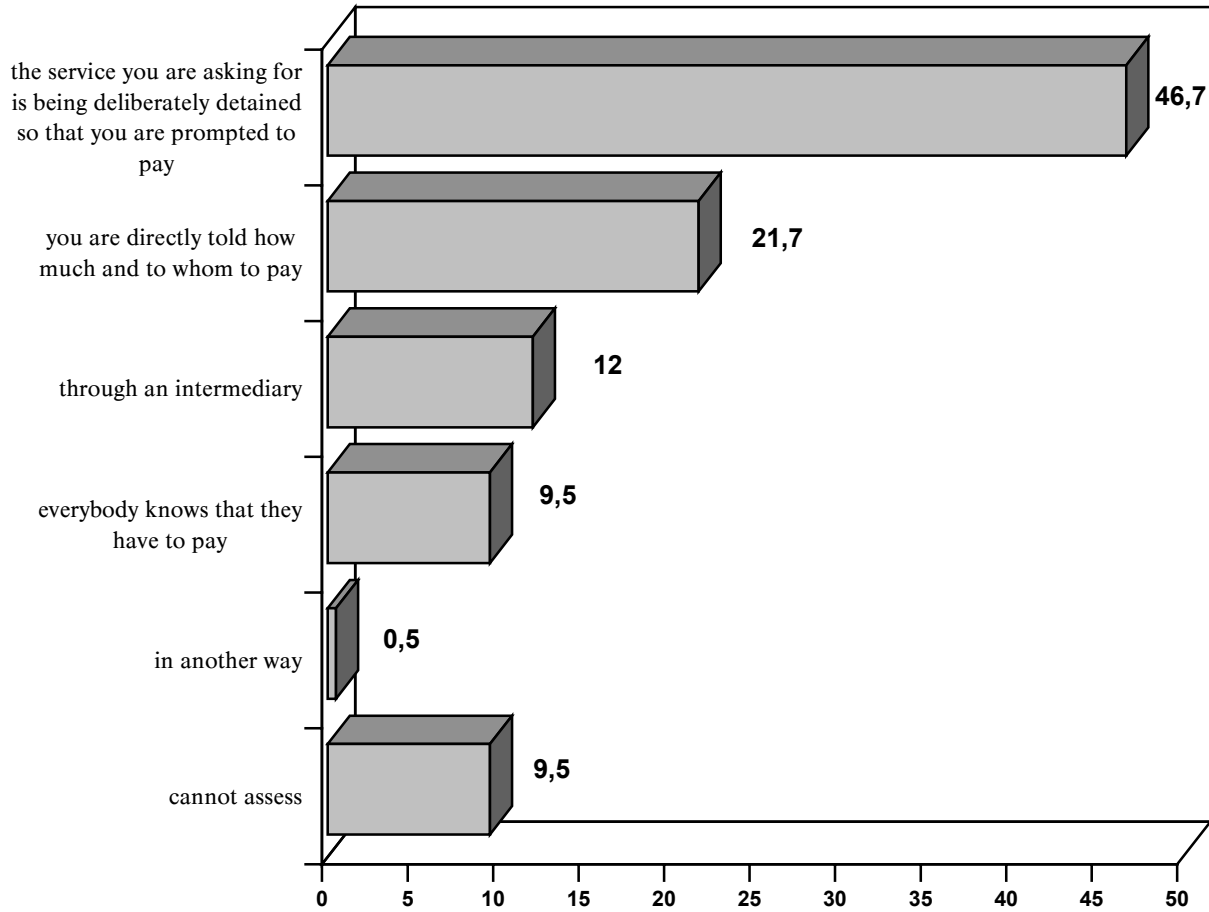


Figure 9

How would you react if you were offered a bribe?

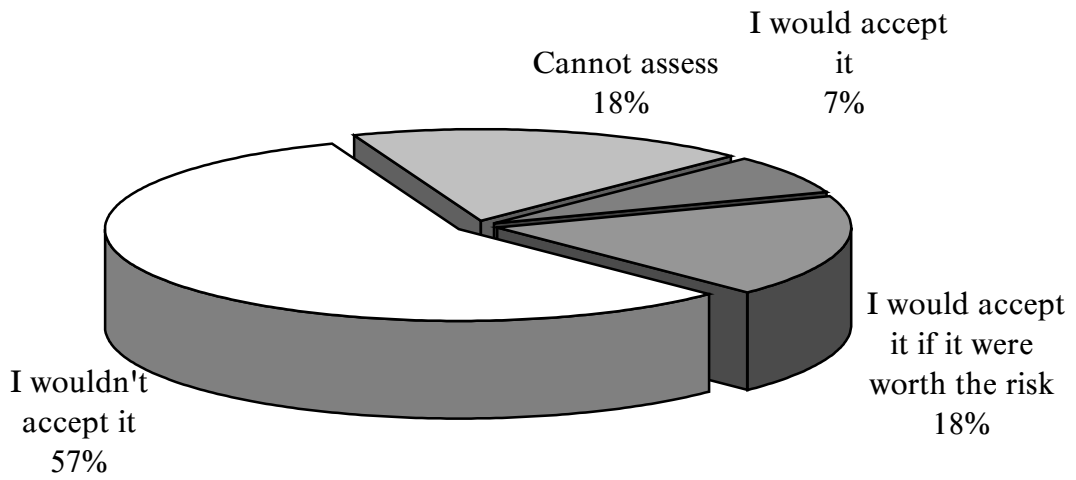


Figure 10

Which is the cause for a person to be corrupt – the lack of morals or the lack of money?

