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## **PUBLIC PERCEPTION ON ANTI-CORRUPTION MEASURES AND THE IMPACT ON NATIONAL SECURITY**

**Melania PĂUȘAN<sup>1</sup>**

### **ABSTRACT:**

*CORRUPTION IS ONE OF THE MOST IMPACTFUL PROBLEMS IN EVERY SOCIETY AND IS HAS LARGE IMPLICATIONS ON NATIONAL SECURITY AS WELL. THIS IS WHY ANTI-CORRUPTION MEASURES ARE EXTREMELY IMPORTANT, ESPECIALLY NOWADAYS, WHEN EVERYTHING AROUND US IS EVOLVING. WHAT IS ALSO IMPORTANT IS THE PERCEPTION OF THE POPULATION ON THESE MEASURES. THIS ARTICLES STARTS FROM THE PREMISE THAT CITIZENS ARE THE ONES WHO ENCOUNTER THE EFFECTS OF CORRUPTION EVERYDAY AND THAT THEIR OPINION IS IMPORTANT REGARDING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF ANTI-CORRUPTION MEASURES, THUS CONTRIBUTING TO NATIONAL SECURITY. THEREFORE, THE PRESENT STUDY AIMS TO MEASURE PUBLIC PERCEPTION ON THE CURRENT ANTI-CORRUPTION MEASURES AND COLLECT NEW IDEAS, IN ORDER TO BOOST NATIONAL SECURITY. ALSO, THIS ARTICLE CAN BE A STARTING POINT FOR ANTI-CORRUPTION PROFESSIONALS IN ELABORATING AND IMPLEMENTING NEW MEASURES TO FIGHT CORRUPTION.*

**KEY WORDS:** CORRUPTION, MEASURES, NATIONAL SECURITY, PERCEPTION, CITIZENS

### **INTRODUCTION**

The phenomenon of corruption is one of the biggest threats to national security, because it affects the efficient functioning of state institutions, accentuates social inequalities [1-2] and increases the degree of people's mistrust in the figure of the state, which ultimately leads to a dysfunctional society and system as a whole, and an environment conducive to the installation of chaos.

Also, the most eloquent and recent example, if we take a look at the developments in society in the last period, in the context of the elections that were held worldwide, we see that extreme right movements movements have taken the lead, which endanger national security, through the idea of ethical principles and fairness that they promote at first glance, which leads to a high degree of instability and social division. This is due, among others, to corruption. The majority of people justify the nationalist choices made by the fact that they are fed up with nepotism, inequalities, corruption and everything that comes with it.

Unfortunately, a world without corruption is a utopia, but we can hope for a smaller flow of acts of corruption by developing more effective measures against this phenomenon,

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and one of the best methods to measure the effectiveness of measures against corruption, among other instruments, is society's perception of them and of corruption in general.

Thus, this article aims to evaluate society's perception on corruption and the effectiveness of the measures to combat it, with the following objectives: identifying the current perception of the effectiveness of the current measures to combat corruption, by identifying the most prominent areas in which, from the public's perspective, corruption is felt, and the objective to identify, also from the public's perspective, what other measures would be effective, bearing in mind the new developments registered at the level of society and which are able to affect the ways of perpetuating and manifesting corruption.

To this end, and to ensure a clear understanding of the treated subject, I considered it appropriate to approach this subject from two perspectives: one theoretical, and one practical. The theoretical perspective has the role of explaining in detail what the phenomenon of corruption means in Romania, the ways in which it manifests itself, the national institutions and the international partnerships established for anti-corruption, and the measures that currently exist. Also, in this part, we will explain the connection between corruption and national security, as well as the importance of public perception in this domain, all in order to create the perfect theoretical context for this study.

On the other hand, the practical perspective consists of a questionnaire applied at the level of society, which targets all branches and all people, starting from the premise that the phenomenon of corruption exists, at a lower or bigger level, in all societal branches. Thus, gathering different opinions, from my point of view, is extremely relevant, especially because this subject is of high value for national security.

At first glance, new research in the field of anti-corruption may seem redundant, bearing in mind that there have been many similar approaches in the past. But, taking into account the developments in society and the fact that new means are always being developed, I consider it opportune to resume research on this subject and explore new measures against corruption, expressed even by those who are directly or indirectly affected by this phenomenon.

Of course, in the end, the contribution of anti-corruption specialists is very important in this field, but the citizen's perspective is equally valuable, because it can highlight needs that were not previously seen by specialists or draw attention to certain aspects that were not sufficiently taken into account in the development of anti-corruption measures.

The results of the questionnaire can ultimately serve as a solid starting point for identifying other measures against corruption, based on society's perception of this phenomenon, because, in the end, the role of anti-corruption institutions is to serve the citizens of the state, to ensure fair access to public services, ultimately contributing to a balance from the perspective of national security in Romania.

## **THEORETICAL CONCEPTS ABOUT CORRUPTION AND NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS**

When we talk about the concept of corruption, we already know that this is not a new notion and that acts of corruption similar to those that happen today exist from the ancient times, when people found ways to deviate from the rules in order to make themselves more pleasant, to enjoy certain benefits more than others or to "cheat the system".

There is no concrete and clear definition of the phenomenon of corruption, this depending on the perspective from which it is viewed, on the purpose of the acts assimilated to corruption, highlighting the fact that this notion can refer to a wide range of fields, activities, etc.

According to the online version of the English Dictionary, corruption means "making or becoming morally corrupt; the fact or condition of being corrupt; moral deterioration or decay; depravity" [3]. It can also be defined as "the abuse of entrusted power for private gain" [4].

There are many more definitions of corruption, such as "an insidious plague that has a wide range of corrosive effects on societies" [5] or the misuse of entrusted power for personal gain, being present in both the public and private sectors, as well as the political arena, taking forms such as nepotism, favoritism to high-level corruption [6].

In Friedrich's opinion, corruption is a deviant behavior from rules considered normal, being associated with a special motivation which consists of private gain at public expense [7]. Here, the gain can be pecuniary (money) but it can also be a quick promotion or decorations for himself or for another. Authors like Heidenheimer et al [8] also see corruption as a deviant behavior which does not meet the formal duties of a public role due to personal interests.

As shown by the definitions presented above, there is no complete and unanimously accepted and used definition of the term "corruption", because acts of corruption can be encountered everywhere and can take different forms.

At the national level, the National Anticorruption Directorate [9] defines it as being a deviation from morality, honor and duty, while the National Anticorruption Strategy [10] identifies corruption as a risk and vulnerability that endangers the state (which directly means that it impacts national security as well), both economically and in terms of good governance, leading to the loss of people's trust in the state, democracy and justice.

More than that, considering the complexity of this phenomenon, over time a series of opinions regarding the types of corruption have emerged. A first classification is private corruption and public corruption, which have the same definition [6], differentiating only in terms of the sector in which it manifests, respectively in public institutions or in private enterprises.

Another relevant classification for this research is active corruption and passive corruption, as they are mentioned in the Criminal Law Convention on Corruption adopted in 1999 by the member states of the Council of Europe and other signatory states. Therefore, the Convention defines active corruption as the act of offering a public agent an improper material benefit for the exercise of a service duty, and passive corruption refers to the act of a public agent receiving an improper material benefit for the performance of a service assignment [11].

According to the Romanian national regulations, passive and active corruption are equivalent to the crimes of giving and taking bribes [12], stipulated in the Romanian Criminal Code, through articles 289 and 290. Similar to those stipulated in the Criminal Law Convention on Corruption, the Romanian Criminal Code makes the difference between the action of giving a bribe and the action of taking, referring to the entire act of corruption, both on one side and on the other.

Therefore, the National Anticorruption Directorate differentiates between two types of corruption, depending on the amount paid or the quality of the person involved, classifying it as "big corruption" or "small corruption" [9].

In continuation of the categories of acts of corruption mentioned above and corroborated with the national institutions empowered to prevent and combat corruption, the national legislation delimits the acts of corruption between corruption crimes and acts assimilated to corruption crimes.

Therefore, the first category is regulated by the Criminal Code, through the following crimes: taking bribe, giving bribe, trading in influence and buying influence [12] – also known as influence padding. To this is added a series of acts assimilated to corruption crimes [12],

the reason behind the choice of the legislators to include these crimes in the sphere of corruption resides in the fact that the criminal means have evolved over time, and the criminals have always found other means to commit corruption, which are poorly regulated from a legal point of view.

In Romania, the institutions empowered with anti-corruption attributions, whether speaking of prevention or combating, are the following: the Ministry of Justice, the National AntiCorruption Directorate, the Anti-Corruption General Directorate within the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the National Agency for the Administration of Undisposed Assets, within the Ministry of Justice, the National Integrity Agency, Prosecutor`s Office attached to the High Court of Cassation and Justice.

All of them have the task of undertaking activities with the aim of combating and preventing corruption at all levels where it is identified, and from several points of view. Some are charged with the task of investigating acts of corruption, others have the task of ensuring the transparency of revenues or making the assets from crimes unavailable and commercial.

The attributes of these institutions must be seen from two perspectives: the perspective of preventing acts of corruption, and the perspective of fighting corruption.

### **ANTI-CORRUPTION MEASURES**

Anti-corruption measures represent that unitary set of tools aimed at reducing the phenomenon of corruption in all areas.

The anti-corruption institutions in Romania, mentioned above, have the role of implementing anti-corruption measures, which are very well stated in the Romanian National Anti-Corruption Strategy (*here in after* SNA). The SNA contains an important compilation of normative acts to regulate and introduce anti-corruption measures, which are:

- the development of ethical, deontological and conduct codes;
- declaration of gifts - according to Law 251/2004;
- the ethics advisor - according to the Government Emergency Ordinance no. 57/2019;
- declaration of assets and interests, according to Law 176/2010;
- conflicts of interests according to Law 161/2003;
- establishing incompatibilities by Law 176/2010 and Law 161/2003;
- the establishment of post-employment prohibitions within public institutions, through Law 98/2016 and 99/2016, Law 672/2002, 161/2003, Government Emergency Ordinance 66/2011, Law 21/1996, Law 100/2016, Government Emergency Ordinance 87/2020;
- regulation of transparency in the exceptional process – according to Law 52/2003 and Law 544/2001;
- protection of the public interest whistleblower – according to Law 571/2004;
- the regulation of sensitive functions, by Order no. 600/2018.

All of these above are considered to be a set of anti-corruption measures, which aim to reform the justice system, training and education of staff from public institutions, introducing measures to monitor political activity, supporting better international cooperation in the field of anti-corruption.

The fact that some measures are designed specifically for each field is also important to mention. For example, we have some measures specifically dedicated to the public health system, the national education system (audio-video monitoring measures of organized national exam competitions, the establishment of evaluation centers for different exams, as well as other measures related to the correction and evaluation of papers).

We also have the field of public procurement, where the main measure here is digitization of the public procurement system. The field of financing political parties and

electoral campaigns also has its measures: periodic organization by the Permanent Electoral Authority of training sessions for the representatives of the political parties, measures concerning with ensuring the publicity of the sources of financing the activity of political parties and political campaigns, measure regarding the development and use of IT programs to eliminate multiple voting.

Of course that all of these measures are not the only ones and that all these are complemented by the attempt to constantly revise the anti-corruption legislation in force, attempts to create some methodologies and mechanisms for measuring corruption with the aim of identifying the best modalities, but also the sectors where corruption is felt in a significant way, to which is added the component of international relations and transnational cooperation in terms of the anti-corruption fight.

### **THE IMPORTANCE OF INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION IN THE FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION**

In order to be able to identify and develop the most efficient measures against corruption, international cooperation in this regard plays an extremely important role. International anti-corruption cooperation has begun to represent an efficient means of developing the best anti-corruption measures. This also explains the growth of international networks and initiatives, as well as the bilateral cooperation in this field.

From Romania's perspective, cooperation in the area of anti-corruption is seen from several perspectives, respectively non-operative cooperation and operative cooperation. In addition, we have in view the perspective of international, regional and bilateral cooperation.

In this sense, we will mention the main networks and partnerships in which Romania has chosen to participate, with the aim not only to align with international trends in anti-corruption and to increase its visibility, but also to take over the most effective techniques and measures against corruption.

On the non-operative cooperation side, there are a series of visible partnerships on the international scene in the field of anti-corruption that Romania, through its institutions specially empowered in this regard, has chosen to be a part of.

The main one, and the one that includes the largest number of participants, with a global spread, is the cooperation within the United Nations Convention against Corruption (*here in after* UNCAC). This is an instrument started by the UN, being "the only legally binding anti-corruption instrument" [13]. The goal of UNCAC is to bring together as many agencies and institutions with attributions in the fight against corruption and to put at their disposal a set of unified rules in this field and contribute to the creation of a strong context of cooperation in general.

This is also the reason why I mentioned this instrument here, although it is not in the true sense of the word an initiative, but it creates the framework for cooperation and the basis of many national normative acts that regulate the development of anticorruption measures.

Also, European Partners Against Corruption/ European contact-point network against corruption (EPAC/EACN), Regional Anticorruption Initiative (RAI), the European Network Against Corruption, the International Association of Anti-Corruption Authorities (IAACA) are also important to mention here because Romania is part of them and has evolved over time because of it.

All of these, have different attributions, some are focused on the exchange of good practices, others facilitate summer schools and planning courses, others facilitate high-level conferences and meetings, but, in the end, they all have the same goal: to identify and develop the best measures to combat and prevent corruption.

Also, there is cooperation, both conceptual and for developing methods and solutions on a bilateral level, both with the neighboring states, Bulgaria, Republic of Moldova, Hungary, Ukraine and Serbia, but also with other states, for example France, Spain, Italy. Moreover, with the neighboring states, we are intensively discussing the fight against corruption, especially on the operative side and regarding corruption at the borders of the countries, with corruption offenses committed by workers from both countries or Romanian citizens or other nationalities.

It is important to mention these partnerships, because they constitute the essence of the development of the most effective measures against corruption at the national level, whether we are talking about measures to combat it, or about measures and strategies to prevent this phenomenon. In fact, if we go back in time, we can observe that one of the most important anti-corruption structures in Romania is also the result of international cooperation and state-wide partnerships.

The Anti-Corruption General Directorate, established in 2005, was established with the help of Spain and Great Britain, and their contribution was an important basis for the operation of this structure. Moreover, through subsequent involvement in various networks, this institution managed to maintain its functionality and establish itself as an important structure at the national level, even reaching to export expertise and good practices for a series of countries in the field of anti-corruption.

This example shows us the importance of international cooperation when it comes to corruption, especially since society has evolved in such a way that there exists some sort of dependence between countries. Likewise, criminality no longer has borders and does not take borders into account.

This undoubtedly requires a common response from the states and the elaboration of unitary rules to deal with these subjects. In addition, within these international cooperation initiatives, several perspectives can be brought together, good practices and expertise can be exchanged, and ideas from several areas can be brought together, which in the end will be stronger and more effective for everyone.

All states cooperate, because crime of all types, including corruption, has evolved and transcends national borders. That is why cooperation and the coagulation of the efforts of all states is now needed more than ever to be able to combat this phenomenon as effectively as possible.

## **THE CONNECTION BETWEEN CORRUPTION AND NATIONAL SECURITY**

Corruption not only affects the equity of citizens' access to financial or any other kind of services, but also facilitates other types of crimes and criminality and penetrates deep into all the fundamental institutions of the state, deeply degrading them, affecting their functionality and endangering national security.

Incidentally, this is not new. This has been emphasized since the beginning of the 2000s, more precisely through the country's National Security Strategy of 2007, when the high danger of corruption to national security was clearly identified, emphasizing that national security is put at risk as a result of "inefficient governance - effect of the democratic deficit and endemic institutional corruption" [14], and moreover, for the fulfillment of the country's objectives and for a good national security, it was emphasized the need to eradicate or reduce corruption, among others [14].

Moreover, it is mentioned that the UNCAC and all the states that have ratified this convention are committed to fighting corruption with the ultimate goal of ensuring national security and generating high security at the regional level [15].

National security is an important pillar for the proper functioning of any state. This concept, highly debated over time, consists of a series of well-regulated institutions and clear laws that allow the achievement of Romania's objectives [16], both nationally and internationally, with the ultimate goal of creating a favorable environment for its own citizens.

It goes without saying that once these institutions are corrupted, or once the laws of the country do not find their application as a result of this phenomenon, the functionality of the state and the national security as a whole are called into question.

Per a contrario, in the scenario where a state has put in place a functional and well-thought-out system of anti-corruption measures, which covers all levels and domains, the national security is safe.

Romania, although it still has many levels to improve, is not far from the scenario where national security is safe from corruption. As seen in the measures section, there are currently measures specifically dedicated to certain levels. However, it is important to recognize that we are not yet 100% adapted to the reality of our days and that there are still situations where corruption is one step ahead of the authorities, and that it is important to continue the procedure of identifying the most appropriate anti-corruption measures.

Thus, bearing in mind that corruption weighs so heavily on ensuring an environment of national and regional security, one can also understand the importance of anti-corruption measures. However, what is equally important and what represents a good tool for measuring the effectiveness of these measures, is precisely the citizens' perception of this subject and of corruption in general, because people are the ones who are directly or indirectly affected by this phenomenon and its effects on a daily basis.

## **METHODOLOGY**

I chose to address all categories of people, regardless of age or level of education, because we are all affected by corruption, in one way or another, either directly or indirectly. Many people have at some point been victims of corruption.

Starting with the main and most well-known measures against corruption detailed in the theoretical part of this study, I designed a questionnaire intended for the population. Also, starting from all the fields mentioned in the SNA, it goes without saying that corruption is felt at all levels, that's why it was relevant to apply a questionnaire to all those willing to participate in this study.

In total, the questionnaire has 4 parts: two questions intended to classify/position them in certain categories related to age and level of education, which most of the time can impact the perception of certain concepts/phenomena. Then we have questions that suggest the level/way in which each person is positioned regarding the phenomenon of corruption and vis-à-vis the institutions empowered to apply measures against corruption.

The third part aims at the way in which the population relates concretely to the anti-corruption measures existing at the national level, by including the most well-known ones and measuring their level of trust in these and see whether they know their relevance for national security.

Then, the most valuable part, from my point of view, is the very personal answer of each respondent regarding what could improve the fight against corruption or what other measures would be effective. This was an interesting part to see, because in some answers, you could see unedited and on-topic, direct answers, some people's frustrations generated most likely because of some experiences in which they ran into and so on.

Considering that I mentioned that one of the instruments for measuring efficiency is the perception of people, I wanted to make sure that I am not addressing only a certain category of

people, which could be subjective or distort reality. That's why, for a copy as faithful as possible of reality in this regard, I addressed this questionnaire.

The questionnaire was developed in the Google Forms application, in English, and was distributed starting from 06.02.2025, so we can say that it is relevant due to the fact that it is recently reported at the time of writing this article. It was shared via WhatsApp, on various groups of which I belong, with the request to cast it further. Thus, the sample consists of Romanian citizens, of all ages, from all geographical and demographic areas of Romania. The responses were collected anonymously.

### KEY FINDINGS

In total, a number of 82 people, aged between 18 and 60 years old, answered the questionnaire, all in the percentages according to *Figure 1*, as follows: 4 people under 18 years old, 43 people (and the highest percentage) aged between 18-30 years old, 29 people aged between 31-45 and 6 people aged between 46-60 years, with the mention that no response was recorded from people over 60 years old.

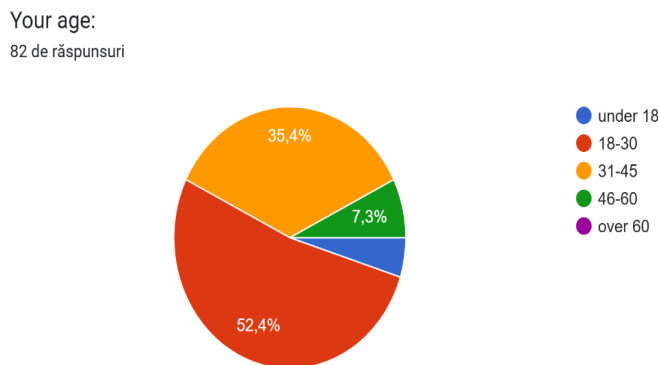


Figure 1. Distribution of respondents by age

I considered it appropriate to share in these categories because I wanted to give everyone the chance to give their opinion on this phenomenon.

This was relevant to see if those with higher education somehow have a distinct opinion and a wider knowledge of this phenomenon - and in conclusion, returning to this question strictly, we can conclude that regardless of the level of education, people have the same opinion about corruption and about the measures and about their impact on national security.

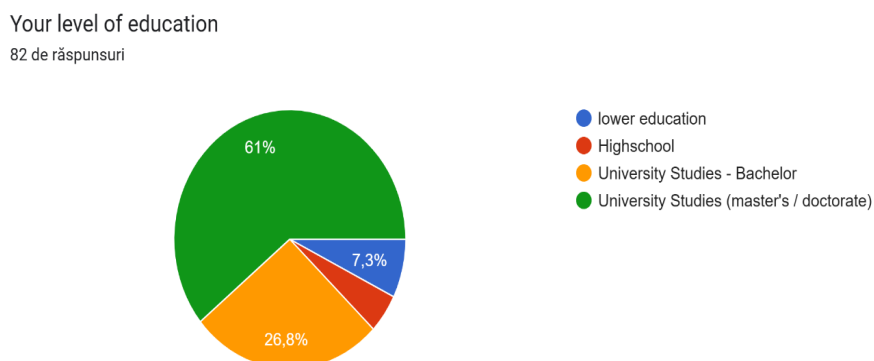


Figure 2. Distribution of respondents by their level of education

Here, it can be seen from *Figure 2* that more than half of the respondents (61%) have a higher education level, followed by 26.8% with higher education, 4.9% secondary education (high school) and 7.3% lower education.

I included the age and the education level because I wanted to see if I can identify different patterns regarding the perception of corruption based on these.

Regarding the measurement of the effectiveness of the currently existing anti-corruption measures, the situation is according to the figure below (*Figure 3*):

In your opinion, how effective are the current measures to fight corruption in the public sector?

82 de răspunsuri

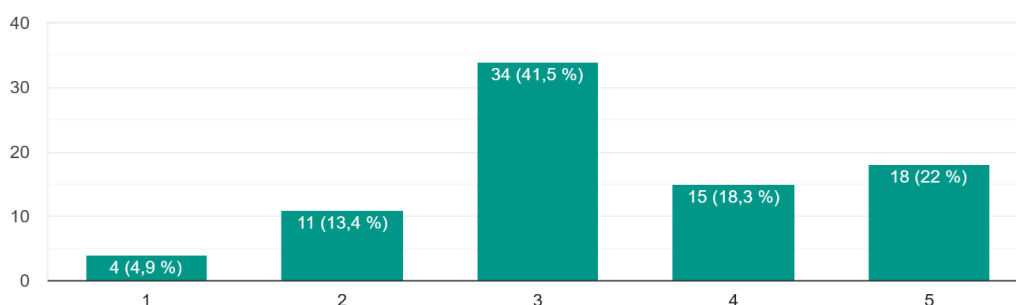


Figure 3. Distribution of perception on effectiveness of the current measures

Here, it is important to mention that I built a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means the lowest value, in the sense that their belief is that the efficiency is very low, and the value 5 means that the belief is that the efficiency is high.

Later, the perception of the main institutions where corruption is spread were measured, the options being: law enforcement institutions, justice, HealthCare System, Local Public Administration and Other, the breakdown of the answers being as follows:

Which do you consider to be the main institutions affected by corruption in your country?

82 de răspunsuri

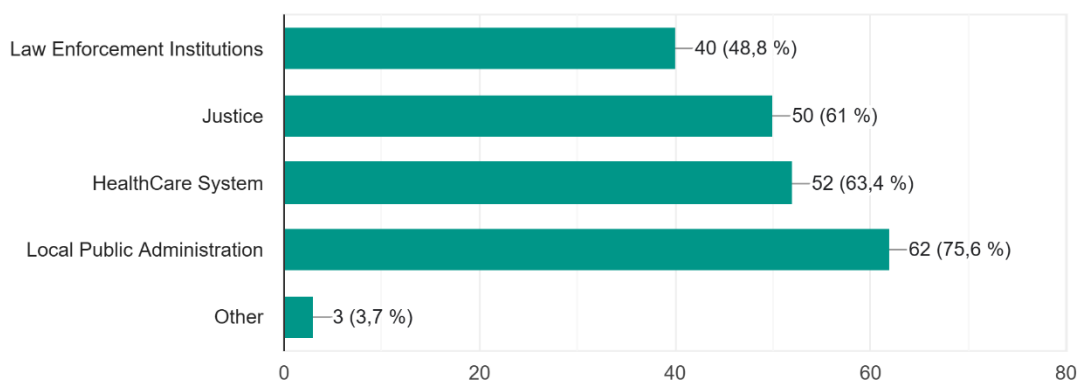


Figure 4. Distribution of the opinion regarding the main institutions affected by corruption in Romania

The answer options are with multiple answers, so the proportion is as follows: 48.8% law enforcement institutions, 61% justice, 63.4% HealthCare System, 75.6% Local Public Administration and 3.7% other option, where 3 people would have felt to add somethings in this regard.

With regard to the trust in the institutions of the state to combat corruption (*Figure 5*), the scale was also thought on the principle that 1 equals excused trust, and 5 equals high trust, so the percentage was 20 people (24.4%) low trust, 26 people (31.7%) medium to low trust, 25 people (30.5%) medium trust, 10 people (12.2%) medium trust to high, and only 1 person (1.2%) high confidence, achieving an average of 2.34 out of 5.

How do you rate your trust in public authorities in terms of fighting corruption?

82 de răspunsuri

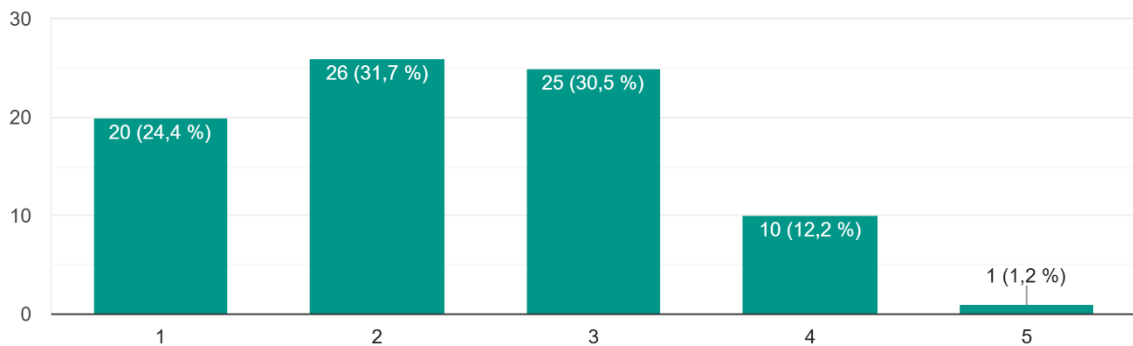


Figure 5. Trust in public institutions rating

Regarding the question regarding the link between corruption and national security (*Figure 6*), the statistics are as follows: 53.7% believe that corruption affects national security to a great extent, 32.9% believe that corruption affects national security to a lesser extent, 11% do not know/have no opinion, and 2.4% believe that corruption has no impact on national security.

Do you think the level of corruption in your country affects national security?

82 de răspunsuri

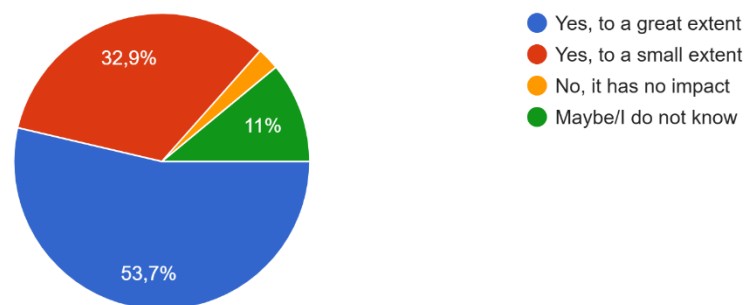


Figure 6. Distribution of perceptions regarding corruption affecting national security

For the part of effective anti-corruption measures that should be increased in order to more effectively fight import corruption, *Figure 7* shows us exactly what the situation is.

Which of the following measures do you think could most improve the fight against corruption and, by implication, national security?

82 de răspunsuri



Figure 7. Distribution of responsens regarding the measures to improve the fight against corruption

Here, we have the following results: increasing transparency in public institutions is considered to be the best in order to improve the fight against corruption by 64.6%, followed by introducing stricter measures 59.8% and reforming the justice system by 57.3%, and then training and education of staff from public institutions by 48.8% and supporting better international cooperation in the field by 41.5%.

Last but not least, the question: *Please tell us what other suggestions/ideas of measures against corruption you have*, which leaves it up to everyone to respond with the measures they consider more appropriate, also recording a total of 82 responses, of which only 55 can be used, because the rest had responses unable to interpret, such as: *I don't know, I have no other suggestions*, or ....

## CONCLUSION

The citizens' perception is that the most significant areas where the phenomenon of corruption is felt is in the local public administration, with a percentage of 75.6% (see *Figure 4*), followed by the HealthCare System and then in the Justice System. With this, we can only reconfirm the fact that corruption is a common phenomenon in all public institutions, regardless of their specifics, and that everyone, despite their age, level of education or profession, is directly or indirectly affected by the effects of corruption.

Citizens do not fully trust the current anti-corruption measures. As seen from *Figure 3*, the trust average is somewhere in the middle on a scale from 1 to 5, which means things are not as bad as we thought, but there is still room for improvement, especially since 22% of the evaluated sample declared that they have maximum confidence in the currently used measures.

Furthermore, regarding the population's trust in the institutions capable of fighting corruption, the perception is somewhere in the middle (*Figure 5*), similar to the trust in anti-corruption measures. However, one can observe the rather distrustful tendency.

The fact that the citizens' perception is somewhere in the middle does not mean that the institutions and measures are ineffective or that they must be completely reformed, but only that they can be improved so that the results are better.

Corroborating the three questions, specialists qualified to measure the phenomenon of corruption and to identify new measures to reduce it, could focus primarily on public institutions, so as to increase the confidence of the population, both in the targeted institutions and in the institutions authorised with fight against corruption.

Regarding the connection between corruption and national security, more than half are of the opinion that they are related, and that corruption greatly affects national security. Of course, the notion of national security is one that requires a certain degree of understanding and that this statistic could have undergone changes as a result of the misunderstanding of what this concept entails, but considering that most of the respondents have higher education, I consider that their answer is relevant.

It is also important to mention that not only corruption affects national security, but also the citizens' negative perception of anti-corruption measures can affect national security. Citizens represent an important pillar of national security and a concept that is entirely addressed to them.

Strengthening institutional capacities is definitely an instrument for strengthening national security, and this is all the more valid, as it is about the institutions capable of fighting corruption.

In addition to strengthening institutional capacities, it is also important to develop, consolidate and improve anti-corruption measures, a good part of respondents being of the opinion that the most efficient measure would be to increase transparency in public institutions, measures that currently exist through asset declarations, for example.

Then, the introduction of stricter measures to monitor the activity in public institutions are considered to be optimal measures (*Figure 7*), followed by the reform of the justice system, with a percentage of 57.3%. The idea of reforming the justice system is not a new one. What's more, if we take a look at the past at the time of joining the European Union.

Closing the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism certainly means that progress has been made in this field, but it does not mean that efforts must be stopped. Moreover, considering the citizens' opinion, this reform process should be resumed from certain perspectives, as one of the most important anti-corruption measures.

The most interesting part of this study is the very last question, which gathers the honest and transparent opinions of the respondents, especially since the questionnaire was anonymous. Thus, among the proposed measures, in addition to those already mentioned in *question 7*, different or closely related to them, the following are included: *education, public awareness, raising the salaries of the public employees, introducing corruption as a subject in schools, training and education of staff in public institutions.*

One of the most interesting responses collected, and which has been repeated many times, is the idea of increasing the penalties for corruption crimes, an idea stated in the form of "*more tough laws*", "*raising sentences*", "*many years in jail for corruption*". This is not entirely possible, because the legislator must take into account a series of principles when deciding the length of punishments or their severity, as well as human rights. However, it is alarming that many people see this extreme measure as the only and final solution against corruption.

An answer that was found many times among the respondents was that of *increasing the salaries of employees in public institutions*. The rationale behind this idea resides in the fact that if employees received a decent salary, they would no longer be so tempted to fall prey to acts of corruption.

In addition, I noticed a pattern regarding the *activity of politicians*. Many respondents believe that this is precisely where corruption starts, from the political class, who most of the time use their position to obtain various benefits for themselves or others.

It was also proposed to *take over the Scandinavian system* in terms of corruption, a system that is well known everywhere for its efficiency in reducing crime, including corruption.

Of course, this study was conducted at a micro level and maybe some would think that if it had been applied to a larger number of people, the statistics would have been much different. However, from my point of view, if the questionnaire had been applied to a larger sample of the population, the data would have been largely the same.

The fact that the citizens' perception is somewhere in the middle does not mean that the institutions and measures are ineffective or that they must be completely reformed, but only that they can be improved so that the results are better.

The conclusion is that many do not currently have total confidence in the state's anti-corruption institutions and in the effectiveness of anti-corruption measures to increase Romania's national security.

What is there to be done? Make a more in-depth analyses of the effectiveness of the current anti-corruption measures, evaluate the actual national context, identify the new threats to national security, see where corruption is located in this whole context and try to develop the existing measures and elaborate new ones.

The study followed the general opinion, not just from certain fields, because corruption must be viewed as a whole and treated as such in order to contribute to national security. This is an important starting point. In addition, considering that the reasoning behind national security is the good of the citizen, it is important to pay particular attention to the expectations that citizens have from the institutions that serve them, in order to do it fairly for all citizens.

Most of the anti-corruption measures are developed by specialists who measure corruption in various fields, taking into account the number of corruption crimes committed from year to year, but less taking into account the opinion of the citizens who encounter corruption on a daily basis. Even if it is efficient up to a certain point, it can be seen from the questionnaire that the citizens still have doubts about them and are waiting for the state to take a step forward in this regard.

This, along with continuing to raise awareness regarding corruption and with the continued mutual efforts of national and international institutions, could constitute a starting point in the future in the development of new measures against corruption.

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