

How do South Africans feel about corruption in South Africa?

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In a telephone study conducted by RS, South Africa's leading marketing insights company, amongst a sample of 500 SA adults in metropolitan areas who had access to a landline telephone at the beginning of January 2005, attitudes and perceptions of South Africans about corruption in South Africa were probed.

Some very serious concerns

Some very serious concerns about corruption and its likely direction were expressed by the sample interviewed. People were asked to agree or disagree with each of the following:

- "There is corruption in senior levels of government"

Agree - 79%

Disagree - 10%

Don't know - 11%

- "Many police officers take bribes"

Agree - 75%

Disagree - 14%

Don't know - 11%

- "Corruption is getting worse in this country"

Agree - 76%

Disagree - 18%

Don't know - 6%

- "Corruption is becoming a way of life in South Africa"

Agree - 74%

Disagree - 24%

Don't know - 2%

This can be summarised by saying that, in general, about three-quarters of those surveyed feel that corruption is a major problem in South Africa - a problem that they feel is getting worse and one that is becoming endemic to the country.

Very often, when looking at such issues, South Africa's past means that responses are different for different race groups. In this case, however, this was less apparent than usual. Blacks were more likely to say that police officers take bribes (85%) than other race groups, especially whites (65%). However, whites were more likely to say that there is corruption at senior levels in government (88%) than blacks (74%), as were those in Gauteng and Cape Town (eight out of ten people compared with six out of ten in Durban).

Some positives

Whilst there are serious concerns about this issue, there is some reason for hope:

- "Corruption is not as bad as elsewhere in Africa"

Agree - 47%

Disagree - 34%

Don't know - 20%

- "The media exposes most corruption"

Agree - 67%

Disagree - 27%

Don't know - 6%

The first statement suggests that we are not as bad as the rest of Africa - but, given the already serious concerns raised about corruption here, this may be more a statement about how bad the rest of Africa is rather than that we are better.

The role of the media is clearly a central one. It is also clear that the people interviewed, whilst being very positive about the role of the media, feel that the media must be ever vigilant.

However, only a half of the white sample felt that the media exposed most corruption compared with almost three-quarters of other race groups. In addition, people in Gauteng were the least positive on this aspect (six out of ten people), compared with three-quarters of those in Durban and Cape Town.

In summary

Whilst the situation is not as bad as in the rest of Africa, there is clearly a serious concern over corruption in general in South Africa, and in government and the police force in particular. The perceptions that people feel it is becoming a way of life and that it is a growing problem are clearly very worrying perceptions. The media's role is very important in exposing corruption. However, clearly, there needs to be very public stances taken by both government and all organisations against corruption. This needs to be backed up by visible action when it is discovered.

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