



Corruption is rampant and has become more entrenched in all areas of life in Afghanistan, and the Afghan government is under increased pressure to address the issue. Demands for action from within Afghan society, as well as from the international community, have reached an unprecedented level. The concerns expressed by voices within Afghanistan may slightly differ from those of the international community. However, both are based on the assumption that corruption derails the fundamental gains of Afghanistan achieved since the end of 2001. Corruption threatens the legitimacy of state-building, badly affects state-society relations, feeds frustration and the support for the insurgency, leads to increasing inequality (which spurs social conflict), violates basic human rights on a daily basis and impedes the rule of law according to Afghan standards, hinders access to basic public services, which impacts the poor most severely, and has a major negative effect on economic development.

Methodology and approach

This is the second corruption survey produced by Integrity Watch Afghanistan (IWA) in a continuous effort to increase transparency, integrity and accountability through policy-oriented research. The survey was conducted at the end of 2009 in 32 provinces of Afghanistan and is the first truly national corruption survey. Previous surveys, both by IWA and other agencies, have covered only parts of Afghanistan's population and geography. IWA's first corruption survey, published in 2007, covered 13 provinces; data were collected in these provinces in autumn 2006. The choice of a limited number of provinces at that time resulted from a lack of funding.

IWA has paid special attention to generating comparable data and analysis and highlighting commonalities or differences between the results of the two surveys throughout this report, bearing in mind the difference in geographical coverage. However, because of the refined methodology of the more recent survey, the stronger focus on experiences rather than perceptions and the wider thematic scope (among other changes), comparisons are not always possible.

The present survey, which covered 6,500 respondents, a representative sample of the overall population of Afghanistan, assesses the impact of corruption on the relationship between Afghan citizens and the state, the trust in state and non-state institutions, the perceived support of the international community for anti-corruption efforts and the links of corruption and perceptions of corruption with insurgency and conflict. While the previous survey focused on perceptions of corruption, the current survey provides a far more comprehensive account of Afghan experiences of corruption. Like the previous

survey, the current survey is focused on petty or administrative corruption, which has the most direct and widespread effects on Afghan citizens. Issues related to grand corruption and political corruption, as well as organized crime, are only partially addressed. As this survey is mainly concerned with experiences of administrative corruption, particular attention has been paid to the provision of public services. This survey also introduces a distinction between households and individuals as a unit of analysis. While the perceptions are often those of individual respondents, the experiences often arise within households.

Overall situation of corruption

The survey findings indicate that Afghans consider corruption the third biggest problem in the country, following insecurity and unemployment, a ranking that has stayed the same since 2007. Corruption is widespread. One adult in seven, i.e. an approximate equivalent of 1,677,000 adults, experienced direct bribery in Afghanistan in 2009. 28% of Afghan households paid a bribe to obtain at least one public service. Furthermore, the Afghan experiences of bribery show that the amounts paid have considerably increased. In 2009, the average value of the bribes among those who paid them was 7,769 Afs (156 USD). This represents an enormous amount of money in a country where the per capita income is 502 USD per year. The survey indicates that the Afghan population as a whole paid twice as much in 2009 as it had paid in 2007. In 2007, the amount of bribes paid by the adult population was estimated at 466 million USD, while the current survey indicates that it is close to 1 billion USD. This also reflects the general perception about the impact of corruption on households. 34% of the respondents stated that the general effect of corruption on their households was considerable or extremely high, while 18% estimated that the financial burden on their households had increased in 2009 compared with 2008 due to higher bribe amounts.

Corruption is also endemic and entrenched in Afghanistan. A majority of people (70%) perceives it as a common occurrence and a normal way of doing business with the state. It is no longer limited to the experience of urban citizens, who have traditionally been faced with corruption in their relations with state officials. It now affects rural areas, where 75% of the Afghan population lives. Even people living in the most remote villages have not been spared and have experienced levels of corruption comparable with that experienced by the urban population. Afghans (23%) who are affected by corruption quite often face it regularly. The majority of the respondents (57%) who had experienced corruption did so at least twice during the 12 months that preceded the interviews. The average number of bribery experiences was 3.4 times a year among those who paid a bribe in 2009.

The entrenched nature of corruption is obvious in the delivery of many public services, where the practice of bribery has become an institution. Public service users consider that paying a bribe will open the door for access to such services and that bribery is often the only way. 34% of those who paid a bribe were highly certain that the payment of the bribe allowed them to benefit from the state service. Only 9% of those who paid did so without having any certainty regarding the outcome of the operation. The deep-rooted practice of bribery is confirmed by the increasing role and power of illegal "professional" commission-takers who now participate in half of all bribery transactions, as reported by 44% of those respondents who had to pay bribes.

Security and judiciary institutions, along with municipalities, are still perceived as the most corrupt institutions, as was the case in 2007. The major services provided by these institutions were implicated in the highest number of bribes paid by households in 2009. Each affected close to 10% of the households surveyed. However, corruption is now increasingly spreading to social public services such as health and education, in which the average amounts of the bribes have often been higher. Each affects close to 5% of households, with the value of the bribes at twice the value of the bribes paid to security and judiciary institutions.

Justice and security institutions are perceived as easily the most corrupt

The survey indicates that Afghans perceive the main institutions responsible for security and justice as the most corrupt. 42% of the respondents consider the Ministry of Interior to be the most corrupt, while the Ministry of Justice and the Directorate of National Security are perceived as the most corrupt by 32% and 30%, respectively. Moreover, households paid the highest numbers of bribes for the provision of security and justice by the police and the courts. The payment of bribes in each service affected 10% of Afghan households.

The general negative perception of security and justice institutions coincides with real and perceived impacts on households. 38% and 17% of households believed corruption within police and courts, respectively, had a negative impact on them. 25% and 26% of households felt deprived of access to the provision of justice and security, respectively, by these institutions due to corruption. Corruption also disappointed those seeking justice from the state. 62% of those households that had experienced corruption within the courts were mainly witnesses and plaintiffs. Furthermore, a significant number of the households that had to pay bribes for such services were poor households with low incomes. Finally, when households faced corruption in both institutions, the amounts of the bribes more than doubled.

The survey also shows that, within the judiciary, corruption occurs most frequently at district courts and the offices of attorneys, with 39% of total cases. The households that experienced the most corruption by the police were located in remote villages. The performance of these institutions at the subnational level should therefore be the focus of anti-corruption policies.

Corruption aids the insurgency and fuels local conflicts

One of the most interesting survey findings was that 50% of the respondents consider that corruption fosters the expansion of the Taliban. Also, one third of the respondents said they had heard the Taliban were mobilizing against the government on the basis of corruption allegations.

Corruption is also a cause of conflict at the local level. One third of respondents reported that corruption caused conflict in their villages or towns. Furthermore, a great number of those who reported such conflicts also believed that organized groups controlled the distribution and selling of land as a result of a collusion between land market actors and high-level state officials.

The highest amounts of bribes are paid in the provision of basic social services

The highest amounts of bribes are paid for the provision of basic social services such as education and health, with average bribes amounting to 10,871 Afs (217 USD) and 7,143 Afs (143 USD), respectively, per household that paid bribes. Even though less than 5% of Afghan households are affected by corruption in a single service, these bribes represent a considerable burden on the households that pay. While an average Afghan household of 7.3 members has an average income of 3,665 USD per year, households that paid bribes did so for more than two services during 2009. This represents an intolerable burden for the Afghan poor and vulnerable.

Although these social services experience sizeable bribes, the services with highest bribe frequency are those involved in the registration and issuance of ID cards and passports, security by the police and justice by the courts (see above). The survey also shows that rural households primarily paid bribes for police, education, health and land services, while urban households mainly paid to the judiciary, duties and tax collection departments, and employment and social affairs and transportation services.

The highest corruption burden is carried by the poorest

The survey indicates that households in villages close to cities are more likely to pay bribes than those in remote villages or in cities. Single-breadwinner households with an income of less than 3,000 Afs (60 USD) are the most exposed to bribery. Poor households with incomes of less than 3,000 Afs (60 USD) considered corruption as the biggest challenge in Afghanistan. Survey findings show that households in rural areas consisting mainly of poor farmers are more likely to pay bribes than those in urban areas.

Corruption can be unavoidable in securing one's own income

13% of households stated that they had paid bribes to secure their own sources of income. Additionally, the survey shows that the professions that reported the highest number of bribery experiences to maintain employment were civil servants and self-employed professionals, both at 29%. Civil servants stated that they had to give their supervisors bribes and gifts to secure their jobs, while self-employed respondents had to pay bribes to those institutions in charge of regulating businesses, such as the municipalities and the Ministry of Commerce.

Corruption weakens the legitimacy of the state

The survey shows that the corruption in the public sector erodes the legitimacy of the state in various ways. Corruption in the judiciary is distancing the citizens from the state. 50% of the households that were unable to resolve their legal matters within the judiciary due to corruption turned for assistance to non-state actors such as local shuras

(consultative councils of elders), mullahs (religious leaders learned in theology and sacred law) and local commanders.

The corruption in services related to the administration of land affecting 15% of households has a similar impact on perceptions of state legitimacy. This type of corruption affects 15% of Afghan households and is mostly dominant in remote villages (75%). The majority of households (60%) that faced corruption related to the administration of land turned to non-state actors for resolution, indicating the weakening of the state's legitimacy.

Perceptions of inequitable access to electricity also affect the legitimacy of the state. Corruption in electricity is perceived to have one of the most negative impacts on households (14%). It exacerbates the feeling that people are being denied a government service (41%, against 26% for police, for instance). While the state's capacity to provide electricity is well below the expectation of households, it appears that households tend rather to question state policies in terms of prioritizing access to electricity.

The institutionalization of bribery that results in the rise of intermediaries such as illegal professional commission-takers is also a threat to the legitimacy of the state. 71% of respondents who had paid bribes over the last year said they believed that the bribes they paid would allow them to enjoy the requested state services. Professional commission-takers, who are paid a lump sum of money to obtain the relevant services on behalf of Afghan citizens and who pay part of these lump sums in bribes to various corrupt officials, now participate in 44% of all bribery transactions.

Finally, a major trend that is a challenge to state legitimacy is the use of ethnic favoritism when households face corruption. 31% of households in 2009 reported that they relied on a shared ethnic affiliation with corrupt state officials while engaging in corruption transactions, against 14% in 2007. According to the earlier survey, local commanders played a more important role. Now, corruption exchanges tend to be more often linked to ethnicity. 46% of civil servant respondents perceive that ethnic favoritism is prevalent in corruption exchanges.

Despite the high levels of perceived corruption and of corruption experiences involving the police and the judiciary and the perceptions of the weakened legitimacy of the state, citizens still expect the state to address corruption in the police and the judiciary. Indeed, victims of the corruption in the police see insecurity as the biggest problem facing Afghanistan and demand that the government address corruption as a priority. Similarly, those who have suffered from corruption in the judiciary expect the government to address the issue of corruption rather than the issue of the access to justice.

Perceived causes of corruption: greed rather than need

The main causes of corruption are considered to include weak accountability systems (63%), low civil servant salaries (57%) and the large sums of money in circulation (49%). Compared with the situation revealed by the 2007 Integrity Watch Corruption Survey, there has been a shift in the tolerance levels of respondents toward various kinds of corruption. In the previous survey, respondents deemed the main causes of corruption to be the economic needs of civil servants, which were partially understood

and accepted. However, respondents are now less willing to tolerate the lavish lifestyles among public officials facilitated through corruption and are asking for increased accountability. Low civil servants salaries are, however, still considered, to some extent, a cause of corruption. Yet, this is no longer accepted as an excuse for corruption to thrive.

Accepting corruption: the dilemma between survival and civic attitude

Corruption in general is not tolerated by Afghans and only becomes permissible in certain specific circumstances. 90% of the respondents stated that they felt guilty paying a bribe, indicating that corruption is not a cultural norm in Afghanistan. The only forms of corruption toward which there was a slightly higher tolerance among respondents were favoritism, at 16% (unacceptable to 73%), and bribery, at 15% (unacceptable to 79%). Fewer than 10% of respondents said that fraud and embezzlement were acceptable. Tolerance, however, varied depending on the situation. Respondents were more tolerant toward civil servants who asked for monetary bribes if they had low salaries (15% in favor; 67% against) and for small gifts in return for small services (16% in favor; 70% against). The survey finds that the acceptance of all forms of corruption was twice as high among the urban population relative to the rural population. The extortion of monetary bribes from the poor was the least accepted. While corruption is condemned, 20% of respondents indicated they would take advantage of nepotism to secure employment, and 25% of respondents stated that they would pay bribes if this protected their interests. This type of behavior was mostly prominent among single and economically active young Afghans, indicating that this is a potential target group for anti-corruption campaigns, together with those who bribe to protect their own sources of income.

Trust in institutions in combating corruption

Despite the high perception that the public sector is corrupt and the massive perception that the state has failed to fight corruption, respondents consider that the most capable institutions to reduce corruption are, in theory, the President, 84%, the Attorney General, 70%, and the Ministry of Interior, 70%. This shows, first, that, despite significant skepticism about the integrity of these institutions, the public still has confidence in the state's theoretical capability in fighting corruption. Second, respondents intuitively tend to single out the actors who are capable of adopting a sanction-based approach in fighting corruption. Still, the confidence in non-state actors who may be associated in a preventive approach to fighting corruption is also high. Civil society, at 51%, and religious leaders, at 55%, score as much as the Afghan government, at 55%, while the least capable are estimated to be the Taliban, at 14%.

Finally, 12% of respondents stated that they had filed a formal complaint related to corruption during the previous 12 months, indicating that people still have some confidence in formal state institutions in fighting corruption. Among these, the institutions receiving the most complaints were district or provincial governors. Those more prone to file a complaint were individuals who had sought government services and paid higher bribes.

Recommendations for action emerging from the survey results

- Special attention is needed to address corruption in the judiciary and, notably, at the offices of district attorneys and in the courts. In the absence of an effective enforcement approach, the government should establish more administrative sanctions that can be used to complement criminal sanctions. Furthermore, the participation of civil society and the public should be encouraged in court hearings.
- Corruption in land issues has affected 15% of households. There is a need for the Afghan government to clarify the roles and responsibilities of the various departments and ministries involved in issues related to land. There is also a need for more transparency in land distribution and land purchase transactions by the government. Citizens and civil society organizations should have access to the relevant decision-making, the criteria guiding decision-making and lists of those who have benefitted from land distribution.
- Access to information is key in reducing corruption. The occasions for bribery and the presence of professional commission-takers are increased if anti-corruption procedures are too complex and information is scarce. The Afghan government should establish the legal foundation for the access of citizens to information of the state based on article 50 of the Afghan Constitution. Furthermore, each department should display and make accessible to public service users the procedures and timelines needed for obtaining specific services. Finally, a hotline should be provided so that public service users may report bribes paid to civil servants.
- The Ministry of Irrigation, Water and Electricity, as well as the state-run enterprise Brishna, which is responsible for providing electricity, and other relevant departments should establish and display clear criteria for benefitting from the government provision of electricity. They should also encourage the monitoring of electricity provision by town and village councils. Furthermore, civil society organizations should monitor and survey state policies to verify that they equitably address the needs of the Afghan population.
- Public officials who are most exposed to bribery should be subject to the asset and income declaration program of the High Office of Oversight, and their asset and income declarations should be regularly checked. The relevant information regarding the assets and incomes of such civil servants, as well as the results of the verification process, should be displayed for the public at the places of work of these civil servants.
- The High Office of Oversight should extend its leading efforts to other relevant agencies so as to simplify procedures for services based on clear criteria, such as in areas in which corruption leads to the most significant losses in the perception of state legitimacy, in which poor people and poor households are most affected, and which are the most important for the operation of businesses and that drive economic development.

- The new penal code that is currently being reviewed should take emerging forms of corruption into account and be based on people's perceptions of these practices. Many emerging forms of corruption, such as sexual extortion and court tampering, that have been identified by the survey respondents are not being given sufficient attention and have not been the focus of the officials in charge of reviewing the penal code.
- The government should encourage the participation of civil society in preventing corruption in basic social services such as health and education. This can be accomplished, in particular, by involving local communities in monitoring decision-making processes, as well as in budget tracking at the village and district levels and in monitoring the quality of the actual services delivered.