# TRACKING SOCIAL NORMS AND BEHAVIOUR IN SOUTH AFRICA: MEASURING ATTITUDES TO CORRUPTION

# HEADLINE FINDINGS FROM THE SASAS 2024/2025 MODULE

*Report prepared*

*by*

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

# GLOSSARY

**Public Opinion**
The collective attitudes, beliefs, and sentiments held by the general population on various issues or topics.

**General Public**
The broad and diverse population within a society who are not part of any specific group or organisation. In this report, the term refers to adults living in South Africa.

**Social Norm**
Social norms represent shared understandings of appropriate behaviour, formed through mutual expectations derived from beliefs about anticipated outcomes or preferred conduct. These beliefs, often implicit, evolve from observations of others' actions and perceptions of anticipated societal standards and interpersonal obligations.

**Indirect Experience**
The experiences that people known to a person have and are then related to them.

**Awareness**
The extent to which respondents recognises a particular subject. It indicates whether people have heard of, or seen, the subject being measured in the survey. Knowledge, on the other hand, goes beyond awareness and reflects the accuracy and extent of a person's information or understanding about that issue.

**Social Value**
A collective belief or principle held by a society, shaping attitudes, behaviours, and priorities. These values often serve as guiding principles in decision-making processes, influencing individual and group actions within the community.

**Institutional Trust**
The confidence individuals have in the credibility, effectiveness, and integrity of an organisation (such as government bodies, corporations, and educational institutions). It plays a crucial role in fostering organisational legitimacy and influences people's willingness to cooperate with organisations.

# 1   INTRODUCTION

The National Anti-Corruption Strategy (NACS) 2020-2030 is an inclusive plan to reduce corrupt practices in South Africa. The NACS acknowledges that corruption is an entrenched problem that permeates both the country's public and private sectors. It recognises that while the nation boasts a sophisticated anti-corruption legal framework, it struggles with enforcement and compliance. The NACS envisions a whole-of-society approach to address the problem of corruption in which all sectors contribute to, and benefit from, anti-corruption initiatives.  It aims to promote social values and social norms that will prevent and counteract corruption in the country, such as accountability, integrity and transparency. The NACS seeks to encourage active citizen participation in the fight against corruption; calling on members of the public to report corruption if they witness it. The National Anti-Corruption Advisory Council (NACAC) and the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME) have sought to develop, assess and adapt strategies to combat and prevent corruption in accordance with the NACS.

The overall goal of the study is to support implementation of the NACS by identifying those social values and social norms that facilitate corruption and those that  enable effective corruption countermeasures in the country.   The study, titled 'Tracking Social Norms and Behaviour Change in South Africa: Measuring Attitudes to Corruption' aims to produce reliable, evidence-based insights into the factors driving and enabling corruption in South Africa as well as efforts to prevent and combat it. The research was conducted by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC).  A nationally representative public opinion survey was utilised to gather information on social values and social norms. Such an approach is designed to estimate the views of a wide and diverse population, providing generalisable insights into public attitudes, beliefs and behaviours.  This approach was selected because the NACS was designed to have a national impact and was not just focused on a narrow segment of the population. DPME has indicated an interest in using the study for as part of the impact measurement strategy of the NACS.

It is important, at this stage, to acknowledge that this is a crucial time to be studying corruption in South Africa. The national government has expanded its fight against corruption in the last few years.  Much of these new efforts build on the work of the State Capture Commission of Inquiry chaired by then-Chief Justice Zondo. This greater emphasis has come at a time when there has been meaningful progress on addressing some of the country's most pressing issues including the energy crisis[1] From a political perspective, the nation has experienced a change in government. National and Provincial Elections (NPE) took place on the 29th of May 2024 and led to the formation of a coalition government or 'government of national unity' (GNU). This is the first coalition government in nearly three decades and, at least in its first year, has been received with a degree of popular support.[2] New government ministers promised renewed efforts to fight corruption and crime, signalling a fresh direction.

Even though corruption poses a significant challenge in South Africa, there is a lack of robust public opinion research on this critical issue.  As a result, not enough is currently known about social norms and values that may inform attitudes regarding corruption in the country.  The present study seeks to address this knowledge gap, promoting a discussion of possible future anti-corruption responses by South African society as a whole. The present report covers findings from the second year of this two-year study.  This headline analysis presented a brief summary of the key findings from the SASAS module, focusing exclusively on the main results. It does not include an extensive examination of subgroup differences or the relationships between variables. A more detailed and comprehensive analysis will be available in a forthcoming full report, which will also include discussion of qualitative components of the study.

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[1] Late 2023 was the height of the so-called when the country experienced record levels of loadshedding. Rolling blackouts left some homes and businesses without electricity for extended periods, sometimes up to 10 hours a day. The crisis was caused by underinvestment, mismanagement, and corruption in the state-owned electricity supplier Eskom (for a discussion of this crisis, see Ballim, 2023). The 'energy crisis' began to lessen throughout the course of 2024 and by August 2024 loadshedding was suspended.

[2] A snap opinion poll taken during early 2025 by the SABI Strategy Group (2025) found that most South Africans approve of the GNU according to a national survey. More than half (57%) of the general public think the GNU is performing well while 60% think it is performing better than the last government.

## 2    THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS: SOCIAL NORMS AND SOCIAL VALUES

Before presenting the methodological framework used for this report, it would be informative to reflect on the key theoretical components that underpin it.  We start by considering the question: what exactly are social norms? Social norms are informal guidelines that shape how individuals act within a specific group or society. These norms can be divided into two primary categories: (i) descriptive norms and (ii) injunctive norms. Descriptive norms relate to what individuals or groups believe to be typical or appropriate behaviour, whereas injunctive norms concern the expectations others have regarding proper conduct (Bicchieri, 2017). Social norms are maintained through rewards and punishments, such as social approval or disapproval. People typically learn these norms by observing others, receiving feedback, and engaging in group interactions. Many norms are accepted without question and simply regarded as the "correct" way to behave by people (also see Gross & Vostroknutov, 2022).

Understanding which behaviours are considered common or normative is important for comprehending social norms. A person's social norms are significantly shaped by observing and imitating the behaviours of others; this is known as social learning (Bandura, 1977).  This mechanism explains how behaviours, including those related to corruption or ethical conduct, become entrenched within communities.  Research on social norms in contexts of corruption has found that people are more likely to engage in (or at least tolerate) a corrupt behaviour (e.g., bribery) if they believe it is widely practiced by other people (Camargo, 2017).  This tendency becomes particularly strong when they depend on those people for social or material support[3]. This reliance creates strong incentives to align with group norms to maintain social acceptance and access to resources, even when the behaviours in question may be illegal (also see Hoffmann & Patel, 2017).

In contrast to social norms, social values can be understood as the core beliefs and principles that direct individuals' behaviour in social settings. They affect how people interpret social situations and influence their choices (for a more in-depth discussion, see Rokeach, 1973). Examples of social values that would be relevant to this study include honesty, integrity and fairness. They are internalised through socialisation processes from an early age, often transmitted by family, education, and community influences, and form the foundation for the development of social norms.  Social values usually play a key role in shaping individuals' attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours (Schwartz, 1992). While these values typically form the foundation for social norms, they are more abstract and long-lasting, often deeply embedded within a culture (see also Hofstede, 2001).  In essence, social values underpin the creation and reinforcement of social norms, guiding not only what people do but also why they do it.

Reviewing the growing research on the social norms and social values that sustain corruption, Kubbe et al. (2024) advocate for effective anti-corruption interventions to address the social pressures and networks that shape behaviour. Such interventions should not focus only on regulatory structures and legal frameworks. Social norms and social values related to corruption should be measured and then this data should be used to design anti-corruption policies and interventions (also see Jackson, & Köbis, 2018; Scharbatke-Church, & Chigas, 2019; Köbis et al., 2022).  Leveraging social norms and social values, we can encourage people to refrain from corrupt behaviour and to actively encourage them to cooperate with the authorities to fight such behaviour. Although not a panacea for societal corruption, an approach that prioritises social norms and values can make a meaningful difference in preventing and combating this scourge that undermines social cohesion and weakens trust in our constitutional democracy.

## 3    DATA AND METHODS

The study began in 2023 and was conducted by the HSRC's Developmental, Capable and Ethical State (DCES) research division.  It was conducted over two years. The first year of study (2023-2024) comprised both quantitative and qualitative research elements. A nationally representative public opinion survey was conducted to identify the social norms and values that inform corruption in South Africa.  This quantitative research tool collected data from a sample of adults as part of the annual round of the South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS).  SASAS is designed to provide a representative snapshot of the adult population across the country at both national and provincial levels. The public opinion survey was supplemented by an online survey of sixty-seven experts. These experts were

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[3] Corruption is not driven solely by individual attitudes but is deeply embedded in collective behaviours reinforced by social pressures (particularly from kinship networks). These pressures, as well as horizontal and vertical organisational influences, create strong incentives to conform to corrupt norms due to fear of social sanctions (Jackson, & Köbis, 2018).

chosen not only for their expertise in corruption but also for their insights into social values and norms in South Africa. The sample for the expert survey included a diverse group of individuals such as journalists, activists, political scientists, psychologists, and sociologists.

Large-scale public opinion surveys can reach a much larger and more diverse group of people, allowing findings to be generalized to the wider population. This kind of approach is particularly important if the goal to speak to a national issue that analysis of a diverse national population. In addition, this approached allow the collection of structured, standardized data collection at scale, with the ability to analyse variations across geographies and socio-demographic groups. Public opinion surveys are internationally recognised as essential tools for understanding societal attitudes comprehensively, guiding evidence-based governance and tracking social progress over time. Beyond these functions, surveys play a critical role in fostering inclusive dialogue by giving voice to diverse perspectives, including the poor and working class.

The results of the baseline study were presented in a number of engagements. First, a series of in-depth interviews with key experts were conducted during which the primary results of the baseline survey were shared and subsequently discussed. Second, a research roundtable with academics and practitioners from different disciplines was held on the 17th of September 2024 to discuss the research findings and help refine the public opinion research instrument going forward. Finally, on the 9th of October 2024, the HSRC hosted a symposium with academics and members of civil society to present data findings. Despite the controversial and contentious nature of the topic, attendees engaged with the research materials and participated in a spirited discussion of the research results.

In the second year (2024-2025), a follow-up survey was designed, incorporating expert feedback invited during dissemination of baseline study to refine research tools and deepen understanding of corruption-related social norms. The goal of this second survey was to build on the work of the baseline study, expanding our knowledge of the social norms and values that inform corruption in the country. Acknowledging the importance of the baseline survey results, the experts that we engaged with during the dissemination process made a series of recommendations for the second survey round. Based on the feedback received from experts, revisions were made to the research instruments in the second year of the study. It is hoped that the data that emerged from the second-year study can be used to support the NACS.

During both the first- and second-year survey, all respondents were guaranteed anonymity as part of the interview process, allowing participants to feel that they could provide honest responses to sensitive questions.[4] The sample was restricted to persons aged 16 and above residing in private households. Data collection was conducted by fieldworkers and was face-to-face. The fieldwork period for the first survey started in August and ended in October of 2023 with a total 3,112 participants interviewed. The fieldwork for the second survey took place from February to March 2025, with a total of 3,095 participants interviewed. A detailed description of the survey methodology, including the sampling frame and the realisation rate, is provided in Section 6.2.

## 4 RESEARCH RESULTS

Drawing on the SASAS 2024/2025 dataset, this section presented a headline breakdown of the results of the second-year research survey. In order to place the second-year findings into context, this evaluation of public opinion data will be supplemented with a discussion of the baseline study. The second-year study sought to expand on the 2023 baseline study and consequently the report will provide, where appropriate, a reflection on the findings of that prior work. As this is a headline analysis of the data, it will focus only on the national results and provide a concise overview of the main findings. A wide-ranging assessment of subgroup variations will not be completed here; this level of analysis will be provided in subsequent documentation. As the headline report will present quantitative statistical data, the terms used in such a presentation may be unfamiliar to some readers. For interested readers, a comprehensive glossary of pertinent statistical terms is provided in Section 6.1.

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[4] It is important to acknowledge that many standard survey questions about personal experiences with corruption are prone to sensitivity bias. Respondents have a tendency to underreport their participation in corruption due to the sensitive or illegal nature of such experiences (for a further discussion, see Agerberg, 2022).

## 4.1 PERCEIVED SEVERITY OF CORRUPTION

The first subsection of Section 4 examines the perceived extent to which corrupt behaviour affects society amongst the mass populace. The initial part of Section 4.1 offers contextual background on the issue while the latter part details the results from the SASAS 2024/2025 round.

### 4.1.1 Background

Policymakers generally acknowledge that corruption significantly hinders a country's economic and social progress. But to what extent does the general public recognise this impact? Although several academic studies have examined the perceived impact of corruption, most of this work is quite Eurocentric (for a discussion, see de Sousa et al., 2023). In addition, this research does not generally assess how individuals perceive the personal impact of corruption, and there is considerably less investigation into how people feel corruption affects their everyday lives. Consequently, it remains unclear whether individuals view corruption as having a significant or minor influence on their own circumstances. This was the knowledge gap that the baseline study sought to address, it tried to understand whether members of the adult population understood the *cost* of corruption on society. By focusing on public perceptions of corruption's personal and societal impacts, the study intended to provide a clear picture of how the public saw the severity of corruption.

As part of the baseline study, we looked at the perceived level of corruption within society. Participants in the baseline survey were asked to rate how corruption was affecting their personal and family life. Most of the public reported that corruption had a significant impact on themselves and their families, with three-fifths indicating a large effect. Around a fifth of the mass populace said the impact was small, while the rest felt it was neither large nor small or were unsure how to respond. We can say, in other words, that a majority of the population thinks that corruption has a negative effect on their own interests and wellbeing. This type of concern can be labelled egotropic, primarily motivated by an individual's personal interests or self-benefit.

In addition to their egotropic concerns, we discovered that the general public was quite worried about the impact of corruption on the general economy. This concern appears to be sociotropic (i.e., focused on the interests or wellbeing of society as a whole).[5] More than three-quarters of the adult population believed that the impact of corruption on the general economy had been large. This sociotropic concern was found to be linked with egotropic concerns about corruption. If a person believed that corruption had a substantial sociotropic effect, they were much more inclined to think that it had a considerable effect on their personal life. The empirical results imply that people used their egotropic concerns to construct their sociotropic concerns about corruption. In summation, most of the public understand the societal cost of corruption and believe that it plays a major role within society.

Seeking to expand on the baseline survey's findings, the second-year study sought to examine our understanding of public perceptions of the *cost* of corruption. Through extensive discussions with experts in various forums, several suggestions were gathered on how to deepen and broaden the baseline study's research into this issue. Experts consulted during the baseline study period suggested that a more significant distinction be made between the perceived impact of private and public sector corruption. In addition, there was a request for a greater focus on local contexts and whether corruption was influencing life at the neighbourhood level. Studying perceptions of corruption at this level is preferable because it provides a more detailed understanding of how corruption affects individuals and communities in their daily lives. Corruption at the local level is often less abstract for the general populace than corruption at the commanding heights of the economy and government.

### 4.1.2 Findings

As part of SASAS 2024/2025, survey participants were asked to rate how corruption was affecting their personal and family life. The bulk of the public told us that corruption had a large effect on them and their family (Figure 4-1, pg. 9). About three-fifths (61%) of the public stated that the impact was large while only approximately a fifth (18%) said that corruption had a small impact. The remainder told us that it had neither a small nor a large impact (20%) or were uncertain of how to respond (2%). As a follow up question, participants were requested to indicate whether corruption had a large or small effect on the "area (e.g., town, village, suburb or township) where you live". The majority of the mass public reported that corruption significantly affected their area, with approximately 72% indicating a large

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[5] For a further discussion of the difference between "egotropic" and "sociotropic", see Lockerbie (2006).

impact. Only a minority (10%) felt the impact was minor while 16% believed it was neither small nor large and 2% were unsure how to answer.

**Figure 4-1: Perceived scale of the impact of corruption on personal and community life, 2024**

*Do you think that corruption has had a small or large impact on the following…*
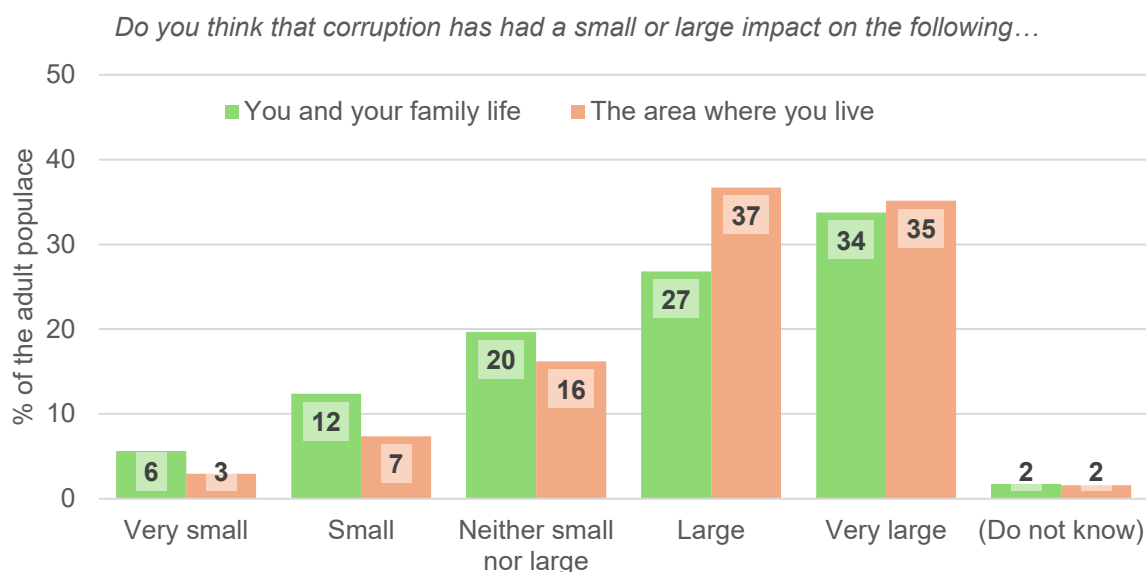


*Source*: South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2024/2025

Survey participants in SASAS 2024/2025 were also requested to evaluate the impact that corruption has had on the South African economy in general. First, participants were invited to indicate whether they thought that corruption by large companies (like banks or construction companies) has a small or large impact on the country's economy (Figure 4-2, pg. 9). Roughly three-quarters (77%) of the general public stated that the impact was large, while only a trivial share (7%) of the public said that corruption had a small impact. The remainder told us that it had neither a small nor a large impact (14%) or were uncertain of how to respond (2%). As a follow up question, participants were requested to indicate whether corruption by government officials has a small or large impact on the country's economy. Just over four-fifths (82%) of the public asserted that they believed the impact to be large whereas a small segment (5%) said that corruption had a small impact. The rest indicated that the impact was neither big nor small (11%) or were unsure how to answer (1%).

**Figure 4-2: Perceived scale of the impact of private sector and public sector corruption on the national economy, 2024**

*Do you think that corruption by […] has a small or large impact on the country's economy?*
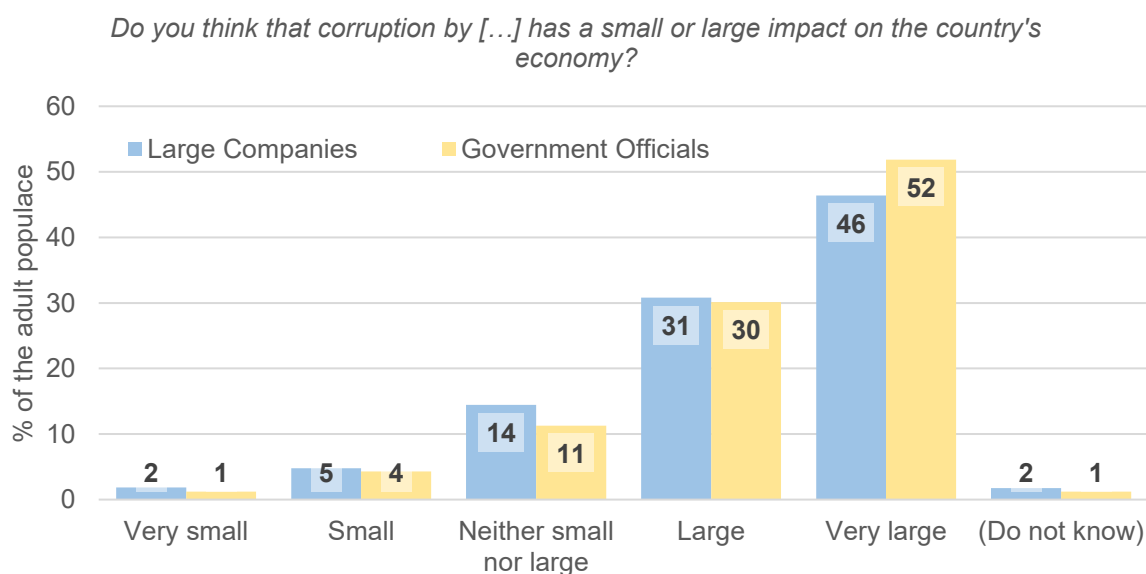


*Source*: South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2024/2025

Even though most of the public discourse on corruption tends to centre on the public sector, the data from SASAS 2024/2025 showed that a significant proportion of the adult population is worried about the role played by big business in perpetuating corruption. This is consistent with what was seen in the baseline survey when we found that a substantial proportion of the adult populace felt that business leaders were involved in corrupt practices. Statistical testing found that the four questions that have been discussed in this subsection so far were strongly interrelated (the results of these are presented in Section 6.3 on pg. 44). In other words, if an adult thought that their personal life was negatively affected by corruption then they tended to think that corruption had a negative effect at a more macro-level. In addition, it was apparent that people who were worried about the impact of corrupt practices by big business were also anxious about the impact of corrupt practices by government officials. This is probably due to the fact that the general public perceive corruption in the public and private sectors as interlinked.
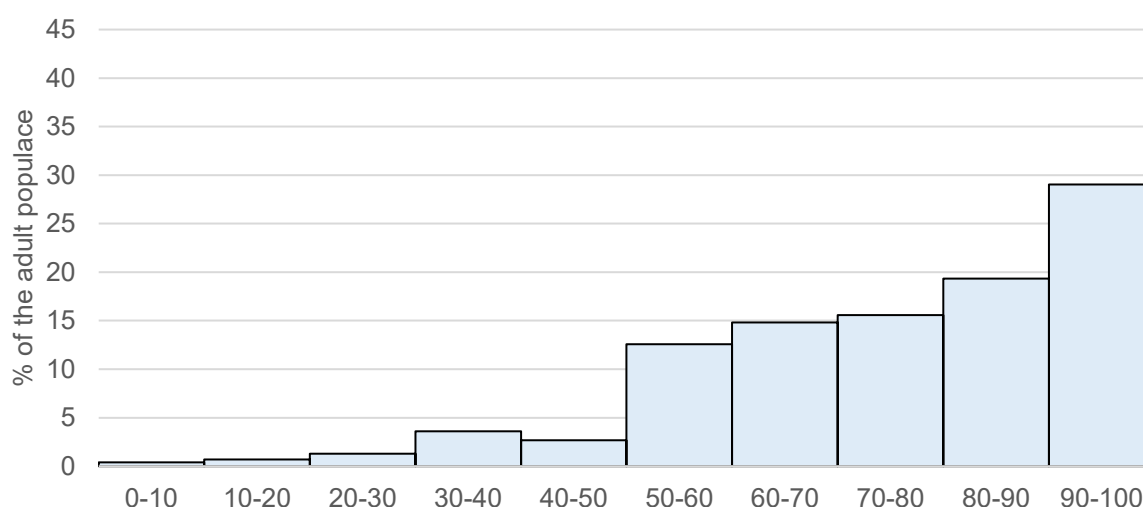
**Figure 4-3: Population distribution on the Impact of Corruption (IoC) Index (histogram), 2024**



*Source*: South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2024/2025

Based on the statistical testing outlined above, we explored constructing an index to measure the perceived societal cost of corruption. Statistical analyses verified the internal consistency of the four questions, indicating that they could be reliably aggregated into a single index (the results of these are presented in Section 6.3 on pg. 44). An index was therefore constructed and was transformed so that it ranged from 0 to 100, with higher scores reflecting a belief that the impact of corruption was large. The indicator was labelled the Impact of Corruption (IoC) Index. The national average on this measure was 76 (SE=0.563), and the histogram displayed in Figure 4-3 (pg. 10) indicated that the distribution of the population on the index was right-skewed. Indeed, it was apparent that less than a twentieth (2%) of the general public scored 25 or below on the index. This would suggest that a clear majority of the general populace recognise that corruption is a major problem in South Africa.

## 4.2    PUBLIC EXPOSURE TO PETTY CORRUPTION

Extensive prior public opinion research has focused on direct encounters with corruption. More often than not, this is focused on the exposure of the public to bribe solicitations from government officials (for a discussion of bribes and their moral history, see Noonan, 1984). This form of corruption, commonly referred to as "petty" or bureaucratic corruption, typically involves ordinary citizens paying small bribes or offering favours to lower-level public workers—such as police officers, nurses, or teachers—in exchange for services that should be provided fairly and without extra charge (for more on petty corruption, see Johnston, 2014). Following this tradition, the baseline study examined recent public exposure to bribe solicitation by public officials. In doing so, we recognised that asking people about their experiences of corruption is a sensitive topic. People may under-report stigmatised or undesirable actions (such as paying bribes), thus affecting the accuracy of self-reported data.

Before presenting data from the baseline study, it is important to acknowledge that surveys on exposure to petty corruption in South Africa are quite common. For instance, data from the 2017/2018 Victims of Crime Survey (VCS) asked participants whether they had "personally been asked by a public official to

pay a bribe and/or paid a bribe to a public official during the last 12 months". A tenth of adults reported that this had occurred in the year before the VCS interview. In another, more recent example, the 2021/2022 Governance Public Safety and Justice Survey (GPSJS) included a more inclusive bribery question. GPSJS respondents were asked: "In the past two years, have you experienced a dispute or problem with corruption, bribes or nepotism?" Only a small minority (3%) felt comfortable acknowledging they had faced such issues during that period. It is difficult to identify the reason for the disparate results in the two surveys.

During the baseline survey in 2023, respondents were asked: "In the past five years, how often have you or a close family member encountered a public official who implied or directly requested a bribe or favour in exchange for a service?" Nearly half (45%) of adults reported that this had never happened to them during that period. Around 19% of the general public said it occurred rarely while 18% experienced it occasionally. A significant minority indicated frequent occurrences, with 10% saying it happened often and 4% very often. The remaining part (4%) of the adult population were uncertain about how to reply. The 2006 SASAS survey included the same question on recent experiences of public sector corruption. This enabled a more direct comparison of self-reported bribe solicitation over time. In 2006, the majority of adults (63%) stated that they had not been asked for a bribe by a public official in the five years preceding the interview. This finding demonstrated, firstly, that levels of petty corruption do fluctuate within a society over time and, secondly, that exposure to petty corruption has increased over the past 20 years.

**Figure 4-4: Percentage who self-reported exposure to public sector corruption, 2024**

*In the last five years, how often have you or a member of your immediate family come across a public official who hinted they wanted, or asked for, a bribe or favour in return for a service?*
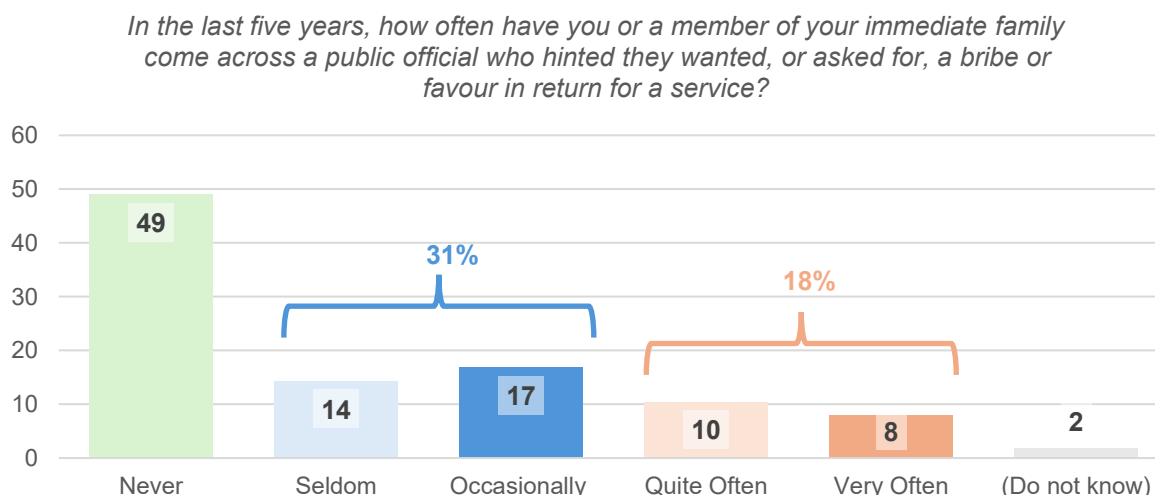


*Source*: South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2024/2025

In the 2024 SASAS survey, participants were again asked the frequency of exposure to petty corruption question, the same one that was included in SASAS 2023 and SASAS 2006. Almost half (49%) of adults reported that they or a close family member had not encountered a public official who suggested or requested a bribe or favour in exchange for a service in the specified timeframe (Figure 4-4, pg. 11). Nearly an eighth (14%) of the mass populace said it happened rarely and 17% reported that they experienced it occasionally. A notable portion of the public reported higher levels of exposures, with 10% of all adults stating it occurred often and 8% very often. The remaining adults (2%) were uncertain about how to answer. Examining the data in both SASAS 2023 and SASAS 2024/2025, it is clear that a small portion of the general public experienced an increase in petty corruption during the period under review while another group saw a decrease.

## 4.3    HEARING ABOUT SEXUAL CORRUPTION
Indirect encounters with sexual corruption among the general population in South Africa are evaluated in this section. The section starts with a contextual overview of the issue, followed by a brief summary of the findings from the SASAS 2024/2025 round.

### 4.3.1    Background
Sexual extortion is a distinct type of crime involving exploitation, where an individual in a position of authority abuses their power to demand sexual favours in return for granting or withholding services or

benefits that should be provided fairly—either equally (such as access to water and sanitation) or based on merit (like employment).[6] This coercive act usually involves threats or manipulation to compel compliance (Feigenblatt, 2020). It is a violent and traumatic offence that obstructs collective efforts toward social justice, human development and community and individual wellbeing (also see Eldén, 2020). When the baseline study was launched, there was limited research into the problem of sexual corruption in South Africa. Since then, there has been new research into this important issue with a recent largescale study published in 2024.[7]

The baseline study was interested, in particular, in sexual corruption within the public sector. This was because public officials hold unique positions of authority that directly affect access to essential services and enjoyment of fundamental rights. As part of the baseline survey, respondents were asked how frequently they believed sexual corruption took place in the South African public sector. The majority of adults reported that it happened at least occasionally, with only a small minority (22%) saying it never occurred. Nearly one-fifth (16%) of the public felt it happened rarely while 21% said it occurred sometimes. A notable portion of the population indicated it happened quite often (19%) or very often (19%). The remaining 3% were unsure how to respond. Data analysis showed that one of the reasons that people thought that this kind of corruption was so common was indirect experience. If an adult had recently heard about people they knew personally being victims of sexual extortion, then they were significantly more likely to think that sexual corruption was an important national problem in the public sector.
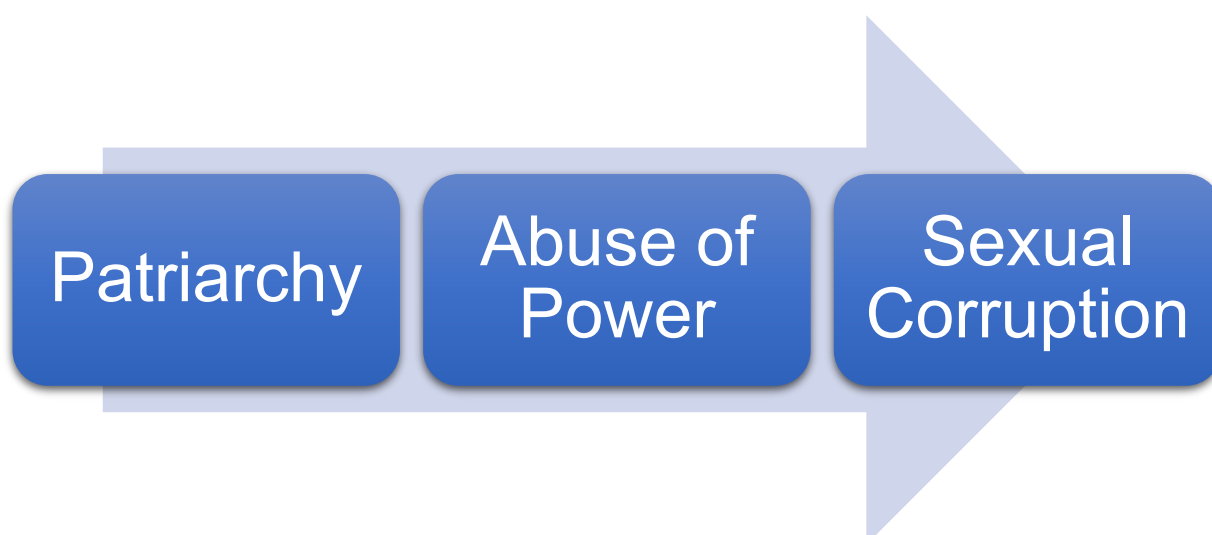


Due to the sensitivities of asking about sexual corruption head-on (i.e., personal experience), fieldworkers sought to ask people about recent indirect experiences of sexual corruption (i.e. 'hearing' about it). Indirect experiences are incidents that are 'witnessed' or heard about from others, rather than happening to a person directly (Tyler, 1980). This kind of experience can also provide individuals with a contextual understanding of important issues by grounding abstract concepts in real-world situations. Hearing about a crime from kinsfolk, colleagues, or friends increases awareness and fosters conversations about the crime.[8] This indirect framing in the baseline survey seems to have worked

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[6] This is a form of exploitation where a person, often using coercive tactics or threats, blackmails another into providing sexual favours (for a more detailed discussion of this definition, see Bjarnegård et al., 2024). While women are commonly targeted, sextortion affects individuals of all gender identities. It is a form of abuse and coercion that undermines the safety, autonomy and dignity of all those targeted by perpetrators.

[7] The Transparency, Integrity and Accountability Programme (TIP) from GIZ funded a National Survey on Sexual Corruption in South Africa by Ipsos (2025). Results were presented 27 February 2025; the survey data highlighted the presence of "sex for jobs" and "sex for marks" indicating that these practices are a serious problem in the country. Additionally, the exploitation of individuals seeking access to public services such as healthcare and housing was also reported.

[8] Borg (1998) has labelled this kind of 'indirect' experience 'vicarious victimisation'. This refers to the psychological impact experienced by individuals who are closely associated with the primary victim of a traumatic event.
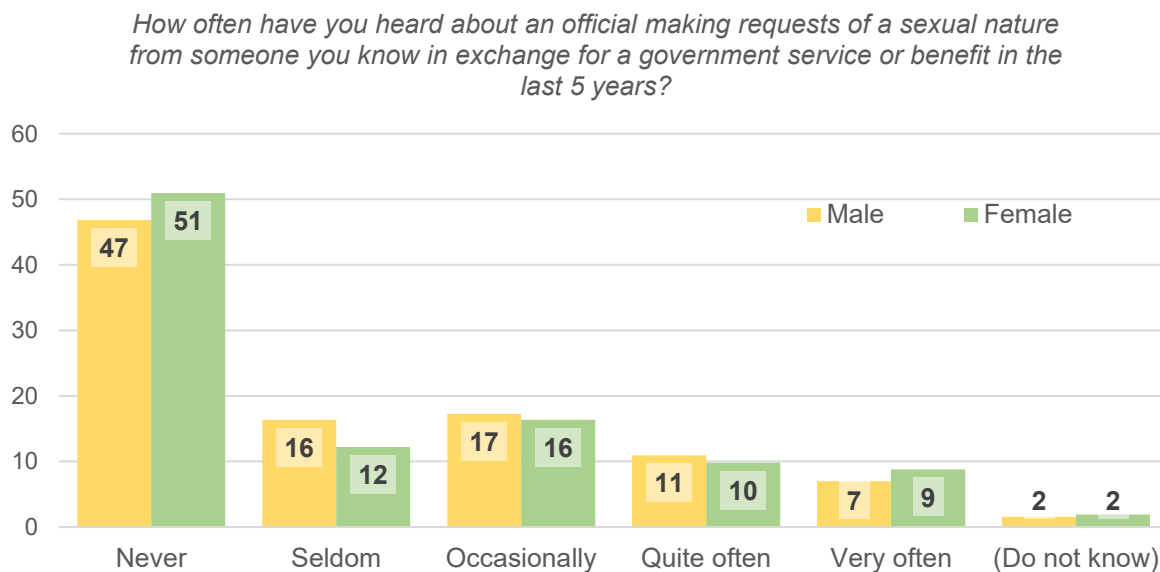
effectively, and people were comfortable to open up to fieldworkers about their most recent indirect experiences of this kind. Most public opinion surveys that look at corruption are primarily concerned with personal victimisation rates and tend to overlook indirect experiences of corruption.

The second-year study aimed to deepen our understanding of public perceptions regarding sexual corruption. Through in-depth consultations with relevant experts (including feminist scholars and activists working on the issue), various recommendations were collected to expand and enhance the initial research on this topic. Experts suggested that the private sector should also be a focus of the analysis. It was felt that a singular focus on the public sector tended to obscure the fact that this type of corruption also occurs in the private sector. Given how new this area of work is, it was not clear how members of the general public would respond to a question about sexual corruption in the private sector. Nevertheless, recognising the private sector's role is essential for a comprehensive understanding of the problem and its extent.

### 4.3.2    *Findings*

During the 2024 SASAS round, respondents were asked: "How often have you heard about an official making requests of a sexual nature from someone you know in exchange for a government service or benefit in the last 5 years?". This question was designed to measure *indirect* experiences of this kind of sexual corruption, and the results are presented in Figure 4-5 (pg. 13). Approximately three-fifths (59%) of the adult population had never heard about this happening to people they know during the specified timeframe. More or less a seventh (15%) said that it had happened seldom, and a similar proportion (14%) reported that it had occurred occasionally. A significant minority said that they had heard about this happening to someone they know either quite often (8%) or very often (3%) in the five years prior to the interview.

**Figure 4-5: Self-reported level of recent indirect experience of public sector sexual extortion by gender, 2024**



*How often have you heard about an official making requests of a sexual nature from someone you know in exchange for a government service or benefit in the last 5 years?*

Source: South African Social Attitudes (SASAS) 2024/2025

As a follow-up to the question on indirect experience of sexual corruption amongst public sector officials, respondents were asked, in the last five years, how often had they heard about someone from the private sector in their area making requests of a sexual nature in exchange for a job or benefit (such as a salary increase or promotion) or a service. A brief definition of the private sector was provided by fieldworkers.[9]   Just about three-fifths (56%) of all adults reported having never heard of this occurring to anyone they know in the five years prior to the 2024 SASAS interview (Figure 4-6, pg. 14). Roughly speaking a seventh (16%) said that it had happened seldom, and a similar proportion (16%) reported

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[9] The exact definition was as follows: "The private sector consists of companies and organisations not controlled by government. Private sector companies and organisations can be very small (e.g., a spaza shop) or very big (e.g., a cellphone company or a bank)".

that it had occurred occasionally.  A notable segment of the mass public reported hearing that this had happened to someone they know either fairly frequently (8%) or very frequently (2%) in the five years leading up to the interview.

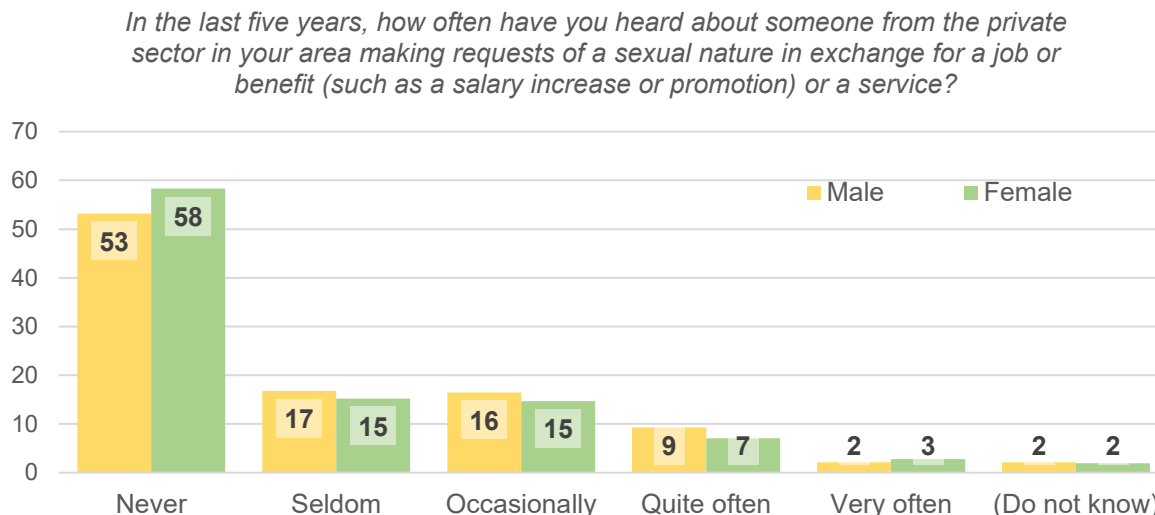**Figure 4-6: Self-reported level of recent indirect experience of private sector sexual extortion by gender, 2024**

*In the last five years, how often have you heard about someone from the private sector in your area making requests of a sexual nature in exchange for a job or benefit (such as a salary increase or promotion) or a service?*



Source: South African Social Attitudes (SASAS) 2024/2025

Bivariate tests indicate a strong relationship between the responses to the two questions outlined in this subsection so far. Test results demonstrated that having indirect experience of one type of sexual corruption increased the likelihood that a person would have indirect experience of another (test findings are reported in Section 6.4).  This outcome implies a linkage between the two phenomena.  The correlation suggests that environments where public sector corruption is normalised may also tolerate or enable sexual corruption in private sector companies.  The reciprocal relationship between public and private sector corruption implies that corrupt practices in one sector may reinforce those in the other.  Analysing the data, we found about half of the adult population had heard at least some stories about sexual corruption in the private sector from people they know personally in the last five years. In addition, there is a notable share (10%) of adults that said that they had a great deal of recent indirect experience of this kind of corruption.

## 4.4    THE VIEW FROM COMMUNITY LEVEL

The fourth subsection of Section 4 investigates how the mass populace perceived the prevalence of corruption within the public sector in their local communities. The opening subsection outlines the background of the issue and then this is followed by a presentation of SASAS 2024/2025 survey data.

### 4.4.1    *Background*

As mentioned earlier, public perceptions about the level of corruption in South Africa were investigated in the baseline study.  The baseline survey, in particular, evaluated public perceptions of corruption among elite figures, concentrating on leaders in business and politics.  The bulk of the population was found to perceive corruption as a major problem amongst elites.  The vast majority believed that politicians are, for the most part, deeply involved in corruption.  The baseline findings were consistent with prior public opinion research which had also looked closely at the perceived degree of corruption in the country (Corruption Watch, 2024).  The baseline survey also explored popular perceptions of corruption within the South African public sector.  The data, in fact, indicate a notable rise between 2004 and 2023 in the public belief that corruption was pervasive among public officials.  This trend also aligns with other public opinion research that shows a significant decline in institutional trust in the post-apartheid nation (Roberts et al., 2021).

Much of the prior public opinion research on public sector corruption has focused on the national level, asking people to think about the macro-level scale of this problem.  But in South Africa public officials at the local level wield significant authority over local communities due to their power to award contracts and their role in delivering essential services.  Local officials (including elected ward councillors as well

non-elected public servants) make key decisions affecting service provision, resource allocation and community development.  This places local officials in a position to have direct and significant influence over the general quality of life for most people.  Because local officials operate at the coalface of government, the public tends to have more knowledge of and access to information about them and their activities.  The Constitution, in fact, establishes public participation in municipal decision-making through mechanisms like ward committees and public meetings, which should mean that the public have access to more information about decision-making at local government level.
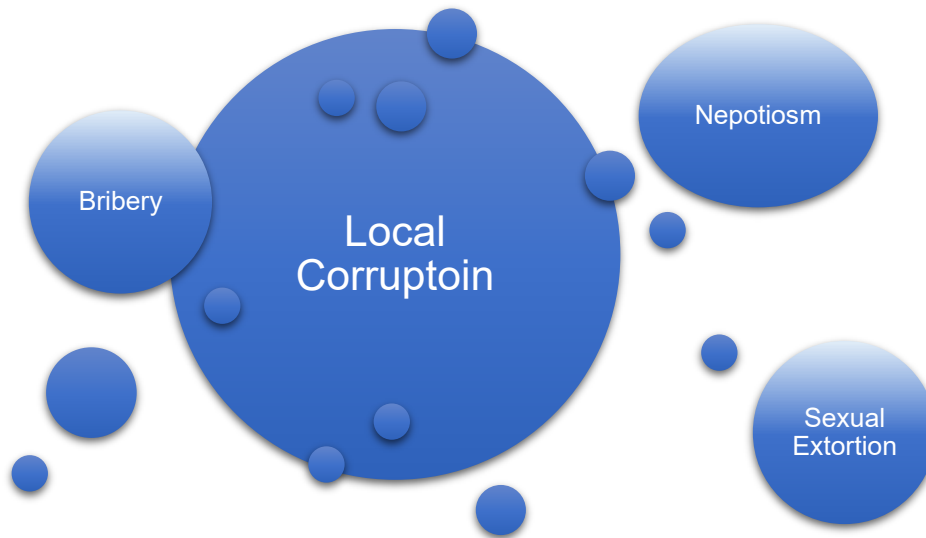


The baseline study sought to improve on prior work on the perceived level of public sector corruption in society by investigating perceptions about the participation of community members in a specific type of corruption (i.e., bribing public officials to provide essential services).  First, fieldworkers told survey participants that we wanted to know about their experience with public officials and civil servants in their community.  Then, again adopting an indirect approach  to a sensitive issue that is intended to reduce perceived pressure on respondents to disclose their knowledge or own involvement in corrupt activities, participants were asked "How often do you think people in your community have to pay a bribe, give a gift or do a favour to these people in order to get the services you need?"  Data results showed that nearly half of the public thought that this kind of corruption occurred infrequently in their community and a fifth believed that it was fairly common in their community.  In summation, it is evident that many people thought bureaucratic corruption was a common feature of how their communities functioned.

The second-year study aimed to enhance our understanding of public perceptions regarding the extent of corruption in South Africa.   Through comprehensive discussions with experts, numerous recommendations were collected to expand and deepen the baseline study's investigation into the perceived level of societal corruption.  Experts recommended that a more significant distinction be made between different types of public sector corruption.  Some thought that a singular focus on bribery payments tended to obscure the complex nature of different types of corrupt behaviour. There was, in particular, a suggestion made to look at perceptions of sexual corruption at the local level.  In addition, it was felt that the previous focus on 'the community' placed the focus at the meso-level. What was required, instead, was an emphasis on the micro-level, the scale of the neighbourhood or village where most people spent much of their time.  This would allow greater insight into the daily lives of the adult populace and the kinds of corruption that would be most visible to them, as well as insights into the social norms that inform attitudes and behaviours to corruption including this particular manifestation of corruption.

### 4.4.2    Findings

First, fieldworkers told survey participants that we wanted to know about their experience with public officials and civil servants in their area.  Here 'area' was defined as the local neighbourhood or village where they lived.  To measure the perceived extent of micro-level corruption, SASAS respondents were asked the following question: "How often do you think people in your area have to pay a bribe or give a gift to, or do a favour for, public officials and civil servants?"  A majority of the mass public said that they lived in neighbourhoods not characterised by public sector bribery, while only a small percentage (3%)

said that they did not know how to answer the question (Figure 4-7, pg. 16). Nearly a fifth (17%) of the public believed that this occurred seldom and a fifth (20%) told fieldworkers that it happened occasionally. Interestingly, we found that a significant share of adults claimed that people in their neighbourhood had to pay bribes to public officials either often (11%) or very often (5%). The remainder (45%) of the adult populace said that people in their immediate vicinity did not have to do this.

**Figure 4-7: Perceived level of public sector bribery at the micro-level, 2024**



*How often do you think people in your area have to pay a bribe to, give a gift to, or do a favour for, public officials and civil servants? Does it happen…*
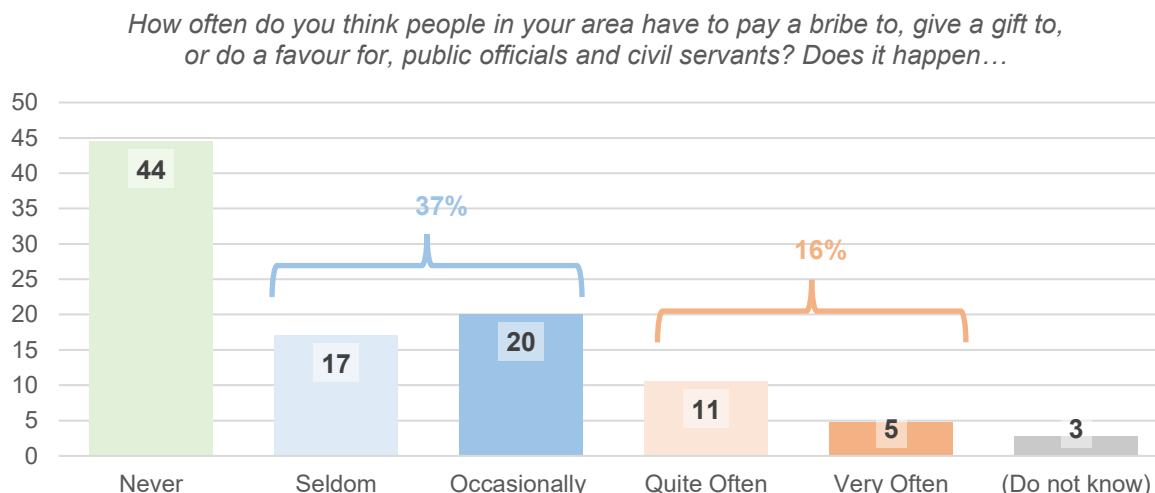
*Source*: South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2024/2025

During the SASAS 2024/2025 round, participants were asked how often public officials in their area have given jobs and contracts to unqualified friends and family. A majority of the mass public said that they lived in areas where this kind of corruption occurred (Figure 4-8, pg.16). Less than a third of the public said that it occurred either seldom (14%) or occasionally (17%). Notably, a significant share reported that public officials in their neighbourhood engaged in nepotism often (16%) or very often (11%). As a follow-up question, respondents were queried on how often they had heard that public officials in their neighbourhood had been making requests of a sexual nature in exchange for a government service or benefit (the results are depicted in (Figure 4-9, pg.17). A notable portion reported that public officials in their area were involved in sexual corruption frequently (12%) or very frequently (5%). Almost one-third indicated they reside in areas where this type of corruption takes place rarely (17%) or sometimes (17%). The remaining segment (46%) of the population stated that officials did not engage in such behaviour in their places where they lived.

**Figure 4-8: Perceived level of public sector nepotism at the micro-level, 2024**



*How often have public officials in your area given jobs and contracts to unqualified friends and family?*
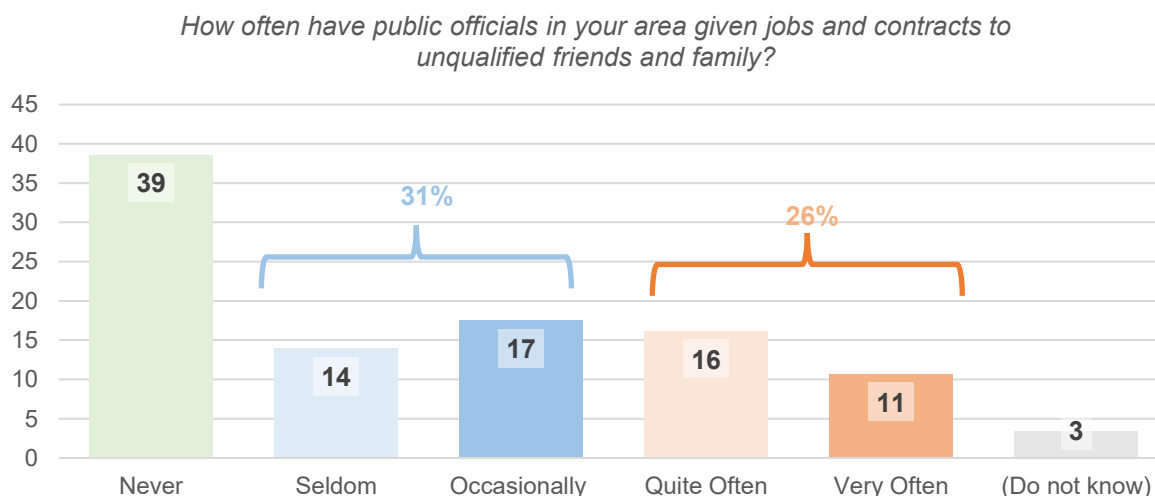
*Source*: South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2024/2025

The high degree of corruption perceived at the local level is telling. Given that the attitudes under discussion are focused on public officials in a respondent's local area (i.e., the micro-level), their assessments are probably based (at least to some extent) on locally sourced information. This would include word of mouth, first-hand accounts, local (or community) newspapers and localised online communities (e.g. community WhatsApp groups). For this reason, corruption at the micro-level is usually more tangible and easier for the general public to accurately grasp and report on. Bivariate analyses indicate that the three questions outlined above are closely connected to each other (see test results in Section 6.5, pg. 44). These tests demonstrated that if a person perceived the prevalence of one type of public corruption in their local area (e.g., bribery) as high than they were more likely to perceived other types as high. We can conclude that these types of corruption are interlinked in the minds of the mass populace. Public officials who are thought to engage in one kind of corruption are more likely to be thought to engage in other types too.

**Figure 4-9: Perceived level of public sector sexual corruption at the micro-level, 2024**



*How often have you heard about public officials making requests of a sexual nature in exchange for a government service or benefit in your area?*
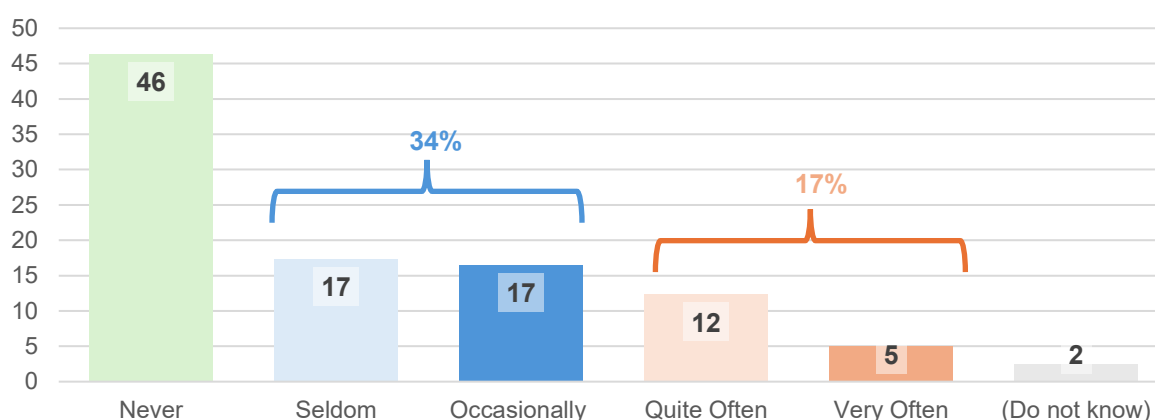
*Source*: South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2024/2025

**Figure 4-10: Population distribution on the Perceived Level of Local Public Sector Corruption (PLoLPSC) Index, 2024**
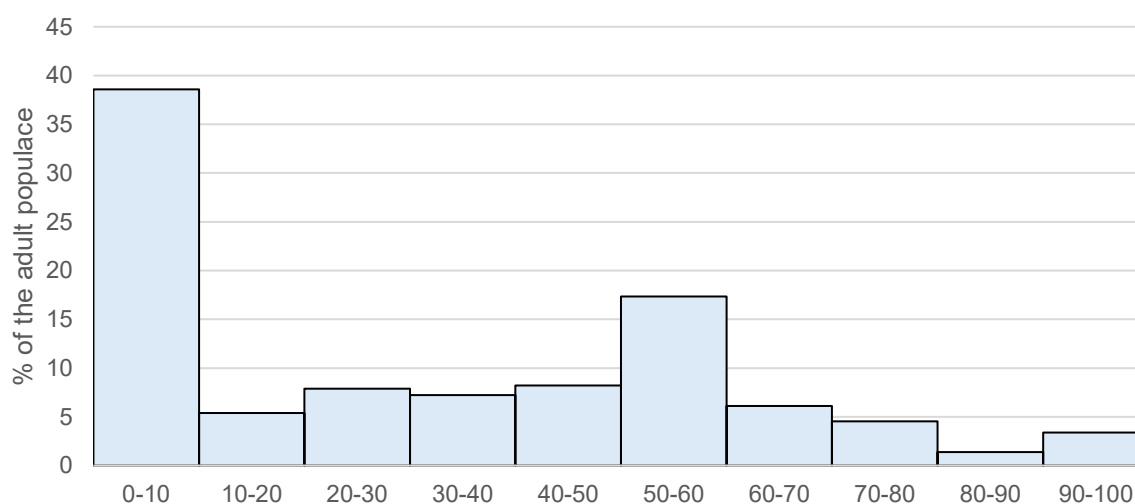


*Source*: South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2024/2025

Based on the statistical testing delineated above, we constructed an index to measure the perceived level of micro-level public sector corruption using the three micro-level corruption questions discussed. The index in question was built to range from 0 to 100; the higher the value on the index, the greater the perceived level of public sector corruption at the micro-level. The variable was labelled the Perceived Level of Local Public Sector Corruption (PLoLPSC) Index. The national average on this measure was 32 (SE=0.878), and the histogram in Figure 4-10 (pg. 17) revealed a left-skewed data

distribution, indicating a low level of corruption.  There is a small (but notable) group that takes a middle position (i.e., who live in neighbourhoods in which they are irregularly confronted by corrupt public officials).  A tenth of the general public state that they live in neighbourhoods which are hotbeds of corruption, where local public officials are always engaging in corrupt behaviour.

## 4.5 PROFESSIONS UNDER PRESSURE
Public perceptions regarding the extent of corruption within South African occupational culture are assessed in this section.  It begins with an overview of the issue's background, followed by an analysis of data from the SASAS 2024/2025 round.

### 4.5.1 Background
During the baseline study, engagements with experts (particularly those in the private sector) highlighted the important role played by occupational culture in South Africa.  Occupational culture is the unique set of shared values, beliefs, attitudes, norms and behaviours that characterise members of a particular profession or occupational group.  Experts we engaged with argued that occupational culture is vitally important because it shapes the shared values, norms and behaviours within a workplace or profession.  As research in South Africa by the Ethics Institute (2025) makes clear, occupational culture shapes how individuals within that occupation think, communicate and act, creating a distinct identity and sense of belonging among its members.  This culture is closely linked to broader social norms and values, as it both reflects and reinforces the accepted standards of behaviour within the occupation (also see Vorster & van Vuuren, 2022).  As a result, occupational culture can directly influence how participants act and make decisions.

Studying how people generally behave in their occupation can help us understand the underlying social norms and values within occupational culture.  A toxic culture is one where, for example, people often engage in rule bending or bribe solicitation for private gain.  An ethical occupational culture, on the other hand, discourages such practices.  Instead, it promotes ethical principles such as integrity, transparency and accountability.  When an occupational culture is grounded in ethical principles, participants are more likely to internalise these values, leading to consistent ethical conduct and efforts to prevent corrupt practices.  When talking about corruption that can occur in an occupation, it is important to acknowledge the diversity of occupations within a society.  No doubt, not all occupations lend themselves to corrupt practices, due to differences in the nature of their work, levels of discretion, and opportunities for personal gain.

The South African economy is, for better or worse, centred around finding and securing employment in an occupation of some kind.[10]  The general populace has, as a result, developed some strong opinions about their chosen occupations.  This includes those who are not currently employed.  Even though employment rates are low in the country, many are seeking a job or are studying (or training) for a future job in a particular occupation.  In addition, others have worked in an occupation for a long time and are now retired.  Despite the relevance of occupation to the lives of most of the adult populace, public opinion surveys tend not to ask about occupational culture.  Most of the existing work is on largescale formal organisations and tends to be unrepresentative of workers in that organisation.  This narrow focus can mask the existence and impact of toxic occupational cultures and how widespread such toxicity might be.  By overlooking occupational culture in surveys and research, there is a risk of missing critical insights into how the problem of corruption in South Africa could be countered.

In the second year of the study, the decision was taken to investigate occupational corruption in South Africa.  The focus was on how normative certain corrupt behaviours were within occupations in the country.  A list of corrupt behaviours that are commonly associated with the workplace were selected for analysis.  This included, for example, bribe solicitation and bending the rules of the job for private gain.  In designing this component of the research, it was apparent that there would be certain

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[10] Barchiesi (2011) examined the complex realities faced by South African workers in the decades after apartheid's end.  Through archival and ethnographic research, he demonstrated the continuities between apartheid-era racial capitalism and post-apartheid labour dynamics, exposing persistent poverty, labour exploitation, and social contestation.  Barchiesi argued that the ideal of citizenship in the country is tied to stable wage labour, a legacy inherited from both apartheid and the colonial period.  The "wage-citizenship nexus" is critiqued because of how economic participation is central to social inclusion but remains elusive for most. This contradiction undermines the dignity and social rights of the entire working class.

limitations. First, due to low levels of labour market participation in the country, some may not feel that they have an occupation. Second, some persons would have better knowledge of their profession than others. Finally, it is necessary to consider the possibility of response bias, as respondents may hesitate to openly acknowledge that certain illegal activities are viewed as normal in their profession or occupation.

### 4.5.2    Findings

During the 2024 round of SASAS, participants were asked to imagine their most recent occupation. A brief definition of an occupation was then provided to the respondent.[11] If the respondent was not working, then they were asked to think about the occupation they used to work in or the occupation they trained/studied to work in. Given South Africa's high levels of unemployment, it was unsurprising that a notable minority (14%) were unable to think of an occupation and said, 'not applicable'. Then respondents were asked to say, from their own experience, how often four different types of corrupt behaviour occurred in their profession. These ranged from rather mild forms (e.g., bending the rules) to quite extreme types (e.g., demanding bribes). Responses to these four questions are depicted in Figure 4-11 (pg. 19) and it was apparent that there is a notable degree of diversity in how people thought about (and no doubt experienced) corruption in their occupations.

**Figure 4-11: Perceived normality of different types of corrupt occupational behaviour, 2024**

*In your experience, how often do workers in your occupation do the following…*
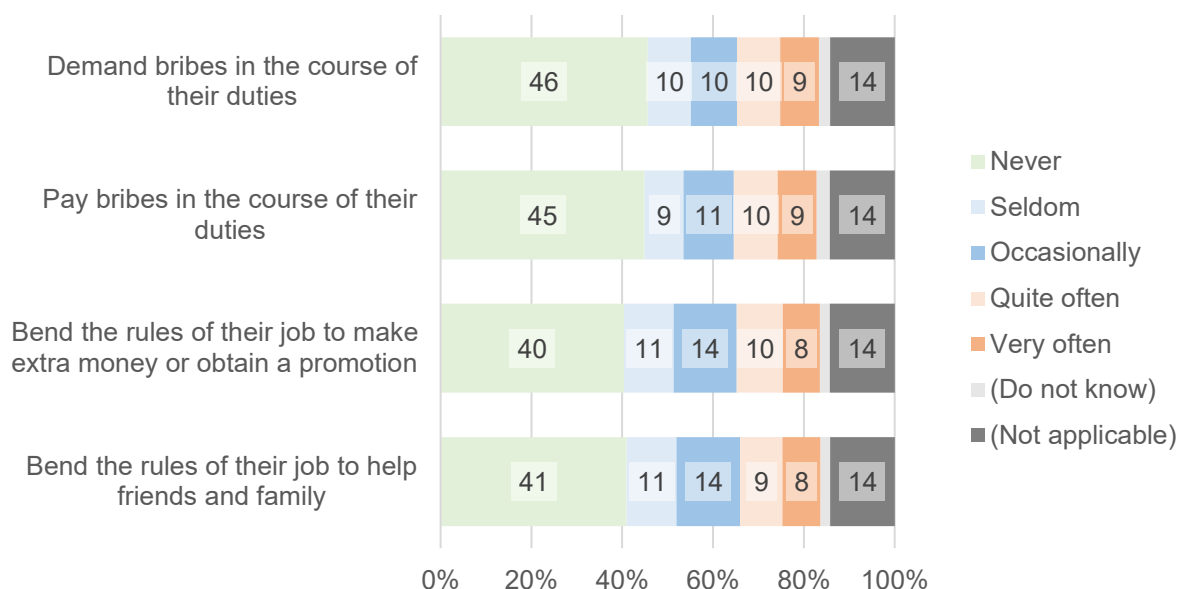


*Source*: South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2024/2025

It was clear that people were somewhat more likely to admit that bending the rules was common in their profession than was bribe-taking. But the majority of the general public, as may be expected, did not claim that their occupation was riven with corrupt behaviour. Consider that, for example, about half (46%) of adults said that people in their profession never demanded bribes in the course of their duties. However, it was interesting to note how willing people were to admit that substantial corruption exists within their occupations. It is a startling finding that a fifth of the public admits that their occupation is a hotbed of corruption in which bribery is common. A tenth of the mass populace thought that extorting bribes occurred often in their profession and 9% believed that it took place very often. Given the seriousness of such a crime, this suggests the underlying strength of corrupt occupational norms in the country.

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[11] The exact wording of the definition is "An occupation is a person's profession or type of work that they regularly do (e.g., plumber, lawyer or farmer)."

**Figure 4-12: Population distribution on Perceived Normality of Occupational Corruption (PNoOC) Index, 2024**
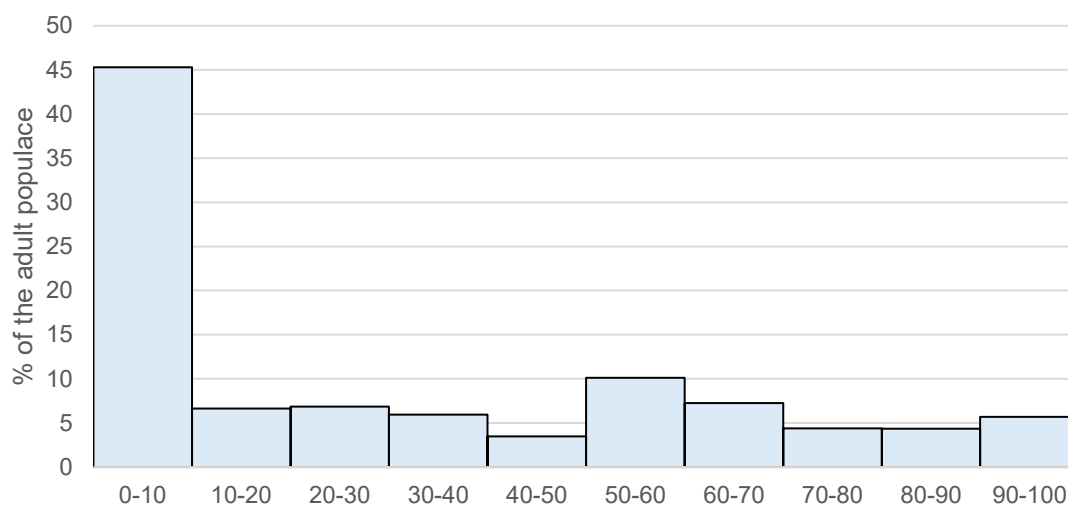


*Source*: South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2024/2025

A bivariate analysis revealed a strong correlation between the way that people answered the different questions presented in Figure 4-11 (pg. 19). If an individual believed that one type of corrupt behaviour (e.g., paying bribes) in their profession was common, then they were more likely to think that other types of corrupt behaviour (e.g., demanding bribes) were too. Given that the behaviours are quite dissimilar, this is a noteworthy finding (test findings are reported in Section 6.10 on pg. 45). We can conclude, therefore, that it is possible to create a single composite index that measures how normative people think that corrupt practices are in their occupation. Supplementary statistical analyses validated the internal consistency of this group of items depicted in Figure 4-11 (pg. 19), indicating that they can be reliably merged into a single composite measure (see test results in Section 6.10 on pg. 45).

Based on this statistical testing, we constructed an index to measure the perceived normality of occupational corruption using the questions discussed above. For the purposes of the index, those without a self-identified occupation (14% of the adult population) were removed, so we are focusing only on those individuals with an occupation. To simplify interpretation, the index was designed to span from 0 to 100; the higher the value on the index, the greater the perceived normality of corruption in a person's occupation. The variable was labelled the Perceived Normality of Occupational Corruption (PNoOC) Index. The national mean score on this metric was 29 (SE=1.064) and a histogram presented in Figure 4-12 (pg. 20) showed that data distribution on the index was skewed to the left, indicating a low level of corruption normality. However, there is a notable share (22%) of adults with an occupation that scored 60 or above on the index and 10% of this group scored 80 or above.

## 4.6 UNDERSTANDING PUBLIC TOLERANCE OF CORRUPTION

The present section looks at perceived acceptability of corrupt behaviour amongst the general public. The first subsection provided a theoretical background on the topic, and the second part presented findings from the relevant SASAS data.

### 4.6.1 Background

Understanding public Tolerance towards Corruption (TtC) is widely considered crucial for fighting corrupt behaviour in any society. TtC (i.e., the willingness to accept corrupt behaviour) is typically viewed as a social norm and TtC research is part of broader work on morally debatable behaviours (Gouvêa, 2021). For decades, a persistent stereotype in international discourse has suggested that Africans have very high levels of TtC. This view has been rooted in both colonial-era prejudices and postcolonial misunderstandings, often portraying corruption as an intrinsic part of African political culture (Akpome, 2021). Today, the idea that Africans have a very high tolerance for corruption is increasingly recognised as patronising and reductionist, a claim that is often made without any reference to empirical public opinion data on how African people think and feel about corruption (also see Apata, 2019).

TtC is often measured by the Morally Debatable Behaviours Scale (Harding & Phillips, 1986), which assesses societal norms on justifiable conduct. Katz et al. (1994) refined this scale into two categories: (i) dishonest-illegal behaviours and (ii) personal-sexual behaviours. Utilising this framework, a number of quantitative social science studies have looked into TtC using data from the World Values Survey (WVS).[12] As scholars like Andersson (2007) have pointed out, the WVS has a limited number of questions on corrupt behaviour. Relying on the WVS limits the analysis to a narrow view of corruption, and a more dedicated set of questions is required to capture its social acceptability (see also Johnston, 2014). Seeking to move beyond the prior WVS work, the baseline study looked at the social acceptability of different unlawful behaviours. In the baseline survey, participants were asked eight different questions that aimed to assess the perceived acceptability of minor and major criminal behaviours. Three of these behaviours involved corruption (i.e., sexual corruption, accepting bribes, and nepotism in the public sector).

| Nepotistic Behaviour | Sexual Corrupt Behavour | Bribery Behaviour |
|---|---|---|
| Employment | Offering | Offering |
| Contracts | Extorting | Extorting |
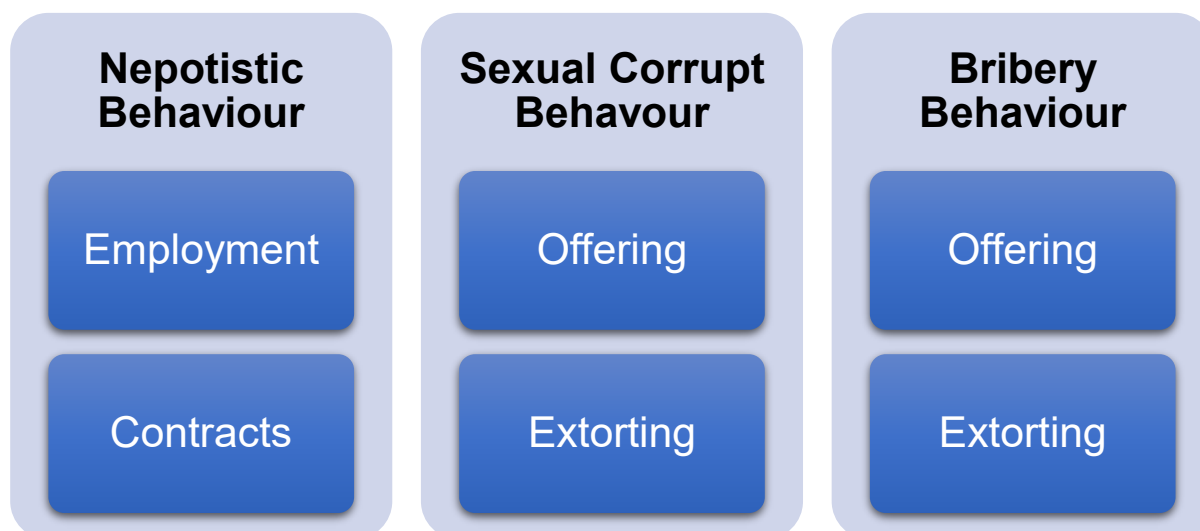
The baseline survey data revealed that a significant minority of the public considers both serious and minor illegal acts to be acceptable. The most tolerated unlawful behaviours were avoiding paying for public transport and fraudulent social grant claims, while the least acceptable was exchanging sexual favours for employment. The acceptance of one type of illegal behaviour was discovered to be linked to the acceptance of others. Individuals who, for example, found fare evasion acceptable were also more likely to view bribery or nepotism as acceptable. It would appear that a common set of social values appears to influence judgments about the acceptability of lawbreaking. In terms of the three behaviours (i.e., sexual corruption, bribery and nepotism) that focused on corruption, we found a clear majority did not think that these behaviours could always be justified. On the other hand, only a small minority (25%) said that the three could never justified.

Building on the work of the baseline survey, the second-year study also looked at the social acceptability of corruption. During a robust engagement with experts during various forums, a number of different suggestions were made concerning how we could expand on the findings of the baseline study. These centred on three key aspects. The first concerned the need to look at the social acceptability of a broader range of corrupt actions and the second concerned the need to differentiate extortion in corrupt

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[12] The WVS included a question on the social acceptability of seeking bribes. Respondents were asked whether "accepting a bribe in the course of their duties" is always justifiable, never justifiable, or somewhere in between. Answers were recorded on a scale from 0 to 10, with higher scores indicating greater justification. Using the 2017/2022 WVS data, it is possible to compare the social acceptance of bribery across different countries. For easier interpretation, responses were converted to a 0 to 100 scale, where higher values represent greater acceptance. Most countries surveyed show a strong rejection of bribery, with the lowest average permissiveness scores found in China (M=7; SE=0.311), the Netherlands (M=5; SE=0.304), and Germany (M=4; SE=0.263). However, some countries, such as Vietnam (M=21; SE=0.671), Malaysia (M=23; SE=0.788) and Serbia (M=24; SE=1.205) reported notably higher acceptance levels.

actions.[13]  Experts felt that extortive forms of corrupt behaviour would be seen as more immoral (and, therefore, less acceptable) than non-extortive forms.  Finally, there was a need to differentiate between nepotism in the public and private sectors.  Based on this feedback, a comprehensive set of actions was explored in the second survey round, and a new (and distinct) focus was placed on extortive forms of corrupt behaviour.

### 4.6.2    *Findings*

As part of the SASAS 2024/2025 round, respondents were presented with the following statement: "Please tell me for each of the following actions whether you think it can always be justified, never be justified, or something in between".  Survey participants were then read a list of seven different types of actions considered corrupt (The exact wording of these actions is presented in Section 6.7 on pg. 46).  A distinction was made between extortive and non-extortive actions.  Responses were captured on a 0-10 scale, with 0 representing 'never justifiable' and 10 representing 'always justifiable'.  For ease of interpretation, each scale was converted onto a 0 to 100 range.  Mean scores on these scales are presented in Figure 4-13 (pg. 22), with the results showing that mean justifiability scores ranged between 14 and 22 out of 100 for the seven unlawful activities, signifying a low level of acceptability.

**Figure 4-13: Perceived justification scales (0-100) of different corrupt activities, 2024**
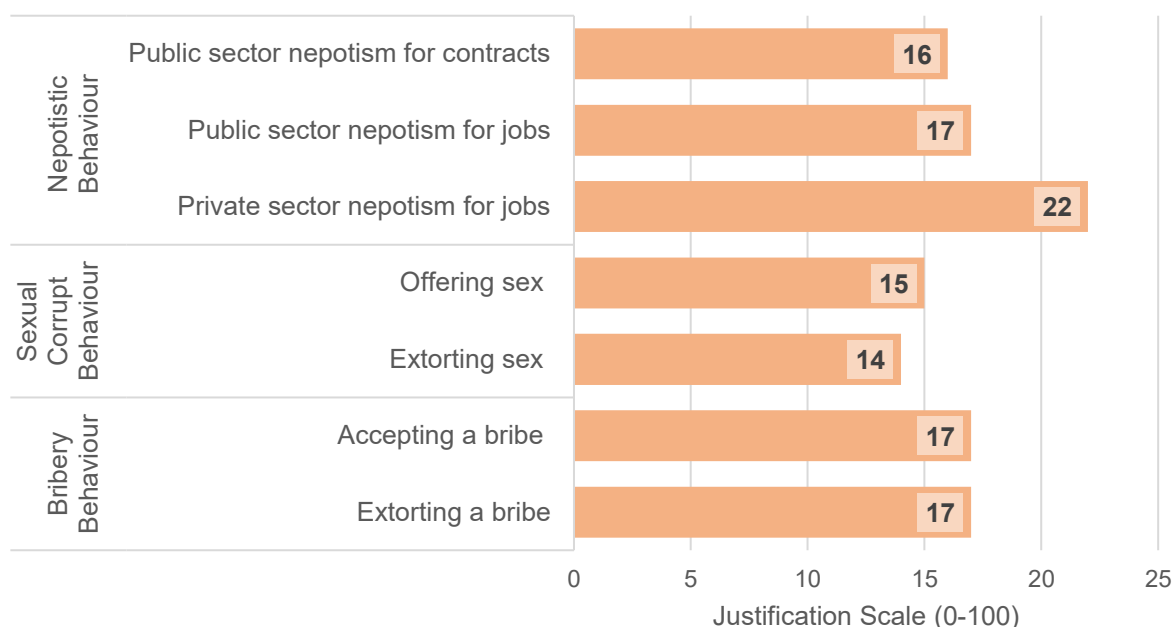


*Source*: South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2024/2025

Statistical testing showed that the different scales represented in Figure 4-13 (pg. 22) were very strongly interrelated with one another (the results of these are presented in Section 6.7 on pg. 46).  In other words, if a person thought that one corrupt act (e.g., offering a bribe) was acceptable, then they were more likely to think that others (e.g., public sector nepotism) were equally acceptable.  It was apparent, perhaps surprisingly, that viewing extortive corrupt behaviour as acceptable was strongly associated with thinking that non-extortive corrupt behaviour was permissible.  It would appear that most people do not make a substantive moral differentiation between extortive and non-extortive forms of corrupt behaviour.  This seems to show that most are using the same social values to judge corrupt behaviour, tending to evaluate the different behaviours in quite similar ways.

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[13] Often in corrupt transactions, a person in a position of authority agrees to receive an advantage (such as money, gifts, or favours) in exchange for performing (or not performing) an action.  This is qualitatively different from when a person in authority explicitly (or implicitly) demands an advantage as a condition for performing (or not performing) an action.  Here the perpetrator initiates the corrupt transaction, often leveraging their position to coerce or pressure the other party into compliance (for a further discussion, see Khalil et al., 2010).

Based on the statistical testing described above, we explored constructing an index to measure societal tolerance for corruption using the seven items in Figure 4-13 (pg. 22). Statistical tests confirmed the internal consistency of this set of items and the results suggested that the items could be reliably combined into a single index (the results of these tests are presented in Section 6.7 on pg. 46). Consequently, an index was created from the selected items and scaled to range between 0 and 100. The higher the value in the index, the greater the tolerance for corruption. The measure was labelled the Social Legitimacy of Corrupt Behaviour (SLoCB) Index. The national mean score on this metric was 17 (SE=0.544) and a histogram presented in Figure 4-14 (pg. 23) showed that the population distribution on the index is skewed towards the left.

**Figure 4-14: Population distribution on the Social Legitimacy of Corrupt Behaviour (SLoCB) Index (histogram), 2024**
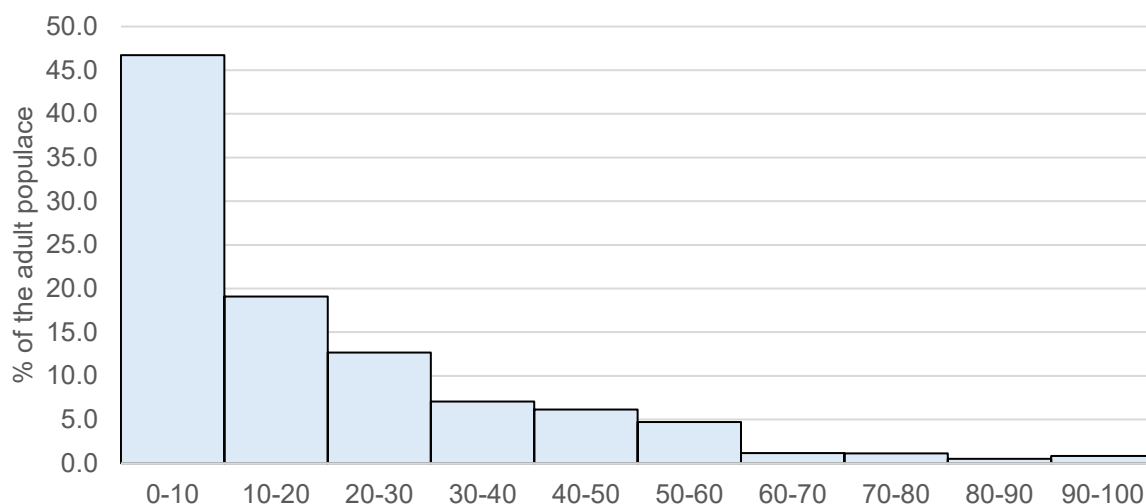


*Source*: South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2024/2025

This would seem to indicate that adults in South Africa do not have a high tolerance for corruption. Only a small proportion (2%) of the adult populace scored above 70 on the SLoCB and 8% scored above 50. On the other hand, the proportion (27%) who viewed all forms of corrupt behaviour as completely unacceptable was not high. Around a fifth of the general population scored between 1 and 10 on the SLoCB, while about two-fifths (39%) of the mass populace scored between 10 and 40 on the index. This finding indicated that the majoritarian position is that corruption is, at the very least, considered unacceptable most of the time. But it would appear that people think that there are times when a person might feel or be obliged to engaged in corruption, or that involvement might be excusable for some other reason, such as an urgent need.

## 4.7    WHO SETS THE STANDARD?

This section explores who the general South African population identifies as role models who embody study relevant social values. It began with a contextual overview of the topic, followed by an analysis of data from the SASAS 2024/2025 round.

### 4.7.1    Background

Role models play a crucial role in the study of social norms and social values because they serve as tangible examples of the behaviours, attitudes and principles that a society or group considers desirable. Scholars have long noted that, by observing and emulating role models, individuals (especially the youth) learn what is socially acceptable and valued, which helps shape their own identity, ethical standards and social behaviour (Kemper, 1968). Role models influence socialisation by demonstrating how social norms are enacted in real-life situations, making abstract values concrete and understandable in the form of behaviours. As regards corruption, they can inspire and motivate others to adopt anti-corrupt behaviours by showing the benefits of certain social values such as integrity or honesty (Jackson, & Köbis, 2018). Moreover, role models contribute to cultural continuity and change by reinforcing existing norms or introducing new ways of thinking and acting that can gradually reshape social values (also see Kubbe et al., 2024).

There is not a great deal of prior research into who the general population in South Africa identifies as role models. Given that role models (whether they are, for example, community leaders, public officials, or celebrities) can serve as powerful agents in shaping societal values and behaviours, this is an unfortunate knowledge gap. With this in mind, the decision was made to investigate in the second-year study the role models that people identify. It is essential to frame this research objective specifically in the context of corruption, rather than approaching it from a broad or general perspective. People may identify role models in different areas of life (e.g., work or sport) and what is required is an understanding of those role models people look to for social values that are relevant to the study. We wanted to identify those role models who play an important role in inspiring citizens to uphold ethical standards and resist corrupt temptations.

Economic Inequality          Prejudice and Bias          Power Imbalances

It is important to acknowledge, at this stage, an important aspect of the South African national culture, viz., that traditional culture in the country is quite family oriented. Familial kin-based relationships have historically been vital in transmitting cultural values and social norms (Zeihl, 2003). Qualitative research by Madhavan and Crowell (2014) into the role models chosen amongst rural youth in South Africa found, for example, that participants tend to emphasise family. Their research showed that local community figures and even national heroes or celebrities provide examples of success and ethical conduct, but that young people tend to differentiate between aspirational "hero" figures and more practical, attainable familial role models. Family has traditionally also been a source of social cohesion in South Africa, although there have been significant demographic shifts in recent decades which has undermined the functioning of traditional familial kin-based networks (Makiwane et al., 2017). As a result, it is possible that we may see the rise of alternative role models that replace the family.

When designing questions to examine role models within the South African context, the research team was confronted with the paucity of existing knowledge on this topic. Given the country's considerable cultural diversity and rapid social transformation, identifying a universally accepted set of role models presented significant challenges. In addition, some individuals may turn to one person as their main role model while others may look to a variety of sources. Therefore, it was necessary to design questions that would allow respondents to identify multiple categories of individuals who play significant roles in offering a moral example. Moreover, a critical function of active role models is to provide guidance when individuals encounter ethical dilemmas. Individuals might admire aspirational role models who they may aim to emulate; while also having more realistic, accessible role models they can approach for guidance. It was, therefore, vital to design questions that uncovered who individuals seek guidance from when confronted with the temptation or pressure to engage in corrupt behaviour. It was posited that this approach would enable a more nuanced understanding of the diverse influences shaping ethical decision-making in South African society.

### 4.7.2    Findings

Respondents in SASAS 2024/2025 were requested to think about integrity and honesty. Then they were asked who their main role models for these values are, i.e., who the respondent admires who exhibits these values. Fieldworkers told respondents that it could be any person, even an ordinary person. Understanding who people admire for integrity and honesty helps uncover the traits and

behaviours they value most in role models. It shows whether role models are public figures, community leaders, family members, or other ordinary people, reflecting the social environment that supports ethical norms. The question posed was open-ended which allowed respondents to write in anyone, and their choices were not dictated by the priorities of the research team. The open-ended nature of the question prompts respondents to think deeply about what honesty and integrity mean to them and who embodies those ideals. Most of the general public gave an answer to this question; only 1% said don't know and 4% told fieldworkers that they refused to answer.

**Figure 4-15: Self-identified role models when thinking about integrity and honesty (multiple response), 2024**
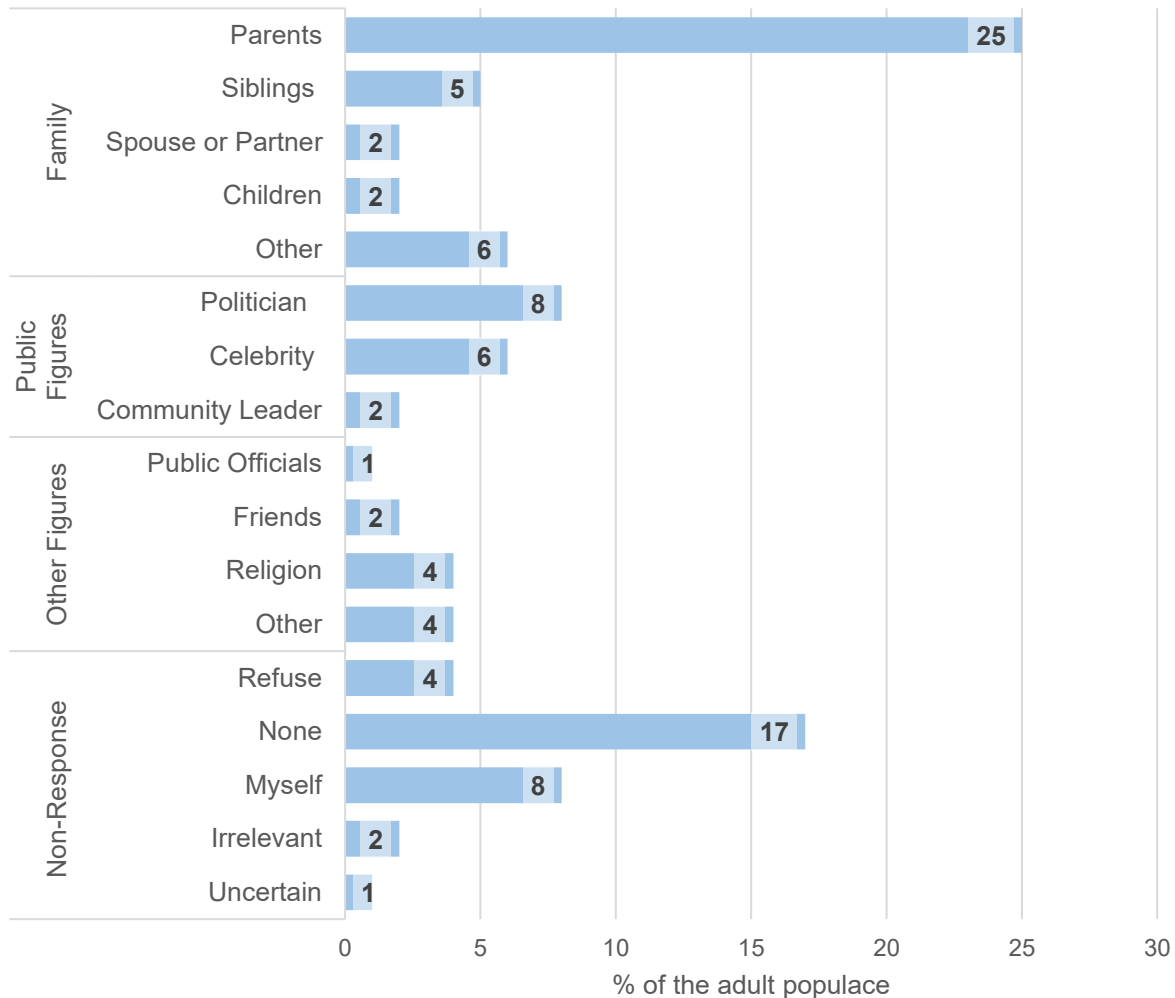


*Source*: South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2024/2025

Responses to the open-ended question are portrayed in Figure 4-15 (pg. 25). We have grouped them into broad categories for ease of analysis. The most popular choice was a family member, with 44% of the mass public listing some kind of family member. The family member who received the most frequent mention was a parent; 27% of adults said that their parents were their role models for integrity and honesty. We found that, perhaps unsurprisingly, a notable proportion (9%) of adults mentioned a political figure and 7% a celebrity of some kind. It was interesting to note that religious figures featured very infrequently here. Less than a twentieth (4%) of the adult population said that their role model was, in some way, connected to their religion. When asked to think about integrity and honesty, around a fifth (17%) of the general public said that they did not have any role models. In addition, about a tenth (8%) of the public said that they are their own role model. These responses may point to multiple possibilities, including child-headed households, a broader societal concern about declining ethical standards, a crisis of confidence in leaders and institutions, or an independent, individualised worldview.

As recognised above, people may have aspirational role models that they look up to, and then there are more practical, attainable role models that they can go to for moral or ethical advice. In order to understand who people look to for moral advice, respondents were asked to imagine that they have the chance to make a lot of money, but it requires doing something corrupt (like misuse funds or take bribes). Next, the respondent was also told to imagine that before making a decision on what to do, they wanted to seek advice. They were then read a list of different types of people and asked to think about from whom they would be most likely to seek advice. This question was designed to assess whom individuals trust or rely on for advice when faced with an ethical dilemma involving corruption. When asked this question, a clear majority of the general public were able to identify at least one type of person in their life from whom they would seek advice. Only a minority (20%) of the public told fieldworkers that they had nobody to go to, or that they would not approach anybody, when faced with an ethical dilemma, and 2% were not sure of who they would talk to.

**Figure 4-16: Types of people who a person would seek advice from if confronted with a moral / ethical dilemma involving corruption (multiple response), 2024**
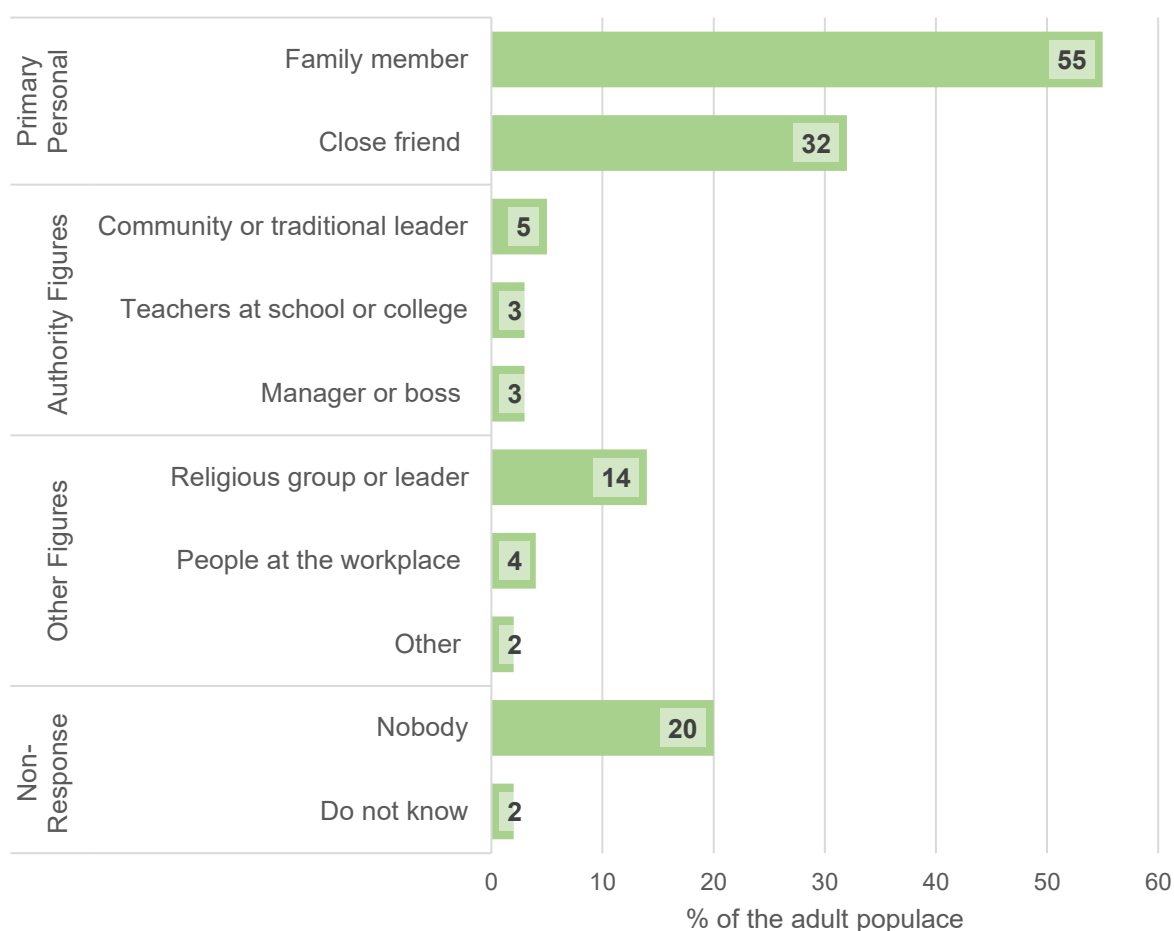


*Source*: South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2024/2025

How the general public answered the question regarding moral or ethical guidance was presented in Figure 4-16 (pg. 26). Almost half of the general public (47%) identified one type of person that they would go to for advice when confronted with the temptation or pressure to commit corruption. Nearly a quarter (22%) indicated that they would seek advice from two types of people, and the remainder (8%) would seek counsel from three types or more. The most common type identified was family members; 55% of the adult populace said that they would seek advice from family. This was a highly favoured option among adults who chose just one type of person for advice; 62% of this group picked a family member. The other popular choice was a close friend; about a third (32%) of the adult population said that they would seek advice from close friends. This was a very popular second choice; of those adults who selected more than one type of person from whom to seek advice, 75% selected a close friend. It was interesting to note that religious figures featured only slightly more frequently here than in the open-

ended question.  Only 14% of the general public said that they would seek advice from their religious group or leader.

## 4.8   THE PRICE OF SUCCESS

In the eighth section, the research team assessed whether the general public believed that engaging in corrupt behaviour can lead to success within society.  The section starts with a background overview of the topic, followed by an analysis of findings from the SASAS 2023 and 2024 rounds.

### 4.8.1   Background

As part of the baseline study, we talked to experts about the roots of corruption in South Africa.  Although there were some differing opinions, experts generally agreed that the legacy of colonialism and apartheid had contributed significantly to the current levels of corruption in the country.  Experts, in particular, identified how settler colonial systems of oppression stymied social mobility for people of colour.  Some contended that the unjust structures established during apartheid continue to dominate the contemporary economy.  Moreover, experts talked about the deep roots of patriarchy within the post-apartheid nation.  Several experts observed that patriarchal structures allow men to exploit their authority for personal benefit, often without accountability, thereby sustaining both gender inequality and corruption.  They noted that cultural norms reinforce these patriarchal views, confining women to subordinate positions characterised by greater vulnerability.

The baseline study analysed expert opinion on the social values and norms encouraging corruption.  Greed and materialism emerged as dominant themes, with experts noting a pursuit of personal enrichment at the expense of integrity as main drivers.  Some thought that the growth of materialistic values around success was compounding the problem.  Desperation and survival instincts, driven by poverty and limited economic opportunities, were also a recurrent theme.  In addition, access to services and efficiency concerns were cited, with some arguing that bribery was the main solution for many who needed to navigate dysfunctional government systems.  Several experts saw corrupt practices as the only way to access unreliable essential public services.  Expert opinion demonstrated that recognising the societal value attributed to corruption can help explain why people engage in it.

In addition to our study of expert opinion, the baseline study investigated popular perceptions of why ordinary people engage in corruption.  A clear majority of the general public thought that the main reasons that the non-elites engaged in corrupt behaviour was greed and a desire for quick wealth.  Half of the public gave this answer, while 35% stated it was driven by a desire for better treatment.  This finding showed that the mass public thought that there was a material return to corrupt behaviour - that people engaged in it because it was a rewarding activity.  This implies that the root of non-elite corruption was perceived to originate in the prioritisation of material wealth over integrity and ethical standards.  In addition, a minority (30%) attributed non-elite corruption to the need to navigate a dishonest system.  It was seen as a necessary means to navigate or compensate for shortcomings in formal state institutions (such as poor service delivery or unequal access to resources).

In the study's second year, the focus shifted to gaining a deeper understanding of the reasons that may lead individuals to participate in corruption.  Through extensive consultations with experts across multiple platforms, a variety of insights were collected to expand and enhance the initial research on this topic.[14]  Many experts emphasised that if corruption is widely perceived within society as an effective or even necessary means to achieve success and advancement, this perception can significantly influence individuals' willingness to participate in corrupt acts.  In other words, we need to understand if corruption is seen as a reliable and therefore a legitimate pathway to so-called 'success'.  If corruption is widely understood as a key avenue to 'success', this perception could help explain why people might be willing to engage in it or ignore it.  To develop relevant questions on this matter, clear points of comparison were needed.  Therefore, the study also included questions aimed at capturing other non-meritocratic factors influencing social and economic advancement.

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[14] A study worth mentioning here is by Plopeanu (2023) who explored how beliefs about the causes of success in life (such as political connections and unlawful actions) influence perceptions of corruption and engagement in corrupt behaviour in post-communist Europe.  Analysing individual data from the Life in Transition Survey III across twenty-one post-communist European countries, the author found that attributing success to external advantages (like political ties or rule-breaking) correlates with higher involvement in bribery.  These results underscore the important role of merit-based achievement and personal effort in shaping how corruption is perceived and practiced in former communist societies.

### 4.8.2 Findings

Fieldworkers first told survey respondents that they were going to ask them questions about opportunities for getting ahead in South Africa. Then they invited respondents to indicate how important they thought each of the following was for getting ahead in life: (i) having political connections; (ii) giving bribes; (iii) being born white; (iv) coming from a wealthy family; (v) doing sexual favours for powerful people; and (vi) being born a man. The goal of these six questions was to assessed perceptions of the role of non-meritocratic factors in social and economic advancement. These questions aim to understand how much a person believed that success depends on unfair or structural advantages and were designed in correspondence with existing scales on non-meritocratic beliefs (for a discussion of these, see Castillo et al., 2023). These questions probe beliefs about the influence of corruption, historical racial privilege as well as continued economic privilege. This survey component also included two questions that looked at perceptions of gender identity and sexual exploitation in determining life chances. Responses to these questions are portrayed in Figure 4-17 (pg. 28); it would appear that a clear majority of the general population think that non-meritocratic factors play a significant role in societal and economic success.

**Figure 4-17: Perceived importance of different traits and actions for social mobility in South Africa, 2024**



*How important do you think each of the following is for getting ahead in life?*
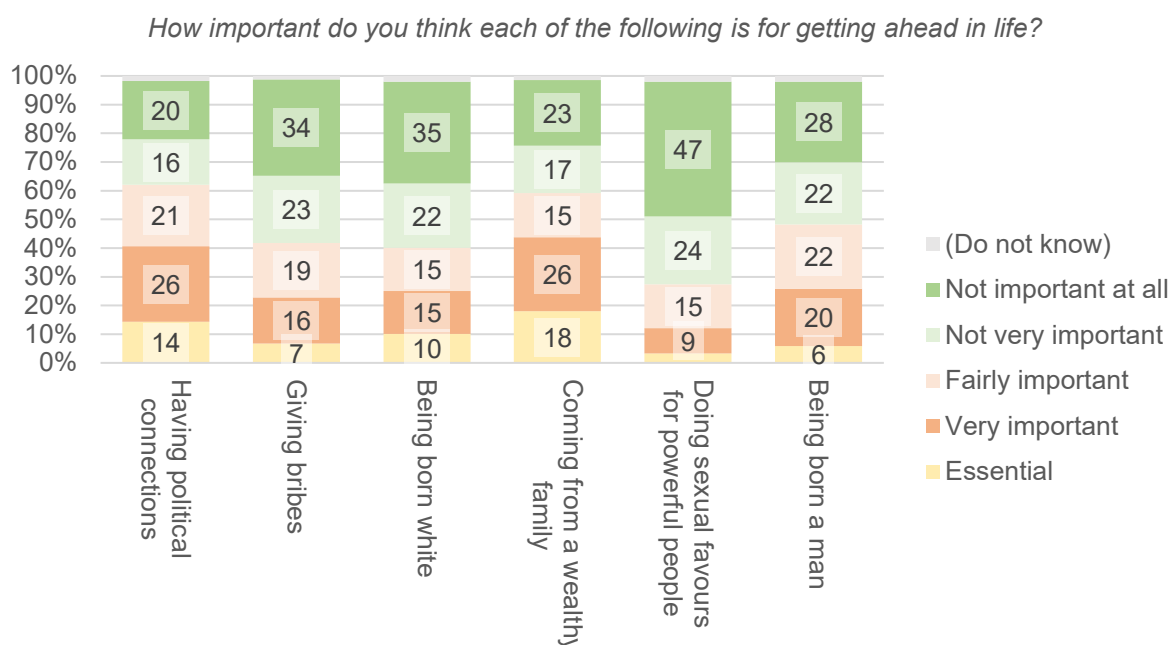
*Source*: South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2024/2025

Of all the non-meritocratic factors in Figure 4-17 (pg. 28), possessing political connections was considered the most beneficial for achieving success in society. More or less an eighth (14%) of the public said this politically-based nepotism was essential to success, while around half considered it very (26%) or fairly (21%) important. When compared to politically-based nepotism, people were less likely to state that giving bribes was instrumental. Fewer than one in ten adults (7%) indicated that this type of behaviour was crucial whereas approximately one-third considered it either very important (16%) or somewhat important (19%). This suggests a hierarchy of perceived non-meritocratic advantages where, in the public's view, nepotism outweighed bribery.  This hierarchy may also suggest that relationships are seen as more useful than the exchange of (immediate) financial gratification. Generational wealth (i.e., elite class membership) was also, perhaps unsurprisingly, thought to be advantageous for societal success. Approximately a fifth (18%) of the general public told fieldworkers that being born into a wealthy family was essential to success while roughly two-fifths said it was either very (26%) or fairly (15%) important.

Among all the non-merit-based factors shown in Figure 4-17 (pg. 28), doing sexual favours for powerful people was considered the least beneficial for achieving success in society. Less than a twentieth (3%) of the general public said this was essential to success , but worryingly about a quarter thought it was

very (9%) or fairly (15%) important. Less than half (47%) of the public stated that this practice was not important at all. The explanation for this result may lie in the view that most of the public tend to see sexual corruption as the exploitation of vulnerable groups that is not often 'rewarded' with a material benefit, rather than as a reliable path to societal success. In addition, response rates likely reflect strong social and ethical norms against exploiting sexual favours as a means to success. The tendency to reject sexual corruption as a path to success was not due to a feeling that gender equality prevails in South Africa. As can be observed from the figure, a notable proportion of the mass populace saw male gender identity as comparatively more important for success.

Bivariate tests demonstrate connections between the way people responded to the six questions discussed above. Although the observed associations were modest, there was a general tendency to see success as influenced by systemic inequality or unfairness (test findings are reported in Section 6.8 on pg. 47). Viewing one non-meritocratic factor (such as bribe-giving) as important for success tended to make an individual more likely to see other factors as important. The strongest association to emerge from the bivariate tests was between coming from a wealthy family and being white. This test outcome reflects how many people see the enduring socio-economic disparities in South Africa, where wealth and race are closely linked in the minds of many in the country. It was noteworthy that perceptions of sexual corruption showed little correlation with perceptions of bribery. This outcome demonstrates that the public does not generally think that monetary bribes and sexual corruption are of equivalent utility, or that monetary and sexual extortion are equally prevalent, when it comes to getting ahead.

## 4.9    THE WILLINGNESS TO ACT

We investigate the readiness to combat corruption in South Africa amongst the adult population in this section. It begins with a contextual overview of the issue, followed by a subsection on the analysis of data from the SASAS 2024/2025 round.

### 4.9.1    Background

In the last few decades, many researchers have started including questions on anti-corruption behaviours in large public opinion surveys. This shift towards 'what ordinary people can do' and away from 'what government has done' is part of a wider change in public opinion anti-corruption research to focus on proactive behaviour (for a discussion of this shift, see Wysmułek, 2019). The baseline study was interested in this issue and looked at public perceptions about fighting corruption. It built on prior research in South Africa on whether ordinary people are able to fight corruption.[15] A deliberate decision was made to explore the extent to which individuals are willing to actively participate in using formal systems and mechanisms to fight corruption. This involved assessing whether the public trusts and feels empowered to report corrupt behaviour through official channels.

The baseline study examined the social norms surrounding reporting corruption to the authorities. The focus was on the *willingness* of the general public to report corruption if they had witnessed it. Participants in the baseline survey were asked whether they would report corrupt behaviour if they encountered or observed it. Responses from the public showed a clear divide. Approximately half of the general public indicated they would not report corruption, with 30% saying it was unlikely and 15% stating it was very unlikely. A comparable proportion told interviewers that they would report such behaviour if they experienced or witnessed it, with 21% saying it was very likely and 31% saying it was somewhat likely. A small percentage (3%) were unsure and did not provide an answer. In this context, the willingness to report serves as an indicator of the social norm to act against corruption by notifying authorities when corruption is observed.

Another important aspect of fighting corruption is willingness to give testimony in court. Experts we talked with noted that witness testimony in court can play a crucial role in combating corruption because it often provides the essential evidence needed to prove corrupt acts. Corruption cases typically involve complex interactions and motives that require firsthand accounts from those who observed or participated in the transactions to clarify intent and expose wrongdoing. Depending on the circumstances, witness testimony can be pivotal in securing convictions, as many corruption cases rely heavily on the cooperation of insiders or intermediaries who can detail the relevant dealings. Without their accounts, it is challenging for law enforcement and courts to build a strong case.

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[15] Corruption Watch (2021), for example, conducted a public opinion study to understand public perceptions related to whistleblowing in South Africa.

The second year of the study sought to gain a deeper insight into how the public perceives the willingness to report corruption. By engaging in extensive discussions with experts across various platforms, a range of suggestions was gathered to broaden and improve the initial investigation on this subject. Many of the experts with whom we engaged indicated that it would be appropriate to explore willingness in more detail. It was decided, in particular, to ask people not merely whether they would report corruption, but also if they would be willing to give testimony in a court case involving corruption. Asking a person to give testimony is a more demanding endeavour than just giving a report. It is also much risker, as court witnesses in South Africa face significant risks such as intimidation and threats, and even physical harm, which undermines fair trials and the pursuit of justice (Wiener, 2023). Consequently, there is an expectation that people would be less likely to indicate a willingness to participate in this kind of anti-corruption behaviour.

### 4.9.2    Findings

Fieldworkers first asked respondents to imagine that they had experienced or witnessed corrupt behaviour (like the misuse of funds or requests for bribes). Then fieldworkers asked respondents how likely it would be that they would report the corrupt behaviour that they had experienced or witnessed. More or less two-fifths of the general public said that they would not report, with 17% stating that they were not at all willing that they would report and 23% that they were not willing. A higher proportion of the public told fieldworkers that they would report corruption if they experienced or witnessed it (Figure 4-18, pg. 30). Roughly speaking a third (33%) said that they were willing to report and 26% stated that they were very willing. The remainder (2%) were uncertain and did not answer the question. The set of responses received in the SASAS 2024/2025 round indicated a greater willingness to report than in the SASAS 2023 round. It's possible that a limited portion of the population is reacting favourably to the recent political and legal developments in South Africa.

**Figure 4-18: Perceived willingness of the general public to report if they experienced or witnessed corrupt behaviour**
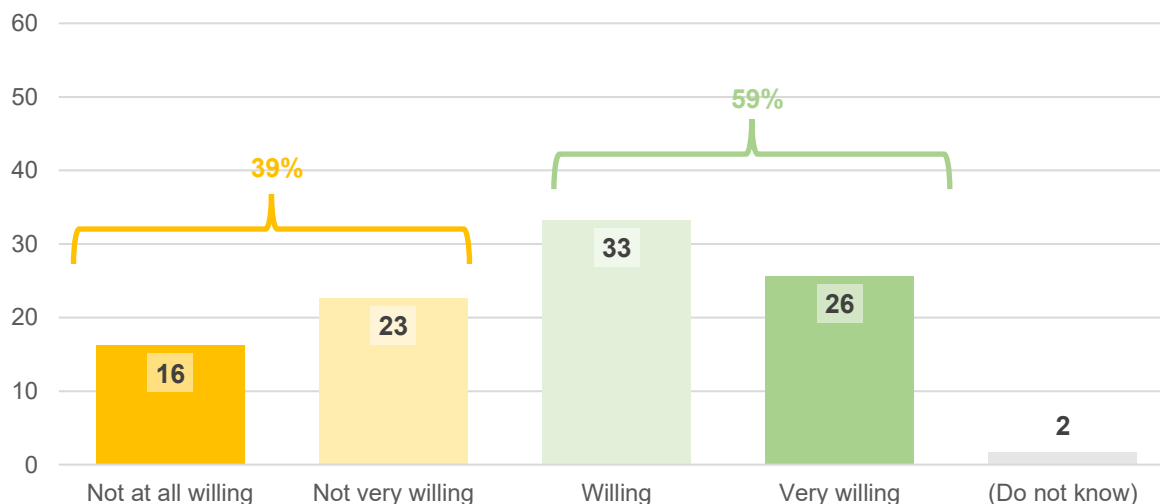


*Source*: South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2024/2025

SASAS respondents in 2024 were then requested to state how willing they would be to give evidence in court against the person accused of corruption. Just about half of the mass populace said that they would not give evidence, with 23% stating that they were not at all willing and 26% that they were just not willing (Figure 4-19, pg. 31). A smaller segment of the mass populace told fieldworkers that they would testify against a person accused of corruption in court. More than a quarter (29%) said that it was very likely that they would give testimony and 19% stated that it was just likely. The remainder (2%) were uncertain and did not answer the question. From a comparative perspective, it was apparent that participants are less willing to testify against someone accused of corruption than they are to report corruption to the authorities.

**Figure 4-19: Perceived willingness of the general public to testify in court against an accused person if they experienced or witnessed corrupt behaviour**
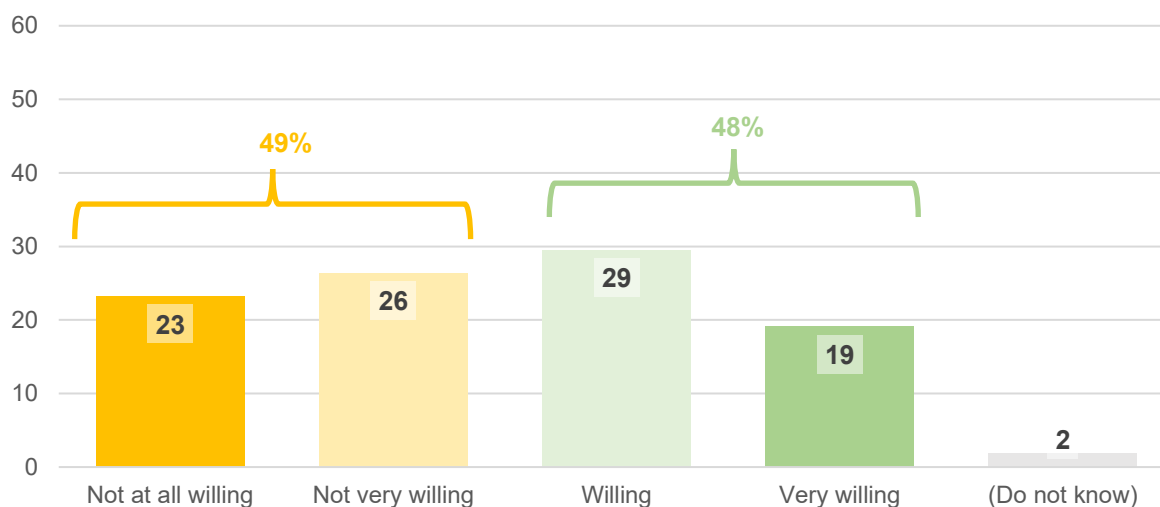


*Source*: South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2024/2025

Bivariate tests demonstrate that there was a robust connection between the way people responded to the two questions discussed above (test findings are reported in Section 6.9). Adults who were more willing to report corruption were more likely to state that they would testify against someone accused of corruption. It would appear that individuals who feel morally or socially compelled to expose corruption are also prepared to take the next step of providing testimony. This relationship likely reflects common psychological and social factors (such as trust in the justice system, perceived legitimacy of authorities, personal integrity, and social norms that encourage or discourage whistleblowing) that drive both activities. Supplementary statistical analyses verified the internal consistency of the two items, indicating that they can be reliably aggregated into a single measure (see test results in Section 06.9).

Utilising statistical testing, we developed a scale to assess the willingness to utilise the system in combating corruption, based on the two questions outlined earlier. The measure was labelled the Willingness to Fight Corruption (WtFC) Scale. To simplify the interpretation, the scale was designed to range from 0 to 100. The higher the value on the scale, the greater the willingness to fight corruption using the system. The national mean score on this metric was 52 (SE=0.976), although it should be noted that only a small minority (14%) of the adult population scored 100 on this scale. This suggested that only about a tenth of the adult population is fully committed to fighting corruption. On the other hand, a significant share of the adult populace has adopted a middling position on this issue. We found that more or less a third (35%) of adults scored between 50 and 70 on the scale, which indicated a moveable middle that can be encouraged to take a stronger position.

## 4.10   WHY PEOPLE STAY SILENT

One of the goals of the baseline study was to understand why there is so much reluctance to report witnessed corruption in South Africa. Expert opinion on report reluctance was examined. Fear of retaliation emerged as a widespread barrier according to the experts surveyed. They also pointed to weak enforcement and inadequate protections for whistleblowers as major reasons why people hesitate to report corruption. This aligns with concerns about a prevailing culture of impunity in South Africa. Indeed, one of the more interesting findings from the baseline study was the mixed view of whistleblowers that emerged from those experts interviewed. On the one hand, many viewed them as courageous figures who expose corruption, while others expressed scepticism or even hostility towards them for risking personal and family safety for uncertain outcomes, or sometimes for supposedly seeking attention.

The baseline survey looked at non-expert opinion on why many people in South Africa do not report the corruption that they have witnessed. Scholars have long considered lay attributions to be an important source of information when trying to understand human behaviour (Kelley, & Michela, 1980). When delineating lay attributions, we made a distinction between the following types of attributions: (i) psychological (i.e., internal) and (ii) environmental (i.e., external). Within attribution theory research, internal factors refer to how people explain the causes of events or behaviours based on personal

qualities or traits of the individual involved. In contrast, external factors are those explanations that point to environmental influences or situational circumstances outside the person and largely outside their control.[16] Understanding non-expert attitudes to the societal reluctance to report corruption can shed light on the complex interplay of societal, institutional and psychological barriers to reporting this kind of crime.

Participants in SASAS 2023 were requested to provide a rationale for why many people in South Africa do not report corruption. The precise wording of this question was as follows: "Some people say that many incidents of corruption are never reported. Based on your experience, what do you think is the main reason why many people do not report corruption when it occurs?" A wide variety of different options were read out by fieldworkers and multiple options could be selected. Most of the general public cited external factors as reasons for not reporting corruption; 86% of adults pointed to issues in the law enforcement system. The leading concerns were lack of punishment for offenders (51%), lack of protection for whistleblowers (49%), and corruption within reporting structures themselves (30%). Over half (55%) mentioned internal factors, such as the normalisation of corruption (27%), lack of knowledge (23%) and loyalty to one's group (21%).

**Figure 4-20: Percentage who selected main attributions identified for why many people do not report corruption in South Africa (multiple response), 2024**



*Source*: South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2024/2025

The lay attribution question on non-reporting was repeated in SASAS 2024/2025 and the results are depicted in Figure 4-20 (pg. 32). Similar to what was observed in the baseline survey, lack of punishment for the guilty was the most popular (52%; SE=1.544) attribution provided by the mass populace. In addition, we found that 43% (SE=1.546) of the public stated that corruption in reporting structures discouraged reporting. This figure was marginally higher than was observed in the baseline survey, possibly indicating a decrease in trust in these institutions. Similar to what we saw in the

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[16] For a further discussion of the difference between internal and external attribution, see Hewstone (1989).

baseline survey, the most common internal factor selected was the normalisation of corruption (33%; SE=1.486).  Similar proportions of the public also selected a lack of knowledge (31%; SE=1.516) and concerns about ingroup loyalty (27%; SE=1.463).  Reviewing the data depicted in the figure as a whole, it was apparent that environmental factors continue to prevail as the main attribution type put forward to explain the reluctance to report corruption.

## 4.11  CODES OF SILENCE

The extent to which the general public has a moral aversion to reporting on people they know to the authorities for engaging in corrupt behaviour is explored here.  The first subsection provided an overview of the issue's context while the second subsection presented findings from the SASAS 2024/2025 round.

### 4.11.1  Background

One of the goals of the baseline study was to identify and understand the social norms against reporting the criminal behaviour of social network members (SNMs), or 'ingroup'.  This term refers to a person's friends, colleagues, acquaintances and kinspersons, and can exist either online or offline.  Almost everyone is part of one social network or another (for a more in-depth discussion, see Putnam, 2000).  A person may think that reporting the criminal conduct of SNMs they know personally is a *betrayal*, a type of immoral conduct.  Indeed, people frequently use colloquialisms (such as 'snitching' or 'impimpi') that carry highly negative connotations to describe whistleblowing.  Stigmatisation of this type can create 'codes of silence' that weaken the rule of law and reduce societal accountability for corrupt and criminal practices.  As a euphemism for these social norms, we used the phrase 'codes of silence' (CoS).  The baseline study provided some of the first nationally representative evidence of CoS norms in South Africa.

To gauge public attitudes towards the social norms that surround CoS we had to design unique questions for the baseline survey.  After careful deliberation, it was decided to ask respondents to indicate if they thought it is morally wrong for a person to report someone they knew personally (e.g., a friend, co-worker, or neighbour) to the authorities if they committed different kinds of crime.  Four types of crimes were selected; these crimes ranged from petty (e.g., avoiding paying for public transport) to quite serious (e.g., paying a bribe).[17]  Data showed that reporting people you know personally to the authorities for unlawful conduct was generally seen as morally wrong by the mass public.  Popular opinion did not seem to make much distinction between the different kinds of unlawful behaviour under discussion.  Even when asked about quite serious crimes, most people said it was wrong to report their SNMs to the authorities.

The baseline study found that if a person thought that reporting SNMs who committed one type of crime (e.g., avoiding paying for public transport) was acceptable then they were more likely to think that informing on SNMs for other types of crime (e.g., reporting someone for accepting bribes) was also permissible.  We can conclude, therefore, that we have identified a single CoS norm, a social norm that views informing on others to the authorities as immoral.  Using the statistical tests described earlier, we created an index to measure moral opposition to reporting crimes by SNMs.  Additional tests confirmed the internal consistency of the items, supporting their combination into a single reliable metric.  The index ranged from 0 to 100, with higher scores indicating stronger moral resistance to reporting such behaviour.  The national average score on the index was 69 (SE=1.094), indicating a significant share of the population skewed towards the right of the distribution scale.

The second-year study aimed to enhance our knowledge of societal codes of silence.  Through in-depth discussions with experts consulted during the baseline study, multiple recommendations were collected to expand and deepen the investigation initiated by the baseline study.  These experts suggested that a radius style approach would yield informative data on the elasticity of CoS norms.  The argument is that CoS norms vary not only in intensity (which types of crime should not be reported) but also in its *scope* or *breadth*; that is, the range or "circle" of people or groups toward whom CoS norms are extended.  This "radius" represents the extent and depth (or strength) of one's willingness to shield others from the law, starting from close family and friends (i.e., narrow radius) and extending to neighbours and work acquaintances (i.e., wide radius).  In addition, it was decided to include a more serious corrupt behaviour when asking about CoS norms.  Given the strength of CoS norms detected

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[17] The criminal behaviours selected for testing were based on the revised Morally Debatable Behaviours Scale that was designed by Katz et al. (1994).

in the baseline study, it was thought that a more egregious crime would be more appropriate for future testing.

### 4.11.2    Findings

During the 2024 round of SASAS, participants were asked to imagine that someone they knew personally engaged in corrupt behaviour (like the misuse of funds or requests for bribes). Then participants were requested to indicate whether it would be wrong or not wrong to report that person to the authorities if they were your: (i) family member; (ii) friend; (iii) neighbour; and (iv) work colleague. It is important to note here that the crimes presented to the respondent was significantly more serious than the crimes that were explored when CoS was first investigated as part of the baseline study. Consequently, there was a moderate expectation that, overall, willingness to report would be greater than what was observed in the baseline study. Responses to these four questions are depicted in Figure 4-21 (pg. 34) and it is clear that a majority of the general public continue to think that reporting SNMs for corruption remains wrong.

**Figure 4-21: Perceived morality of reporting corrupt behaviour to the authorities by different types of ingroup members, 2024**

*Would it be wrong or not wrong to report a person to the authorities for corruption if that person were your...*
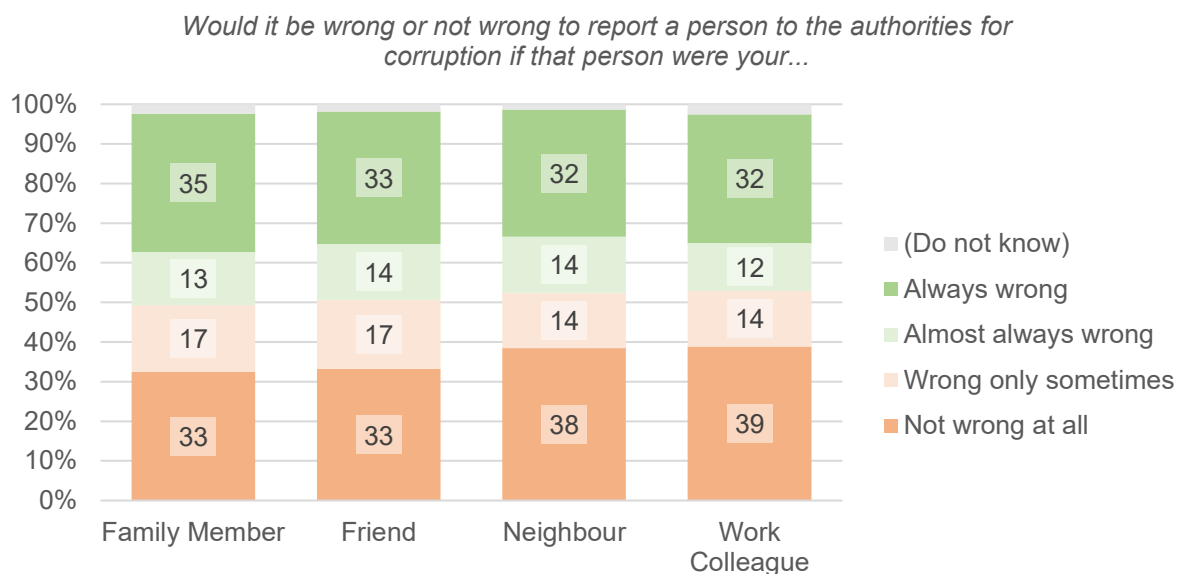


*Source*: South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2024/2025

It would appear that the general public is divided on whether they would view reporting a family member to the authorities as morally wrong. Roughly a third (33%) of adults thought that reporting on family members who engage in serious corrupt behaviour was always wrong and 13% believed that it was almost always wrong. Indeed, a similar proportion of the public claimed that this behaviour was wrong only sometimes (17%) or not wrong at all (33%). Given the seriousness of the crime under review, this tendency to protect family is interesting and suggests the underlying strength of CoS norms. There was a mild tendency to view reporting family members to the authorities as more egregious than reporting on work colleagues or neighbours. But the level of variation was not as large as some may have anticipated. A significant quotient of the mass public tended to think that reporting on work colleagues or neighbours for corrupt practices was equally wrong.

Bivariate tests show that the items in Figure 4-21 (pg. 34) are strongly interrelated with one another. This outcome demonstrates that the perceived morality of reporting on one kind of SNMs was found to be correlated with the morality of reporting on others (test findings are reported in Section 6.4 on pg.47). We can conclude, therefore, that we have identified the radius of the CoS norms that view as immoral informing on different kinds of SNMs to the authorities for corrupt behaviour. This is consistent with the prior research on CoS conducted in the baseline survey and demonstrates that social norms around protecting SNMs are an important part of South African culture. Further statistical analyses verified the internal consistency of these items, indicating that they can be reliably aggregated into a single measure (see test results in Section 6.4 on pg. 47).

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& Ethical state

**Figure 4-22: Population distribution on the Radius of Codes of Silence Norm (RoCoSN) Index (histogram), 2024**
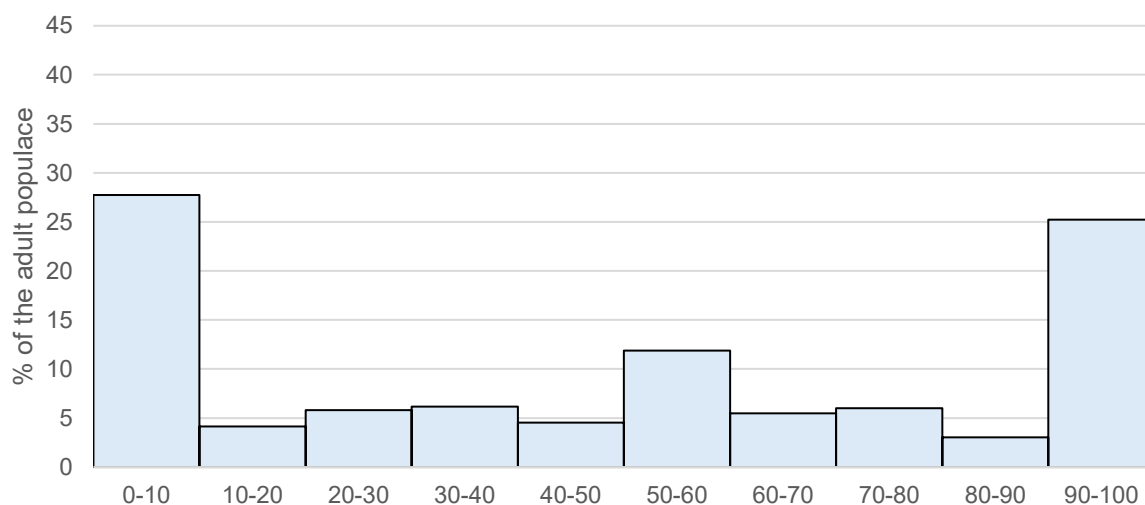


*Source*: South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2024/2025

Drawing on the statistical analysis, we created an index to evaluate the moral reluctance to report the offences of SNMs using the questions shown in Figure 4-21 (pg. 34). The index was designed to have a range from 0 to 100; the higher the value on the index, the greater the perceived moral opposition to reporting the corrupt behaviour of SNMs. The metric was labelled the Radius of Codes of Silence Norms (RoCoSN) Index. The national mean score on this metric was 48 (SE=1.161) and a histogram presented in Figure 4-22 (pg. 35) showed that the data distribution was characterised by two distinct peaks (or nodes). Although there is a small (but notable) group that adopts a middle position, these two peaks represent two local maxima in the frequency density of the data. The general public is, in other words, divided between two camps; the first represents a strong aversion to reporting on SNMs for corruption and the other rejects this view entirely.

## 4.12   A CULTURE OF FEAR

Every individual in South Africa should be able to report corruption without fear of retaliation. It is the responsibility of the authorities to safeguard those who choose to come forward. Unfortunately, the reality is often different. People can face negative repercussions (such as losing one's job, facing social ostracism, or even physical harm) if they come forward to report corruption. The fear of such negative consequences can discourage people from exposing corrupt behaviour, allowing unethical or criminal actions to persist without challenge. When people are afraid, corruption thrives because wrongdoers feel confident that their misconduct will remain hidden. Indeed, in Section 4.10, we found that about half of the general public said that the reason that people do not report corruption was a lack of protection for those who come forward.

When we talked to experts as part of the baseline study, many said that fear of retaliation was the major reason why many people in South Africa choose not to report corruption.  . Indeed, some experts believed that the danger associated with reporting corruption has increased recently due to the involvement of the rise of organised criminal groups. Investigative research by Wiener (2023) confirms the risks whistleblowers encounter in South Africa. Her research revealed that exposing corruption can be perilous, and she documented numerous instances where whistleblowers suffered severe retaliation, including acts of violence.

Expert opinion on fear of retaliation aligned with the findings presented in the baseline survey. As part of that survey, respondents were asked whether they agreed with the statement: "In this community, people risk revenge if they speak out against corruption". Approximately three-fifths (62%) of adults reported that individuals who expose corruption in their community face the danger of retaliation. Only a small portion (14%) felt they lived in communities where corruption could be reported without fear of backlash. The remaining respondents either gave a neutral answer (21%) or were unsure how to respond (3%). Overall, the data indicated that most people in South Africa believe they reside in

communities where it is unsafe to report corrupt activities. This finding aligns with earlier research highlighting widespread fear as a major barrier to reporting corruption.[18]

**Figure 4-23: Perceived fear of retaliation against reporting on corruption in a person's community, 2024**

*To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "In this community, people risk negative consequences (such as losing friends, losing work, or violence) if they speak out against corruption?"*
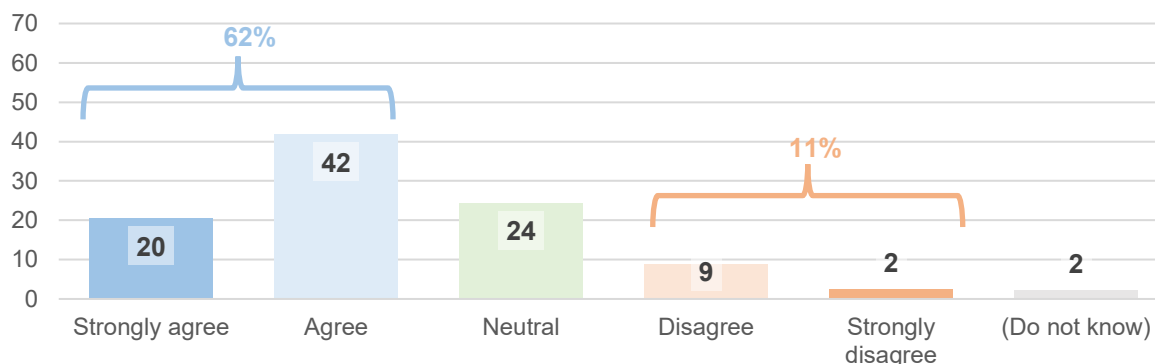


*Source*: South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2024/2025

During the second year of the study, participants were again asked the baseline question about retaliation, but some examples of retaliation were provided (i.e., losing friends, losing work, or violence). Roughly three-fifths of the adult population agreed (42%) or strongly agreed (20%) that those who reported corruption in their community risk revenge (Figure 4-23, pg. 36). Only a minority either disagreed (9%) or strongly disagreed (2%) with the statement, implying that they lived in communities where people could report corruption without fear of retaliation. The remainder of the population either gave a neutral response to this question (24%) or said that they were uncertain of how to answer it (2%). Taken as a whole, these results are very similar to what was seen in the baseline survey. Indeed, there is not a strong reason to believe that there would be a significant change between the two periods, as South Africa remains a violent society.

## 4.13 PERCEPTIONS OF THE CULTURE OF IMPUNITY

As part of the baseline study, we looked at expert opinion on why corruption in the country has become worse over the last few decades. The consensus among experts pointed to institutional and political shortcomings. Many highlighted the absence of accountability as a primary factor driving the rise in corruption since the post-apartheid era began. They argued that unethical leadership combined with a lack of accountability has nurtured a culture of impunity in South Africa, worsening corruption levels. They were particularly concerned about the lack of accountability, weak law enforcement and the absence of political will to fight corruption. These concerns, particularly as it related to law enforcement's ineffectiveness, align with findings by the Zondo Commission (for a detailed discussion of the findings of the commission, see Holden, 2023).

When experts were interviewed about the causes of corruption in South Africa, a considerable number identified the criminal justice system's weaknesses as a central cause. A number of experts we spoke with noted that insufficient and inadequate investigations and prosecutions have emboldened corrupt behaviour. In addition, many believed that law enforcement officials have been complicit in corruption. It is unclear to what extent police inaction is rooted in complicity or arises from fear of retaliation from violent criminals. The baseline survey investigated public attitudes concerning a culture of impunity for engaging in corrupt practices in South Africa. A large proportion of the public appeared to believe that there was general impunity for participating in corruption. More than half (51%) of the population felt that non-elites would not be held accountable for engaging in public sector corruption. In addition to this distressing discovery, we learnt that only a minority (34%) of the adult population thought that elites

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[18] Patel and Govindasamy (2021), using 2021 Afrobarometer data, found that only about a fifth (21%) of South African adults believed they lived in a country where ordinary people could report corruption without fear of retaliation.

would be held accountable for engaging in corrupt practices. Further, if someone believed that non-elites would be held accountable, they were also likely to think that elites would face accountability.

If a person reported a case of corruption to South African law enforcement, they should be confident that the authorities will act. But during the baseline survey we found that a clear majority of the adult population thought that anti-corruption reporting structures were ineffective. The data suggest that a majority (61%) of the mass public believe that the authorities would not act if they reported a case of corruption. A fifth said that such action was not at all likely while 41% told fieldworkers that it was not very likely that action would be taken. These findings draw our attention to a persistent legitimacy challenge in the police-public relationship. It represents a clear failure of the justice system to convince the public of its effectiveness and is a major obstacle to the creation of a zero-tolerance environment for corruption, which is a key NACS aim.

**Figure 4-24: Perceived likelihood that action would be taken if corruption was reported to a government office or the police, 2023 & 2024**
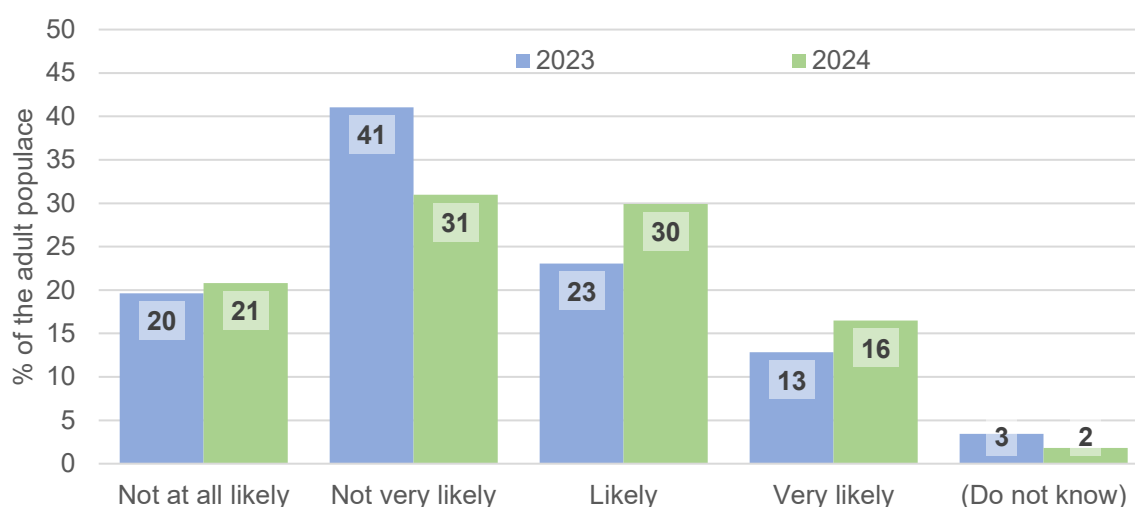


*Source*: South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2023 -2024

As part of the study's second year, the question on the confidence that the authorities would act if the respondent went to a government office or the police to report corrupt behaviour was repeated. Nearly a fifth (16%) of the general public said that it was not at all likely that action would be taken while 30% told fieldworkers that it was not very likely that action would be taken (Figure 4-24, pg. 37). Nearly a third (31%) of the mass populace believed that it was likely that the authorities would take action if they reported corrupt behaviour and 21% stated that it was very likely. A small minority (2%) were unsure and did not answer the question. When compared to what was seen in SASAS 2023, this is a noteworthy (if not substantial) improvement in sentiment over the last year. It might be possible that a small segment of the general public is responding positively to recent law enforcement efforts to fight corruption in South Africa.

## 4.14  HOTLINES TO REPORT CORRUPTION

This section appraises public awareness of, and confidence in, anti-corruption hotlines in South Africa. It starts with a background overview of the topic, followed by an analysis of findings from the SASAS 2024/2025 round.

### 4.14.1  *Background*

Anti-corruption hotlines are essential tools in the fight against corruption because they provide a confidential, accessible and anonymous channel for individuals to report corrupt activities without fear of retaliation. Hotlines help to overcome barriers associated with corruption reporting (such as fear of victimisation or social stigma) by allowing confidential or anonymous disclosures. This anonymity is crucial in contexts where whistleblowers may face real risks of intimidation or retaliation. Anti-corruption hotlines also contribute to building a culture of integrity by signalling that corruption will not be tolerated and that the government (or the company or other organisation) is committed to addressing it. They form part of a broader anti-corruption infrastructure that includes legislation, investigations and enforcement mechanisms. Under the right circumstances, hotlines can serve as accessible platforms

for whistleblowers and concerned citizens to provide credible information to law enforcement and oversight agencies.

Since the first National Anti-Corruption Summit held in April 1999, a number of hotlines have been established, both in the provinces and in national departments in South Africa.  Key national hotlines include the Special Investigating Unit Whistle-blower Hotline, which specifically targets corruption within government departments and entities. The Presidential Hotline and the Public Protector Hotline offer additional avenues for reporting unresolved service delivery issues and maladministration, respectively. Another key example is the Public Service Commission National Anti-Corruption Hotline, which specifically targets corruption within the public service.  Beyond government-run hotlines, civil society organisations like Corruption Watch and the Organisation Undoing Tax Abuse (OUTA) operate their own reporting lines, offering alternative channels for whistleblowers and the public.  The diversity and specialisation of these hotlines reflect South Africa's efforts to provide a comprehensive approach to tackling corruption by facilitating reporting across multiple levels and sectors.

Awareness        Confidence        Usage
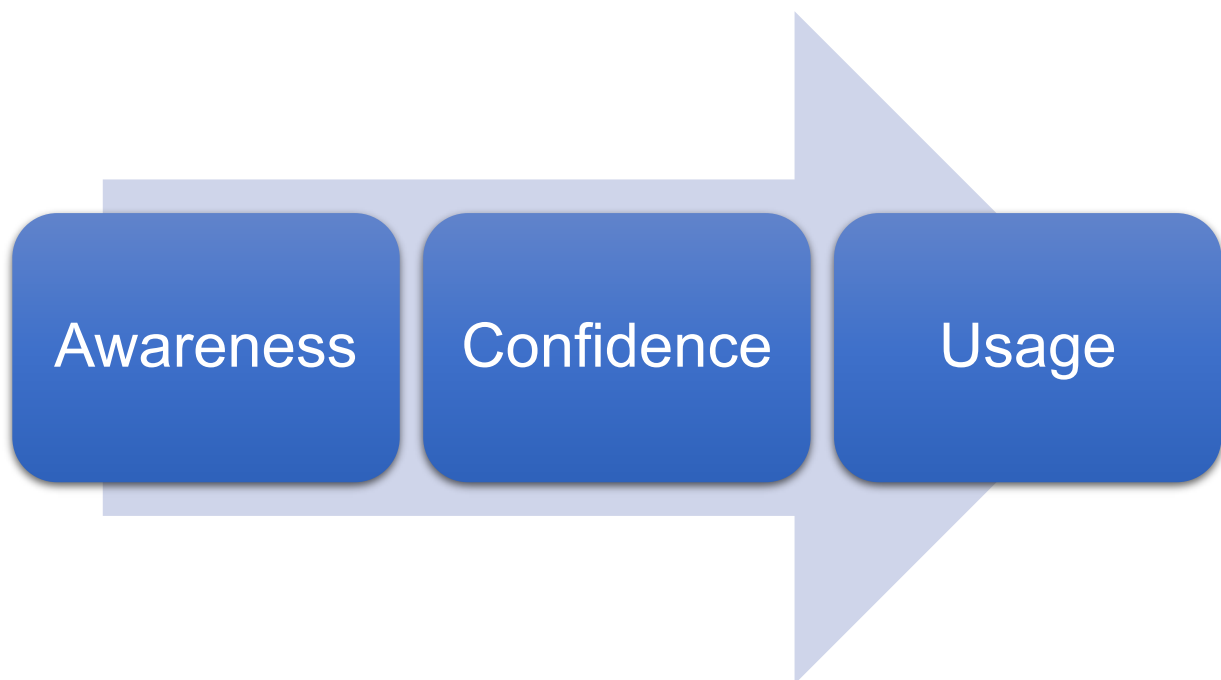
If we want the anti-corruption hotlines outlined above to work, it is important to make sure that the public is both aware of, and confident in, anti-corruption hotlines.  First, awareness determines whether citizens know these reporting channels exist and understand how to access them.  Without sufficient knowledge of hotlines, potential whistleblowers or witnesses of corruption may remain silent, limiting the flow of critical information needed to detect and address corrupt practices.  Studies have shown that even in countries with active anti-corruption efforts, public awareness of hotlines can be surprisingly low due to a range of different barriers (Fagan & Keller-Herzog, 2009).  Second, confidence in anti-corruption hotlines strongly influences the willingness of individuals to use them.  If the public doubts that their reports will be handled confidentially, taken seriously or lead to meaningful action, they are less likely to come forward.  Trust in the hotline's impartiality, professionalism and effective protection of whistleblowers is essential (also see Koranteng, 2013).

As part of the second-year study, we chose to examine public attitudes toward anti-corruption hotlines in South Africa, recognising these hotlines as key tools for reporting corruption and promoting accountability.  After conducting a thorough review of the numerous hotlines operating across the country, we identified nine of the most prominent and widely recognised ones to focus on.  Our initial focus was to assess the level of public awareness regarding these nine hotlines.  Following this, we explored the extent to which the public has confidence in these hotlines (i.e., whether people believe that they can trust them).  This dual approach was designed to provide a comprehensive picture of how these anti-corruption mechanisms are perceived by the general public.

Participants in SASAS 2024/2025 were queried on whether they had heard about different anti-corruption hotlines in South Africa.  First, they were told that there are several such hotlines where anyone can make an anonymous report or tip-off about corrupt behaviour that they are aware of or have witnessed.  Respondents were then read a list of nine prominent hotlines and invited to identify which from this list they were aware of.  A majority of the general public were able to identify at least one hotline that they were aware of, although roughly two-fifths (35%) of the public had not heard about one of the hotlines on the list and 5% stated they refused to respond.  Approximately a fifth (19%) of the public were aware of one hotline and only a tiny fraction (1%) of the adult populace said that they were aware of all nine hotlines on the list.  The number of hotlines that the public was aware of, on average, was two; this indicated that awareness of anti-corruption hotlines was not very high amongst the adult populace.

**Figure 4-25: Percentage of adults who said that they were aware of the pertinent anti-corruption hotline, 2024**
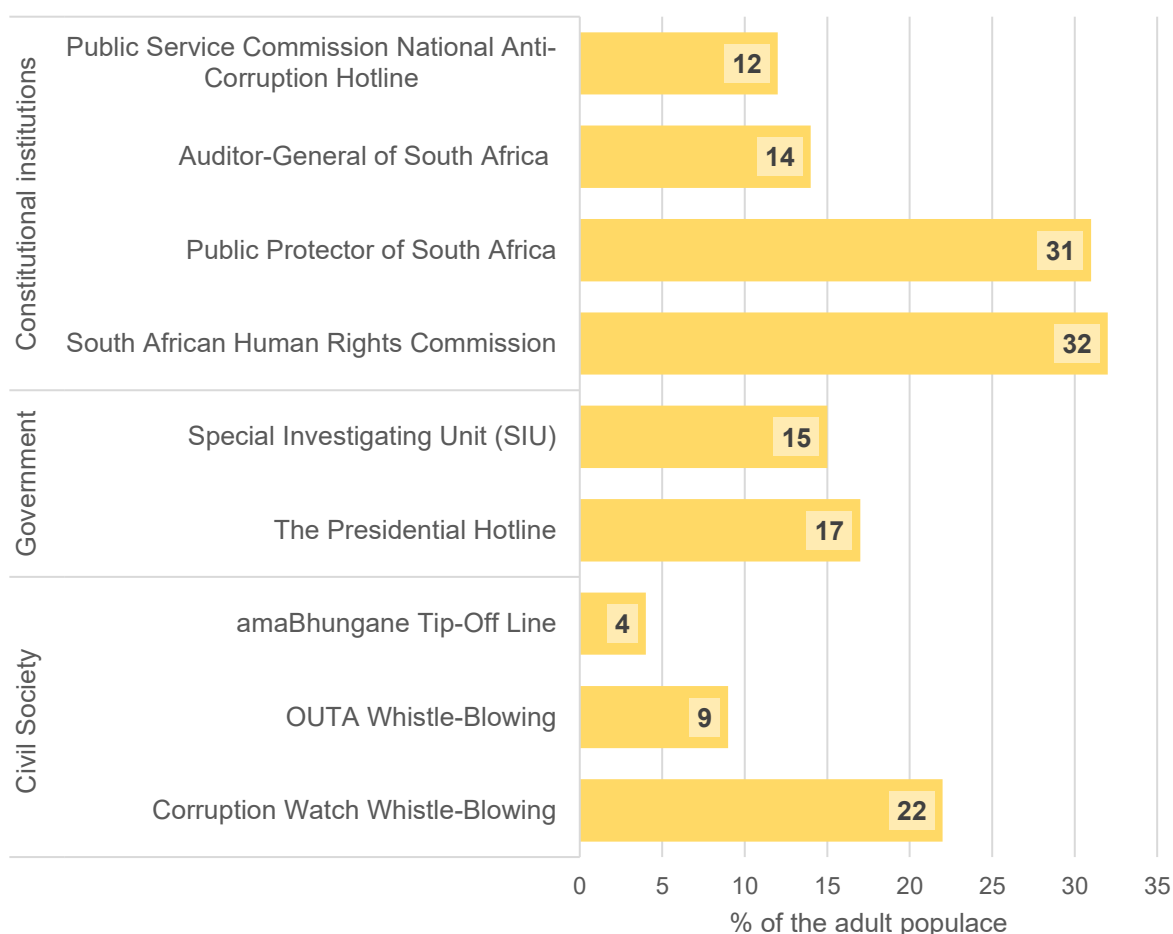


*Source*: South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2024/2025

The two hotlines that received the most frequent mentions from the general public were the Public Protector of South Africa and the South African Human Rights Commission.  About a third of the public said that they were aware of these two hotlines.  This outcome is, perhaps, unsurprising; these are two quite important constitutional institutions in the country and have repeatedly featured in the news media. As can be observed from Figure 4-25 (pg. 39), the Corruption Watch Whistle-Blowing hotline also emerged as relatively well-known, 22% of the adult population were aware of this hotline. The least known anti-corruption hotline was the amaBhungane Tip-Off Line; only around a twentieth (4%) of the public was familiar with this hotline.  It was interesting that such a small fraction (12%) of the public was aware of the Public Service Commission National Anti-Corruption Hotline.  Even though the mass populace is very concerned about corruption in the public sector, most are unaware of the hotline designed to report suspected acts of corruption in the public service.
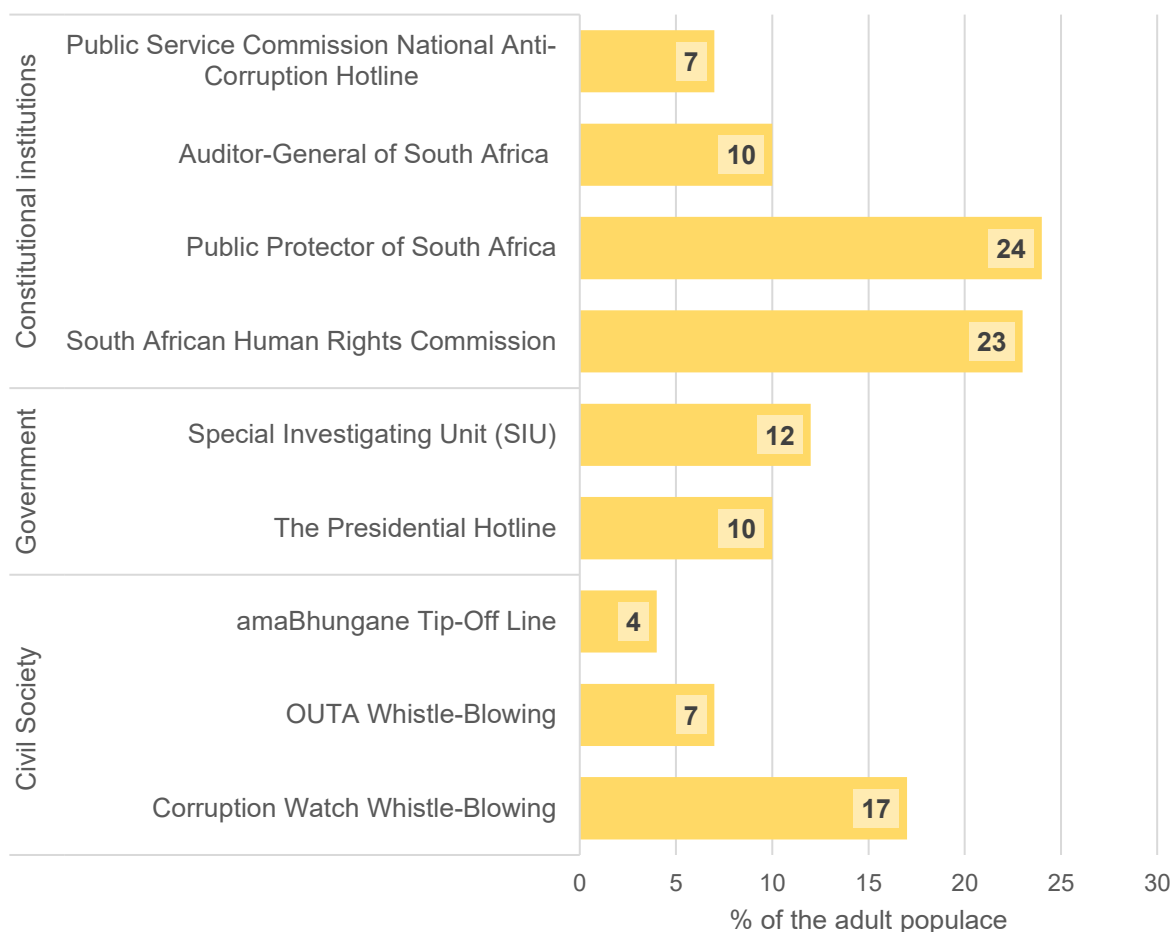
**Figure 4-26: Percentage of adults who said that they could trust the pertinent anti-corruption hotline, 2024**



*Source*: South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2024/2025

Fieldworkers asked SASAS 2024/2025 respondents whether they thought they could trust any of the nine anti-corruption hotlines on the list. This question was restricted to those members of the general public who said they were aware of any of the nine hotlines. More or less a third (31%) of this segment of the public said that they trusted one hotline and only a tiny fraction (1%) of the adult populace said that they trusted all nine hotlines on the list (Figure 4-26, pg. 40). Two-fifths of the public did not answer the question because they were not aware of any anti-corruption hotline while 1% declined to respond and 1% told fieldworkers that they did not trust any of the hotlines on the list. The number of hotlines that the public trusted was, on average, one; it was two if we looked only at persons who were aware of anti-corruption hotlines. These results indicate that trust in the anti-corruption hotlines amongst the populace was generally quite low.

Of the nine anti-corruption hotlines under review, the most trusted was the Public Protector of South Africa hotline. If we focus on those respondents who were aware of this hotline, then we find that two-thirds (65%) of this group trusted this hotline. The South African Human Rights Commission hotline was the second most trusted again, focusing only on those who knew about the hotline, we see that 60% of this group had confidence in it. The Corruption Watch Whistle-Blowing hotline also emerged as relatively trusted by those persons who were aware of it. We found that nearly two-thirds (64%) of those who were aware of this hotline said that they trusted it. Less than a tenth (7%) of the general populace were confident in the Public Service Commission National Anti-Corruption Hotline. Indeed, and perhaps quite unexpectedly, we found that only about a third (38%) of those who were aware of this hotline said that they trusted it. This demonstrates that the Public Service Commission hotline was not seen as a trustworthy anti-corruption tool even by those persons who were aware of it.

# 5    CONCLUSION

This headline report has outlined a series of significant findings from the second-year survey. We have revealed crucial insights about South Africans, pointing to important social norms and values that characterise and help explain corruption in our society. Public awareness of the problem of corruption was found to be quite widespread, and most people thought that it had a large and negative impact on society.  It is evident, from the survey data, that, unsurprisingly, some in the country are more exposed to corruption than others.  We found that, overall, a significant segment of the populace frequently encountered corrupt practices in their micro-level environments (i.e., their neighbourhoods and villages) as well as in their occupations.  We need to encourage and empower this group to cooperate with the authorities to fight corruption in line with the goals of the NACS.

Social acceptance of corruption in South Africa is not high, but only a minority (27%) embrace a zero-tolerance stance in line with the NACS.  This finding revealed the need for programmes to encourage and empower people to take a harder line against corruption.  Given already-high public disapproval for corrupt practices, such programmes will have a strong foundation on which to build their efforts.  In addition, it is necessary to challenge popular beliefs that corrupt practices can bring success within society.  It is very concerning that a large component of the general populace saw corrupt practices (like bribery or politically-based nepotism) as important for getting ahead in society.  When looking to change social norms and values, it is important to understand societal role models. We discovered that family figures continue to play a central role in shaping attitudes toward honesty and corruption tolerance.

The results shown here indicate guarded optimism regarding the public's readiness to fight corruption. After the 2024 NPE, there seems to have been a modest rise in people's willingness to oppose corruption.  However, the percentage willing to report corruption remains relatively low, and fewer than half of the general population expressed readiness to testify in a corruption trial.  To boost public willingness to combat corruption, it is essential to promote awareness of and to enhance trust in safe and credible reporting and accountability mechanisms, and to promote shared responsibility through ethical messaging in the media and educational initiatives.  In addition, we need to address cultures of silence that are apparent in many communities in South Africa.  We found that a significant quotient of the adult population would rather protect their social network members than help the government fight corruption.

Public attitudes can change over time, as this report demonstrates.  Changes can arise in response to a variety of factors, including events, experiences and influences, amongst others. Changing attitudes can also lead to changes in behaviours.  In order to accurately track public sentiment and behaviours in response to events and anti-corruption campaigns and messaging over time, it will be necessary to implement regular surveys and related qualitative research that measure changes in public attitudes and experiences of corruption.  Regular surveys should be integrated into the NACS' ongoing monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) framework to track shifts in public attitudes and corruption experiences. Securing funding is essential for consistent, high-quality data collection and analysis. Regular (annual or biannual) measurements capture both sudden changes and long-term trends, especially following major events like scandals, policy shifts or anti-corruption campaigns.  Embedding these surveys within the broader NACS MEL system would foster evidence-based synergy between anti-corruption efforts, and would encourage broader participation from government, civil society, private sector, researchers and academics, strengthening national strategies through synthesising diverse insights and expertise.

# 6 STATISTICAL ANALYSIS APPENDIX

## 6.1 STATISTICAL ANALYSIS GLOSSARY

| Term | Definition |
|---|---|
| Mean | Often called the average, is a measure of central tendency that represents the sum of all values in a dataset divided by the number of values. It provides a single value that summarises the overall level or typical value of the data, helping to understand the general trend within a set of numbers. |
| Percentage | A measure that expresses a proportion or part of a whole as a fraction of 100. |
| Standard error | Standard error (SE) is a statistical measure that indicates how accurately a sample mean represents the true population mean. It reflects the variability or dispersion of sample means if multiple samples were drawn from the same population. |
| 95% Conf. Interval | A 95% confidence interval is a range of values calculated from sample data that is believed to contain the true population parameter (such as a mean) with 95% certainty. This means that if the same sampling process were repeated many times, approximately 95% of the calculated intervals would include the actual population value. |
| Bivariate | Bivariate analysis is a statistical method that examines the relationship between two variables to determine if and how they are connected. It involves analysing paired data—often called X (independent variable) and Y (dependent variable)—to explore patterns, associations, or predictions between them. |
| Pairwise Correlation | A statistical technique used to measure the strength and direction of the linear relationship between two variables at a time. It quantifies how closely the values of one variable move in relation to another, typically represented by a correlation coefficient ranging from -1 to 1, where values near 0 indicate little or no relationship, and values near ±1 indicate strong positive or negative relationships. |
| Cronbach Alpha | Cronbach's alpha (α) is a statistical measure used to assess the internal consistency or reliability of a set of scale or test items, indicating how closely related the items are as a group. It ranges from 0 to 1, with higher values (typically ≥0.7) suggesting stronger consistency among items in measuring the same underlying construct. |
| Item-rest correlation | This shows the correlation between each individual item and the total score (sum of all items). Higher values (closer to 1) indicate that the item is strongly related to the overall scale. A low value (e.g., < 0.3) may suggest the item doesn't fit well with the rest of the scale. |
| Item-test correlation | This is the correlation between an individual item and the sum of the remaining items, excluding that item. It's similar to Item-Test Correlation but removes the item from the total score to avoid inflating the correlation. Again, higher values are better, and low values could indicate that an item is not consistent with the others. |
| Average interitem covariance | This is the average of all pairwise covariances between items on the scale. It gives a sense of how much items move together. Higher average covariance usually indicates better internal consistency. However, if it's too high, it could also suggest redundancy among items. |

## 6.2 SURVEY METHODOLOGY

The present section outlines the sampling framework, data collection protocols, and fieldwork procedures employed in SASAS. The survey targeted a nationally representative sample of 3,500 South African adults aged 16 and older across all nine provinces, excluding institutional settings. Sampling followed a three-stage design: (1) 500 small area layers (SALs) were selected as primary sampling units, stratified by province, geography and population group using updated 2011 census data; (2) seven dwelling units per SAL were randomly chosen as secondary sampling units; and (3) one eligible individual (aged 16+, residing in the household for at least 15 of the last 30 days) was selected per household. Ethical permission for the survey was sought and was granted by the HSRC's Research Ethics Committee.

**Table 6-1: Sample Realisation for South African Social Attitudes Survey, 2023**

| Province | Number of SALs | Ideal Sample (N) | Realised Sample (N) | Realisation Rate (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Western Cape | 65 | 455 | 323 | 71% |
| Eastern Cape | 65 | 455 | 442 | 97% |
| Northern Cape | 37 | 259 | 219 | 85% |
| Free State | 38 | 266 | 244 | 92% |
| KwaZulu-Natal | 93 | 651 | 611 | 94% |
| North West | 37 | 259 | 212 | 82% |
| Gauteng | 83 | 581 | 538 | 93% |
| Mpumalanga | 38 | 266 | 256 | 96% |
| Limpopo | 44 | 308 | 267 | 87% |
| Total | 500 | 3500 | 3112 | 89% |

**Table 6-2: Sample Realisation for South African Social Attitudes Survey, 2024**

| Province | Number of SALs | Ideal Sample (N) | Realised Sample (N) | Realisation Rate (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Western Cape | 65 | 455 | 365 | 80% |
| Eastern Cape | 65 | 455 | 419 | 92% |
| Northern Cape | 37 | 259 | 212 | 82% |
| Free State | 38 | 266 | 234 | 88% |
| KwaZulu-Natal | 93 | 651 | 607 | 93% |
| North West | 37 | 259 | 242 | 93% |
| Gauteng | 83 | 581 | 474 | 82% |
| Mpumalanga | 38 | 266 | 261 | 98% |
| Limpopo | 44 | 308 | 273 | 89% |
| Total | 500 | 3500 | 3087 | 88% |

Data collection adhered to strict ethical guidelines approved by the HSRC Research Ethics Committee (REC). Informed consent was obtained digitally for adults (18+), while minors (16–17) required additional parental/guardian consent. Confidentiality was maintained by removing personal identifiers and storing data securely. Fieldworkers notified local authorities (e.g., traditional leaders, police, or ward councillors) before commencing surveys to ensure legitimacy and safety. Training covered sampling methods, multilingual questionnaires, and tablet-based data collection, with supervisors conducting spot checks and backchecks to verify compliance. Realisation rates for SASAS 2023 (**Table 6-2**) and SASAS 2024/2025 (**Table 6-1**) both were within acceptable parameters. Final person weights benchmarked the data against Statistics South Africa's mid-year population estimates for province, population group, gender and age.

## 6.3 STATISTICAL ANALYSIS FOR SECTION 4.1

Respondents were asked four questions on whether they thought corruption has had a small or large impact. Responses were captured on a categorical scale that ranged from 1 'Very small' to 5 'Very large'. The legend for these four questions is presented in **Table 6-3**. 'Don't know' responses were treated as missing.

**Table 6-3: Exact wording of the four impact assessment questions**

| | |
|---|---|
| A1 | Corruption has had a small or large impact on you and your family life. |
| A2 | Corruption has had a small or large impact on the area (e.g., town, village, suburb or township) where you live. |
| A3 | Corruption by large companies (like banks or construction companies) has a small or large impact on the country's economy. |
| A4 | Corruption by government officials has a small or large impact on the country's economy. |

A pairwise correlation (or covariance) matrix analysis was conducted to examine the relationships among the four items mentioned above. The results are presented in **Table 6-4**; all values shown in the table were above 0.300 and this implies a robust degree of intercorrelation between the different

items. Of the four items, A3 and A4 in **Table 6-4** had the strongest association while A2 and A4 had the weakest.

**Table 6-4: Pairwise correlation for the four impact assessment questions**

|    | A1    | A2    | A3    |
|----|-------|-------|-------|
| A2 | 0.527 |       |       |
| A3 | 0.327 | 0.497 |       |
| A4 | 0.320 | 0.470 | 0.639 |

A Cronbach's alpha test was conducted to evaluate whether the four items loaded well together. The results of this test are shown in **Table 6-5**; the table presented the findings for item-test correlation, item-rest correlation, average inter-item covariance, and Cronbach's alpha. The test scale exhibited a high Cronbach's alpha value ($\alpha=0.788$), indicating strong internal consistency among items A1 through A4. It can be concluded that these items reliably assess the same underlying concept and can be aggregated into a single index.

**Table 6-5: Interitem correlations (covariances) and Cronbach's alpha for the four impact assessment questions**

|            | Observations | Item-Test Correlation | Item-Rest Correlation | Average Interitem Covariance | Alpha |
|------------|--------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------|-------|
| A1         | 3,020        | 0.774                 | 0.529                 | 0.561                        | 0.781 |
| A2         | 3,022        | 0.836                 | 0.674                 | 0.497                        | 0.694 |
| A3         | 3,038        | 0.795                 | 0.635                 | 0.575                        | 0.720 |
| A4         | 3,058        | 0.747                 | 0.572                 | 0.639                        | 0.749 |
| Test Scale |              |                       |                       | 0.568                        | 0.788 |

## 6.4    STATISTICAL ANALYSIS FOR SECTION 4.3

A pairwise correlation (or covariance) matrix analysis was carried out to investigate the relationship between the two items related to sexual corruption. The resultant correlation coefficient ($r(2971) = 0.566$, $p<0.001$) indicated a moderate positive linear relationship between two variables. This is regarded as a significant and meaningful relationship in quantitative social sciences.

## 6.5    STATISTICAL ANALYSIS FOR SECTION 4.4

Respondents were asked three questions on how often three different types of activities occurred in the area where they lived. Responses were captured on a categorical scale that ranged from 1' Never' to 5 'Very often'. 'Don't know' responses were treated as missing. The legend for each of these actions is presented in **Table 6-6**.

**Table 6-6: Exact wording of the three questions about the prevalence of local corruption**

| B1 | People in your area have to pay a bribe to give a gift to, or do a favour for, public officials and civil servants |
|----|----|
| B2 | Public officials in your area given jobs and contracts to unqualified friends and family |
| B3 | Public officials making requests of a sexual nature in exchange for a government service or benefit in your area |

A pairwise correlation (or covariance) matrix analysis was conducted to examine the associations among the four items mentioned earlier. The results are presented in **Table 6-7**; all values shown in the table were above 0.300 and this implies a robust degree of intercorrelation between the different items. In fact, all three items were robustly intercorrelated and had coefficients that were close to or above 0.600.

**Table 6-7: Pairwise correlation for the three questions about the prevalence of local corruption**

|    | B1    | B2    |
|----|-------|-------|
| B2 | 0.599 |       |
| B3 | 0.634 | 0.619 |

A Cronbach's alpha test was conducted to evaluate whether the items depicted in **Table 6-6** loaded well together. The results of this test are shown in **Table 6-8**; the table depicted the results for item-

test correlation, item-rest correlation, average inter-item covariance, and Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The test scale showed a high Cronbach's alpha value (α=0.837) which indicated strong internal consistency among items B1-B3. It can be concluded that these items reliably reflect the same core construct and can be merged into one composite index.

**Table 6-8: Interitem correlations (covariances) and Cronbach's alpha for the three questions about the prevalence of local corruption**

|  | Observations | Item-Test Correlation | Item-Rest Correlation | Average Interitem Covariance | Alpha |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| B1 | 2,967 | 0.866 | 0.701 | 1.10 | 0.771 |
| B2 | 2.939 | 0.877 | 0.690 | 1.01 | 0.785 |
| B3 | 2,978 | 0.870 | 0.705 | 1.09 | 0.766 |
| Test Scale |  |  |  | 1.07 | 0.837 |

## 6.6    STATISTICAL ANALYSIS FOR SECTION 4.5

Respondents were asked four questions on how often they thought that different kind of corruption occurred in their occupation.  Responses were captured on a categorical scale that ranged from 1'Never' to 5'Very often'.  'Don't know' responses as well as 'not applicable' answers were treated as missing.  The legend for each type of corruption is presented in **Table 6-9**.

**Table 6-9: Exact wording of the four occupational corruption questions**

| | |
|---|---|
| C1 | Bend the rules of their job to help friends and family |
| C2 | Bend the rules of their job to make extra money or obtain a promotion |
| C3 | Pay bribes in the course of their duties |
| C4 | Demand bribes in the course of their duties |

A pairwise correlation (or covariance) matrix analysis was carried out to investigate the interrelationships among the four items described above. 'The results are presented in **Table 6-10**; all values shown in the table were above 0.500 and this implies a robust degree of intercorrelation between the different items.  In fact, all three items were robustly intercorrelated and had coefficients that were above 0.700.

**Table 6-10: Pairwise correlation for the four occupational corruption questions**

|  | C1 | C2 | C3 |
|---|---|---|---|
| C2 | 0.813 |  |  |
| C3 | 0.740 | 0.782 |  |
| C4 | 0.703 | 0.773 | 0.823 |

A Cronbach's alpha analysis was performed to assess the degree to which the four items cohesively grouped together.  The results of this test are shown in **Table 6-11**; including the results for item-test correlation, item-rest correlation, average inter-item covariance, and Cronbach's alpha.  The test scale showed a high Cronbach's alpha value (α=0.920) which signified strong internal consistency among items C1-C4.  We can therefore determine that these items consistently assess the same fundamental concept and can be consolidated into a single index.

**Table 6-11: Interitem correlations (covariances) and Cronbach's alpha for the four occupational corruption questions**

|  | Observations | Item-Test Correlation | Item-Rest Correlation | Average Interitem Covariance | Alpha |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| C1 | 2,666 | 0.876 | 0.774 | 1.53 | 0.909 |
| C2 | 2,657 | 0.911 | 0.834 | 1.44 | 0.890 |
| C3 | 2,642 | 0.912 | 0.836 | 1.42 | 0.889 |
| C4 | 2,659 | 0.900 | 0.812 | 1.46 | 0.897 |
| Test Scale |  |  |  | 1.46 | 0.920 |

## 6.7    STATISTICAL ANALYSIS FOR SECTION 4.6

Respondents were read a list of eight different actions. They were then asked to tell fieldworkers whether they thought these actions can always be justified, never be justified, or something in between. Survey participants were instructed to use a scale from that ranged from 0 'Never Justifiable' to 10 'Always Justifiable'. 'Don't know' responses to these eight items were considered as missing data. The legend for each of these actions is presented in **Table *6-12***.

**Table 6-12: Exact wording of the seven descriptive social norm items**

| | |
|---|---|
| D1 | Someone demanding a bribe in the course of their duties. |
| D2 | Someone accepting a bribe in the course of their duties. |
| D3 | Demanding sex from someone in exchange for a job. |
| D4 | Offering sex to someone in exchange for a job. |
| D5 | A shop owner giving a job to a family member instead of someone more qualified. |
| D6 | A public official giving a job to a family member instead of someone more qualified. |
| D7 | A public official giving a large contract to a political connection instead of someone more qualified. |

A pairwise correlation (or covariance) matrix analysis was performed to explore the relationships between the eight items outlined above. The results are presented in **Table *6-13***; all values shown in the table were above 0.300 and this implies a robust degree of intercorrelation between the different items. From a comparative perspective, D4 had the weakest associations with the other items listed in the table whereas D7 exhibited the strongest.

**Table 6-13: Pairwise correlation for the seven descriptive social norm items**

| | D1 | D2 | D3 | D4 | D5 | D6 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| D2 | 0.769 | | | | | |
| D3 | 0.672 | 0.706 | | | | |
| D4 | 0.597 | 0.672 | 0.823 | | | |
| D5 | 0.393 | 0.462 | 0.450 | 0.479 | | |
| D6 | 0.570 | 0.601 | 0.672 | 0.667 | 0.633 | |
| D7 | 0.634 | 0.689 | 0.687 | 0.677 | 0.551 | 0.751 |

A Cronbach's alpha analysis was performed to assess whether these eight items reliably grouped together. The results of this test (i.e., item-test correlation, item-rest correlation, average interitem covariance as well as the Cronbach's alpha) were shown in **Table *6-14***. A high Cronbach's alpha value ($\alpha=0.925$) was shown and this figure denoted strong internal consistency among items D1-D7. We can conclude that these items consistently measure the same underlying construct and can be combined into a single index.

**Table 6-14: Interitem correlations (covariances) and Cronbach's alpha for the seven descriptive social norm items**

| | Observations | Item-Test Correlation | Item-Rest Correlation | Average Interitem Covariance | Alpha |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| D1 | 3,071 | 0.802 | 0.729 | 3.89 | 0.916 |
| D2 | 3,077 | 0.851 | 0.791 | 3.78 | 0.911 |
| D3 | 3,075 | 0.874 | 0.825 | 3.75 | 0.907 |
| D4 | 3,072 | 0.871 | 0.819 | 3.73 | 0.908 |
| D5 | 3,073 | 0.731 | 0.616 | 3.91 | 0.931 |
| D6 | 3,076 | 0.850 | 0.788 | 3.73 | 0.911 |
| D7 | 3,077 | 0.871 | 0.821 | 3.75 | 0.908 |
| Test Scale | | | | 3.79 | 0.925 |

## 6.8   STATISTICAL ANALYSIS FOR SECTION 4.8

Respondents were asked six questions about opportunities for getting ahead in South Africa. The questions required respondents to indicate how important six different actions or traits were for getting ahead in life. Responses were captured on a categorical scale that ranged from 1' Essential' to 5' Not important at all'. Don't know' responses were treated as missing. The legend for each different action or trait is presented in **Table *6-15***. '

**Table 6-15: Exact wording of the six questions about getting ahead in life**

| | |
|---|---|
| E1 | Having political connections |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| E2 | Giving bribes | | | |
| E3 | Being born white | | | |
| E4 | Coming from a wealthy family | | | |
| E5 | Doing sexual favours for powerful people | | | |
| E6 | Being born a man | | | |

An analysis using a pairwise correlation (or covariance) matrix was carried out to investigate the connections among the four items described above. The results are presented in **Table 6-16**; most of the values shown in the table were below 0.500 and this implies only a moderate degree of intercorrelation between the different items. Of the four items, E3 and E4 had the strongest association while E1 and E5 had the weakest.

**Table 6-16: Pairwise correlation for the six questions about getting ahead in life**

| | E1 | E2 | E3 | E4 | E5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| E2 | 0.474 | | | | |
| E3 | 0.378 | 0.422 | | | |
| E4 | 0.415 | 0.361 | 0.507 | | |
| E5 | 0.230 | 0.470 | 0.469 | 0.347 | |
| E6 | 0.282 | 0.294 | 0.380 | 0.417 | 0.397 |

## 6.9 STATISTICAL ANALYSIS FOR SECTION 4.9

A pairwise correlation (or covariance) matrix analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between the two items measuring willingness to combat corruption. The resultant correlation coefficient ($r(3008) = 0.639$, $p < 0.001$) indicated a moderate positive linear relationship between two variables. In the quantitative social sciences, this is considered a substantial and meaningful association.

A Cronbach's alpha test was carried out to determine if the two items demonstrated strong internal consistency. The test scale demonstrated a high Cronbach's alpha coefficient ($\alpha = 0.761$), reflecting strong internal consistency between the two items. It can be concluded that these items reliably assess the same underlying concept and can be merged into a single measure.

## 6.10 STATISTICAL ANALYSIS FOR SECTION 4.11

Respondents were asked four questions on whether they thought it was wrong or not wrong to report on different types of people they knew for corruption. Responses were captured on a categorical scale that ranged from 1 'Not wrong at all' to 5 'Always wrong'. 'Don't know' responses were treated as missing. The legend for each type of person is presented in **Table 6-17**.

**Table 6-17: Exact wording to the four questions on reporting on social network members**

| | |
|---|---|
| F1 | Family Member |
| F2 | Friend |
| F3 | Neighbour |
| F4 | Work Colleague |

An analysis using a pairwise correlation (or covariance) matrix was carried out to investigate the connections among the four items described above. The results are presented in **Table 6-18**; all values shown in the table were above 0.500 and this implies a robust degree of intercorrelation between the different items. Of the four items, F3 and F4 had the strongest association while F1 and F4 had the weakest.

**Table 6-18: Pairwise correlation for the four questions on reporting on social network members**

| | F1 | F2 | F3 |
|---|---|---|---|
| F2 | 0.748 | | |
| F3 | 0.648 | 0.807 | |
| F4 | 0.595 | 0.758 | 0.838 |

A Cronbach's alpha test was carried out to determine if the four items demonstrated strong internal consistency. **Table 6-19** displayed the outcomes for item-test correlation, item-rest correlation, average inter-item covariance, and Cronbach's alpha. The test scale demonstrated a high Cronbach's alpha

value (α=0.932) which reflected strong internal consistency among items F1-F4.  It can be inferred that these items consistently capture the same fundamental concept and may be integrated into a unified index.

**Table 6-19: Interitem correlations (covariances) and Cronbach's alpha for the four questions on reporting on social network members**

|  | Observations | Item-Test Correlation | Item-Rest Correlation | Average Interitem Covariance | Alpha |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| F1 | 3,008 | 0.867 | 0.764 | 1.37 | 0.935 |
| F2 | 3,023 | 0.930 | 0.873 | 1.25 | 0.900 |
| F3 | 3,036 | 0.932 | 0.874 | 1.23 | 0.899 |
| F4 | 3,013 | 0.915 | 0.843 | 1.26 | 0.909 |
| Test Scale |  |  |  | 1.28 | 0.932 |

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