

The perception of corruption in the daily life of Ukraine

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Introduction

In the course of the last quarter of the 20th century corruption became not only a social, but also a political issue both on the international and domestic levels. Politically this has entailed international organisations addressing the subject to ensure that conventions or international treaties can be ratified. Domestically, it has entailed that even endemically corrupt countries have found it difficult to stay out of campaigns against corruption. This situation applies to Ukraine.

Since independence in 1991, Ukraine has always scored highly on a scale of corruption of Transparency International Corruption Perception Index. At the international political level, fighting corruption has often entailed the signing of relevant protocols. Thus, Ukraine has developed a complex legal framework providing for the application of anti-corruption measures. For example, when Ukraine ratified the UN Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC) and adopted its measures on the 31st October 2003, it accepted the following obligations: to support the introduction and development of initiatives designed to target corruption; to support international collaboration intended to challenge

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corruption (including technical facilitation, collaboration and assistance in anti-money laundering procedures); and to facilitate honesty, responsibility and transparency in managing its state, budget and assets.

These procedures may be considered as a breakthrough; providing an array of resources to tackle corruption. However, the efficient execution of these measures by the state remains unmonitored, making them in effect little more than diplomatic signposts indicating compliance without detailing any successful outcomes. Indeed, the implementation of anti-corruption directives has proved to be largely ineffective, and not only in Ukraine.

UNCAC is considered to be a first global legally binding anticorruption instrument. Mungiu-Pippidi (2015) notes that the most challenging aspect to the implementation of this convention is the lack of “an effective follow-up monitoring mechanism” (p.189). Once countries such as Ukraine adopt the provisions of the UNCAC as national law, it has proved extremely difficult to put them into effect (*ibid.*). Despite the fact that there is presently no evidence that such countries that have adopted the UNCAC have deployed their anti-corruption measures efficiently, the importance of their diplomatic significance should not be underestimated. Their very recognition is an acknowledgement of the importance of anti-corruption reform movements: a point of departure.

In 2014, fighting domestic corruption was highlighted as being a major priority for Ukraine. In fact, the demonstration of effective anti-corruption initiatives has now become a prerequisite to obtaining political and especially financial support from western donors whose perception of the situation in Ukraine is crucial. For example, a Dutch referendum on the EU-associate agreement failed because of the Dutch perception of Ukraine being a corrupt country.

Though there is a degree of international unity concerning the importance of fighting domestic corruption, the definition of what qualifies as such is vague. “Integrity” (or the lack of it) is often seen as being a vital element of the definition but it is badly demarcated. For the purpose of our research this is not necessarily a problem as we are not dealing here with demarcations of basic concepts but with the *perceptions* of citizens.

It is important to understand corruption and the perception of corruption as being cultural phenomena because these are related to the ways societies understand its rules and compliance with those rules (Melgar *et al.*, 2010). People's perception of corruption depends on their "values and moral views" (*ibid.*). Some may never have paid a bribe in their lifetime, but are aware nevertheless, that others are engaged in corruption, a situation that has the potential to make them regard their entire society as being corrupt.

Why then is it important to study corruption perception? A short answer would be that it directly affects the issue of trust. Melgar *et al.*, (2010) point out that "high levels of corruption perception could have more devastating effects than corruption itself; it generates a 'culture of distrust' towards some institutions and may create a cultural tradition of gift giving and hence, raising corruption". Mungiu-Pippidi (2015) develops this notion further in discussing the importance of the cultural context in implementing anti-corruption measures.

'Perception' is not necessarily a vague concept here. There are a number of internationally recognised indicators of corruption which attempt to capture statistically the experience of people (households and business communities). Some well-known surveys are: Global Corruption Barometer, the Global Competitiveness Report, the International Country Risk Guide and the World Bank Worldwide Governance Indicator for the Control of Corruption. These analyse representative population samples and also the perception of businessmen and experts on corruption: their findings are used widely in developing policy initiatives, hence, even if subjective, perception matters.

The analysis of cultural settings is often considered essential to provide an estimate of the scale of corruption in a country. Investigating the endemic nature of corruption among the elite in Ukraine is one way to begin to understand such cultural settings. The 'elite' of Ukraine includes political, military, and public service representatives. Illegal profits gained from corrupt exchanges often depends on hierarchical positions within the state, proximity to state budget control and/or legislative power.

It is difficult to find any sphere of life in Ukraine that is not affected by corruption. Schools, hospitals, ministries, and both state and privately owned

factories have all been implicated in corruption scandals. Below we have selected some recent examples investigated post 2014.

Various cases have provoked different degrees of concern. In 2017 the case of the State Enterprise (SE) Lviv Armor Vehicle Factory, that after a tender won the supply of new B-46-6 engines to the Armored Command Center (ACC) of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, was a particularly striking example arising from the military conflict in the east of the country (NABU, 2017). According to retrieved documents “LAVF bought engines from Limited liability company (LLC) Bullet Line and supplied them to the ACC of the Armed Forces of Ukraine for 28.560.000 UAH²”. Detectives of the National Anti-Corruption Bureau (NABU) investigated the deal and found that “the engines were supplied by a third party without any documents. The contracts with LLC were in fact fictitious”. The investigation also revealed that “the supplied engines had been sold to enterprises in the domestic market as surplus assets of the Ministry of Defense”. Such effective stealing from the armed forces was considered by the Ukrainian media at the time as being a new low for the Ukrainian ‘elite’.

The illegal extraction of amber in Western Ukraine, facilitated by Members of Parliament, is an example of a different cultural context of corruption: that of natural resources (NABU, 2017). The illegal extraction of amber in Western Ukraine has been reported by the Ukrainian media over a long period (Fakty, 2016; Lebed, 2015). Lebed (2015) reports that depending on the nation’s presidency, the official policy against illegal extraction differed significantly. For example, in the time of President Kuchma the illegal extraction of amber was in effect a state enterprise, but during the Yushchenko regime it became directly exploited by criminals. Lebed (2015) also states that following a moratorium on illegal amber extraction the documentation concerning the activity and possible state involvement in it was intentionally chaotic, making any investigation virtually impossible. In a similar way Ukrainian officials were implicated in the “organisation of a criminal scheme of purchase of ilmenite, rutile, zirconium and salomonite concentrates extracted at low prices” (NABU, 2017).

² As of 13 February 2019, 28.560.000 UAH is approximately 935.000 Euro.

The first two decades of Ukrainian independence created a fruitful ground for the elite to abuse their power without being subject to sanctions, the consequent loss of public trust is therefore hardly surprising, and had serious consequences. Johnson (2014) studied the nature of political trust following democratic reforms in Poland and Ukraine, and found that in Ukraine there exists a negative association between support for democracy and trust in political institutions. People believe in democracy but they do not trust the political elite.

This chapter presents the results of a five year corruption perception survey undertaken in the city of Kharkiv in order to critically address the structural factors and models with which to assess the level of corruption in Ukraine. We aim to facilitate ongoing discussion regarding effective anti-corruption reforms.

Ukraine and the fight against domestic corruption

The Maidan Revolt engendered a real hope that endemic corruption in Ukrainian politics and society would be tackled seriously. Such a hope was, however, soon disappointed. Freedom House (2017) reported that since the revolution of 2014, anti-corruption reforms had not progressed according to the expectation of local reformers and the international community. “Corruption still permeates the state, and it is clear that the political will at the top of the government has not been sufficient to dismantle the old system” (Ibid.). The Ukrainian public still rated corruption as the nation’s most serious problem. 44% of people interviewed by the Fund for Democratic Initiatives (2017) considered corruption as its most serious problem, while 90% believed that corruption was widespread. In the same study the most corrupt institutions were identified as being the courts, the Verkhovna Rada (the Parliament of Ukraine), the Prosecutor’s Office, and the Government. Only the church and NGOs received higher ratings in terms of trust (*ibid.*). For many ordinary Ukrainians, it is precisely the political will to address and tackle corruption that is lacking. A factor that makes the fight against corruption ever more difficult is the continuing armed conflict in the east of the country and the consequent increasing

number of cases of corruption related to that conflict (Markovska and Serdyuk, 2018).

Among significant changes identified by the Freedom House in 2017 was the initiative of Ukrainian civil society groups, backed by international organisations or governments (The United States, the European Union, and the International Monetary Fund), in effecting structural changes to accommodate new organisations to control corruption. For example, in 2015 the Ukrainian government established the National Anti-Corruption Bureau (NABU), an independent law enforcement organisation with significant powers to investigate high level corruption. This body works in conjunction with the Specialised Anti-Corruption Prosecution Office (SAPO) which has powers to prosecute upper level criminality. However, as Markovska and Van Duyne (2019) note “the data available (or lack of it) thus far does not show that their integrated approach is efficient and effective”. Nevertheless, the budget of NABU has been increased from 486,6 mln Hrv in 2016 to 857 mln Hrv in 2018, and as of 31st March 2018 it has secured 19 convictions. For some this is considered to be a success, but others raise the issue of undue political influence to explain the relatively small number of successful prosecutions. This may point to the activity of a clandestine opposition against an intensive anti-corruption policy at a higher level. Indeed, the immediate future will be crucial for the ability of NABU to establish its credibility and independent investigative authority.

Over the past four years the Ukrainian parliament has “passed wide-ranging judicial reforms, including important constitutional changes to establish a comprehensive anti-corruption framework modelled on EU best practices” (Freedom House, 2017). The conclusion drawn by Freedom House (2017) was that as “long as Ukraine’s international partners remain clear about the fundamental principles that will lead to success, and continue to back change with both short-term and long-term incentives, the country will have no choice but to press ahead with major reforms”. The question remains as to how realistic is it to suggest that the progress against Ukrainian domestic corruption will in fact continue even when the international partners withdraw from Ukraine?

For an answer to this question we refer to the study conducted by Mungiu-Pippidi (2015) who analysed different understandings of the causal mechanisms of corruption, and the policy initiatives employed in their suppression. Mungiu-Pippidi (2015) argues that there are at least three distinct models used to explain the rationale behind corruption control initiatives:

1. structural factors that are facilitated by the external events (for example financial crises or war);
2. institutional legal instruments and the establishment of a legal framework to fight corruption;
3. corruption control as one element in a wide spectrum of economic reforms.

In order to understand the ‘what works agenda’, we need to go beyond attempts at control and look at the social, political and geographical setting of a particular country that facilitates corruption (Ibid.), consequently, Mungiu-Pippidi (2015) elaborates on structural factors such as size of population, ethnic diversity, the existence of a principle of ethic universalism (equality before the law) and regional variation in living conditions and rates of modernisation (including political modernisation). Her purpose is to determine whether developing countries can impose “a superstructure of rational and legal administration” (p.97) in order to create an environment conducive to good governance and the application of the measures demanded by anti-corruption reform. Mungiu-Pippidi (2015) identifies a problem in the process of modernisation enforced from above that has the potential to create significant discord between official norms, and how society operates (*ibid.*). By ratifying the UNCAC, Ukraine has accepted the role assigned to it by the international community and continued to co-operate in the development of comprehensive institutional legal instruments (one of the three rationales behind corruption control mentioned above). However, this does not necessarily mean that “government and society are in some state of transition to modernity” implying therefore different cultural norms (*ibid.*:97). In this chapter we understand the ‘transition to modernity’ as being a move to principles of good governance, accountability and transparency. Many countries in the world have been ‘modernised’ but only a selected few have managed to implement accountability and transparency in standards of governance.

What then can be said of the impact of international anti-corruption initiatives? In response, Mungiu-Pippidi (2015) investigated institutional interventions to control corruption arguing that “the bivariate regressions show that neither of the tested anti-corruption interventions has a positive significant effect on control of corruption. The presence of an anti-corruption agency is even associated with a deterioration in the control of corruption” (p. 106). The researcher concedes that in order to study any individual country, country-specific information must be tested to understand the actual effectiveness of its relevant measures. That is why an understanding of the national context of Ukraine is very important in assessing the success of its anti-corruption measures.

In this chapter we discuss the results of a 5-year survey beginning in 2013 and concurrent with an anti-corruption movement that led to political unrest against the background of military conflict in the east of the country. In an attempt to understand the sentiment of the citizens of Kharkiv prior to, during and in the aftermath of a series of anti-corruption measures that were supported by both local enthusiasts and international donors.

Methodology

Since December 2013, five annual surveys have been conducted in Kharkiv in eastern Ukraine. The first survey was conducted in December 2013, the second in October 2014, and repeated annually in October 2015, 2016 and 2017. Each survey was conducted over a three-day period. In the 2017 survey, 662 respondents aged 16 and above were interviewed. The survey was conducted as part of the “Program for ensuring public safety and order in the territory of the Kharkiv Region for 2016-2017” implemented by the Kharkiv National University of Internal Affairs. To gather data, selected members of the general public were interviewed face-to-face for 10-15 minutes by 36 interviewers from the University of Internal Affairs using a structured paper questionnaire.

A quota sampling method was used to select respondents by demographics (sex, age) and geographical characteristics (district of residence in the city).

The selected cohort was selected to be representative of the general population of Kharkiv (population 1.451.377 as of 01-10-2017) according to age, sex and place of residence. The measurement errors at a 95% confidence limit were calculated as being: for indicators approaching 50% \pm 3,94%; for indicators approaching 25% \pm 3,4%; for indicators approaching 10% \pm 2,36%; for indicators approaching 5% \pm 1,71%.

The questionnaire includes 19 items measured by Likert scale and three sets of questions:

1. Perception of corruption (seriousness of the problem of corruption, level of corruption, assessment of the effect of corruption, readiness of respondents themselves to participate in corrupt practices, the 'image' of corruption that respondents create for themselves, personal "policy" towards bribery, ways to eliminate corruption);
2. Experience of corruption (% of Kharkiv residents who have personally experienced corruption during the contacts with 19 types of the official institutions, "bribes on demand", voluntary offer of bribes, use of personal connections, official complaint against corruption);
3. Social and demographic characteristics of participants (sex, age, education, income, district of residence).

SPSS (v 22.0) was used in statistical analysis.

Findings

In this chapter we discuss selected questions that deal with the public perception of corruption; in particular, just how do people perceive corruption, and why does this matter?

In order to understand the participants' perception of the seriousness of corruption, they were asked to answer the following question, "In your opinion, how serious is the problem of corruption in Ukraine?". Table 1 below shows their responses to this question starting 2013 onwards. In 2017, 65% of respondents believed that corruption was a serious problem in Ukraine. Interestingly, in comparison with 2013, by 2017 the number of people who held corruption to be a very serious problem was lower. Is it the case that the anti-

corruption reforms in post-Maidan Ukraine started to work, or is it because the other social and political issues become more prominent?

Table 1:
How serious is the problem of corruption in Ukraine?

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	Mean
	%	%	%	%	%	
Very serious	45	53	35	39	25	39
Serious	35	30	34	32	40	34
Difficult to answer	17	13	20	17	24	18
Not serious	3	2	6	8	8	5
Absolutely not serious	0	2	4	4	2	2
100% = N	492	581	533	1016	622	-
Index*	0,6	0,65	0,45	0,46	0,38	-

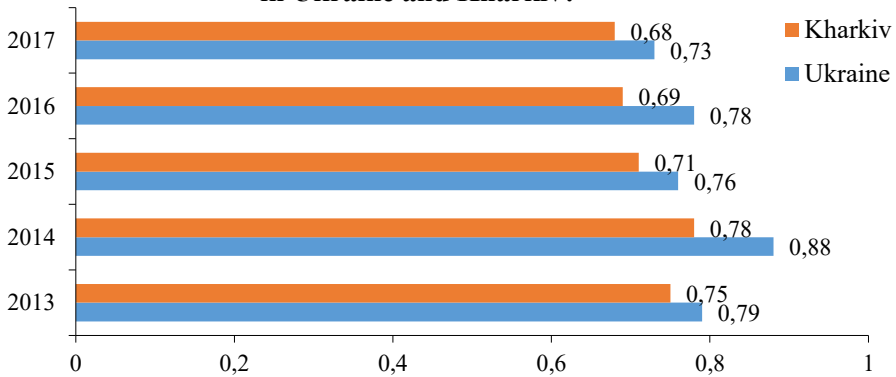
*Index calculated by recoding responses into digital values: Very serious = +1; Serious = +0,5; Difficult to answer = 0; Not serious = -0,5; Absolutely not serious = -1. Index varies from +1 to - 1. Please note that ‘difficult to answer’ is important because it can change our mean (and index) by increasing the general number of respondents (our denominator). So this category must be included in the table, “difficult to answer” was therefore coded as “missing value” and excluded from further analysis.

A more visual means of understanding the trend over the last five years is by analysing the index calculated according to the responses: here +1 means the problem is “very serious” and -1 means that the problem is “not serious at all”. We identify two discernible groups: one representing those who believe in the seriousness of corruption as a social issue and a smaller group who does not think there is a serious problem. It is interesting to observe that over the five years of the study there was a fluctuation in the number of respondents choosing not to give a definitive answer. It is this group of respondents that is of major interest to us. There are several ways to interpret the ‘difficult to answer’ entry. Some researchers argue that often the ‘difficult to answer’ option represents a lazy way of responding to a questionnaire (Krosnick and Presser, 2010). By contrast, we suggest that this is in fact an important indicator of public difficulty make a definitive choice. According to us, the increasing number of respondents choosing the ‘difficult to answer’ option might point to the emergence of new concerns in Ukrainian society where the perception

of the seriousness of corruption is overshadowed by concerns about the military conflict on the one hand, and the worsening economic situation of ordinary citizens on the other. In a survey of the general public undertaken in 2018, the Fund of the Democratic Initiatives (FDI, 2018) reported that 36% of respondents assessed life in Ukraine as being difficult, and 46% as being unbearable.

Graph 1 below represents responses to the question “How would you rate the level of corruption in Ukraine and in the city of Kharkiv?” Results have been recoded into the index from 0 to 1, where 0 is “very low level of corruption” and 1 is “very high level of corruption”. Index calculated by recoding answers to digital values: Very high = 1; Higher than average = 0,75; Average = 0,5; Lower than average = 0,25; Very low = 0.

Graph 1.
“How would you rate the level of corruption in Ukraine and Kharkiv?”*



*The index estimate varies from 0 – very low level to 1 – very high level

We observe that normally the respondents from Kharkiv rated the issue of corruption as being worse for Ukraine than for their home city of Kharkiv; emphasising the corrupting influence if the outsiders rather than that of their fellow Kharkiv citizens.

Question 3 was designed to measure changes in perception of the level of corruption over the last 12 months by asking: “In your opinion, has the level of corruption changed in the last 12 months?”

Table 2.
Has the level of corruption changed in the last 12 months (%)

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Increased a lot	17	17	11	9	12
Increased a little	27	19	17	19	19
Has not changed	46	46	49	43	48
Decreased a little	4	10	12	16	13
Decreased a lot	1	1	3	4	2
Difficult to answer	5	7	8	10	6
100% = N	492	581	533	1016	622
Index*	0,29	0,22	0,11	0,07	0,13

*Index calculated by recoding answers to digital values: Increased a lot = +1; Increased a little = +0,5; Has not changed = 0; Decreased a little = -0,5; Decreased a lot = -1; Difficult to answer = missing value. Index varies from +1 to -1.

It is interesting to note that in 2017 more respondents believed that corruption had increased (31% in total) whereas about 48% of respondents believe that the level of corruption had not changed.

In order to quantify the personal understanding of the negative effect of corruption, question 5 asked, “In your opinion, is corruption bad for the state and citizens in general or bad for you personally?”

Table 3.
Is corruption bad for citizens and state or bad for you personally?

	2013		2014		2015		2016		2017	
	Citi-zen %	Per-son %	Citi-zen %	Per-son %	Citi-zen %	Per-son %	Citi-zen %	Per-son %	Citi-zen %	Per-son %
Yes, negative impact	57	40	68	56	60	46	60	42	51	38
Rather negative impact	37	42	24	19	24	26	25	26	34	37
Rather no negative impact	4	10	3	13	8	15	5	12	8	14
No impact	1	5	2	9	4	9	4	11	3	7
Difficult to answer	2	4	4	4	4	4	5	9	3	4
100% = N	492	492	581	581	533	533	1016	1016	622	622
Index*	0,7	0,4	0,8	0,5	0,65	0,4	0,7	0,4	0,6	0,41

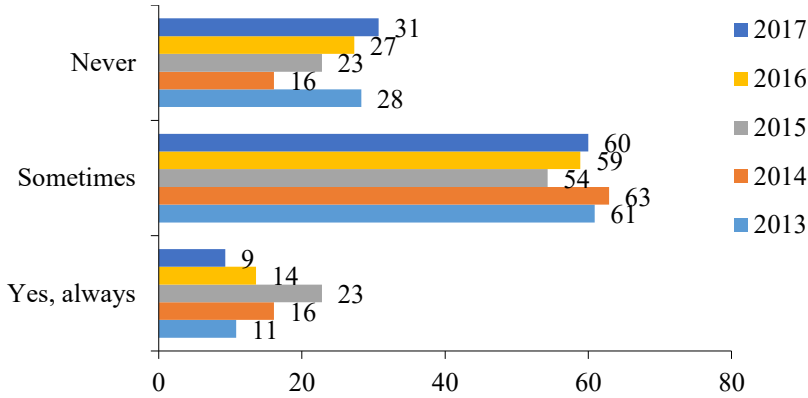
*Index calculated by recoding answers to digital values: Yes, negative impact = +1; Rather negative impact = +0,5; Rather no = -0,5; No impact = -1; Difficult to answer = 0. Index varies from +1 to -1.

Table 3 shows that in general, respondents believed that corruption was bad for all citizens and the state. However, with regard to themselves, they rated the seriousness of the impact of corruption across the years as being universally lower.

In order to quantify the readiness of respondents themselves to participate in corrupt practices, question 5 asked “In your opinion, can you justify bribery, unofficial services or presents, if it is important to you in solving a certain problem?”

Our Graph 2 reveals that in 2014 only 16% of respondents categorically objected to corrupt practices, but this proportion increased to 31% by 2017. However, more than half of respondents (60%) were prepared to justify corruption depending on the situation. This we believe is due to the peculiar feature of the cultural context of Ukraine.

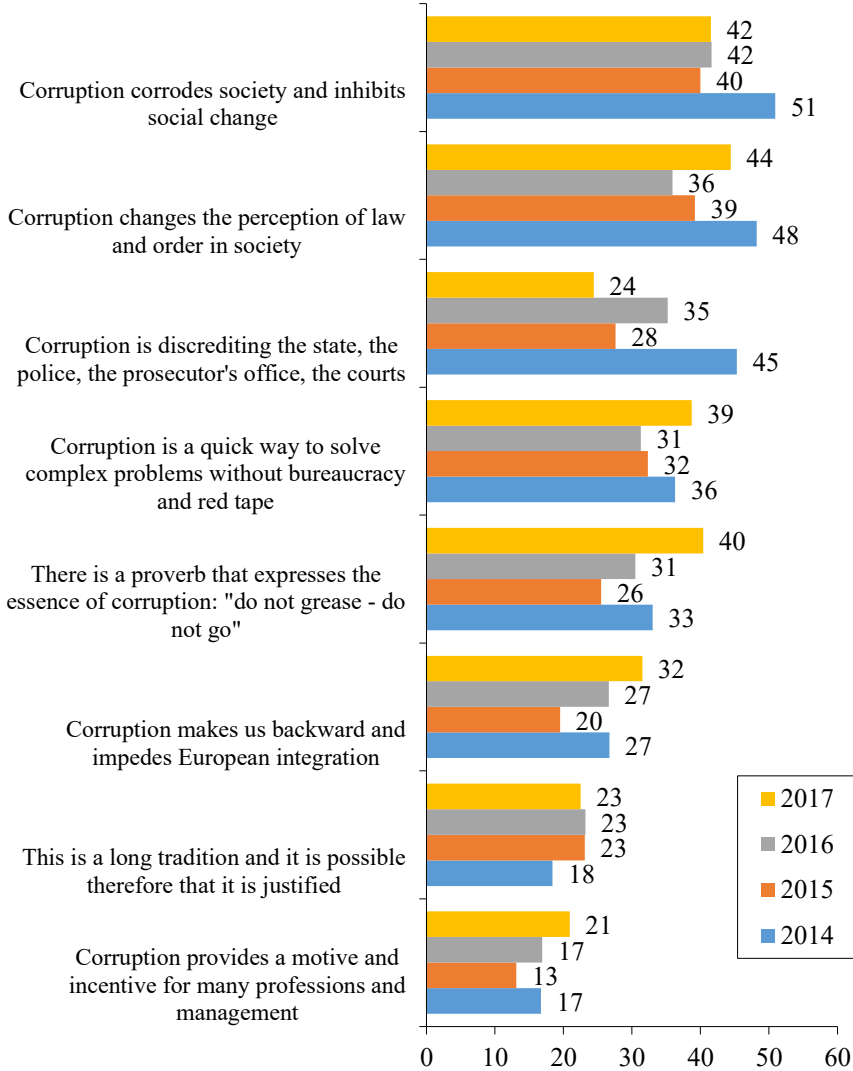
Graph 2.
Can corruption be justified?



In order to understand the ‘image’ of corruption that respondents create for themselves we asked “In your opinion, what does corruption mean for people in society and for yourself?” Respondents were asked to select 4 answers out of a possible 8.

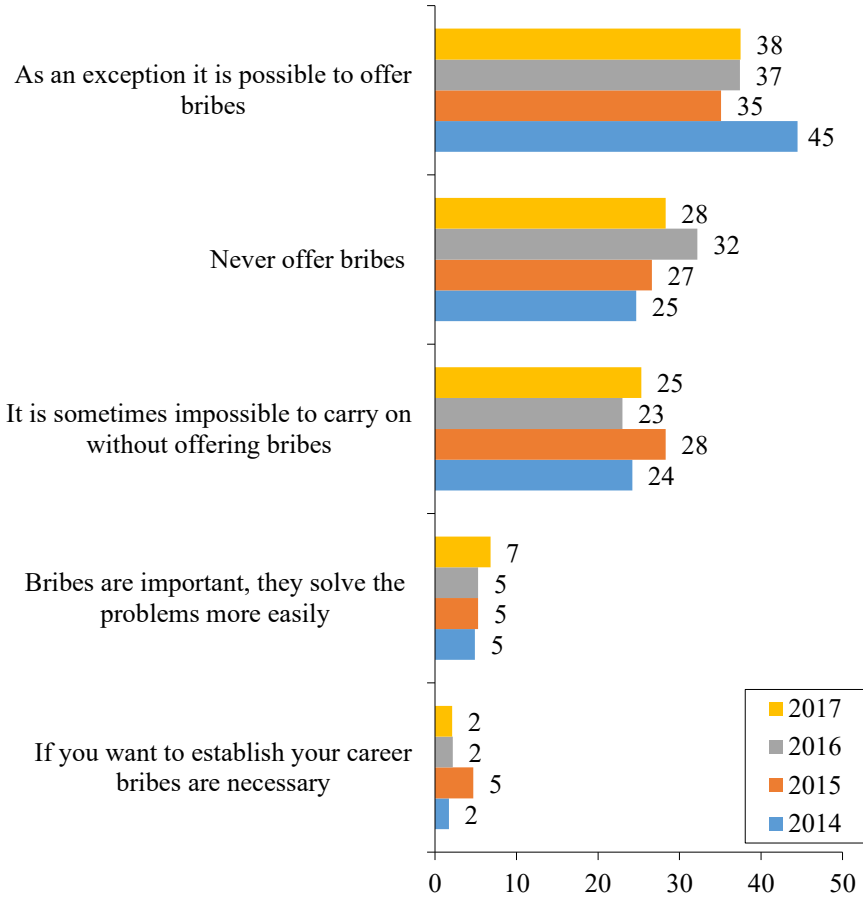
According to Graph 3, 40% of respondents believed in the overall negative influence of corruption and expressed an awareness that corruption has a devastating impact on society and state institutions. However, more than a third (39%) indicated that corruption was nevertheless “a quick way to solve complex problems without bureaucracy and red tape.” Both opinions it seems could be held by the same respondent. This is illustrated by a fifth of respondents agreeing with the old saying “if you don’t oil, you don’t move” indicating that corruption is still accepted in certain situations. For example, informally settling a parking fine by negotiating and bribing the police. While evidently understanding the negative impact of corruption, the respondents revealed a surprising ambivalence to the issue.

Graph 3.
Perception of corruption
(The image of corruption that respondents create for themselves)



In order to understand personal conduct in relation to bribery we posed the further question: “What is your personal “policy” towards bribery?” of which the results are summarised in Graph 4.

Graph 4.
Personal “policy” towards bribery.



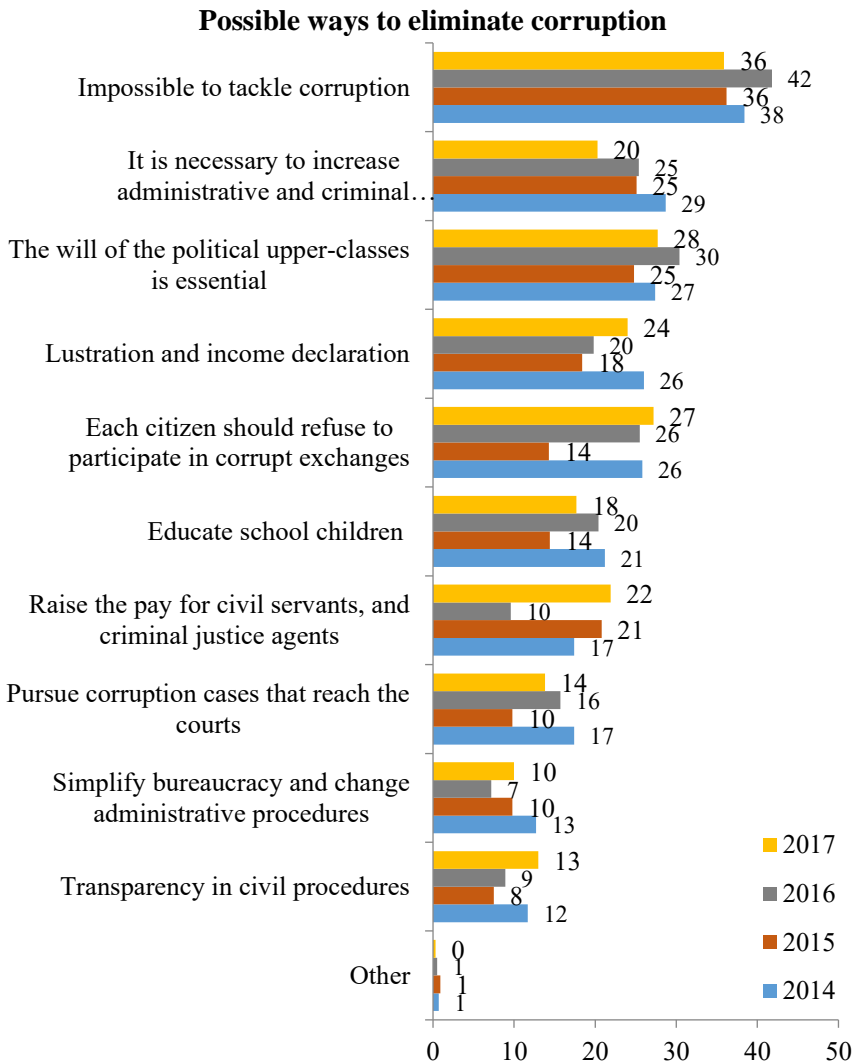
More than a third of respondents personally justified bribery, when faced with a hopeless situation (from their point of view) or where they “very much needed a result.” A quarter believed that some corruption could be avoided. However, less than a third of respondents refused participation in corrupt practices and believed that bribes should never be given in any circumstances.

It is interesting to observe that around 6% of people claimed to be comfortable with corruption, and that this proportion has not changed significantly since 2016, though the percentage of those who believe that one should never

offer a bribe has decreased over the same period. Overall, the respondents tend to be increasingly tolerant towards corruption.

Our next question asked “What possible steps might be undertaken to eliminate corruption”?

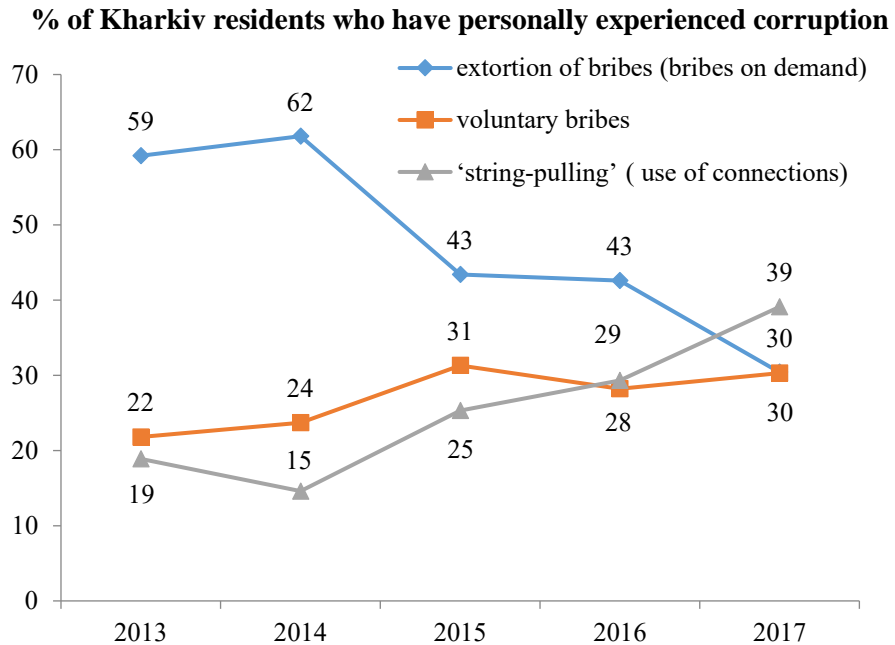
Graph 5.



Kharkiv respondents tend to believe that corruption is practically impossible to suppress (36% in 2017, 42% in 2016 and 36% in 2015) and a third of respondents believe that the authorities lack any real will to tackle corruption.

The survey also investigated respondents' personal experience of corruption. In 2017 as compared with 2016, less people reported that they had been solicited for a bribe though more reported that they had offered a bribe voluntarily. Surprisingly however, the FDU (2018) national survey reported that 60% of Ukrainians prioritised the implementation of anti-corruption reforms.

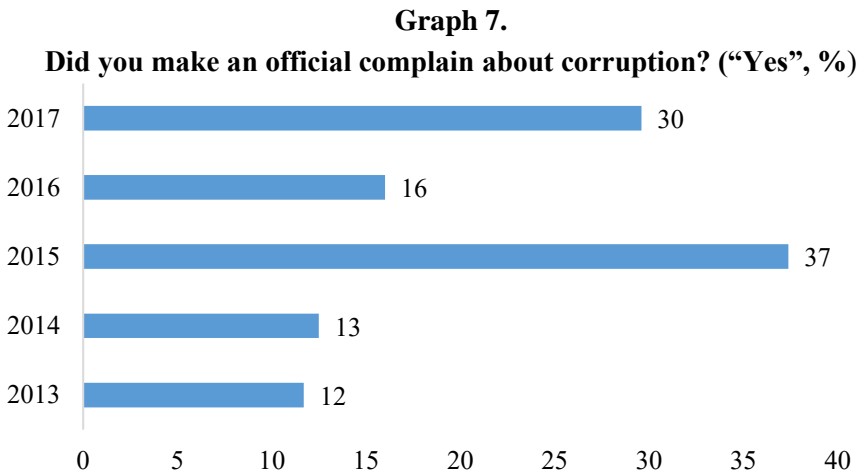
Graph 6.
Personal experience of corruption



Against the background of a general reduction in the experience of “bribes on demand”, there was a slight increase in the voluntary offer of bribes and a large increase in the use of personal connections. This is important, because it implies that an ‘enabling network’ of like-minded people of questionable integrity exists, signalling a hidden economy of corrupt exchange, which implies

all previously noted forms of corruption, but one which employs them with greater caution.

The following graph shows the percentage of respondents who had personally experienced corruption and made an official complaint against it.



It will be noticed that the percentage of those who have complained of corruption has increased: from 16% to 30% between 2016 and 2017, showing that there are now a growing number of Ukrainians who are less tolerant to corrupt practices. Our previous two graphs provide us with some interesting material for consideration. While 39% of our respondents had themselves offered bribes on a voluntary basis, 30% of respondents had complained officially about corruption! While intolerance of corruption is growing, the same can be said of a pragmatic personal tolerance of it.

Discussion and conclusions

The 2017 Kharkiv survey highlighted significant ambiguity in public attitudes towards corruption. As stated above we have observed a growing intolerance of corrupt conduct while also accepting it as part of daily life. Mungiu-Pippidi

(2015) notes that in the context of developing countries, as in our case, this ambivalent attitude towards corruption, challenges the assumption of Western anti-corruption donors that corruption is a deviation from the rule of law and seeks to impose ‘zero-tolerance’ of it. We can perhaps conclude that ‘pathologising’ corruption has not yet been effective in Ukraine, and may not necessarily be the most expedient way to cure this malaise.

A second significant observation is that of a lack of political will in tackling corrupt practices. This issue is evidently connected with the ambiguity towards corruption noted above and the seeming acceptance of it by a third of our respondents. In 2017, 36% of Kharkiv respondents believed that it is impossible to tackle corruption. This is in agreement with a 2017 national survey that revealed 90% of Ukrainians as believing corruption to be widespread (FDI, 2017). The problem of corruption in transitional societies is often associated with political power. Unfortunately, up to the present donors have attempted to counter corruption through the encouragement of technical expertise and training (Mungiu-Pippidi, 2015). The danger with this approach in Ukraine is that the task of controlling the implementation of an anti-corruption policy is often in the charge of a political elite which is corrupt and controls access to the state resources. Since 2014 Ukraine has made substantial progress in founding and developing independent institutions to investigate corruption cases and prosecute guilty parties even if often actively opposed by. But even then it was an uphill struggle achieved because donors threatened to withdraw funding.

The third topic that deserves further study is that of the growth in *voluntary bribes* being offered by members of the general public in exchange for favourable official decisions and the use of informal links and social connections to influence that decision making. This phenomenon accords with the ‘*blat* system’ as described by Ledeneva (2018) where corrupt practices are “associated with sociability, *i.e.* the use of personal networks, but also serve an instrumental purpose in gaining influence or accessing limited resources” (Ledeneva, 2018). In Soviet times the term was used to describe mutual assistance in gaining goods or services that were in short supply (and where financial payment was often not required). Voluntarily offered bribes in Ukraine are similarly

likely to occur concerning obtaining a favourable decision from service providers. For example, extractors of amber from the fields of the western Ukraine used to offer bribes to the local police to keep their illegal extraction from the notice of the authorities (Lebed, 2015). Our 2017 Kharkiv study suggests that in a time of political instability and conflict, the employment of social connections and informal links could be seen as beneficial and less blameworthy. It is also less likely to be investigated by the new anti-corruption organisations if any exchange is classified as ‘security cleared and pre-arranged’, no matter how that exchange was achieved.

Regarding the effectiveness of anti-corruption initiatives Kaufmann (1997) argues that they must relate to available information, decisive leadership and collective action. Mungiu-Pippidi (2015) notes that while many Western donors understand the importance of civil society and the media in creating the social climate necessary to tackle corruption, not many understand the importance of collective action. Successful anti-corruption projects must be multi-dimensional and involve a broad range of actors (*ibid.*).

In 2017 Kharkiv residents no longer described corruption as the most challenging issue faced by country. There are many factors that may have influenced this change. Among them are: the worsening economic situation for ordinary Ukrainians and the continuing military conflict in the east of the country. The priority for most ordinary people is simply to survive financially in this worsening economic and political situation. Many ordinary people view the effectiveness of anti-corruption measures with more than a pinch of scepticism. On a local level respondents believe that the level of corruption in the city of Kharkiv is stable. One in five believes that corruption does not impact on their daily lives (see Table 3). A prevalent sentiment is that although corruption is bad it can be good for you personally. Consequently, in comparison with the 2016 survey by 2017 more respondents were willing to justify corrupt actions. At the same time, however, respondents increasingly argue categorically against corruption in all its aspects. We believe therefore that it is possible to argue that we are observing a degree of ‘inner polarisation’ indicated by the evident internal ambiguity in these views. On the one hand, a rejection of corruption in principle while on the other hand, tolerating it in personal prac-

tice. Those who complain about corruption often view themselves as the ‘prisoners’ of the phenomenon having very little ability to challenge the system in which they are forced to function.

Anti-corruption initiatives in Ukraine have in the past targeted specific individuals, and have consequently failed to challenge the institutional framework or the systems of governance within which those individuals operate. In addition, those in power have failed to present a good example of transparent governance and personal probity. In 2016 in an attempt to tackle corruption and placate western donors, specifically the International Monetary Fund, the government of Ukraine “launched the wealth database for legislators and civil servants” (Prentice, 2018). About one million civil servants had to complete an on-line e-declaration. As a result of the information being made public ordinary citizens have learned of the luxurious life style of many politicians and senior civil servants. Nevertheless, it is telling that the National Agency on Corruption Prevention that is supposed to check the e-declaration data, has never really been fully operational (*ibid.*). This half-baked implementation explains the remaining and substantial degree of scepticism on the part of the general public. It seems that although information on corrupt officials is increasingly available, systemic concrete actions to end corruption have not yet started.

In such a context one can see why voluntary bribe offering becomes a norm: the administrative structure remains the same and most newly appointed officials tend to operate under the same norm. To simply survive it becomes necessary to ‘play the system’; to offer a bribe when necessary.

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